

Senate Committee on Energy and Environment  
Oregon State Legislature  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301

**RE: Opposition to SB 301 – Protect Public Safety and Habitat in the Newberg Pool and the greater Willamette River**

Dear Chair, Senator Sollman ; Vice-Chair, Senator Findley ; Member, Senator Golden ; Member, Senator Hayden ; Member, Senator Lieber:

My name is Mark Taratoot. I am a long-time home owner and resident of Corvallis. I am also an advocate for the Willamette River. I ran for City Council on behalf of the river. I spend a lot of time on and around the Willamette River and her tributaries. I was happy when SB 1589 passed removing wake boats from the Newberg Pool in the lower Willamette River. I am very concerned about the proposed SB 301, and especially the amendment that could remove ballast weight from vessel weight regulations.

I am sure that people enjoy using these vessels. There are places that are far more appropriate for their use. The Newberg Pool is not among those places. These boats pose a safety risk to other river users, and not just paddlers. A friend is a State Parks Ranger, and he almost had his jetboat flipped by one of these boats. When SB 1589 was enacted back in 2022, it improved public safety. Passing SB 301 would remove these protections. Removing these vessels from the Newberg Pool also benefited the ecology of the area; we share the river not just with each other but with all the critters that call it home. SB 1589 protects them as well as public safety.

The Newberg Pool provides ample opportunities for human-powered recreation. It provides opportunities for Oregonians and their families to fish. It gives paddle boarders a safe place to enjoy the river. Even swimmers enjoy this section of our river. Including ballast weight restrictions in SB 1589 eliminated the unusually sharp and steep waves that these vessels throw. This wake can flip boats, injure people, cause erosion, and destroy habitat.

The Newberg Pool provides critical habitat for Willamette River Chinook salmon and steelhead. These fish are federally protected species. The sharp wakes from these vessels increases erosion rates and degrades spawning habitat. Our iconic fish are an indicator of the health of the environment. Allowing further degradation of this habitat is anathema to me.

This amendment may benefit a very small number of people who use these vessels. All other users of the river as well as the community as a whole will suffer damages from allowing these vessels back in the Newberg Pool. Peer-reviewed studies show that these wake-boats require significantly more buffer space from shorelines than most boats – over 500 feet. The Newberg Pool does not offer this buffering.

SB 1589 is working. It has restored balance to the Newberg Pool, created safer conditions, and reduced habitat degradation. SB 301 and its amendment represent a significant step backward. Please reject this bill. Please raise your voice to protect public safety. Help improve stewardship of our shared and loved river. Please vote NO on SB 301 and its proposed -1 amendment.

Sincerely,

*Mark Taratoot*

Reverend Mark Taratoot  
Church of Flowing Water