

Submitter: Helen Bishop

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Energy and Environment

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB301

I stand with the majority of Willamette River users who value safety, habitat protection, and access for all.

1. The current system is fair and effective. The claim that "90% of new boats are unfairly excluded" is simply false. In fact, the majority of recreational boats using the Newberg Pool, including pontoon boats and fishing boats, weigh well under 4,000 pounds.

For example: A typical 23-foot pontoon boat weighs approximately 2,900 pounds. Most fishing boats commonly used on the Willamette weigh significantly less. Even most family-oriented runabouts and recreational boats are eligible under the current 5,500-pound total weight limit. And in fact, according to the Oregon State Marine Board, over 1,000 towed watersports endorsements were issued for the Newberg Pool for the 2024 season. Boaters clearly have ample options that comply with the law while keeping the river safe for everyone.

2. Removing ballast weight reintroduces a dangerous loophole. The ballast weight is essential to calculating a boat's operational weight. Boats equipped with ballast tanks dramatically increase their wake size when tanks are filled. Removing ballast weight from the weight calculation would allow these high-wake boats to legally operate in the Newberg Pool, reintroducing the very conditions that forced the Legislature to act in 2022.

Wake boats using ballast create waves two to five times larger than non-ballasted boats, according to peer-reviewed studies. These wakes directly harm the river's ecology and other recreational users.

3. The erosion science is crystal clear. Dr. David Poor's 2022 expert testimony in defense of SB 1589 outlined how large wakes accelerate severe erosion of the Newberg Pool's soft, silty banks, a process that undermines trees, causes landslides, and degrades critical riparian habitat. Unlike natural flows, these artificial wakes:

>>Destabilize the banks by dislodging soil and roots.

>>Increase sedimentation and turbidity, which harms aquatic vegetation and ESA-listed Chinook salmon and steelhead habitat.

>>Damage private property and public infrastructure, including docks and river

access points.

SB 1589 is already reducing these impacts by limiting boat size and ensuring ballast is factored into the weight cap.

4. Small businesses & families benefit from a safer, balanced river.

Contrary to claims, local small businesses benefit when more people can safely access and enjoy the Newberg Pool, including paddlers, anglers, and families with children. Since SB 1589 went into effect, participation from these groups has grown, driving demand for rentals, outdoor gear, and services in the area.

5. The Newberg Pool's unique geography matters.

Unlike larger, wider sections of the Willamette, the Newberg Pool is a narrow, constrained river corridor where the impacts of large wakes are magnified. Peer-reviewed research (e.g., Macfarlane et al., 2025) recommends a 500-foot minimum buffer between wake boats and shorelines to prevent damage—space that simply doesn't exist within the Newberg Pool.

The facts are clear:

>>The current law works and is supported by science.

>>The Newberg Pool is thriving under SB 1589 with increased safe, equitable use.

>>SB 301 is a step backwards that risks public safety, habitat protection, and fair river access.

We urge Oregon's lawmakers and the public to reject this industry-driven effort to weaken Oregon's river protections. The Newberg Pool is one of the most heavily used and sensitive sections of the Willamette. It is no place for unchecked wake-enhancing boats.

Thank you for reading, Helen Bishop