

March 25th, 2025

Senate Committee On Energy and Environment



Re: Please Oppose SB 301

Dear Chair, Senator Sollman and Committee Members:

I am writing today to on behalf of Human Access Project's (HAP) to express our strong opposition to SB 301 and its proposed amendment to remove ballast weight from vessel weight regulations in the Newberg Pool. HAP wants to eliminate barriers of people to experience all the fruits the Willamette River can provide, from mental health, to recreation to the ecology it supports. This is the case of a small number of river users having big impact on an extremely well used and loved place to recreate and for the fish and wildlife that live there.

HAP is deeply concerned that this bill and its amendment would undermine the progress made under SB 1589 (2022), which has significantly improved both public safety and ecological health in this unique section of the Willamette River.

HAP is a nonprofit organization based in Portland, Oregon. The mission of HAP is Transforming Portland's Relationship with the Willamette River. Our goals include improving Willamette River edge spaces for recreation, developing creative activation/programming around these spaces, fostering environmental stewardship, community investment and connection with these spaces, and identifying and removing barriers to people feeling comfortable interacting with the river.

The Newberg Pool has become a vital space for paddlers, swimmers, anglers, and other low-impact users who rely on its calm waters. The inclusion of ballast weight in boat restrictions under SB 1589 was essential to reducing unsafe wakes and conflicts between river users. Removing this ballast weight consideration will reintroduce the same enforcement challenges that plagued the area for over a decade.

Additionally, this change would have dire ecological consequences. The Newberg Pool is critical habitat for federally protected Upper Willamette River Chinook salmon and steelhead. Larger wakes from heavily ballasted boats accelerate shoreline erosion, degrade spawning habitat, and threaten already at-risk fish populations.

HAP questions the rationale for this amendment, which seems to benefit only a small number of large wake boat operators at the expense of the wider community and the health of the river. 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 step backward that I urge you to reject.

Please stand up for river safety, environmental stewardship, and the interests of the majority who cherish this unique waterway. I respectfully request that you vote NO on SB 301 and its proposed -1 amendment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Willie Levenson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Willie Levenson  
Executive Director  
Human Access Project