

Submitter: Steve Corbato  
On Behalf Of: Self  
Committee: Senate Committee On Energy and Environment  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB301

Dear Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Smith, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing as both a resident of southwest Portland and a user of the Willamette River to express my strong opposition to SB 301 and its -1 Amendment.

This legislation directly threatens public safety, water quality, and critical fish and wildlife habitat in the Newberg Pool section of the Willamette River. The proposed amendment would eliminate ballast weight from how vessel compliance is determined under existing law (SB 1589, passed in 2022), which will undo the progress made to protect this highly sensitive stretch of river.

The Newberg Pool is a narrow section of the Willamette that has become safer and more accessible for paddlers, swimmers, anglers, and families since SB 1589 was enacted. The law has helped reduce dangerous wakes caused by heavily ballasted wake boats, which have historically caused significant erosion and habitat degradation.

Removing ballast weight from the weight calculation is a loophole that will allow oversized wake boats to re-enter this fragile area despite their fully loaded operational weight far exceeding the current 5,500-pound cap. This is not a minor adjustment—it's a full-scale rollback of hard-won protections supported by peer-reviewed science, law enforcement, and thousands of river users.

Specifically, SB 301 and the -1 Amendment will:

- o Endanger Public Safety

Reintroduces large wakes in a narrow river corridor, creating dangerous conditions for paddlers, anglers, swimmers, and other small craft users.

- o Harm Critical Habitat

Threatens Upper Willamette River Chinook salmon and steelhead, both listed under the Endangered Species Act, by degrading key migration and spawning habitat in the Newberg Pool.

- o Accelerate Shoreline Erosion

Large, artificial wakes will destabilize banks and destroy riparian vegetation—just as Dr. David Poor’s 2022 expert testimony confirmed.

Undermine Enforcement

Returns Oregon to a failed “ballast-only ban” that enforcement officials and the Oregon State Marine Board have long said is unenforceable.

I urge the Committee to reject SB 301 and the -1 Amendment to ensure that Oregon continues to protect this vital section of the Willamette River for both ecological health and community safety.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,  
-Steve Corbato