

Submitter: Devin Ocheltree

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Energy and Environment

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB301

Dear Chair Senator Sollman, Vice-Chair Senator Findley, and Members Senators Golden, Hayden, and Lieber:

My name is Devin Ocheltree, and I am a resident of Portland as well as an active user of the Willamette River. I am writing to express my strong opposition to SB 301 and the proposed amendment, which seeks to remove ballast weight from vessel weight regulations in the Newberg Pool.

I am deeply concerned that this legislation would reverse the progress achieved under SB 1589 (2022), which has significantly improved public safety and ecological health in this sensitive and heavily used section of the river.

The Newberg Pool is a cherished area for paddlers, swimmers, anglers, and other low-impact recreational users who rely on its calm, safe waters. Including ballast weight in boat restrictions under SB 1589 was a necessary step in reducing dangerous wakes and minimizing conflict among river users. Eliminating this consideration would reintroduce longstanding enforcement challenges and compromise safety on the water.

From an environmental perspective, the consequences would be equally troubling. The Newberg Pool provides critical habitat for federally protected Upper Willamette River Chinook salmon and steelhead. Heavily ballasted boats generate larger wakes that accelerate shoreline erosion, degrade spawning grounds, and put already vulnerable fish populations at further risk.

I also question the rationale for this amendment. It appears to serve the interests of a small group of large wake boat operators at the expense of the broader community and the health of the river. Research—including a recent peer-reviewed study by Professor Macfarlane—clearly shows that wake boats require a minimum 500-foot buffer from the shoreline, a condition the Newberg Pool cannot safely accommodate.

SB 1589 is delivering results. It has brought balance back to the Newberg Pool, improved safety, and curbed habitat destruction. SB 301 and its amendment represent a step in the wrong direction. I respectfully urge you to reject this bill and stand in support of river safety, environmental stewardship, and the many Oregonians who value this unique waterway.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Devin Ocheltree