

**Testimony of Justin Patterson
Parks and Property Stewardship Program Director
In Support of House Bill 2233
February 14, 2013**



Chair Witt and members of the Committee:

Metro is the elected regional government of the Portland metropolitan area. We serve a population of 1.5 million people in an area that extends from the Columbia River to just south of the Willamette River in Wilsonville, and from the foothills of the Coast Range near Forest Grove to the banks of the Sandy River at Troutdale.

Among our major responsibilities is caring for thousands of acres of natural areas and a number of developed park sites transferred to Metro from Multnomah County in 1994. One of the developed facilities under Metro's care is the M. James Gleason Boat Ramp, located along the Columbia River just across Marine Drive at the western end of the Portland International Airport. The boat ramp and associated marine facilities host tens of thousands of visitors each year.

In March of 2012, a large privately owned structure/vessel known as the "Vancouver Yacht Club" was found adrift in the Columbia River in the middle of the night. To protect the safety of the Columbia's navigational channel, the US Coast Guard secured the vessel at the Gleason Boat Ramp without Metro's authorization.

The Coast Guard assumed no further responsibility and the owner proved unable to afford or otherwise provide for structure's removal. This left Metro responsible for its disposal by default and marked the beginning of a months-long bureaucratic nightmare. The vessel was technically abandoned, but because Metro is not an authorized "removal authority" under state law, we were unable to legally remove the vessel for disposal. As a result, Metro had to have the owner sign over interest in the vessel to Metro so it could be moved from the boat ramp for disposal. This problematic solution was necessary but carried significant risk.

The dock portion of the ramp to which the structure was moored was not designed to handle such a significant structure. As a result, some of the dock was damaged during the time it was moored, which was nearly five months. During the process of gaining ownership of the vessel, Metro conducted a request for bids and secured a contractor, Fred Devine Diving and Salvage, who later removed and disposed of the structure. The cost of this work, not including the tremendous amount of staff time involved from multiple jurisdictions, was nearly \$90,000. Fortunately for Metro, a significant portion of that cost was reimbursed from the State Marine Board's Derelict Vessel Fund. It should be noted the State Marine Board was a vital partner in gaining resolution to this situation.

HB 2233 would streamline the process for seizing and disposing of abandoned vessels, and would allow for the seizure and disposal of derelict vessels (vessels in a condition that constitutes a hazard). The concept also makes failure to remove an abandoned vessel and possession of a derelict vessel on the waters of this state criminal offenses. Most important from Metro's perspective, the bill amends the definition of "removing authority" in a way that would allow Metro to more easily address future incidents like the one that recently occurred at the Gleason Boat Ramp.

We urge you to support HB 2233. Thank you for your consideration of these comments.