



Columbia Seaplane Pilots Association

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May 6, 2013

House Committee on Energy and Environment / SB 602 A

Rep. Jules Bailey, Chair
Rep. Deborah Boone, Vice-Chair
Rep. Mark Johnson, Vice-Chair
Rep. Cliff Bentz
Rep. Michael Dembrow
Rep. Jessica Vega Pederson
Rep. Gail Whitsett
Via email: anne.may@state.or.us

Chair Bailey and Members of the Committee:

Seaplanes are being maligned unnecessarily in this discussion of Waldo Lake. Our planes have landed there for over 50 years with no impact and very few people seeing them. Many times when we land, the road is closed by snow and there is no-one else there except the snowmobilers.

We have offered compromises so that the paddlers can get times when the lake is “just theirs”. But so far we can’t get anyone to be willing to sit with us and talk about it!

We are asking that you call a meeting of the paddler groups and our seaplane group to find some common ground for an amendment that would allow both user groups.

Seaplanes are an integral part of Oregon’s aviation system, and those of us who fly them are often the same people who work with the Governor’s office, Business Oregon, and the Oregon Business Council in furthering Oregon’s traded sector economy by the use of the Aviation Cluster of businesses.

<http://www.oregonbusinessplan.org/Industry-Clusters/About-Oregons-Industry-Clusters/Aviation.aspx>

We request that the Committee please entertain an amendment which states:

- a) Seaplanes can use Waldo Lake when the road to the lake is closed by snow and thus paddlers are not using the lake.
- b) Seaplanes can use Waldo Lake for emergency landings when flight conditions make landing at another lake a high risk of danger.

There is no factual basis to the claims that seaplanes would environmentally harm Waldo Lake. Seaplanes are specifically designed and purposed to fly into remote lakes just like Waldo Lake. It is unfair that we would have to fly 400 miles north to British Columbia to land in remote pristine lakes, but not be allowed to land in our own such lakes.

When the U.S. Congress created the Wilderness areas near Waldo Lake, they specifically excluded the lake, and encouraged multiple recreational use by bringing in a good road, and creating campgrounds and boat ramps on the east side. They excluded the hiking trail around the lake from the Wilderness designation. Thus the trail is used by snowmobilers in the winter.

Seaplanes use Waldo Lake as part of the chain of lakes when traveling between British Columbia and California (see attached map). While there are other lakes in this chain, seaplane pilots never know which lake is clear of clouds and/or for which the water surface is appropriate for a safe landing. Being a large body of water along this route, Waldo Lake is an extremely important lake for the practical, safe use of seaplanes transiting the Cascade Mountains – between the Willamette Valley and Central Oregon.

Seaplanes have used Waldo Lake for landings for more than 50 years. There is no documented history at Waldo Lake of either environmental or safety issues attributable to seaplanes. If so, this information would have been touted by those seeking to outlaw seaplanes from Waldo Lake. While challenging the Forest Service's ban on floatplanes (which we won in federal court) CSPA filed a freedom of information act with the Forest Service asking for copies of any information relating to seaplanes from their files. The only information they came up with from their records were eight campground comment cards that contained minor comments, for example, asking simply "are floatplanes allowed" by visitors who saw one parked at the lake. There were no complaints of any actual safety or noise problems with a seaplane. The Forest Service staff we have talked to have all acknowledged that they have personally never even seen a seaplane on the lake.

We take pride, as pilots, that seaplanes "leave no trace." You will also note on our letterhead that we are active members of the nation's key boating safety groups. As a group we work very hard at being safe and responsible waterway users.

There are even positive environmental reasons to use the seaplane for access to Waldo Lake. The use of a seaplane to fly from Portland to Waldo Lake to camp has in many cases a lower carbon footprint than using an automobile for the same journey. Cars, trucks, RV's, and motorcycles already drive to the lake and bring their noise, oil, and gas into that watershed. Seaplanes are simply one more vehicle of arrival for campers and hikers at the lake.

Seaplanes in fact avoid the environmental damage of oil-based asphalt roads and parking lots - including those in the Waldo Lake watershed that are required for auto visitors. That is why seaplanes are the prime transportation mode in all the wilderness lands of Alaska and Canada. Those who arrive at Waldo Lake by car forget that the roads in the watershed that they use, consist of more than 120 million pounds of asphalt material, and required removal of upwards of 100 acres of forest.

Opponents of seaplanes search for reasons to object to seaplanes. For example opponents bring up the canoe hit by a National Guard Pilot flying a seaplane on the Willamette River. It truly was a terrible accident by a person, whose day job was to defend the United States of America from terrorists. However, it was a freak accident. To my knowledge it is the only accident in 20 years, in the entire United States of a seaplane killing someone in a boat. Cars are not immune from this problem. It is a terrible fact that in the United States, every year, cars kill 5000 pedestrians.

All airplane pilots are licensed by the Federal Aviation Administration, and have safety check rides at a minimum of every two years. The FAA's regulations are extensive. There is zero tolerance for alcoholic beverages. To ensure safety, the rule simply is that no alcohol can be consumed within 8 hours of flying. The point being that safety rules for pilots even exceed those for road vehicles.

Seaplane pilots are a strong environmentally concerned group that has long been proactively concerned about the risks of Invasive Aquatic Species (IAS). Our national organization and local volunteers developed standard IAS seaplane pre-flight inspection procedures under funding from the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission that can be viewed at many web sites including www.youtube.com/watch?v=luDZptFsQDk . An IAS brochure for seaplanes was created from a grant from USF&W at Portland State University. Invasive species awareness seminars are conducted at aviation trade shows and exhibitions by trained instructors. Seaplane pilots are federally licensed and monitored, and every two years receive an FAA mandated check ride which in a seaplane nowadays commonly includes IAS awareness training.

For your information, I've attached copies of key letters from aviators and aviation organizations about this issue, which support keeping Waldo Lake open for floatplanes.

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These are our nation's major aviation organizations, and they request that Waldo Lake be kept open for seaplane use.

Our Oregon organization represents approximately 300 persons, and there are approximately 650 seaplane rated pilots in Oregon. However, seaplane pilots from other states travel through Oregon too, so the need for the waterway is important for other citizens of the United States as well. Nationally there are approximately 33,000 seaplane rated pilots.

In closing, I would point out that under the Oregon Admission Acts of 1859, the federal government granted the waterways to the State of Oregon with the condition that:

“all the navigable waters of said State, shall be common highways and forever free, as well as to the inhabitants of said State as to all other citizens of the United States.”
(Section 2)

Seaplanes are vehicles which still need these waterways as highways in order to remain safe and efficient in their travel. We need Waldo Lake as part of the available landing spots while we travel around the state. In addition, seaplane pilots from other states, need them when transiting through our state.

We pledge to continue to respect the paddlers and their interests in a quiet experience.

Thank you for considering our interests in utilizing Oregon's navigable waters for transportation by this seaplane mode, so that we can travel and recreate in our great State of Oregon.

Respectfully,



Aron Faegre
President, Columbia Seaplane Pilots Association

Attachments:

- Map of common seaplane cross-country flight routes through Oregon
- Picture of Willamette Pass (near Waldo Lake) during transit by floatplane during cloudy conditions



Common Seaplane Cross-country Flight Routes



Willamette Pass with clouds from my personal floatplane while flying my daughter, a wildlife biologist, from Klamath Lake Bird Observatory to Portland;

In this case Waldo Lake was an extremely important lake to have for safety of operations in transiting from Central Oregon back into the Willamette Valley. On this day and time other lakes were not visible for use.