

March 13, 2013

Public Testimony in Favor of SB 602
"Bans use of motors on Waldo Lake"
Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

Chair Dingfelder, members of the committee:

My name is Bruce Johnson. I am a fifth generation Oregonian currently living in Bend, a retired member of the Oregon State Police, and great-grandson of John Breckenridge Waldo after whom Waldo Lake was named. I appreciate this opportunity to speak to you in support of Senate Bill 602, banning the use of internal combustion motors on Waldo Lake.

I base my support for the bill on both the historic efforts and current needs to preserve wild areas for those who wish to enjoy them as my great grandfather did more than 100 years ago.

John Waldo was not merely a man after whom a lake was named. He was an Oregon State legislator, Chief Justice of the Oregon Supreme Court, and visionary who championed the preservation of Oregon's Cascades.

From the 1870s until his death in 1907, Waldo would spend his summers camping, exploring, hunting and fishing in the Oregon Cascades. He developed a profound reverence for the unspoiled wilderness where, in his words,

".... In communion with untrammelled nature and the free air, the narrowing tendencies of an artificial and petty existence might be perceived and corrected, and the spirit enlarged and strengthened."

His efforts to preserve this experience for future generations led to the creation of the Cascade Forest Reserve, from which the National Forests and Wilderness areas of the Oregon Cascades originated.

What was true then, is even more true now. Today's easy access for motorized recreation has brought the distractions, bustle and stress of city life to all but the most remote wilderness areas of the Cascades. Motor boats dominate nearly all the large lakes, making it difficult to experience the peaceful, reflective escape that my great-grandfather so cherished.

Fortunately, one lake, Waldo Lake, remains relatively unchanged. Because of the remarkable purity of the water, fish populations have not thrived there, which in turn has made the lake less desirable for motor boaters. Those same qualities, combined with thoughtful management of the forests around the lake, have made Waldo Lake a haven for canoeists, kayakers, sailboat operators, hikers and mountain bikers who seek non-motorized recreation in relative solitude.

In 2007 the US Forest Service, in an effort to provide a diversity of recreational opportunities on public lands, found that the best use of Waldo Lake was to exclude seaplanes and boats with internal combustion motors from the lake. The Oregon State Marine Board, Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation, two Oregon governors, two US Representatives, the editorial staffs of the Oregonian, Register Guard and Bend Bulletin, and the vast majority of public respondents have all agreed. Keep Waldo Wild.

Although my family and I enjoy spending summer days relaxing on our power boat, we have plenty of places to go, including Odell, Crescent, Davis, and other large lakes in close proximity to Waldo. But Waldo Lake is the only large mountain lake in the entire Pacific Northwest where I can drift quietly across the surface of the incredibly clear blue water in my kayak and experience exactly the same spiritually refreshing sense of connection to nature that my great-grandfather described.

I urge you to help preserve that same opportunity for my great-grandchildren. Please keep Waldo Lake as a peaceful and pure sanctuary for those who appreciate its value, and pass Senate Bill 602.

Thank-you,

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Hi Bruce,

I do believe, like you, that Waldo Lake is a precious natural resource, that deserves special attention and protection. Once lost, it may never recover. It is the responsibility of people that recognize this important fact, to act now and always to communicate this to the people and politicians that can enact protection for this lake into law.

To begin, Waldo Lake is unique. Oregon's second largest natural lake fills a glacier scaped basin that encloses a small watershed. This limits surface inflow and so Waldo Lake receives almost all of its water from precipitation. This type of water inflow is very pure allowing the chemical purity of Waldo Lake to appear almost like our finest distilled water. Indeed, looking at electrical conductivity alone, Waldo Lake is twenty-five times more pure than Crater Lake.

To be on Waldo Lake, one cannot miss the extreme clarity of the lake. There are few lakes in the World that allow one to drift quietly along and appear to be floating in space. The water of this lake, at times of the day, is so clear, it seems to disappear. This leaves a canoeist or kayaker to feel as if they are being held up by nothing and seem to be floating across the lake's bottom, visible up to 150 feet away. Indeed, this 150 foot depth was recorded last summer (2012) as the visibility of the eight-inch diameter Secchi depth, used around the World as a test for a lake's clarity. I believe today that there is no lake in the World that can boast a higher water clarity measurement. It is also telling, that this measurement was made on a day that was far from perfect. I think that if scientists were to visit the lake more often, this visibility measurement would actually be deeper.

Waldo Lake can be said to be unique in a biological way too. This lake did not have fish in it until fish were first planted. A lake with fish is dramatically different from a fishless lake. The amphibian, zooplankton, macroinvertebrates, and phytoplankton communities have been rebounding since 1995 when we have stopped stocking fish in Waldo Lake. In the past twenty-seven years, we have watched these biological communities change and become more ecologically diverse, healthy, and sustainable. The zooplankton community has remarkably changed each year since fish stocking ceased including last summer in 2012, when Daphnia were found in our collections. They had not been observed in any collections in the past forty-five years. We have learned that in the past twenty-seven years of research and monitoring, that Waldo Lake is slow to respond to positive changes we make in its use. Not only is Waldo Lake unique, it is sensitive to our management practices and slow to recover from our unwise uses.

Keeping internal combustion engines off Waldo Lake will allow visitors to enjoy its natural beauty in all of its dimensions. Visitors will see, hear, touch, smell, and taste both the water and the surroundings of Waldo Lake as had its early visitors. There are many lakes in our fair State, many of those lakes have lodges, marinas, restaurants, and other facilities surrounding them. Waldo Lake is not a part of that group. Waldo Lake is a wilderness lake in many respects. Those of us who know Waldo Lake intimately, can only hope and communicate our sincere desire to protect this outstanding Oregon resource for future generations. And this protection needs to be extreme, because Waldo Lake is an extremely unique and sensitive resource. Let's enact the best protection we can to assure Waldo Lake its continuing place amongst the World's pristine lakes.

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