

Testimony of Warren Weathers, Derby Coordinator (Pg 1)

Annual Blackberry Jam Festival

P.O. Box 212, Lowell, Oregon

Mr. Chairman, Senators and staff:

I am Warren Weathers. I live at 29 S. Alder St. in Lowell, OR. I am here representing the Blackberry Jam fishing derby. The derby is part of the annual Blackberry Jam festival, a self supporting summer event beginning its 22nd year, and is sponsored by the City of Lowell in conjunction with the communities of Dexter and Fall Creek.

In 1993 a group of local citizens got together with an organization known as Rural Development Initiatives to brainstorm economic development options that the Dexter-Lowell-Fall Creek community could pursue to boost our economy and bolster community pride. Our strategy was to turn a negative such as the expanding pikeminnow population in Dexter Lake into a positive by managing this rough, sportfish-eating pest with guidance from biologists at Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. We intended to accomplish this in a self supporting sustained basis with volunteers and donations. Our annual pikeminnow fishing derby presents awards for most pikeminnow caught, largest pikeminnow caught, and catching a tagged pikeminnow, and includes a similar prize schedule for children. Prizes offered have been donated by tackle shops, traded with local businesses in exchange for elbow grease, such as sweeping parking lots and cutting firewood, or have been purchased with proceeds from the sale of derby tickets.

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The top prizes awarded always include prestigious hand made trophies created by local supporters. Our high school wrestling team sells tickets, measures pikeminnow, distributes awards and searches for appropriate disposal options which include burying them in a hole and burying them in a garden.

We are always looking for ways to improve the derby, and to secure the sustainable conservation ethic our derby represents. Early on ODF & W recognized that anglers had a new interest in fishing Dexter Lake so they added us to their trout stocking schedule. We would catch pikeminnow in the derby and they would replace them with catchable rainbows. That was 21 years ago. When our wrestling team found a potential alternative use for the carcasses (superior to their use as a no-cost soil amendment) we were ecstatic. The newly discovered use was to develop a micro market for the pikeminnow sold as crab bait, and then use those proceeds to help fund derby prizes and trips to high school sporting events or similar competitions that otherwise may be unaffordable to our students and school system. The bait shops contacted said they thought they would like being able to offer pikeminnow crab bait in limited amounts as an alternative to turkey legs. Before we knew that it was illegal, our wrestling team bagged 2,000 pikeminnow at 3 per bag and the purchasers froze them. Up until 2013 we had removed about 15 tons of pikeminnow from the lake since the derby's inception.

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Last year we found that the pikeminnow landed in the derby appear to be getting smaller which may indicate that our effort to improve the habitat for sport fish is working as we are improving habitat needed by larger trout and bass. Since the derby began fish biologists have used the event several times as a venue for their research.

Last year we learned that state law requires fish brokers and commercial fisherman and owners of commercial boats to have commercial licenses which appear to vary in cost from \$200 to \$700 each. It appears that the law applies to any one who intends to catch a fish with the intention of selling it or relinquishing it to receive a prize. We understand that these requirements are dictated by Oregon statutes, so there is no opportunity to modify regulations to correct unintended consequences of previous legislation. Last year our number of entrants dropped by approximately 50%, when we heard the rumor that we might be unknowingly violating an unfamiliar law.

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If adopted, SB 958 will allow pikeminnow derbies to be held without requiring sport fishing contestants to purchase a commercial fishing license. The proposed legislation also provides that the derby organization is required to apply for a derby license from ODF&W (at no cost). The licensed derby organization will be allowed to sell pikeminnow carcasses as crab bait or soil amendment while the derby is in session, and will allow our high school activity groups to raise funds to both purchase derby prizes and to fund their travel to attend special sporting and/or scholastic events.

If SB958 does not pass our derby will end in this its 22nd year, as neither the derby nor our contestants can afford commercial licenses. Without this legislation the pikeminnow population will likely expand to pre-1993 conditions, replacing bass and trout in Dexter Lake and disenfranchising sport anglers visiting our community, causing them to find someplace else to fish and to patronize with their business.

We believe the corrective adjustments prescribed by SB 958 will solve the problem and are reasonable and fair. We ask you to adopt SB 958.

Thank you for your consideration and thank you for giving us the opportunity to address the committee. Thank you also for the advice we have received from your staff members.