

Email received by Kaspar Murer, Wasabi Paddling Club, on September 15, 2019

My name is Linda Mendel and I am a tiller for Tilikum dragons. I have been paddling in Portland for about 15 years as well as tilling for a combined total of about 3 years.

I would like to document an incident that happened to us, one of many, but this one was particularly egregious. This happened about the third week of August on a weeknight. Frankly I'm not sure if it was Monday or Wednesday.

Our practice time is 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. and this was up by Ross Island so I would say it was around 7:15 or so in the evening. I believe it was the same day that a Dragon Boat swamped right around the Zidell area.

There was a red ski boat out on the water and it had kicked up some pretty big wakes that made it impossible to continue to practice, we really just had to try and ride out the wakes. In what seemed to be a response to seeing us struggling, this boat came back around and made a big circle and intentionally threw a wake right at us. They then took off in the direction of Sellwood.

Very shortly afterward a blue ski boat came by throwing wakes. Our caller, Trudy Robinson, signaled for them to slow down. There were five people on the boat and all laughed, waved, and yelled as the boat speed it up and threw a wake at us. Again we couldn't practice and I was trying to turn the boat around to get out of that area when this boat came back around again and threw another wake at us. There was no way to turn without the boat swamping so I just had to sit there nosing towards the wakes and waiting for them to calm down enough for us to paddle out.

This blue boat came around again and headed straight for us as though it were playing a game of chicken. I couldn't see the driver. And had no idea if he had dropped his beer, or his cell phone, or if he was headed directly at us intentionally. Trudy and I looked at each other in horror because there was nothing I could do to get out of the way of that speeding boat. At the last moment they swing hard to the left and threw an enormous wake at us. Several of us were hollering at them.

They flipped us off, laughed and yelled back at us, and came around again. They headed off toward Sellwood. and I was able to get the boat turned north and we paddled out of there.

This was the worst case of intentionally trying to swamp us that I have been personally involved in.

We did have issues at a several practices earlier in the year in July and in those cases there were so many boats pulling wakeboarders that we had to cross the river and go into the Ross Island Channel.

We've also had problems in the Ross Island Channel there's an area there where you can throw wakes and people do it all the time.

If there are three or four of them going at once it's all you can do to keep the boat from tipping over. There's no way you can do any kind of practice drills it's all just crisis control at that point.

Our other tiller, Rebecca, tills our Saturday practices. She runs into the same problems. There was one particularly bad day in July when they paddled up to the area around Spaghetti Factory and couldn't practice at all . It was just wake after wake after wake. It was all Rebecca could do to keep the boat under control and get out of there.

I don't know what the solution to this problem is. Obviously the people that are trying to intentionally swamp us it should not be on the water at all. Those that are out recreationally wakeboarding need a space to do that that's separate from where the dragon boats, sail boats, and shells are practicing. The two activities are incompatible.

Thank you for passing our concerns on. We appreciate your working on a solution to this problem.

Sincerely,
Linda Mendel