

April 28, 2019

Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
Senator Michael Dembrow, Chair
Senator Alan Olsen, Co-Chair
Committee Members

Subject: Increased wakes: damage and danger to river users, HB 2351A

Dear Senator Dembrow:

I am writing to you to request your support for HB 2351A currently before the Senate. HB 2351A will empower the Oregon State Marine Board to make regulations and necessary restrictions to avoid unnatural wake and wave damage to waterfront businesses, property, marine habitat and shoreline and river users. It will close a current Policy Gap that allows a small class of river users to cause damage to whole sections of the river and impact all other users.

I am a dragon boater who has participated in the Rose Festival Dragon Boat Race and practices for the last 15 years. The season runs for 10 weeks and ends on the second weekend in June. My role on our boat is the tiller (steersperson.) The tiller is responsible for the safety of all in the boat, usually around 20 or more people. The dragon boats are only human-powered.

Early in the season there are few powered craft in the water, but the number of motor powered craft increases as weather improves. Several times our boat has been on the Willamette River when a small craft generating a huge wake has passed our boat. As tiller, I am instructed to turn almost perpendicular to the oncoming wake to prevent swamping of the boat. At times there is so much traffic on the water that it makes it difficult to get fully turned into the wake.

One day several years ago, we were on the Willamette River between Ross Island and the west shore. A large black craft, generating the largest wake I have ever encountered on the river, passed us and created a wake that I estimated to be at least six feet or more in height measured from peak to trough. I turned the boat toward the wake and told everyone in the boat to hang on. Both the caller, in the front of the boat, and I in the back, had to kneel and hang on as well. Had we not taken that quick action, one or both of us would have been flipped into the water.

Craft generating such large wakes are a huge safety concern for human-powered craft on the Willamette River. Please consider the safety of human-powered craft on the water. They cannot move fast enough to evade the large wakes and are forced to take evasive action to protect the safety of humans on the craft.

I am grateful for your appreciation and understanding of our concerns. I am sure that suitable, safe, wakeboarding locations can be found locally. Thousands of Willamette users will be grateful and the couple of hundred wake boarders, and other large-wake-generating craft will be able to enjoy the river in the knowledge they will not be harming anything or endangering others. We ask for your support of this bill.

Richard C. Bursch