



March 9, 2021

Representative Brad Witt, Chair
Representative Vikki Breese-Iverson, Vice-Chair
Representative Zach Hudson, Vice-Chair
House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

Re: Oregon Council of Trout Unlimited Comments on House Bill 2555/2725 and House Bill 2695

Dear Chair Witt and Members of the Committee,

Trout Unlimited is a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of cold-water fish (such as trout, salmon, and steelhead) and their habitats. The organization has more than 300,000 members and supporters nationwide, including over 3,000 members in Oregon. The Oregon members of Trout Unlimited are affiliated with the Oregon Council of Trout Unlimited (OCTU). OCTU supports recovery of abundant and resilient populations of wild salmon, steelhead, trout, and sturgeon in the Willamette River basin. OCTU also supports recreational boating opportunity consistent with that paramount conservation goal.

For those reasons, OCTU — along with the Oregon League of Conservation Voters (OLVC) and the Oregon Conservation Network (OCN) — supports HB 2555/2725 and HB 2695.

HB 2555/2725 will take measures to protect water quality in the Willamette River, and thus, the habitat for native fish that migrate through it (both downstream to the ocean as juveniles, and upstream to spawn in its tributaries as adults). HB 2695 will increase the size and representation of the Oregon State Marine Board (OSMB), thereby improving its ability and capacity to serve Oregonians in making informed decisions on complex boating issues.

HB 2555/2725

As recreational boats get larger and heavier, there is increasing scientific evidence that the habitat in the Willamette River is suffering, and our native fish species are being detrimentally affected due to the wave energy created. In short, the proliferation of large ballast capacity motorboats used in towed watersports is creating significant erosion and water quality issues in the Newberg Pool Congested Zone of the Willamette River (the “Newberg Pool”). Because the Willamette River is home to numerous runs of anadromous fish — many of which are struggling — water quality issues in the Newberg Pool affect native fish populations throughout the Willamette River basin.

To combat this problem, the legislature passed HB 2351 and HB 2352 in 2019 in effort to minimize the effects of artificial wave energy caused by boat wakes in the Newberg Pool. Thereafter, the Oregon State Marine Board (OSMB) established a 10,000 pound weight limit (based on ramp capacity) for motorboats in the Newberg Pool.

HB 2555/2725 will reduce the maximum loading weight limit of motorboats to 4,000 pounds in the Newberg Pool. This will help to reduce the wave energy which damages the shoreline and riverbanks, and

thereby reduce the ongoing erosion and related water quality problems. In addition, HB 2555/2725 asks for additional scientific data before this weight limit can be increased, depending on whether heavier boats are suitable for these sensitive areas.

Many native fish in the Willamette River basin depend on water quality in the Newberg Pool at some point in their life cycles. As examples only, wild spring chinook from the Mckenzie River, and wild winter steelhead from the Molalla and Santiam River basins, migrate through this river corridor and require sufficiently high water quality throughout their migration corridors to ensure they return to their home streams as adults. Similarly, the wild coho salmon, winter steelhead, and spring chinook in the Clackamas River (which enters the Willamette about 5 miles downriver of the Newberg Pool) need high water quality from upstream portions of the Willamette during their respective migrations. Passage of HB 2555/2725 will improve the water quality these fish experience by reducing streambank erosion in the Newberg Pool.

HB 2695

HB 2695 increases the size of the OSMB (currently comprised of 5 members) to 7 voting members and 2 non-voting members, and specifies certain new qualifications for OSMB members. These adjustments will ensure representation for various groups of water-users on the OSMB, and guarantee representation for recreational anglers and environmental experts on the OSMB. With the passage of HB 2695, the OSMB will expand their member knowledge base, thereby giving the Board greater diversity and skill to manage complex issues (such as towed watersport boat weight limits) in all our waterways.

Conclusion

OCTU supports passage of HB 2555/2725 and HB 2695, and we look forward to continuing discussion on this legislation.

Sincerely,



Mark W. Rogers
Council Chair
Oregon Council of Trout Unlimited



James A. Fraser
Representative to the TU National Leadership Council
Oregon Council of Trout Unlimited

Oregon Council of Trout Unlimited
PO Box 740
Gladstone, OR 97027