

Submitter: Becky Blanchard

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Environment and Natural Resources

Measure: SB1589

I support SB 1589. We need to restrict the impact of Towed Water Sports boats to alleviate their negative impact to the Willamette River.

The Willamette is a rare jewel, an incomparable greenway that connects people and nature. It's a backyard wild-land that Oregonians have worked hard and invested tremendous resources to protect, restore, and make accessible for people of all means to enjoy. As so many learned during the pandemic, the Willamette can be a place of calm, quiet respite, a place for renewal and reflection, a place to enjoy the gifts of nature — encounters with blue herons, bald eagles, fish, deer, bobcats, and more. I love to share these moments of discovery with my preschooler, and I wish the same for every family in the valley.

We have another opportunity to protect this jewel for present and future generations.

Wake Surfing Boats, and those conducting towed water sports, weighing over 5,000 lbs, are specifically designed to create massive artificial surf waves on inland waterways. The Willamette does not generate such waves naturally, and the impact is clear.

As in other areas of the country, these artificial waves are impacting nearshore areas, river banks, private property, other river users.

The nearshore “nurseries of the river” are where an amazing amount of biological productivity occurs, support a range of species from wild fish, freshwater mussels, to birds and mammals. These shallow water areas extending up to 50ft from the shoreline are where the artificial waves slam into the river bottom, and the riverside.

Only a small number of registered power boats would be impacted by this new law. There are 165,000 registered power boats in Oregon, and only 500 have the Towed Water Sports certificate, and a smaller subset of that number uses the Newberg Pool.

Well established riverine biologists have concluded that there are negative impacts for the Willamette, from the letter to the Marine Board from NOAA Fisheries, to fisheries biologists at OSU and others. The science is well known and clear, and does not need to be repeated yet again on the Willamette. The recent study from the University of Minnesota also clearly concluded that Towed Water Sports boats are NOT like other motor boats and concluded that wake boats need to be at least 500ft from shorelines to protect them.

Thank you for your consideration and I hope you support this sensible bill. This is the right thing to do for the Willamette River's health, and for other river users impacted by these craft!