

# Willamette RIVERKEEPER®

March 1, 2017

Oregon House Committee on Transportation Policy

Representative Caddy McKeown, Chair  
Representative Mark Meek, Vice-Chair  
Representative A. Richard Vial, Vice-Chair  
Representative Greg Barreto  
Representative Paul Evans  
Representative Susan McLain  
Representative Ron Noble  
Representative Carl Wilson  
Representative Brad Witt

Re: Support of HB 2320

Dear Chair McKeown and Committee Members:

On behalf of Willamette Riverkeeper I submit this letter indicating support of a modified version of HB 2320. Willamette Riverkeeper has worked with the Oregon State Marine Board for many years, and we also served on their Non-motorized Advisory Committee a few years ago as elements of what is now HB 2320 were being developed. We think the idea of this new program has merit.

Willamette Riverkeeper works to protect and restore the Willamette River's water quality and habitat. While we are not a paddling organization in terms of our mission, we utilize canoes and kayaks on a frequent basis to get people on the river. Last year alone we facilitated over 750 people getting on the river in paddle craft through our River Discovery Program. We also conduct the annual Paddle Oregon event, now in its 17th year. Further, we work with the Oregon State Parks and Recreation Department and other partners to manage the Willamette Water Trail ([www.willamettewatertrail.org](http://www.willamettewatertrail.org)), a set of access points and camp sites that have enabled thousands of people to canoe, kayak, SUP board and float the Willamette River since 2005.

Over the past 20 years, the Oregon State Marine Board has had to contend with an increasing number of concerns and issues that the non-motorized boating community has brought forward, from the desire for No Wake Zones, to issues at certain access points where minor conflicts have been observed. What has been clear is that the paddling community has had many of its concerns addressed by the Marine Board, even though paddlers do not pay into the Board for such service. It has been a long held belief by many paddlers that there will need to be a contribution of some sort to help support the Marine Board's service to the paddling community in Oregon as we go forward. Certainly the needs of paddlers will not decrease as more and more people try out canoeing, kayaking, SUP boards and more as Oregon's population continues to grow.

With a focus on **access and education**, HB 2320 strikes a thoughtful balance that would provide a new program, with transparency about where the funds are dedicated. The fees envisioned by HB 2320 are based on significant feedback by many members of the paddling community.

While there was public process for this bill, with information posted to the OSMB website, information provided to various Advisory Committee members that were engaged, and Marine Board staff meeting with various clubs and groups - there are some in the paddling community who had not been tracking the process.

It has become clear to me that as is reflected in many issues and policy proposals, there are situations where one part of a user group discusses a concern, but wider communication with other related user groups does not always happen. The paddling community, from flat and moving water paddling to white water paddling is reflective of that. Even so, it would seem there is enough interest and momentum for your Committee to consider approving a modified version of HB 2320.

To move this discussion forward, I would suggest that the Committee consider the following:

*1) Make HB 2320 sunset after 6 years. The program can get a start, provide services, and then be evaluated after a fair amount of time by the Oregon Legislature. Then the general public can weigh the costs and benefits of the program and it can be established permanently or eliminated.*

*2) Provide a broader fee scale for those, like some whitewater paddlers, who might not gain the same level of service from the program as other paddling constituencies. The fee for the average Class 3 and 4 whitewater kayaker might be reduced in comparison with paddlers of flat water and moving water. This element would allow a level of input to the program that is commensurate with the level of service received.*

3) *Create an Advisory Committee at the OSMB to guide the development and implementation of the new program that is representative of the whole paddling community. This will help ensure that the program meets the needs for education, access and strikes the right tone.*

4) *The Education Program by the OSMB should be voluntary.*

*What is not needed is overzealous enforcement.* People go to the water often to gain a bit of peace, solitude, and freedom. Having law enforcement motor up to check to see if a paddler has their permit can be, at the very least, annoying.

I have seen through the years a growing number of newer paddlers who have limited knowledge about the real risks that can at times be present when paddling. These are the people who should be the focus of this new program. While there are many great efforts by paddling clubs and others that provide training and educational materials in regard to paddling safety, the nexus of the Marine Board Program in this realm should be in reducing risk for the average recreational paddler who might only get on the water a few times each summer.

The Grant Program proposed under HB 2320 can be beneficial to the canoeing, kayaking, and SUP boarding community. Such funds would enable paddlers to have a hand in creating the type of access or educational efforts that *they* want to see. Such funds can support and expand projects that provide moving water safety classes, and create better non-motorized access points. In fact, many basic project concepts have been forwarded to the Marine Board by the paddling community. Some are as basic as placing gravel on a muddy trail, creating a bit more parking space and other such requests that are at present unfunded.

I believe that HB 2320 is a template that can be modified to reflect just a bit more of the desire of the *whole* paddling community, and can address the fear that some have expressed about this bill.

I have had my own reservations about such a program. As a whitewater and flat water canoeist, and a frequent river camper, paddling is about freedom - and is one of the few things people can do to get out to explore the natural world, enjoy nature, and be left alone.

At the same time, a careful balance can be struck with this new program that allows for full transparency, a reauthorization period, and a modified fee structure that will benefit a wide array of the paddling community.

Hopefully your Committee can keep these notions in mind as you move forward in considering this bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tracy Wilton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Riverkeeper & Executive Director  
Willamette Riverkeeper