

To: Oregon Marine Board

August 31, 2018

From: Karl Lee and Roberta Jortner, 7201 SE 36th Ave. Portland OR 97202

Subject: OAR 250-010-0026, Revisions to Statewide Wake Sport Rule

While we support increased regulation of boats used for wake-board sports, we feel the proposed rules do not go far enough to protect the non-motorized boating population in the Willamette River in downtown Portland. Usage of the river by numerous non-motorized craft, as well as swimmers, has increased over the past several years, due in part to the perception that the river has become cleaner and safer for water sports. While Portland and numerous cities in Oregon fronting the Willamette River at one time turned their backs on the River, there is renewed enthusiasm and actions to get more people enjoying this resource. We are asking your help in getting all boaters to use the river safely. In particular, we feel improvements need to be made in protecting non-motorized users of the river.

As members of one of the several Wasabi dragon boat paddling teams, we practice for an hour, 3 times a week, boarding our boat from the dock on the east side of the Willamette River just upstream of the Hawthorne Bridge. Typically, we are among 2 to 4 other teams departing from that dock around the same time, amounting to a hundred paddlers or more. Multiply this by the many teams practicing other times of the day/week and by the other large club that practices on the west side of the river, there can be several hundred dragon boat paddlers on the Willamette River on a given day. This is in addition to the kayak, SUP, outrigger, racing shells, and other non-motorized population using the river on a daily basis.

We know the hazards of the wakes created by motorboats first hand. We are members of Wasabi VIP (Visually Impaired Paddlers), and our boat was rolled by boat wakes on July 10, 2018. On that day, we had 16 paddlers, plus a steer person and coach. Two-thirds of our crew on that day was visually impaired or blind, and we had 2 paddlers who couldn't swim. This was the first time both our coach and our steer person, each with decades of dragon boat experience, were capsized. We were relatively lucky – all wore PFD's, the water was warm, and all were accounted for quickly. With some assistance from a nearby motorboat, we got to a dock, got our paddlers out of the river, bailed out our boat, re-boarded, and returned to the dock.

The issue of our experience relative to the proposed rules is this: Our boat was rolled by a series of about 3 waves that came from a boat passing way more than a hundred feet away. The boat that rolled us was probably 500 feet away, and passed at least a couple of minutes prior to the problem. Our understanding was the boat that caused the problem was most likely a wake-board boat with capability of making an enhanced wake for the wake boarding participant. Such wakes propagate across the river and are difficult if not impossible to navigate under certain conditions by boats such as our dragon boat. Changing the rules for wake-board sports to 100 feet would be insufficient to protect the non-motorized boater.

In addition to the hazards presented to non-motorized boats by individual wake-sport boats, there may be conditions somewhat unique to the reach of the Willamette River between the Hawthorne Bridge and the northern tip of Ross Island. Most portions of the river banks in this area are hardened and reflect waves back into the river. Waves also bounce off the large piers of the Ross Island, Tillikum, and Marquam Bridges as well as the submarine docked on the east bank at OMSI, leading to a chaotic, unpredictable water surface.

We supported the Oregon Marine Board's decision several years ago to designate the south end of the Holgate Channel and the Ross Island Lagoon as wake free. We believe the wake-free zone needs to be expanded to include the area from the Hawthorne Bridge upstream to the northern end of Ross Island, and including the entire Holgate Channel. This would provide an area for wake sports along the river west of Ross Island, including the primary launch point for motorboats at Willamette Park, as well as the area north of the Hawthorne Bridge. This would provide protection for the non-motorized boaters, where who use the entire Willamette River, between the Hawthorne Bridge and extending up through the Holgate Channel.

We know that with regulation comes the cost associated with education and enforcement. We support fees applied equitably across all types of watercraft for these purposes.

We also support exemptions for commercial activity, including the large cruise-ship type boats, barges, Willamette Jet boat operators, and commercial fishing guides. Our general experiences with these activities are the pilots are professionals, and are respectful of the safety of all boaters.

Thank you for your work in safety for all boaters. We look forward to many years of safe boating on Oregon's rivers, including the Willamette River in downtown Portland.

Sincerely,

Karl Lee and Roberta Jortner