

Power Boats

From River Mile 55 to the Willamette's confluence with the Columbia, paddlers will encounter power boats, from fishing boats in the spring to wake board boats in the summer. Typically wakes from these boats have little effect on paddlers—they merely cause a little bump as you paddle down river. Still, paddlers are best served by staying near the river's edge. When crossing the main channel, cross quickly and always look up and down river as you paddle. Never assume that the power boat sees you! It is your responsibility to ensure your safety.

On some weekends, traffic in the Newberg Pool and the Portland area can be very heavy. Again, stay near the river's edge and always be aware of the power boats around you. While most power boat drivers are conscientious about safety and have no interest in colliding with or being a hazard to human-powered craft, it is possible that some drivers will not see you.

Commercial Traffic

The lower 15 miles of river covered in this guide is an area that is regularly traveled by large ships and tugboats. Paddlers must always give way to these larger vessels. Typically it is best to stay out of the middle of the channel, or to head to the opposite shoreline if the vessels are being moored or are just getting under way in front of you.

Canoes and kayaks typically have little problem passing over tugboat wakes, but the wakes can be large, particularly near the shoreline, where shallow water helps them build into sizable waves. Also pay attention to wakes “rebounding” off of hardened riverside surfaces and heading back out into the river—the combination of rebounding wakes and new ones can create some interesting water. In all cases it is best to keep paddling, in order to maintain your stability. Just put your paddle in the water and pull! If you keep your boat under way, you will typically cruise right through. While there may be times in Portland Harbor when you do not encounter any ship or tug traffic, it is always best to be keep an eye out for these craft, both ahead and behind.

Sellwood Bridge at night

