

Willamette Riverkeeper: River Closure Position

Closure Background

Organizers of the 2008 World Championship Boat Race scheduled during Memorial Day weekend, May 24 -26 have requested that the Oregon State Marine Board permit the closure of over 80 miles of the Willamette River at the following locations:

- May 24: Willamette River from 1 to 6 p.m. from Bowman Park (RM 117.5) upstream 1.5 miles to Albany.
- May 25: Willamette River from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. from Bowman Park (RM 117.5) upriver 61 miles to Valley River Inn, Eugene (RM 179).
- May 26: Willamette River from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. from Bowman Park 40 miles downriver to the confluence of the Santiam River, upriver on the mainstem Santiam to the confluence of the North Santiam and then upriver on the South Santiam to Gills Landing boat ramp in Lebanon.

For an event of this magnitude to take place, an extensive amount to safety and patrol support will be required from Lane, Linn, Benton, and Marion counties and local city fire departments.

Riverkeeper Position

Willamette Riverkeeper has some 1,500 members throughout the Willamette Valley, and many of them recreate along the Willamette River, or live along the river, or its tributaries. Willamette Riverkeeper opposes the closure of the Willamette for jet boat racing for the following reasons:

- 1) Closure of a navigable river for the purpose of one river user group, is in direct conflict with the idea and purpose of a publicly owned, navigable river. It is also in conflict with the intended uses of other publicly owned sites, such as the myriad Oregon Parks & Recreation parks and greenway sites along the river.
- 2) The impact of multiple race boats with large wakes and noise on local wildlife and aesthetic values has not been evaluated. Given that sections of the Willamette River are now being designated as key natural areas critical to recovery efforts, it makes little sense to encourage greater motorized use of the section of river.

It makes more sense to have such a race on Detroit Reservoir, or some other area where intensive motorized boat use is common and planned for. Willamette Riverkeeper support use by all people of the river and what it offers. It is a different story though, to allow closure of the Willamette to a single special group.

We urge the Oregon State Marine Board to deny the request.

Your chance to comment

The Marine Board is accepting written public comment on whether the proposed race should be permitted. All comments must be received by Monday, March 31. Comments can be sent to June LeTarte, OSMB, P.O. Box 14145, Salem, OR 97309. They can also be sent via email to june.letarte@state.or.us, or via fax (503) 378-4597. Comments by telephone cannot be accepted.