



Accident Database

Report ID# 118080

[Help](#)

2022-04-23

Date

Mariana Dukes

Victim

23

Victim Age

Long Tom River

River

United States Oregon, US

Location

Water Level

II

River Difficulty

- Cause Code(s)
- Caught in Low Head Dam Hydraulic
- Injury Type(s)
- Does not Apply
- Factors
- One Boat Trip

Private

Trip Type

Open Canoe

Boat Type

Joseph Bendix, 26

Other Victim Names

Reported

Status

Accident Description

Families of two kayakers who drowned in one of Oregon’s 200 ‘killer dams’ sue for \$50 million

Updated: Apr. 19, 2024

Mariana Dukes II and Joseph Bendix died on April 23, 2022, on the Long Tom River in Lane County.

By Aimee Green | The Oregonian/OregonLive

The families of a couple who drowned while kayaking over a small, underwater dam filed a pair of \$50 million lawsuits against the state of Oregon, Lane County and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers this week for failing to post signs upriver warning of the mortal danger.

Mariana Dukes II and Joseph Bendix, ages 23 and 26, died in April 23, 2022 after they paddled down a calm stretch of the Long Tom River in Lane County and then

suddenly found themselves tumbling over the submerged government-built dam called a “low head dam,” according to lawsuits filed in state and federal courts Tuesday and Wednesday. The dams are colloquially known as “killer dams” or “drowning machines” and are responsible for the deaths of more than 100 people in the U.S. from 2018 to 2020, according to the National Weather Service.

“It’s innocuous looking,” said Travis Eiva, the families’ Eugene attorney, of the low head dam that killed Dukes and Bendix. “People go down little rapids all of the time in their tubes, in rafts and in kayaks. But it is profoundly inappropriate to do it on this kind of rapid, over this low head dam. It is just recirculating current that just pulls you down and an Olympic swimmer can’t get out of it.”

Eiva said because the dams are submerged and often don’t have a big drop-off, they are difficult for people to see upriver or to realize the imminent danger. The National Weather Service has posted photos of how hidden the dams can be to users floating down the river.

Eiva said Dukes and Bendix, who lived in Eugene and were planning to get married, had expected to enjoy a “nice, meandering day on the river.”

“They weren’t going down a river with rapids,” Eiva said. “They weren’t going down the McKenzie. They weren’t going down portions of the Willamette. They were going down a sleepy river called the Long Tom. And it’s just tragic. Absolutely tragic. This shouldn’t have happened.”

Eiva said that since Dukes’ and Bendix’s deaths, signs have appeared above the dam warning river users of the danger and to exit the river.



Our Organization

About AW

Outdoor Alliance

News

[Stewardship](#)

[Safety](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Employment Opportunities](#)

[Board of Directors](#)

[Professional Staff](#)

Support AW

[Join or Renew](#)

[Donate](#)

[Giving](#)

[Become a Volunteer](#)

[AW Store](#)

[Industry Partner Program](#)

[Advertising Information](#)

River Info

Library

[AW Journal](#)

Community

[Clubs](#)

[Events](#)

[Industry Partners](#)

Account

[AW Site Login](#)

[New Account](#)

[Password Reminder](#)

[Create AW Account](#)

Administrator

[Content](#)

[Users](#)

© 1999-2025 American Whitewater
Terms of Service