

Date: April 9, 2013, 10:57:12 PM PDT
To: <beth.reiley@state.or.us>
Subject: Concerns of SB 401 & 838

To Beth Reiley

I am writing this message addressing my concerns to Senate Bill 838 & 401; it places extraordinarily strict laws on mining practices that will be harmful to rural communities and family businesses across the state. In addition, removing motors from mining equipment will not have any environmental protection benefits, contrary to misunderstood belief. It makes as much sense as removing motors from boats and other watercraft and only allowing rowboats and kayaks in Oregon's waterways.

Gold prospecting is a way of life in Oregon. Historically, it was one of a few incentives to urge American settlers to move westward and claim the Oregon territory. The Oregon gold rush enticed many pioneers from the east to move to Oregon to build the state into what it is today. Gold is still abundant in Oregon and many people still hunt for gold as a way of life it helps bring more people outdoors. Gold is a great investment for many people. It has been used as monetary value for hundreds if not thousands of years. It is an investment that is strong and will last. Nobody can make gold on demand and create it out of thin air like most fiat currencies of the world. Gold also has value as an electrical conductor in microchips, batteries, your cell phone, and numerous consumer electronics.

Opponents of small scale dredging claim that the pollution and possible erosion of stream beds and fish nesting grounds take place because gold dredges vacuum and overturn stone and sediment, muddy up the water and create large plumes of dirt and sediment behind the tailings from the sluice. Environmentalists have expressed even greater concern over the destruction of fish nesting habitats which could be caused by irresponsible suction dredging during the nesting season. But the truth is the the regulators and environmentalists are over-exaggerating the pollution impacts of river dredging. The turbidity created by small dredges are far less than that of natural erosion. During a dredge operation, small sand and gravel get overturned from deep beneath the river bottom, and get placed on top of the river bed and can therefore create more salmon nesting beds. They also state that the only "pollution" which takes place is the displacement of sand and gravel in a river. It isn't about industrial waste in the rivers, it is about sand and rock. You dig it from the bottom of a stream, and the sand and rock settles back down.

Another common misconception about river dredging is that operating motorized dredges ruin fish nesting grounds and reduce salmon populations. The fact is dredging season is already restricted by law during the winter months when the native fish spawn and lay their eggs. Dredging mostly takes place in the summer when no fish eggs are present in nesting beds. Also as mentioned earlier, the sediment tailing piles which are created by motorized suction dredges brings sand and lightweight material to the top of the river bed, making it easier for salmon to lay their eggs.

Motorized suction dredges have been proven an effective tool for removing litter, heavy metal, and toxins from watersheds. As a gold prospector, I have found lots of lead bullets and fish weights in my sluice. Many rivers and creeks contain mercury deposits that come from eroding cinnabar and mining practices from the old frontier. The frontier miners have left behind a lot of mercury and it still remains there in our natural waterways. Removing this highly toxic substance can be made possible with a gold dredge. A report made by the State Water Resources Control Board concluded that a four inch gold dredge removed up to 98% of the mercury it sucks from the environment. It further states that the escaping 2% will get carried long distances down river in small miniscule particles which could be biologically taken in by bacteria and other microbes where it will be broken down into methylmercury. Gold dredgers have also worked collaboratively to safely and properly dispose of this recovered mercury found inside their sluice boxes. Collecting and removing poisonous metals such as lead and mercury from dredges and sluice boxes have proven to be spillover benefits: not only is the river's toxic metals content reduced, but the miner is also rewarded with placer gold.

Gold will always be in demand in the market regardless whether it is legal or not to dredge. An alternative to small-scale river dredging is large scale corporate mining. The mining industry has been known to practice unsustainable methods of acquiring ore via strip mining and leaching. Leaching is a common practice used in the commercial gold mining industry; it is done by pouring cyanide solution through large piles of ore. These tailing piles are often several stories tall. The gold is collected and the heap piles often get neglected and release cyanide into the environment. Motorized dredgers in Oregon have no use for cyanide in their gold prospects.

All mining clubs across the west coast require all members to practice environmental stewardship and are strict on littering and pollution. Clubs such as the New 49ers Club and the GPAA practice environmental stewardship and know never to leave no mess behind.

In conclusion, gold will always be in demand for its monetary value, electrical properties, jewelry, and aesthetic qualities. As long as there is a demand for gold, someone will mine for it. Dredging is a widely misunderstood hobby and many believe that because the anthropogenic sifting and moving of rock and gravel is not natural, they automatically assume it is harmful and leaves behind irreparable damage. Erosion and tumbling of rocks and stone is a naturally occurring process in rivers during high waters and floods. Dredging is not about leaving behind industrial waste, it is about gravel and sediment displacement. Placing loose sediment on top of the river bottom can create easier nesting grounds for migrating salmon as they do not have to work as hard to dig very deep in smaller grained sediment. Plus the excessive algae caused by eutrophication of organic nutrient waste is also stirred up and removed by the dredge, allowing various species of fish access to swim and migrate up river. As long as miners continue their good stewardship toward the land and the public is educated on the benefits of gold dredging, it can be an enjoyable hobby for many people in a sustainable practice of gold extraction. Many people come to Oregon to prospect gold to this day. Banning motorized dredging equipment will prove no environmental benefit in the state of Oregon. These bills are just another way to prohibit Oregonians from venturing outdoors and embracing the beauty of nature.

Sincerely,

Tom Tice