

# **River Trail Outfitters**

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April 12, 2013

## **Testimony in support of SB 838 and SB 401 by Frank Armendariz to the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee**

Dear Chair Dingfelder and members of the committee:

I would like to thank you all and the people of the great state of Oregon for the opportunity to speak in this forum today. My name is Frank Armendariz, and I am the owner of Eugene, Oregon-based River Trail Outfitters, a family-owned marketing business that specializes in guided river trips, automobile shuttles, and specialized river equipment sales and repair.

I have worked in the outdoor recreation industry since 1982, mostly as a river guide and river outfitter, but also as a partner in a drift boat business and as the manager of a retail outdoor sports equipment and whitewater boat shop. I am a past president of the Emerald Empire Chapter of the Association of Northwest Steelheaders. I served as a past president of the Cascade Family Fly Fishers, a chartered Federation of Fly Fisher club. I recently served on the board of the directors of the Willamette Riverkeeper, and I am a member of the McKenzie Guides Association.

I have spent the last thirty years of my life, either directly or indirectly, encouraging people from all walks of life to enjoy Oregon's outdoors, especially Oregon's rivers. Today, I represent my own concerns and those of my company's, but I believe that my concerns are shared by many of my fellow river enthusiasts, customers and others in the river recreation industry.

As president of the above-mentioned angling clubs, I took my turn at stewarding groups of people among our membership who have spent thousands of volunteer hours devoted to enhancing, rehabilitating and reestablishing habitat for wild salmon and steelhead. Across our state, thousands of Oregonians have volunteered tens of thousands of hours performing very hard work to mitigate many of the poor land use practices of the past. I have always been proud to know and lead folks so committed to the traditional heritage of fishing and fisheries stewardship in our great state.

As a member of the McKenzie Guides (established in 1932 and the oldest association of river guides in the world), I am profoundly aware of the wonderful history of river recreation in Oregon and its citizens' passion for fishing, floating

and hiking along the banks of our state's many great rivers and streams. I am fortunate to say that on many days my office is the magnificent McKenzie River in all its glory and history. My desk is the deck of a boat that bares the river's name, a McKenzie River Drift Boat, a fine craft for the job, developed on the McKenzie River and built right here in Oregon. My oars and some of the fishing gear I use were made here, too.

I point this out to draw your attention to the fact that every year 2.8 million people, Oregonians and other visitors, travel our state to fish and float, hunt and sightsee. They participate in recreational activities with long histories, deep traditions and historical significance in our state. One could easily argue that our state's \$2.5 billion outdoor sports and recreation industry and all the jobs it provides is entirely driven by our state's clean water resource and its great outdoors. We know all of this from a study recently completed on behalf of the Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife and conducted by Dean Runyon & Associates of Portland.

The study was complete and comprehensive, as it looked at every region of the state and the benefits to the state's economy generated by the general categories of fishing, hunting, shellfish collection and wildlife viewing. It is proof that the outdoor industry is big business in Oregon. I am proud to be part of this tradition and thriving economic engine. Oregon's clean rivers and wild landscapes are a gift that keeps on giving to its citizens and its outdoor business community.

The outdoor recreation industry in Oregon accommodates 2.8 million travelers every year, and these are the people that eat in out-of-the-way restaurants and stay in hotels, motels, B&B's and lodges. They are the travelers who fill up their gas tanks at the local stations and purchase groceries and supplies in local markets and shops. They also pay state and county fees related to some of the activities they pursue. They buy fishing and hunting licenses. They pay parking fees, fees to view some attractions, and fees to float some rivers. Where I live in Lane County, we have the most beautiful parks, but our park system, including the boat landings on the McKenzie, are entirely funded by users. We would not have any parks if people stopped coming and stopped paying the user fees. Given the financial condition of many of our counties, user-funded destinations and services are becoming the way of the future. So it's important that people keep visiting.

We have a duty to protect these Oregon Treasures for future generations to see, feel, experience and enjoy. Adding to our state's inventory of wild places and protected river adds value and benefits that reach far beyond the edge of the wilderness or the bank of the river. When we value clean water, wild fish and pristine places, we ensure that small businesses like mine can and will continue to prosper.

My job is to invite other Oregonians, people from around the country and the world, to experience what Oregon's iconic rivers have to offer. The storied McKenzie and Rogue, the wild Illinois and the free-flowing Chetco, all world renown, offer a multitude of recreational opportunities in their waters, on their banks and in the grandeur of their river canyons.

It's true that some visitors will come to hunt, some will come with the intent of harvesting one of our great fish, a steelhead or a salmon from a river where harvest is allowed, and I support these traditions. Of the 2.8 million people that travel for recreation in our state each year, 631,000 will fish, 282,000 will hunt and 1.7 million will only sightsee. They will take absolutely nothing away from our great state but pictures and memories. And their travels, in pursuit of peace, quite, a salmon, the perfect picture and family memories, creates thousands of full-time and seasonal jobs across our great state.

However, our clean water, wild salmon and steelhead in these iconic river systems, and our outdoor recreation industry are at risk because of a short-sighted and destructive hobby called suction dredge mining. Others will be more qualified to speak to the science, but the hobby is a noisy, intrusive practice that is fouling our common waterways and jeopardizing our outdoor businesses and the communities that rely on healthy fish runs and clean water.

California had the good sense to place a moratorium on suction dredge mining a couple of years ago, and Oregon should follow suit. Some of our most popular fishing and floating rivers, like the Rogue, Chetco and Umpqua have become ground zero for this practice. There is no place for these noisy, gas-powered vacuums in our waterways that are so critical to the survival of our wild salmon stocks and other salmonids teetering on the brink of extinction. I find it quite ironic that county, state and federal governments are spending millions of dollars to restore our ailing salmon runs each year, yet this practice of sucking up sensitive spawning and feeding grounds for young fish proceeds largely unchecked.

It has been almost a hundred years since any major industrial scale gold mining has taken place in Oregon. A recent Oregon Public Broadcasting special detailed the destructive practice of displacing millions of cubic yards of over burden from the banks and the bed of the Rogue River, destruction and damage that we are still trying to repair today. We must move beyond practices that degrade our common waterways, like suction dredge mining.

Fishing, hunting and wildlife viewing are values we hold dear and have proven to be sustainable over many decades in our state's history. Suction dredge hobbyists have a responsibility to prove that their hobby is sustainable, safe for the future of our rivers, our fish, our traditional outdoor recreation industry and for Oregonians.

In 1970, the good and thoughtful people of our great state voted by a two-to-one margin to create the Oregon State Scenic Waterway System. Over the years there has been a modest addition to the system, but none over the past 25 years. Given the new pressures that have been placed on our state's rivers, SB 401 would begin the process of safeguarding some of our critical waterways by requiring the state to recommend needed additions to the State Scenic Waterway system. It would speak loudly in support of the things we value as Oregonians: our clean and wild places, our free flowing rivers, our fish other wildlife and our jobs. I strongly support the SB 401, which will set things in motion to protect our iconic rivers in Oregon from harmful activity.

And prior to the creation of new State Scenic Waterways, we must take immediate action to halt the destructive practice of suction dredge mining in our critical salmon waterways. Therefore, I strongly urge you to support SB 838, which will put a prohibition on suction dredge mining until effective sideboards can be established.

SB 401 and SB 838 are good for business, good for the environment and good Oregonians. Future generations deserve no less. Let's keep Oregon special together.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment today, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

/s/

Frank Armendariz

Owner, River Trail Outfitters