

Testimony of Robyn Janssen before the Oregon Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee in support of Senate Bill 838 relating to suction dredging

April 15th, 2013

Senator Dingfelder, members of the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

My name is Robyn Janssen and I am here to speak as a citizen of Oregon. I strongly support Senate Bill 838, an act to enact a moratorium on suction dredging in salmon habitat and to propose a new regulatory framework for the practice of suction dredge mining in Oregon's streams and rivers.

I grew up in southern Oregon and have been an avid outdoor enthusiast my entire life. 16 years ago I became a river guide and have spent every summer since on the rivers of southern Oregon, northern California and beyond. While I only work part time as a raft guide now, I would like to speak from my experiences on our rivers and what I have seen over the years working in this industry.

As a raft guide, I made my living showing visitors the beauty and serenity of our public waterways, offering them the experience of peace, adventure and the opportunity to get away from the noise and "hustle and bustle" of their everyday lives. In my earlier years as a raft guide, that's generally what it was; peaceful and serene. I cannot say the same anymore at least on certain sections of the rivers that we run commercially.

During my time as a guide, I have seen dredges and the act of suction dredge mining on multiple rivers in northern California and southern Oregon including the Klamath, Scott, Applegate, Illinois and the Rogue. In the past it seemed fairly minimal and not a huge burden to others trying to enjoy the quiet peace of the river. There may have been a dredge here or there along a stretch of river, some running some not. But that has since changed and I, as well as my guests, find it noisy, intrusive, dangerous, distracting, smelly, and an overall hindrance to an otherwise enjoyable river experience.

I am not going to talk about the danger it may cause to fish and spawning beds though I have read the scientific reports and believe that it is harmful to our fisheries; I want to speak of the harm that it is doing to our recreational economy and the threat that it poses to outfitters, guides, and river users now and in the future.

In the summer months, when it is legal for the dredges to be running, there is a section of river on the Rogue where in the past there have been 3 maybe 4 dredges stationed, most of which were rarely running. Now when you float this section, which I will also mention is one of the most popular raft trips in southern Oregon, you may find up to 30 dredges within less than a ¼ mile stretch of the Rogue River. Not only is this noisy, crowded and an incredible eye sore, but it is dangerous for river runners.

There are five+ rafting companies that run this stretch of river daily throughout the summer. I have heard personal accounts from guests, guides and the owners of these companies, that this

section of river is becoming increasingly dangerous and the least favorite raft trip for guests and guides as well. Not only do the guides have to warn their guests when they get them in the boat at the put-in that they will not be able to talk to them because of the noise from all of the dredges but there have often times been ropes strewn across the river, leaking gas cans, loose dredges, aggressive miners, trash and a traffic jam of floating dredges that the rafts have to literally weave through in order to get downstream.

I would also like to point out is that this raft trip is the introductory trip for people who have never done any whitewater rafting. For folks new to rafting, outfitters will put them on this trip because it is safer, easier, it's fun and it's just enough to get people excited for the next step up. If people are experiencing whitewater rafting for the first time and have to endure floating through a sea of 25 running motors, the smell of gasoline and exhaust as well as trash and aggressive behavior, my guess is that they may not be inclined to want to come back and try another river trip. It certainly doesn't "add" to their experience in any kind of positive way. If I were a visitor to the area and on my first river trip I would honestly question the so-called "progressive state of Oregon" and its treatment of its waterways.

Additionally and on a side note, I went camping with my father last summer which is a rarity. It was a weekend we had planned to spend together in the outdoors which we used to do regularly when I was a kid. We visited a small campground along the Applegate River where we assumed we would be in the peace and quiet of the clear water river and the Applegate Valley. Unfortunately, this was not the case as a suction dredge was stationed directly across the river from our campsite and proceeded to run throughout the day. It was loud, smelly and otherwise a great disappointment to our once a year father/daughter outing.

I believe that Oregon needs to act now to limit or ban suction dredge mining. I believe this for the sake of our dwindling salmon populations, for the sake of the land owners living along the river experiencing a compromised quality of life, for the sake of outdoor enthusiasts trying to find the peace and serenity that they expect, and primarily for the sake of our recreational economy and the jobs and revenue that rafting & fishing bring to Oregon. I urge our senators to act now to pass a moratorium on suction dredge mining as well as amendments to require the implementation of new regulatory framework.

Thank you.

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