

SB 401 and SB 838
Statement by George Atiyeh
Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee

Senators:

With your indulgence I would like to introduce myself - I am George Atiyeh. I am a third generation Oregonian, from a rural portion of Oregon. I have lived on the Little North Fork of the Santiam River for the last 60 years. I am a registered Republican from a long line of Oregon Republicans. Starting with my Great Grandfather for last three generations we have worked in the mining industry, myself for over 30 years. I am a member of the Association of Mining Engineers, I have worked as consultant for Duval Corporation, Freeport Minerals, Amoco Minerals and Plexus Corporation. I also operated a mine and mill for 25 years just east of Salem. I am familiar with both hard rock and placer mining.

While it may seem at odd with my personal history, I am also the founder of *Friends of Opal Creek* now called the *Opal Creek Ancient Forest Center* and of *Opal Creek Watch* which I am currently the Conservation Director. In addition, I am an avid Steelhead and Salmon fisherman.

This is a interesting issue for me for I have always been in favor of recreation mining. A guy going out with his kids panning a little color in our stream was something I have always supported. In fact, I wrote a provision to allow recreational mining into Senator Mark Hatfield's *Opal Creek National Scenic Recreation Area Legislation*, to the objection of many of the environmental groups in the state. I now have to admit they may have been right. The problem is that regardless how it is characterized, recreational mining is not the issue before you. What is going on in Oregon's streams is massive destruction of critical Salmon and Steelhead spawning grounds under the guise of recreational mining

while at the same time we are taxing or having ratepayers spend 10s of millions of dollars attempting to restore this very habitat so Oregon can once again have our tradition fish runs. As a taxpayer and electrical ratepayer I am outraged. Why should I be asked to spend my hard earned money to restore these runs while you allow a small group of people to destroy that very habitat, not for recreation, not for sustainable economic growth, but their personal self interest. Sorry, I am not real sympathetic I shut down my mining operation and gave it back to the public trust. When the gift was made it was valued at 12.6 million dollars. I now live on my social security and a small pension and struggle to put my girls through college instead of living in a villa at some place warm. Was it worth it? yes. This issue is simple **Gold vs Fish**, nothing more.

I have seen first hand the destruction of Salmon spawning beds and the destruction of the armour at the bottom of these streams.. I have lived along the Little North Fork for over sixty years I have seen (2)100 year floods and (4) 50 year floods, after each flood I have spent time looking at the stream bottoms and fishing the river, in each case the damage from the flood is not as bad as what I have seen in some of these dredging operations. If you just look at the invertebrates in the bottom of the stream, after flood events their habitat is intact and they are still there. When I have visited streams that have been dredged the invertebrates are gone for years.

After the 1996 Flood I spent three years as a government contractor doing flood repair and improving structures for fish in Oregon streams, taxpayer money that appears to be wasted if you do not stop the destruction.

Now when I go into Cedar Creek or the Quartsville drainage which are close to my home I see streams diverted and the bottoms ripped up from suction dredging. If you doubt my veracity I ask only that you just do a You Tube search of suction dredge mining, these guys are certainly not shy showing the

destruction they are causing. Now I was told I should be nice to the miners, that they are good people, which I have no doubt, remember I came from the mining industry. But I just do not feel like being nice to someone who is destroying a common resource like our fishery, for their personal gain. Yet I am sympathetic to the few who are living on their claims and making a meager living off of them. I know BLM or the Forest Service is just salivating to kick them off of their claims. So yes I am conflicted, but I am sorry but fish are just more important to Oregonians than Gold.

I urge you to take a conservative approach by stopping suction dredge mining until it can be proved that it does not harm fish or habitat, the gold will still be there in 4 years the fish may not be. My neighbors are loggers and mill workers as typical rural Oregonians we fish after work, we do not go suction mining. This is not your typical urban vs rural issue with rural representatives fighting off what rural people perceive as the tyranny of the urban majority. This issue is rural vs rural and for you Senators who represent rural districts it might be prudent for you to count how many fisherman you have in your districts and how many suction dredge miners. To be honest a lot of us are ticked off that the legislature might not do its job this session, we do want you to limit our freedoms, but we do want you too protect the commons. Fish are common to all Oregonians and rural Oregonians care about Fish not Gold.

Thank You

George Atiyeh