

From: Jon Ball
Sent: Tuesday, April 16, 2013 12:38 PM
Subject: Opposition to SB 838 and SB 401

Dear Senator,

Please allow me to begin by stating that for every tenth of an ounce of gold flake fines that I pull from Oregon rivers in a given afternoon, my small-scale mining and dredging operation captures and removes POUNDS of harmful, man-made lead from Oregon waterways. That is NO JOKE! It is a fact. (I capture endless quantities of bullets, fishing lures, weights, strips, fragments of lead of all sorts of shapes and sizes along with all sorts of trash items like shell casings, fish hooks, needles, nuts and bolts, car parts, binoculars, grommets, pop cans, rebar, etc) Let me know if you would like to see it sometime? I'm happy to bring it by.

I also capture free and bound mercury. Some naturally occurring, some from historical industrial operations. No body uses mercury in small scale placer mining, now that the health affects are known. It's actually regarded as a nuisance in our industry today.

We also make holes of various sizes in stream beds, which I have found hold fish, providing much cooler water, deeper down and protect them from strong currents, where before no protection was available in that same stretch of river.

I have been placer mining for four years now. Both in Oregon and Wyoming. I have learned that our water ways are apparently devoid of fish in many areas. This is a problem indeed. We all share the same concerns.

But what I have found is that in the course of several hours of working my dredge in an area... the fish tend to congregate and even feed off the back of my dredge. Others come and swim with me. It's a real treat. Over the course of a weekend, I will see fish, crayfish, caddis flies, and many more aquatic species moving into my mining area and populate the holes I leave behind... These holes are often filled back in by storm surges within a single winter in some cases...

My wife, Tina, is an environmental advocate. She works at one of Oregon's premier environmental education centers (Oregon Coast Aquarium). She wasn't supportive of my mining efforts until she witnessed the fish moving into my dredge holes for herself. Now we look forward to mining in a small area each summer and we look forward to making fish habitat. We enjoy protecting the fish and assisting them whenever possible. On several trips each spring, we goto Cow Creek, a tributary of the S. Umpqua river... The naturally occurring bedrock depressions (formed by boulder rubbing on the bedrock during storms) fills with fish fry every spring. My wife, daughter and I take great pride in taking our small Aquarium fish nets and we capture the small fry from these landlocked depressions that will dry up within weeks and kill thousands of small fry when their two or three inch deep holes dry up by June. We capture the fry and put them in the main water ways, hoping to save the few hundred we can in an afternoon.

When we goto any mining site, we often find that other people, usually drunks and drug users (whomever they are), have left behind lots of trash. We always clean up the sites we visit and remove all our trash, and that of other people who came before us.

This is a family affair for us. We all pitch in. We all enjoy our time on Oregon's waterways.

This is the real face of Oregon's small scale placer miners. We are the one's looking out for the fish, for the environment and for the freedom for everyone to choose to participate or not in small scale mining.

I grew up in the nicest neighborhood in Portland, very wealthy. Members of the Portland Trailblazers and Mark and Mindi Ross (Musical Group: Quarterflash) were just some of my neighbors. I always thought I would grow up to be a CEO of some company some where. Instead, I provide anti-cyber terrorism enterprise security technical support to federal agencies, our nation's banking system, our armed forces and to our country's largest private companies. I work hard to protect our nation's IT infrastructure, so we can keep our nation's intelligence and assets safe and our company's competitive advantages strong. I make a good living. And I love nothing more than to go out on the weekends in the summer and mine. I look forward to running my dredge and find that next big nugget. It's a lot of fun and my family loves joining me and all the aquatic lifeforms in the water.

Growing up, my father and I used to go hunting a lot. We would kill everything from ducks to geese to Deer and Elk and yes, even the fish who would end up on our lines and eventually on our BBQ grill... I tell you this, because those behaviors have changed for me. I have given up hunting and fishing... not by force. Not by some legislation... Not because the President told me I had to. NO. I changed because the Freedom to do so was there. Because I ENJOY MINING MORE. I enjoy helping the fish find cooler, slower waters in the hot summer heat where the tree canopies have gone away due over logging. I enjoy finding that little bit of gold that jumps out at me from the sluice box waters, telling me, I'm in the right area... I even enjoy removing the toxic lead and heavy metals and mercury and all the trash that goes with it... it's like opening up a present on Christmas morning... you never know what awaits you in the sluice box.

All the while, my family is certainly spending a lot of money every summer on food and lodging, gifts and keepsakes and some fuel while we visit the distant rural reaches of Oregon. Rural communities that might not otherwise have a tourist interest about them, usually find me and my mining friends showing up in town at some point in the year. Before I began mining, I'd never been to Myrtle Creek, Scio, Quartzville, Sweet Home, Riddle, John Day, Holley, Enterprise, Baker, Sumpter, Bohemia, Atlantic City (Wyo), and countless other places that don't even have names... just GPS coordinates and logging roads.

Please don't take away our freedom to choose to be Place Miners. Please don't ban dredging or any form of small-scale mining. There was a time, just a few years ago when we had to live off of it to survive. And survive we did. We've gone from public assistance to being tax payers. Placer Mining got us through.

Please make this a part of the record of SB115, SB370, SB388, SB401, SB838 and any future bills that unfairly target small-scale mining. There is no need to make virtually every water way in Oregon a "Wild and Scenic River." That only dilutes the term for it's intended purpose. Not all human activity hurts fish and aquatic life as some of these bills would have you believe. You have stewards of the land visiting Oregon's water ways all the time. We are known as Placer Miners. Ban us, and the fisherman, and the boaters... and soon no one will visit the rivers to take care of them or even care what's in there. Remember, if it's out of sight, it's out of mind.

Sincerely,

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Working in Eugene, Springfield and Newport.