

**Testimony before the Senate Environment and
Natural Resources Committee
Supporting SB 401 and SB 838
April 15, 2013**

**Angela Crowley-Koch, Legislative Director
Oregon Environmental Council**

Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Chair Dingfelder, Vice-Chair Olsen and members of the committee:

Oregon Environmental Council supports SB 401 and SB 838

Suction dredge mining has dramatically increased in Southern Oregon rivers since California established a moratorium in 2009. This practice of vacuuming up the stream bottom and spitting it back out harms water quality, fish habitat and the ability of fishermen, boaters and landowners to enjoy the river.

California established a moratorium on suction dredge mining until a permitting system could be established to prevent significant environmental effects from the practice of section dredge mining. The California Department of Fish and Game developed regulations, and their own 2012 Environmental Impact Report found that even with the regulations, suction dredge mining would have significant environmental effects. Because of that determination, California's moratorium against suction dredge mining still stands today.

California designed a regulatory system that would reduce the effects on fish spawning habitat by requiring dredgers to provide the Department with the location of their dredging operations, allowing the Department to monitor and manage high dredging use areas, requiring dredgers to level all tailing piles to minimize the potential for fish to spawn on unstable substrate, and regulating timing and location of allowed dredging to avoid disturbing redds. This level of regulation is far beyond what we have the capacity to enforce here in Oregon.

Even with such a regulatory program, California determined suction dredge mining would still have significant unavoidable effects. Those unavoidable effects include:

- Water quality effects from resuspension of mercury and other metals
- Water quality effects from increased turbidity and suspended sediment
- Effects on bird species that nest in riparian areas
- Public exposure to high noise levels

- Effects on historical and archaeological resources

Suction dredge mining is currently having these same effects in Oregon, as well as impacts on fish because our regulations do not protect against that.

River recreation activities such as like fishing, rafting, and hiking benefit Oregon's economy and local communities. For example, in Josephine County, leisure and hospitality is the fourth-largest sector of employment, behind retail, health services, and manufacturing. Suction dredge mining deters others from enjoying Oregon's rivers, while the mining provides little economic benefit. It threatens other river recreation activities that are so important to Southern Oregon's economy.

In addition, suction dredge mining harms the endangered salmon species that Oregon is spending millions of dollars to restore. We need to protect those investments by taking action to end suction dredge mining's harmful impacts.