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April 15, 2013

The Honorable Jackie Dingfelder, Chair  
Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources  
900 Court St NE, S-407  
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Senator Dingfelder:

I am writing to state my strong support for Senate Bills 838 and to thank you for considering these forward-looking bills in your Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. This bill would direct the appropriate state agencies to study the effects of placer mining and place a moratorium on motorized methods of mining until 2018.

As one of the three constitutional officers who sit on the State Land Board, I am concerned about the impact of motorized placer mining on state waterways. Placer mining has the potential to release toxic chemicals like mercury, arsenic, and other heavy metals into the water. This poses risk to critical and protected habitat. Coho salmon, chinook salmon, and steelhead trout are all protected under the federal Endangered Species Act and could be harmed. Streams that once teemed with life have already suffered large losses.

Currently, agencies do not have the tools to adequately regulate placer mining in Oregon's waterways. We cannot determine the extent of motorized placer mining that is taking place or evaluate the effectiveness of our current regulatory scheme. I support SB 838, so state agencies can develop meaningful regulatory efforts to prevent further harm and implement a simple, consolidated system instead. We need the authority to better coordinate state agencies' efforts with federal agencies and tribal governments.

A recent California decision brought this conversation to the fore. Since California placed a moratorium on suction-dredge mining in order to study its environmental impact, the number of applications for permits has skyrocketed in Oregon from 482 permits in 2007 to 2,409 permits in 2012.

I appreciate your work on this urgent matter. Thank you for your consideration of SB 838.

Sincerely,

Kate Brown  
Oregon Secretary of State