

Suction dredge mining is a practice in which riverbeds are vacuumed up by a large, loud, floating machine. Materials from the riverbed go through a sluice, allowing miners to more easily search for heavy precious metals, in particular gold. Sediment is then discharged back into the river in long murky plumes and gravels dumped back in piles called tailings.

Between 2009 and 2012, Oregon almost tripled the number of permits issued for suction dredge mining. Because of sensible restrictions in Idaho and California and the high price of gold, that number is only expected to rise. Depending on the permit pulled, costs to miners are nominal to nil – and that makes enforcement or monitoring of the practice nearly impossible. Further, conflicts have increased between miners and other river users, like fishers, rafters, and riverside residents.

SB 838B offers a three part approach that limits rather than bans suction dredge mining.

**Part One: Limits on the Rapid Growth of Suction Dredge Mining for the 2014 and 2015 Seasons**

- A cap of 850 permits will be enacted and those permits will be distributed in a way that gives preference to long-time Oregon suction dredge permit holders.
- In endangered fish habitat:
  - Dredges must be kept 500 feet apart
  - Dredges can only operate from 9am to 5pm
  - Dredges cannot be left unattended in waterways
- Fees would be increased in order to provide resources for enforcement and the development of a more complete regulatory framework

**Part Two: A New Regulatory Framework**

Meanwhile, state agencies and the Governor's office will study and then propose a comprehensive, streamlined regulatory framework for suction dredge mining. The bill requires a report for the 2015 legislative session, leaving plenty of time for next steps to be determined.

**Part Three: A 5-Year Moratorium ONLY IF the Legislature Fails to Act in 2015**

If – and only if - the Legislature does not adopt a new regulatory and fee framework during the 2015 session, then a limited moratorium takes effect. This moratorium retains the 850 permit cap, along with the preference for long-time permit-holders, and is only in endangered fish habitat above the lowest spawning grounds.

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OCN is coordinated by the Oregon League of Conservation Voters and powered by the tens of thousands of Oregonians who belong to OCN's member organizations. Contact Christy Splitt at 971.404.7279 or [christy@olcv.org](mailto:christy@olcv.org) or visit [www.forahealthyoregon.org](http://www.forahealthyoregon.org).

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From the Desk of State Representative Brent Barton

