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Senator Edwards, Chair
and the members of the Senate Environment
and Natural Resources Committee
April 15, 2015
Dear Senator Edwards, et al.:

I am the volunteer conservation chair for Umpqua Watersheds, Inc. (UW), a 501C-3 environmental conservation, restoration, education and advocacy organization of some 850 concerned and active members. UW's offices are located in Roseburg, although our area of interest extends into the Coquille and other watersheds in our region. In another capacity, representing Camas Valley, I volunteer on the Executive Council of the Coquille Watershed Association (CWA), an OWEB sanctioned restoration/education group, and also participate in DEQ's TDML citizen advisory panel for the Coquille. In addition, I represent Umpqua Watersheds in the Beaver Working Group, hosted by the Roseburg District of the BLM. However, I do not intend to, nor do I, represent the official views of either the CWA, TDML panel or the beaver group in these comments.

Please understand, I have cited my volunteer participation in groups other than Umpqua Watersheds in order to emphasize to this committee my intense interest in "issues riparian," so to speak. This active concern for Oregon's streams and rivers is shared, I know, by the remainder of UW's Board of Directors and, it is safe to say, by our active and interested membership.

But in all of these groups, folks volunteer countless hours at meetings and in the field doing what each can to help restore high ecological function to our many beleaguered waterways. For us to observe dredge miners, some sorely afflicted with what is perhaps best characterized as "gold fever," imposing yet more harm on rivers such as the South Umpqua, which are already listed under the Clean Water Act as 303d impaired, is discouraging and off-putting, indeed! In that vein, I recall the dire (albeit honest) warning Hernan Cortez is reported to have given to the first indigenous leader he met on landing in Mexico: "We Spaniards are afflicted with a sickness that only gold can cure."

UW was made aware, a year or two back, of the presence of new dredge mining claims in several of the index pools on the upper South Umpqua River, refuges for an important remnant of a once abundant population of Spring run Chinook Salmon. (One wonders if there is not a means to communicate the conquistador's warning to these iconic, if struggling, fish?) We who volunteer in riparian restoration do not wish to see our investment in time and personal financial outlay undone by this anachronistic means for squeezing still more from the deteriorating natural world. The S. Umpqua is already badly impacted by high peak flows in winter, low summer flows, poor dissolved oxygen content, high bacterial counts, severe blooms of blue-green algae, high temperatures and excess turbidity. It cannot well accommodate more negative inputs from we human beings.

UW knows that this hobby group of dredge miners (a significant number of whom arrive on the banks of our rivers from out of state) impacts more rivers than those in Douglas County. Thus, we would like to echo the sentiments expressed by others when we ask this committee to adopt and forward S.B. 830, as amended by Senator Bates. In particular (though not exclusively) UW asks the committee and the Oregon Legislature to please:

- Limit the number of annual dredge mining permits to 850 or less.
- Prohibit mining in habitats deemed sensitive for salmon and other aquatic species of concern (e.g., lamprey, bull trout, mollusks, et al.) by ODFW, NOAA/NMFS and other relevant state and federal agencies.
- Institute permit fees whose paucity are not an insult to citizen intelligence. Such fees, to be effective, should fully cover the true cost incurred by DEQ, DSL, State and local Police, etc. to conduct and enforce meaningful regulation and monitoring.
- Provide stiff penalties for such harmful riparian practices as “high banking,” excessive sediment plumes, chemical violations (e.g. from improper handling of fuel, lubricants, human waste, trash, etc.); or for threatening or obstructing other citizen users of our rivers.
- Adopt legislation that would prevent the negation, in part or whole, of the volunteer investments mentioned above, not to mention the treasure in state funds, grant monies, etc. that have already been made toward the restoration of our precious waterways and their denizens, including we humans.

Sincerely,

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