

April 15, 2015

Attn: Beth Reiley
Regarding: SB830 / Senator Bates amendments

Dear Ms. Reiley,

We support SB830 inclusive of amendments proposed by Senator Alan Bates.

We would like to provide comment and testimony regarding Recreational Dredging, a practice we consider: 1) harmful to our natural resources, 2) harmful to all other people desiring to be outside in a reasonably quiet environment, and 3) harmful to our local economy by chasing away tourists and visitors who might otherwise come to enjoy Oregon.

We live along the Rogue River below where once stood the Gold Ray Dam and have “lived” first hand thru the influx of dredgers who have flocked to our area during the past few summers. We can tell you with certainty many of these dredging units are working in prime Salmon and Steelhead holding and spawning areas.

On most days we see and listen to the unpleasant noise from two or three dredging units. Unfortunately this is for all day, every day, all summer long. There is no escape.

1. We believe your first order of business should be to protect our habitat for all species of fish.
 - A. Protect our rivers from activities that can reduce water quality, ie dredging.
 - B. Protect our rivers from the introduction of invasive species. All dredging rigs should receive and inspection before entering our waters.
 - C. A study should be required to determine if the underwater noise from dredging equipment harms the migration or reproduction of fish. Keep in mind, these units can and do operate all day, every day, all summer long moored in the same location.

2. Secondly, we are personally disappointed by the lack of enforcement for current regulations. (Perhaps some of the violations are unintentional so how do we verify individual dredgers know current regulations?) Violations such as dredging units being too close to other dredging units or water intakes, in-water fueling, improper bathroom habits, trash left behind are all routinely easy to spot but receive little proactive attention from authorities.
 - A. Dredging units are watercraft and should follow the same guidelines for displaying an identification number, navigation lighting (if left in the river overnight), proper in-river mooring line use, invasive species inspection, etc. (It might be worth noting that we see multiple groups using the same dredging equipment that is left in place all summer.)

3. *On a personal note, our issue as a homeowner also includes the unpleasant noise from dredging. Recreational gold dredgers moor in front of our homes for all summer and operate for hours every day. Their non-muffled uncovered engines create a noise nuisance similar to a car parking in front of your home with windows down blaring unpleasant music. This noise prevents the peaceful and quiet enjoyment of our homes. We cannot even be in our yard. Even inside with doors and windows to the house closed the constant drone of the engines can be heard. We are not alone, fishermen, hikers, campers, kayakers, rafters and other outdoor enthusiasts suffer the same fate. Noise can carry for great distances up and down a river or stream channel.*

A. The engines of recreational gold dredging equipment should be required to have an effective muffling system such as other water craft are required to have. Individuals operating recreational dredging equipment must follow regulations provided by both the Department of State Lands and the Department of Environmental Quality. We recommend they also follow noise regulations (and enforcement procedures) of the State Marine Board as they pertain to other watercraft.

“Quiet Boating – Oregon Noise Level Limits” prepared and distributed by the Oregon State Marine Board can be found at www.boatoregon.com, publication #250-432.) One statement within the Quiet Boating Brochure states; “If your exhaust noise is clearly audible above all other noise, it is too loud.” We don’t know if the dredging noise is exhaust noise or other noise from the uncovered engines and pumps, but it might be a good place to start reducing the impact of dredging noise.

We’d like to point out one difference between boats and dredging equipment is that boats move away up or down river whereas dredging equipment remain stationary running for hours, often all day long at one location, and often day after day all summer. Dredging units sometimes remain moored in the river for months.

Our hope is that these State Marine Board noise provisions would prove adequate, and thus provide a workable solution to this issue. Perhaps dredging could be regulated to every other week during the summer season so outdoor folks can also enjoy our environment unspoiled for a week by recreational dredging.

In closing, we would like to quote the Oregon State Marine Board Quiet Boating Brochure: “To ensure a better quality of life for everyone, Oregon law prohibits excessive noise.” “Be considerate when operating near residential, picnic and camping areas.”

We believe the minimum separation between dredgers and homes, picnic areas/camp grounds should be no less than 1,200 feet. Your consideration of our thoughts will be appreciated.

Respectfully,

Greg & Carol O’Neal
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