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To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in regards to the proposed legislation (SB 830) to further regulate suction dredge mining on the rivers of Oregon. I have lived in the State of Oregon for over 40 years, and I have worked as a river guide on the Rogue River for over 20 years. In the past, suction dredge mining caused very little impact upon the Rogue and its many users, but in recent times, the massive increase of suction dredge miners has caused a tremendous negative impact (air pollution, noise pollution, channel blockage, littering from squatters' camps, and even human feces along the river's edge) upon the entire river experience. For this reason, I would like to see a full moratorium on suction dredge mining within the State of Oregon. However, considering this is probably not going to happen anytime soon, I support Senator Bates amendments to the currently proposed SB 830.

The section of the Rogue River that I guide on is one of the areas being affected the most by the suction dredge mining – the Table Rocks to Gold Hill section of the Rogue River. Ironically, this section is also the focus of a significant restoration and conservation effort – the removal of the Gold Hill and Gold Ray Dams. With all the money and effort that has gone into the broader Rogue River restoration project (including the Savage Rapids Dam Removal), I must ask a simple question: Why are we allowing such a destructive practice like suction dredge mining to take place on rivers that we are simultaneously spending millions of dollars to restore?

I personally do not understand why suction dredge mining is still a legal mining practice, and neither do most of my rafting guests. Many of the people that I guide down the Rogue River ask me why this destructive mining practice is allowed in the State of Oregon, and I wish I had a good answer for them. What would you tell them? Is this a case of personal liberty (granted by the archaic mining laws of the 1800's) running amuck?

Does the State of Oregon value an economic system that holds individual profit making above the health of the commons? Does the State of Oregon not understand that protecting its natural resources is the soundest investment in the State's future?

Recreation, like rafting and fishing, is a sustainable use of Oregon's natural resources that should be protected from highly unsustainable practices such as suction dredge mining. Oregon's recreation industry is necessarily dependent upon a healthy and thriving natural environment (e.g., the river and its watershed); the healthier Oregon's rivers are the more the recreation industry will grow and thrive.

If one is to understand why suction dredge mining is such a threat to the wellbeing of our rivers and the land they run through, then one must understand the fundamental relationships of

ecology. For example, it is believed that 40% of the nitrogen that has historically fed the forests of the Pacific Northwest, comes from marine life (e.g., the carcasses of spawned out salmon). Rivers do a lot more than transport water downhill!

There is nothing more valuable than a healthy river system, which is a vital part of the global water cycle and all life on earth – a healthy water cycle is the ultimate commons of all life. Not protecting the quality of our water, all of the water, may be the most unethical form of human greed and ignorance. Nothing should be more important than protecting our water and all that it runs through.

As a political leader of the State of Oregon, what are your ethical principles surrounding the current dilemma between unbridled economic growth and protecting the quality of our water for future generations? I sincerely hope that you are guided by a set of ethical principles that sees the foolishness of sacrificing the long-term sustainability of our natural resources for short-term economic gains. I am sure you do.

In short, suction dredge mining is the destruction of the commons for a small gain by even a smaller few – allowing suction dredge mining to continue is either irrational or unethical. If we truly are the “rational animal” that Aristotle claimed, then why would we continue to allow such irrational behavior to take place?

If suction dredge mining is allowed to continue in the State of Oregon, then Oregon will see a dramatic decrease in its revenues from the recreational industry (e.g., rafting and fishing); people do not pay money to go rafting and fishing only to be accosted by the overwhelming negative impacts of this unsustainable mining practice.

I think it is vital to critically analyze the message Oregon is sending out to the greater public by its allowance of practices like suction dredge mining. What is Oregon telling the rest of the world by supporting this type of natural resource abuse? Does Oregon want to be a leader of the sustainable world, or, does Oregon want to be a follower of the status quo that is at odds with the natural environment?

By further regulation of suction dredge mining, the State of Oregon would send a powerful message to the rest of the world. The old premise, which claims economic growth is at odds with the protection of the natural environment, is nothing more than a false dichotomy. By reducing the negative impacts of suction dredge mining, the State of Oregon would make a powerful statement that protecting the natural environment, which its recreation industry is dependent upon, is a high ethical standard that makes good economic sense.

Please put a stop to the abuse of Oregon’s waterways from the destructive mining practice of suction dredging – ban suction dredge mining in the State of Oregon, now! If you cannot ban suction dredge mining, then at least pass SB 830 with Senator Bates amendments.

Thank you for your time,
Eric Peterson
Registered Oregon Outfitter/Guide #1041