



January 27, 2016

RE: Cascadia Wildlands testimony on SB 1530: a bill to enact regulatory framework for suction dredge mining in Oregon

Dear Chair Edwards and Committee Members:

I am writing on behalf of Cascadia Wildlands, a regional non-profit conservation organization representing 10,000 members and supporters. Cascadia Wildlands educates, agitates, and inspires a movement to protect and restore Cascadia's wild ecosystems. We envision vast old-growth forests, rivers full of wild salmon, wolves howling in the backcountry, and vibrant communities sustained by the unique landscapes of the Cascadia bioregion. Cascadia Wildlands and our members are concerned about the harmful impacts of suction-dredge mining to our state's iconic rivers and aquatic species.

Cascadia Wildlands supports SB 1530, a bill that extends a temporary moratorium on suction-dredge mining in areas with state-designated salmon habitat and environmentally sensitive areas, and creates a regulatory and permitting framework for the practice in the future. **We strongly encourage you to support this bill, which is** critical to the protection of clean water and salmon habitat, and essential to protecting Oregonians' investments in salmon restoration.

Suction dredging is a method of gold mining that use a large vacuum, fueled by a floating gas generator, to suck up gravels and sediments beneath a river, which are then filtered through a sluice box. After filtering out any gold flecks, the remaining materials are dumped back into the river, often times creating sediment plumes 100 feet long. This mining practice is largely recreational.

Oregonians are endeavoring to establish a regulatory framework surrounding suction dredge mining because of the threats this practice poses to Oregon's rivers, and the scenic, recreational, and ecological benefits of these river systems in our state. Oregon taxpayers have spent millions of dollars to protect and restore these vital salmon waterways, and common-sense rules governing suction dredge mining are necessary.

While we support the SB 1530 and its initial steps towards regulating this harmful practice, Cascadia Wildlands is concerned that the bill does not go far enough to limiting this destructive activity. The recent moratorium on suction dredging in California and uptick in gold prices have led to a surge in these activities in Oregon. The number of suction dredge mining permits issued has increased from 656 permits in 2007/2008 to 1,527 permits in 2010/2011. The number of permits rose 200% in 2012 alone. Cascadia Wildlands believes that an overall cap on the number of permits provided by the state is necessary to prevent undue degradation.

Our organization and our members are also very concerned with the mining practices potential impacts to recreation, commercial enterprises and tourism on many of Oregon's most treasured and iconic waterways. These harmful mining activities are occurring on the world-renowned Rogue, Illinois and Chetco Rivers, and many other special waterways in our state. No recreationist, commercial guide or fisherman wants to have to deal with a noisy, polluting mining operation occurring right in the middle of the river. Given the amount of investment our state has in these rivers, it is unbelievable that we would tolerate and permit these activities on these rivers and their tributaries.

Thank you for your time today.

Nick Cady
Cascadia Wildlands