



# NATIVE FISH SOCIETY

Advancing the Recovery of Native, Wild Fish in Their Homewaters

February 3, 2016

TO: Oregon Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources  
RE: Support for SB 1530 and its Long-term Protection of Oregon's Natural Resources from Suction Dredge Mining

Dear Senate Committee Members,

Native Fish Society (NFS) is a 501c3 conservation non-profit, dedicated to utilizing the best available science to advance the protection and recovery of wild, native fish and promote the grassroots stewardship of the habitats that sustain them. NFS has 3,000 active members and supporters, and over 80 place-based volunteer River Stewards who help safeguard their homewaters across the Pacific Northwest.

Suction dredge mining is a practice in which riverbeds are "vacuumed up" by large, loud gas-powered floating machines. Gravel and substrate from the riverbed go through a sluice where heavy metals drop out, in particular gold. Plumes of sediment are then discharged back into the river impairing water quality, mobilizing toxins like mercury and negatively altering salmon habitats. Suction dredge mining may also include the removal of trees that shade our streams and provide critical aquatic habitat. Mining in the floodplain involves the construction of pits that often bleed sediment into streams and capture and strand threatened juvenile salmon. Oregonians have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in salmon habitat restoration in recent years. For their very survival, Oregon's wild, native fish require clean water and healthy watersheds. Allowing miners to alter their habitats isn't only bad for the rivers and fish it ignores the public's investment to protect and restore streams.

Miners refuse to recognize the state's authority to regulate their practices and oppose all legislative efforts to do so. As a result, the Legislature failed to pass permanent reforms in 2015 and a 5-year moratorium was initiated on January 2<sup>nd</sup> barring suction dredge miners from 80% of Oregon's waterways. While the current moratorium successfully protects salmon, steelhead, bull trout, and pacific lamprey its duration and as a result its protections are limited.

SB 1530 represents a significant compromise over the current moratorium. In 2021, SB 1530 would permit mining in 65% of Oregon's waterways. However, the Native Fish Society and its coalition partners agree, the benefits found in SB 1530, including permanent protections for essential habitats for salmon, steelhead, bull trout and lamprey and protections for currently polluted streams outweigh its compromises.

We urge you to support SB 1530 and provide a workable long-term solution for Oregon's wild fish and cherished rivers.

Best Regards,

Mark Sherwood  
Southern District Manager