

River Trail Outfitters

1302 Piper Lane
Eugene Oregon 97401
541-228-4084

Bank side services for your next great river adventure.

www.rivertrailoutfitters.com

February 3, 2017

Chair: Senator Michael Dembrow District # 23
Vice Chair: Senator Allen Olsen District # 20
900 Court St. NE, S-407
Salem Oregon 97301

**Testimony in support of SB 3 by Frank Armendariz,
For River Trail Outfitters of Eugene Oregon
February 3, 2017**

Dear Chairmen Dembrow, Vice Chair Olsen and members of the committee: I would like to thank you all and the people of the great state of Oregon for the opportunity to speak in this forum.....

My name is Frank Armendariz, I am the owner of Eugene, Oregon-based River Trail Outfitters a family owned marketing business that specializes in guided river trips, automobile shuttles, specialized river equipment sales and repair. I have worked in the outdoor recreation industry since 1982 mostly as a river guide and river outfitter but also as a partner in a drift boat business and as the manager of a retail outdoor sports equipment and whitewater boat shop. Today I represent my own concerns but I believe that my concerns are shared by many of my fellow river enthusiast. I am a current member and past president of the Emerald Empire Chapter of the Association of Northwest Steelheaders; I am a past president of the Cascade Family Fly Fishers a chartered Federation of Fly Fisher club. I recently served on the board of the directors of the Willamette River Keepers and I am member of the McKenzie River Guides Association. In general I have spent the last thirty years of my life in some manner, either directly or indirectly, encouraging people from all walks of life to enjoy Oregon's outdoors and especially Oregon's rivers.

As a president of a couple of angling clubs I took my turn at stewarding groups of people among our membership who have spent hundreds even thousands of volunteer hours devoted to enhancing, rehabilitating and reestablishing habitat for wild salmon and steelhead. Across our state, thousands of Oregonians volunteer thousands of hours doing very hard work to mitigate many of the poor land use practices of the past. I have always been proud to know and lead folks so committed to the traditional heritage of our great state. Before there was anything, there were the fish in the rivers, which is the heritage of our state.

As a member of the McKenzie Guides, (established in 1932 we are oldest association of river guides in the world) I am profoundly aware of the wonderful history of river recreation in Oregon and it citizen's fondness, no, I will say passion for fishing, floating and hiking along the banks of our states many great rivers and streams. I am fortunate to say that on many days my office is the magnificent McKenzie River in all its glory and history. My desk, is the deck of a boat that bears the rivers name, a McKenzie River Drift Boat a fine craft for the job, developed on the McKenzie River and built right here in Oregon. My oars and some of the fishing gear I use were also made here too. I point this out to draw your attention to the fact that every year 2.9 million people, Oregonians and other visitors travel our state to fish and float, hunt and site see. They participate in recreational activities with long histories, deep traditions and historical significant in our state. One could easily argue that our state's \$2.7 billion dollar outdoor sports and recreation industry and the jobs it provides is entirely driven by our states clean water resources and its other pristine places. We know all of this from a study done on behalf of the Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife and conducted by Dean Runyon & Associates of Portland.

The study was complete and comprehensive it looked at every region of the state and the benefits to the states economy generated by the general categories of fishing, hunting, shellfish collection and wildlife viewing. It is proof of a fact that the outdoor industry is big business in Oregon. I am proud to be part of this traditional and thriving economic engine. Oregon's clean rivers and wild landscapes are a gift that keeps on giving to its citizens and its business. Driven by the recreation industry we manufacture every style of boat and other related gear and equipment. We accommodate 2.9 million travelers every year, people that eat in out of the way restaurants; stay in hotels, motels, B&B's and lodges. Travelers who fill up their gas tanks at

the local filling stations and purchase groceries and supplies in local markets and shops. They also pay state and county fees related to some of the activities they pursue. They buy fishing and hunting licenses, they pay parking fees, fees to view some attractions and fees to float some rivers. Where I live in Lane County we have the most beautiful parks but our park system including the boat landings on the McKenzie are entirely funded by users. We would not have any parks if people stopped coming and stopped paying the user fees. Given the financial condition of many of our counties user funded destinations are becoming the way of the future. So it's important that people keep visiting. I expect the outdoor industry in Oregon to break all records for tourist participation in the next season and for many to come.

My feelings are that we have a duty to protect these Oregon Treasures for other generations to see, feel, experience and enjoy; that adding to our states inventory of wild places and protected river adds value and benefits that reach far beyond the edge of the wilderness or the bank of the river. When we value clean water, wild fish and pristine places we insure that with my fore thought, my hard work and participation small businesses like mine can and will continue to prosper. My job is to invite other Oregonians, people from around the country and the world, to experience what Oregon's iconic rivers have to offer. The storied McKenzie and Rogue, the wild Illinois and the free flowing Chetco all world renown, they offer a multitude of recreational opportunities in their waters, on their banks and in the grandeur of their river canyons. Here is another "Win-Win" for our state; it's true that some visitors will come to hunt, some will come with the intent of harvesting one of our great fish, a steelhead or a salmon from a river where harvest is allowed and I support those traditions. Of the 2.9 million people that travel for recreation in our state each year, 631,000 will fish, 282,000 will hunt and 1.8 million will only site see. They will take absolutely nothing away from our great state but pictures and memories. And their travels, in pursuit of peace, quite, a salmon, the perfect picture and family memories creates thousands of full time and seasonal jobs across our great state.

However, our clean water, wild salmon and steelhead in these iconic river systems and others are at risk because of a short cited hobby called suction dredge mining. Others will be more qualified to speak to the science but the hobby is a noisy, intrusive practice that is fouling our common waterways and jeopardizing our outdoor businesses and the communities that relies on healthy fish runs, clean water and a sustainable tourist industry for their livelihoods. California had the good sense to place regulations on the practice a couple of years ago and even though gold deposits in Oregon are modest at best dozens of hobbyist have already flocked to some of our most popular fishing and floating rivers. There is no place for these noisy gas powered vacuums in our waterways that are so critical to the survival of our wild salmon stocks and other salmonids teetering on the brink of extinction. It is also ironic that county, state and federal governments are spending millions of dollars to restore our ailing salmon runs yet this practice of sucking up sensitive spawning and feeding grounds for young fish proceeds largely unchecked.

It has been almost a hundred years since any major gold mining has taken place in Oregon, a recent Oregon Public Broadcasting special detailed the destructive practice of displacing millions of yards of over burden from the banks and the bed of the Rogue River, destruction and damage that we are still trying to repair today and still paying for. The value of fishing, hunting and wildlife viewing is well documented in our state; the pastimes mends well with values we hold dear and has proven to be sustainable over many decades in our states history. Suction dredge hobbyist I feel have a responsibility to prove that their hobby is sustainable, safe for the future of our rivers, our fish, our traditional outdoor recreation industry and for other Oregonians.

In 1971 the good and thoughtful people of our great state voted by a two-to-one margin to create the Oregon State Scenic Waterway System, over the years there have been modest additions to the system. Given the new pressures that have artificially been placed on our state's rivers, SB3 would add obviously need restriction on suction dredge mining; include other river segments for protection, which is good for fish, while only imposing modest restriction on land use. It would speak loudly in support of the things we value as Oregonians: our clean and wild places, our free flowing river, our fish other wild life and our jobs. I strongly support the SB3 and regulations on the harmful practice of suction dredge mining. SB3 is good for business, good for the environment and good Oregonians. Future generations deserve no less, I ask for your support. Let us keep Oregon special.....

Thank you for the opportunity to comment today.

Sincerely,

Frank Armendariz

River Trail Outfitters