



NATIVE FISH SOCIETY

Advancing the Recovery of Native, Wild Fish in Their Homewaters

February 3, 2017

To: Oregon Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee

Re: Native Fish Society Testimony on Oregon State Legislature 2017 Session SB3

Greetings Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Olsen, and Respected Members of the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

My name is Jake Crawford and I am the Southern Regional Manager of the Oregon-based non-profit, Native Fish Society. We are a regional grassroots organization guided by the best available science that is dedicated to the protection and recovery of wild, native fish and stewardship of the habitats that sustain them. Native Fish Society has over 3,000 active members and supporters, and 88 place-based, volunteer River Stewards who protect their homewaters across the Pacific Northwest.

Thank you for the opportunity to show our support for Senate Bill 3, which will establish the long-term regulatory framework necessary to reform suction dredge mining practices and help protect sensitive, distinct native fish populations across the state. I first became involved in this issue in 2010, after the influx of suction dredge miners migrated north to my homewaters of southwest Oregon following the California moratorium on the practice. Organizing with other local affected stakeholders, we sought to find meaningful, sensible legislation through the Oregon Legislative Assembly that would help prevent suction dredge mining from negatively impacting sensitive populations of wild, native fish. For this, I am grateful to be here today to support Senate Bill 3, which is the culmination of years of effort by our grassroots stewards working with a diverse coalition of other interested parties, including other non-profits, river user groups, the Oregon Chapter of the American Fisheries Society, state agencies, and members of the mining industry who have participated in the collaborative process first brought forward by the Senator Alan Bates with SB 838.

Oregon is home to native fish threatened by this practice including two populations of federally listed coho salmon on the Southern Oregon/Northern California Coast and Oregon Coast, in addition to world class runs of wild Chinook salmon and steelhead, and sensitive species such as bull trout and lamprey. Over these past years of working with our River Stewards and organizations across the state, it has become clear that this issue needs a permanent solution; one that extends beyond the current 5-year moratorium initiated in January 2017 and we appreciate the opportunity to be here today to support SB 3.

The negative effects of suction dredge mining have been well documented, in which a multitude of peer-reviewed studies have identified that this practice can trap and kill aquatic insects, fish eggs and juvenile fish, and negatively alter salmon habitats.^{ii,iii} Suction dredge miners have removed trees in riparian areas that shade and cool streams and provide critical aquatic habitat. On the South Umpqua River, suction dredge miners illegally removed or altered habitat restoration improvements that were paid for with millions of public tax dollars invested to restore stream complexity and aquatic refugia for species of concern, such as spring Chinook salmon.

In addition, suction dredge mining can stir up legacy deposits of mercury left from historic mining operations, and put rearing juvenile salmon and trout at risk from exposure.^{iv} A 2015 US Fish and Wildlife study reported that “fish metabolic processes are not effective at processing and eliminating methylmercury, and at certain tissue concentrations, methylmercury can negatively impact behavior, health and reproductive success”^v This activity has also been identified as a threat to lamprey throughout all their different life stages, from adults, to embryos and ammocoetes, which are particularly sensitive to this harmful activity by being passed through the dredge, destruction of their nests (or redds), and displacement and degradation of their rearing habitats. Furthermore, the different life histories of lamprey can mean that they are present in the river system at different life stages for up to 7 years, and continued disruption of their habitat can have lasting negative effects and be detrimental to these populations.^{vi}

Finally, the National Marine Fisheries Service just released its final plan for recovering the federally listed, threatened population of Oregon Coast Coho salmon, which suggested that this is the first population of salmon in the Pacific Northwest with the possibility of being recovered in in the next 10 – 15 years. In this plan, NMFS specifically called attention to the need for improved suction dredge regulations to minimize or prevent impacts to OC Coho salmon, which include special closed areas, closed seasons, and restrictions on methods and activities, which would help protect coho in areas throughout their current and historic habitat.^{vi} We believe that to allow this harmful practice in areas with sensitive populations of coho salmon, as well as bull trout and lamprey, would be counter to the millions of public tax dollars that have been invested from state and federal agencies, public and private groups, and the individuals who have committed to these restoration actions to recover these iconic species, while also leaving the state vulnerable to potential future litigation.

For these reasons, I am here today to represent Native Fish Society and our membership in support of Senate Bill 3. We recognize that small-scale mining represents a part of Oregon’s cultural heritage, but similarly does the state’s rich salmon heritage with its world-class populations of wild salmon, steelhead and trout, and the ongoing recovery actions that are taking place across the state to prevent further extinction of these iconic species. I understand the interests and passions of small-scale miners to enjoy this pastime, but we are requesting that we protect our public investments by limiting this harmful activity in waters that are necessary to protect the state’s important wild, native fish populations, and that we restrict this activity in waters that will jeopardize this important cultural resource.

Thank you for your time today, and for your consideration on this issue. We appreciate the opportunity to show our support for Senate Bill 3, and urge you to move this bill forward to find a permanent solution by establishing a long-term framework for this activity.

Respectfully,



Jake Crawford
Southern Regional Manager



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Literature Cited

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- ⁱⁱ Horizon Water and Environment (HWE). 2009. Suction Dredge Permitting Program. Literature review on the impacts of suction dredge mining in California. <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/suctiondredge/Luzier>
- ⁱⁱⁱ United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2012. Pacific Lamprey Fact Sheet.
- ^{iv} Marvin-DiPasquale, M., J. Agee, E. Kakouros, L.H. Kieu, J.A. Fleck, and C.N. Alpers. 2011. The Effects of Sediment and Mercury Mobilization in the South Yuba River and Humbug Creek Confluence Area, Nevada County, California: Concentrations, Speciation and Environmental Fate. Part 2: Laboratory Experiments. U.S. Geological Survey Open File Report 2010-1325B
- ^v Oregon Chapter American Fisheries Society (ORAFS). 2015. “Effects of Suction Dredge Mining on Oregon Fishes and Aquatic Habitat Supplemental Information.”
- ^{vi} National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). 2016. Recovery Plan for Oregon Coast Coho Salmon Evolutionary Significant Unit. National Marine Fisheries Service, West Coast Region.