

Willamette RIVERKEEPER®

February 6, 2017

Oregon Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
Senator Michael Dembrow, Chair
Senator Alan Olsen, Vice-Chair
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: Testimony on SB 3

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Olsen and Committee Members:

On behalf of Willamette Riverkeeper I submit this letter indicating our support of Senate Bill 3. We feel that it is time for thoughtful action in relation to suction dredge mining in Oregon's rivers.

In my work on behalf of the Willamette River's water quality and habitat over years I've had a chance to understand the fragility of our river ecosystems in many areas. Whether one is looking at the impact of riverside development, or at many types of pollution, there are multiple ongoing threats. Suction dredge mining is an obvious additional threat to river health.

Suction dredge mining literally removes the stream bottom, resulting in a great disturbance to habitat. Whether one is concerned about sustaining healthy populations of native fish, or in recovering Pacific Lamprey, the harm posed by suction dredging to the stream bottom is clear.

One species of special interest are freshwater mussels. Some of these mussels can live to be over 100 years old in healthy streams and river systems. They live at the bottom of streams and rivers and filter feed, providing a benefit for water quality and providing food for other wildlife.

When portions of the bottom of streams and rivers are essentially removed it can cause great harm to these species. They cannot flee, and when disturbed in such a way, they can die. Recently the Pacific Northwest Freshwater Mussel Working Group submitted an analysis of these impacts, and their conclusion was pretty clear:

“Suction dredge mining can affect all life stages of freshwater mussels. Mussels are harmed directly through physical injury or mortality, interference with reproduction and feeding, and inability to excavate themselves and/or regain a natural orientation in the substrate after being entrained and covered by tailings; and indirectly through habitat loss and water quality degradation. The damage to substrate used by mussels can last more than one season. These direct and indirect effects are likely to reduce the size and resiliency of freshwater mussel populations.”

Our river systems have too often been subject to the whims of human activity, frequently with too little consideration for what has lived in our rivers for thousands of years. Additional levels of both consideration and protection are warranted for those streams subject to suction dredge mining, which have too often been overlooked. We urge the passage of SB 3.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tracy Willington". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Riverkeeper & Executive Director
Willamette Riverkeeper