Testimony of Richard Nawa before the Oregon Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee in support of Senate Bill 838 relating to suction dredging.

April 15, 2013

Senator Dingfelder, members of the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

My name is Richard Nawa and I am here to speak as a citizen of Oregon. I support Senate Bill 838 that enacts a suction dredging moratorium and establishes a new regulatory framework for suction dredging.

I am highly qualified to give testimony because I have research experience with salmon in Oregon. I did in-stream field investigations of how salmon spawning beds respond to destabilizing activities. I co-authored several research reports and co-authored one publication as a research assistant at OSU. Since 1993, I have observed and documented hundreds of instances of salmon habitat damage from suction dredging activities in southwest Oregon. I have compiled my observations in two reports and have given presentations about mining impacts at conferences.

I am concerned because the damaging activities associated with suction dredging have greatly increased in intensity and the extent of stream areas affected. I am concerned because the public's salmon producing streams are being needlessly damaged and salmon production is being jeopardized. Oregon needs to act now because the stream damage is chronic. The damage occurs every year and is likely to get much worse in the near future.

Reproduction is the most critical period for any species. Salmon rely on stable streambeds to bury their eggs to assure high reproductive success. Myself and other scientists have observed that suction dredging creates unnatural pits and tailing piles in these spawning areas. Salmon then unwittingly spawn in these disturbed areas. Published research finding of Brett Harvey and Tom Lisle indicate that winter storms cause higher mortality of incubating salmon eggs in areas disturbed by suction dredging (publication attached). This means fewer salmon emerging from the gravel and fewer smolts migrating to the ocean to mature. Coho salmon are federally listed as threatened with extinction in Oregon. Oregon does not have any surplus coho salmon eggs to be wasted on recreational suction dredging.

Agencies have required dredgers to level tailings as mitigation for digging holes in spawning beds. This mitigation is impractical to implement and has not been demonstrated to be effective. I have observed hundreds of suction dredge pits and tailings. None have been leveled. In most streams it is impractical to fill dredge holes due to downstream movement of sediments dredged. Once a streambed has been dredged, the damage to salmon spawning habitat is done and cannot be undone with mechanical methods.

No industry in Oregon is allowed to routinely excavate deep holes in salmon spawning habitat. Gravel mining, industrial mineral mining, and logging activities are generally prohibited within

and adjacent salmon spawning streams. Homebuilders have riparian setbacks and livestock are often fenced from salmon streams. On federal lands, where most suction dredging occurs, loggers are not allowed to cut large trees within 300 ft of a coho stream, yet suction dredgers are allowed to suction dredge holes in the spawning beds of those very same streams. There is no biological justification for allowing suction dredging in Oregon's salmon spawning streams where millions of dollars are being spent to restore salmon habitat and all potentially harmful activities are tightly regulated.

I support the goals of SB 838 and urge members of the committee to vote in favor of this bill as well as amendments to require the implementation of the new regulatory framework.

Thank you.

Richard K. Nawa
3185 Cheney Creek Rd.
Grants Pass, OR 97527
541-218-7973
richnawa@yahoo.com

Attachment: B.C. Harvey and T. E. Lisle. 1999. Scour of Chinook Salmon Redds on Suction Dredge Tailings. North American Journal of Fisheries Management 19:613-617. Available at http://www.fs.fed.us/psw/rsl/projects/water/Harvey99.PDF