OREGON CONSERVATION NETWORK

2017 Priority for a Healthy Oregon

April 10, 2017

RE: Support the Suction Dredge Reform bill (SB 3-A Engrossed) to establish permanent regulatory reform of suction dredge mining to protect clean water and native fish

Dear Senators:

On behalf of our organizations and our members and supporters across the state, we ask you to support Senate Bill 3-A Engrossed, introduced by Senate President Courtney. This bill establishes long-term regulatory reform of suction dredge mining to protect sensitive habitats and streams.

Suction dredge mining is a form of recreational gold mining that vacuums up the bottom of river beds using a motorized floating dredge. This type of mining can trap and kill young fish and fish eggs, including threatened salmon and lamprey. [1,2,3] Dredges release plumes of sediment that can smother gravel beds in the river bottom that salmon use for spawning. [4] Suction dredge mining can also mobilize legacy mercury left by historic mining operations that can become re-suspended in the water column and expose fish and humans. [5]

In 2013, the Oregon Legislature passed SB 838 championed by the late Senator Bates which established a five-year moratorium on suction dredge mining in essential salmon and bull trout habitat. Although the limited moratorium provides some level of protection for native fish and water quality, it is only a temporary solution that expires in 2021.

The Suction Dredge Reform bill (SB 3-A Engrossed) is the result of a long and collaborative process to still allow suction dredge mining while permanently protecting the most vulnerable habitats for threatened and endangered salmon and lamprey. Specifically, the bill prohibits suction dredge mining in streams that support sensitive salmon and lamprey. This means that streams and rivers that provide essential habitat for threatened and endangered species are protected. Outside of these areas, suction dredge mining would be allowed under a Department of Environmental Quality permit that places certain limits on where and how suction dredges can be operated in streams. The bill also amends enforcement procedures for permit violations in response to agency feedback.

This bill is not a ban on suction dredge mining. This compromise bill works to find a balance between the unique cultural heritage of Oregon mining, as recognized by the Legislature in

passing SB 838, and the significant risks it poses to the health of streams and native fish. In fact, this amended bill represents a further compromise from the legislation as introduced in February. It does not provide additional protections for bull trout or from the impacts of mining in the riparian area.

SB 3-A Engrossed represents a measured approach to protecting the most sensitive rivers and streams from the impacts of suction dredge mining. Please support the Suction Dredge Reform bill to protect Oregon's rivers and native fish.

Respectfully,

Association of Northwest Steelheaders
Cascadia Wildlands
Center for Biological Diversity
Earthworks
Fly Water Travel
Institute for Fisheries Resources (IFR)
Native Fish Society
Northwest Environmental Defense Center
Oregon Chapter, Sierra Club
Oregon Coast Alliance
Oregon Council Trout Unlimited
Oregon Wild
Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations (PCFFA)
Rogue Flyfishers
Rogue Riverkeeper
Smith River Alliance
South Umpqua Rural Community Partnership
Umpqua Watersheds
WaterWatch of Oregon
Wild Salmon Center
Willamette Riverkeeper

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[1] Harvey and Lisle. 1998. E□ects of Suction Dredging on Streams: A review and an evaluation strategy. Fisheries Vol. 23 (8): 9.

[2] 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

[3] United States Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS]. 2012. Pacific Lamprey Fact Sheet.

[4] Harvey and Lisle. 1998. E□ects of Suction Dredging on Streams: A review and an evaluation strategy. Fisheries Vol. 23 (8): 9.

[5] 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