



SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

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Oregon Senate votes to protect vital fish habitat

SB 3 bans use of motorized mining equipment in certain stream locations

SALEM – The Oregon Senate passed a bill today that strikes a balance between allowing miners to pursue their livelihoods, while still protecting vital native fish habitat for lamprey and salmonid species.

Senate Bill 3 repeals the moratorium on using motorized mining equipment, except in the areas up to the ordinary high water line in any river containing essential indigenous salmonid habitat. In other areas, suction dredge operators would be required to obtain either an individual permit or a general permit from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. The measure also establishes specific conditions for hours of operation.

“This is a thoughtfully crafted bill, and is the result of numerous conversations with conservationists, outdoors enthusiasts and, of course, miners,” said Sen. Michael Dembrow (D-Portland), who carried the bill in the Senate. “It is vitally important to protect endangered and threatened fish species in our rivers and streams, but we also recognize that there is a strong mining heritage in our state, as well. This bill will strike a solid balance in allowing miners to keep pursuing their passion, while we also protect native fish species.”

SB 3 follows up on 2013’s Senate Bill 838, which imposed the moratorium on motorized mining for precious metals in streams and upland of rivers and tributaries with essential indigenous salmon habitat. SB 838 is scheduled to end on Jan. 2, 2021.

The bill passed today by the Senate repeals the moratorium and sets clear guidelines as to where motorized – also known as in-stream placer mining or suction dredge mining – may occur. The practice is only prohibited in parts of streams where there is native salmonid habitat.

Motorized mining can occur in other areas, but under certain conditions, which are listed below:

- It is between the hours of 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. or sunset – whichever is earlier – within 1,000 feet of a residence or campground;
- The suction hose being used is 4 inches in diameter or smaller; and
- The mining is being done in a manner that is not harmful to freshwater mollusks, essential fish habitat or habitat necessary for recovery and conservation of lamprey.

Non-motorized equipment – including but not limited to gravity dredges and siphon dredges – do not fall under the prohibition.

Senate Bill 3 now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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