



SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

Oregon State Legislature
State Capitol
Salem, OR

NEWS RELEASE

July 3, 2013

CONTACT: Tom Powers (503) 986-1074
tom.powers@state.or.us

Suction dredge bill seeks to protect Oregon's rivers from excessive mining *SB 838B places a cap on placer mining permits and asks state agencies to develop regulatory framework*

SALEM—This morning the Oregon Senate voted to limit destructive mining practices on some of Oregon's most cherished rivers. Senate Bill 838B, which limits the number of permit available for suction dredge mining and asks state agencies to devise a plan to regulate the practice, passed the Senate on a vote of 17-13.

Suction dredge mining is a practice in which riverbeds are vacuumed up by a large machine in pursuit of precious minerals. Materials from the riverbed go through a sluice, allowing miners to more easily search for heavy precious metals, in particular gold. Sediment is then discharged back into the river in long murky plumes and gravel is dumped in piles called tailings.

“Southern Oregon is home to thousands of us who consider our peaceful, pristine rivers a legacy to pass on to the next generation,” said Senator Alan Bates (D-Medford), who has championed more protections for Oregon's rivers in recent sessions. “Left unchecked, the impact of vacuuming up all these river beds will be bad for property owners, bad for recreational river users, and bad for fish and wildlife. It's just common sense that we would put in place a solution to protect our rivers from harm, while allowing safe recreational mining in our rivers.”

Between 2005 and 2012, the number of permits issued for suction dredge mining in Oregon increased by nearly 600 percent. Because of restrictions in neighboring Idaho and California and the high price of gold, mining activity will likely continue to increase in Oregon.

“This bill gives agencies tools to implement a framework that will minimize damage to rivers, especially in Southern Oregon where dredge mining has run rampant,” said Senator Jackie Dingfelder (D-Portland), chair of the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee. “Protecting fish habitat for threatened and endangered species is important, and ensuring proper oversight and enforcement of mining will also allow Oregonians to enjoy our magnificent rivers while minimizing conflicts with miners.”

Senate Bill 838B caps the number of suction dredge mining permits at 2009 levels and asks state agencies to study and propose a comprehensive framework to regulate this kind of mining by 2015. If the Legislature does not pass a new framework by the 2015 session, a five-year moratorium on suction dredge mining in certain areas will take effect.

The bill moves now to the Oregon House of Representatives for a vote.

###

For more information on the Senate Majority Caucus, please visit www.orsenatemajority.org