



June 6, 2011

The Honorable Edmund “Jerry” G. Brown
 Governor, State of California
 Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Darrel Steinberg
 President Pro Tempore, California State Senate
 Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable John Perez
 Speaker, California State Assembly
 Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Brown, Pro Tem Steinberg, and Speaker Perez:

The undersigned conservation and fishing organizations, and Native American Tribes, urge you to retain budget language adopted by Senate and Assembly budget subcommittees to eliminate funding for the California Department of Fish and Game’s (CDFG) suction dredge mining regulatory program and maintain the state’s current moratorium on this destructive and polluting mining practice for at least five years.

Fees paid by suction dredge miners fail to cover the full costs of CDFG’s suction dredge mining regulatory program. CDFG estimates that its proposed new suction dredge mining regulatory program will raise only \$373,000 a year in permit fees but cost more than \$1.8 million to administer and enforce.

Californians can ill-afford to permit costly and destructive mining in our streams and rivers at a time when budget cuts have reduced the number of game wardens in the field, the state

is proposing to close 70 state parks, public health programs are cut to the bone, and communities are forced to lay-off public safety personnel and teachers.

CDFG also admits that its proposed suction dredge mining regulatory program will result in significant and unavoidable impacts on water quality, wildlife, and Native American and historical resources. It simply makes no sense to adopt a regulatory program that costs taxpayers money and fails to protect public trust resources.

The potential for the program to mobilize toxic mercury and pollute drinking water supplies and further harm endangered salmon and the state's once healthy fishing industry are sufficient reasons to ban this mining activity in our rivers and streams.

We urge you to retain the budget language eliminating funding for the suction dredge mining regulatory program and maintaining the current moratorium on this costly and destructive practice. As noted in the attached Sacramento Bee editorial, "This money-saver is good policy."

Thank you for your consideration.

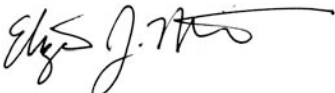
Sincerely,



Steven L. Evans
Wild Rivers Project Director
Friends of the River



Jonas Minton
Water Policy Advisor
Planning & Conservation League



Elizabeth Martin
Executive Director
The Sierra Fund

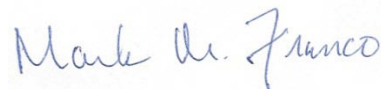


Bill Jennings
Executive Director
California Sportfishing
Protection Alliance



president

Anne-Marie Bakker
Northern California Council
Federation of Fly Fishers



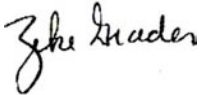
Mark Franco
Headman
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Michael Endicott
Resource Sustainability Advocate
Sierra Club California



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Environmental Justice
Water Coalition

Editorial: A smart budget trim will help water quality

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Lawmakers looking under every rock to find flecks of budget savings have found easy pickings. Budget committee members have voted to continue the 2009 moratorium on gold suction dredge mining throughout California.

That makes good policy sense as well as budget sense. How can lawmakers justify funding a new, more expensive suction dredge mining permit and enforcement program when they face harsh cuts to big state priorities – higher education, and [health care](#) for the elderly and poor, for example? Every dime counts.

Suction dredge mining is a practice by which miners use vacuum hoses to suck up sediment, gravel and sand from river- and streambeds. The material passes through a sluice box, which traps heavier gold particles.

The problem is that dredging stirs up long-buried mercury left over from Gold Rush mining practices in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

These mercury-contaminated sediments are relatively harmless if they're left buried. But if they're stirred up and reintroduced into the aquatic system, they can become methylated and accumulate in the food web. The sluice box on a standard suction dredge does not catch fine sediments, so newly mobilized mercury goes downstream.

Under somewhat more restrictive rules proposed by the [California Department of Fish and Game](#), a new dredging program would raise \$373,000 a year in permit fees but would cost \$1.8 million to enforce. That's not worth it.

In the 15 years before the moratorium, the state each year issued an average of 3,200 suction dredge mining permits to California residents and 450 nonresidents. That doesn't sound like a lot. But it adds up. About 270 hours of dredging per permit per year is nearly 1 million hours, potentially leading to transport of substantial amounts of mercury far downstream.

The top five watersheds for dredging activity (Yuba, Feather, Klamath, American and Trinity) account for 60 percent of all suction dredging activity statewide. Suction dredging activities that increase the concentrations and loads of mercury thus can have a big impact on the [Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta](#).

Budget committees in both houses of the Legislature have done the right thing by blocking funding for dredge mining permits for five years, effectively extending the 2009 moratorium. This money-saver is good policy.

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