

The rivers of Washington are valued for their scenic beauty, pristine water quality, exceptional recreational opportunities, and as high quality fish habitat. Rivers such as the Columbia and Cowlitz provide critical habitat for federally-listed fish species and support vibrant recreational and commercial fisheries. Each year millions of taxpayer dollars are spent on fish habitat restoration throughout Washington. These investments can be washed downstream in moments by a miner with a suction dredge.

In their search for gold, suction dredge miners can enormously impact fish habitat by destroying redds and refugia as they vacuum up the river bottom. A plume of sediment is released downstream, along with the toxic metals that were once settled in the sediment, exposing aquatic wildlife to these toxins. Current regulations in Washington allow suction dredge mining without oversight, tracking, or accountability – no permits, fees, or monitoring required.

Given what is at stake for our critical fish populations, many of them on the brink of extinction, we must reform Washington's suction dredge mining laws to adequately protect water quality and fish habitat. At minimum, suction dredge miners should be required to obtain individual permits and pay fees, similar to anglers, so that state agencies are able to monitor the impacts of these activities on waterways. Additionally, suction dredge mining should be excluded from areas providing habitat for federally-listed fish population, particularly during times critical to the life cycle of those species. I ask for your leadership in protecting Washington's watersheds and fish populations by supporting these essential reforms.