

P R E S S R E L E A S E

Karuk Tribe • Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations • Institute for Fisheries Resources • Center For Biological Diversity • Friends of the River The Sierra Fund • Upper American River Foundation • Environmental Law Foundation • California Sportfishing Protection Alliance • Foothills Anglers Coalition • North Fork American River Alliance • Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center • Klamath Riverkeeper

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CALIFORNIA GOV. BROWN SIGNS NEW LAW TO PROTECT RIVERS AND FISHERIES FROM HOBBY GOLD MINING

SB 637 Requires Clean Water Act Permits for Small Scale Motorized Gold Miners

SACRAMENTO, *Calif.* – California Gov. Jerry Brown today signed into law Senate Bill 637 in order to protect California's water supplies, wildlife and cultural resources from the damaging effects of destructive hobby gold mining. The new law requires that all small scale miners using motorized suction pumps obtain a Clean Water Act Permit from the State Water Resources Control Board before mining in California waterways.

"This is a great victory for all of us concerned about clean water and healthy fisheries," said Elizabeth Martin, of the Sierra Fund.

"We are very pleased that our Tribal fisheries and sacred sites will receive additional protections from the ravages of gold mining clubs who have been damaging our resources for decades," said Josh Saxon, council member of the Karuk Tribe.

The legislation affects suction dredge mining, high banking and any other form of mining that relies on motorized suction pumps to process materials for the banks or bed of rivers and streams. Suction dredges are powered by gas or diesel engines that are mounted on floating pontoons in the river. Attached to the engine is a powerful vacuum hose which the dredger uses to suction up the gravel, sand, and mud from the bottom of the river. The suctioned material is sifted in search of gold. Similarly, high banking

suctions water to process material excavated from river banks causing erosion and sediment issues as well as affecting cultural sites.

Dredging and high banking alters fish habitat by altering the river bottom and often reintroduces mercury left over from historic mining operations to the waterways threatening communities and fisheries. These machines can turn a clear running mountain stream into a murky watercourse unfit for swimming or fishing.

The measure comes after nearly a decade of litigation between tribes, conservationists, and miners. A moratorium on the environmentally destructive practice has been in effect since 2009, but recent court decisions have cast uncertainty on the moratorium and prompted clarification from the legislature. Senate Bill 637 was authored by Senator Ben Allen (D – Santa Monica) to provide clear authority to the State Water Resources Control Board to permit or deny small scale suction dredge mining in order to maintain water quality standards.

“We commend Senator Allen and his staff for standing up for our precious water resources and wildlife during this devastating drought,” said Jonathan Evans, Environmental Health Legal Director with the Center for Biological Diversity.

The issue has implications for the economy as well as the environment. “For our members, this is about protecting jobs and family owned businesses which rely on healthy salmon fisheries,” said Glen Spain of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations, the west coast’s largest trade association of commercial fishing families.”

The Sierra Fund and the Karuk Tribe have been working with the Center for Biological Diversity, Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations, Friends of the River, Environmental Law Foundation, Upper American River Foundation, California Sportfishing Protection Alliance, Foothills Anglers Association, North Fork American River Alliance, Klamath Riverkeeper, and the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center for several years to reform small scale mining laws and regulations.

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Editor’s note: for a picture of a suction dredge in action, email request to ctucker@karuk.us

Also see a dredge in action on YouTube:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1qwdzQ4fzI>