

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. Both HB 1077 and HB 1106 offer the legislature an opportunity to move Washington toward compliance with the Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act. We ask for your leadership in protecting Washington's watersheds and fish populations by supporting these essential reforms.