

Proposed dredging regulations affect vacuum size, bank alteration

David Smith, Siskiyou Daily News, 3-8-11

A number of changes have been proposed for suction dredge mining in the state, opening a public comment period for interested parties as the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) works toward the reinstatement of the activity, which is contingent upon the department's issuance of a revised environmental impact report (EIR) and regulations.

Some aspects of the proposed changes drew comments during the March 1 meeting of the Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors, including the restriction on nozzle size and the potential revocation of dredging permit if cited.

According to the draft EIR, in general, nozzles will be restricted to 4 inches in diameter unless the department has conducted an on-site inspection of the area to be dredged.

The on-site inspection requirement also extends to the use of motorized equipment, including winching, to move boulders, logs or other objects, which is otherwise restricted in the regulations.

The list of proposed changes also includes a prohibition on fuel, lubricants and chemical storage within 100 feet of the current water level unless infeasible; a restriction on moving materials embedded on the banks of rivers; and a requirement that all tailing piles be returned to pre-mining grade before the end of the dredging year or before moving to another site; among other requirements.

According to the EIR, four alternatives to the proposed changes were explored, including a no change alternative, a return to 1994 regulations, a water quality alternative and a reduced intensity alternative.

A major component included in the water quality alternative includes the closure of rivers listed as impaired under the Clean Water Act, while the reduced intensity alternative would limit the number of permits issued to 1,500, as opposed to 4,000 under the proposed program in the EIR.

A number of public meetings are scheduled to discuss the proposed EIR, including meetings in Santa Clarita, Fresno, Sacramento, Yreka and Redding. According to the DFG website, the Yreka meeting is scheduled for March 30 at 5 p.m. at the Yreka Community Center, 810 N. Oregon St.

Jim Foley, a miner and mining advocate, stated in an e-mail Thursday that mining interests in the state are gearing up to challenge the DFG on its proposed regulations and will be suggesting changes before the draft regulations go in effect.