

September 27, 2010

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Re: Mining withdrawal from southwest Oregon Siskiyou Wild Rivers, request from fish conservation organizations

Dear Secretaries Salazar and Vilsack:

Following the concerns and requests voiced by Oregon's communities of faith and a diverse collection of Oregon state legislators, we would like to respectfully add our names to those from our Federal delegation who have already requested an immediate withdrawal of the Southern Oregon Siskiyou Wild Rivers area from the Mining Law of 1872. Concurrently, we also offer our support to the Oregon state legislature's consideration, under Senator Jason Atkinson's guidance, of a suction dredge ban in all state waters.

When considering a federal withdrawal, we urge the Secretary of the Interior to utilize the authority granted to the Secretary in Section 204 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. Like Oregon's faith leaders, state legislators, and Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, Representative Peter DeFazio, and Governor Ted Kulongoski, we believe that the antiquated 1872 Mining Law is in desperate need of revision, and that strong measures are necessary to permanently protect Oregon's Siskiyou Wild Rivers from the significant threats posed by mining under this dated statute.

Since 2001, when a mining moratorium from the Clinton administration was reversed for the region, there have been over 800 new claims filed in the Siskiyou Wild Rivers. An additional rise in claims is occurring at present due to the 2009 suction dredge-mining ban throughout the state of California. With the record-high price of gold, California miners have turned their sights to southern Oregon's pristine streams. According to a July 2010 Associated Press story, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has issued 1,205 suction dredge permits so far this year – a 30 percent increase from 2009. Similarly by mid-July, permits issued to Californians number 85 this year, up 67 percent.

As spokespeople for Oregon's fishing community, the impacts of mining offend both the recreational fisher and our conservation allies. Such impacts of mining are widespread in these treasured Oregon watersheds. Suction dredge mining disturbs streambeds, and eliminates spawning habitat for sensitive fish, including some the state's most endangered salmon runs. In addition, toxic runoff, leaching, and erosion from mines result in poor water quality for downstream wildlife and human communities. Mining often includes cutting of old-growth, bulldozers in and near streams, suction dredge machines in salmon spawning habitat and irresponsible road building for access.

The Siskiyou Wild Rivers area attracts people from around the world who come to view the rare botanical wonders, fish, raft, hike, and otherwise enjoy this area. As the primary contributors and leaders of the fishing industry, it is noteworthy that a recent regional economic report concluded that

west coast residents enjoy more than \$1.5 billion in economic benefit annually from the Rogue River salmon and steelhead runs.

Until Congress reforms the 1872 Mining Law and withdraws the Siskiyou Wild Rivers region, our rivers will be at risk. Based on its ecological value to the state's prized fishing runs and its economic importance to recreation, tourism, and other wildlife, we urge you to take this action to safeguard Oregon's Siskiyou Wild Rivers area. These beautiful waters deserve to be protected so they can continue to provide benefits to our diverse communities. Thank you for your consideration of these and like concerns, and your ongoing support of our public lands. The recreational, commercial, and conservation-fishing community looks forward to working with you to preserve our state's resources.

Sincerely,

Steve Pedery, Conservation Director
Oregon Wild

John DeVoe, Executive Director
WaterWatch of Oregon

Bill Bakke, Executive Director
Native Fish Society

Guido Rahr, Executive Director
Wild Salmon Center

John Kober, Executive Director
Pacific Rivers Council

Liz Hamilton, Executive Director
Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association

Brett Brownscombe, Director of Strategic Policy
The Freshwater Trust

Cc: Senator Ron Wyden
Senator Jeff Merkley
Congressman Peter DeFazio
Congressman Earl Blumenauer
Governor Ted Kulongoski
Robert Bonnie, Senior Advisor to the Secretary, USDA
Harris Sherman, Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, USDA
Thomas Tidwell, Chief, US Forest Service
Amy Salzman, Associate Director, Policy Outreach, CEQ
Sylvia Baca, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Land & Minerals Management
Ned Farquhar, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Land & Minerals Management
Mike Pool, Deputy Director, Bureau of Land Management