



Times-Standard

State Supreme Court says no to suction dredge gold mining

By The Times-Standard
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The California Supreme Court on Monday upheld a 2009 state-wide moratorium on recreational suction dredge gold mining after suction dredge miners asked the court to prevent the California Department of Fish and Wildlife from enforcing the ban.

According to a press release from the Center for Biological Diversity release, the court said the regulations protects water supplies, fisheries, wildlife and cultural resources.

“Suction dredging is a continuation of the genocidal legacy of goldminers that started over 150 years ago,” Karuk Tribe Natural Resources Director Leaf Hillman said in the release. “We will continue the fight to protect our cultural and natural resources from this reckless form of river mining.”

The practice uses machines to suck up gravel and sand from streams and river bottoms to search for gold, threatening cultural resources and sensitive wildlife.



TIMES-STANDARD FILE PHOTO PROVIDED BY OREGON WILD This undated file photo shows a suction dredge machine in action; on Monday, the California Supreme Court upheld a 2009 statewide moratorium on recreational suction dredge gold mining.

The California native American Heritage Commission has condemned the practice’s impact on tribal and archeological resources. This mining pollutes waterways with mercury and sediment while destroying habitat for salmon, steelhead trout, California red-legged frogs and migratory songbirds.

“Suction dredging is a reckless form of hobby mining that tears up rivers and threatens our waterways, imperiled salmon and other wildlife,” Center for Biological Diversity environmental health legal director Jonathan Evans said in the release.

“In this time of drought and climate change, we can’t afford to have California’s waterways trashed by a small but vocal group of gold miners.”

State law prohibits in-stream suction dredge mining until regulations to pay for the program, protect water quality, wildlife and cultural resources and Clean Water Act permits are issued.

Both the Environmental Protection Agency and State Water Resources Control Board have urged a complete ban on the practice because of its impacts.

“The unanimous decision handed down by the California Supreme Court this morning correctly holds that state regulations protecting our riverbeds from being vacuumed up by suction dredge gold mining has not been preempted by federal law,” Friends of the River Senior Counsel Bob Wright said in the release. “This is a victory for sanity and common sense as well as the effort to protect our crashing fish populations.”