



NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Idaho Water Resource Board approves recommendations on four dredge-mining permits on the South Fork of the Clearwater River

BOISE - (March 28, 2017) – The Idaho Water Resource Board voted unanimously to approve a hearing officer’s recommendations on four suction-mining permits issued by the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) on the South Fork of the Clearwater River in 2016.

Four different miners objected to permits issued by IDWR last year to dredge mine on the South Fork of the Clearwater River. All four requested administrative hearings on the permits, objecting to the conditions placed on them.

IDWR hearing officer James Cefalo, water resource program manager for eastern Idaho, denied two of the petitions for appeal because they were not filed within 15 days as required by state law. In the other two cases, Cefalo found the permits consistent with Idaho’s State Water Plan, the Stream Channel Protection Act, and the Stream Channel Alteration Rules. He affirmed IDWR’s issuance of the permits.

Miner Ronald Miller objected to the conditions placed on the permit because 20 of the 25 “don’t work on the ground.” He said conditions aimed at protecting endangered fish don’t make sense. “We’d like to see the science on this,” he said. “There are no native fish left in the Columbia River Basin.”

Water Resource Board Chairman Roger Chase told Miller he would personally visit the area involved and meet with suction dredge-miners to hear more about their concerns.

Dredge-mining was prohibited on the South Fork of the Clearwater River until a basin plan was completed in 2005. Since then, dredge-mining on the South Fork of the Clearwater River has required a rigorous permitting process with federal agencies. Coordination between IDWR, the Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management resulted in issuance of up to 15 dredge-mining permits last year. The permits came with requirements for protecting six fish species listed as threatened or endangered on the South Fork under the Endangered Species Act. Those species include spring and fall Chinook salmon and bull trout.

The Board also received an update on the \$300,000 Priest Lake Water Management Study. The international consulting firm Mott Macdonald has been hired to complete the study, which seeks to develop a range of feasible alternatives – in consultation with stakeholders and the public – for improving management of Priest Lake water.

A steering committee has been formed to help guide the study, including representatives from the local community. Public meetings will be conducted this summer to hear from local citizens and lakeshore residents. A draft report is expected in December and a final report in early 2018.

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