



# *Friends of the Clearwater*

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December 19, 2017

Nikki Regent  
Administration Assistant II  
Planning & Projects Bureau  
Idaho Department of Water Resources

RE: Suction Dredging Changes to South Fork Clearwater

Sent VIA Email to [nikki.regent@idwr.gov](mailto:nikki.regent@idwr.gov)

Dear Ms. Regent:

The following comments for potential changes in the small-scale suction dredging permits on the South Fork Clearwater for 2017 and beyond are submitted on behalf of Friends of the Clearwater. Friends of the Clearwater is a conservation organizations concerned about the public wildlands, watersheds, and wildlife in and immediately around the Clearwater Basin in north-central Idaho.

## **Introduction**

Friends of the Clearwater has participated in the public involvement processes by the US Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) on suction dredge mining in the South Fork Clearwater as well as the joint state/federal public involvement process for NPDES permits in 2012. We are very concerned about the impacts of section dredge mining. These concerns are documented in our past correspondence to your office on July 3 and 25 and September 28, 2017. Further, the decline of wild steelhead in the Clearwater Basin is of significant concern and the Biological Assessment for the suction dredging on the South Fork made a finding of likely to adversely affect steelhead. As such, we oppose any changes that might weaken the current conditions in terms of protection of water quality and fish habitat.

## **Concerns**

Any proposed changes in conditions should be coordinated with other agencies like the US Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Environmental Protection Agency, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Organization fisheries division (NOAA Fisheries), the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. The Nez Perce Tribe has treaty rights and interests in the South Fork Clearwater that must be recognized. Citizens of Idaho and the entire also have interests is protecting water quality in the South Fork Clearwater. Since changes may involve the production of a new environmental assessment (EA) by the Forest Service and BLM, that would be a major undertaking and needs to go through public involvement. However, if changes are proposed to increase protection through additional measures, such changes may not need an EA rewrite as the Forest Service decision allows for additional requirements from IDWR. Changes that don't increase protection and/or create confusion between the requirements of various agencies should be avoided.

For example, condition 9 in the November 22 memo is a bit inconsistent with the EA and decision by the federal agencies. There are strict limits placed on suction dredging around tributaries in the EA, yet the way condition 9 is worded leads one to believe the prohibitions could be overridden. Further, this condition could be improved to be more consistent with the plume monitoring so that no dredging takes place within 150 feet upstream of tributaries.

If changes are implemented, it must be made explicit in IDWR's regulations that federal permits are also required. Charging a fee to cover agency administrative costs of this private commercial use of public resources should be implemented as well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gary Macfarlane", is written on a light-colored, slightly textured background.

Gary Macfarlane

cc: Jim Zokan, EPA