

Legislation would extend ban on gold mining technique

By Matt Drange, California Watch

When it comes to protecting California watershed habitats, environmentalists rarely embrace budget cuts. But that is exactly what they are doing in response to a recent proposal to slash funding for gold mining permits.

Last month, legislators amended the proposed state budget to prohibit the California Department of Fish and Game from issuing new permits for the gold mining process known as suction dredging. They estimate it will save the state \$1.8 million by eliminating costs associated with selling and databasing individual permits, sending biologists to collect information at various sites, and paying for wardens who must devote a portion of their time to enforcing the regulations.

Suction dredging involves using vacuum-like devices to suck up sediment from the river bottom and deposit the material into sluice boxes floating on the water. But environmentalists say it is damaging to fisheries that are already on the decline. Craig Tucker, a spokesman for the Karuk Indian Tribe in Northern California, said it has been “downhill” for the tribe since the first Gold Rush more than 150 years ago.

Some fish species, such as the lamprey, live in riverbed sediment for up to seven years during their larval stage, Tucker said, and are especially vulnerable to suction dredging.

“It’s deadly to those species,” Tucker said.

Read the whole story