

WHEREAS, the California Department of Fish and Game's Final Environmental Impact Report on Suction Dredge Mining dated April 1994, based on several peer reviewed, scientific studies on suction dredge mining states repeatedly that suction dredge gold mining has little, if any, negative impact on fisheries and aquatic habitat; and

FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

ADOPTION OF REGULATIONS FOR SUCTION DREDGE MINING

APRIL 1994

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
THE RESOURCES AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

ISSUES TO BE RESOLVED

At issue is whether or not to adopt regulations permitting suction dredge mining in California. If suction dredge mining regulations are adopted, decisions are needed to accept the proposed list of open waters, seasons of operation, equipment size limits, and other appropriate special conditions. This document includes a review and discussion of the proposed project as well as the six alternatives thereto.

CONCLUSION

The Department is the trustee for fish and wildlife resources of the State of California. The Department is charged with protecting and managing fish populations and other related aquatic dependent resources in a sound biological manner.

Suction dredge mining can potentially result in the loss of fish production, temporary loss of benthic/invertebrate communities, localized disturbance to streambeds, increased turbidity of water in streams and rivers, and mortality to aquatic plant and animal communities. However, based on best available data, it is anticipated the project to adopt regulations for suction dredging as proposed, will reduce these effects to the environment to less than significant levels and no deleterious effects to fish.

The proposed regulations would result in the maintenance of healthy lake, stream and river systems while allowing for suction dredge mining in California. To further ensure the maintenance of healthy lake, stream and river systems in California, the Department would periodically review and amend regulations based on additional evidence and data.

7

The Department recognizes there is a long history of other impacts to California's rivers and streams associated with other recreational and commercial activities. These activities include the construction of dams, commercial mining, rafting, fishing, road building and logging. In comparison, the cumulative detrimental effects of these activities are more significant to the overall health of fish and fish habitat than the impacts caused by suction dredging. All negative impacts to the State's rivers are of concern to the Department due to the continuing decline of fisheries and riparian habitat throughout the State. An overview of the historic and current declining condition of the State's rivers and fisheries resources is provided in the 1993 California State Lands Commission's report "California's Rivers - A Public Trust Report".

As a Trustee agency for the fish and wildlife resources of the State, the Department participates with private and public entities in the planning, development and regulation of these other activities. This participation, through the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process, Timber Harvest Assessment Program, coordination with other State and Federal agencies and development of Environmental Impact Reports and regulations for sport and commercial fisheries is well documented in the public record. Therefore, the detailed impacts of these activities on the State's rivers and streams are not discussed in this Final EIR (FEIR). An overview of the relative comparison of suction dredge mining compared to these other activities is provided in the environmental effects section of this FEIR. The scope of this document is specific to adoption of regulations for suction dredging. The environmental effects of the proposed project and suction dredging in general are described in detail in Chapter V of this document. The Department has determined that absent regulations the impacts of suction dredging on the environment would be significant and deleterious.

(rafting)

ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED PROJECT

The Department proposes a range of six alternatives to the proposed project. The alternatives, described in Chapter VI, are presented in order of those alternatives having the least to the most environmental impacts.

Alternative 1

Alternative 1 is the No Project Alternative. This alternative would prohibit suction dredge mining in California. The Department would not issue permits or designate any waters of the State open to suction dredge mining.

Alternative 2

Alternative 2 would adopt the proposed project with modifications based on specific stream course studies to be conducted.

Alternative 3