

# Fact Sheet

## Title: Suction Dredging

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Suction dredging is a popular form of recovering gold from the numerous placer streams in Alaska. Various sizes of suction dredges are used, varying from those “recreational” models with a small 1½ inch intake hose to large, heavy dredges with 8 inch and 10 inch intake hoses, driven by powerful engines, and capable of processing large amounts of material in a single day.

The definition of “recreational” suction dredging varies between state and federal agencies; but, generally it may be stated that, on:

**STATE LAND:** Use of a suction dredge, with an intake line of six (6) inches or less, powered by a motor of 18HP or less, and which is used without mechanized support equipment, is classified as a recreational activity and would not require a permit from the Division of Mining, Land & Water (DMLW).

Structures are not permitted, even if they are on skids or some other form of non-permanent foundation. However, temporary tent camps may be utilized, but for not more than 14 days at one site.

Suction dredging is not permitted in State Parks.

**FEDERAL LAND:** Use of a suction dredge, with an intake line of four (4) inches or less, is considered recreational. A suction dredge with an intake line larger than four (4) inches is considered a commercial operation and requires a “Notice of Intent” to be filed with the federal land manager of the area.

“Commercial” operations involve the use of suction dredges larger than those defined above under the “recreational” category and may require permitting by several state and federal agencies. Most operators in the “commercial” category submit an Annual Placer Mining Application (APMA) for their permits. The APMA may be used to satisfy the “Notice of Intent” required for “commercial” mining operations on federal lands. Contact the Division of Mining, Land and Water, Mine Permitting Office for further information concerning the Annual Placer Mining Application process.

Many gold-bearing streams in Alaska support salmon and there is only one way to tell if the stream you want to dredge has been designated as important to anadromous fish - contact the nearest Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Habitat Section.. **Anyone proposing to conduct suction dredging operations are required to obtain prior authorization from one of their offices before the commencement of such activity due to potential impact on anadromous fish habitat.** Permits are free!

In most areas of the state, adult salmon spawning begins in mid-July and extends through the fall. The eggs deposited in the stream bed do not emerge as free swimming fish until April or May of the following year. Salmon eggs deposited in stream bed gravel's are extremely vulnerable to any type of disturbance such as suction dredges. Accordingly, the instream use of **any** suction dredge is generally prohibited in salmon spawning and rearing areas except for a period between May 15<sup>th</sup> and July 15<sup>th</sup>, when salmon eggs and salmon fry are least vulnerable to disturbance. These dates may vary depending upon the species of fish and the distances they must travel to reach their natal streams.

Please note changes to regulations of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency which became effective September 24, 1993, are affecting regulations of recreational placer mining activities in Alaska. There are exemptions; but each of these agencies should be contacted to determine if your mining operation will require permits from their respective agencies.

Any activity must be conducted in a responsible manner and must comply with all applicable state, federal, and local laws and regulations. Many land classifications do not allow recreational activity that disturbs the surface in any manner. Camping permits may be required for certain areas. **Check First!** Both the State Department of Natural Resources and the Bureau of Land Management can assist you in determining land ownership.

For additional information contact:

**Department of Natural Resources**

Public Information Center  
550 West 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 1260  
Anchorage, AK 99501-3557  
Phone: 907-269-8400  
TDD: 907-269-8411

Public Information Center  
3700 Airport Way  
Fairbanks, AK 99709-4699  
Phone: 907-451-2705  
TDD: 907- 451-2770

Division of Mining, Land & Water  
Mine Permitting & Reclamation  
550 West 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 900 B  
Anchorage, AK 99501-3577  
Phone: 907-269-8647

Division of Mining, Land & Water  
Mine Permitting & Reclamation  
3700 Airport Way  
Fairbanks, AK 99709-4699  
Phone: 907-451-2788

**Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G)**

**Habitat Division**

Southcentral Region  
333 Raspberry Road (corner of C & Raspberry)  
Anchorage, AK 99518  
Phone: 907-267-2342

**Northern Region**

1300 College Road  
Fairbanks, AK 99702  
Phone: 907-459-7289

**Southeast Region**

400 Willoughby Ave., 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Juneau, AK 99808  
Phone: 907-465-4105

**Bureau of Land Management**

Alaska State Office - Public room  
222 West 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue #13  
Anchorage, AK 99513-7599  
Phone: 907-271-5960

Fairbanks Support Service Center  
1150 University Avenue  
Fairbanks, AK 99709-3844  
Phone: 907-474-2200

Tok Field Office  
PO Box 309  
Tok, AK 99780-0309  
Phone: 907-883-5121

**U.S. Army Corps of Engineers**

Regulatory Branch-Permit Review Section  
PO Box 6898  
Elmendorf AFB, AK 99506-6898  
Phone: 907-753-2712  
1-800-478-2712 (Within Alaska)

**Environmental Protection Agency**

EPA Region 10 (WD-134)  
1200 Sixth Avenue  
Seattle, WA 98101-3188  
Phone: (907) 271-6561 or  
1-800-781-0983 (Within Alaska), or

1-800-424-4372 Ext. 1214 (Seattle Office)