

Fact Sheet

Title: Suction Dredging



Alaska Department of
**NATURAL
RESOURCES**

Division of Mining, Land & Water
February 2012

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: The 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 Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mining, Land & Water (DMLW). (The exception is the Nome Recreational Area where a suction dredge permit is required.)

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: Before using a suction dredge of any intake size on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) managed federal lands, the suction dredge operator must contact the local BLM Field Office to determine if suction dredging can be authorized for the desired location, and if so, how to apply for authorization.

“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 15th and July 15th, 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 natural 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. **As of October 31, 2010, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) has assumed permitting authority from EPA; therefore, any EPA related questions must now be directed toward ADEC.**

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 7th 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 7th Avenue, Suite 900B
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

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., 4th Floor
Juneau, AK 99808
Phone: 907-465-4105

Bureau of Land Management

Anchorage Field Office
4700 BLM Road
Anchorage, AK 99507-2591
Phone: 907-267-1246

Fairbanks District Office
Eastern Interior and Central Yukon Field Offices
1150 University Avenue
Fairbanks, AK 99709-3844
Phone: 907-474-2200

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)

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation

Engineering/Mining Technical Services Section
610 University Avenue
Fairbanks, AK 99709
Phone: 907-451-2142
Fax: 907-451-2187

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Habitat Division Continued

Mat-Su Region

1800 Glenn Highway, Suite 6
Palmer, AK 99645
Phone: 907-861-3200

Soldotna Region

514 Funny River Road
Soldotna, AK 99669
Phone: 907-714-2478