

Gold-mining Practice in California Still on Hold After Suction Dredge Bill Grinds to Halt

Desert Sun
Samuel Metz
June 29, 2018

Even though the Gold Rush is long gone, the fight over the valuable mineral rages on in California. For over a decade, gold miners have been battling with the state government and conservationists in the Sierra Nevada Mountains concerned that modern-day mining practices damage the environment and should be scrutinized and regulated.

Suction dredge mining, a practice in which individuals use vacuum-like devices to extract minerals from the bottom of waterways, has been restricted by a series of new laws passed in the California State Legislature. Earlier this year, miners' rights groups were optimistic that a bill authored by Sen. Jeff Stone, R-Temecula, would narrow the scope of the restrictions and allow them to apply for permits to return to rivers and streams with their suction dredge equipment once again.

The bill stalled before it reached a vote on the Senate floor, and now both its supporters and opponents are regrouping as the State Water Board prepares to introduce a permitting structure that could authorize suction dredging in California.

Nearly two centuries after 300,000 people rushed to California to search for gold, miners continue to make a living by selling the mineral, which goes for over \$1,200 an ounce. Prospectors own about 40,000 federal claims to the minerals below public lands in California, a vestige of a gold-rush era policy that let people purchase property rights to the mineral deposits below ground.

<https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/politics/2018/06/29/suction-dredge-mining-advocates-foes-regroup-after-clarifying-legislation-grinds-halt/742999002/>