

IN-STREAM GRAVEL MINING IN OREGON

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Gravel has been harvested from Oregon's coastal rivers for decades. Heavy rains and steep mountains leave vast deposits of hard mineral rock near the slope break; dry summer months reveal bars of gravel ripe for the taking. With the decline in salmon runs across the state, all possible threats to freshwater habitats have come under increased scrutiny. In-stream gravel mining, which increases turbidity, alters channel morphology, and creates dangerous traps in abandoned pits, is now viewed under the bright light of endangered species and last chance ecosystem protection. A uniquely successful partnership of Oregon and Federal regulatory and resource agencies has been working the conflict between gravel extraction and salmon habitat. The group, co-chaired by the Oregon Department of State Lands and the Corps of Engineers, aims first to establish whether or not current mining operations deplete river systems of gravel at an unsustainable rate. For those systems found to be in equilibrium or aggrading, sustainable harvest volumes will be set. Eventually, an annual system of review, modeled perhaps on the County of Humboldt Extraction Review Team (CHERT), will be established to monitor gravel mining over time. The elusive goal is to maintain a gravel business important to the local economy while maintaining salmon runs vital to a regional identity.