



Fact Sheet: Suction Dredging

Suction dredging is a popular form of recovering gold from the numerous placer streams in Alaska. Various sizes of suction dredges are used from “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 (**pumping no more than 30,000 gallons of water per day**) 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. 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 to obtain instructions on applying 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 & Water, Mine Permitting Office for further information concerning the Annual Placer Mining Application process.

Many gold-bearing streams in Alaska support anadromous fishes such as salmon and other resident species such as Arctic grayling. To determine if the stream you want to mine in supports fish, please contact the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) - Habitat Section (contact information below). **Anyone proposing to perform suction dredging or high banking operations in fish bearing waters is required to obtain prior authorization from ADF&G before commencement of such activities due to the potential impact on fish habitat.** ADF&G Fish Habitat Permits are free of charge.

In most areas of the state, salmon spawning begins in 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 gravels are extremely vulnerable to any type of disturbance such as suction dredges. Accordingly, the instream use of any suction dredge or the operation of a high banker is generally prohibited in salmon spawning and rearing areas except for a period from May 15 - July 15, when salmon eggs are not likely to be present 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, 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:

Alaska Department of Natural Resources (

Public Information Center
550 West 7th Avenue, Suite 1360
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-3561
Monday thru Friday / 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM
(907) 269-8400
dnr.pic@alaska.gov

Division of Mining, Land & Water
Mine Permitting & Reclamation (Statewide)
3700 Airport Way
Fairbanks, AK 99709-4699
Phone: 907-451-2736

Public Information Center
3700 Airport Way
Fairbanks Alaska 99709-4699
Monday thru Friday / 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM
(907) 451-2705
fbx-pic@alaska.gov

Statewide ADNR TTY – 711 for Alaska Relay or 1-800-770-8973

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
P.O. 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 & Game, Habitat

Southcentral Region
333 Raspberry Road
Anchorage, AK 99518
Phone: 907-267-2342

Northern Region
1300 College Road
Fairbanks, AK 99701
Phone: 907-459-7289

Southeast Region
802 3rd Street
Douglas, AK 99824
Phone: 907-465-4105

Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Habitat continued

Mat-Su Region
1801 South Margaret Drive, Suite 6
Palmer, AK 99645-6736
Phone: 907-861-3200

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