

TRANSPORTATION AND TRAFFIC

4.9.1 Environmental Setting

Site Access and Facilities

As previously shown in Figures 3-5 and 3-6, gold mining areas are wide-spread throughout California and can be located on either public or private lands. Access to these sites can vary greatly depending on the exact location used for mining. For instance, well developed recreation areas might provide paved two- or four-lane roadways and designated parking facilities, while other locations may be far less accessible. More rural or less frequented areas may be characterized by single lane roads, gravel or dirt paths, and/or limited parking. In many cases, the most accessible suction dredging sites are those which are located near roadways where vehicles can park and walk equipment down to the water's edge. These areas may not have locations designated for parking; however any space available is often utilized by visitors.

Parking availability and traffic conditions are often subject to seasonal fluctuations. During peak seasons (spring/summer), recreational users may experience higher degrees of traffic congestion and fewer available parking spaces than during off-peak times (fall/winter). This may not be as problematic in privately owned areas or those which monitor or limit the number of visitors to reflect available capacity.

4.9.2 Impact Analysis

Findings of 1994 Environmental Impact Report

The 1994 EIR did not make specific findings in this environmental resource area. Instead, traffic-related effects of suction dredging activities were generally discussed as a component of "*Impacts on Recreational Opportunities*." Vehicles and equipment associated with suction dredge activities were found to be in completion for parking spaces with other recreational users in the vicinity. Such parking conflicts between recreational users are especially high during peak recreation seasons and where spaces are extremely limited. However, as previously discussed, these 'recreational conflicts' were considered to be beyond the jurisdiction of CDFG to regulate and were included in the 1994 EIR for informational purposes only. In addition, the 1994 EIR comments that suction dredging is a legitimate recreational activity and is afforded equal rights to use public lands to participate in the activity, so long as it is done in a legal manner.

Criteria for Determining Significance

For the purposes of this analysis, the Proposed Program would result in a significant impact on transportation and traffic if it would:

- Substantially increase traffic hazards; or
- Result in inadequate parking capacity.

Other traffic impacts were eliminated from further consideration in the Initial Study and are not discussed further here.

Suction dredging activities requiring notification under Fish and Game Code section 1602 are not anticipated to result in any new or more severe impacts related to traffic and transportation beyond those which are described below.

4.9.3 Environmental Impacts

Impact TR-1: Traffic Hazards Caused by Suction Dredging (Less than Significant)

Dredgers frequently use personal vehicles in order to transport equipment and supplies to dredging locations. The number and size of vehicles used is highly dependent on the equipment being used, the number of persons in their group, and the duration of their stay. Such vehicular transport can range in size from small cars or pickups up to large SUVs and RVs. In addition, these vehicles may also be equipped with trailers towing the suction dredge or additional supplies.

Erratic or unsafe driving maneuvers, unsecured equipment, and malfunctioning vehicles or trailers can all potentially result in traffic hazards for the general public. However, this potential risk for traffic hazards is inherent to all drivers operating such vehicles on California's roadways. Because this risk is not exclusive to drivers who participate in suction dredging activities, and given the historically small percentage of drivers who are transporting suction dredge equipment relative to other drivers in these locations throughout California, the implementation of the Program would not result in a substantial increase in traffic hazards.

This impact is considered to be less than significant and no mitigation is necessary.

Impact TR-2: Inadequate Parking Capacity (Less than Significant)

Depending on the location and season, parking spaces may be a rare commodity. For instance, in rural areas such as the Klamath River corridor, there are only a limited number of pull-outs and adequate space for vehicles within the shoulders of roads can be non-existent. During the height of the summer tourist season, miners have been observed using these limited pull-outs along the road and depending on the vehicle size and positioning, may occupy these areas in a manner that excludes other users. In these situations, the result is that other vehicles are not able to find parking to access the river in these locations for the duration of the dredger's trip. In this way, the vehicular transport associated with suction dredging competes with other recreational activities for parking resources, which in certain areas or seasons, may be limited.

However, because parking is required by all activities involving personal vehicular transport to and from recreational areas, parking demand is not exclusive to the Program activities. Most parking spaces are generally utilized on a first-come, first-served basis regardless of recreational endeavor, whereby even individuals participating in suction

1 dredging may be unable to find parking at their desired locations. Furthermore, Program
2 participants are equally subject to local policies regarding long-term parking and may be
3 cited for improper or illegal placement. As such, Program participants are not singularly
4 responsible for lack of parking capacity, but rather, these conditions are a reflection of an
5 area's recreational popularity and available facilities.

6 Because suction dredgers in general are anticipated to generate a small portion of the
7 overall parking demand in areas subject to suction dredging, potential parking demand and
8 utilization associated with the implementation of the Program is considered to be less than
9 significant.