

Commonwealth of Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet

Steven L. Beshear, Governor

Leonard K. Peters, Secretary

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CONTACT: Allison Fleck, 502-564-3410

Division of Water provides guidelines for removal of creek gravel from streams *Excavation process can degrade waterways, harm aquatic life*

FRANKFORT, Ky. (May 1, 2012) – Reports of excessive gravel removal from Kentucky streams have prompted the Kentucky Division of Water (DOW) to reiterate creek gravel extraction guidelines to minimize impacts on the physical, chemical and biological characteristics of the waterway.

Creek gravel is used by road departments, construction companies and private landowners in a variety of ways. However, when gravel is removed from the stream channel in an environmentally unsound manner, the disturbance to the stream bed and banks can degrade the stream channel, water quality and aquatic life, said Barbara Scott, supervisor of the DOW Water Quality Certification Section.

“Gravel removal causes the stream bed and banks to become unstable, sometimes for miles upstream and downstream,” said Scott. “The resulting head cuts and bank failures impact farmlands, wetlands, recreational areas and infrastructure.”

Scott said because gravel provides a natural filtering system, its removal increases the volume of sediment in the water. The resulting cloudy, or turbid, water harms fish by clogging their gills, reducing the oxygen in the water and impairing feeding and egg development.

Guidelines for creek gravel excavation

- Excavate gravel by using backhoes and front-end loaders to scoop and lift the material and place it outside of the stream channel. Perform work from the bank of the stream, avoiding use of vehicles in the stream channel.
- Restrict excavation to the top 12 inches of gravel bars outside of the stream flow.
- Excavate only once per year during low-flow periods of late summer or fall, avoiding the fish spawning season of April 15 to June 15.
- Maintain a buffer of 10 feet between the shoreline and the work area and minimize vegetation loss.

It should be noted that in-stream activities that significantly increase sedimentation or alter stream flow are violations of state water quality standards and may be subject to enforcement action. Additionally, stockpiling of excavated material in the floodplain will require the acquisition of a floodplain permit from DOW.

For more information about proper techniques for removing creek gravel, contact Barbara Scott at 502-564-3410 or barbara.scott@ky.gov.

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