



# Recreational Gold Panning

## GOLD DEPOSITS

Gold occurs in two types of deposits: lode and placer (pronounced *plasser*). Lode deposits consist of ore minerals in veins or series of veins or disseminated in rock. These deposits require blasting, milling, or chemical treatment to recover the gold.

When a lode deposit weathers and erodes, gold and other minerals that resist weathering remain. Some of these minerals are called ‘heavy minerals’ because a given volume weighs more than the same volume of most other minerals. Many heavy minerals are black and make up what are commonly referred to as ‘black sands’. When the weathered material is transported in a stream, heavy minerals (including gold) settle into crevices and any other depressions in the streambed and form placer deposits. Gold in the sand and gravel in the streambed can be recovered by panning.

## PANNING IN WASHINGTON

The state’s streams that contain placer gold are also important for the plant and animal communities they support. To protect stream and streamside habitats, the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) administers the Hydraulics Code (RCW 75.20.100). This requires that any person or government agency desiring to use, divert, obstruct, or change the natural flow or bed of any river or stream, or utilize materials from stream beds shall obtain a Hydraulic Project Approval (HPA). A formal HPA is not required for recreational panning and prospecting if you use a gold pan, mini-rocker box, or non-motorized, small sluice box. You must have a formal HPA for sluicing and dredging.

The DFW publishes the booklet *Gold and Fish* to provide details and definitions for use by recreational gold panners. Be sure to obtain and read a copy of *Gold and Fish*, which you must carry with you whenever you are panning. The booklet also lists the classes of different streams and seasonal restrictions to certain activities on the various streams. If you have any questions, contact the DFW. Check for a regional DFW office in your local phone directory.

It is important to know where in Washington you can go to find land that is ‘open’ for recreational panning. The map on the back of this sheet shows general areas in which placer gold deposits have been found. **Not all of these localities are open for recreational panning.** Unless withdrawn, federal lands managed by the [U.S. Bureau of Land Management](#) and the [U.S. Forest Service](#) are open to panning (and prospecting). These federal agencies provide maps showing which lands they manage and withdrawn areas. Obtain a map from either of these agencies for the area where you plan to pan.

Many cities, such as Everett and Seattle, own the watersheds that supply their water. These areas are typically posted and closed to the public.

[State-owned lands](#) are not open for panning unless a placer mining contract for a specified parcel of land has been obtained from the Department of Natural Resources. Privately owned land and patented or unpatented mining claims are considered private lands, and you must obtain the owner’s/claim holder’s permission before you begin to pan.

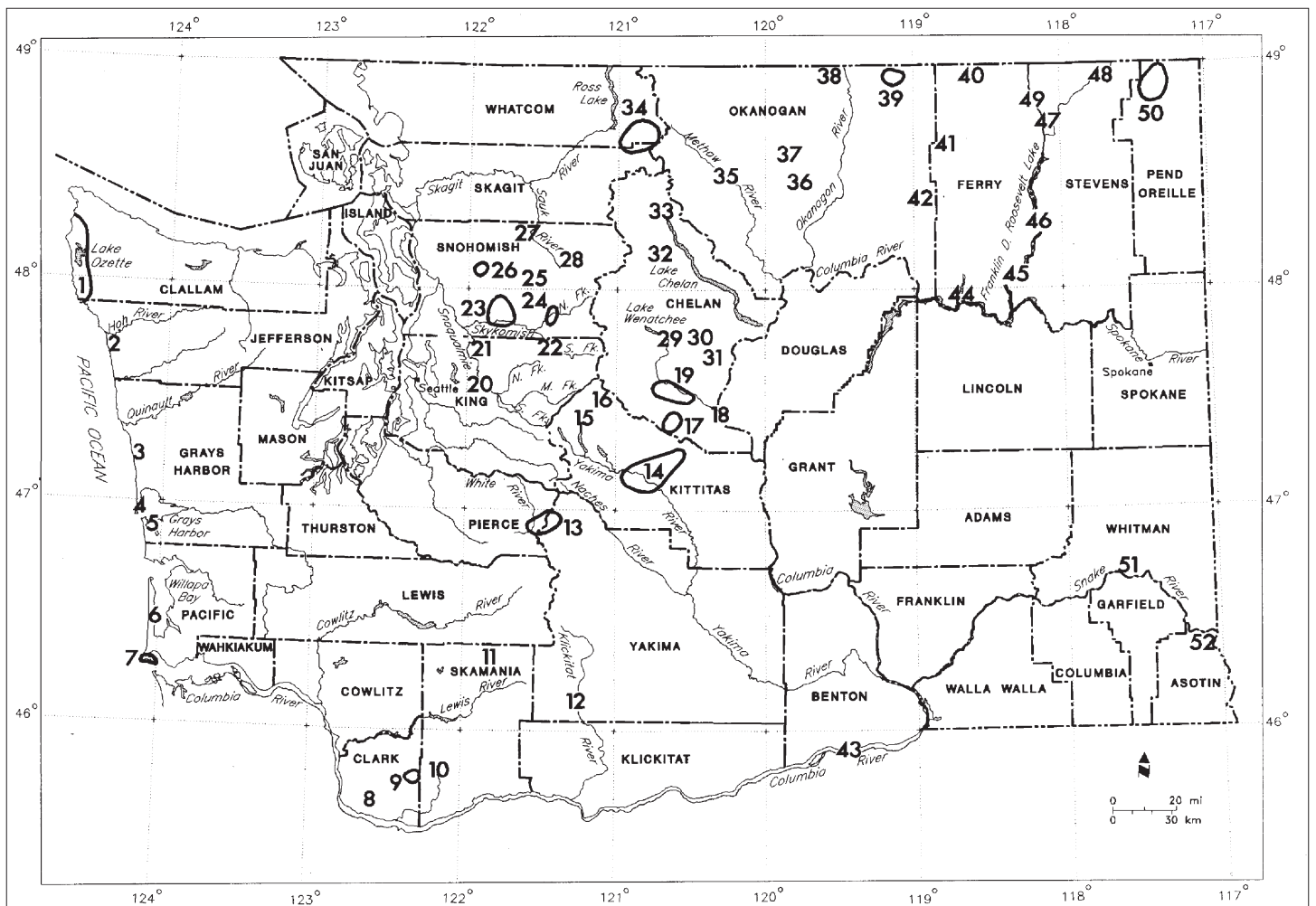
If you have questions about land ownership, check with your local County Assessor; assessors maintain records of all land ownership in each county.

When doing more than recreational panning on public lands, you should check with the appropriate land management agency to see if a Hydraulic Project Approval (HPA) is required and to file operation plans with them.

## HOW TO PAN

The following simple instructions will help you get started with a gold pan, which you can purchase at your local hardware store, rock shop, or prospecting supplies store.

1. First, fill your pan nearly full of the sand and gravel. Remove the largest stones from the pan.
2. Place the pan under water and be sure that all the material gets wet. You may have to mix the contents of the pan with your hands.
3. Quickly move the pan from side to side, either under water or while it is full of water, and rotate the pan’s contents (but don’t spill the contents). This action gives the gold particles a chance to settle to the bottom.
4. While continuing the side to side motion, gently tip the pan away from you. Lighter material and larger pieces that come to the top will move to the front of the pan. These can be skimmed or scraped over the brim of the pan with your thumb or hand.
5. Continue the motion described in steps 3 and 4, allowing water to wash lighter material over the brim until only a small amount of material remains in the pan. You’ll need to add water to the pan.
6. The remaining heavy material is the concentrate. If you haven’t yet seen any gold in your pan, pour out excess water until enough is left to barely cover the concentrate. Swirl the pan contents to ‘string out’ or ‘feather’ the concentrate; lighter particles will be washed farther than the heavier particles, leaving the gold (because it is the heaviest) in the ‘tail’ of the concentrate.
7. Continue swirling water in the pan to further clean the concentrates, being careful not to lose any gold. Recovering gold by panning takes practice!



Areas in Washington known to contain placer deposits. Prospecting in and along streams in central and northeastern Washington offers the greatest chance of finding placer gold. *Note: Just because an area is shown on this map does not mean that it is open to panning. Many, if not most, of these areas are closed to the public. Check with the County Assessor for private ownership and with the appropriate state or federal agency for [public lands](#). An asterisk (\*) indicates areas known to be closed.*

- |  |   |  |   |
|--|---|--|---|
| 1. Shi Shi beach<br>Ozette beach<br>Little Wink beach<br>Morrow beach<br>Yellow Banks beach<br>Main and Bartness<br>Johnson Point beach<br>Cedar Creek<br>Sunset Creek | Becker<br>Bryant Bar<br>Dennet<br>Swauk Mining<br>Gold Bar (Swauk area)<br>Nugget<br>Old Bigney (Liberty area)<br>Williams Creek<br>Swauk Creek<br>Yakima River<br>Perry (Yakima River) | 24. Bench (Skykomish River)<br>Phoenix (Howard Creek)  | 42. Crouse (Strawberry Creek)   |
| 2. Ruby Beach  | 15. Big Salmon La Sac<br>(Cle Elum River)   | 25. Williamson Creek   | <b>Columbia River Placers (43-48)</b>   |
| 3. Moclips River   | 16. Fortune Creek   | 26. Granite Falls<br>Peterson (Stillaguamish River)  | 43. Artesian Coulee<br>Gone Busted<br>Berrian Island  |
| 4. Oyhut beach   | 17. Ingalls Creek<br>Ruby Creek<br>Bloom<br>Solita (Peshastin Creek)<br>Shaser Creek<br>Negro Creek   | 27. Darrington   | 44. Covington Bar<br>Hellgate Bar<br>Keller Ferry   |
| 5. Point Brown beach   | 18. Wenatchee   | 28. Deer Creek   | 45. Rogers Bar<br>Wilmont Bar<br>Ninemile   |
| 6. Ocean Park beach  | 19. Icicle Creek<br>Leavenworth<br>Wenatchee River<br>Wednesday (Wenatchee River)   | 29. Deep Creek   | 46. Daisy<br>Johnson<br>Turtle Rapids   |
| 7. Fort Canby<br>Sand Island   | 20. Tolt River  | 30. Mad River  | 47. China Bend<br>Bossburg Bar<br>Valbush Bar   |
| 8. Brush Prairie   | 21. Money Creek   | 31. Entiat River   | 48. Reed & Roberts<br>Negro Creek Bar<br>Northport Bar<br>Negro Bar<br>Evans                  |
| 9. Lewis River<br>McMunn   | 22. Aristo<br>Horseshoe Bend* (Sultan River)<br>Sultan River<br>Sultan Canyon<br>Sultan<br>Gold Bar (Skykomish River)   | 32. Railroad Creek   | 49. Kettle River  |
| 10. Texas Gulch  |   | 33. Stehekin River   | 50. Scheirding<br>Harvey Bar (Pend Oreille River)<br>Sullivan Creek<br>Schultz (Linton Creek) |
| 11. McCoy Creek  |   | 34. Combination<br>Nip and Tuck<br>Farrar (Slate Creek)<br>Lazy Tar Heel<br>Alice Mae<br>Old Discovery (Ruby Creek)<br>Slate Creek<br>Woodrich (Canyon Creek)<br>Johnnie S (Granite Creek) | 51. Indian Bar (Snake River)  |
| 12. Surveyors Creek  |   | 35. Methow River   | 52. Clarkston (Snake River)<br>Snake River  |
| 13. Elizabeth<br>Gold Hill<br>Ogren (Summit area)<br>Gold Links (Morse Creek)<br>Silver Creek  |   | 36. Ballard (Salmon River)   |   |
| 14. Cle Elum River<br>Baker Creek<br>Naneum Creek<br>Boulder Creek<br>Bear Cat   |   | 37. Meadows (Salmon River)   |   |
|  |   | 38. Similkameen River  |   |
|  |   | 39. Cuba Line<br>Walker (Myers Creek)<br>Deadman Creek<br>Mary Ann Creek   |   |
|  |   | 40. Goosmus Creek  |   |
|  |   | 41. Alva Stout (Republic area)   |   |