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Trinity River "Restoration" Program Wastes Money, Degrades Environment

Channel Rehabilitation Work Falls Flat on Multiple Counts

A coalition of 21 groups and individuals led by the California Water Impact Network (C-WIN) is asking the Trinity River Restoration Program (TRRP) to put all "channel rehabilitation" projects on hold pending a thorough review.

The group noted in a letter that the projects are causing rather than mitigating environmental harm, that necessary watershed rehabilitation projects are underfunded due to the channel revamping efforts, and that a new county bridge is needed at Bucktail because of higher fishery flows that have undermined the structure.

The project's channel rehabilitation work consists of bulldozing the river's edge to create juvenile salmon habitat, an activity equivalent to a clear-cut on a Wild and Scenic River (see link to photo below).

An embargoed draft report by the TRRP's Science Advisory Board (see link below) found that the benefits of the mainstem projects to salmon are not significant, and that the program has veered significantly from the intent described in the 2000 Trinity River Record of Decision. Tens of millions of dollars have been spent on the mainstem projects with few results and multiple negative impacts, including turbidity, the spread of noxious weeds, reduction in public access, noise, truck traffic, impacts to agricultural water systems, and the filling of adult steelhead holding habitat.

"The 2000 Trinity River Record of Decision (Trinity ROD) called for a break in these projects to evaluate them before more mainstem work is done," said Tom Stokely, an analyst for C-WIN. "The Science Board's draft report clearly shows that the expected benefits of these projects have not materialized. Spending millions more public dollars on these projects cannot be justified at this time."

Zeke Grader, the executive director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, concurred with Stokely, noting that "the Trinity River Restoration Program has produced scant results for the 'boatloads' of money that have been invested."

"We've got to do better," said Grader. "That money should have been spent on reviving our fisheries through watershed and tributary restoration. That's where we'll get real results."

Steve Townzen with the Trinity River Guides Association said the projects have "decimated much of the "adult steelhead holding habitat upstream of Douglas City."

"Bucktail is one of the last good holes left in that part of the river," said Townzen. "A new Bucktail Bridge should be built before any other mainstem alterations occur. They also propose eliminating the existing

public access to the river at Bucktail, moving it downstream. The proposed Bucktail project will be a disaster for the river, the fish and the public.”

Barbara Vlamis with AquAlliance of Chico said the Science Advisory Board’s report nullifies agency attempts to justify the projects.

“The Science Board said that *“increases in juvenile rearing habitat were not statistically significant”* from channel rehabilitation projects and that the program’s *“formal scientific hypothesis testing is frequently lacking,”* observed Vlamis. “The Bureau of Reclamation is being dishonest with the public when they claim the benefits outweigh the 25 significant impacts from these projects.”

Gary Graham Hughes of the Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC) in Arcata said a full environmental review based on current conditions in the river must be conducted before the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board allows further restoration work.

“Public participation is crucial for developing real solutions, and we also need a couple of wet years to see if the existing projects will provide any benefits,” said Graham Hughes. “There is plenty of habitat restoration work to do in the watersheds and tributaries below the dam. Those tributaries will become increasingly important as salmon refugia if Trinity Lake reaches dead pool and the river dries up from continued drought.”

Bill Jennings of the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance said the projects evoke another troubling “conservation” effort – the Bay Delta Conservation Plan.

“If the Trinity River Restoration Program is any indication of how the Bay Delta Conservation Plan will use Science and Adaptive Management to ‘restore’ the Delta ecosystem, we’re in deep trouble.” Jennings said. “We can’t promote environmental destruction under the rubric of conservation. It’s dishonest, it’s catastrophic for fisheries and wildlife, and it’s an affront to the public that pays for these boondoggles.”

Other signatories to the letter are the Northcoast Environmental Center, AquAlliance, Friends of the Eel River, Trinity Lake Revitalization Alliance, Safe Alternatives for our Forest Environment, Trinity Fly Shop, Butte Environmental Council, California Environmental Water Caucus, Trinity River Outfitters, Gold Coast Guide and Shuttle Service, Trinity River Adventures, Sweet Trinity Guide Service, Steve’s Trinity River Guide Service, Tiger T’s Guide Service, Kristi Bevard, Michael Caranci and Clark Tuthill.

The coalition’s recommendations are contained in a comment letter to the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board and the Bureau of Reclamation.

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Links:

Coalition Letter: http://www.c-win.org/webfm_send/410
“**Review of the Trinity River Restoration Program’s Channel Rehabilitation Strategy**”:
<http://trinityriverguidesassociation.com/4-14-2013-wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/TRRP-Phase-1-Draft-Review-copy.pdf>
Photograph of Trinity River Channel Rehabilitation Project: http://www.c-win.org/webfm_send/417