

Smith River rec area gets improvements and money

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The watershed in the North Fork Smith River area has received grant money for restoration projects provided by federal, tribal and local contributors.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation delivered \$330,526 to Del Norte County to implement watershed infrastructure improvements for about 30 miles of streams, roads and trails in the Smith River National Recreation Area.

The recreation area is a 305,337-acre stretch of wilderness anchored by the Gasquet Ranger Station and Visitor Center.

The grant provides funding for projects and improvements developed through the Smith River National Recreation Area Restoration and Motorized Travel Management Project.

The watershed restoration will focus on 53 miles of roads and trails. It will involve decommissioning 27 miles of roads and trails to protect water quality, fish, wildlife, sensitive plants and their habitat.

The application for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant was prepared by the U.S. Forest Service in collaboration with the Smith River Collaborative - a venture of the Six Rivers National Forest, Elk Valley Rancheria, Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation, Del Norte County, Del Norte Fire Safe Council, American Forest Resource Council, and the local and regional environmental groups Klamath Forest Alliance/EPIC, Smith River Alliance, Klamath-Siskiyou Wildland Center and Friends of Del Norte.

In a Smith River Alliance press release, Del Norte County Supervisor Gerry Hemmingsen said, "This is about watershed health and maintaining access to our public land.

“Del Norte County was active in the development of this travel management project. While the stakeholder process was sometimes frustrating, it is great to see work getting underway on priority components.

“The Forest Service deserves a lot of credit for this funding - and they are also directing \$440,000 of internal funds to the project. Their leadership is very much appreciated.”

Del Norte County will provide just over \$255,000 to the project by way of other projects it had overseen.

Most of the project’s activity will occur within the North and Middle Fork drainages.