

Cedar Creek Dam Removal Opens Up Habitat for Salmon, Steelhead in Eel River Watershed

December 22, 2022



Nine miles of wild fish habitat on a South Fork Eel River tributary, blocked for more than 60 years, is now accessible once again thanks to a fish passage restoration project recently completed by California Trout, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and partners.

Cedar Creek provides a significant portion of the cold water that flows into the Eel River's South Fork in the summer. With the removal of an 8-foot-high dam on the creek, migratory Chinook salmon, coho salmon, steelhead and Pacific lamprey will have improved access to the creek during all their life stages.

In fact, on Dec. 7, CalTrout staff observed adult Chinook salmon already spawning above the former dam's location. These fish likely would not have been able to make it past the dam if it were still in place, given this fall's low water levels.

“The initiation and completion of this project is a testament to CDFW’s engineering and fisheries staff and their commitment to restoring California’s natural resources while creating long-lasting partnerships with private landowners such as the Yangshe Gomde Buddhist Retreat Center and restoration groups such as CalTrout,” said Scott Monday, Environmental Scientist with CDFW’s North Coast Watershed Improvement Center in Fortuna who has worked on the Cedar Creek dam removal project since 2017. “This dam may have very well sat in place another 60 years without this crucial collaboration and cooperation.”

The Cedar Creek dam, located approximately 700 feet upstream from the confluence of South Fork Eel River, was left over from a fish hatchery decommissioned after a major flood in 1964. The dam was serving no practical purpose and almost completely blocked fish passage on this otherwise-healthy, cold-water creek.

Before the construction crew moved in to remove the concrete dam, fish biologists spent many hours finding and moving to safety all the fish and amphibians in the section of the creek that was diverted during the demolition. Hundreds of young steelhead, a juvenile coho salmon and two adult Pacific lamprey were among the rescued fish. To see a video documenting the dam removal, go to <https://vimeo.com/777684958>.

“The project on Cedar Creek is part of CalTrout’s Reconnect Habitat initiative, with a goal of giving salmon and steelhead access to diverse habitat by removing barriers and getting obsolete dams out,” said Matt Metheny, North Coast Program Manager for California Trout. “Access to the cold-water habitat above the old Cedar Creek dam is now even more important to young steelhead and salmon as climate change warms the South Fork Eel to dangerously high summer temperatures for fish.”

The Cedar Creek fish passage restoration project aligns with Governor Newsom’s commitment to protect wildlife during the extended drought. Funding for the project came from CDFW and the state Wildlife Conservation Board. Project partners include the Yangshe Gomde Buddhist Retreat Center, McBain Associates, SHN Engineering, Hanford Applied Restoration & Conservation (Hanford ARC), and Ross Taylor and Associates.

CalTrout completed another important fish passage restoration project on the Eel River in 2018, when it reconnected Woodman Creek fish habitat to the Eel River after more than a century of blockage. The project, with funding and permitting from CDFW’s Fisheries Restoration Grant Program, opened up 14 miles of prime spawning and rearing habitat for steelhead and Chinook salmon.

“The Eel River has the potential to be one of California’s healthiest watersheds for salmon and steelhead populations to thrive,” Metheny added. “Removing the Cedar Creek dam is the latest step in the process to reconnect fish habitat and recover the Eel River to a state of wild abundance.”

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About California Trout

[California Trout](#) partners with numerous government agencies, Tribes, and conservation groups to conduct research, habitat restoration and advocacy, to restore vibrance and abundance to California’s freshwater ecosystems and to keep them that way for years to come. Founded in 1971, CalTrout has been working for more than 50 years to protect salmon and steelhead strongholds, reconnect fish habitat, integrate fish and working lands, steward source water areas, and restore estuaries.

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About the California Department of Fish and Wildlife

The mission of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife is to manage California’s diverse fish, wildlife, and plant resources, and the habitats upon which they depend, for their ecological values and for their use and enjoyment by the public.