



For Immediate Release

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Butte Creek Salmon Recovery Efforts Celebrated

20th Anniversary of Restoration Efforts that Have Led to Significant Salmon Recovery

DURHAM - Partners from state and federal agencies, conservation organizations, water districts, and farmers today commemorated the 20th anniversary of restoration efforts on Butte Creek that have led to a significant recovery of spring-run Chinook salmon. Butte Creek is one of only four Sacramento River tributaries with remaining populations of spring-run Chinook salmon, and resource agencies and environmental groups value Butte Creek as the keystone project in preserving the spring-run.

The Butte Creek Fish Passage Improvement projects are located along 90 miles of the middle reach of Butte Creek, comprising one of the nation's most significant fisheries restoration efforts. In addition to restoring the creek for the benefit of spring-run salmon, these projects also effectively divert water for the benefit of farms, birds and other species along the Pacific Flyway.

When the project began during the drought of the late 1980s, spring-run salmon had dwindled in some years to less than 100 returning adults. Today, as a result of the Butte Creek Fish Passage Improvement projects, in tandem with a valuable food supply and safe rearing habitat in the Sutter Bypass wetlands, more than 10,000 spring-run salmon return on average to Butte Creek.

“When I was here twenty years ago, there was spirit of hope for California to find a better balance between agriculture, recreation and the environment,” said Bruce Babbitt, Former US Secretary of the Interior. “And today, we celebrate that hope being reality on Butte Creek. Butte Creek is a wonderful example of how innovation and partnerships can lead to real improvements for fish, and there are many lessons we can take from Butte Creek as we address other water challenges in California.”

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Secretary Babbitt was Secretary of Interior nearly 20 years ago when he visited Butte Creek with a sledgehammer to tear down McPherrin dam, which is downstream of where the event was held.

“The Butte Creek effort is a leading example of how regional leaders are working to re-establish the natural connection between water and the landscape, providing functional and targeted flows that are directly tailored to benefit salmon and other species,” said Ted Trimble, General Manager, Western Canal Water District. “And the results of these efforts are real, they are making a difference.”

There are many reasons for this success including water management in the upper reach of Butte Creek that provides well-timed functional flows for spawning and holding habitat; the Butte Creek fish passage improvement projects along the middle reach of the creek, including the Gorrill Ranch diversion and the Western Canal Gary Brown siphon; and fish food production and safe rearing habitat for juvenile fish in the lower reach of the creek flowing through the wetlands created by the Sutter Bypass.

“The Butte Creek restoration projects happened because of the cooperation between the different communities involved. We are pleased to see these partnerships continue to bring new, innovative projects to the Sacramento Valley to benefit salmon and other species,” said Jeff Kightlinger, General Manager, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. MWD has invested in numerous salmon projects in Northern California, including providing funding that helped with the Western Canal siphon.

Unprecedented partnerships between agricultural, urban, and environmental communities developed during this project were essential to its success. Key stakeholders included local water suppliers and farmers, California Urban Water Agencies, U.S. Department of Interior, and California Department of Fish and Game.

Other speakers included Correen Nichols-Davis, Principal, Gorrill Ranch; Tim Quinn, Executive Director, Association of California Water Agencies; Tracy McReynolds, Senior Environmental Scientist (Specialist), California Department of Fish and Wildlife; Olen Zirkle, Ducks Unlimited, Manager Conservation Programs, retired; and Lance Tennis, Director, Western Canal Water District & Rice Farmer.

For additional information see attached infographic and for additional interviews, please contact Jennifer Wonnacott at (916) 996-3672.

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