

Paige Boulder Watershed Restoration Project

Whiskeytown National Recreation Area

Background

Whiskeytown National Recreation Area was established in 1965 as a parcel of land surrounding the newly constructed Whiskeytown Lake with a size of approximately 6,000 acres. The boundary was increased to over 42,000 acres in 1972. Between 1962 and 1972 timber extraction in the surrounding area greatly increased with the anticipation of the new boundary. Timber harvest left approximately 67 miles of poorly constructed timber haul roads, skid trails, landings and other features in the Paige Boulder watersheds. These relic features are subsequently eroding and discharging sediments to lower Clear Creek, the section of Clear Creek below Whiskeytown Dam.

Prior to dam construction Clear Creek provided up to ten percent of all anadromous salmonid fish found in the Sacramento River watershed. These fish include fall-run Chinook salmon, spring-run Chinook salmon, late fall-run Chinook salmon, and Central Valley steelhead trout. Construction of Saeltzer Dam in 1903, approximately 8 miles downstream of the current Whiskeytown NRA boundary, created an effective fish barrier that diminished the once large populations of salmonids to below ten percent of the original populations. This analysis also determined that with proper watershed management and stream restoration, lower Clear Creek could provide up to six percent of the total Sacramento River salmonid population if Saeltzer Dam was removed. In 1996, a cooperative effort to restore lower Clear Creek fisheries was undertaken by the Lower Clear Creek Restoration Team (LCCRT) composed of USFWS, BOR, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), NPS, and multiple state, county, and private organizations. To date, over thirty-five million dollars for channel restoration, spawning gravel augmentation, land acquisition, and dam removal has been spent restoring the channel in lower Clear Creek. In July 2000, Saeltzer Dam was removed as part of Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt's dam removal projects, allowing Chinook salmon and steelhead to travel upstream as far as Whiskeytown Dam. In the same year, lower Clear Creek was federally designated as Critical Habitat for steelhead trout and spring-run Chinook salmon, and currently both species are federally listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

In 1997, a debris torrent started from a failed logging road in the upper elevations of Paige-Boulder watershed. The debris torrent destroyed two bridges and flooded a building at the Whiskeytown Environmental School and deposited an estimated 195,000 cubic yards of sediment into Paige Boulder and lower Clear Creek. Fortunately, this debris torrent occurred before any restoration efforts had occurred. Today, if the same event occurred, \$35 million in restoration efforts in lower Clear Creek would be buried. In 2012 Pacific Watershed Associates completed a watershed inventory which identified 2 areas where future debris torrents could occur. Additionally, with watershed restoration, over 11,000 cubic yards of sediment will be saved from depositing in lower Clear Creek every ten years.

Two alternatives for restoration for Paige Boulder watershed are proposed including a no action alternative which would not conduct restoration activities and a second alternative which would remove relict logging features from the landscape within the extremely erosive Shasta Bally batholith.