

Mr. Randall Hauser
Shasta Resources Council
3179 Bechelli Lane, Suite 100
Redding, California 96002

April 4, 2006

Dear Randy:

You asked if I might make some comments about the fishery situation in Salt Creek. Shasta Trinity Fly Fishers began its conservation program on the creek this last year, so this winter season is really our only direct experience thus far. But we have certainly learned a lot about the creek. I personally have been acquainted with the creek for several years.

Our initial focus has been on gaining familiarity with the creek, making fish counts, and trying to determine where our group might make meaningful future contributions to the creek's fisheries.

The creek has a robust, healthy run of Rainbow Trout, and a smaller run of Late-Fall run Chinook salmon. It's very difficult to estimate the total annual numbers of these fish that spawn in the creek. Personally I would estimate well over 1000 Rainbows and less than 150 Chinooks per year. Late-Fall run Chinooks are currently considered a "Species of Concern" under the Endangered Species Act. Both Middle and Salt Creeks are known as spawning grounds for particularly large Rainbows. The Sacramento River above the ACID dam is well-recognized by sportsmen for having large trout, so these "resident Rainbows" are probably the ones using Middle and Salt Creeks for spawning grounds.

Rainbow trout and Steelhead are the same species. There is some question as to whether the larger fish running up Salt Creek are Rainbows or Steelhead. This year our club took some scale samples from fish netted at the Highway 299 culvert (with DFG permission, of course), but these samples have yet to be analyzed. Probabilities are that the fish are "resident Rainbows", but this remains to be seen. Steelhead, of course, are considered a "Threatened Species" under the Endangered Species Act.

The great fisheries benefit of all these seasonal streams, like Salt Creek, is that they are self-sustaining. Mother Nature sees to it that they consistently produce runs of fish year after year. No (expensive to taxpayers) human intervention is required, as on a Clear Creek or Battle Creek. The seasonal creeks don't produce the numbers that the bigger creeks do, but they contribute their numbers reliably. Since Salt and Middle Creeks are the last viable spawning grounds for anadromous fish below Keswick Dam on the Sacramento River, I believe we should value these creeks even more. Who knows, they may become "refugia" for the fish in the event of some cataclysmic event like the Cantara Loop metam sodium spill a few years back.

The biggest fisheries "fix" required is on the culvert under Highway 299. It is a definite impediment for fish, especially salmon, which are trying to get upstream to spawn. By concentrating fish below the culvert, it exposes them to poachers and human harassment.

STFF and Redding Rotary are working with DFG to get the culvert made more “fish friendly”, and we are hopeful DFG will make the fix this summer. The project is currently in the approval process within DFG.

Perhaps the next biggest “fix” for Salt Creek would be the introduction of spawning gravel. On a recent hike, with DFG Fisheries Biologist Steve Baumgartner, down the Tilton Mine Road to Highway 299 stretch of the creek, it was noted that there was a shortage of good spawning gravel. This is a project that STFF could work on with residents of the watershed. I have been very impressed with the cooperative spirit of local landowners and their willingness to allow access through their private property to introduce spawning gravels.

A huge potential threat to the creek comes from decomposed granite sedimentation. Several years back, Middle Creek was severely damaged by development-caused introduction of decomposed granite into the creek. Salt Creek is also in the same westside decomposed granite “zone”, and, in fact, a lot of DG was deposited in the creek naturally by washouts from the heavy rains of late December 2005 and early January 2006. As you know, the DG basically clogs up the interstices in the spawning gravel where the eggs have been deposited and essentially chokes the developing eggs by closing off the water flow around them. It would be catastrophe if a creek as beautiful as Salt Creek were damaged by human development as Middle Creek was.

I must also stress the economic value of these fisheries to the area. The Sacramento River in the Redding area has become a world-renowned destination for fly fishers, one of the top Rainbow trout fisheries in the country. You can easily see this by noting the number of drift boats floating through downtown Redding. Most of these are guided trips, many by of them by guides from The Fly Shop, one of the country’s leading fly fishing businesses. Most of the customers are out-of-towners; the money they spend for guide fees, meals, lodging, etc. contributes to our local economy. Their fishing experiences further add to our reputation as a tourist destination. As I mentioned before, the stretch of the river above the ACID dam is becoming well known for its large trout, many of which were born in Salt Creek.

STFF takes no position on the proposed land swap of Area 51 by the BLM. We definitely DO want to insist that the fisheries are protected, especially since Area 51 contains most of the headwaters of Salt Creek. The entire creek is, in my opinion, the most beautiful urban stream in the Redding area. More and more people are finding out about Salt Creek and visiting it; this is inevitable. This can be very dangerous for the fisheries unless we do as much as we can to educate people and prevent human impact.

Sincerely,

Richard Baumann
Shasta Trinity Fly Fishers – Salt Creek Conservation Team Leader