

Battle Creek Salmon and Steelhead Restoration Project

In 1999, the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) negotiated an agreement with the National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Reclamation and Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) to remove five dams on Battle Creek in Shasta and Tehama counties. These five dams are part of a hydropower project operated by PG&E, and through open dialogue during negotiations all parties realized the benefits this action would provide to native salmon and steelhead populations in this waterway.

The underlying volcanic geology of Battle Creek produces very high perennial flows of cold, clean water, which is critical to the vitality of native fish species. The restoration project will reestablish access to 42 miles of premier spawning and rearing habitat for spring- and fall-run Chinook salmon and steelhead, which are listed as threatened or endangered species, and consider the Sacramento River home. These species are spawned in these waters, migrate to the ocean, and later return to spawn their next generations. This is undoubtedly the foremost restoration opportunity in the Sacramento River system, and it will be funded through a combination of non-tax payer funds provided from the Central Valley Project Improvement Act, Proposition 50, Iron Mountain Mine trust funds, Caltrans mitigation and water contractor mitigation funding.

State and federal fish and wildlife agencies believe this project will significantly improve and expand natural production of spring-run Chinook salmon and steelhead. The project also is supported by the Battle Creek Watershed Conservancy and numerous conservation and fishing organizations. Favorable editorials have been published over the years in north-state newspapers.

There are very few opponents to this project. Initially, Friends of the River protested that the project should remove even more hydropower facilities, including dams. They have since concurred the terms of this agreement are substantial, and its opposition has completely dissipated. One local landowner alleged various procedural flaws in the settlement process. However a court ruling favored the settlement procedures.

DFG fishery biologists continually work to provide healthy, unobstructed habitat and waterways for fish species, and this project is no exception. It is divided into three phases all of which include an expected ten-fold increase in stream flow. In Phase 1A, Wildcat Dam and associated structures have been removed, and construction of state-of-the-art fish ladders and screens at Eagle Canyon and North Fork Battle Creek Feeder Diversion dams is in progress. Phase 1B will start in late 2010, and involve connecting the outflow of Inskip Powerhouse directly to the Coleman Canal, thus avoiding greatly fluctuating water flow, and mixing of water from the north and south fork of Battle Creek. Phase 2 will include removal of Coleman Diversion and South Dams, and the construction of new screens and ladders at Inskip Diversion Dam beginning in 2011.