

Study -- fish unharmed at Battle Creek

Damon Arthur, Redding Record Searchlight, 12-24-11

Poorly designed roads are leaching sediment into Battle Creek and its tributaries while the federal government is spending millions of dollars to restore the stream as a salmon fishery, according to a recent study on the area.

But the study, authored by several state and federal agencies, says there is not enough sediment washing into the creek to hurt fish.

The study refutes claims by Battle Creek Alliance officials who complained that clear-cut logging in the Battle Creek watershed was responsible for silting up the stream and harming fish.

"The basic assumption that clear cutting is causing turbidity has been refuted in this report," said Mark Pawlicki, a spokesman for Sierra Pacific Industries of Anderson.

The report was prepared after Marily Woodhouse and others from the Battle Creek Alliance took water samples from Battle Creek and its tributaries they said showed that SPI's clear cutting of forest in the area contributed to silting in the streams.

"These concerns have garnered statewide attention with the recent publishing of several stories in the Sacramento Bee detailing the potential for clear cutting-related impacts to the success of the restoration in Battle Creek," the report says.

But the report, prepared and written by officials with several state agencies, found little soil was being washed into the creeks from clear cuts. However the report said some dirt roads and culverts in the area leached "a generally low or unobservable level" of sediment into the creeks.

"The highest magnitudes of sediment delivery from roads were associated with poor BMP (best management practices) implementation (e.g. poor road drainage) and/or poor location (e.g., road segments within 30-50 feet of a watercourse)," the report says.

"Poor BMP implementation was commonly associated with county-managed roads or SPI-managed roads with public access," the report says.

However, Marily Woodhouse, a spokeswoman for the Battle Creek Alliance, said those who worked on the report tested the water for only five days in September, the driest month of the year. They should have conducted water testing for at least a year, she said.

She also said the report takes into account only individual clear cuts, rather than the cumulative impacts of all the clear cutting that SPI does in the watershed.

Woodhouse said she also wanted an independent study, rather than one prepared and written by the same state officials who do the timber harvest plans on the clear cuts.

Mary Marshall, who is overseeing the Battle Creek fishery restoration for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, said their environmental reports done on the streams in the watershed about 10 years ago did not find problems with turbidity in the water.

Silting and sedimentation in the stream has not harmed fish living in the streams, she said.

Just the opposite has happened since 2010, she said.

Since work began on removing dams and adding fish ladders in Battle Creek, there have been new salmon spawning areas found in Battle Creek downstream from the logging areas, Marshall said.

The bureau has plans to remove five hydroelectric dams on Battle Creek and build fish ladders around three others, Marshall said. All of the dams belong to Pacific Gas & Electric Co. The first dam was removed last year, Marshall said.

The bureau has estimated it will spend \$128 million to bring salmon and steelhead back to the Battle Creek watershed.

When SPI clear cuts an area, a 150-foot buffer is left between the logged area and streams with fish, said Cajun James, SPI's research and monitoring manager. The soil is ripped, similar to plowing, which allows rainwater to flow into the soil, rather than causing rainwater erosion into nearby creeks, she said.

Loggers also leave forest slash on the ground to help collect rain and keep it from eroding the soil into nearby streams, she said.

Shasta County Public Works Director Pat Minturn said his department will have to further study the roads in the area to find out where roads, culverts and ditches may need to be modified to redirect runoff away from streams.

"The task force noted relatively long stretches of roads draining into watercourses on county-managed roads and SPI-managed roads that were accessible to the public," the report says.

The report recommends relocating or abandoning roads near streams.

Minturn estimated the county would spend about \$20,000 a year over the next few years completing work on modifying roads in the area.