

Dam Removal Updates

Clear Creek dam to come tumbling down

Northern California's Clear Creek appears one step closer to some fishery restoration thanks to a recent agreement between the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and a local water company that could lead to the removal of the 93-year-old McCormick-Saeltzer Dam.

The 15-foot-high dam was highlighted in F.O.R.'s recent "Rivers Reborn" report as a structure that could be removed in order to open up 15 miles of spawning habitat for endangered steelhead and salmon.

Clear Creek is a tributary to the Sacramento River. The bureau says its "agreement in principle" with the Townsend Flat Water Ditch Company could lead to spawning runs of up to 2,000 steelhead and 2,000 salmon in the creek.

Before the dam comes down, the parties must complete the necessary environmental documents, as well as finding funding for dam removal and identifying appropriate mitigation measures.

Bay Area dams could be removed, too

Also moving a big step forward in the dam removal effort are a pair of dams on Alameda Creek in the highly urbanized Bay Area. In March, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission announced that it too wanted to help restore steelhead and salmon spawning habitat, perhaps by even removing the East Bay's Sunol and Niles dams.

Both dams were listed in the "Rivers Reborn" report as great opportunities for fishery restoration within an urban area. The 6-foot-high Niles Dam is more than 100 years old, and 12-foot-high Sunol Dam isn't much newer. Both were built for flood control and water supplies, but neither is considered essential today.

The San Francisco PUC says it's willing to either remove or modify the two dams. However, there are still some obstacles to fishery restoration, including several other barriers on the creek, plus the usual funding needs and mitigation requirements.

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