

Home » News

## \$2 million project proposed to restore Yuba River floodplain

Story

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Posted: Sunday, September 11, 2016 12:11 am

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The lower Yuba River restoration project, if completed, would be the "Disneyland of habitats."

That's according to Chris Hammersmark, co-owner and director of cbec eco engineering – the main project manager. He presented details about a proposed habitat improvement project Thursday.

The Hallwood Project is a 170-acre floodplain habitat restoration along the Yuba River downstream of the Daguerre Point Dam, off Highway 20 and Hallwood Boulevard.

Its purpose, as presented on a PowerPoint slide, would be to "focus on enhancing productive juvenile salmonid rearing habitat to increase natural production of fall and spring run chinook salmon and central valley steelhead in the lower Yuba River."

Essentially, as outlined by Joe Merz, vice president of Cramer Fish Sciences, the habitat program is aimed at one specific life cycle of two threatened salmonid species – providing the depth, velocity, food (Hammersmark said a "smorgasboard" of bugs), water and cover from predators needed to help baby salmon grow to be able to make it out to the ocean. Currently, he said, the channel areas are inundated, too deep and provide habitat for exotic predator species (sunfish, which include blue gill, and large and smallmouth bass) that prey on the young salmon.

"I'm pretty gosh-darn excited. It's a large project on the river that has great potential," Merz said. "(It could) do some positive things for these fish and incorporate some positive for the community."

A team of eco engineers looked at past flood and ecological flows and site topography and used hydraulic modeling to determine "how it functions now and how it would function if we change it," Hammersmark said.

To improve the connectivity of off-channel areas, the middle training wall (an 80- to 100-foot island in the middle of the floodplain) would be removed, lowering and spreading the water level. Engineers would need to fill in areas with deeper pools.

That would help foster the growth of riparian plants and trees and provide ideal conditions for juvenile salmon. Hammersmark also spoke of a dual benefit: reducing flood risk. "Preliminary analyses indicate the full project and removal of the middle training wall could lower water surface elevation by up to two feet," he said Friday.

Additionally, Hammersmark said, the removal of the gravel in the center wall would be sold to offset the costs and could generate \$2 million of revenue for the Yuba County general fund.

The estimated \$2 million cost of the project is being funded by Anadromous Fish Restoration Program through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. But Hammersmark said the project could cost more depending on planning, design and construction, but would be taken care of through additional grants.

Residents at the meeting were mostly supportive, though a few people asked why more wasn't being done to address flood protection during construction.

Hammersmark and Beth Campbell, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist, said the funding was provided in order to create and enhance habitat for young salmon; while solving a small part of the floodplain issue is an added bonus, it's not the purpose of the project.

Hammersmark said they have received support from the landowners — Teichert Material and Western Aggregates — and are on track to start construction in April 2017. But, he added, if permitting takes longer than expected, breaking ground could be pushed back to 2018.

He, Campbell and Merz, who also is vice president of the South Yuba River Citizens League, are partners on the project and presented why it's needed and what it would look like. The project team consists of cbec, USFWS, Cramer Fish Sciences and South Yuba River Citizens League.

Merz said so far, successful and similar habitats have been created in Merced, Trinity and Stanislaus counties and currently on the American River.