A Sampler of Bad News Barriers

by Sandy Guldman
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During July 2005 Ross Taylor, an expert on barriers to fish passage, and his field assistant Anabel Knoche visited almost 50 bridges, culverts, weirs, and dams in tributaries to Corte Madera Creek. Their goal was to identify which of these structures, upstream of the Army Corps of Engineers' concrete channel, are barriers to movement of steelhead and other salmonids. At over 25 sites, they took measurements, calculated how deep the water would be at different flows and how fast the current would be, and how high the drops were over dams. His analysis considered not only the spawning adults that swim upstream in the winter, but young fish that move up and down the streams when water levels are low as they search for the deep, cool pools they need to survive the summer. Surprisingly, juvenile steelhead also make upstream migrations during winter storms to seek protection from storm flows and perhaps to feed on eggs deposited by the spawning adults. The amount of habitat available upstream of the culvert, weir, or dam was considered when prioritizing sites for improvements.

Taking all that into account, Ross then ranked the barriers in the order they should be treated. Here are pictures of the four highest priority barriers in the preliminary ranking; the rankings may change as we review the report, but these four will be high on the list in any case.

If you would like an electronic copy of the report, contact us at info@friendsofcortemaderacreek.or g. Please join us in the San Anselmo Town Council Chambers on Wednesday, February 8, 2006 at 7:00 pm, when Ross Taylor will give a presentation about his findings.

We know that the concrete channel in Kentfield and Ross and the wooden fish ladder at its upstream end are the most serious barriers in the watershed. In a separate study, Ross Taylor is working with a team of engineers, Michael Love and Associates and Stetson Engineers Inc., to design improvements to both the resting pools in the flood control channel and the fish ladder. They are also working on some alternative fishways to replace the barriers at Saunders Avenue and Pastori Avenue. We'll have an update on these projects in the next issue of Creek Chronicles.

Preliminary Priority 1: Fish ladder with a long, narrow chute downstream, on San Anselmo Creek at Saunders Avenue (San Anselmo), Ross Taylor and Associates ©2003

Preliminary Priority 2: Fish ladder on San Anselmo Creek at Pastori Avenue (Fairfax), Ross Taylor and Associates ©2003

Preliminary Priority 3: San Anselmo Creek at the outlet of the Center Boulevard/Lansdale Station culvert (San Anselmo), photographed by Ross Taylor, Ross Taylor and Associates ©2005

Preliminary Priority 4: Sleepy Hollow Creek at outlet of Taylor Street culvert (San Anselmo), photographed by Anabel Knoche, Ross Taylor and Associates ©2005

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