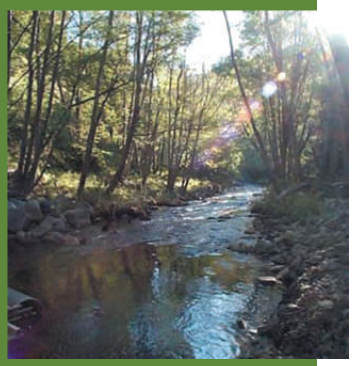
Restoring the Carmel River



An Extraordinary Opportunity

The Carmel River represents one of the best opportunities for river restoration on California's Central Coast. Flowing through the Ventana Wilderness and the Los Padres National Forest, the Carmel River provides essential habitat for important species, including steelhead trout and California red-legged frogs.

Since 1921, however, the Carmel River and its wildlife resources have been impacted by San Clemente Dam. As a result, the Carmel River suffers accelerated erosion, the once vibrant steelhead run has dramatically decreased, and lives and property below the dam are threatened with potential collapse of the dam -- which has been deemed unsafe by the State of California.

Today, there is an extraordinary opportunity to remove the antiquated dam and implement a watershed restoration process that will bring the Carmel River back to life. This project, referred to as the Carmel River Reroute and Dam Removal Project is a unique example of public and private interests working together to realize benefits far beyond what either could achieve working alone.

Benefits of Dam Removal

• Permanently remove the public safety risk posed by San Clemente Dam, which now threatens 1500 homes and other buildings.

• Aid in the recovery of South-Central California coast steelhead trout, a threatened species, by providing unimpaired access to over 25 miles of spawning and rearing habitat.

• Expand public recreation by preserving over 900 acres of coastal watershed lands, resulting in over 5400 acres of contiguous park land.

• Restore the natural sediment regime, reducing channel incision and improving habitat for steelhead trout.

• Reduce beach erosion that now contributes to destabilization of homes, roads and infrastructure.

• Re-establish a healthy connection between the lower Carmel River and the watershed above San Clemente Dam.

• Improve habitat for threatened California red-legged frogs.

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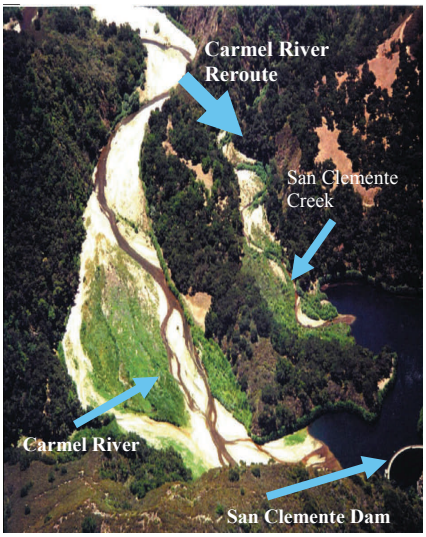
The Carmel River Reroute and Dam Removal Project

Eliminates the Public Safety Risk



San Clemente Dam poses a significant threat to lives and property in the lower Carmel River. In the late 1990s, the State determined that the dam had the potential to fail during a significant earthquake or flood event. Sediment has been building up behind the structure for the past 85 years and now, if the San Clemente Dam were to fail, 2.5 million cubic yards of sediment and over 40 million gallons of water could flow downstream, potentially causing harm to residents and property.

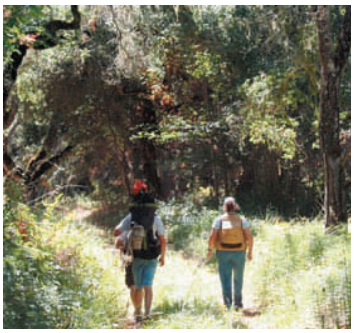
The Reroute and Removal project can solve this problem by permanently rerouting the Carmel River around the large mass of accumulated sediment, and into the San Clemente Creek. Once the river is rerouted, the reservoir will be drained, the sediment stabilized in place, and the dam safely removed. This unique project design will create an unobstructed flow of the Carmel River while

Contributes to the Recovery of Steelhead

San Clemente Dam is also a significant barrier to threatened steelhead trout. While this river once boasted an estimated steelhead run of 10,000 to 20,000 fish, now, less than 700 fish return to the Carmel River each year. Though a small population, NMFS has determined the Carmel River steelhead run is critical to the recovery of the steelhead on the Central Coast. By removing the dam, steelhead will have unimpaired access to over 25 miles of natural spawning and rearing habitat.

Re-establishes Sediment Transport

The San Clemente Dam has captured and blocked sediment from moving downstream since 1921, resulting in downstream channel incision and bank collapse. Lack of sediment has also contributed to accelerated erosion of the beach and lagoon at the mouth of the river. Removal of San Clemente Dam will re-establish a natural sediment regime on the Carmel River reducing erosion, replenishing the beach, and improving the lower river habitat.



Expands Recreational Opportunities

As part of the Reroute and Removal project, CAW will transfer approximately 928 acres of watershed property to a public entity or non-profit organization, resulting in over 5400 acres of contiguous conservation land.

A Public-Private Collaboration

The Reroute and Removal project presents a unique opportunity for public and private interests to work together to realize benefits far beyond what either could achieve working alone.

The project is a cooperative effort:

- The Conservancy and CAW will manage project planning and design
- The Conservancy, with the assistance of NMFS, will coordinate project permitting
- CAW will manage the project construction.
- CAW will donate the property to a public entity after the project is complete.

The total project cost is currently estimated at $83 million. CAW will pay the estimated cost of buttressing the dam, or approximately $49 million. The Conservancy, with assistance from NMFS, will secure the additional $34 million from state, federal, and private foundation sources.

For More information

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http://scc.ca.gov/2010/01/07/san-clemente-dam-removal-project/