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Carmel River Steelhead Association

Advocating for Steelhead Since 1974

Fish Tales
Monthly Newsletter



January 2021

Mark Your Calendar!

CRSA's Annual Member's Meeting will be held via ZOOM on **Thursday, January 21st!**

Zoom Meeting Info Below:

Link: <https://zoom.us/j/4183062889>

Meeting ID: 418 306 2889

*If you cannot join via ZOOM, then you can call 1(669)-900-9128, and use code:
4183062889#*

2021 Slate:

Officers

President: Steve Park

VicePresident: Frank Emerson

Treasurer: Brian LeNeve

Secretary: James C. Jeffery III

Conservation Chair: Brian LeNeve

Board of Directors

Robert Stoddard, Tom Pelikan, Hallie Heath, Luke Coletti, Erik Scarr, Jaime Eltit, Miranda A. Taylor

**If you are unable to join the meeting, please email an officer with your proxy vote for the 2021 Slate of Officers. Emails can be found at the end of this newsletter.*

CRSA Membership

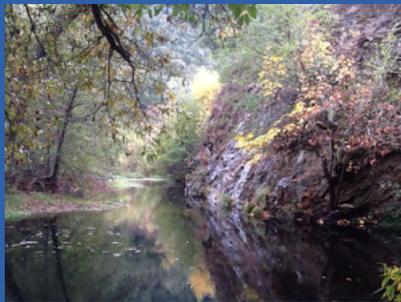
HAPPY NEW YEAR FISH FRIENDS!

**Members, please click the blue button above to
*PAY YOUR 2021 Membership Dues!***

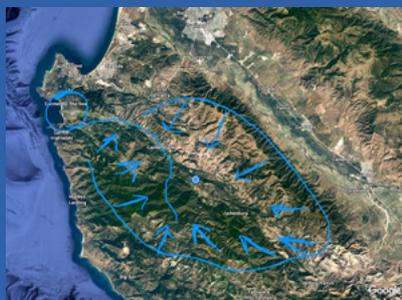
PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Written By Steve Park

John Steinbeck referred to the Carmel River as “a pretty little river”. However, I suppose it did not strike him as much of a river in comparison to mighty rivers or never ending, long rivers or even rivers that rush out of towering mountain ranges. But he did refer to it as a river. I’ve heard people from the mid west refer to it as a creek.



What it truly is, is a coastal mountain river, flowing to the ocean from a perfectly formed three sided bowl off mountains.



It is a cousin to many similar rivers. Many of those rivers are already lost or they are degraded to a point where it won't be long before they, too, will be lost.

This then, is the Carmel River, trying not to be lost.

Those who disregard the need to protect and save rivers like the Carmel River more than likely look at them as nothing more than a water source. That's what the thinking was as rivers were lost in areas where population boomed and sucked them out of their existence.

I am reminded in my travels in and out of the Carmel Valley (the Carmel River Valley) that a river is still carving through it. One recognizes the long runs of cotton wood trees that mark the signature look of a river flowing through a landscape. The creeks that flow into the river mark themselves by creating canyons that reach up toward their headwaters in the flanking watersheds. The mountain ranges loom high above these canyons reaching elevations of three to five thousand feet. Winter storms often leave snow scapes which can be seen all the way from the river's estuary.



And if all of that isn't enough to paint a perfect picture of a thriving, classic coastal river then just add water and witness a sea run trout, we know as steelhead, who will thrive in this river if given the chance.

Human kind cannot allow just another pretty little river to be eliminated. The river has rights and those rights must be advanced. The river supports a fish population which also has rights. **It is up to us to keep up the fight for those rights, to inform the public about the importance of the Carmel River in the bigger picture, and teach about the importance of maintaining fish populations to complete the picture of a healthy, robust coastal river.**

Let it flow.



CONSERVATION REPORT

Written By Brian LeNeve

Back To Fish

In the last few articles, I have talked about water and fundraising and while both are directly related to survival of fish in this day and age, I would like to get everyone “caught up” on what is going on with our fish. So, in no particular order, the following is an update.

Cachagua Creek

I mentioned some time ago that Cachagua Creek went dry this year. Cachagua Creek is a term most people use for the whole sub-watershed starting just below Prince’s Camp and ending in the Los Padres National Forest, but in reality, it is made up of several streams. Cahoon and Anastasia Creeks come together to form Finch Creek with Anastasia the significant creek (Anastasia Creek starts near the White Oaks Campground on the way up to Chews Ridge). Finch and James Creek come together to form Cachagua Creek and Cachagua empties into the Carmel River below Los Padres Dam. So, when I say Cachagua went dry, I mean Cachagua, James, Finch, and Anastasia all went dry. There may have been some small pockets of water in Finch Creek on the property just above Hastings Natural History Preserve but someone would have had to walk the 2 miles to find out and considering how early in the season Finch went dry that stretch of creek is not verified. **This is the worst I have seen the whole Cachagua system as far as drying** and except for the 11,929 Cachagua fish CRSA released and the 4,315 Cachagua fish the Monterey Peninsula Water Management District (MPWMD) released into the Carmel River below Los Padres Dam, the genetic diversity of Cachagua could have been lost. There are still adult Cachagua Creek fish at sea that will come back if the river runs this year, but it is hard to recover a species when

every fish over-summering in a creek dies. This does however show the absolute necessity of continuing to rescue stranded fish in the Cachagua system.

Sleepy Hollow Steelhead Rearing Facility

After spending \$68,524.00 for design and permitting of the Sleepy Hollow ford removal and new bridge, \$1,400,000.00 for its construction, \$448,296.00 for design and permitting of the new water intake for the steelhead rearing facility, and \$1,800,000.00 for construction of the new water intake (for a total of \$3,716,820.00), MPWMD rescued and stocked into the facility 5,119 young steelhead. Below is a section from the MPWMD December 14, 2020 fisheries report:

***SLEEPY HOLLOW STEELHEAD REARING FACILITY:** Due to the high risk of a mudslide or debris flow into the river or across the access road at the Facility as a result of this summer's wildfire, District fisheries staff, in consultation with NMFS and CDFW staff, decided the safe and prudent course of action was to release all the fish held at the Facility slightly earlier than usual. Typically, we wait until the river has reconnected to the lagoon or ocean and let the benthic invertebrates get reestablished before the fish are returned to the river, but all agreed to be on the safe side this year.*

Between November 3 – 13, 2020 all Sleepy Hollow fish were captured, PIT tagged, weighed and measured, then released back into the Carmel River. Smaller/young-of-the-year (YOY) fish were released between the Sleepy Hollow area and Robinson Canyon while larger/older fish were released further downstream.

The preliminary end of the season numbers were as follows: Of the 5,119 fish stocked in the rearing channel, there were 1,716 known mortalities (mostly bacterial disease brought on by the warm river water) and 434 unaccounted for mortalities (likely predation). We released 2,969 fish, including 593 older/larger fish and 2,376 YOY. The overall survival for the season was 58.0% (the long-term facility survival rate (1996-2016) is 43%.

Now, I may upset some people and/or get myself in trouble, so for the record, the following five paragraphs are my comments and not necessarily the opinion of CRSA.

I cannot say how disappointed and distressed I am about the early release of fish and apparent failure of the Sleepy Hollow Steelhead Rearing Facility once again. After spending \$3,716,820.00 in funds designated to benefit steelhead on two projects that were designed to prevent this from happening, it did happen again and it appears those funds should have been used on other projects.

I will admit the Carmel Fire was an unprecedented event. CRSA was not included in the discussion on the early release so, I do not know all of the particulars, but it seems to me the new bridge would have provided access and the partial recirculating system which we were promised would be a part of the project should have kept the fish alive for a month or more.

CRSA did give its approval of both projects, but we would have preferred scrapping the old artificial rearing channel and installing modern circular tanks with a total recirculating system. While we made our feelings known to all, our recommendations were not followed.

With the river not running yet and the forecast out to Jan 22 predicting less than 0.25 inches of rain, the Sleepy Hollow fish were released into a partially-watered river for at least two months. Releasing the fish into a river that already has fish in it makes the CDFW objection to a rescue permit for CRSA based on the possibility of over populating a river a moot point.

I am likewise distressed about the number of mortalities again this year. I thought the \$3,716,820.00 spent the last several years was to help with mortalities yet with just over 5,000 fish stocked the mortalities are once again unacceptable (42%). The rearing facility was originally built to rear 64,000 fish but whenever large numbers of fish were reared there was high mortality. The new estimate of fish to be reared now is around 40,000 and while just over 12% of the fish were stocked there were still 42% mortalities. Once again it appears the money for the upgrade did not do what was promised.

I do want to make one thing very clear. I am not criticizing the fisheries staff at MPWMD. I know these people and have worked with them and believe they care as much about the fish as most of us.

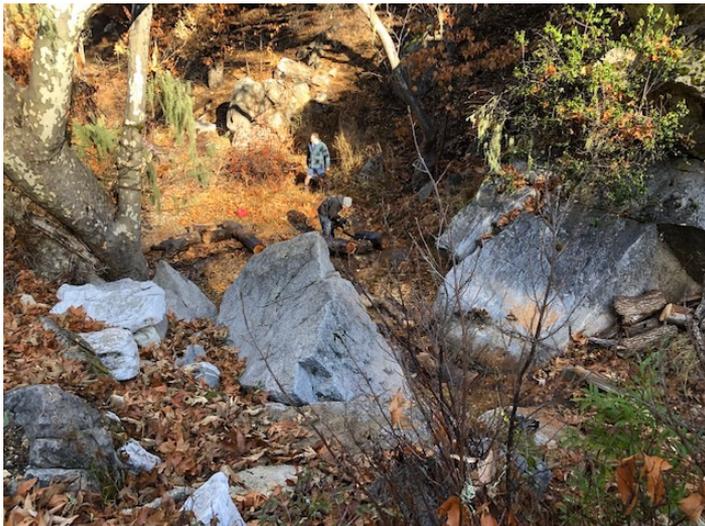
CRSA Ongoing Work

The board of CRSA is not just waiting for next season, we are actively working on many fronts. We have removed a limb and debris jam on lower Cachagua Creek to improve fish passage and removed three logs blocking the hydrology of the “turtle pond” so it once again can be the deepest pool in Cachagua Creek. We are working with the **Carmel River Task Force** to see if we can develop winter water storage to reduce summer river pumping. We are working on a way by either PIT tags or DNA sampling to determine that fish rescues work and if Cachagua Creek fish are genetic to Cachagua Creek. I have had discussions with one member about purchasing water rights from southern San Joaquin Valley farmers to bring to the peninsula.

Most of these projects are long-term projects but will only happen if they are

talked about and are actually started. Any member who has an idea on how we can improve habitat or steelhead numbers do not be reluctant to contact us. Some real good projects have come from what once seemed as a farfetched idea.

Volunteer Turtle Pond Clean Up on Cachagua Creek Jan 2021



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[CRSA Membership](#)

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