



Winter Edition

REFLECTIONS

Upon a Delicate Treasure!

January 2005

Providing Stewardship for Kings River Lands

Gravel Mine

By Kent Kinney

Gravel Mining Along The Kings River—Is the Benefit Worth the Cost?

The Kings River and its riparian area cover a large volume of rock aggregate. Gravel mining in California has become the equivalent of a modern gold rush. It is a multibillion-dollar industry that is largely owned by international corporations. Coupled with the infrastructure of urban sprawl, the aggregate mining industry appears poised to consume every acre of land that possesses a stratum of gravel. In Fresno County that means a significant amount of the land on both sides of the Kings River from Pine Flat Dam to Reedley.

At the present time, there are two commercial gravel companies extracting their product near the river. Although biological impacts are unmistakable, the degree of environmental degradation is minimal in relation to that which will occur as new, vastly larger mining operations are initiated.

Exhausted San Joaquin River Gravel Prompts Move to the Kings

The San Joaquin River has been mined for gravel for several decades. From Woodward Park to Friant Dam aggregate rock has been dug from shallow strata in and along the river. The river was diverted in places. Levees were constructed to hold the water back from the mine in other places, and, in the end, levees failed and caused the unintended flooding of what was once riparian habitat. With the rock all but exhausted from that river, one of the primary mining companies has targeted the Kings River for its future gravel supply.

Calaveras Materials Incorporated (CMI), over the past decade, has acquired 455 acres of land between Sanger and Reedley. Four years ago CMI received approval from Fresno County to dig a 100-foot-deep mine on the property. The land supported both natural riparian areas and agricultural vegetation when it was purchased. Bounded by the Cameron Slough on the east and the extension of Riverbend Avenue on the west, the property can be viewed from the south side of Goodfellow Avenue, east of the Kings River Bridge. Calaveras Materials Incorporated has not yet begun excavation at the site.

Environmental Concerns

Voicing opposition to the mine are residents that will have to cope with the noise, dust, and traffic created by the mining and transport of rock aggregate. Loss of agricultural land and the mine's ground water consumption are also issues. The most vo-

cal argument has been that safety would be impaired by truck traffic at the Kings River Bridge on Goodfellow Avenue and on Central Avenue to Highway 99. Surprisingly, concerns of environmental problems at the mine site have not been in the forefront of the discussion.

There are several reasons that environmental impacts should be considered in a project of this type. First, the depth of this mine pit will be much greater than any other previous project in the Fresno area.

It is likely that neither local residents nor County representatives have witnessed this type of mining operation. Deep pit mining creates dangerously



steep sided, biologically deprived craters. CMI has implied that restoration of the site would be similar to that done on the San Joaquin River. The truth is that an eighty to one hundred foot-deep pit is not comparable to the shallow extraction done on the San Joaquin. There is no realistic way to return a massive pit to its original state of biological productivity.

Issues relating to ground water and the water in the Kings River need to be addressed. Because Calaveras Materials Incorporated will need large quantities of water to process the rock there will be a draft created from the aquifer. Mining will also expose the aquifer that is normally protected under the ground. Ground water will be lost to evaporation by the sun's energy, and will lose its soil filter that helps to prevent water pollution. Kings River water will be likely to percolate through the channel banks to fill the deficit in the adjacent mine pit.

Decision by the Fresno County Board of Supervisors

The Fresno County Board of Supervisors approved this project four years ago. The board imposed a few mitigation requirements for road safety improvements. These included replacement of the narrow, arched Goodfellow Bridge. CMI has sought elimination of these requirements and has requested an extension on time to begin the project. Environmental degradation was never adequately discussed before the Board.

Our Choice

It is hard to be accepting of a huge deep-pit mine that is scheduled to be dug along the Kings River between Sanger and Reedley. It is also uncomfortable to have to oppose a project that

some people believe is needed for their job security. Ultimately, one has to be guided by a sense of responsibility to the people who will come after our generation. Rapid population growth is demanding building materials, including gravel, for roads and buildings. Therefore, we are faced with a decision to exploit, preserve, or conserve the land that harbors this natural resource. These decisions should be based on scientific reasoning and social ethics, while thoughtfully regarding those generations that will follow us.

China Creek Nature Walk

By Connie Krahn

El Río Reyes Trust and California Native Plant Society are planning a nature walk at China Creek Park, a 120 acre undeveloped park owned by Fresno County, located south of Centerville. This walk will be a guided by the Native Plant Society.

Join us on Sunday, April 24th, 2005, time 1:30 pm. You may want to bring a snack, water, hat, camera, binoculars, and wear appreciate clothing and shoes/boots for hiking.

Directions: Highway 180 to Centerville turn west on Rainbow Avenue drive till you see the China Creek Nature walk sign.

If you have any questions, please call Connie at 559-638-9617 or e-mail conniekrahn@elrioyeystrust.org

Bob Frisch Memorial Ride

By Connie Krahn

El Río Reyes Trust hosted its sixth annual poker ride on Saturday, September 11, 2004. This fundraising event was started by Bob Frisch and it is fitting the ride be named for Bob. The ride took place at the Reedley College Horse Unit. Twenty-five riders from around the valley assembled and were lead by Kent Kinney on a four-mile ride along the scenic Reedley College trail adjacent to the Kings River. Upon returning to the horse unit, a tri -tip barbecue lunch, with all the trimmings, was served to all the riders. The great lunch ended with the "playing" of the best poker hand won by James Crawford.

Next year's Bob Frisch Memorial Ride will be held on September 10, 2005.

Local Farmers Clean Up Tires

By Connie Krahn

David Krehbiel and Fred Smeds, two local farmers, decided to clean up car tires along the river and on their properties. After gathering the car tires, David asked el Río Reyes Trust for help in disposing of approximately 120 tires. The Trust was happy to assist with this task because stewardship for the Kings River is very important in keeping the river healthy and looking good.



El Río Reyes Trust contacted Fresno County to obtain the proper paperwork to allow the tires to be hauled to the dump. David Krehbiel provided the truck and the Reedley College Forestry Department provided the trailer. David Krehbiel, Bruce McElhoo and several Trust members loaded the tires into the trailer. David's tractor, with its front end loader, made the loading task pretty easy. What had been planned as a two-day task was accomplished in one. David then delivered the tires to the American Avenue Disposal Site in Kerman.

Thanks from el Río Reyes Trust to the Krehbiel and Smeds families for their stewardship of the Kings River.

The Kings River Fishery

By Frank Fonseca

Fishing in the Kings River is a recreational pastime enjoyed by many people. Whether you do it from a boat or from the bank, the excitement of catching fish can be very addicting. The principle game fish caught in the river is trout, however, non-game fish such as Sacramento sucker, Sacramento pike minnow, California roach, Kern brook lamprey and green sunfish dominate the fish population in terms of both numbers and biomass.

In an effort to promote a viable and reproducing trout population, several public agencies, including the Kings River Water Association, Kings River Conservation District and the Department of Fish & Game, have joined together to implement habitat improvement projects along and in the river below Pine Flat Dam. Significant efforts by these agencies towards this end have been undertaken over the last four years in accordance with the Kings River Fisheries Management Program Framework Agreement. The purpose of this agreement, in part, was to identify and implement a variety of actions designed to protect and enhance the lower Kings River fishery.



To date numerous habitat enhancement projects have been completed including: boulder placement, construction of coves and jetties, spawning gravel augmentation, and construction of the Thorburn spawning and rearing channel. Additionally, a turbine bypass was constructed at Pine Flat Dam to allow for the release of cold water from the bottom of the reservoir during periods of warm weather and low River flows. Cold water is essential to the survival of river trout. The cost of the bypass was over five million dollars and was a cost share project designed and funded by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Kings River Conservation District.

Fish stocking is done on a regular basis during the spring and early summer. Stocking includes streamside egg incubators for rainbow trout, routine stocking of sub adult and catchable size rainbow trout, and supplemental catchable trout stocking as conditions allow. Additionally, experimental planting of differ-

ent strains of trout, including wild trout, will continue in an effort to increase the size to the trout population.

Results of the overall effort to enhance the river's fishery are closely observed through an extensive monitoring program. Monitoring activities are done by Dept. of Fish and Game and Kings River Conservation District personnel. Their activities include electrofishing surveys, monitoring of fish use within areas of completed habitat enhancement projects, macroinvertebrate surveys, catchable trout mark-recapture tagging studies and angler logbooks.

The physical conditions posed to the trout population by the Kings River due to significant annual changes in flow and water temperature are significant. Never-the-less, a resident population of trout seems to have adapted to these conditions and efforts to protect them have been implemented. These efforts have taken the form of fishing regulations that cover take limits, size limits, and restrictions on when fish can be taken at various locations of the river.

A significant measure of the success of the Fisheries Management Program has been public involvement. A Public Advisory Group (PAG) was formed and meets on a monthly basis. It is very active in engaging the Technical Steering Committee whose responsibility is to implement the actions of the Framework Agreement. The PAG public education effort last year included development of a web site (in progress), intra-group communications, and production and installation of educational signs along the lower river. Proposed changes to recreational angling regulations on the lower river were also a major focus of PAG activities.

Through the work of various Federal, State, and local agencies and active public involvement, the future is looking good for the lower Kings River fishery. For information on how you can become a part of the Public Advisory Group, call the Kings River Conservation District at 266-0767. When the web page is on-line, we will include an announcement in a future issue of this newsletter.

Kings River Discovery Bicentennial Celebration

By Kathy Omachi

El Río Reyes Trust is pleased to announce its partnership with Kings River Conservation District, Reedley College, and the City of Reedley in celebrating the 200th Anniversary of the discovery of the Kings River. The celebration is planned for Friday, June 3, 2005.

Two educational and cultural lectures, leading up to the event, will be part of Reedley College's lecture series. They will be held at the Reedley College Forum in March and April. A re-enactment of the river's discovery, complete with costumed actors, horses, and possibly pack animals will be presented at Reedley Beach on Friday, June 3, 2005.

The planning committee is inviting all cities along the Kings River through Fresno, Tulare, and Kings counties to participate in the celebration. Also invited to participate are all the school districts along the River.

For more information or to volunteer for the event, please contact Connie Krahn at 559-638-9617 or e-mail conniekrahn@elrioeyestrust.org

Kings River Clean Up

By Ted Tartaglia

On September 25, 2004, a group of property owners, local citizens, and students from General Grant school and Reedley College met at Kelly's Beach to embark upon an adventure that would ultimately remove several tons of trash from the banks of the Kings River. This diverse group were about to participate in a river clean up project organized by el Río Reyes Trust and Kelly's Beach. After signing up and receiving a tee-shirt commemorating the event, the volunteers were divided into groups, introduced to clean up coordinators and assigned specific areas to clean up along the river. They were then ferried to start points between Goodfellow Avenue on the north to Olsen Avenue on the south. After the volunteers finished cleaning up their areas, they were returned to Kelly's Beach where they enjoyed a lunch prepared by Mike Kelly and his staff.



Tom's of Maine Grant

By Kent Kinney

In March, el Río Reyes Trust was awarded the Tom's of Maine National Rivers Awareness Grant for \$5,000 to establish a low water crossing on Wahtoke Creek. The generous donation from Tom's of Maine Company is coordinated through the National Park Foundation. This crossing will be a new link to an existing trail along the Kings River on the Reedley College campus. The gravel ford creek crossing will allow hikers and equestrian users to gain improved access to the river.



Wahtoke Creek Crossing Site

This site of the proposed Wahtoke Creek ford will soon invite hikers and equestrians to cross the creek in safety as they travel along the new Reedley College Kings River Trail.

Reedley College Forestry Department students and el Río Reyes Trust are working cooperatively to accomplish the construction of this project. Completion and dedication are scheduled for March, 2005. The new crossing will be point of interest on the Bob Frisch Memorial ride next year.