

Suction Dredger Saves Threatened Fish Species Habitat (January 2024)



About 3 years ago Disney Ron was on the East Fork of the San Gabriel River up in the narrows, taking lunch with 3 others performing suction dredge reclamation, when a large group of people showed up from upriver. It was several Forest Service ranger biologists, people from CA Fish & Wildlife and numerous forestry volunteers conducting a fish count on the Santa Ana sucker fish, which is listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. I asked them what they were doing and if it was successful. A young lady said they weren't finding many fish and it looked bad. I told her that there were thousands of Santa Ana suckers in my dredge holes and invited her to use my mask and snorkel to see and make a count if she'd like. She went in and came out about 15-30 minutes later and said there definitely were a couple thousand of them in our hole and was surprised. Saying that they hadn't seen that many from the north fork down, until now. I said the river is full of them and that they are looking for them wrong, and that they should have a mask, snorkel and a shovel. You can dig a small hole a foot deep, and the baby suckers will come to it and when you investigate the deeper pools and use the mask you see the larger ones. They thanked us and left. Not one person told us we couldn't dredge. They appreciated it when I explained that the fish love it! By dredging, we are feeding the fish and creating a nest for them in the gravel beds. The Fish and Wildlife personnel agreed.

Public Lands for the People's note:

The Forest Service biologist and CA Fish and Wildlife were very pleased to see so many Santa Ana suckers flourishing in Ron's dredge holes and beds, when the Biologists were previously hard pressed to find Santa Ana suckers elsewhere on the river. Since the river is shallow now it is especially helpful to the species because it gives them a better chance at survival and provides them with a safe resting place. If the State of California were to advocate suction dredging as a best management practice, more species in California's waterways just might flourish as well.