



Y U R O K T R I B E

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Yurok Tribe and Karuk Tribe Kick Off Major Restoration Project *McConnell Bar Initiative Located Immediately Below Recently Removed Dams*

The Yurok Tribe and Karuk Tribe, through their respective fisheries and natural resource departments and partners, are preparing to implement a large-scale restoration project spanning 1.25 river miles and covering up to 45 acres in the mid-Klamath River to address the impacts of historic mining operations and sedimentation from the McKinney Fire footprint.

Just downriver from the recently removed dams, the McConnell Bar project site is about 7 miles northwest of Yreka and 3.7 miles downstream of the Klamath's confluence with the Shasta River. Humbug Creek runs into the McConnell Bar site, and the popular Tree of Heaven campground is nearby.

Conducted in collaboration with local landowner, philanthropist, and hospitality entrepreneur Lance Evans, the Karuk Tribe, Mid-Klamath Watershed Council, The Watershed Research and Training Center, and the Klamath Indigenous Land Trust, the project aims to correct the detrimental alterations of widespread gold mining, which have resulted in a scarcity of salmon and steelhead habitat.

"We are excited to begin healing this long-neglected stretch of the Klamath," said Joseph L. James, Chairman of the Yurok Tribe. "Once this project is completed, it will benefit fish and all other living creatures for generations."

"This project in the Karuk Tribe's ancestral territory is an important effort that will help restore Klamath River fish populations and complement the beneficial effects of the recent removal of the Klamath River dams," said Russell "Buster" Attebery, Chairman of the Karuk Tribe. "We are hopeful that projects like the McConnell Bar project will continue throughout the mainstem Klamath River and serve as a model for future collaborative fish restoration projects."

Since time immemorial, both tribes have relied on salmon as a primary food source. Similarly, the fish are integral to tribal culture and traditions.

Currently, this river segment is unnaturally straight and shallow, providing little to no fish rearing or spawning habitat. It is also surrounded on both sides by large piles of mine tailings. Comprised of

softball- to bowling ball-sized rocks, the mine tailings, deposited between 1910 and 1942, prevent critically important native vegetation from taking root within the riparian area.

Funded by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Bureau of Reclamation, the project will restore the land and river roughly to its pre-mining state, improving habitat complexity, reconnecting floodplains, and allowing fish better access to Humbug Creek, a known salmon-bearing tributary.

This stretch of the Klamath was heavily affected by the July 2022 McKinney Fire, which burned more than 50,000 acres in its first three days. Torrential rains in the area triggered heavily sedimented flooding in creeks and the Klamath that killed tens of thousands of fish. Fish species impacted include suckers, lamprey, and juvenile salmon and trout.

The influx of sediment from Humbug Creek and other tributaries has impacted fish passage, spawning grounds, juvenile rearing habitat, and has significantly compromised the overall health of this part of the Klamath River and five tributaries.

The McConnell Bar project will rectify these issues and put the area in a much better position to weather future fires, floods, and droughts. Typically, wildfires can improve conditions, as they tend to add wood and coarse sediments to waterways, but the impacts of large-scale mining have made these benefits much less likely.

The Tribes' restoration approach to the McConnell Bar project will include reshaping the river channel, increasing the extent and frequency of floodplain inundation, removing tailing piles and other mining remnants, and introducing more wood features to the waterway. The wood features, coupled with the river's hydraulic pressure, will scour fine sediments onto the banks and create new deep pools with cover for fish.

At a minimum, this project will double the fish rearing capacity of the site year-round, create cold pools for salmon and other fish to take refuge during the summer heat, improve native amphibian habitat, and restore the native riparian flora that supports wildlife and a healthy river ecosystem. Planting native trees and shrubs will provide shade for fish and habitat for terrestrial wildlife.

This project will complement work the Yurok Tribe, Karuk Tribe, and their partners—including Siskiyou County and the U.S. Forest Service—have undertaken to minimize further sediment inputs from Humbug, Little Humbug, McKinney, Vesa, and other tributaries. The Tribes' fire recovery efforts have already shown promising results in these nearby watersheds and demonstrate that post-wildfire restoration can be both fast and effective.