

THE SESPE WILD

The Newsletter of the Keep the Sespe Wild Committee

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EXOTIC INVASIVE AQUATICS IN SESPE CREEK

JUNE 2018

The upper reaches of Sespe Creek have in recent decades seen growing populations of a number of exotic invasive fish species (as well as bullfrogs), whose presence poses an increasing threat to the native rainbow trout which have inhabited the waters of the Sespe for millennia.

By exotic, we mean species that are established far beyond their original native habitat; by invasive, we mean species whose population growth is so fast that they come to dominate the available resources and thereby displace the native rainbow trout. Invasive species can prey on native trout directly, as well as compete for food and living space and introduce diseases, thus impacting the entire ecosystem.

In this and future newsletters, we shall be taking a look at a number of these exotic invaders, describing how they live, where they are now in Sespe Creek - and how they may be controlled.

Most of these species have reached the upper Sespe by way of the Rose Valley Lakes, which were constructed in the mid-1900's as a water supply for the SeaBee base there. The base structures were all removed a few years ago, which opens up the possibility of restoring the natural streambed of Rose Valley Creek, which carries the flow from the Rose Valley Falls down towards Howard Creek, which itself joins Sespe Creek half a mile further north.

Recreational users introduced all of these invasive exotics into the Rose Valley Lakes, without realizing the future ramifications of their actions. Whenever the lakes overflow in major rainfall events, some of the exotics may be washed over the rim of the lakes, thus entering Rose Valley Creek, Howard Creek, and the larger Sespe watershed, from where their downstream spread is unimpeded.

The upper Sespe dries up in drought years, leaving all the surviving fish, trout and exotics, crowded together in the few remaining pools. With large populations of the exotics, it is unlikely that any young trout will survive the summer and fall in a limited pool of water with so many non-native predators present.

GREEN SUNFISH

Green sunfish, *Lepomis cyanellus*, are native to the central U.S., from the Great Lakes down to Texas. They were first recorded in California in 1891. They are a small fish, usually under one pound in size and 3-7" long. They are aggressive feeders, whose large mouths enable them to compete with larger fish species for food sources in the creek. They are known to prey on young rainbow trout.



An adult green sunfish in Sespe Creek below Alder Creek in 2013, over twenty miles downstream from where Howard Creek meets the Sespe.

SESPE ART SHOW BENEFIT FOR KSWC IN OCTOBER

Robert Wassell, a Ventura artist who has made a specialty of painting our Los Padres Forest backcountry, has arranged an art show to benefit KSWC at downtown Ventura's Fox Fine Jewelry in September. Since our next newsletter comes out in late September, we're giving you an early heads-up to this cool event.



Robert Wassell captures the rock faces of the Sespe Gorge (as in the above painting) quite beautifully. 50% of all art sales from the show will be donated to KSWC.

The show at Fox Fine Jewelry will run from September 13 through December 12. There will be a opening reception from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. on Saturday September 15, when we and the artist will be present.

Save that date! Our thanks to the artist, and also to Fox Fine Jewelry for their ongoing generosity to many local environmental causes.

SESPE OILFIELD UPDATE

The application by Seneca Resources to double the size of the exempt aquifer area of the Sespe Oilfield north of Fillmore is still in the hands of the Ca. Division of Oil, Gas & Geothermal Resources (DOGGR), who are still eval-

uating public comments submitted last October. The State Water Resources Control Board is also providing their opinion. From there, the issue moves for a final approval to the federal EPA, Region 9.

The normal pattern is for an oil company's application to be approved. But KSWC and other opponents of this application will continue to use all available opportunities to amend or halt this application.

At stake is Fillmore's only water supply in the Fillmore Basin beneath the city, which is very close to the downstream edge of the Sespe Oilfield and its underground aquifers, where the application will double the area where oilfield waste water may be deposited deep underground. This of course also allows the potential to double the oil wells drilled into this oilfield.

What exactly will transpire in the Sespe Oilfield in the future is still unclear. The oilfield has seen declining yields in recent years, even though we believe all the active wells up there have been fracked to allow for increased production.

Then there is our global requirement to move away from fossil fuel use, to reverse climate change. And oil prices which are unlikely to reach and remain at some of the higher peaks seen a few years back.

The interesting recent news is the change in ownership of the Sespe Oilfield, sold by Seneca in May to the Carbon California Company.

Carbon's parent company also operates in Illinois and in Appalachia.

They spent \$43 million to purchase the oil facilities in the Ventura Basin, including the Sespe Oilfield. Carbon and an institutional investor each put down \$5 million, and Carbon increased its borrowing base from \$15 million to \$41 million.

This raises the question as to whether Seneca Resources was really interested in further developing the oil resources in the Sespe Oilfield by applying to DOGGR to double the exempt aquifer area.

It may in fact be that Seneca's intention was to increase the value on paper of their available reserves of oil, so as to inflate their assets and make them more valuable to a potential purchaser. This sale was likely under negotiation before their application with DOGGR was filed.

NEW BOOK ON CHAPARRAL

Titled "Valuing Chaparral" this 450-page volume covers every chaparral topic you can think of. There are four editors, and most of the 16 chapters have multiple authors.

There are chapters on chaparral diversity, chaparral wildlife, native peoples and chaparral, its environmental history, the cycling of carbon and nitrogen, sediment & flooding, water quality & quantity, connecting with chaparral, restoration, climate trends, and more. This is an academic book, published as part of the Springer Series on Environmental Management, and it'll cost you over \$150.

But it is an invaluable addition to the available literature on this native vegetation type that covers more area of California than any other - including over 500 square miles of Ventura County alone.

Here is some of the story it tells:

Early European travelers imagined chaparral as pristine, when in fact it was originally "a carefully-tended 'garden' that was a result of thousands of years of selective harvesting, tillage, pruning, burning, sowing, weeding, and transplanting." Chaparral has been evolving here for over 10 million years. Indigenous Californians had been shaping the landscape into something more productive and diverse than nature could accomplish.

Over 400 species were used by indigenous tribes for food, weaving, ceremonies and more. The manzanita family was perhaps the most useful - the leaves, bark, berries & wood were all collected. An alcoholic cider was made from the berries, referred to in 1902 by ethnographer Hart Merriman as like "the very best apple cider, cooling & delicious."

Most of the local diet came from chaparral - tubers, seeds, grains, nuts, leaves, stems, flowers, fruits and berries. Vegetables included young shoots of mule ears (*Wyethia*), thistle stems, dock leaves, phacelias, fiddlenecks and buckwheats.

Berries were dried for later use - lemonade berry (*Rhus integrifolia*), elderberry, chokecherry, spiny redberry (*Rhamnus crocea*), ribes varieties (currants), wild roses, snowberry, junipers, and others. The seeds of many wildflowers were collected for food - chia sage,

wyethia, western buttercup, clarkias, mentzelia, and white and black sages. Oaks provided acorns, a staple food source.

Beyond these, chaparral provided medicinal plants used internally or topically. Chaparral was also gathered for basketry, cordage, clothing, utensils, weapons, structures, brooms, combs, nets, bowstrings, adhesives, fishing lines, dyes, belts, netbags, thatching and bedding. Species used for baskets included pine needles, *Rhus aromatica*, *Muhlenbergia* grass, stems of rushes, western redbud, some ceanothus, keckiella, honeysuckle & *Fremontodendron*.

The chaparral also provided hunting opportunities, for small mammals, birds and deer. But smaller food sources such as beetles and grasshoppers were used as well.

Fires were set by the indigenous inhabitants to promote new plant growth for the species they gathered, to provide food for the fauna they hunted, and to create open areas that allowed access deeper into dense chaparral growth.

Then the Europeans came along. After the U.S. took control of California in 1846-7, the following thirty years were devastating for the indigenous peoples. 80% died from disease and outright slaughter, leaving only 30,000 by about 1873. Among the hardest hit were chaparral dwellers, whose lands were taken by farmers, herders and miners.

It is now known that some hundreds of Chumash peoples did survive for decades in small villages in remote areas of what is now Los Padres Forest east of Santa Barbara, continuing to live in their traditional ways, and moving home frequently.

The newcomers' sheep and cattle ate up the chaparral. In 1894 it was reported that the "San Bernardino mountains are thicker with sheep than locusts of olden times and twice as destructive. There is not a green shrub to be seen. The young oaks are eaten down to the ground." Ranchers and shepherds routinely burned the chaparral.

Conservationist Abbott Kinney, chair of the State Forestry Board in the 1880's argued to preserve chaparral. Congress passed the Forest Reserve Act in 1891, which in 1905 became the U.S. Forest Service. Attempts to convert chaparral to forests or grasslands both failed.

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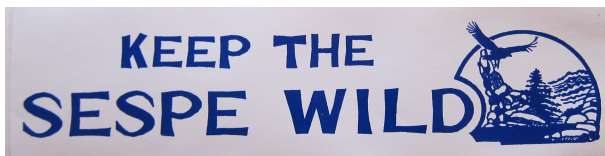
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ST. FRANCIS DAM DISASTER MEMORIAL ACT

The House of Representatives has passed legislation to create a memorial for the St. Francis Dam break in 1928 in the L.A. County headwaters of the Santa Clara River.

The bill was sponsored by Rep.'s Steve Knight & Julia Brownley. The measure was introduced in the U.S. Senate by Senators Feinstein & Harris.

431 lives were lost in the middle of the night as all the water behind the dam rushed out to sea down the Santa Clara River corridor. The dam was designed by William Mulholland, and the disaster brought his career as a water engineer to an end. Mulholland had investigated dam sites on Sespe Creek at an earlier date. Two new books were recently published on the dam break story. The Act will

create a new 440-acre national monument to be administered by the U.S. Forest Service.

Santa Paula's Ca. Oil Museum has an exhibit on the St. Francis Dam - July 08 is its last day, so hurry over soon!

DONATIONS TO KSWC

Your donations keep covering our expenses, thank you all kindly. Please keep them coming our way! Donations are not tax-deductible. We wish you all a great summer.