

THE SESPE WILD

The Newsletter of the Keep the Sespe Wild Committee

P.O. Box 715, Ojai, CA 93024

(805) 921-0618 www.sespewild.org

RESTORING ROSE VALLEY CREEK

SEPTEMBER 2018

Rose Valley Creek flows north for about three miles from the base of Rose Valley Falls, past the series of three artificial lakes built as a water supply in the late 1950's for the adjacent work camp built by the Seabees. Below there it runs into Howard Creek, about one half mile from Sespe Creek itself.

Popular with fishermen and other recreational visitors over the decades, these Rose Valley Lakes have also inadvertently been the source of a number of invasive, exotic aquatic species reaching the mainstem of Sespe Creek with winter storm flows, and becoming established downstream below that point.

These exotic species include catfish, green sunfish, bluegill, swamp crayfish, largemouth bass and bullfrogs. Visitors have planted these exotics into the Rose Valley Lakes to give themselves something to fish for in the following years, likely not realizing the downstream ecological consequences, particularly for the endangered native southern steelhead trout.



A group of agency staff, consultants & stakeholders met at the Rose Valley Lakes in late August for a site review, to discuss the future restoration of Rose Valley Creek.

A meeting was arranged on August 22 at the Rose Valley Lakes to begin a collaborative effort to look into restoring Rose Valley Creek and removing the three lakes. The work camp that sat adjacent to the lower lake was removed by the U.S. Forest Service several years ago, after falling into disuse, so the original need for a water supply is no longer present.

The 18 stakeholders attending represented the U.S. Forest Service, the County of Ventura, the Ca. Dept. of Fish & Wildlife, the National Marine Fisheries Service, CalTrout, KSWC, Friends of the Santa Clara River, Stillwater Consulting, and several local property owners.

A grant from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation was received by CalTrout to initiate the project, which may take a decade to come to fruition. At first is a feasibility study, with public comments requested next summer, then a final study report in August 2020. The project will include a strategy to address all of the invasive aquatic species now established along Sespe Creek, to produce better conditions for the steelhead trout and other native aquatic species in its waters.



A six-inch native Sespe steelhead trout near Alder Creek.

Sespe Creek remains the finest rainbow and steelhead trout rearing habitat in the Santa Clara River watershed, and therefore has the best potential for improving the steelhead population in that larger watershed.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Port Hueneme SeaBee base museum has records relating to the early history of the Rose Valley work camp, which dates from the mid-1950's. Other data came from U.S. Forest Service files.

As far back as June 1948 - long before the lakes were there - the Fillmore Fish Hatchery planted 2,000 young Mt. Whitney rainbow trout in Rose Valley Creek for fishermen.

A permit was granted to the U.S. Navy in 1951 for the use of 50 acres in Rose Valley for use as a test area for dirt-moving equipment, and another in 1956 for the use of 20,000 acres there for training purposes. The Port Hueneme base is home to the naval Construction Battalion, otherwise known as the SeaBees (C.B.s).

SeaBee training began in Rose Valley in 1954, though the men were bussed back and forth from Port Hueneme, according to a 1966 base newspaper article. The following year saw the first bunks and kitchen constructed.

The 8-acre, 9 feet deep lower Rose Valley dam and lake was built in 1957. The upper lake is 2 acres in area, the middle lake about 1.5 acres. In some years, the lakes may dry out.

CATFISH IN SESPE CREEK

Black bullhead, *Ameiurus melas*, a species of catfish, are perhaps the most prolific of exotic invasive fish now found along most of Sespe Creek. On our hikes down the lower Sespe Gorge close to Fillmore we have watched over the years as the catfish population has steadily increased its downstream range year after year.

In summer the small schools of catfish, when they are the size of tadpoles, can readily be scooped up in a fishing net and dumped on the bank. If you handle them you are likely to get cut by their sharp whisker-like barbels.

But at only a little bigger, when you move your net close to them, the school will scatter in all directions instead of swimming together in a



Two bullhead catfish in the shallows of Sespe Creek.

group, thus evading the net. We have thus diminished their population, but not enough.

The bullhead catfish thrive in the warm summer temperatures of Sespe Creek, quite content in the low oxygen levels in shallow summer pools. The adults feed by night, and are both voracious and omnivorous. We've fished 100 out of one pool and made little difference.

This species of fish has no scales - but its body is covered with up to 100,000 taste receptors instead, that help guide it through murky night-time waters to its food sources.

PLEASE SEND US A DONATION

KSWC depends on our newsletter readers for the funds needed to continue our work across the Sespe's watershed.

Please send us a donation to:

KSWC, PO Box 715, Ojai, CA 93024.

Donations are not tax-deductible.

SESPE OILFIELD EXPANSION MOVING SLOWLY AHEAD

The expansion of the Sespe Oilfield's exempt aquifer area, where toxic oilfield waste water fluids may be injected back underground, is still moving forward - but slowly. DOGGR, California's oil industry regulators, received so many public comments last fall that they are still working on their comment responses before sending the issue on to the federal EPA for a final decision. We'll keep you posted.

BLM STARTING TO EVALUATE MORE FRACKING IN MANY CALIFORNIA OILFIELDS

The federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has initiated a proposal to potentially open up around a million acres of land in central and southern California for oil the fracking of oil well facilities.

Ventura and Santa Barbara counties are two of the seven counties being evaluated under this proposal.

The BLM is responsible for mineral resources beneath public lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service, which is why they, not the Forest Service, are conducting the analysis. The lands in question include certain private properties.

In 2015 a report from the California Council on Science & Technology stated that fracking in California takes place at shallow depths, with high concentrations of fracking chemicals being injected underground, sometimes dangerously close to aquifers that supply public drinking water.

The BLM will be preparing a supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, and potentially a Resource Management Plan. This process will take well over a year to run its course before a final decision is made.

WASELL ART SHOW BENEFIT

Ventura-based artist Robert Wassell has a show of his Sespe Creek art at Fox Fine Jewelry, 560, E. Main St. Ventura (opposite the downtown movie theatre) through November 04.

Most of this series of 42 new paintings are of the Sespe Gorge, the wildest and most beautiful lower section of Sespe Creek north of Fillmore, where the canyon walls rise up to one thousand feet above the river.

One half of the proceeds from this show are generously dedicated to KSWC. Our thanks to the artist and to Fox Fine Jewelry. After the well-attended opening on September 15, nearly half of the paintings had been sold.

If you live far away, you may visit the artist's website - [wassellart](http://wassellart.com) - and see his Sespe Portfolio. Then you should contact Fox Fine Jewelry to see if your selection is still available. They are at (805) 652-1800, open till 7:00 weekdays, till 8:00 Fri.-Sat. and till 6:00 Sundays.

These are not expensive art works - the smallest can be had for \$150.



Sespe Trail Upper Narrows, by Robert Wassell, July 2017



This California condor visited our Sespe Gorge hiking party in June this year. We were relaxing after lunch at a pool, when it flew over and landed on a ledge 150 feet away. It proceeded to stay around for 40 minutes, flying to eight different spots all clearly visible to us.

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U.S. HELICOPTERS IGNORE CONDOR SANCTUARY ELEVATION LIMITS

On our May 2018 hike to the Sespe Hot-springs area, we were surprised to see two black helicopters flying right over the hilltops near the junction of Alder Creek and the Sespe.

This area is at the north edge of the Condor Sanctuary, where flight charts require a clearance of 2,000 feet above ground.

We recently contacted Point Mugu Naval Air Station to look into this, only to learn that these helicopters do not fly out of that base.

The Point Mugu public affairs officer got back to us to let us know that the helicopters were CH53's from the 3rd. Marine Aircraft Wing at Miramar or Camp Pendleton. We'll be contacting the public affairs officer there to ask their pilots to give the condors the clearance that is required.

Local small aircraft also intrude on the Condor Sanctuary. We're contacting Santa Paula airport on this matter. If you're hiking the Sespe Gorge, please send us photos of intruding aircraft, with dates and times.

