The Lower San Lorenzo River and Lagoon

The San Lorenzo River Lagoon

The sandbar across the mouth of the river forms naturally through the year. It has been suggested that the lagoon could support numerous salmonids. A deep, properly functioning, freshwater lagoon is important to steelhead trout and coho salmon. Steelhead trout and coho salmon are now listed as threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Coho salmon and steelhead trout are also listed as threatened under the California ESA.

Endangered Species Act listings promote preservation and restoration of aquatic species. The species is protected by federal and state laws. It is illegal to harass or disturb these species.

The San Lorenzo River watershed is habitat for the threatened steelhead trout and also coho salmon. Steelhead trout and coho salmon are now listed as threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Coho salmon and steelhead trout are also listed as threatened under the California ESA.

This brochure has been produced by the Santa Cruz County Resource Conservation District with California Coastal Salmon Recovery Program funds administered by the California Department of Fish and Game.
**The San Lorenzo Urban River Plan**

- The San Lorenzo Urban River Plan articulates a community vision for the corridor encompassing the lower San Lorenzo River, Branciforte Creek, and Jessie Street Marsh as both a wildlife area, and a community recreation and public open space amenity.

- In 1999, the Santa Cruz City Council requested that the plans for the San Lorenzo River be updated due to:
  - the initiation of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers flood control improvement project beginning in 1999; and
  - the listing of the steelhead trout and Coho salmon as federally threatened species, and the federal designation of the San Lorenzo River as critical habitat for these species.

The City Council appointed a citizen task force, the San Lorenzo Urban River Task Force, to complete the plan update emphasizing community involvement as the foundation for plan development. The City Council requested that the San Lorenzo Urban River Plan Task Force update restoration and design plans for the River as well as address Branciforte Creek in the planning update process.

The Goals and Benefits of the Plan are to:

- enhance and restore biotic values of the River, Creek and Marsh as habitat for fish and wildlife;
- maintain flood control capacity of the San Lorenzo River and Branciforte Creek;
- improve the scenic and recreational value of the Riverfront;
- improve the urban and neighborhood interface with the San Lorenzo River, Branciforte Creek, and Jessie Street Marsh;
- improve public access and pedestrian/bicycle movement to and along the River; and to
- incorporate the San Lorenzo River, Branciforte Creek, and Jessie Street Marsh into the surrounding urban fabric of downtown Santa Cruz and neighborhoods.

**Flood Control Confines**

While restoring aquatic habitat is one of the City of Santa Cruz’s goals for the San Lorenzo River, the reality that Santa Cruz is largely built upon the San Lorenzo River’s floodplain must be considered.

As Santa Cruz has become more and more developed over the years, the San Lorenzo River floodplain has been encroached upon and flooding has occurred on several occasions. Eighteen flood events occurred from 1862-1958. Some of these floods were minor events but others were quite severe and caused extensive damage.

Following the December 22, 1955 flood, the costliest, deadliest, and most well-known flood, the lower 2.5 miles of San Lorenzo River and Branciforte Creek was channelized into a flood control structure in 1957-1959 in a cooperative project of the City of Santa Cruz and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps).

The San Lorenzo Flood Control Improvement Project is designed to provide 100-year Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) equivalent flood protection for the downtown areas of the City of Santa Cruz designated as floodway or floodplain. Any restoration plans proposed for the lower reach of the river must be compatible with the authorized project purpose of flood control. Proposed restoration work cannot adversely affect the flow conveyance capacity of the flood protection level. Any restoration or management work must also be compatible with maintenance operations and inspections during flood events.

**The New Riverway Park**

Recreational access along the San Lorenzo River provides opportunities for public interaction with the river corridor for enjoyment, education, and continued stewardship. A multitude of recreational opportunities exist along the 5 linear miles of Riverway parkland: hiking, picnicking, bicycling, jogging, skating, bird-watching and wildlife viewing.

**Park Rules**

- Park hours: Sunrise to Sunset
- Bicycles and pedestrians on recreational paths
- Limited access to habitat areas of the river to protect wildlife
- No littering

**What is to come?**

Anticipated Improvements include:

- Installing lighting and call boxes for public safety
- Developing interpretive signage about the river's habitats
- Developing community events such as a river festival
- Involving schools in river restoration

**Next Steps**

**Water Quality Improvement**

Recent studies have identified excess bacteria levels in the lagoon. The bacteria is coming mainly from stormdrains and birds.

The City of Santa Cruz has received funding from the State Clean Beach Initiative Program to reduce storm drain inputs to the San Lorenzo River.

**Learning More About the San Lorenzo River Lagoon**

In efforts to learn more about the San Lorenzo River Lagoon and the habitat it offers to migrating fish, the City will participate in the Comparative Lagoon Ecological Assessment Project (CLEAP) as part of the Integrated Watershed Restoration Program for Santa Cruz County.

The CLEAP will examine local lagoon systems with regards to the biological, physical, and chemical characteristics for fisheries productivity and water quality.

CLEAP will compile a team of technical advisors, scientific consultants, and local lagoon management agencies to examine identified impacts to lagoon stability and potential management options for enhancing these sensitive habitats.

For more information on CLEAP contact the City of Santa Cruz at (831) 420-5132