

Eel River Recovery Project Wilderness Committee Gets New Energy

The Eel River Recovery Project (ERRP) was awarded a Rose Foundation California Wilderness grant in March 2018 that will re-invigorate partnerships cultivated over the last 5 years with the Arcata Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Six Rivers National Forest (SRNF) and Mendocino National Forest (MNF). The project will allow clean up garbage from a cartel marijuana grow on BLM land adjacent to the Red Mountain Wilderness and planning for similar activities in the future with the SRNF and MNF. The grant also promotes expansion of Wilderness in the Eel River basin and envisions more support for forest health projects on public lands involving volunteers.

Wilderness Committee co-chairs Jeff Hedin and Bruce Hilbach-Barger both helped lay a solid foundation with both Arcata BLM and MNF, and now ERRP has a new Wilderness Coordinator Phillip Hosking ready to follow in their foot-steps. Originally from Pennsylvania, he is a mast organic gardener, but would rather hear the call of the Wild. Phill is passionate about Wilderness and wants to help improve access and trails using volunteer labor also as part of the Wildlands grant. One such project may include linking the Cahto Wilderness compartment to Elder Creek on the Angelo Reserve.

We got lucky twice in that Phill's best friend and back-packing buddy Imil Ferrara is also stepping up as the ERRP Forest Health Coordinator and will work with Phill on forest health aspects of the grant. Raised in the Salmon River and Middle Klamath, he has seen the Karuk Tribe begin work with SRNF and Klamath NF to re-introduce traditional ecological land management practices (i.e. burning) and wants to help with the forest health problem on the east side of the Eel River basin.



Phill Hosking (I) and Imil Ferrara at ERRP St. Patrick's Day meeting of ERRP in Covelo.

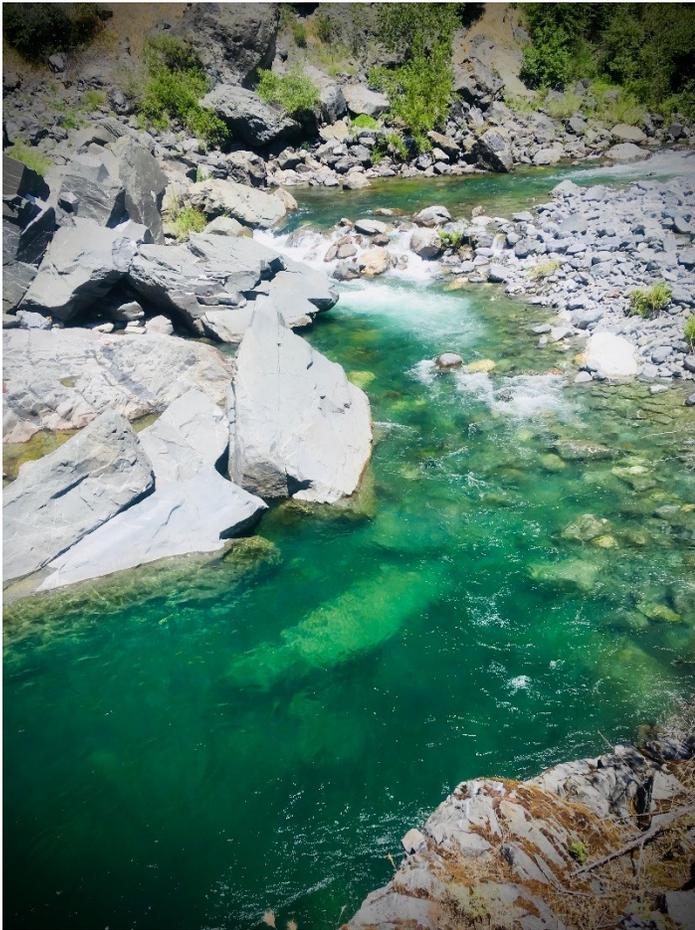
The grant will also be used to promote Wilderness protection and expansion in the Eel River basin. ERRP will be closely coordinated with the California Wilderness Coalition and organized on-going efforts to promote northern California Wilderness expansion. Field trips and workshops will inform the public on the benefits of Wilderness for water supply and biodiversity and to try to build a consensus on prudent management of federal lands. Pursuant to the latter, ERRP will host a field trip on June 20 to Raglin Flat in the North Fork Eel River watershed lead by retired SRNF archaeologist Tom Keter and John and Tracy Elgin. The Elgin brothers are indigenous Wylacki-Wintu and live in the territory of their ancestors, are extremely concerned about forest health, and have ideas on how to restore it.

The field trip will start at the Ruth Forest Service Fire Station at 9 AM on Wednesday the 20th before heading out to Raglan Flat. We will be doing reconnaissance after a hot forest fire to see if oaks have an ecological advantage after such an event. Oaks have been going away in the North Fork Eel watershed – learn more at: www.solararch.org. ERRP is trying something new with an over-night stay on June 19 at the Fir Cove Campground on Ruth Lake. People are encouraged to bring floatation devices and we will try to catch trout and spy on fish with masks and snorkels in the afternoon. There is no potable water at Fir Cove so bring a lot. Folks will also be free to camp out on June 20, after the field trip. Those coming up Highway 36 should be aware of two four-hour daily closures from 8 AM – noon and 1 PM to 5 PM, so plan accordingly. ERRP will provide chow for dinner on June 19, but everyone is on their own for provisions other than that (breakfast/lunch). RSVP to Pat Higgins at 707 223-7200, if you want to join this field trip.



Bill Heil (l), Linda Perkins and John Elgin before ERRP Salmon Awareness Fest forest health workshop. 10/16/17.

Phill Hosking and ERRP will also promote more recreational use of Wilderness to increase ecotourism and to dissuade illegal activities. He is wild about the prospect of the southern extent of the Big Foot Trail as endorsed by Congressman Huffman as part of his developing Wilderness plan. Improving access to BLM's Red Mountain Wilderness is also a high priority for ERRP and Arcata BLM and will probably get attention during our current Wildlands grant.



Middle Fork Eel River

But Phill and Imil have already broken boundaries is a recent trip up the Middle Fork Eel above the Black Butte River. They were stunned by the gem-like quality of the Middle Fork waters. A summer steelhead over two feet long bolted past them as they waded a run. After hiking the river bar, they decided to follow an old trail route along the south rim of the canyon on the way back to their car. They found the trail an ideal route, except for about a mile that was covered with poison oak and brush. Phill reported on their exploits and estimated it might only take a week with a hand crew of volunteers to rehabilitate this scenic gateway to the Yolla Bolla.

ERRP is also extremely interested in other trail opportunities that are opening up like Senator Mike McGuire's Great Redwood Trail that just passed the California Senate unanimously and may use portions of the NCRA right-of-way. This could include a Lower Eel River Parkway that ERRP has envisioned. We also have an eye in Rondal Snodgrass' Indian Creek Trail along the old Bear Harbor Railroad line from Piercy to the Coast. ERRP wants to promote trails in the Eel River basin for community health, quality of life and the economic development benefits of eco-tourism. Once people come from around the world to see the beauty of the Eel River, we will re-double our efforts as a community to maintain its ecological health and amazing ecosystem services.