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Davis Hydro receives support from fisheries experts for its Kila

Photo provided by Davis Hydro:
Lower New Habitat Area—
—Close to the end, the canal comes up onto the hill top. There is just under a mile of wide gravel bottom canal beds here that could be converted into the largest spawning and young juvenile habitat area with the addition of groins, large boulders, gravel, woody debris, and cover.



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By Sharyn Cornelius

Davis Hydro, LLC, the power generation company interested in purchasing and licensing the Kilarc-Cow Creek Hydroelectric Project after the Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) completes its license surrender process with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), recently solicited and received comments from private sector fisheries experts on their Reconstruction Alternative proposal released last winter. In that prospectus, Davis Hydro, LLC, proposes to mitigate any impairment to fish habitat caused by continued operation of the two power-houses included in the project by creating additional and perhaps better spawning and rearing habitat for fish within the canals that transport water to the fore bays. (The Kilarc powerhouse diverts water from Old Cow Creek and the Cow Creek powerhouse diverts from South Cow Creek.)

All three of the experts consulted issued letters or reports indicating that such habitat enhancement is not only possible, but would likely be efficacious for the fish populations; and two of the scientists involved concluded that in light of the Davis Hydro proposal, the FERC should reconsider PG&E's plans to demolish the power plants and return all diverted water to the streams.

Reports by Joseph E. Merz, Ph.D., of Cramer Fish Sciences of Auburn, and Richard Poore, of StreamWise of Mt. Shasta, deal with both the Kilarc and Cow Creek power generation systems; while the field report by Ayako Kawabata, Fisheries Biologist at UC Davis, deals only with Kilarc. Merz and Poore clearly support the idea that the creation of supplemental spawning grounds and rearing habitat within the canals, coupled with return channels so that the young fish can easily return to the streams, could be more beneficial to the native fish populations than destroying the power plants and returning all diverted water to the two creeks.

In a letter to Davis Hydro Poole writes, "In summary, the Davis Hydro proposal to continue power production and enhance the productivity of the existing facility seems feasible. Further investigation is needed to determine the cost and specifications of this concept. If it is determined that the

fishery could potentially benefit more from enhancement of existing facilities than from a complete removal of the hydro system, then that alternative should be investigated in greater detail and given due consideration in the FERC relicensing process." Merz writes, "Based on our findings, as well as concerns raised previously by other stakeholders, we strongly recommend that PG&E and fishery resource agency staff carefully and objectively review and reconsider current plans to decommission the Project."

Kawabata, on the other hand, thoroughly investigated the details involved in altering sections of the Kilarc Canal to make it more hospitable for the spawning and rearing young fish. "The following is an assessment of the possibility that a reengineered canal combined with the bypass reach can be developed into a more productive habitat than the Old Cow bypass by itself." He located three fish habitat areas in the natural sections of the Kilarc Canal, two of which would need few enhancements to be favorable habitat for juvenile trout. A third area would need to be provided with boulders to slow the flow of water, plus riparian vegetation and deeper pools so that the young fish could hide from predators. He also evaluates Davis Hydro's plans for returning fish to Old Cow creek from several points along the canal and finds them sound.

Though Kawabata does not express an opinion about whether the enhanced habitat of the canals would be better for the local fish population than destroying the diversion dams and returning all the water to the creek, he does express enthusiasm for the idea of using the canal habitat as a research station. "Davis Hydro makes the point, with which I agree, that this area allows easy access of viewing wild living fish and can be used as a public outreach education. The fish collection facility can provide a great fish monitoring station and research facility as it is accessible about 8 months of the year. The facility can [also] provide a great fish monitoring station and research facility. Compared to upstream fish passage systems, downstream fish passage systems are much less advanced. This station could provide valuable data to the downstream fish passage research.

Based on the above expert opinions, Davis Hydro revised its initial proposal to 1) include the new information furnished and 2) focus exclusively upon the Kilarc power generating system, and sent it off to the FERC. The entire document, including the letters and reports by the consultants, may be read at www.kilarc.info.

http://eastvalleytimes.com/news/product_info.php?cPath=97&products_id=293&osCsid=8d26cc1c140679c4e6bac075a66bd34d