



THE MODOC WATERSHED MONITOR

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A quarterly publication of the Central Modoc Resource Conservation District and the River Center

Central Modoc RCD offers Pit River Fencing Initiative

By Laura Unrue

With increasing environmental regulation, agricultural producers are finding the need to stay one step ahead of the game. As price takers, agricultural producers still receive the same value for their products and yet are faced with skyrocketing costs of production, many associated with increased environmental regulation.

Unfortunately, given the social, political and regulatory climate in California this situation is not likely to change. A commonly recommended management practice that has been proven to improve water quality on agricultural land is riparian fencing.

Environmental regulatory agencies are making strides toward realizing that farmers and ranchers are entitled to financial and technical assistance in protecting the invaluable natural resources harbored on their land. Funding has recently become available to support farmers and ranchers in the implementation of management measures such as riparian fencing. For Modoc County agricultural producers that funding is available through the Pit River Fencing Initiative (PRFI), a program facilitated by the Central Modoc Resource Conservation District (CMRCD).

PRFI basically works like this: if you agree to install riparian fencing along the Pit River or any of its tributaries, then the CMRCD will give you the fencing supplies and develop a contract with the Devil's Garden Conservation Camp to have that fence installed at a rate much lower than a traditional fencing crew would cost. CMRCD will also help develop off-site water so that no productivity or water source for livestock is lost. A basic grazing/riparian management plan is developed through the University of California Cooperative Extension's California Rangeland Water Quality Management Plan program. This simple plan provides documentation of Best Management Practices such as riparian fencing and can be very valuable to have on hand as proof of good, proactive land stewardship. Riparian fencing can provide many management advantages from better utilization of upland/meadow forage to positive public and agency perception of livestock grazing. If you are interested in (or simply would like to know more about) riparian fencing projects please contact CMRCD staff so that we may determine how PRFI money can best fit your operation and management goals.

- Blair Parrott 640-1120
- Laura Unrue 640-0930

2004-2005 Water Quality Monitoring Program Summary

By Abbey Kingdon and Todd Sloat

December 2005 marked the conclusion of the 2004 to 2005 Water Quality Monitoring Program facilitated by the Pit River Watershed Alliance (PRWA) in cooperation with several stakeholders, including the Central Modoc RCD and landowners in the Upper Pit River Watershed.

At the PRWA meeting on January 12, in Adin, Calif., Todd Sloat, watershed coordinator for the PRWA presented a summary of the monitoring program.

The PRWA is a collaborative group of agencies, landowners, interest groups and other stakeholders who meet regularly to discuss PRWA activities. The forum created from the meetings and activities, enables private landowners, stakeholders, local, state and federal agencies, to share ideas, skills and leverage funding opportunities to complete projects. Water quality data was collected in 2004 and 2005 at 12 sites on the Pit River and 33 sites on tributaries to the Pit River for the monitoring program; the Central Modoc RCD also implemented on-the-ground projects to improve water quality. Collected data included flow, pH, conductivity, dissolved oxygen, temperature, turbidity, total suspended solids, organic carbon, nutrients, bacteria and macroinvertebrates. The objectives of the monitoring program included:

- Implement a monitoring program within the Pit River Watershed that documents existing conditions of water quality and stream channel conditions

- Determine if beneficial water uses are impaired by water quality or other stream conditions

- Establish a monitoring program to determine long-term trends in water quality and watershed condition

- Provide a means to document future watershed condition improvements

The monitoring program summary provided insight into potential next steps for the PRWA in terms of long-term improvement of water quality and watershed health. The presentation was not a complete summary of all parameters monitored, but a sketch of those of special concern to the watershed community.

The 2004 to 2005 PRWA Water Quality Monitoring Program Summary:

- **Temperature:** During the summer, water temperatures in the mainstem of the Pit River are generally not conducive to cold-water fish. Temperatures recorded on lower and middle watershed tributaries and the mainstem of the Pit River are similar.

- **Dissolved Oxygen:** Dissolved oxygen concentrations were highly variable at Pit River and tributary sites. Dissolved oxygen levels were below Basin Plan objectives (The Basin Plan is a framework that implements state and federal water quality control laws and regulations within each regional board. It lists the beneficial uses of water in each region and also the water quality objectives set by each regional board.) established by the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board at some Pit River sites, and DO levels were even below Basin Plan Objectives



Central Modoc RCD Watershed Coordinator Blair Parrott measures stream flow in Mill Creek, Summer 2004, as part of the PRWA Water Quality Monitoring Program.

at a few tributary sites.

- **Nutrients (phosphorus):** Depending on the time of year, phosphorus concentrations were found above levels recommended by the Environmental Protection Agency. EPA recommends that levels are not exceeded in order to prevent eutrophication (weed/algae growth). The storm event in May 2005 increased levels of phosphorus on tributary sites and on the mainstem of the Pit River. However, when averaged across multiple samples in several months, phosphorous levels were still below the EPA limit.

- **E.Coli:** *Escherichia coli* (usually abbreviated to E. coli) is one of the main species of bacteria that live in the lower intestines of warm-blooded animals (including birds and mammals) and are necessary for the proper digestion of food. Its presence in surface water is a common indicator of fecal contamination ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki.E.coli](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E.coli)). In general, E. coli was found in concentrations less than those identified in the Basin Plan Objectives.

Irrigated Lands Program Update

By Laura Unrue

It has been a tumultuous past couple of months for agriculture special interest groups working to reform the Irrigated Lands Waiver Program (Ag Waiver). On November 28, 2005, Regional

Board voted to extend the Ag Waiver in its current form for only six months, much to the disappointment of agriculture lobbying organizations that were arguing for a five-year extension. In June 2006, the Ag Waiver will again go through the amendment process with the potential for more stringent regulations to be placed on irrigated agriculture producers.

The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (CVRWQCB) also refused to

rescind its request for coalition membership information, citing its ultimate responsibility to enforce the Porter-Cologne Act. The CVRWQCB requested that coalition information be submitted by January 31, 2006. This placed water quality coalitions in a very difficult situation: they were faced with the decision to either turn in the names of non-compliers or provide a coalition membership list. The Northeastern California Water Association

(NECWA), which represents irrigators in the Upper Pit River Watershed, chose the high road on this issue.

NECWA refused to submit the names of producers that were not participating in a coalition, citing that they are a non-regulatory entity and will not turn in their friends and neighbors. The agriculture community has committed to staying united throughout the course of this controversial program.

Behind the Scenes . . .

By Abbey Kingdon



Laura Shinn, Central Modoc RCD business manager. Shinn joined the CMRCD in September 2002.

Under the supervision of its business manager, the Central Modoc Resource Conservation District operates like an immaculate budget spreadsheet. Grants are managed with detailed accuracy, meetings are prompt and organized and numbers add up.

And it's all there. On one page, in one office. That's, at least, how grant managers know the district.

But work behind the scenes of the Central Modoc RCD is a bit more....well... creative.

"There are no boundaries set up," said Laura Shinn, Central Modoc RCD business manager, "you must have initiative and motivation to get things done. No one is there telling you what to do."

For Shinn, discipline and time management are essential to managing the district. A Resource Conservation District is not the most common entity to manage. In fact, it's exactly the opposite of managing a private business, Shinn said. She admits managing a RCD in Modoc County was an

adjustment after living and working in Sacramento.

As a native of Lassen County, it didn't take Shinn long to re-adjust to rural life. She and her husband, Richard Shinn, a wild-life biologist with the California Department of Fish and Game, left the Sacramento Valley in pursuit of a "better quality of life," in Modoc County. They wanted to raise a family-which consists of their 19-month old daughter Madilyn-in a small, strong community.

Shinn's experience managing economic development marketing publications for the Sacramento Area Commerce and Trade Organization (SACTO) and bachelor's degree in economics from California State University Sacramento prepared her for management of the Central Modoc RCD.

Private businesses generate a profit, create a budget and decide how to spend their money. Grant-funded organizations, like the Central Modoc RCD, are required to spend their allotted funds first, and then invoice the grantors for reimbursement.

For a business manager of a RCD, grant management means collecting, proofing, organizing, tracking, filing and distributing an assortment of formal documents. Later, after reports and invoices are sent to grant managers first in Redding and then Sacramento, reimbursements are received in the district office. Checks are written to service contractors. Bills are paid. Books updated.

"You need to be familiar with your grant contracts and communicate with your grant managers," Shinn said.

During 2004 and 2005 ten grants were in operation from federal, state and private funding sources. The operating budget of the Central Modoc RCD during this time was more than \$550,000.

Fiscal oversight and management of RCD operations is only a segment of a business manager's duties. There's also a RCD board of directors and personnel to coordinate. The business manager sees that board of directors meeting minutes are recorded and distributed. Timesheets are collected. Policies and procedures are followed.

The function and definition of a RCD is sometimes not readily apparent. This is because RCDs receive very little to no regular funding through taxation and therefore rely on grants and other types of fundraising to stay in business. The objectives and goals of the grant and granting organization will determine how staff of a RCD set their priorities and spend their time.

But regardless of the funding source, the mission of the Central Modoc RCD is to facilitate the sound management of natural resources.

In California, RCDs are "special districts" organized under the state Public Resources Code, Division 9. Each district has a locally elected or appointed volunteer board of directors made up of landowners in that district. RCDs address a wide variety of conservation issues such as forest fuel management, water and air quality, wildlife habitat restoration, soil erosion control, conservation education and much more.

Conservation Districts emerged during the 1930s as a way to pre-

A snapshot of Central Modoc RCD management

vent the soil erosion problems of the Dust Bowl from happening again. Districts were formed as independent local liaisons between the federal government and landowners and are considered local government. They are not regulatory organizations.

It's the third Tuesday of the month. The Central Modoc RCD

board meeting is about to begin. Board packets and meeting agendas are set neatly on the conference table. The reports are included, the budgets neatly labeled. This is the result of the business manager's motivation and independence-her ability to start with a "blank canvas" and end with a picture of professionalism.



Shinn manages all grants of the CMRCD, during 2004-05 the operating budget of the CMRCD was more than \$550,000. The business manager duties require keeping extensive budgets and formal documents well labeled and organized.

The River Center aims for new projects and programs

By Abbey Kingdon

The River Center continues to work with the Central Modoc RCD fulfilling the educational needs of the district, while developing its own programs to serve the community. The projects are new, but the work is still in line with the center's original purpose.

Here are some potential programs for which we are seeking funding:

- **River Center Trail and Native Plants Garden:** Funding sought from the California River Parkways Grant Program. Awards announced in Spring 2006. If funded, a trail would be installed along the Pit River behind the River Center and the planned garden of the River Center would be built. Partners on this project include: the Central Modoc RCD, the Modoc County Office of Education and the Modoc County Department of Public Works.

- **Native Plants Education:** The Central Modoc RCD is hoping to secure funding to establish a native plants nursery as a potential sustainable project for the district. The River Center would provide educational materials, activities and experiences for the community and public as the educational component to this project.

- **Biodiesel Education:** The Central Modoc RCD also is researching funding for biodiesel crop production or retail pumps in the county. The River Center would provide biodiesel and alternative energy use educational materials and experiences for the community and public.

- **5 Star Restoration Grant Program:** The River Center will participate in this grant selection process offered through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in order to create opportunities for students to participate in technical aspects of stream restoration work. The Central Modoc RCD has already identified willing landowners to participate in this project and allow students to learn from a restoration project that will occur on their private property. Applications are due in March 2006.

- **Natural Resources Summer Camp:** The River Center and partners in the Alturas community are seeking funding for the implementation of a summer camp focusing on natural resources and outdoor experiences.

- **Combined Federal Campaign:** This program allows federal employees to donate funds to nonprofit or charity organizations of their choice. In this area, the United Way of Northern California facilitates the program. Applications are due in March 2006.

CMRCD seeks funding for restoration and community enhancement projects

By Laura Unrue

In the middle of winter it is hard to imagine that one day we will all return to a more productive outdoor schedule, possible during long days of summer. Cold and inclement weather, however, has not stopped the Central Modoc Resource Conservation District (CMRCD) from working hard to plan restoration projects for implementation in the summer and fall. Three potential restoration projects are being developed to help address landowner concerns with erosion and other management issues that threaten their productivity. A description of each project is provided below:

- **Mainstem of the Pit River near Canby, Calif.:**

This project will address erosion that is undermining the integrity of a diversion structure. This results in less efficient irrigation and also threatens to drain several acres of wetland habitat used by migratory waterfowl and other wildlife. CMRCD will address the erosion problem through bank stabilization techniques such as the installation of rock rip rap, willow planting and establishing other deep-rooted vegetation to minimize soil loss. The project will also enhance existing wetlands through the planting of vegetation utilized for waterfowl feed and the construction of islands, on which waterfowl can nest.

- **Lower Canyon Creek:**

This project will focus on re-vegetating channelized reaches of Canyon Creek and enhancing nearby wetlands to reduce sediment deposition into the stream. Native riparian plant species will be established to help with bank stabilization as well as supply overhanging vegetation to provide fish/wildlife habitat and shade for cooler water temperatures.

- **Mainstem of Pit River near Rattlesnake Butte:**

This project will entail wetlands enhancement to provide additional habitat value for migratory waterfowl and other wildlife species. Project efforts will also focus on addressing riverbank erosion, which threatens a nearby access road. This road is essential for hay produc-



This potential project is on the main stem of the Pit River near Canby and depicts the irrigation diversion structure threatened by erosion.

tion. CMRCD will work to stabilize the riverbanks through the use of rock and other bioengineering techniques. The ultimate goal is to ensure bank stabilization to maintain access road integrity so that agricultural production may continue with additional benefits of wildlife habitat enhancement.

In addition to restoration projects, CMRCD is also working on several projects to expand availability of certain services in the Alturas, Likely and Canby areas. A description of each service project is provided below:

- **Biodiesel**

CMRCD is working on making biodiesel available in Modoc County. The district is partnering with various agencies and organizations that operate vehicle fleets, in order to demonstrate the need for biodiesel availability in the local area. The district also hopes to provide biodiesel education and assist producers in obtaining incentive funding to grow oilseed crops for the production and use of biodiesel on their operations.

- **Native Plants Nursery**

CMRCD is looking into establishing a native plants nursery. The district hopes to one day have a commercial nursery facility to provide native plant materials for restoration efforts conducted by the United States Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and the CMRCD. CMRCD is also partnering with the River Center and Modoc High School to develop an educational component that addresses the propagation of native plants as well as the importance of native plant communities.

- **Recycling**

CMRCD is pursuing grant funding to assist with further coordination of recycling efforts in Modoc County. The district hopes to utilize and build upon existing recycling facilities and programs in the Alturas area to develop an integrated, region-wide system that offers multiple material recycling options for local residents.

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This potential project is also on the main stem of the Pit River near Rattlesnake Butte. It illustrates erosion and cutbanks threatening the access road.



This potential project would enhance wetlands on the main stem of the Pit River near Rattlesnake Butte.



Kate Hall, who recently graduated with a master's degree in ecology, joins the River Center.

Ecologist joins River Center to lead adult and higher education programs

By CMRCD Staff

The River Center and the Central Modoc RCD is pleased to introduce Kate Hall. She will work as the River Center watershed education director. As a part of her role with the River Center, she will be available to give talks for schools and community groups on stream and forest health, ecology and restoration. Hall will launch the River Center's higher and adult education program, but will also facilitate youth programs.

She is part of the planning group for a possible children's summer day camp offered by the River Center and other partners in the community. She is thrilled to join the River Center and describes the position as "a great fit".

Hall moved to Cedarville in May 2005 from Moscow Idaho, where she obtained her master's degree in ecology at the University of Idaho. Since moving to Modoc County, she has been active as a substitute teacher for the Surprise Valley Joint Unified School District, working with all grades. Kate said she's "excited to be working with the community" about her favorite subject: California streams.

River Center and Central Modoc RCD Calendar of Events

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Place</u>
February		
February 4th		PlacerGrown Conference, Lincoln, CA <i>River Center Director attending</i>
February 15th	9:00AM	River Center Annual Board Mtg., River Center
February 21st	3:00PM	RCD Board of Directors Mtg., USDA Service Center
February 23rd		River Center Teacher Open House, River Center
February 28th		River Center Programs Night, Surprise Valley
March		
Date TBA		River Center Business Plan Mtg., River Center
March 5th		5-Star Grant Application Due
March 21st	3:00PM	RCD Board of Directors Mtg., USDA Service Center
March 24th	10AM-2PM	NECWA Annual Mtg., Intermountain Fairgrounds McArthur, California

The Central Modoc RCD receives funding from Ducks Unlimited for projects

By CMRCD Staff

The Central Modoc RCD recently received financial assistance from Ducks Unlimited (DU) through their grant award from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. DU will provide Phase 2 and Pit River Land & Cattle) already partially funded by the, with Proposition 13 California State Water Resources Control Board funds. DU is also fully funding another restoration project on Department of Fish & Game land along Fitzhugh Creek. CMRCD staff will implement this restoration project.

The Likely Phase 2 project consists of almost two miles of stream-bank stabilization work along the South Fork Pit River, a few acres of wetland enhancement and construction of riparian fencing to protect brooding habitat for ducks and geese.

The Pit River Land & Cattle project also seeks to enhance up to 60 acres of wetlands and floodplain located one mile downstream of Alturas. Refurbishment of a diversion dam on this project will help facilitate the inundation of adjacent wetlands and provide better brooding habitat for waterfowl. The goals of the Fitzhugh Creek project are to stabilize eroding streambanks by using hand labor and local materials. The remoteness of this project will require the use of on-site materials (such as rocks, willows and juniper trees) for streambank stabilization features.



Pit River Land & Cattle project area, December 2005.



Likely Phase 2 project area, taken from John Flournoy's plane.

Please Note:

The Central Modoc RCD has changed the date of its Tree Sale. Instead of holding the sale in the spring, the sale will occur in September 2006.

Thank you!
CMRCD Staff

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