

**Interstate 5 Improvement Project Update**

**Background:** At the July Environmental Oversight Committee meeting, unforeseen complications with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Streambed Alteration Agreement (1602) permit for the Interstate 5 (I-5) Widening Project were discussed. These complications were a result of the implementation of SB 857 (Chapter 589, Statutes of 2005) which requires steelhead passage to be assessed for federally funded transportation projects. The CDFW, the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA), and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) staff were able to develop multiple options that would satisfy the requirements of SB 857 while minimizing schedule delays and cost increases to the I-5 Widening Project. On September 18, 2019, the I-5 Widening Project 1602 permit was issued by CDFW. Below is a summary of the outcome for the project 1602 conditions related to SB 857.

**Streambed Alteration Agreement (1602 Permit) Additional Measures**

Future On-site Steelhead Barrier Remediation

The 1602 permit includes a commitment from Caltrans (as the Permittee) “to not prevent future remediation of the steelhead barrier involved (I-5 Aliso Creek structure) with this project so that it passes steelhead at all life stages.”

Off-site Measures to Protect Fish Resources

In addition, OCTA will conduct two off-site measures to protect fish resources. The first offsite measure will be for OCTA to fund the removal of 17 dams within Trabuco and Holy Jim creeks. OCTA previously allocated funding to the United States Forest Service (USFS) for the removal of 14 dams within San Juan Creek. This project was approved by the OCTA Board of Directors in February 2017, and is one of 12 Environmental Mitigation Program restoration projects. The dam removal is nearly complete and approximately \$70,000 under the budgeted amount of \$185,000. The remaining funds (\$70,000) will be utilized to remove an additional 17 dams within Trabuco and Holy Jim creeks. In total, OCTA will have funded the removal of 31 dams in this very successful ecosystem (including fish passage) restoration project. See the enclosure for more information pertaining to the USFS dam removal efforts. Staff is working with the USFS to administratively amend the contract agreement scope of work to include the removal of these additional 17 dams without an increase to the budget.

The second 1602 off-site measure is to fund a one-time grant (\$100,000) to a local non-profit entity, Laguna Canyon Foundation (LCF), to support steelhead restoration within the Aliso Creek watershed. OCTA will provide a one-time grant to the Laguna Canyon Foundation (LCF) for an additional project to improve steelhead passage and/or habitat in the Aliso Creek watershed. This funding will be accompanied by an agreement with LCF that includes a requirement for written concurrence from CDFW before LCF proceeds with a project.

**Discussion:** Although these additional project measures were not anticipated, staff believes that the outcome of this collaboration was successful. OCTA, Caltrans, and CDFW will continue to monitor upcoming Measure M freeway projects to ensure that no delays occur in regard to SB 857.



## *Reporting Our Progress in Caring for the Land and Serving People*

### **Trabuco District Dam Removal Project Fisheries FY2018 Accomplishments Cleveland National Forest, Trabuco Ranger District**

**State:** California

**Project Costs:** \$680,000 to date  
Approx. \$1,000,000 total project

**Congressional District:** California's 45<sup>th</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> Congressional Districts

**External Partners:**

US Fish and Wildlife Service  
California Department of Fish and Wildlife  
California Department of Transportation  
Orange County Parks  
Orange County Transportation Authority  
US Marine Corps  
Federal Highways Administration

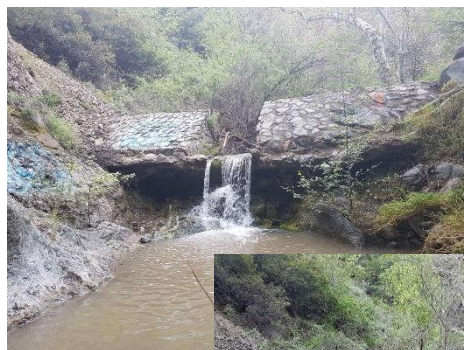
**Accomplishments:**

- 44 dams removed

**Forest Service Contribution:** \$180,000 to date

**Partner Contribution:** \$500,000 to date

This project is part of a nation-wide initiative to restore stream function and remove barriers to fish and aquatic organism passage. 81 total manmade dams occurring in several stream segments totaling approximately 4.75 stream miles are targeted for removal. These dams are partial or complete barriers to native fish and other aquatic organisms, especially during periods of low flow. Currently 44 of these dams have been removed using multiple methods of removal; excavator, explosives, and pneumatic devices. The remainder of these dams are planned for removal within the next couple years.



Before



Directly after (Explosives)



Before



After (Excavator)

All of the project areas are within streams or watersheds where the Recovery Plan for Southern Steelhead has identified removal of dams as a priority to promote species recovery.

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