

The Eel River Delta Restoration

August 2014

Overview

The Eel River was once one of the largest salmon producing rivers in California.

Recovery of Eel River salmonid stocks can have a significant influence on the regional fishing economy of California's north coast.

Approximately 60% of the estuary has been lost due to the construction of levees and dikes, and only 10% of the salt marsh habitats remain.

Inhabited by humans for thousands of years, the Eel River estuary is one of the most important and sensitive estuaries on the West Coast, with 8,700 acres of tidal flats, both perennial and seasonal wetlands, and about 75 miles of river channels and tidal sloughs. The Eel River Delta provides habitat for many aquatic and terrestrial species, and supports flourishing agricultural communities. Long before the "farm to table" movement, the Eel River Delta, and Ferndale in particular, supplied California with some of the world's finest dairy products. The Eel Delta still produces high quality dairy and beef products, while also hosting one of California's major salmon and steelhead runs. However, flooding, sea level rise and other issues challenge the viability of some agricultural operations and infrastructure such as roads and waste treatment facilities. Balancing ecosystem restoration with the promotion of high quality agriculture and infrastructure in the coastal zone is challenging, but several key projects illustrate the importance and success of this approach.

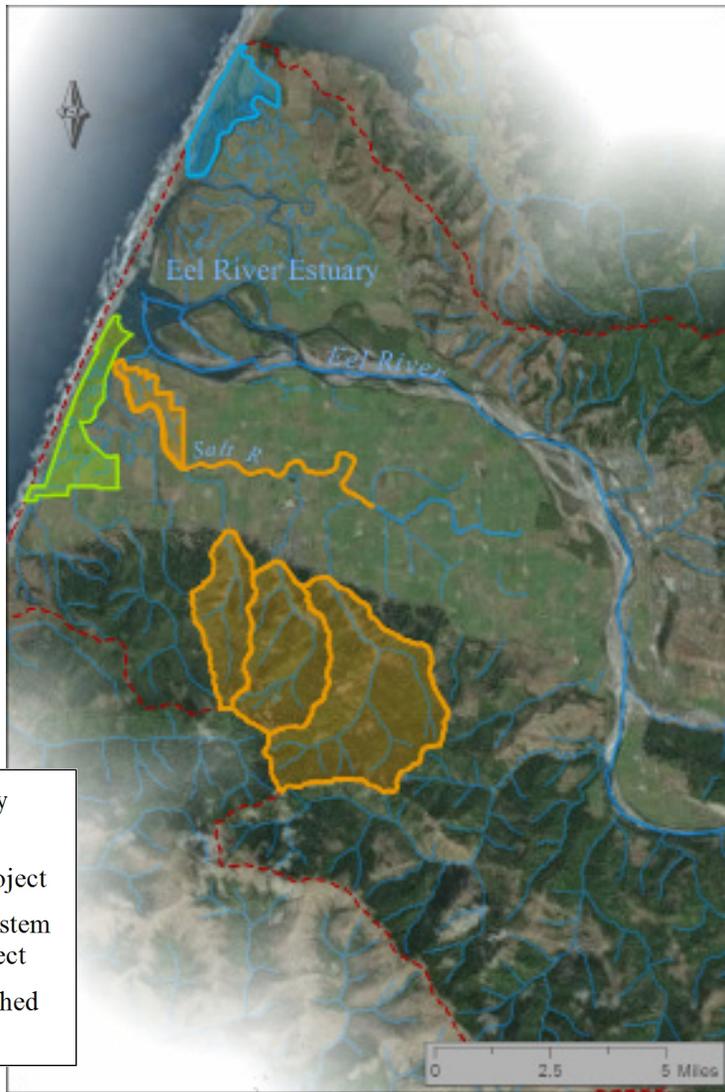


Canada Geese. Photo: Dave Erickson

Although nearly 60% of the estuary has been lost due to the construction of levees and dikes, 10% of salt marsh habitats remain today. Restoring the estuary is a key component towards recovery of salmon, but also other sensitive and listed species. Ecosystem restoration in the Eel Delta also affords unprecedented opportunities to improve drainage and infrastructure for the agricultural communities around the Delta. The Salt River Ecosystem Restoration Project and the Eel River Estuary Preserve Project, two of many projects within the Eel River Delta, seek to restore ecological integrity to reclaimed areas, while also enhancing agricultural



Photo: Zane Ruddy



-  Eel River Estuary Preserve
-  Ocean Ranch Project
-  Salt River Ecosystem Restoration Project
-  Eel River Watershed Boundary

productivity and prosperity in the region by providing land management options for landowners that support enhanced business security, stability and ecological integrity. Hydrologically intact and functional channels tend to improve drainage for farmers. It also ensures a complex and diverse estuary with suitable cover of deep channels and sloughs, connected to productive brackish wetlands that will help to increase size and fitness of juvenile salmon prior to entering the ocean, and ultimately improve overall marine survival for adults.

Numerous landowners as well as local, state, and federal agencies, industry representatives, and nonprofit organizations are working together to ensure the Eel River Delta is a working landscape that

can support sustainable agriculture and other land management practices while providing healthy fish and wildlife habitats. The Eel Delta provides an historic opportunity to enhance coastal agricultural productivity while ensuring the long-term, recovery of Eel River salmon stocks capable of supporting the regional fishing economy of California's north coast.

