

STREAM INVENTORY REPORT

North Branch North Fork Elk River

INTRODUCTION

A stream inventory was conducted from July 3 to August 8, 1990 on North Branch North Fork Elk River. The survey began at the confluence with North Fork Elk River and extended upstream 0.7 miles.

The North Branch North Fork Elk River inventory was conducted in two parts: habitat inventory and biological inventory. The objective of the habitat inventory was to document the habitat available to anadromous salmonids in North Branch North Fork Elk River. The objective of the biological inventory was to document the presence and distribution of juvenile salmonid species.

The objective of this report is to document the current habitat conditions and recommend options for the potential enhancement of habitat for coho salmon and steelhead trout. Recommendations for habitat improvement activities are based upon target habitat values suitable for salmonids in California's north coast streams.

WATERSHED OVERVIEW

North Branch North Fork Elk River is a tributary to North Fork Elk River, a tributary to Elk River, a tributary to Humboldt Bay, which drains to the Pacific Ocean. It is located in Humboldt County, California (Map 1). North Branch North Fork Elk River's legal description at the confluence with North Fork Elk River is T04N R01E S35. Its location is 40.6868 degrees north latitude and 124.0331 degrees west longitude, LLID number 1240288406876. North Branch North Fork Elk River is a second order stream and has approximately 1.9 miles of blue line stream according to the USGS McWhinney Creek 7.5 minute quadrangle. North Branch North Fork Elk River drains a watershed of approximately 4.1 square miles. Elevations range from about 415 feet at the mouth of the creek to 1,500 feet in the headwater areas. Redwood forest dominates the watershed. The watershed is entirely privately owned and is managed for timber production. Vehicle access exists via Wrigley Road or Road 10 via Yager Camp.

METHODS

The habitat inventory conducted in North Branch North Fork Elk River follows the methodology presented in the *California Salmonid Stream Habitat Restoration Manual* (Flosi et al, 1998). California Conservation Corps (CCC) personnel that conducted the inventory were trained in standardized habitat inventory methods by the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG). This inventory was conducted by a two-person team.

North Branch North Fork Elk River

SAMPLING STRATEGY

The inventory uses a method that samples approximately 10% of the habitat units within the survey reach. All habitat units included in the survey are classified according to habitat type and their lengths are measured. All pool units are measured for maximum depth, depth of pool tail crest (measured in the thalweg), dominant substrate composing the pool tail crest, and embeddedness. Habitat unit types encountered for the first time are measured for all the parameters and characteristics on the field form. Additionally, from the ten habitat units on each field form page, one is randomly selected for complete measurement.

HABITAT INVENTORY COMPONENTS

A standardized habitat inventory form has been developed for use in California stream surveys and can be found in the *California Salmonid Stream Habitat Restoration Manual*. This form was used in North Branch North Fork Elk River to record measurements and observations. There are eleven components to the inventory form.

1. Flow:

Flow is measured in cubic feet per second (cfs) near the bottom of the stream survey reach using a Marsh-McBirney Model 2000 flow meter.

2. Channel Type:

Channel typing is conducted according to the classification system developed and revised by David Rosgen (1994). This methodology is described in the *California Salmonid Stream Habitat Restoration Manual*. Channel typing is conducted simultaneously with habitat typing and follows a standard form to record measurements and observations. There are five measured parameters used to determine channel type: 1) water slope gradient, 2) entrenchment, 3) width/depth ratio, 4) substrate composition, and 5) sinuosity. Channel characteristics are measured using a clinometer, hand level, hip chain, tape measure, and a stadia rod.

3. Temperatures:

Both water and air temperatures are measured and recorded at every tenth habitat unit. The time of the measurement is also recorded. Both temperatures are taken in degrees Fahrenheit at the middle of the habitat unit and within one foot of the water surface.

4. Habitat Type:

Habitat typing uses the 24 habitat classification types defined by McCain and others (1990). Habitat units are numbered sequentially and assigned a type identification number selected from a standard list of 24 habitat types. Dewatered units are labeled "dry". North Branch North Fork Elk River habitat typing used standard basin level measurement criteria. These parameters require that the minimum length of a described habitat unit must be equal to or greater than the stream's mean wetted width. All measurements are in feet to the nearest tenth. Habitat

North Branch North Fork Elk River

characteristics are measured using a clinometer, hip chain, and stadia rod.

5. Embeddedness:

The depth of embeddedness of the cobbles in pool tail-out areas is measured by the percent of the cobble that is surrounded or buried by fine sediment. In North Branch North Fork Elk River, embeddedness was ocularly estimated. The values were recorded using the following ranges: 0 - 25% (value 1), 26 - 50% (value 2), 51 - 75% (value 3) and 76 - 100% (value 4). Additionally, a value of 5 was assigned to tail-outs deemed not suitable for spawning due to inappropriate substrate like bedrock, log sills, boulders or other considerations.

6. Shelter Rating:

Instream shelter is composed of those elements within a stream channel that provide juvenile salmonids protection from predation, reduce water velocities so fish can rest and conserve energy, and allow separation of territorial units to reduce density related competition for prey. The shelter rating is calculated for each fully-described habitat unit by multiplying shelter value and percent cover. Using an overhead view, a quantitative estimate of the percentage of the habitat unit covered is made. All cover is then classified according to a list of nine cover types. In North Branch North Fork Elk River, a standard qualitative shelter value of 0 (none), 1 (low), 2 (medium), or 3 (high) was assigned according to the complexity of the cover. Thus, shelter ratings can range from 0-300 and are expressed as mean values by habitat types within a stream.

7. Substrate Composition:

Substrate composition ranges from silt/clay sized particles to boulders and bedrock elements. In all fully-described habitat units, dominant and sub-dominant substrate elements were ocularly estimated using a list of seven size classes and recorded as a one and two, respectively. In addition, the dominant substrate composing the pool tail-outs is recorded for each pool.

8. Canopy:

Stream canopy density was estimated using modified handheld spherical densimeters as described in the *California Salmonid Stream Habitat Restoration Manual*. Canopy density relates to the amount of stream shaded from the sun. In North Branch North Fork Elk River, an estimate of the percentage of the habitat unit covered by canopy was made from the center of approximately every third unit in addition to every fully-described unit, giving an approximate 30% sub-sample. In addition, the area of canopy was estimated ocularly into percentages of coniferous or hardwood trees.

9. Bank Composition and Vegetation:

Bank composition elements range from bedrock to bare soil. However, the stream banks are usually covered with grass, brush, or trees. These factors influence the ability of stream banks to withstand winter flows. In North Branch North Fork Elk River, the dominant composition type and the dominant vegetation type of both the right and left banks for each fully-described unit were selected from the habitat inventory form. Additionally, the percent of each bank covered

North Branch North Fork Elk River

by vegetation (including downed trees, logs, and rootwads) was estimated and recorded.

10. Large Woody Debris Count:

Large woody debris (LWD) is an important component of fish habitat and an element in channel forming processes. In each habitat unit all pieces of LWD partially or entirely below the elevation of bankfull discharge are counted and recorded. The minimum size to be considered is twelve inches in diameter and six feet in length. The LWD count is presented by reach and is expressed as an average per 100 feet.

11. Average Bankfull Width:

Bankfull width can vary greatly in the course of a channel type stream reach. This is especially true in very long reaches. Bankfull width can be a factor in habitat components like canopy density, water temperature, and pool depths. Frequent measurements taken at riffle crests (velocity crossovers) are needed to accurately describe reach widths. At the first appropriate velocity crossover that occurs after the beginning of a new stream survey page (ten habitat units), bankfull width is measured and recorded in the appropriate header block of the page. These widths are presented as an average for the channel type reach.

BIOLOGICAL INVENTORY

Biological sampling during the stream inventory is used to determine fish species and their distribution in the stream. Fish presence was observed from the stream banks in Sample Creek. In addition, two sites were electrofished using a Smith-Root Model 12 electrofisher. These sampling techniques are discussed in the *California Salmonid Stream Habitat Restoration Manual*.

HABITAT INVENTORY RESULTS

The habitat inventory of July 3 to August 8, 1990 was conducted by Gregg Moody, Steve Holzerland, and Michele Long (CCC). The total length of the stream surveyed was 3,598 feet with an additional 154 feet of side channel.

Stream flow was not measured on North Branch North Fork Elk River.

North Branch North Fork Elk River is a C2 channel type for 1,527 feet surveyed (Reach 1) and a B2 channel type for 2,071 feet surveyed (Reach 2). C2 channels are meandering point-bar, riffle/pool, alluvial channels with broad well defined floodplain on low gradients and boulder-dominant substrates. B2 channels are moderately entrenched, moderate gradient, riffle dominated channel with infrequently spaced pools, very stable plan and profile, stable banks and boulder-dominant substrates.

Water temperatures taken during the survey period ranged from 52 to 56 degrees Fahrenheit. Air temperatures ranged from 60 to 76 degrees Fahrenheit.

North Branch North Fork Elk River

Table 1 summarizes the Level II riffle, flatwater, and pool habitat types. Based on frequency of occurrence there were 51% pool units, 28% riffle units, and 21% flatwater units. Based on total length of Level II habitat types there were 54% pool units, 26% riffle units, and 20% flatwater units.

Sixteen Level IV habitat types were identified. The most frequent habitat types by percent occurrence were low gradient riffle units, 28%; mid-channel pool units, 16%; and log formed lateral scour pools, 13%.

A total of 82 pools were identified. Scour pools were the most frequently encountered at 57%, and comprised 59% of the total length of all pools.

Table 4 is a summary of maximum residual pool depths by pool habitat types. Pool quality for salmonids increases with depth. 66 of the 82 pools had a maximum depth of less than three feet. Three of the pools had a maximum depth of over four feet.

The depth of cobble embeddedness was estimated at pool tail-outs. Of the 82 pool tail-outs measured, 14 had an embeddedness value of 1 (17%), 13 had a value of 2 (16%), and 55 had a value of 3 (67%). On this scale, a value of 1 indicates the best spawning conditions and a value of 4 the worst. Additionally, a value of 5 was assigned to tail-outs deemed not suitable for spawning due to inappropriate substrate such as bedrock, log sills, boulders, or other considerations.

A shelter rating was calculated for each habitat unit and expressed as a mean value for each habitat type within the survey using a scale of 0-300. Of the pool types, the scour pools had the highest mean shelter rating at 109. Main channel pools had a shelter rating of 88. Backwater pools had a shelter rating of 81.

Small woody debris and large woody debris are the dominant cover types in North Branch North Fork Elk River.

Gravel was the dominant substrate in 60% of the units surveyed. Small cobble was the next most dominant substrate; it occurred in 16% of the units surveyed.

The mean percent canopy density for the surveyed length of North Branch North Fork Elk River was 82%.

For the stream reach surveyed, the mean percent right bank vegetated was 73%. The mean percent left bank vegetated was 72%. The dominant elements composing the structure of the stream banks consisted of deciduous trees, 53%; grass, 19%; coniferous trees, 11%; bedrock, 7%; bare soil, 6%; and brush, 4%.

North Branch North Fork Elk River

BIOLOGICAL INVENTORY RESULTS

Survey teams conducted an electrofishing survey at two sites for species composition and distribution in North Branch North Fork Elk River on August 9, 1990. The sites were sampled by Steve Holzerland and Michele Long (CCC).

The first unit sampled was a mid-channel pool approximately 300 feet from the confluence with the North Fork Elk River. The site yielded five coho salmon ranging from 51 millimeters to 75 millimeters, and seven steelhead/rainbow trout ranging from 40 millimeters to 100 millimeters.

The second unit sampled was a plunge pool approximately 1495 feet from the confluence of the North Fork Elk River. The reach site yielded 13 steelhead/rainbow trout ranging from 40 millimeters to 142 millimeters.

DISCUSSION

North Branch North Fork Elk River is a C2 channel type. The suitability of C2 channel types for fish habitat improvement structures is as follows: C2 channel types are good for plunge weirs, single and opposing wing-deflectors, channel constrictors, and log cover.

The water temperatures recorded on the survey days July 3 to August 8, 1990 ranged from 52 to 56 degrees Fahrenheit. Air temperatures ranged from 60 to 76 degrees Fahrenheit. This is a good water temperature range for salmonids. To make any further conclusions, temperatures need to be monitored throughout the warm summer months, and more extensive biological sampling needs to be conducted.

Flatwater habitat types comprised 20% of the total length of this survey, riffles 26%, and pools 54%. 66 of the 82 had a maximum depth of less than three feet. Three of the pools had a maximum depth of over four feet. In general, pool enhancement projects are considered when primary pools comprise less than 40% of the length of total stream habitat. In first and second order streams, a primary pool is defined to have a maximum residual depth of at least two feet, occupy at least half the width of the low flow channel, and be as long as the low flow channel width. Installing structures that will increase or deepen pool habitat is recommended for locations where their installation will not be threatened by high stream energy, or where their installation will not conflict with the modification of the numerous log debris accumulations (LDA's) in the stream.

Twenty-seven of the 82 pool tail-outs measured had embeddedness ratings of 1 or 2. Fifty-five of the pool tail-outs had embeddedness ratings of 3 or 4. None of the pool tail-outs had a rating of 5, which is considered not suitable for spawning. Cobble embeddedness measured to be 25% or less, a rating of 1, is considered to indicate good quality spawning substrate for salmon and steelhead. Sediment sources in North Branch North Fork Elk River should be mapped and rated according to their potential sediment yields, and control measures should be taken.

The mean shelter rating for scour pools is 109. The mean shelter rating from main channel pools is 88. The mean shelter rating for backwater pools is 81. A pool shelter rating of approximately

North Branch North Fork Elk River

100 is desirable. The amount of cover that now exists is being provided primarily by small woody debris and large woody in North Branch North Fork Elk River. Log and root wad cover structures in the pool and flatwater habitats would enhance both summer and winter salmonid habitat. Log cover structures provide rearing fry with protection from predation, rest from water velocity, and also divide territorial units to reduce density related competition.

The mean percent canopy density for the stream was 82%. In general, revegetation projects are considered when canopy density is less than 80%.

The percentage of right and left bank covered with vegetation was and 73% and 72%, respectively. In areas of stream bank erosion or where bank vegetation is sparse, planting endemic species of coniferous and hardwood trees, in conjunction with bank stabilization, is recommended.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) The North Branch of the North Fork Elk River should be managed as an anadromous, natural production stream.
- 2) The debris accumulations appear to be barriers to coho, at least in some years. These debris accumulations should be modified by removing the minimum amount of wood necessary to provide fish passage.
- 3) Stabilize bank erosion sites.

COMMENTS AND LANDMARKS

The following landmarks and possible problem sites were noted. All distances are approximate and taken from the beginning of the survey reach.

Position Comments:
(ft):

466'	Log debris accumulation (LDA) at Humboldt crossing.
1002'	LDA above bridge measures 20' long x 25' wide.
1861'	LDA measures 25' long x 25' wide x 10' high.
2074'	LDA measures 20' long x 30' wide x 7' high.
2263'	LDA measures 5' long x 25' wide x 6' high. It is creating an erosion site on the right bank measuring 20' long x 30' high.
2308'	LDA measures 15' long x 10' wide x 3' high.

North Branch North Fork Elk River

- 2416' LDA measures 5' long x 15' wide x 5' high.
- 2514' LDA measures 35' long x 25' wide x 5' high. It is retaining gravel and cobble.
- 2700' Left bank erosion site measures 50' long x 40' high.
- 2743' LDA measures 45' long x 60' wide x 5' high. It is retaining gravel.
- 3238' Right bank erosion site measures 20' long x 10' high.

REFERENCES

Flosi, G., Downie, S., Hopelain, J., Bird, M., Coey, R., and Collins, B. 1998. *California Salmonid Stream Habitat Restoration Manual*, 3rd edition. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California.

North Branch North Fork Elk River

LEVEL III and LEVEL IV HABITAT TYPES

RIFFLE

Low Gradient Riffle	(LGR)	[1.1]	{ 1 }
High Gradient Riffle	(HGR)	[1.2]	{ 2 }

CASCADE

Cascade	(CAS)	[2.1]	{ 3 }
Bedrock Sheet	(BRS)	[2.2]	{24}

FLATWATER

Pocket Water	(POW)	[3.1]	{21}
Glide	(GLD)	[3.2]	{14}
Run	(RUN)	[3.3]	{15}
Step Run	(SRN)	[3.4]	{16}
Edgewater	(EDW)	[3.5]	{18}

MAIN CHANNEL POOLS

Trench Pool	(TRP)	[4.1]	{ 8 }
Mid-Channel Pool	(MCP)	[4.2]	{17}
Channel Confluence Pool	(CCP)	[4.3]	{19}
Step Pool	(STP)	[4.4]	{23}

SCOUR POOLS

Corner Pool	(CRP)	[5.1]	{22}
Lateral Scour Pool - Log Enhanced	(LSL)	[5.2]	{10}
Lateral Scour Pool - Root Wad Enhanced	(LSR)	[5.3]	{11}
Lateral Scour Pool - Bedrock Formed	(LSBk)	[5.4]	{12}
Lateral Scour Pool - Boulder Formed	(LSBo)	[5.5]	{20}
Plunge Pool	(PLP)	[5.6]	{ 9 }

BACKWATER POOLS

Secondary Channel Pool	(SCP)	[6.1]	{ 4 }
Backwater Pool - Boulder Formed	(BPB)	[6.2]	{ 5 }
Backwater Pool - Root Wad Formed	(BPR)	[6.3]	{ 6 }
Backwater Pool - Log Formed	(BPL)	[6.4]	{ 7 }
Dammed Pool	(DPL)	[6.5]	{13}

ADDITIONAL UNIT DESIGNATIONS

Dry	(DRY)	[7.0]	
Culvert	(CUL)	[8.0]	
Not Surveyed	(NS)	[9.0]	
Not Surveyed due to a marsh	(MAR)	[9.1]	