

**Chi Council for the Clear Lake Hitch**  
**Minutes of October 24, 2007 meeting at Lake County Agricultural Center**

Submitted by Victoria Brandon, Chi Council secretary

Present: Tom Smythe, Linda Juntunen, Victoria Brandon, Peter Windrem, Pam Francis, Bill Rett, Judy Barnes, Lee Morgan

Minutes of September 26 meeting approved as presented.

Barrier removal projects were the first (and primary) subject of discussion. Francis and Smythe began by describing recently completed work modifying the Clover Creek diversion structure in a joint effort between the county Department of Public Works and Robinson Rancheria, which supplied funding through a Tribal Wildlife Grant. The county is very pleased with the results, which will allow free passage to migrating hitch through a notch that has been cut in the middle of the concrete barrier. They explained that the weir work was just a small part of a much larger project conducted by the State Department of Water Resources (not by the county) in order to maintain and improve flood control structures protecting the town of Upper Lake. The diversion channel itself is an artificial waterway that was created to for the express purpose of diverting high water from Clover to Middle Creek, not a natural stream; no maintenance had taken place for at least 10 years, and it had become choked with vegetation and gravel which were impeding the free flow of water and putting the community in danger. The vegetation has now been removed (by the State), the gravel will be taken out next summer, and the banks will be revegetated in order to restore their habitat value: all this work is required by the Army Corps of Engineers as a condition of levee certification. Francis said that when the tribe came to inspect the weir work (that they were funding) they were upset by the extensive vegetation removal on the diversion channel. Juntunen: so there were two separate projects and the county is taking heat from the tribe on work that the state did? Francis: it's "a huge misunderstanding".

Windrem said that natural streams are in a different category from artificial ditches even if restricted by levees: are there plans for a similar drastic vegetation clearance on the main channels of creeks such as Middle and Kelsey? Smythe: no, vegetation in these areas isn't affecting the flow much, there will be some brush removal but nothing drastic. Francis: vegetation removal is pertinent to artificial levees and flood control systems regulated by the Army Corps, not to natural streams.

Windrem: any hard surface across a creek (ie those used to stabilize bridge abutments) seems to create a downcut on the downstream side that turns into a migration barrier.

We need to design a different kind of system to compensate for this effect, since every one of these concrete sills is a major obstruction and three absolutely impassible. It's time to deal with barrier structures much more aggressively. Rett: the weir on Schindler Creek -- a series of very wide shallow steps -- looks like the hitch could navigate it easily, but there are no fish in the creek so can't be sure. Windrem: Middle Creek is perfect for scientific study and restoration. Smythe: once the weirs there fill in with gravel they should work fine since hitch don't seem to have trouble navigating similar structures on Adobe Creek. Windrem: the worst problem is right at Rancheria bridge.

Windrem asks for suggestions on dealing with Decker Bridge. Smythe: it was originally built as a flashboard dam for irrigation diversion. The county could remove the bridge but would not be legally entitled to pay for replacement, which would be very costly since a new bridge would have to be *much* longer than the current structure and also solid enough to carry heavy trucks hauling pears. Rock weirs could aggravate flooding problems, gravel removal wouldn't last, and ripping everything out would leave unstable steep banks and potential for serious erosion. One (cheaper) solution might be to take out the bridge and provide alternative access to the pear orchard by way of a new road. Windrem: allowing this obstruction to persist "will not be tolerated".

Francis: is there scientific evidence that migration barriers are the most significant element of hitch population decline? Windrem: there may be other elements but it's obvious that impediments to spawning are a crucial problem, and the one we need to address first.

Smythe: the only readily available fisheries restoration money is reserved for salmonids. Morgan: tribes have access to special (and very large) funding sources, and could easily tap into enough money to (for example) fund a new Rancheria Rd bridge that didn't impede fish passage. General agreement that tribal collaboration is crucial to our efforts.

The Council authorized Windrem to write a letter of congratulations to Department of Public Works head Gerry Shaul on the new Merritt Rd bridge.

The Chi Council 2007 Volunteer of the Year was chosen, and all present pledged to secrecy. Come to the annual Watershed Year in Review on January 9 to find out his or her identity.

Next meeting: 3:30PM on November 28, at the Ag Center.