

Chi Council for the Clear Lake Hitch
Minutes of February 24, 2010 meeting at the Lake County Ag Center

Submitted by Victoria Brandon, Chi Council secretary

Present: Victoria Brandon, Keith Petterson, Tom Smythe, April Hargis, Peter Windrem , Oscar Dominguez, Mike & Phyllis Stevenson, Kylie Hill, Hannah Wascom. Linda Juntunen came in towards the end of the meeting.

The minutes from the January 27 meeting were approved as presented.

A copy of the revised MOU was passed around and several of the volunteers present signed as individuals. Hargis said that the USFS staffer in charge of grants and agreements has been unavailable, but that she hopes that the agency will sign on soon.

2010 observations to date. A small (100+) school was seen in Adobe Creek at Soda Bay Road for a few days starting on February 16, and a few scattered fish have been observed in the lower reaches of Kelsey Creek, but the main spawning run doesn't seem to have begun yet, and with rainy weather anticipated it might be a while before it gets started. Several observers have reported suckers traveling with the hitch, and pike minnow have also been sighted. Brandon reported a single report of a few hitch just below the Highlands Springs dam, and also a hearsay observation from Scotts Creek.

Windrem passed around a mailer that he is about to send to volunteers from previous years, containing a letter and observation report form. Discussion of monitoring protocol followed. Mike Stevenson: polaroid glasses make it much easier to see fish, and it also helps to get up as high as possible. Sightings are easier when the sun is high and the water clear.

Dominguez: Chuck Mansell at Upper Lake High School wants to get biology students involved in a Forbes Creek restoration project. Windrem: they should start by taking an inventory of barriers and other impediments such as concrete streambeds and culverts. Mike Stevenson: there's an open channel from Main St to Forbes St. but with a concrete bottom which makes it unsuitable for spawning; in the past he has seen large schools of hitch at the Main St bridge and in the little creek that enters Forbes at at Bevins, but not in recent years. Smythe: they used to spawn in Lyons Creek near Juvenile Hall, and penetrated a couple of hundred feet of box culvert in order to do so. Peter: now they can't get up that far on Lyons because a dropoff on the downstream side of Lakeshore -- the kind of obstacle we're seeing on all creeks and that prevents hitch passage because they are such poor jumpers. Petterson says they might be stronger jumpers than people think, and that he has seen them jump an 18-inch drop off on Thompson creek where it enters Manning. We want to encourage student involvement, but the Forbes modification project will take time. After doing an inventory, the next step will be figuring out what it's possible to modify, and working closely with DFG on design and permitting. In the meantime, students should be encouraged to work as volunteer observers on Clover Creek near the high school.

Smythe mentioned the work done last year to modify the fish ladder at the detention dam on Kelsey Creek. When the run begins we'll find out if the changes have reduced flow velocity and provided an alternative route. The dam is still closed pending the beginning of the main spawning migration: a sighting of 100 hitch below the dam is the trigger for opening the structure.

Hargis reported that a kayaker had encountered a control structure on Rodman Slough just downstream of Highway 20. Smythe doesn't know anything about it. He said a series of four drop structures were installed in Kelsey creek upstream from the detention dam in approximately 1993, followed by several years when no hitch were seen in the creek. Perhaps these structures interfered with migration, or perhaps the hitch ran in February when nobody was looking. Three large trees have fallen into the creek just below Quercus bridge, but rather than being impediments they may actually improve passage by helping trap gravel between the big boulders in this area.

Windrem: need people to observe possible spawning along the lakeshore, and mentioned Quercus beach as a prime target. Any gravelly stretch of shoreline could be suitable -- not necessarily at the outlet of a creek. Bass fisherman have reported reported huge schools of hitch in the lake near Lucerne; Stevenson saw a school in that area measured in acres.

2010 field trip. We'll try to schedule this on the first Saturday after the run begins, with March 13 or 20 being likely dates. Windrem: when hitch are running you can smell them.

2011 Hitch Festival. Brandon will get the application form for the US Fish & Wildlife grant email that David Wooten mentioned at the February meeting, and Windrem will speak to Bernie Butcher about it. Both Denise Rushing and Melissa Fulton have been told that this festival is being contemplated.

Other subjects: Juntunen mentions that Harry Lyons wants to get his Yuba College students involved. Brandon: one of them has already submitted a set of observation reports. General query: are the tribes going to read the tags from last year? Do they have the funding? Windrem: Greg Giusti & Lisa tohompson are preparing a peer reviewed scientific paper based on our observations DFG is still in the process of reviewing Species of Special Concern.

Next meeting: 3:30PM on Wednesday March 24, at the Ag Center