

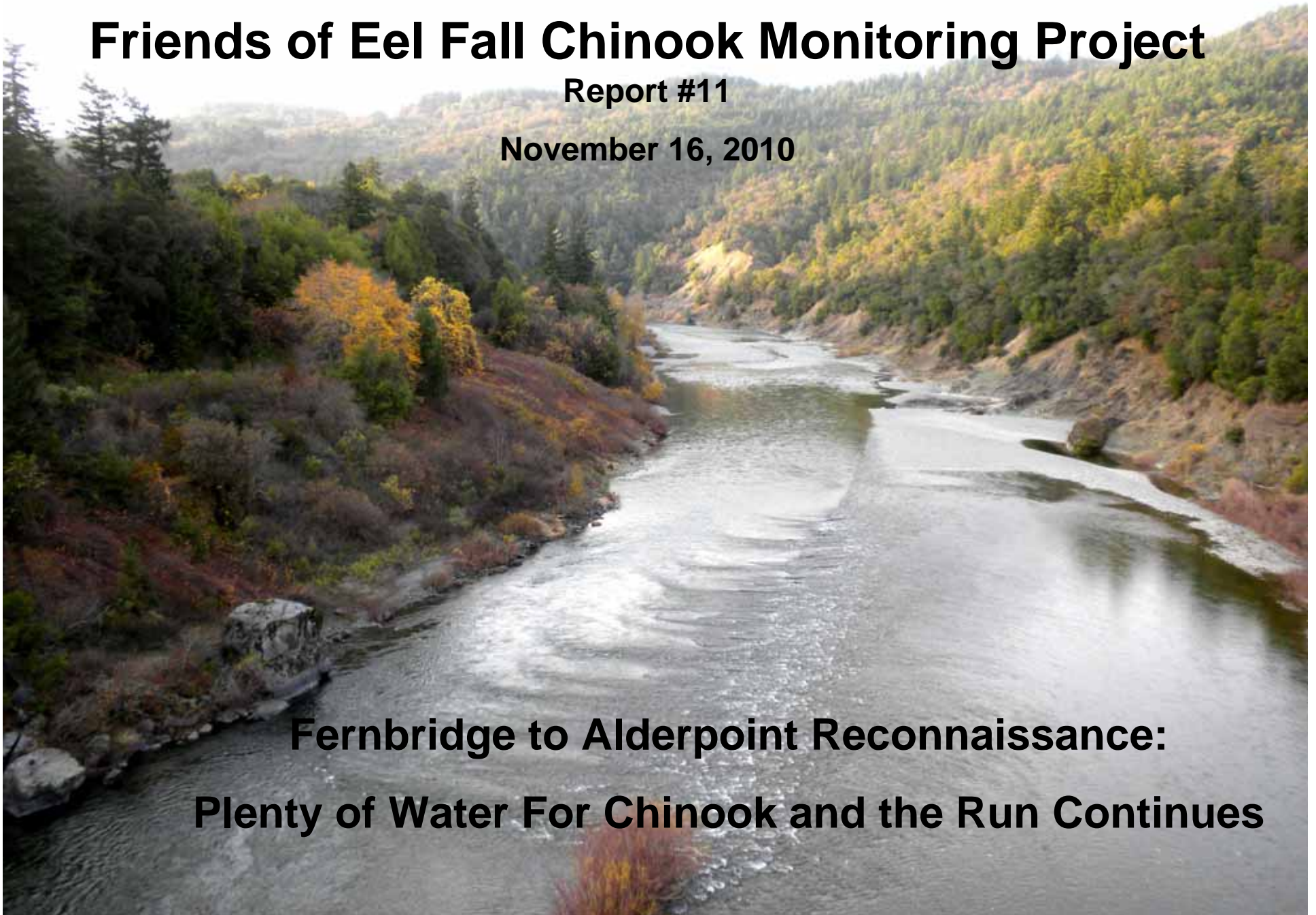
Friends of Eel Fall Chinook Monitoring Project

Report #11

November 16, 2010

Fernbridge to Alderpoint Reconnaissance:

Plenty of Water For Chinook and the Run Continues



Reason for the Trip and Itinerary

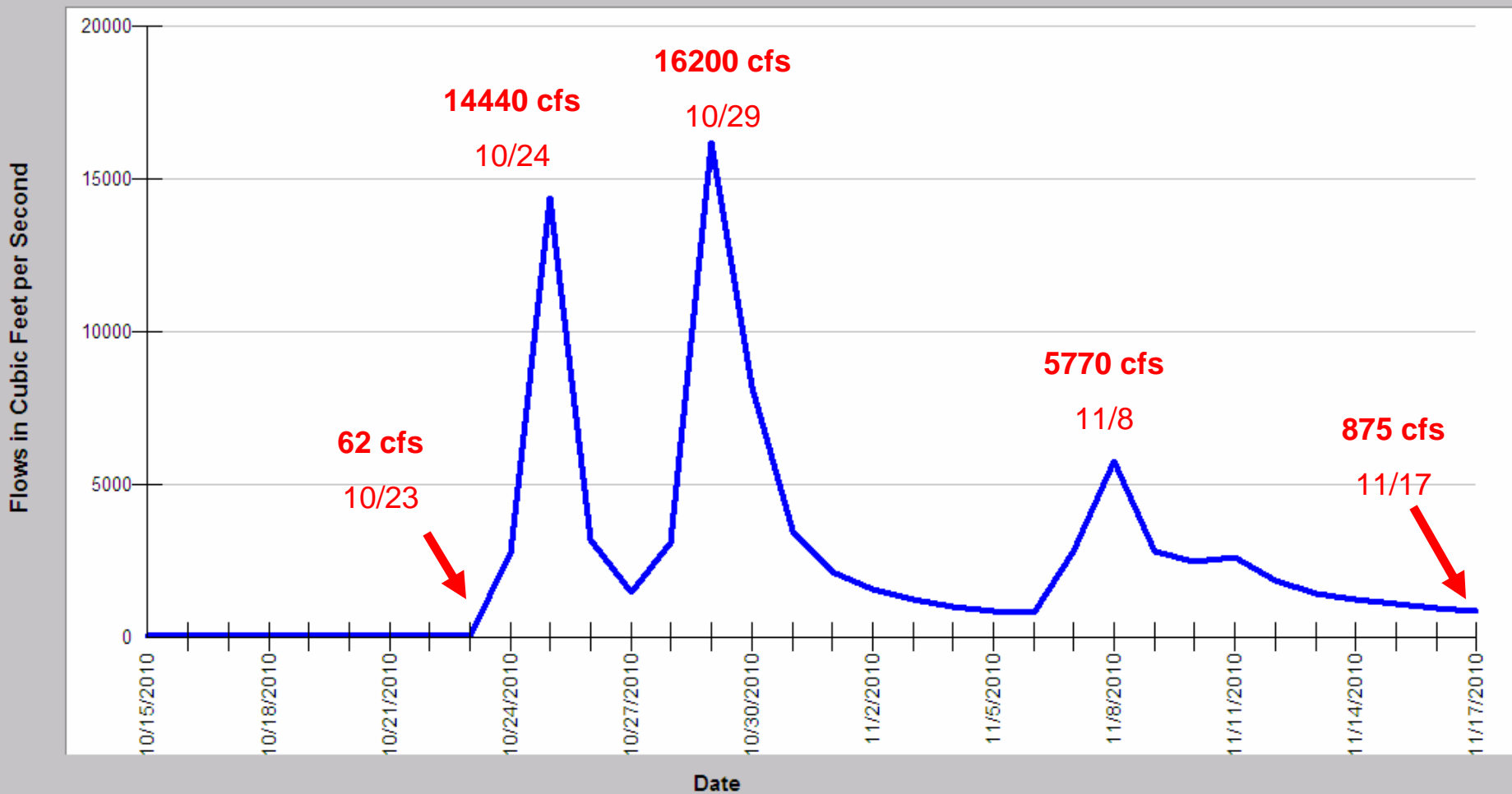
Eel River fall Chinook salmon had been jumping upstream at Van Arsdale Dam since October 29 and extensive spawning was documented on the mainstem at Hearst and from Outlet Creek to Dos Rios on November 4. The reason for this trip was to determine whether there were more Chinook salmon entering the system or if the first high flow passed most of the run.

Dry conditions following a November 8 rain event allowed the Eel River to clear by November 16 and this was confirmed by FOER volunteers at Hearst and Alderpoint. Consequently, conditions would be good for fish observations.

I started my trip at Fernbridge and the 12th Street Hole and stopped at several places below Dyerville to look at the river and for signs of fish. I headed east from Myers Flat and went to Ft Seward and ended the day at Alderpoint. I photographed Dobbyn Creek on the road from Ft Seward to Alderpoint and share thoughts below on its condition.

I learned as much or more from gregarious fishermen I met as I did from my observations of the river.

Eel River Flow at Ft Seward October-November 2010

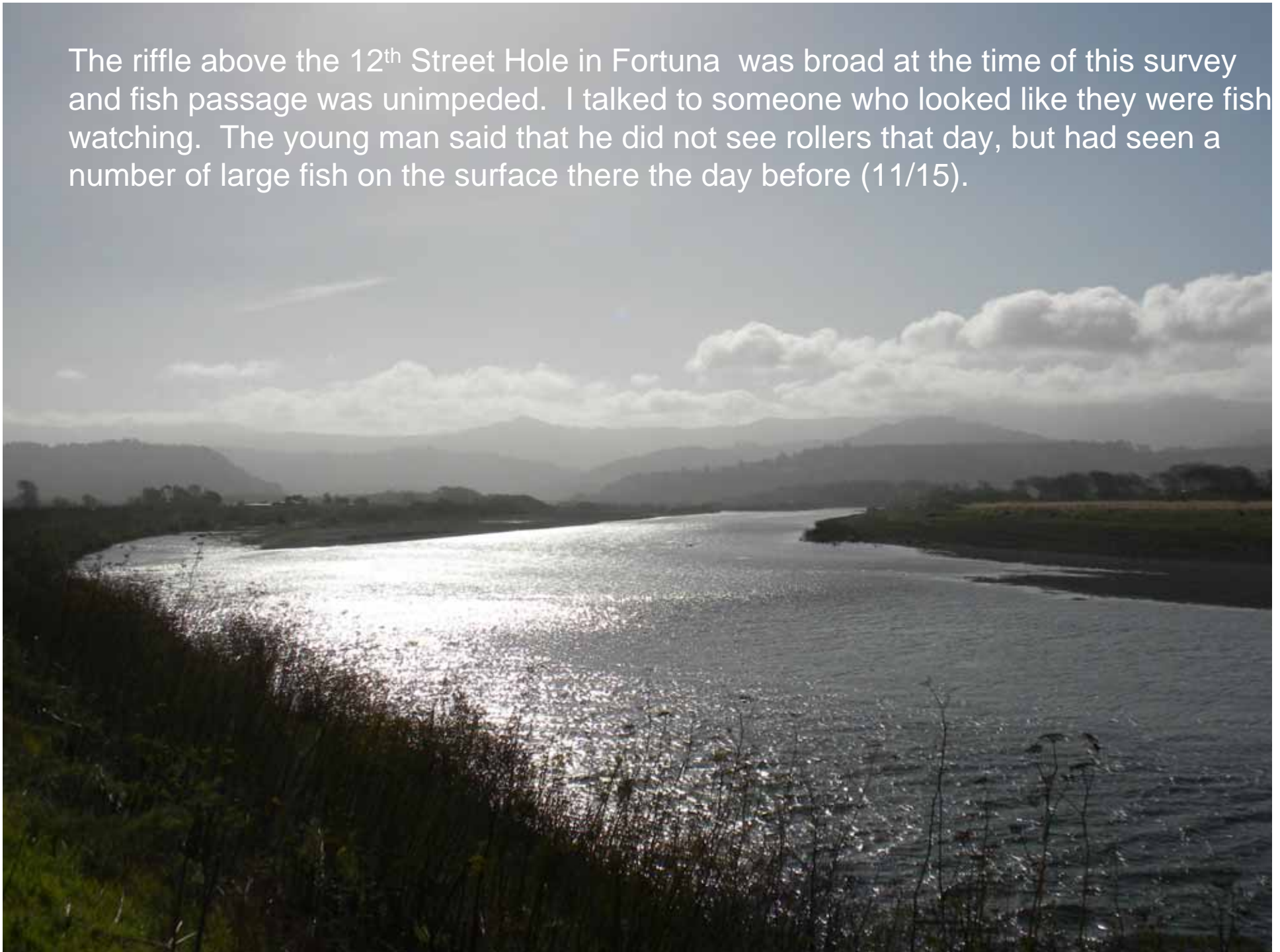


The fluctuation of flow of the Eel River at Ft Seward indicates three major rain events in late October and early November 2010. High flows had created turbid conditions at locations like Alderpoint, but with the lack of rain after November 8, the river finally cleared a week later.



The Eel River below Fernbridge on November 16 with flow likely in the range of 2000-2500 cfs. There was ample flow for fish passage and the water clarity was 3-4 feet. (USGS flow gauge results for Scotia and Fernbridge were provisional when this report was completed).

The riffle above the 12th Street Hole in Fortuna was broad at the time of this survey and fish passage was unimpeded. I talked to someone who looked like they were fish watching. The young man said that he did not see rollers that day, but had seen a number of large fish on the surface there the day before (11/15).



Looking downstream at the lower 12th Street Hole on November 16 at 1 PM.





Water level photos of the riffle above the 12th Street Hole (left) and looking downstream. Water clarity would have been ideal for angling, but I wanted to see what was going on upstream.

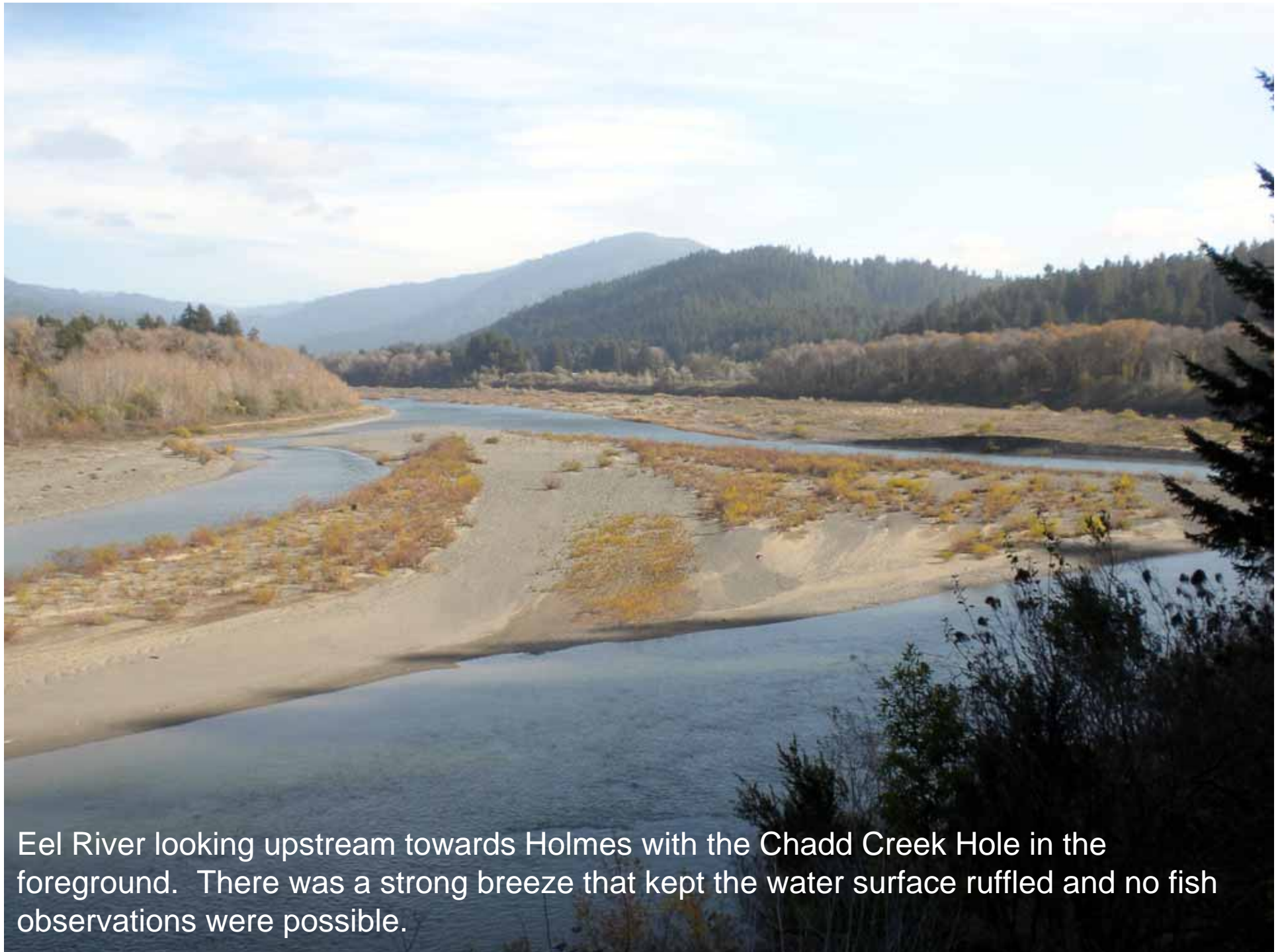




Looking downstream at the mouth of Twin Creek on the mainstem Eel River at Stafford on November 16, 2010 with plenty of water for fish passage.



The mainstem Eel River above Bear Creek looking downstream at the Shively area index riffle (red arrow). High flows made fish observations here by Bill Reynolds only periodically feasible.



Eel River looking upstream towards Holmes with the Chadd Creek Hole in the foreground. There was a strong breeze that kept the water surface ruffled and no fish observations were possible.



This photo was taken at the front of the Chadd Creek Hole and adult fish would have been visible on this riffle if they had been moving.



No fish were rolling at the Holmes Bluff Hole and anglers I talked to had not hooked any salmon at the hole that day. Fisherman Jake Luna reported that he and friends had hooked 13 adult salmon in the Weymouth Bluffs Hole on the previous Sunday (11/14). The fish all had color, but he said other friends had hooked and released 17 salmon and many were bright silver on a drift trip below Dyerville. This indicated that more fish were moving upstream even though flows were dropping.



The convergence of the mainstem Eel River and the South Fork Eel on November 16, 2010. Note the truck with a boat trailer on the gravel bar, which indicates sport fishing activity. This was the upstream limit of legal fishing due to a low flow closure on the South Fork. The mainstem does not open for salmon fishing but steelhead fishing is allowed after January 1.



The road to Ft Seward winds up the hill from Myers Flat and this taken is from the ridge on that road looking west into the South Fork Eel River drainage. The extensive grasslands are characteristic of Central Belt Franciscan geology and the main land-forming process here is earth flows. These areas are subject to gully erosion as well as mass wasting.



Looking north off the road to Ft Seward down the Eel River watershed. Douglas fir forest dominates the shade facing slopes and is interspersed with grasslands and oak woodlands.



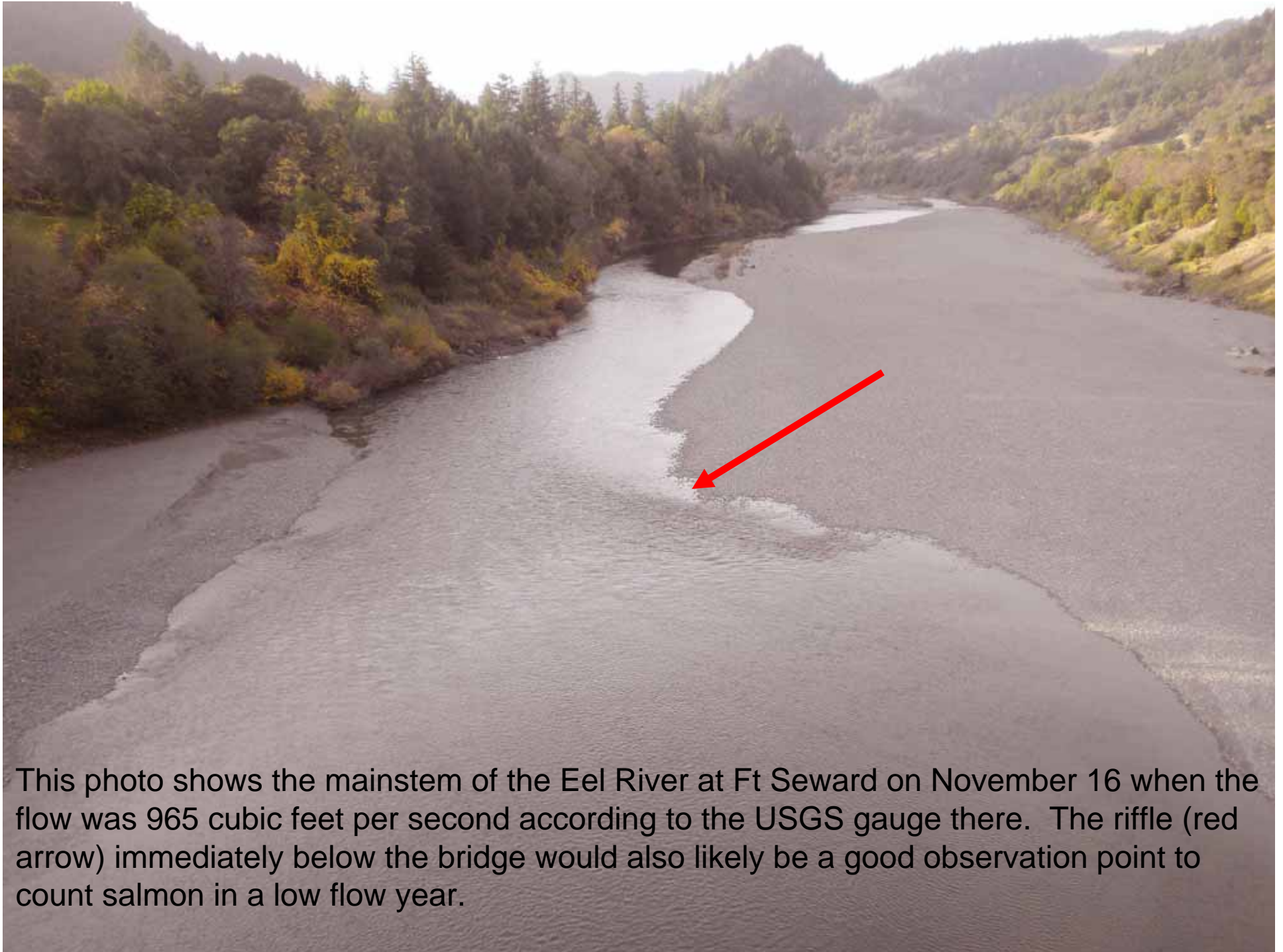
Looking north-east off the road to Ft Seward down the mainstem Eel River watershed. Most of the slopes in view here are grasslands and oak woodlands.



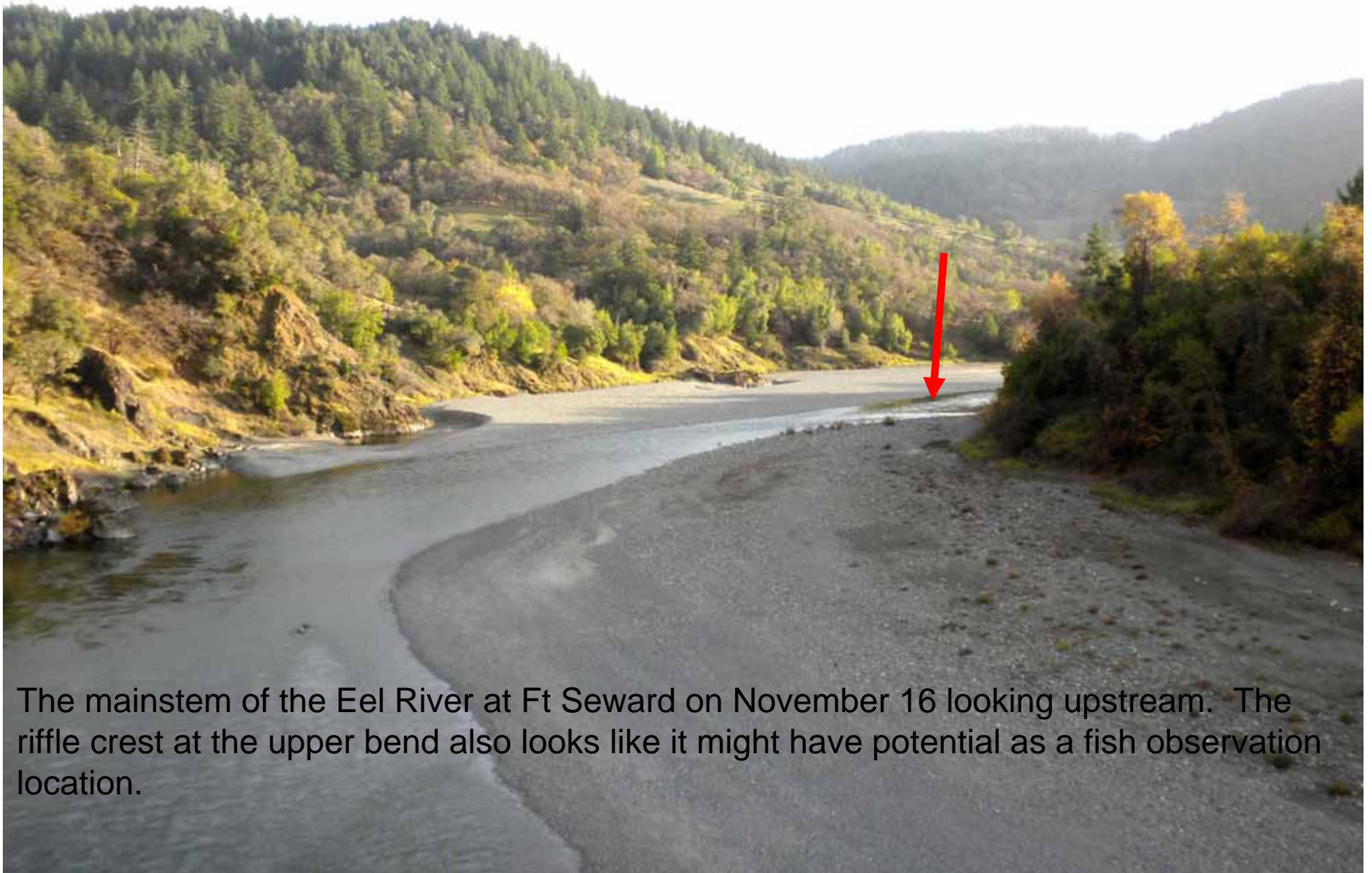
Looking south-east off the road to Ft Seward across the mainstem Eel River watershed. Grasslands dominate the gentle slopes here and grazing likely prevents invasion by fir trees.



Looking south at the mainstem Eel River near Ft Seward. Although the vegetation in the foreground is oak and grasslands, all the slopes in the distance are steeper and forested.



This photo shows the mainstem of the Eel River at Ft Seward on November 16 when the flow was 965 cubic feet per second according to the USGS gauge there. The riffle (red arrow) immediately below the bridge would also likely be a good observation point to count salmon in a low flow year.



The mainstem of the Eel River at Ft Seward on November 16 looking upstream. The riffle crest at the upper bend also looks like it might have potential as a fish observation location.



Dobbyn Creek looking downstream from the Ft-Seward to Alderpoint Road. Although flow appeared sufficient for salmon spawning, there were no fish present. Also, turbidity was high and there were other indications of problems with fish habitat quality.



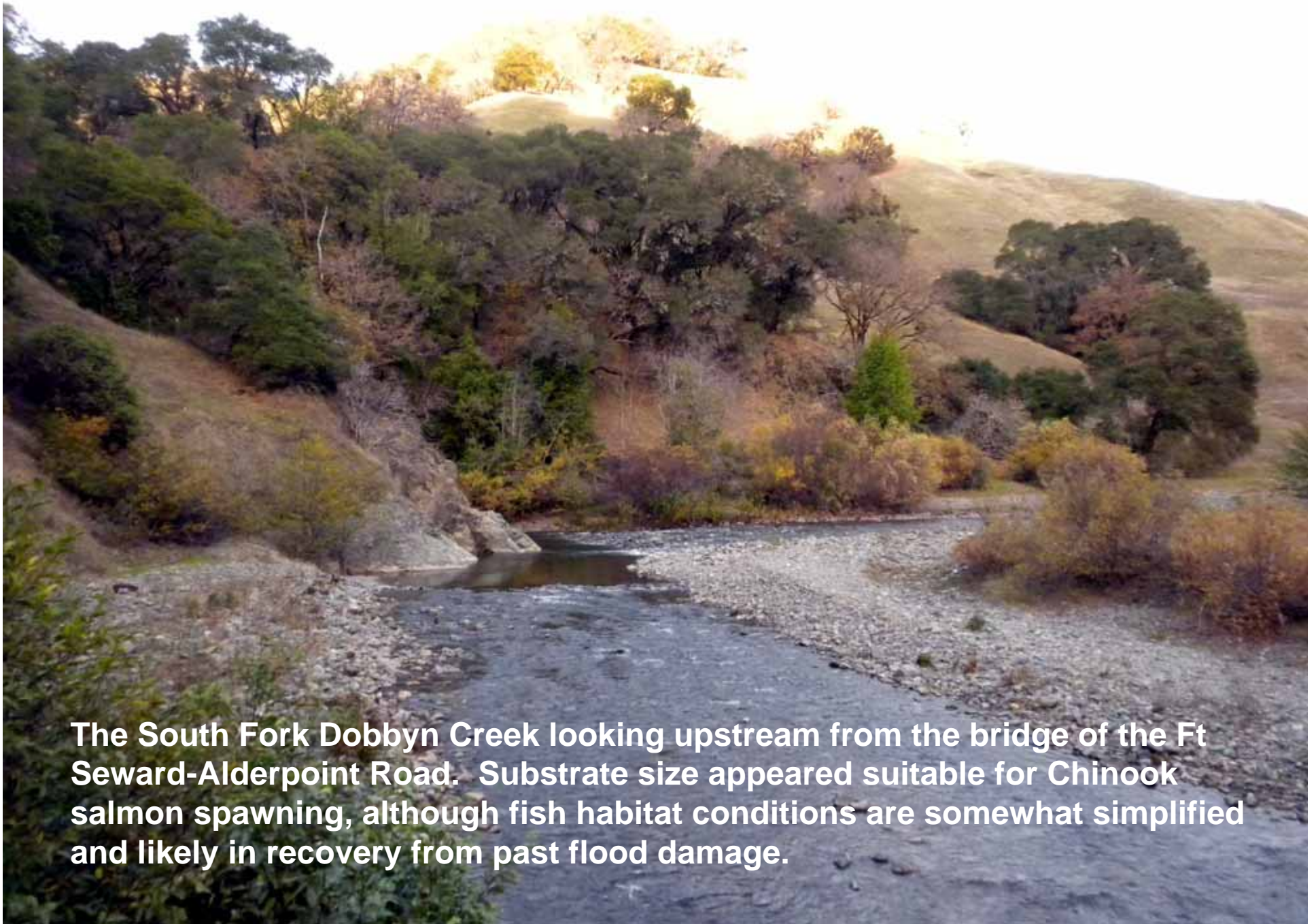
Dobbyn Creek looking upstream from the Ft-Seward to Alderpoint Road shows very disturbed conditions. The lack of pools and riffle dominated habitats, large median bed particle size and high embeddedness are all signs of sediment related cumulative effects. Alders and willows are not well established, also indicating frequent high flows and/or excess sediment transport.



The North Fork Dobbyn Creek was grey (left) due to high turbidity and the culvert remnant indicates road failures have occurred in the drainage. The young alders (above) and dead alders just upstream of the bridge (upper left) indicate a recent channel reset.



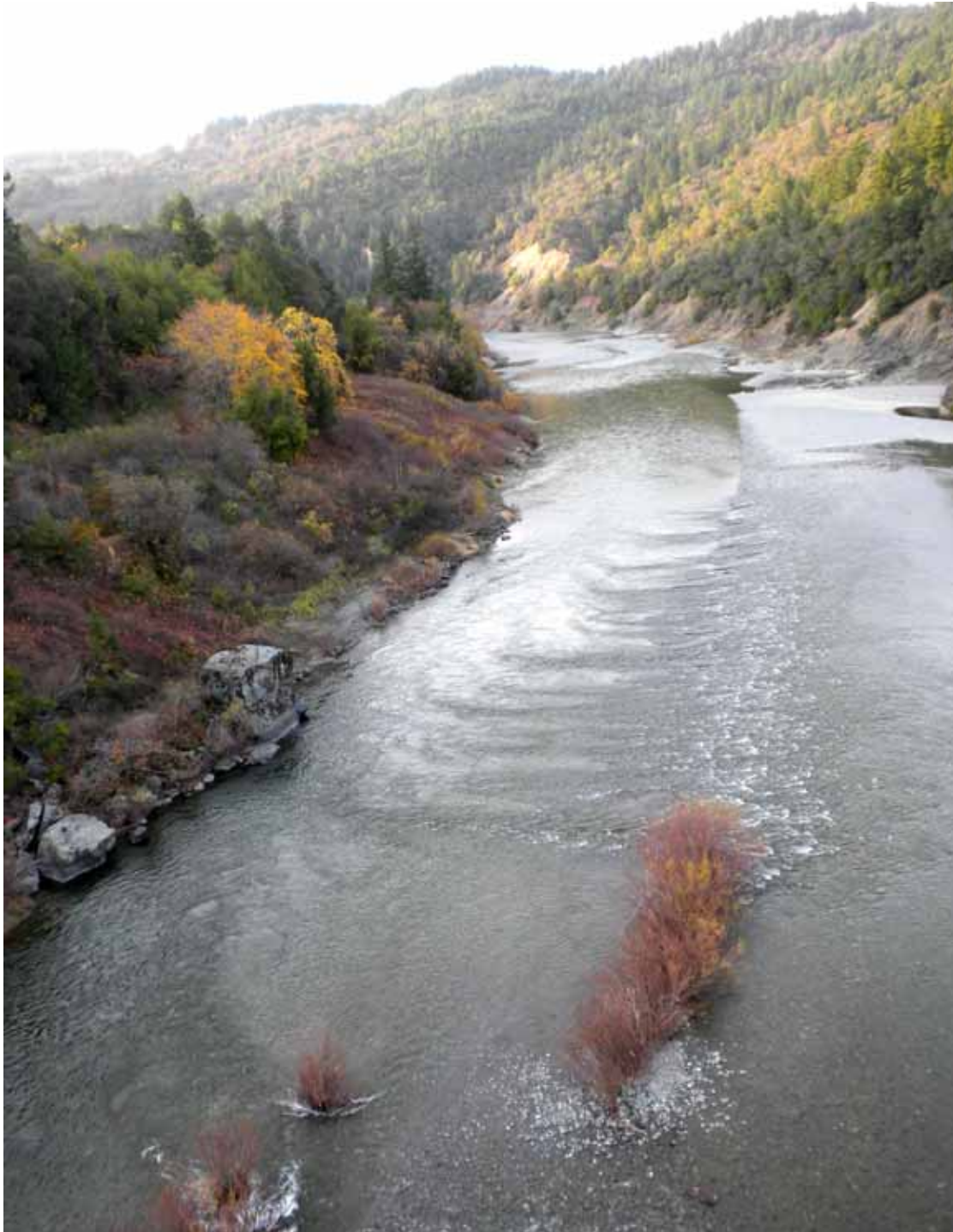
South Fork Dobbyn Creek
photo taken looking upstream
on November 16 from the Ft
Seward to Alderpoint Road.
Note that the riparian canopy
here has more mature trees
and tree species diversity than
on the North Fork indicating
better watershed health.



The South Fork Dobbyn Creek looking upstream from the bridge of the Ft Seward-Alderpoint Road. Substrate size appeared suitable for Chinook salmon spawning, although fish habitat conditions are somewhat simplified and likely in recovery from past flood damage.



The South Fork Dobbyn Creek looking downstream from the Ft Seward-Alderpoint Road Bridge. The bank armoring at this location is likely in response to an earlier episode of bank erosion. Eroding banks are often a sign of an over-supply of sediment or increased peak discharge due to land management.



The mainstem Eel River at Alderpoint looking downstream on November 16 at 5 PM. Although the low sun angle makes it difficult to discern water clarity, there was at least four feet of visibility.

The riffle downstream that was to serve as a counting station has sufficient flow to pass adult salmon, but the side channel at left would have been an even easier passage route. Water clarity at Alderpoint limited observations from October 23 to November 15.



The mainstem Eel River at Alderpoint looking upstream on November 16 at 5 PM. Note that the channel at right has plenty of water to pass adult salmon; therefore, the riffle counting station below the bridge does not work at higher flows. Fish were rolling in the pool up near the bend in the distance (red circle) and the riffle (red arrow) there would be a better counting station, although less convenient. The location is accessible via an old railroad right of way access point off Eel River Road.

Local angler Sam Humphries noted that Chinook salmon spawn in the riffle at the upstream corner in December and estimated that 200-300 fish built redds there last year. He also said steelhead have been abundant in recent years.



Looking upstream in the mainstem Eel River watershed to the south off the Alderpoint-Garberville Road. I found some very cool folk art along the road on this trip and it follows as a post script (see last three slides).

What Did We Learn?

- Additional adult Chinook salmon were present in the lower Eel River on November 16 and were holding and moving according to accounts from anglers and other observers.
- Fisherman Jake Luna reported catches of 13 adult Chinook salmon in the Weymouth Bluff Hole on Sunday, November 14 and a catch by his friends on the same day of 17 adult Chinook below Dyerville.
- Additional counting riffles are available both above and below the bridge at Ft Seward.
- Dobbyn Creek habitat is impaired and it is apparent that the North Fork is showing more problems with sediment and cumulative watershed effects than the South Fork.
- Adult fish were seen rolling in a mainstem Eel River pool above the bridge at Alderpoint on the evening of November 16.
- Flows were too high to allow observations of salmon at the riffle at Alderpoint for much of the period following the October 23 storm. The river did not clear until November 15. Flows were still too high for good direct observation on November 16.
- Spawning activity in the mainstem Eel River at Alderpoint in December could represent another race of late fall spawning Chinook.
- The amount of angling effort in the lower Eel River could be used as an index of run strength. Volunteer anglers could be used to mark caught and released fish to help generate a statistically a valid population estimate of Chinook salmon and steelhead.

This whimsical Fruitland Ridge Bridge does not cross a creek but is only decorative. The inset at upper left is a close up of the classic T-Bird and presumable the artist(s).



I also photographed other nearby folk art pieces (see next two slides).





