



FRIENDS OF THE EEL RIVER

Working for the recovery of our Wild & Scenic River, its fisheries and communities.



Northwest California's Wild and Scenic Eel River includes five major tributaries that drain 3,684 square miles of some of the most remote, rugged and beautiful landscapes of the West Coast into the Pacific Ocean. From its headwaters in the Yolla Bolly-Middle Eel Wilderness to the largely roadless Eel River Canyon and iconic redwood forests on the South Fork Eel River, this rich and diverse watershed is truly an underappreciated wonder of the North American West.

Today, the upper Eel River watershed offers an unmatched chance to rebuild the populations of wild, native salmon and steelhead. Over the past 150 years, dam building, industrial logging, overfishing, railroading, and poor land use practices have degraded the watershed, yet the salmon hang on. These once abundant and diverse runs of chinook, coho, and steelhead are the keystone of ecosystems evolved along the North Coast over millions of years. Their recovery is also central to the health and vitality of the region's tribal cultures and economy.

Founded in 1994 by a small group of passionate watershed activists, Friends of the Eel River has grown to be a principled organization guided by science and using litigation and advocacy tools to accomplish major wins for this critical ecosystem. We are uniquely positioned to continue this work to realize the great potential of the Wild and Scenic Eel River.

Restoring Fish Access to the Upper Eel

One of FOER's primary objectives is to restore fish passage to the cold water refugia trapped behind two dams on the mainstem. The Potter Valley Project has blocked access to over 280 miles of prime steelhead spawning habitat for the last century. We are now pursuing our greatest opportunity to remove this archaic, unsafe infrastructure.

Recovering and Strengthening the Lower River

After submitting comments in 2017 on Humboldt County's Alternative Groundwater Plan, we are now working to ensure that the County complies with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act in protecting our public trust resource in the lower Eel River. We will also analyze anticipated sea level rise in the lower river and work with partners to improve critical habitat in the heavily diked and manipulated 7-mile estuary.

Protecting Endangered Species and Habitat

In 2018 FOER submitted petitions under the state and federal ESA to list summer steelhead. We plan to see these petitions through any necessary litigation, as well as work to secure additional protective designations for their habitat in the upper watershed. After negotiating a settlement in our CEQA case challenging Humboldt County's insufficient cannabis regulations in 2019, FOER continues to pursue opportunities to improve regional land use practices.

For more information visit eelriver.org or contact us at foer@eelriver.org



@FriendsEelRiver



@friendseelriver



@FriendsEelRiver

Recent Major Accomplishments

North Coast Railroad Authority Victory: For nearly a decade FOER was engaged in litigation with the NCRA challenging their claim that the agency was exempt from CEQA. In 2017 we won our case at the California Supreme Court, paving the way for Senator Mike McGuire's 2018 bill the North Coast Railroad Closure and Transition to Trails Act.

Cannabis Victory: In 2019 FOER reached a settlement agreement with Humboldt County in our CEQA case challenging their insufficient cannabis regulations. Our settlement requires the County to pay for additional road and culvert repairs to reduce sediment pollution in the most sensitive salmonid habitats in the most active cannabis cultivation regions in the South Fork.

Listing Summer Steelhead: In 2018 FOER submitted state and federal petitions to list summer steelhead under the Endangered Species Act. These petitions were well-received by the agencies and status reviews are now underway. Litigation may be required to secure the federal listing, and FOER is prepared to take the necessary action.

Frequently Asked Questions

How does the two basin solution lead to dam removal?

The two-basin solution, an effort spearheaded by Congressman Jared Huffman, is centered on two core principles. The first is to establish volitional fish passage above the dam project locations on the mainstem; the second is to avoid adverse impacts to water supply while achieving this first goal. Years of research and analysis have shown that the only economically and technically feasible method for obtaining volitional fish passage is removal of Scott dam.

What other projects does FOER work on?

Because FOER is focused on recovering the ecological health of the Eel River and its ability to sustain native fisheries, we work on a wide variety of projects. In addition to our three primary program areas we also: monitor development projects like wind energy and other industrial activities throughout the watershed; support genetic research on the Eel's native fish; and engage in outreach activities to educate the public about this special watershed and our efforts to protect it.

Why is the Eel River critical salmonid habitat?

The Eel River has been identified as a stronghold for Southern Oregon Northern California Coho, in part because of the incredible in-tact habitat it still holds. In addition to coho, the Eel is also home to Northern California winter and summer steelhead, California coastal chinook, green sturgeon, pacific lamprey (an iconic species in the river), and a variety of other native fish. The headwaters of the Eel lie primarily in protected public land, and much of the watershed is large landholdings with very few densely populated regions and less road development than many other watersheds in California. FOER will work in the coming decade with our many NGO and legislative partners to increase protective designations for this incredible habitat.

Friends of the Eel River is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. We are funded primarily by private foundations and individual donors. If you are interested in supporting our work to recover the Wild and Scenic Eel River and its fisheries, please visit our website eelriver.org or contact us at foer@eelriver.org.