

Carmel River Acquisition and Water Dedication Rancho Canada

The Carmel River in coastal Monterey County is a native steelhead stronghold, but dams and a steady increase in water diversions have helped reduce annual adult steelhead returns by 90% or more. Recently, two of three dams on this river were removed (including San Clemente, the largest dam removal project in California to date). However, the mainstem still dries out, particularly in its lower reach, depleting habitat conditions for young steelhead.

TU's goal for the Carmel is to "re-water" the river and recover its steelhead run. The Rancho Canada Acquisition and Water Dedication Project, executed by Trout Unlimited, the Trust for Public Land, and the Santa Lucia Conservancy, helps to achieve this goal.

Rancho Canada, a 36-hole public golf course bisected by the Carmel River two miles upstream of the estuary, was offered for sale in December 2015. This parcel, which has riparian and pending appropriative water rights, was expected to be purchased by land/water developers. This would have continued or even increased the diversion burden on the Carmel River.

Our team of conservation partners stepped in and successfully negotiated with the seller to discount the sales price in order to achieve shared conservation goals. In a single year, \$11 million of public and private funding was raised, and this parcel was acquired for permanent conservation and public access benefit, which includes:

- Acquisition of 185 acres -- including 40 acres of primary floodplain and native gallery riparian forest -- providing opportunity to "re-wild" the golf course
- Permanent protection of one mile of the Carmel River (both sides)
- Permanent retirement of all water diversion, except for 15 acre-feet per year to restore native vegetation (golf course irrigation has been as high as 900 acre-feet per year)
- Enhancement of wildlife connectivity and protected habitat for steelhead
- Transfer of the property to the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District



This project was made possible by the funding from the California Coastal Conservancy, the Wildlife Conservation Board, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and private donations. Project partners include Trout Unlimited, the Trust for Public Land, the Santa Lucia Conservancy, and Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District.