Proposed Oregon Gulch Channel Rehabilitation Project In-River Construction Proposed for 2022

Project Background

The Trinity River Restoration Program (TRRP) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Redding Field Office are beginning the 30-day public scoping period for the Oregon Gulch Channel Rehabilitation Project and are requesting input and participation at the upcoming public meeting, by mail or by email.



Oregon Gulch project area

The U.S. Department of Interior (DOI) established the TRRP in 2000 with the goal of restoring the fisheries of the Trinity River affected by dam construction and related water diversions of the Trinity River Division of the Central Valley Project[1]. Baseline ecological conditions of the Trinity River at the time the TRRP was established also reflected the effects of past mining and timber harvesting in the watershed. These effects are the target of the Program's restoration activities.

Administered by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), the TRRP is a partnership of federal and state resource agencies, tribes, and Trinity County. The Program's objective is to restore the processes and attributes of an ecologically functioning river system, which should in turn recover diminished salmon and steelhead populations while retaining Trinity and Lewiston Dams' deliveries of water and power to California's Central Valley.

There are five primary components of the TRRP's river restoration work:

1. ***Variable annual instream flows***: releasing water from Lewiston Dam (based on forecasted water availability for the Water Year type) to mimic natural Trinity River conditions and to maintain and interact with downstream areas to enhance conditions for all life stages of fish and wildlife.
2. ***Channel rehabilitation***: restoring the functional floodplain of the river, which has been channelized and simplified by managed river flows and mining.
3. ***Sediment management***: reintroducing gravel (aka coarse sediment) to the river and controlling fine sediment input from upslope areas. Gravel needed for spawning and habitat diversity is blocked by the dam, and moves downstream during high-flow events. The reintroduction of gravel will improve fish and macroinvertebrate habitat.
4. ***Watershed restoration***: addressing negative impacts that have resulted from poor land management in the basin. Watershed restoration activities include decreasing the input of fine sediment from Trinity River tributaries and increasing aquatic habitats.
5. ***Adaptive management***: monitoring, evaluating, and improving the effectiveness of river restoration actions.

[1] https://www.usbr.gov/mp/cvp/

As part of its continuing Trinity River restoration efforts, the TRRP proposes to construct the Oregon Gulch Channel Rehabilitation Project near Junction City, California. The TRRP will complete an Environmental Assessment/Initial Study (EA/IS) to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The NEPA effort will be led by Reclamation and the BLM Redding Field Office, and the CEQA effort will be led by the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board. The EA/IS will evaluate and disclose the potential environmental effects of implementing the Oregon Gulch project. Reasonable alternatives that could satisfy the intent of the proposal will be analyzed if they are determined to be feasible. At minimum, the EA/IS will analyze the effects of the Proposed Action (the Oregon Gulch project) and a No Action Alternative.



Rearing habitat for young salmon and steelhead after TRRP project construction

The purpose of this notice is to invite you to contribute to the NEPA/CEQA process for the Oregon Gulch project by providing comments, suggestions, or concerns you may have about the project during the public scoping period, pursuant to 40 CFR § 1501.9[2]. To encourage your informed participation, this scoping notice includes a general description of the Proposed Action and the purpose of and need for the project.

Oregon Gulch Project Goals and Objectives

The Oregon Gulch project is designed to improve the overall functioning of the restoration area. The completed project would:

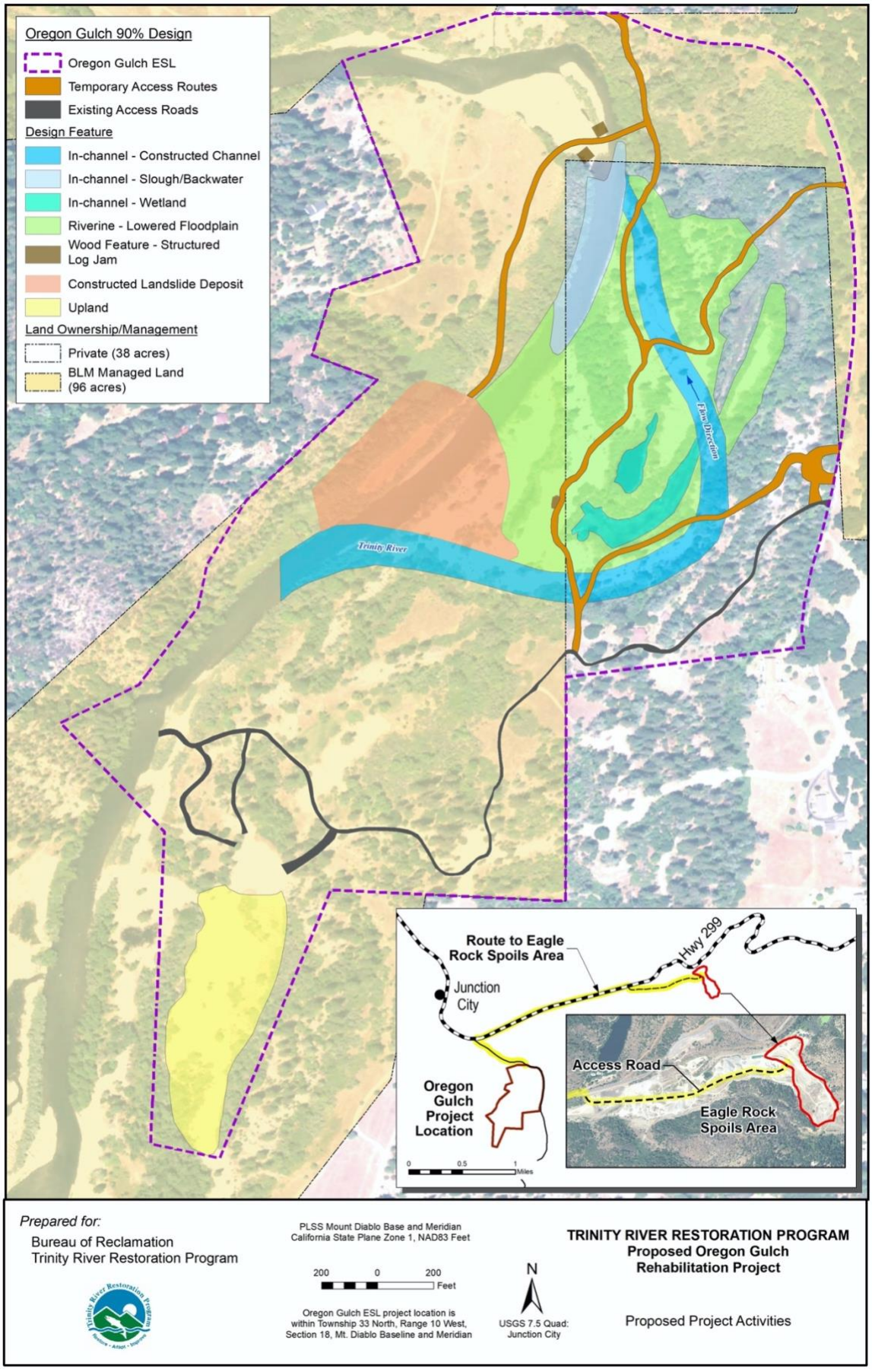
- Reestablish a functional, topographically complex floodplain to promote dynamic river processes, increase river connections, and create juvenile salmon and steelhead habitat at a greater range of flows.
- Increase in-channel habitat diversity under all flows by placing wood in the river to interact with river flows, provide cover for fish, increase channel complexity, and allow for increased groundwater retention.
- Revegetate construction-disturbed upland and riparian habitats to restore native plant diversity and fish and wildlife habitat, and provide future trees for recruitment to the river.

Oregon Gulch Channel Rehabilitation Project Description

The proposed Oregon Gulch project spans approximately 134 acres upstream of Junction City between river miles (RM) 80.9 and 81.7. Equipment access to the Oregon Gulch project area would be via Sky Ranch Road on river right. Access to river-left construction areas would be made by crossing the river from river right. About 96 acres of the area included in the project footprint is managed by the BLM Redding Field Office. The remaining 38 acres consists of several privately owned parcels along the eastern extent of the project area. The figure below shows the proposed Oregon Gulch project activity areas.

[2] Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) National Environmental Policy Act Implementation Regulations. 40 CFR Parts 1500–1508 (2020).

Oregon Gulch Project Location and Proposed Project Activity Areas



Proposed Project Activities

To achieve the goals and objectives of the Oregon Gulch project, TRRP proposes the following project activities:



Mining waste (tailings) at the proposed Oregon Gulch project area

- Removing up to 500,000 cubic yards of mining waste from the site, which would dramatically increase riparian habitat on a valley-wide scale;
- Placement of wood and reduction of channel-stabilizing vegetation, which would improve dynamic riverine processes;
- Lowering floodplains and creating a high-flow channel, which would promote broad vegetated areas away from the river's banks;
- Excavating to create new side channels and in-channel pools for immediate habitat that would evolve over years of seasonal flooding;
- Placement of large wood features, including log jams, which would provide immediate cover for fish and interact with river flows to scour and maintain function;
- Construction of a river-left landslide deposit, which would encourage the channel to meander toward the right while allowing for adjacent floodplain areas to create slow-water juvenile fish habitat; and
- Vegetation planting and amending of soils in riparian and upland vegetation zones to increase use by wildlife and improve aquatic habitat conditions.

Possible Local Disturbances

- Up to 500,000 cubic yards of historic mine waste (tailings piles) would be excavated and moved off the project site to the Eagle Rock quarry, located approximately 3.7 miles east of the Oregon Gulch project area via Sky Ranch Road and State Route 299.
- Highway-legal haul trucks would make deliveries of equipment, large wood, plants, and other needed materials during work hours using existing roads. An estimated 29,000 truck loads would be required to remove mining waste. Hauling the mine waste over an 18-month period would require about 75 dump trucks a day travelling between the Oregon Gulch project area and the Eagle Rock quarry.
- Nearby residents may experience noise commensurate with the use of haul trucks and heavy construction equipment, such as dozers and excavators.
- Drivers would experience traffic delays from pre-construction and construction activities, including mine waste hauling and potential road improvements to support truck traffic.
- Minimal tree and vegetation removal would occur. Trees removed for project activities would be used to construct the project's large wood features, reducing the need for off-site timber.

Proposed Oregon Gulch Project Schedule

- Public Scoping:
  October 22–November 23, 2020
- Public Scoping meeting:
  November 5, 2020
- Draft EA/IS for public comment:
  Winter 2020/21
- Final EA/IS and Final Decision:
  Spring 2021
- Proposed project construction:
  Trucking of mine waste to the Eagle Rock quarry as early as spring 2021 to spread out the required truck trips. Summer 2022 for in-river construction.
- Post-construction revegetation and maintenance: As needed

To Comment on the Proposed Oregon Gulch Project:

- *Attend* the **Virtual Public Scoping Meeting** on Thursday, November 5 at 6:00 PM. The link to the meeting will be available at https://www.trrp.net/calendar/event/?id=11685.
- *OR* send your comments via **mail** by November 23, 2020, to:
  Oregon Gulch Project Scoping
  C/O TRRP
  P.O. Box 1300
  Weaverville, CA 96093
- *OR* send your comments via **email** by November 23, 2020, to fgutermuth@usbr.gov.
- Only comments *postmarked or emailed by November 23, 2020,* will be fully considered by the agencies' interdisciplinary team to meet the project's NEPA timeline per DOI Secretarial Order 3355.

How to Participate in the Oregon Gulch Project Scoping Process

The TRRP and BLM are seeking information or analysis related to the Oregon Gulch project. All comments submitted via mail, email, or at the public meeting will be considered. Full citations for referenced literature are requested to ensure and expedite their retrieval. After the scoping comment period, the interdisciplinary team will review the scoping comments and determine key issues.

- Project information and updates are available at: https://www.trrp.net/restoration/channel-rehab/sites/oregon-gulch-channel-rehabilitation-page/.
- A virtual public meeting will be held Thursday, November 5, 2020, at 6 pm. Members of the public are invited to join the meeting through a link posted on the project page at https://www.trrp.net/calendar/event/?id=11685.
- Send your comments via mail or email to the address above or provide verbal input at the virtual public meeting.
- For mail and email submittals, please include Oregon Gulch Project Scoping Comment in the subject line and the following information:
  - Your name and address (telephone number and email address are also suggested)
  - Site-specific comments about the Proposed Action along with supporting information that would help identify issues, develop alternatives to respond to those issues if necessary, or predict the environmental effects of the proposal
- Comments received, including comments submitted at the virtual public meeting, will be considered part of the public project record for this proposal and will be available for public inspection.
- This project supports the objectives of the Redding BLM Resource Management Plan. This project is not a fuel reduction project as defined by the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003.