

Humboldt
Baykeeper

Inland Empire
Waterkeeper

Klamath
Riverkeeper

Monterey
Coastkeeper

Orange County
Coastkeeper

Russian
Riverkeeper

San Diego
Coastkeeper

San Francisco
Baykeeper

San Luis Obispo
Coastkeeper

Santa Barbara
Channelkeeper

Santa Monica
Baykeeper

Ventura
Coastkeeper

Break Down Barriers to Healthy Waterways and Fish

In Brief

Dams, diversions, and road crossings siphon waterway flows and create thousands of impassable barriers in California's streams and rivers, denying native fish populations the cold, abundant waters that they need to thrive.



An endangered coho salmon attempts to clear a spillway.

Legal Landscape

Both the Department of Fish and Game and State Water Board are responsible for ensuring healthy flows in our waterways for all users, including fish. The Fish and Game Code requires dam operators to ensure sufficient flows exist downstream to support fish. The Department also must calculate stream flows needed to maintain healthy populations of fish. The State Water Board allocates and enforces water rights to protect waterway health. Unfortunately, diversions are often allowed (or occur illegally) with little information on the minimum water levels needed to ensure thriving fish populations.

Moving Forward

The state must fully implement existing legal mandates to ensure sufficient, clean waterway flows to support healthy aquatic ecosystems. This includes upholding public trust doctrine requirements to protect waterway health, preventing the "waste and unreasonable" use of water, and funding dam and barrier removal where appropriate. Progress is being made in some areas, including the 2010 Klamath dams agreement, the 2010 release of the State Water Board's Delta flow criteria, and the recent Delta Watermaster "waste and unreasonable use" report. The State Water Board has also appropriately prioritized for 2011 adoption of a policy on the use of surface waters for frost protection efforts in vineyards; frost control has siphoned numerous streams essentially dry, further reducing disappearing fish habitat.

Learn More

Learn about the Ocean Protection Council efforts to improve flows at: <http://www.opc.ca.gov/category/projectsbytopic/>. Review Fish and Game's flow efforts at: http://www.dfg.ca.gov/water/statewide_programs.html and the Water Board's activities at: <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/>. Learn about use the public trust doctrine for rivers at: <http://www.waterplan.water.ca.gov/docs/cwpu2005/vol4/vol4-environment-applyingpublictrustdoctrine.pdf>, and about the Water Board's Frost Control Policy at: http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/hearings/russian_river_frost/.

Key Issues: Flows, Endangered Species, Fish, Dams, Water Rights