

# Butte Creek Watershed

Including the tributaries, Dry Creek/Cherokee, Little Butte Creek, Little Chico Creek, Clear Creek, Hamlin Creek

[www.buttecreek.org](http://www.buttecreek.org)

Spring 2006



Summit Lake in the upper watershed

*Friends of Butte Creek was formed in 1999 to promote the protection, restoration and enhancement of the fishery of Butte Creek and all its tributaries*

**Butte Creek Statistics**  
Upper Watershed - 140 square miles  
Lower Watershed - 360 square miles  
Highest elevation - Humboldt Peak 7,064 feet above sea level  
Communities - Paradise, Magalia, South Chico, Durham, Biggs, Nelson, Richvale, Butte Meadows, Jonesville, Forest Ranch, Butte Creek Canyon  
Population - Approximately 68,000

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## Spring Run Salmon Making a Recovery in Butte Creek

### Unprecedented recovery of threatened spring run chinook

Years of efforts initiated by Fish and Game are reaping huge rewards on Butte Creek in the form of Spring Run

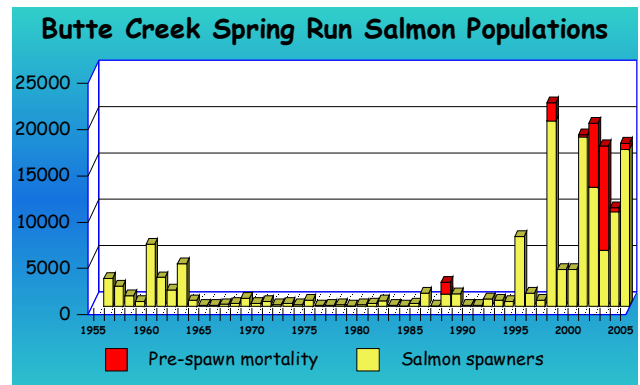
Chinook Salmon. Since 1995 the runs have been consistently successful at moving upstream passed the new fish ladders and spawning, and juveniles have been very successful passing the maze of diversions to return to the ocean. Most of the upper diversions have been screened to prevent the take of juveniles and the populations have jumped dramatically in response. 1995 was an unprecedented return with over 7500 fish. The successful spawning and outmigration lead to the record busting 20,000+ fish recorded by snorkel survey in 1998. Following the three year cycle, 2001 was also a huge return. Snorkel surveys in August counted around 10,000 fish but a followup carcass count yielded nearly that many carcasses with only a fifty per cent return on tagged and recovered carcasses. This result indicates that the snorkel count was greatly undercounting salmon, particularly in pools holding hundreds and in some cases thousands of fish. An interesting note from the Fish and Game survey is that there appears to be a significant number of fish returning on a four year cycle instead of the typical three year cycle for spring run. Also, observers this year report many larger fish, usually indicating four year olds. This means there

could be a large return of four year olds this year from the 2002 run. In addition there should be a good return of three year old fish from the 6000 surviving fish of the 2003 run. Fish die-offs in 2002 and 2003 greatly reduced the spawning population in those years. All in all it looks like a another banner year with near perfect water conditions.

Agencies working to recover spring run salmon, in particular the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, have suggested that doubling of the

*“If you fix it, they will come.”*

historic average would constitute full recovery. Their average from 1954-1998 was estimated at 1,557. Since 1995, the numbers slipped below this average only once, in 1997. In the last nine years there has been an average of over 9000 fish. The indications are the 2006 run will also more than double the average.



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# Watershed Groups in the Butte Creek Watershed



One of the larger groups of Butte Creek Spring Run Salmon in the Quartz Bowl in 2001.

Steelhead fishing season is open November 15th through February 15, catch and release, barbless hooks from the Oro-Chico bridge to the Centerville Head Dam below DeSabra Power house.

Butte Creek and its tributaries support Spring, Fall and Late-Fall chinook salmon and steelhead trout.

## Collaborative Efforts Pay Dividends for Everyone

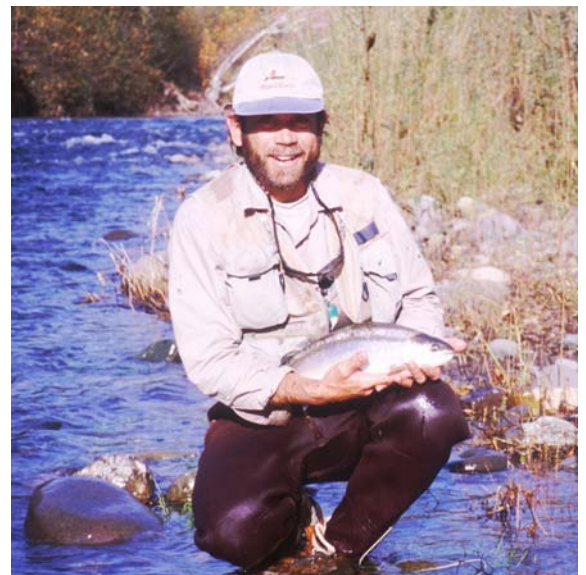
Working together collaboratively has paid significant dividends for many interests in the Butte Creek Watershed. Fears of losing these magnificent fish and fears of losing water and property rights brought most parties to the table. What the agencies, agricultural interests, environmental interests, and wildlife groups found was that there were many things that everyone could agree on. With support from private and public funding sources these activities were expedited and the results are clear. Fish are back and we have a catch and release steelhead fishing season. We can work together and we

can recover threatened and endangered species and their habitats. The extraordinary efforts of all groups and the agency partners has made a difference. That's what it's all about! A final note to this is that the current run of salmon returning to Butte Creek appears to be another good one. Stay tuned!

*“One of the last best salmon streams”*

*Richard Clark, DFG, 1929*

There are several organized groups doing watershed work in the Butte Creek Watershed. Protect our Watershed was formed in 1994 to develop a grassroots effort to reduce runoff and sediment pollution of Paradise Lake and Magalia Reservoirs. The Butte Creek Watershed Conservancy was formed in 1995 and has evolved to represent primarily large landowners and industry in the watershed. Cherokee Watershed Group was formed in 1998 and is focused on the Dry Creek tributary of Butte Creek, often referred to as Cherokee, due to the fact that mine runoff from the Cherokee area is channeled into the Cherokee Canal through the valley. Little Chico Creek Watershed Group was formed in 1998 to address specific issues of the Little Chico Creek Watershed, a tributary that connects to Butte Creek in the valley south of Chico, primarily through what are now agricultural drains. In high water the creek runs freely into Butte Creek through Angel Slough. The Friends of Butte Creek was formed in 1999 to represent conservation and environmental interests. Formed by several of the original founders of the Conservancy, the Friends focuses on enhancing the fishery and ensuring sportfishing opportunities. They are conducting citizen monitoring of fish populations and water quality.



Tim Hutchins holds a beautiful 21" Butte Creek Steelhead caught in December 2001.