Construction Monitoring in Steelhead Trout Habitat: Ventura River

Cher Batchelor

David Magney Environmental Consulting

Discussion Topics

- Comparison of two monitoring projects on the Ventura River
- How to monitor effectively
- What to expect from grading contractors
- Advice to monitors

Project Background and Comparisons

- San Buenaventura Foster Park Water Intake Facilities Repairs
- Ventura County Transportation Department Santa Ana Road Repair
- Emergency Permits

San Buenaventura - Foster Park Facilities Repairs Project

- Domestic water intake structure
  - Access road washed out in 1998
  - Intake diversion structure damaged
- Instream water wells
  - Well heads either damaged or connecting pipelines washed away in 1998
- City hired biological monitor for all construction work in riverbed

VCTD - Santa Ana Road Repair Project

- Roadbank washed out in February 1998
  - Major access road into Ojai Valley closed, causing major traffic congestion on SR 33
- VCTD excavated 35,000 cy from riverbed without applying for appropriate permit
  - Habitat for the endangered Southern Steelhead Trout (VCTD got in BIG trouble from the Corps)
  - Corps issued Cease & Desist Order
- Corps ordered fulltime onsite monitoring

Emergency Permits

- Army Corps of Engineers Regional Permit
  - RGP 52 issued in late 1997 for emergency actions in anticipation of El Nino flooding
  - After-the-fact reporting required
- Gov. Wilson exempted disaster areas from state permitting requirements
  - No 1601-03 Streambed Alteration Agreements required for any emergency work performed

How to Monitor Effectively

- Keeping client out of trouble
- Documenting compliance or noncompliance for permit requirements

Keeping Client Out of Trouble

- Allowing equipment to work in a streambed only while a monitor is present
- Making sure equipment working out of flowing water
- Ensuring sediment barriers are in place downstream
- Keeping exclusion-area fencing in place to protect sensitive habitats properly
- Allowing groundwater to dewater discharge into a catchment basin

Keeping Client Out of Trouble (continued…)

- Keeping silt fencing intact downslope of work areas adjacent to wetlands
- Insisting all permits must be present onsite
- Ensuring all equipment refuel in designated area(s)
- Maximizing surface water turbidity control
- Keeping nonnative debris/fill out of streambed
- Making sure litter is picked up daily

Documenting Compliance with Permit Requirements

- Monitoring easier when client *requests* a monitor
  - Client requests monitor's help/advice for appropriate approach to construction activities
- Monitoring can be difficult when client is *ordered to* have monitor present
  - Client ignores monitor's requests/advice
  - Client belittles or harasses monitor

What to Expect from Grading Contractors

- Ignoring you if you aren't persistent
  - Performing noncompliance activities more than once, regardless of your advice not to
  - Taking their supervisor's advice over yours
- Complaining that you take them away from their job
- Making fun/light of your very important job

What to Expect from Grading Contractors (continued...)

- Ignorance (or thick-headedness) in understanding the regulations they need to comply with
  - Supervisor/foreman did not explain them to the equipment operators
  - They just don't care (this can include both supervisors/foremen and operators)

Advise to Monitors

- Work for clients that care about natural habitats (not always practical or possible)
- Have very thick skin
- Don't argue, but be confident and demanding
  - This will earn the monitor respect from client and contractors
  - Start nicely…when ignored, don't be so nice
- Remind client/contractor that you are there to help and to keep them out of trouble

Advise to Monitors (continued...)

- Have full authority to stop any and all activities (be backed up by THE LAW)
- Let them know you are watching
- Get your hands dirty
- Learn all you can about grading construction work
  - Know what the equipment can and can't do
  - Know the names of the equipment