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Salt River Restoration Project Celebrates Success

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Ferndale, Ca., (KIEM)- The Salt River Restoration Project celebrated the re-connection of Francis Creek with the Salt River Saturday. It's a community effort in Ferndale that has been reducing flood risk and reconnecting aquatic habitats.

Francis Creek accounts for about 25% of the Salt River watershed, and is a very important tributary. In reconnecting the two aquatic systems, sediment has been removed from Port Kenyon and Francis Creek.

"On Port Kenyan and Francis Creek we used to be able to walk, ride our motorcycles… the channel was there." One of 45 cooperating landowners, Rick Sousa, explained. "Over the years the sedimentation, you know built up, caused the bridge to be more like a dam which caused a lot of flooding on our property. The old bridge this year, they took it out. It was five feet lower than the ground. They put in a new bridge and it turned out a lot better than we ever expected."

"It really hit me as I came into the room and saw how important this project is to the community." Leah Mahan, a habitat restoration specialist with NOAA (the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) said. "It's one of those really unique projects that helps the community and fish."

NOAA awarded a coastal resiliency grant which is mandated to help communities and fish populations according to Mahan.

The Salt River Restoration project helps fish by restoring key habitats. "Fish all over the Eel River use the estuary habitat and the lower parts of the Salt River for rearing when they're juvenile fish," Mahan explains, "And so this project will help improve that habitat for all the fish in the whole river. That will make them grow bigger in the ocean and increase their chances of coming back."

“The project benefits not only the restoration of the creek and… Francis Creek, it also benefits the agricultural land.” Sousa says. Reducing flood waters can help ensure there is more dry land viable for agrarian use. It also restores terrestrial habitat.

“Tiny Humboldt RCD is now managing one of the largest Eco-restoration projects on the Pacific Coast. Which is now up to a $35 million public works project that is providing tremendous economic benefit to the county of Humboldt and the state of California.” Michael Bowen, a project manager for the California State Coastal Conservancy says. “Profound improvement to agriculture around the coastal zone, and incredible benefits to the fish and wildlife that benefit from the project.”