

Beyond Searsville Dam Coalition Vision Statement

We, the undersigned, share a common interest in supporting actions to evaluate and consider removal of Stanford University's Searsville Dam in a manner that is beneficial to protecting creekside communities and watershed health.

For over a century, Searsville Dam has had an enormous impact within the San Francisquito Creek watershed and greater San Francisco Bay estuary. The 65-foot tall Searsville Dam has lost over 90% of its original water storage capacity as roughly 1.5 million cubic yards of sediment has filled in the reservoir. Searsville Dam does not provide potable water, flood control, or hydro power.

The disappearing reservoir behind the dam flooded and buried a unique confluence valley where five streams merged together among adjacent wetland ponds before squeezing through a small gorge where the dam now stands. With dam removal, restoration of this valley and ponds can provide a valuable flood control function by soaking up and retaining winter flows and releasing them gradually while providing excellent habitat. Enhancement of flood protection characteristics and connectivity with proposed downstream flood protection measures could also be key design features.

San Francisquito Creek is home to several sensitive species including one of the last, wild, self-sustainable runs of threatened steelhead trout in the South San Francisco Bay. A 2007 report by the Center for Ecosystem Management and Restoration identifies San Francisquito Creek as one of eight "anchor watersheds" for steelhead in San Francisco Bay, which are "critical" to steelhead recovery. Another recent report by fish biologist R. Leidy states that the creek may have supported coho salmon and that in the years immediately following the construction of Searsville Dam the caretaker reported that salmon swam upstream to the dam. The Department of Fish and Game considers the watershed home to one of the key steelhead runs left on the Central California Coast.

The impassable and obsolete Searsville Dam blocks native fish and other aquatic species from accessing the watershed's largest, historic spawning and rearing tributary in Portola Valley and Woodside. The artificial habitat of the disappearing reservoir also supports numerous exotic and invasive species, including a variety of fish and bullfrogs that compete with and prey upon native species both within the reservoir and downstream where they spill over. With the removal of Searsville Dam and elimination of the reservoir's stillwater habitat, populations of exotic fish would be eliminated or greatly reduced while water quality would likely improve.

Managers of ongoing wetland restoration projects in San Francisco Bay have expressed a need for millions of cubic yards of clean sediment. Removal of Searsville Dam could provide some of this sediment back to the bay while helping to minimize project costs and potential adverse impacts to downstream flood carrying capacity.

Across the country and around the world, dams that have outlived their usefulness are being removed to restore ecosystem health, improve flood protection, reduce safety risks, comply with environmental regulations, save money, improve water supply operations, revitalize communities, and provide unique educational and research opportunities. A multi-objective project that involves dam removal, enhanced flood protection, and watershed restoration can provide all of these benefits to the San Francisquito Creek watershed and surrounding communities.

Signatories as of May 1, 2009

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