

2-21-16

COMMENTARY

Wild trout of San Gabriel River are under siege

By John Tobin

Less than an hour's drive from the flatlands of Los Angeles County, up in those dry and dusty San Gabriel Mountains, are three rare and precious wild trout streams, the West, North and East forks of the San Gabriel River.

Under arbors of alder, sycamore and oak, they run clear and cold all year long, despite drought, and harbor wild rainbow trout. Some of the rainbows are direct descendants of steelhead trout, which went to and from the sea for eons before the system of dams was built. They are also home to some threatened and endangered creatures, including the Santa Ana speckled dace, which exists only in the Los Angeles basin.

These streams are always under pressure, and not just from our desert climate. They frequently suffer from overuse by crowds of visitors, some of whom trash them and others who



STAFF FILE PHOTO

The San Gabriel River is known for its streams full of trout and visitors.

damage them with illegal gold mining and with what the United States Forest Service calls "recreational dam building" — moving boulders around to create pools deep enough to swim or float in.

The Forest Service has long been hard-pressed to protect these forks of the river — not enough money, and not enough staff. Now they may be squandering a golden opportunity to change that be-

cause of inadequate scoping of the work that needs to be done in developing the management plan for the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument.

The many people who know and love these streams were naturally excited when President Obama proclaimed the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument in the fall of 2014, anticipating that plans and re-

sources would be developed to better protect these waters. And so the fishers, the hikers and the mountain bikers, together with professional fishery experts, weighed in during the requisite public comment period to tell the forest service what they thought should be done for these streams in the new National Monument plan.

At the end of that process, the Forest Service produced a scoping outcome summary of the comments and an outline of the issues and concerns they determined should be the focus of the plan. Sadly, the outline for the management plan does not include any focus on these streams.

Consequently, in accordance with the Forest Service's planning policies, most of the stream-specific comments and recommendations that were submitted by the public and by fishery experts were deemed irrelevant. They will not have an influence on the management plan for the national monument. Contrary to the recom-

mendations of fishery experts, there will be no explicit aquatic management strategy developed, and no suitability studies for the streams already eligible for the important Wild and Scenic River designation. And there is no mention of the genetic southern coastal steelhead that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has identified in tributaries of the San Gabriels, a valuable potential state resource for steelhead restoration projects.

If this concerns you, let the forest service know.

Contact Justin Seastrand, Environmental Coordinator, Angeles National Forest, at jseastrand@fs.fed.us, or Superintendent Jeffrey Vail, at JVail@fs.fed.us. Don't wait for the next public comment period later this winter or spring, when part of the environmental assessment will be published. It may be too late by then.

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