

Salmon program looks to transfer to nonprofit

John Driscoll/The Times-Standard

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A hard-working Trinity County salmon restoration program is hoping to move under a nonprofit umbrella that would allow it to save money and expand its mission at the same time.

The Five Counties Salmon Restoration Program would become part of the Northwestern California Resource Conservation and Development Council, a public-private nonprofit. The council is made up of representatives of county boards of supervisors, landowners and farmers, conservation districts and tribal representatives.

The council is considering taking the salmon program under its wing, and is expected to vote on it on Sept. 22. Supervisors with Trinity County -- which is still in serious financial straits -- are scheduled to consider whether to let the program go next week.

The salmon programs' director, Mark Lancaster, said that the move would reduce the effort's costs, which would mean it could do more work at a lower cost.

"If this happens we will be stable and competitive," Lancaster said.

The program is known for having replaced dozens of culverts that blocked salmon migration up streams -- opening up more than 100 miles of spawning grounds. It's also taken on road improvement measures to prevent erosion from damaging fish habitat and other efforts. Its budget this year is \$1.4 million, but Lancaster said it would be out of money by the fiscal year's end if it can't make the switch.

Under a nonprofit like the council, the program would be able to do similar projects on private lands, too.

Humboldt County Supervisor Jill Geist said that the expanded abilities of the program would help it realize much greater benefits to salmon.

"It retains the integrity of the program and allows us to apply it to willing private property owners," Geist said.

But Geist described it as a transition with lots of details, comparing it to arranging a divorce and a prenuptial agreement at the same time. Part of that is securing agreements with other counties not part of the council, Geist said.

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