



Volunteers make dams during last year's Truckee River Day.
COURTESY/CATHY HOWARD, TRUCKEE RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL

Slow the flow

Truckee River Day and Fair

Every year around this time, dozens of volunteers join members of the Truckee River Watershed Council and other groups to help make the Truckee River a better place. The annual Truckee River Day—and its companion festival and education event, the Truckee River Fair—are a chance to help restore the Truckee's creeks and meadows.

"The purpose of the projects [is] to improve the overall habitat and water quality and ecology of our watershed," said Michelle Prestowitz, program manager for the Truckee River Watershed Council. "We're mostly concerned with the interaction between the water and the land, so we really focus on that area of the Truckee. We're doing things like bank stabilization, if there's been erosion, so that there is less sediment going downstream."

This year's projects include planting seeds and vegetation in McIlver Dairy Meadow, making willow bundles along Squaw Creek and building Donner Camp boardwalks. The volunteers also create check dams, which Prestowitz explained are essential to a healthy Truckee River.

"They are built like beaver dams," she said. "The dams slow down the flow of the creek so the water can spread to the wetlands and meadows and create a habitat. With the way they are built, the water can flow through them."

The projects are followed by the River Fair, which starts at 1 p.m., at Granite Flat Campground. Prestowitz said the fair features a lot of hands-on events and experiences.

"One thing we have is a watershed table, about eight feet long and four feet wide, and it has granular materials with

little trees," she said. "It almost looks like a play-set, but at the top there's a hose with water, so you get to experience what the velocity of the water is like and how that erodes and changes the landscape. If you put a tree here or a rock there, you see how it does really change it."

It also includes an activity for children in which they release native Lahontan cutthroat trout into the Truckee. The fish are provided by a local hatchery, and it's one of the more popular parts of the day.

The reason for all of this extra work to strengthen the Truckee is mainly because of the way the river affects families in the area.

"The value of these mountain meadows can't be understated," she said. "The Truckee is the source of our clean water and overall ecology, and the habit of our native species. Meadow restoration is one of the most effective tools we have to mitigate any damage."

The effects of the annual volunteer effort over the years can be seen. Erosion has been reduced in the first four miles of the Truckee River, which leads to cleaner water. Previously barren meadows such as the ones in Perazzo are now dotted with wildflowers. While there has been progress, Prestowitz noted that there's still much work to be done.

"We have 50 projects that we want to complete within the next 10 years," she said. "It's a compelling time now, because the work we are doing is going to make our watershed more resilient to climate change and growth. We know that these are impending dangers, and if we can make a little bit of progress on our watershed here and there, then we can turn things around." □

Truckee River Day takes place starting at 9 a.m. Oct. 20 around areas of the Truckee River. The Truckee River Fair takes place from 1-4 p.m. at Granite Flat Campground, Highway 89, Truckee, California. Learn more about the Truckee River Watershed Council at truckeeriverwvc.org.

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