

Kokanee return to North Shore after 50 years

A stream restoration project on the North Shore is reaping environmental benefits as a small, fall run of kokanee salmon was spotted in the lower reaches of the creek last month.

The run has gone missing since the 1960s when Lake Forest Meadow was filled and numerous stream channels were diverted into a culvert in anticipation of a construction project that was never built.

Restoration work by the Placer County Department of Public Works Tahoe Engineering Division began in 2009. The project reconstructed the historic stream channel close to how it existed prior to modification in the 1960s. Additionally, the meadow was changed back to its historic contours. In all, 35 acres were restored, which required moving 21,000 yards of soil. To restore the natural grade of the area, 3,000 yards of that soil were actually trucked out of the Tahoe Basin.

Kokanee salmon are not a native fish species to Lake Tahoe. Their introduction likely occurred in the 1920s when an overflow of troughs in the Tahoe City fish hatchery allowed kokanee fry to escape into the lake.

The land for the Lake Forest Meadow restoration was acquired by the California Tahoe Conservancy and work began in September 2009.

In 2010, work was completed on restoration of 300 feet of channel on the north side of Highway 28, along Old Mill Road three miles east of Tahoe City. The channel runs south through the Lake Forest Meadow and ends at the outlet to Lake Tahoe in Pomin Park.

The project was finished earlier this year.

When the meadow was filled in the 1960s, it became drier than normal and vegetation was reduced. This lack of riparian vegetation then reduced wildlife habitat, encouraged erosion, and reduced opportunities for the public to enjoy the area.

In the now finished project, water flows through the meadow and has re-established a more natural environment. The finished grade of the meadow is closer to the top of the water table, which encourages greater vitality for the plant community. The restoration has increased species richness associated with riparian, meadow, and wetland habitats.

Funding for the \$2.7 million project was provided by:

- * U.S. Bureau of Reclamation;
- * U.S. Army Corp of Engineers;
- * U.S. Forest Service;
- * California Tahoe Conservancy;
- * Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.