



## Conservancy plans removal of San Clemente Dam by 2015

By PAUL MILLER

Published: December 3, 2010

**A**N 89-YEAR-OLD dam on the Carmel River will be torn down to improve earthquake safety and habitat, according to a detailed proposal unveiled at two public meetings this week.

In front of audiences that were sometimes skeptical but more often supportive, officials with the California Coastal Conservancy and the National Marine Fisheries Service painted the \$83 million San Clemente Dam Removal project in idyllic terms, and without any reference to the federal and state budget crises.

“We’re very excited about this plan, and we’re at the stage where it’s not ‘if,’ but ‘how and when,’” said Laura Engeman of the state coastal conservancy.

“It’s one of our top priorities for the Central Coast and will do a great deal to help bring back the steelhead trout, which are diminishing every year,” said Joyce Ambrosius of NMFS.

An official with the Bureau of Land Management echoed their sentiments. “This is a great project which will create a large area of public open space,” said George Hill.

San Clemente Dam, built in 1921 8.5 miles up the Carmel River to supply the Monterey Peninsula with water, is a graceful, concrete arch. But in the early 1990s, the California Department of Dam Safety declared it to be seismically unsafe and ordered its owner, California American Water, to make it safe. Furthermore, over the decades, the reservoir behind the dam became silted up, making it useless as a water source.

At first, Cal Am proposed to strengthen San Clemente Dam at a cost of \$49 million. But under pressure from environmentalists, the water company agreed to remove it if somebody else would pick up the extra cost and take liability for the property after the dam was no more.

That’s where the coastal conservancy and BLM got involved, developing a project that would remove the old dam but leave the sediment accumulated behind the dam in place. It calls for rerouting the Carmel River along the path of an adjacent creek and using most of the dam pieces for rerouting the river.

“The more material we keep on site, the less the project costs,” said Engeman, responding to residents’ concerns that a lot of construction traffic would end up on Carmel Valley Road.

Of the \$83 million overall cost, \$49 million will come from Cal Am's ratepayers, and the rest from federal and state taxpayers. While Engeman acknowledged some of the funding is not confirmed, she did not mention any anticipated difficulties getting it because of massive shortfalls in federal and state budgets.

According to Engeman, if permits for the project are approved by the end of 2011, construction will take place from 2012 to 2015.