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A Day on a Local Salmon Creek

Gary W. Flanagan
President, Granite Bay Flycasters



I remember reading an article in *Field and Stream* when I was about ten or eleven years old. I was living in K-part housing at Mather AFB. The article was titled "How to tell the difference between a "Creek" and a "Crick". The article went on to explain that a "Creek" was usually located some distance from where you live and was pristine and unpolluted. A "Crick" on the other hand was a local stretch of water in an urban setting which had a collection of old tires, broken glass, bums and rusted discharge pipes squirting out strange colored liquids that smelled bad.

I recall the author saying that he had a favorite "Crick" he fished where he caught a large Black Bass by casting through a broken out rear window into the back seat on a half submerged 1947 Ford Sedan. It's funny how little things mold your perception and these perceptions follow you through life. I spent several years traipsing around Mather on my stingray bike fishing and exploring the local "Cricks." When I got older and obtained my driver's license and got a car, I abandoned these "Cricks" and began fishing the more exotic locations. I regarded those fishing holes of my youth as just that, good enough for children but not worth the time of the seasoned angler.

When I moved to Granite Bay in 1986, I carried that same mentality with me. I knew of Dry Creek, Miner's Ravine, Linda Creek, Secret Creek and the many other creeks that were in my neighborhood. I always regarded them as drains for the water that ran down my driveway after I washed the car. They certainly qualified as "Cricks" in my book and I never paid much attention to them when I drove past unless they were at flood stage and were threatening the neighborhoods.

Soon, after becoming a Granite Bay Flycasters member, I met Dave Baker. Dave is also involved with the Dry Creek Conservancy. Last year Dave had asked me if I would like to be involved with the annual one day King Salmon count on the several reaches of Dry Creek. I was busy last year and couldn't accommodate Dave. This past year, Dave asked me again and I volunteered to help with the count.



Dave Baker with the *Dry Creek Conservancy* instructs volunteers for the Salmon Count, Nov. 19, 2004

The morning of November 19, 2004 I showed up at the lower parking lot of the UA Theaters on Roseville Parkway and was paired up with GBF member Terry Chappelle. We were assigned a "reach" on Secret Ravine Creek. It was our job to count the live salmon, note the number and locations of "salmon redds" and count and tag the dead salmon carcasses. Our assigned reach began at Sierra College Blvd, just south of I-80 and went upstream to Brace Road. Terry is a new GBF member and I was looking forward to getting to know him. As we shuttled his car upstream and drove back to the starting point on Sierra College, I learned that Terry is a recently retired El Camino and Rio Americana teacher who is now working for the California Department of Fish and Game in the Water Pollution Lab at Nimbus.

After we suited up in our waders, we dropped into the "Crick" and began wading upstream. The water level was just above my ankles and the "Crick" was only about fifteen feet wide. I looked into the concrete tube that ran under a roadway and saw several discarded tires. It brought on a flashback to my childhood haunts and I was positive we would find no salmon here. Terry and I managed to negotiate the barbed wire without ripping our waders and sloshed upstream. After about a hundred yards I caught the distinctive whiff of rotting salmon. Unless you are a Steelhead Angler I suppose one would consider this an unpleasant smell, but for me it is as pleasant as the smell of Lilacs. Smells are a strong memory jogger and I have always associated the smell with steelhead season.



Tagged and counted Salmon Carcasses, Secret Ravine, Nov19, 2004

We climbed a downed tree and found two thirty inch salmon carcasses. After tagging, measuring, determining the sex of the fish and logging that they were non-hatchery fish, Terry and I continued upstream.



A view of Secret Ravine upstream from Sierra College Blvd

I was more optimistic now that we had found evidence of salmon, and the "Crick" was starting to look a little more interesting.



Terry Wading Secret Ravine for Salmon Count, Nov 19, 2004

We rounded a bend and we saw a huge Cottonwood tree lying across the "Crick." This obstruction looked like it completely blocked any fish passage upstream and my heart sank. The water was percolating under the log through the decomposed granite on the "Crick Bed." The water had dammed up and was about knee deep. We halfheartedly moved upstream to where the damming effects started to subside and suddenly, we saw movement in the water.



Salmon on Redds, Secret Ravine, Nov19, 2004

Several salmon were holding in a small riffle. Once we got closer, we realized they were sitting on two separate redds. Redds are the depression that salmon make by laying on their sides and shaking their tails in the gravel. This is where they lay their eggs once they are happy with the depth. Once the eggs are laid and fertilized by the male, another depression is made upstream and the gravel is broadcast downstream to cover and protect the salmon eggs.



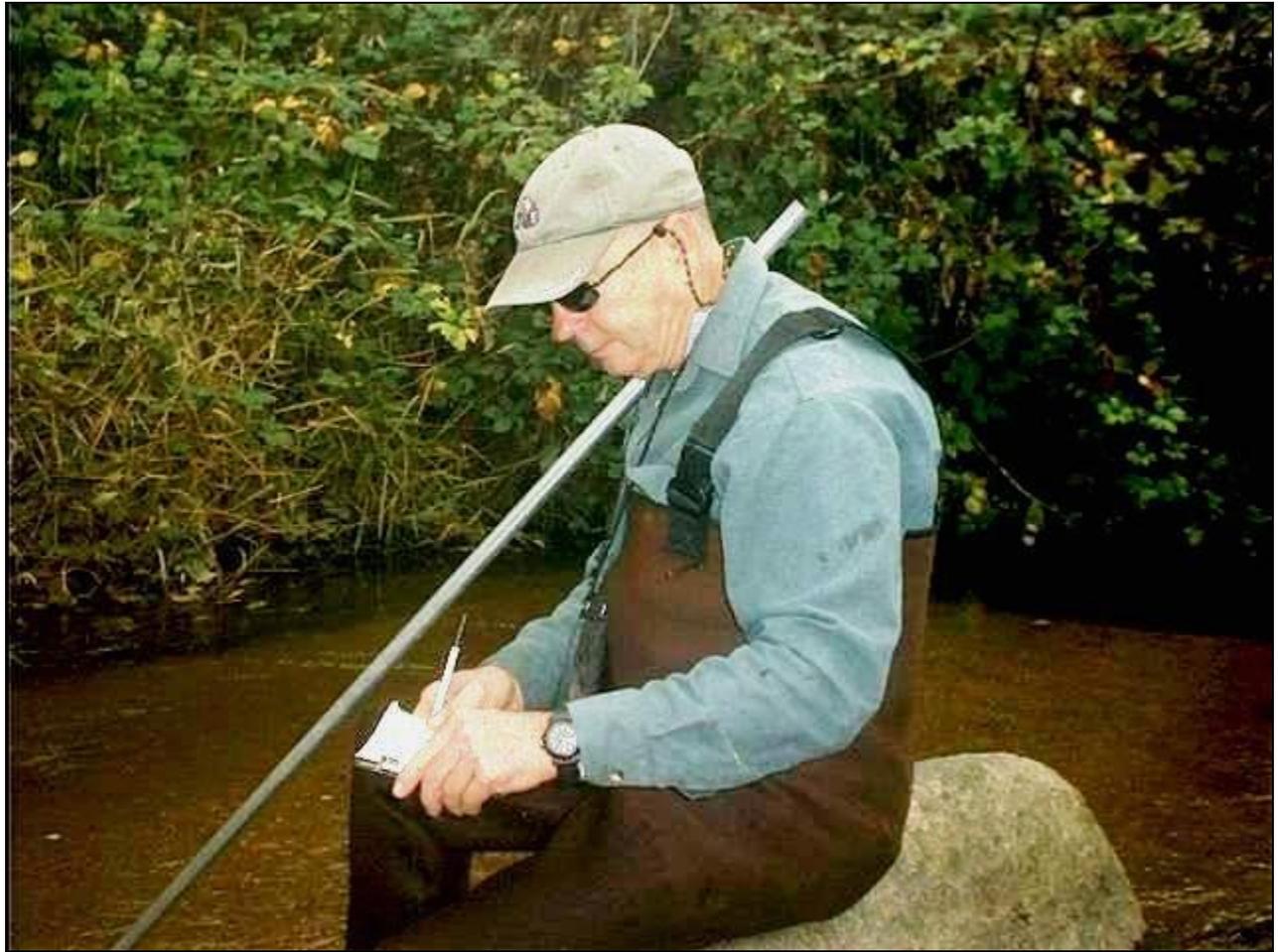
Beaver Dam offers a challenge to migrating salmon on Secret Ravine, Nov19, 2024

So this is how the day went. Every time we came across an obstruction, I was convinced we would no longer find any salmon. And there were plenty of obstructions in the form of trees, beaver dams and granite formations that split the water into tiny trickles with waterfalls up to five feet in height. Each time though, more salmon were upstream on their redds. Terry and I counted a total of twenty-nine live fish and fifteen dead ones.



Terry Chappelle returns a beached Salmon to the Secret Ravine water, Nov 19, 2004

It took us several hours to complete our count but only fifteen minutes into the count I realized that Secret Raving is indeed a beautiful "Creek" that deserves our protection and I was ashamed that it took me this long to see the Dry Creek Drainage as a special natural resource. These small creeks are important to the genetic diversity in salmon and steelhead populations that have been all but destroyed by the hatchery mentality of the past and present. These creeks are refuges for all native plants and animals that still thrive in our community.



Terry Chappelle entering Salmon count data, Secret Ravine, Nov 19, 2004

My hat goes off to everyone at the Dry Creek Conservancy for all the fine work they are doing and I look forward to participating in upcoming activities on our local **"CREEKS"**.

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