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Gray Creek Restoration May Get Cutthroat Trout

The Truckee River Watershed Council has high hopes for restoring Gray Creek's natural habitat. Gray Creek is part of more than 1,350 acres of land impacted by the Martis Fire in 2001.

The Gray Creek canyon property, located off Hirschdale Road from Interstate 80, is currently owned and managed by Truckee Donner Land Trust. The watershed council recently finished assessing the habitat of Gray Creek to develop a plan for restoration.

"Gray Creek is the biggest sediment-producer to the main stem of the Truckee River," said Beth Christman, watershed council program manager. Gray Creek is a "geologically young watershed," she said, with preliminary assessment results showing significant areas for improvement.

Once the creek's natural habitat has been restored and the sediment has been reduced, the watershed has a pretty great potential for Lahontan Cutthroat Trout population, said Sara Taddo, the land trust's land conservation director. Also of biological importance are the migrating deer that make their way to Sierra Valley in the winter months, Taddo said. And, Taddo said, there is a historical horse-packing trail that runs along Gray Creek.

Taddo said the land trust acquired the acreage as five private parcels between 2003 and 2005, to preserve Gray Creek and secure public access to the watershed. If the land trust hadn't purchased Gray Creek, the property would have been used for salvage logging, Taddo said.

And now, the future ownership of the Gray Creek acreage is up in the air, Taddo said. The land trust will donate the land to the California Department of Fish and Game, as long as the agency can find necessary funding to manage the land, she said.

The watershed council will present the Gray Creek assessment results on Monday, Dec. 4 at a special meeting from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at Truckee Town Hall. The Gray Creek project is supported through a grant from the California State Resources Control Board and funding from Proposition 13, the 2000 voter-approved water bond.

A group of volunteers worked on a restoration project near Gray Creek on Truckee River Day last month, using backhoes to mulch the land, Christman said. However, the timeline for the rest of the restoration work is dependent upon more grant funding, she said.

Another project in the works is the watershed assessment of Coldstream Canyon, a joint effort with the watershed council and California State Parks, Christman said, with results expected by January 2007.