

Dry Creek/Spenceville

Dry Creek, a tributary of the lower Bear River, is a perennial creek rising west of Grass Valley and flowing through Spenceville Wildlife and Recreation Area and Beale Air Force Base (AFB). Spenceville is managed by the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), Region II, and when combined with Beale AFB accounts for 19,213 acres of the Dry Creek Watershed (Bitterroot Restoration, Draft Dry Creek Concept Proposal, 2001). Summer flows of 5cfs, routed from the Bear River, are provided by NID at the headwaters (Terry Mayfield interview, 2/6/03). Dry Creek and its blue oak watershed habitats support steelhead trout and fall-run Chinook salmon. A dam on Beale AFB with inadequate fish passage poses the biggest single constraint to the fishery (John Nelson CDFG interview, 12/17/02). Cesar Blanco of USFWS and Ian Drury of CDFG have begun to survey Dry Creek's steelhead and salmon habitat. Dry Creek provides an important rearing opportunity for anadromous fish.

Spenceville Wildlife and Recreation Area is an 11,213 acre preserve just east of Beale AFB, south of State Route 20 and north of New Camp Far West Reservoir. The Spenceville area was home to the foothill Maidu-Nisenan and a wealth of visible evidence of their villages remains. Most Nisenan were forced out of the area (or had succumbed to disease or violence) by 1857; however, some remained in the area until the 1870's, welcomed by the early Dawson and Nichols ranching families. In 1862, the town of Spenceville was founded as a result of the discovery of copper ore. The U.S. Army established Camp Beale in 1942 and took over the existing ranches. After the war, some of the area was resold by the Army and the rest was deeded to the state as the Spenceville Wildlife and Recreation Area, to be managed by the Department of Fish and Game(Quitclaim Deed, 12/17/62).

The Wildlife Area is the largest tract of blue oak woodland habitat in public ownership in the north/central Sierra foothills. There are at least 80 known nesting bird species in Spenceville among the more than 175 species which inhabit the area at some point in their yearly cycle. Included in the bird population are nineteen Special Status Species, including the State Threatened and Federal Special Concern listed Black Rail (Friends of Spenceville, Comments on the Yuba County Water Agency's Phase II Report, 8/2/99). In addition to the above mentioned listed steelhead and fall-run salmon, the Area hosts Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle and "does have more herpetoids than most anywhere as well as lots of amphibians" (John Nelson op cit).

Friends of Spenceville, a non-profit group, was formed "to educate ourselves and the public about Spenceville and in so doing preserve Spenceville as a wildlife and recreation area" (Friends of Spenceville, comments op cit). Threats that have engaged Friends of Spenceville have included a proposed state prison facility, the proposed Waldo Dam (a 300,000 AF "off-stream" reservoir that would inundate 3,600 acres of the SWA's prime habitat area), and the currently-proposed Yuba Highlands residential project (a new town between the SWA and Beale AFB which would have major impacts on both the SWA and the base).

Beale Air Force Base comprises 23,000 acres of grasslands and blue oak habitat just west of Spenceville Wildlife and Recreation Area. The base maintains 38 Native American sites, 45 homestead sites, and 41 World War 11 sites (www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/beale.htm). As mentioned above, the base was established in 1942 and named after the man who founded the Army Camel corps (and a major

California land owner). During the war, the base was expanded to 86,000 acres and, in addition to training armor and infantry soldiers, served as a prisoner-of-war encampment. In 1956, Beale became the base for U2s. At present, it is home base for the 9th Reconnaissance Wing. The base has an active volunteer Conservation Corps as well as an Environmental Compliance officer and, through the Bear River Workgroup, is active in improving the Dry Creek habitat.