

RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Bodega Bay Land Trust

by Robin Rudderow - 2013

The Bodega Land Trust was formed to foster the conservation and restoration of agricultural lands, forests, streams, wilderness, natural habitats and resources in perpetuity through acceptance or purchase of land or conservation easements in Western Sonoma County. The Trust affords an opportunity to help develop and encourage rural communities through involvement in projects like the Salmon Creek Project.

The prehistory includes the Coast Miwok people as the latest indigenous people to inhabit the area into the mid-1800s. Don Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Cuadra sails into Bodega Bay in 1775 and claims the region for Spain. The Russians and Native Alaskans arrive at Port Rumiantsev, Bodega Bay, in 1812 to establish Fort Ross. From 1835-1846, the Mexican government gives land grants, and introduces the first Anglo settlers in the Salmon Creek watershed who were given instructions to bother the Russian settlements nearby.

The 1840s to the mid 1880s brings the arrival of Captain Stephen Smith, the Mexican-American War, the California Gold Rush, development of logging and sawmills, and the “Squatters’ Wars”. The narrow gauge railroad was built beginning in 1873 which brought over a thousand Chinese workers who were subsequently driven from the county in an 1886 boycott.

In 1885-1890 early Sonoma County environmental concerns arose concerning county-wide over-fishing of salmon and trout species; rules regarding the fishing season and catch were implemented. Concern was expressed over the effect of coastal logging on local climate change.

There was a proposal in 1961 to construct a saltwater barrier 2 miles upstream from the mouth for the Bodega Bay Public Utility District and a dam and reservoir on Finley Creek, approximately 1 3/4 miles upstream from the well site. A complete survey to evaluate the possibility of delayed spawning and migration to the ocean of salmon was conducted.

In 1974 there was a record salmon catch at sea off Salmon Creek. Observers noticed in 1978 that sand that was excavated to free a beached boat in 1970 was moving eastward into the estuary. More dune grass was planted on the dunes at the mouth of Salmon Creek to help hold the sand back.

Heavy rains and flooding in both 1982 and 1986 caused an astonishing quantity of sediment to wash down the tributaries, and the estuary’s breadth and depth changed dramatically. In 1996 the last documented Coho salmon was seen in Salmon Creek. The Department of Fish and Game has released adult salmon for four consecutive winters beginning in January 2009. This has created a big boost in the salmon population, .

