

Mokelumne Watershed Environmental Benefits Program



David Edelson, TNC

“For the Lodi region, productive agriculture depends on a healthy Mokelumne River; by protecting the watershed and its wildlife we are investing in a thriving economy and community.”

—Chris Storm, Vino Farms

The Mokelumne Environmental Benefits Program is an innovative, collaborative and voluntary effort to protect and restore nature’s benefits, support local economies, and sustain rural communities, from the headwaters of the Mokelumne River in California’s Sierra Nevada mountains to its confluence with the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. Our premise is simple: by measuring and tracking economic investments and environmental outcomes, we can substantially increase both the amount and effectiveness of watershed restoration activities. By creating a framework where environmental benefits are tracked and traded, the Program incentivizes environmental stewardship.

Our vision

We envision a future in which public and private sectors are brought together to develop and participate in investment opportunities that reward sustainable resource management and watershed restoration in the Mokelumne River watershed. Under this vision, landowners and land managers will be compensated for undertaking sustainable management practices and restoration activities. By providing incentives, the Mokelumne Program will foster healthier forests and streams and improved water quality and flows, resulting in jobs, cost savings, and other societal benefits.

The Mokelumne

The Mokelumne supplies drinking water to more than 1.3 million California residents, produces an average of 1000 GWh of hydropower which gives electricity to about 215,000 homes, and supports an extensive agricultural economy of more than 800,000 acres of important crops such as winegrapes and orchards. At the same time, the watershed provides critical habitat for many sensitive fish and wildlife species, including fall-run chinook salmon, steelhead trout, red-legged frog, northern goshawk and American marten. The Mokelumne also offers outstanding recreational opportunities such as hiking, camping, biking, rafting, and fishing. But like many watersheds

in the state, the Mokelumne faces threats from high-intensity fire, land use patterns and practices, and climate change impacts.



Mathew Grimm, EDF

Illustrated above, the Mokelumne River reaches the end of its journey as it joins the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. Agriculture, including vineyards, is the primary land use of the lower watershed.

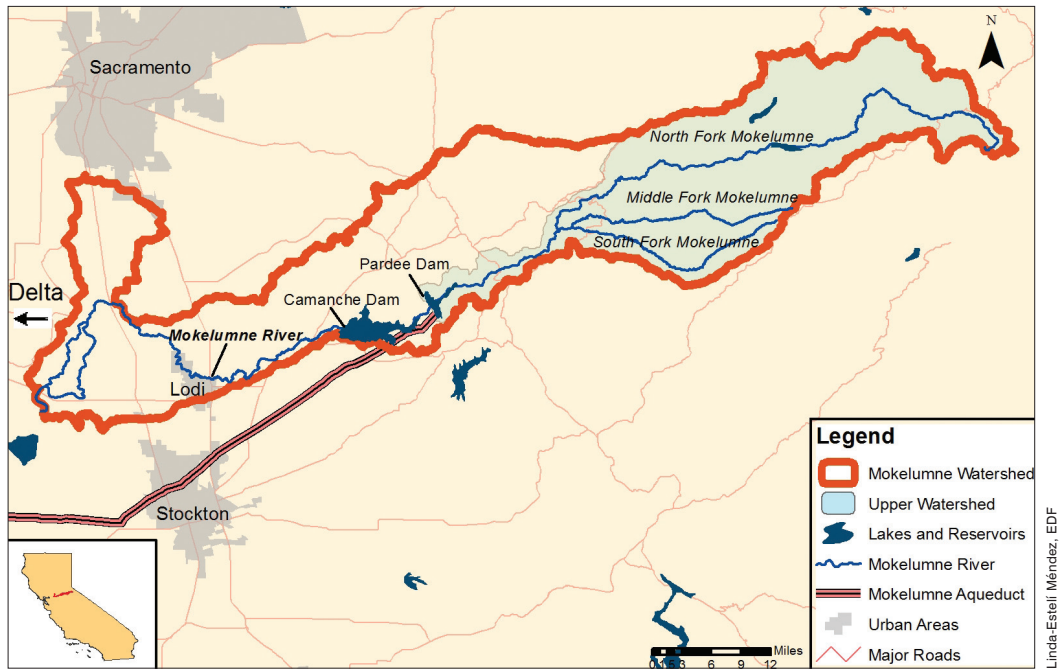


Friends of the River

The Mokelumne is a fishing hotspot of the region. Above, Mikey Wier, Fly Fishing Ambassador for Patagonia, Inc., displays a Mokelumne River Rainbow Trout.

Mokelumne Watershed

We envision a future in which public and private sectors are brought together in a program that rewards sustainable resource management.



Our objectives

- Create new opportunities for landowners and land managers to restore, protect and enhance the watershed and support the local economy.
- Provide a performance-based environmental accounting system to track environmental improvements.
- Establish a broad-based collaborative program to ensure results are adapted to local conditions and supported by local communities.
- Educate stakeholders and decision-makers about the wide-array of environmental benefits provided by the Mokelumne watershed.
- Devise a verifiable investment vehicle for public and private investors seeking to improve environmental values.
- Consider the application of this approach to other California watersheds.

The program

By rigorously quantifying and monitoring environmental benefits, the Program will encourage cost-effective investments in forest, meadow, and streamside restoration, thereby providing private and public landowners and land managers with incentives to implement sustainable land management practices.

Collaborative process

Sustainable Conservation, Environmental Defense Fund, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, and The Nature Conservancy have convened a working group of local and regional stakeholders to develop and implement the Program. The working group includes broad representation from watershed groups, the U.S. Forest Service, local governments, East Bay Municipal Utility District, Foothill Conservancy and other environmental interests, private landowners, and the San Joaquin County Resource Conservation District.

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