

Comments of Chris Shutes, CSPA, at the dedication of the Rock Creek Bench recreation access, North Fork Feather River, June 13, 2017

The Rock Creek Bench is an important, practical improvement to safe recreation at the Rock Creek – Cresta Project.

But it is much more. It is a physical representation of ten years of partnership in the Rock Creek – Cresta Ecological Resources Committee, or ERC. The ERC is a partnership of PG&E, the Forest Service, other resources agencies, Plumas County, the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance, and American Whitewater.

The Rock Creek Bench is a milestone in the resolution of conflicting interests. When I joined the ERC eleven years ago, its conflicts seemed intractable. At one of my first meetings, someone from one of the agencies suggested that the ERC could never reach consensus. Whitewater boaters wanted more boating days, while my predecessor at CSPA wanted no boating days at all. We were all concerned about boating impacts to aquatic insects, and we were becoming increasingly concerned about the declining frog population on the Cresta reach.

PG&E funded an extensive study of the effects of boating on aquatic insects, and we reached a level of boating on Rock Creek we could all live with. We have been adjusting the flows on the Cresta reach for about ten years to try to protect the frogs and still meet multiple interests. AW decided to approach boating on Cresta in a whole new way. We all worked hard and we all gave things up along the way.

Above all, we kept talking, we all listened, and we focused efforts on solving problems. It took years to work out a plan to make receding flows at the end of runoff mimic the natural hydrograph. We had to do it because the measures in the Settlement and the resulting requirements in the project license didn't do the job, PG&E didn't have the technology to do better, and we needed to do better by the frogs. We're testing it this year.

To many people, the Rock Creek Bench is a parking lot, and as such it has real value. But it is also testimony to the fact that the ERC has understood that how you do business is as important the business you do. We could have bickered or fought, for the last ten years and for another ten years, about how to re-work the parts of our Settlement and the project license that didn't work as planned. We chose a better road. It's not just where you park. It's also how you get there.