



Living History of Tuolumne County's Ditch System

Come join local archaeologists Barbara Balen and Charla Francis as they discuss the historic ditch system and its recent eligibility determination to the National Register of Historic Places on **Friday, January 27**, at 7:00 pm, at the public library on Greenley Road—Community Room.

Charla was part of a team of local historians and historical archaeologists who researched and evaluated the architecture, rock retaining walls, pipes, and flumes that comprise the various ditch systems. Barbara is an archaeologist with the Forest Service, a second term director on the TUD board, and a ditch irrigation customer. The following is a brief snapshot of water history as background for their presentation.

Hidden throughout Tuolumne County are its legacy of canals, flumes, ditches, ponds and reservoirs - hand hewn by miners and engineered to convey water from the Stanislaus River to the gold fields of Sonora, Columbia, Tuolumne, Jamestown and everywhere in between. Few people realize the colorful history associated with this system or that the genesis of wealth and water and the California Dream are inextricably linked to the present through this amazing waterway of the past. The TUD system is 100% gravity fed, requiring no energy.

The system has been in continuous use since the Gold Rush, delivering water to ranches, farms, lumber mills, industry, people and treatment plants. The ownership of the system tracks some of the earliest consolidated water rights in the history of water development in California. Today only 57 miles of the 250 miles of historic ditch system survive. The ownership is divided between TUD and PG&E, with PG&E owning and maintaining the main canal and the District owning and maintaining the rest of the ditch facilities.

The ditch system threads its way from high elevation to low, through forest, rural, urban, commercial, and agricultural settings. It can be considered a cultural landscape. As such, the canal and ditch system provide a variety of social, economic and environmental benefits for the community of Tuolumne County as a whole. Among these are: gravity-fed water, fire protection, wetlands, health and wellbeing, recreation, wildlife habitat, connectivity as migratory corridors, climate greenbelts, aesthetics, community identity, sense of uniqueness, and living history.

The fever and fury of the Gold Rush left a landscape forever changed. However, through ongoing use, our remarkable ditch system continues to deliver water and convey its sense of time and place in history, its original architecture in many places, stone workmanship, and 160 years of naturalized and water dependent wildlife landscapes of valley oaks, dogwoods, woodwardia ferns.

The determination of eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places and the Ditch Sustainability Plan will help TUD develop maintenance strategies that achieve the objective of protecting precious water resources while equally protecting the systems history, biology, ecology, property values, and the community's dependency on ditch water for fire protection. All these values are considered beneficial uses under the California Water Code. We hope you can join us for this PowerPoint presentation, discussion, and Q&A.