



Merced River Corridor Restoration Plan Baseline Studies

Volume I: Identification of Social, Institutional, and Infrastructural Opportunities and Constraints

April 30, 2001

**MERCED RIVER CORRIDOR RESTORATION PLAN
BASELINE STUDIES**

**VOLUME I:
IDENTIFICATION OF SOCIAL, INSTITUTIONAL, AND
INFRASTRUCTURAL OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS**

FINAL REPORT

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PREFACE

The purpose of this report is to provide the results of the Phase II baseline studies to identify social, institutional, and infrastructural opportunities and constraints for restoration that were conducted for the Merced River Corridor Restoration Plan. Previous drafts of this report were reviewed by Ted Selb (Merced Irrigation District), Rhonda Reed (California Department of Fish and Game), Desmond Johnson (Merced County Planning and Community Development Department), Scott Spaulding (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), and Randy Mager (California Department of Water Resources). The draft report was also presented to the Merced River Stakeholder Group (on June 15, 2000) and was subsequently revised. The revised draft was redistributed to the Stakeholder Group (on March 5, 2001). Many stakeholders provided valuable comments, which are reflected in this final report.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Merced River drains a 1,276-square-mile watershed on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada range in the southern portion of California's Central Valley and joins the San Joaquin River about 87 miles south of Sacramento (Figure 1). Elevations in the basin range from 13,000 feet NGVD¹ at its crest in Yosemite National Park to 49 feet NGVD at the San Joaquin River confluence. The climate is typically Mediterranean, with wet winters and dry summers. Similar to other rivers originating from the west side of the Sierra Nevada mountains, flow in the Merced River is typified by late spring and early summer snowmelt, fall and winter rainstorm peaks and low summer baseflows. Annual water yield from the Merced River averages 996,500 acre-feet (for the period 1903–1999).

The Merced River Corridor Restoration Planning project was initiated to develop a publicly supported, technically sound, and implementable plan to improve geomorphic and ecological function in the Merced River corridor from Crocker-Huffman Dam (River Mile² [RM] 52) downstream to the San Joaquin River (RM 0). The project is a joint venture being led by the Merced County Planning and Community Development Department (the County) and Stillwater Sciences. In addition, the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) and the Merced Irrigation District (Merced ID) actively participate on the Project Team.

The project is being implemented in three phases. In Phase I, Stillwater Sciences and the County established a Merced River Stakeholder Group and Merced River Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). This phase was funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Anadromous Fish Restoration Program (AFRP) and began in November 1998. In Phase II, the Project Team conducted baseline geomorphic and ecological analyses and identified social, infrastructural, and institutional issues and concerns that will define opportunities and constraints for restoration in the Merced River corridor. This phase was funded by CALFED and began in April 1999 and was completed in Winter 2001. In Phase III, which was also funded by CALFED and which began in Fall 2000, the Project Team will complete field and modeling efforts to develop design guidelines for geomorphically functional channel and floodplain dimensions³, and in collaboration with the Stakeholder Group and TAC, develop the Merced River Corridor Restoration Plan.

¹ National Geodetic Vertical Datum, a standard vertical datum used throughout the United States.

² River miles represent the distance along the river channel upstream from the San Joaquin River.

³ This task was originally included in Phase II. Phase II, however, was only partially funded in the 1999 CALFED cycle. This task was shifted to Phase III due to funding constraints.

2 SCOPE AND STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

To be successful, the restoration plan must work within the ecological as well as the social, institutional, and infrastructural context of the river. This social, institutional, and infrastructural context includes property ownership, land use and zoning, water resource development, water supply reliability, flood control requirements, physical structures (such as bridges), and environmental, flood control, and other regulations. Understanding this social, institutional, and infrastructural context of the river provides necessary insight into potential opportunities and constraints for river restoration. Recognizing these opportunities and constraints, the plan and the restoration projects contained within the plan can be designed to be implementable and functional within the current and foreseeable social, institutional, and infrastructural framework of the river.

This report identifies social, institutional and infrastructural factors affecting future restoration opportunities within the Merced River corridor, including existing zoning and land use, land ownership patterns, existing and planned aggregate mining activities to provide a reliable aggregate supply, Merced ID operations, and other factors. This report focuses on lands within a 3-mile-wide corridor along the river (Figure 2). The area shown is the area of analysis used to describe the context of the river. It is NOT necessarily the area where potential restoration projects would occur. Restoration projects would focus on the river channel and its immediate adjacent floodplain.

This report is meant to be a source document providing information to guide future studies, develop appropriate restoration strategies, and assess the feasibility of specific restoration projects. This report will be used in conjunction with the geomorphic and riparian technical evaluations reported by Stillwater Sciences (2001) to work with the Stakeholder Group and TAC to identify feasible restoration projects in Phase III of this project.

3 LAND OWNERSHIP, LAND USE, AND INFRASTRUCTURE

3.1 Property Ownership

The analysis area includes 1,991 parcels covering 79,662 acres. Of this area, 1,931 parcels (97% by area) are in private ownership (Figure 3). A comprehensive restoration program, therefore, will require restoration projects to occur on private property in partnership with private property owners. In addition, restoration projects implemented on publicly owned lands could potentially affect nearby private property owners and would thus require coordination with these owners. Throughout the corridor, the largest landowners include: Merced ID, La Grange Gold Dredging Company, Gold River Ranch Partnership, Sunup Land & Cattle Partnership, N. Ellinwood, Robinson Cattle Company Partnership, United Packaging Partnership, Gallo Vineyards, Bettencourt Property Partnership, Ulkje Hilarides Trustee, P&H Dairy, Henry J & Adrienne M TeVelde Trustees, Joseph P & Cherry Vierra Company Trustees, the City of Livingston, J.O. Rocha, James J. Stevinson Corporation, and California Department of Fish and Game.

Privately owned parcels range in size from 0.1 acres to 970 acres, with the smallest parcels occurring in urban areas such as Snelling and Cressey. The average parcel size is 82 acres. Based on parcel maps provided by the Merced County Tax Assessor's Office, private property parcels are typically larger upstream of Cressey than downstream of Cressey (Figure 3). The large parcel ownership upstream of Cressey provides restoration opportunities in this reach. Fewer landowners and larger parcel sizes simplify restoration planning and project implementation and increase the likelihood of reaching a restoration agreement. In addition, public ownership of several large parcels upstream of Shaffer Bridge provides opportunities for restoration. Conversely, restoration downstream of Shaffer Bridge would be more complex due to numerous landowners and, smaller parcels.

Understanding the concerns of private property owners and working with private property owners to develop the restoration plan is crucial for developing implementable projects and ensuring that restoration projects do not adversely affect private property without appropriate, mutually acceptable compensation. Initial stakeholder comments indicate that the local property owners are concerned that a restoration plan would infringe upon their individual property and water rights, but that many landowners support improving natural resources and habitat in and along the river. In addition, landowners have expressed strong concerns regarding bank erosion, flooding and flood control, riparian water rights, mineral rights, trespassing, and vandalism. Lack of landowner support for restoration activities would be one of the greatest constraints to planning and implementing restoration actions.

Many of the agricultural and dairy operations along the river rely on water diverted from the river either by the Merced ID or by riparian diversions. For these operations, water from the Merced River is essential for irrigation supply and managing dairy byproducts. Several property owners along the river also operate aggregate mines on their land or may pursue future mining operations. Mineral rights are an important element of property rights. Recognition of aggregate resource values is expected to be a significant issue for riparian property owners. In addition, many landowners have experienced vandalism, littering, and other adverse effects of uncontrolled access to their properties and wish to limit and control access to the river corridor.

Sixty parcels, or approximately 3% of the analysis area, are publicly owned (Figure 3). These properties include land owned by the State (Department of Fish and Game and Department of Parks and Recreation), the County, Merced ID, the City of Livingston, Stevenson Water District, Turlock Irrigation District, Snelling School District, Snelling Community Services, Sacramento and San Joaquin Drainage District, Merced Falls School District, Hilmar Water District, and Delhi County Water District. Although these parcels are publicly owned, most do not offer public access.

3.2 Zoning, Planning Policies and Land Use in the Merced River Corridor

Zoning and planning policies shape the land uses within the Merced River corridor. California Government Code (Section 65300-65307) requires city and county planning agencies to prepare and adopt a comprehensive, long-term General Plan for the development of the county or city and of any land outside its boundaries that is within the planning agency's jurisdiction. The General Plan outlines the goals concerning land use and is designed to serve as the basis for development-oriented decision making. General plans include a land use element that designates the proposed general distribution, location, and extent of the land uses for housing, business, industry, open space (including agriculture), natural resources, recreation, education, public buildings and grounds, solid and liquid waste disposal facilities, and other categories of public and private land uses.

The Merced County Year 2000 General Plan was adopted in 1990, and the Land Use Element was most recently revised in 1998. In the General Plan, all land in the unincorporated areas of Merced County is classified into land use designations for a variety of urban and rural uses. These designations are implemented through various zoning districts, such as Exclusive Agricultural (A-2), Single-Family Residential (R-1), or General Commercial (C-2). These districts are described in the Merced County Zoning Code. This code is intended to: (1) help implement the goals, objectives, and policies of the General Plan; (2) ensure compatibility between land uses; and (3) encourage development that protects and promotes the public health, safety, and general welfare of the unincorporated areas of the county. The Zoning Code describes the uses allowed and development standards for each zoning designation. Zoning districts within this report's area of analysis are shown in Figure 4 and Table 1. Some land uses (such as farming) are allowed by right, while other uses require a special permit. For example, mining/mineral extraction projects are allowed with a Conditional Use Permit in the A-1 and A-2 zones only. In addition to designating zoning, the County also tracks land use within the county area. Land uses in the Merced River corridor are shown in Figure 5 and Table 2.

Table 1. Zoning Within the Merced River Corridor

Zoning Type	Acres	% of Total Analysis Area
A-1 General Agricultural	41,987	53
A-2 Exclusive Agricultural	36,573	46
A-R Agricultural Residential	397	<1
C-2 General Commercial	58	<1
R-1 Single-Family Residential	118	<1
R-2 Multi-Family Residential	4	<1
M-1 Light Industrial	5	<1
M-2 Heavy Industrial	22	<1
Total	79,164	100

Source: Merced County Planning and Community Development Department.

Table 2. Land Use within the Merced River Corridor

Land Use Type	Acres	% of Total Analysis Area
Urban	1,030	1
Agriculture	24,433	31
Orchard	27,204	34
Grazing	12,688	16
Dairy	4,223	5
Poultry	2,430	3
Sand and Gravel (Aggregate)	1,331	2
Government	2,924	4
Vacant, Unclassified, Utility/Railroad, Misc.	3,399	4
Total	79,662	100

Source: Merced County Tax Assessor's Office.

3.2.1 Urban Zoning and Land Use

Three urban areas are situated within the Merced River corridor: Snelling, Cressey and Livingston (Figure 4). Snelling is located adjacent to the Merced River and has an estimated population of 453 for the year 2000, with a current average annual growth rate of 3%. The most recent population data for Cressey are from the 1990 U.S. Census Bureau, which lists the population of the Cressey voting district at 840. Livingston is one of the more populous cities in Merced County, with an estimated population of 10,183 for the year 2000 and a current annual growth rate of 4%.

Snelling, Livingston and Cressey are zoned for urban development along the river, and each has a Specific Urban Development Plan (SUDP). Land within an SUDP may include the following zoning designations: General Commercial (C-2), Light and Heavy Industrial (M-1 and M-2), Single Family Residential (R-1), and Multi-Family Residential (R-2), with some nearby lands zoned Agricultural Residential (A-R) (Merced County 1990). All land within an SUDP is planned for eventual development in a mixture of urban and urban-related uses, and whenever land is added to an SUDP, the decision is made that it will ultimately be converted to an urban use. The purpose of an SUDP is to direct urban development to designated urban centers in order to avoid the urbanization of rural areas (Merced County 1990). Public services, such as water and sewer, are typically available in these areas, making higher density development possible. SUDPs also provide an ultimate growth boundary for each community over the life of the Plan. SUDPs in Merced County are currently being revised.

Urban uses cover much less land area than agricultural uses along the river. Only 1,029 acres (1% of the analysis area) within the Merced River corridor are zoned for urban land use. Urban land uses within the vicinity of the Merced River tend to be located within SUDP areas or Rural Residential Centers (RRC). Urban land uses include residential, commercial, industrial and related institutional uses, and are described below (Merced County 1990). Large-scale restoration actions would not be appropriate on lands zoned for urban or residential uses. These areas have or potentially have intensive development and concentrated populations, factors which limit the effectiveness of restoration activities for ecological function but provide opportunities for public education and river-oriented recreation. Where appropriate, smaller-scale, urban-oriented restoration projects, such as parks and greenways, could be implemented in urban and residential areas.

Land use designations found in urban and residential areas are described below:

- Residential land use designations are applied to areas considered appropriate for the construction of single-family and multi-family dwellings. Single-family dwelling developments are further classified as Very Low and Low Density Residential. These lower density residential areas provide for the majority of unincorporated communities in Merced County and are generally located in regions that may lack public water or sewer systems. The multi-family dwelling developments are further classified as Medium and High Density Residential. These higher density residential units are found in the form of duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes and townhouses, and are predominantly located near the center of a community. Medium Density Residential areas typically have dwellings constructed at a density of up to 15 units per acre, while the buildings within High Density Residential areas may be constructed at a density of up to 33 units per acre.
- Commercial land use classifications are generally applied to areas within an urban district considered appropriate for general retail commercial activities. These areas are usually located near the center of a community to encourage the development of a central business district or core, possibly with other non-residential land uses. The mixture of businesses is important in these central business districts because the activities may complement each other and provide a certain level of convenience to customers. Typical uses that may locate in commercial areas include general retail commercial activities and personal and professional services. Recreational and institutional uses may also be appropriate in this land use designation.
- The Industrial land use designation is generally applied to areas within an urban district that are considered appropriate and necessary for manufacturing and wholesale activities. Industrial areas generally locate along major transportation routes and/or toward the fringes of the city. Typical uses that may locate in these areas are those involved in research, processing, distribution, storage, or the wholesale trade of various materials and products. Additional activities that may be considered appropriate in these areas include transportation facilities, maintenance facilities, and recreational or institutional activities.

3.2.2 Agricultural Zoning and Land Use

The majority of land within the analysis area is zoned for General or Exclusive Agricultural, with 41,987 acres (53% of the analysis area) zoned for General Agricultural and 36,573 acres (46% of the analysis area) zoned for Exclusive Agricultural. The General Agricultural zoning designation provides area for open space, agricultural, agricultural/commercial, and/or industrial uses dependent on proximity to urban areas or uses that require location in sparsely populated, low-traffic areas. Parcels with this zoning are 20 to 40 acres or greater in area, but can be reduced to a minimum of 20 acres if approved at a public

hearing and if the parcel reduction does not reduce the agricultural productivity of the property. Lands zoned for General Agricultural tend to rely on good soil quality, good water availability, and minimal slopes. Lands zoned for General Agricultural are located primarily downstream of Shaffer Bridge (Figure 4). The Exclusive Agricultural zoning designation area is primarily used as foothill pastureland and open space and allows for expanded agricultural enterprises since the minimum parcel size required for this zoning is 160 acres. Lands zoned for Exclusive Agricultural are located primarily upstream of Shaffer Bridge (Figure 4).

The crops grown within the Merced River corridor are typical of the types of crops grown throughout Merced County and include field crops such as oats, wheat and sorghum, fruits and nuts such as apricots, cherries, almonds, walnuts, figs, mandarin oranges, navel oranges, and prunes, and vegetables such as corn, lima beans and potatoes. Other agricultural land uses, such as dairies and poultry farms, are distributed throughout the corridor. Descriptions of the major agricultural land uses within the river corridor are provided below:

- Foothill pasture, or grazing, land is predominately located upstream of Shaffer Bridge (Figure 5). Characteristic features of grazing areas include: slopes greater than 4%, elevations greater than 200 feet above sea level, slow-to-very rapid water runoff potential, moderate-to-severe erosion potential, moderate-to-poor water availability, and thin topsoils and/or hardpan subsurfaces (i.e., poor for row crops). Within the Merced River corridor, 12,688 acres are used for pastureland, accounting for nearly 16% of the analysis area. In 1999, cattle was the sixth ranked farming commodity in Merced County, generating \$70,579,000 in revenue (Merced County Department of Agriculture 1999).
- Dairies are located throughout the Merced River corridor (Figure 5). According to the Merced County General Plan, a typical large size dairy consists of approximately 1,600 cows on a 60- to 70-acre site. Facilities include 25 to 30 acres of corrals (including free stall barns for shelter), a 4-acre water treatment lagoon, three acres of feed storage, and a 1/4-acre milk barn. In addition, up to another 1,000 to 1,500 acres of adjacent land may be controlled by the same owner and used to grow alfalfa and corn for feed that is irrigated with nutrient-rich dairy wastewater. Within the Merced River corridor, 4,222 acres are used for dairy production. Milk is the highest valued commodity produced in Merced County, generating \$519,743,000 in 1999 (Merced County Department of Agriculture 1999). Manure, a byproduct of dairy operations, is also an important agricultural commodity, generating \$7,998,000 in Merced County in 1999 (Merced County Department of Agriculture 1999). According to local dairy operations, modern dairy practices and mandated water quality regulations have greatly reduced the impact of dairy operations on the Merced River.
- Poultry ranches are predominately located upstream of Snelling Road, with a few located downstream State Route 99 (Figure 5). According to the General Plan, a typical poultry ranch requires a 70- to 80-acre parcel, including about 45 poultry sheds on 18 to 20 acres containing approximately one million birds. Additional facilities include three homes for employees, drainage detention basins covering two acres, and manure storage areas covering another two acres. Within the Merced River corridor, 2,430 acres are used for poultry production. Poultry is the second highest grossing commodity in Merced County, with a production value of \$165,507,000 in 1999.
- Orchards are located throughout the Merced River corridor, but they are more concentrated between Route 165 and Route 59 (Figure 5). Orchards include various nut and fruit crops such as almonds, walnuts, apricots, cherries, figs, mandarin oranges, navel oranges, and prunes. Within the Merced River corridor, 27,203 acres are used for orchards, accounting for approximately 34% of the total corridor area. A total of 77,461 acres of orchard crops were harvested in 1999 throughout Merced County. In 1999, almonds were by far the largest orchard crop grown in the County and were the

third highest grossing crop, valued at \$120,033,000 (Merced County Department of Agriculture 1999).

3.2.3 Mining

Aggregate (sand, gravel, and crushed stone) mining along the Merced River is an economically important industry and provides aggregate resources needed for current and future development in Merced County. Clinkenbeard (1999) identifies aggregate as the primary mineral commodity produced in Merced County. In 1998, approximately 1.7 million tons of construction aggregate, valued at more than \$9 million, were produced in Merced County. Mining activities do not require a separate land use designation within the General Plan; the operations are permitted on land within the General or Exclusive Agricultural zoning districts (L. Martinez, pers. comm., 1999).

The Merced River and its floodplain have been historically mined for both gold and aggregate, and aggregate mining continues on the floodplain today. Large-scale aggregate mining began in the Merced River in the 1940s. Older mines excavated sand and gravel directly from the riverbed, leaving behind deep pits within the channel. More recent mines have been located on floodplains and terraces adjacent to the river. These mines are typically separated from the river by narrow berms. Many of the berms at older mines have been breached, resulting in direct connection of many of these floodplain mines to the river channel.

The California Department of Conservation Division of Mines and Geology (CDMG) recently completed a mineral land classification of Merced County, which evaluates the mineral resource potential of Merced County and describes the location, quantity, and quality of concrete aggregate resources in the county, as well as the projected demand for construction aggregate within the county for the next 50 years (Clinkenbeard 1999). California's Surface Mining and Reclamation Act (SMARA) requires the State Geologist to prepare mineral resource reports indicating the mineral deposits of statewide and regional significance for all counties. According to the CDMG, lands containing significant mineral deposits are identified solely on geologic factors and without consideration to present land use or ownership. The goal of mineral land classification is to recognize the mineral resource potential of lands and consider that potential in land use planning.

The CDMG has designated the majority of the valley floor from Merced Falls to Cressey as an Aggregate Resource Area and estimates that 1.18 billion tons of concrete aggregate resources are contained within the 38 square miles of Merced County that are classified for concrete aggregate production. From Snelling Road to Oakdale Road, the valley floor is classified as MRZ-2a, meaning areas underlain by mineral deposits where geologic data indicate that significant measured or indicated resources are present (Figure 6). A notable exception, the dredger tailings in the Snelling vicinity are not included in the Resource Area. The dredger tailings are classified as MRZ-3a, or areas containing known mineral occurrences of undetermined mineral resource significance. Several mines, however, are operating in the tailings, and the tailings potentially provide a valuable aggregate resource, though the lack of sand in those deposits may limit their end-use. The Upper Merced River Property Owners' Group, which represents several landowners in the Merced Falls area, is currently investigating the feasibility of increasing the level of aggregate mining in dredger tailings on their properties.

Currently, mining along and near the Merced River provides a majority of the County's aggregate resources (D. Johnston, pers. comm., 1999). Within the Merced River corridor, 1,331 acres, all of which are located upstream of Shaffer Bridge (Figure 5), are used for sand and gravel production. The operating mines include the following (permit numbers are in parentheses): Bettencourt Ranch (Santa Fe Aggregates, CUP 97018); La Grange (CUP 3075); Blasingame (CUP 2870); Merced River Mining and

Reclamation Company (CUP 3668); Doolittle Mine (Sante Fe Aggregates, CUP 99021); and Woolstenhulme Ranch (Calaveras Material, CUP 99012). The mines that have completed excavation and are in the final reclamation phase include: Silva (LEP 586), Carson (CUP 3554), and Triple C (LEP 529). The Robinson South (LEP 307) and Robinson North (LEP 597) mines captured the river channel in the January 1997 high flows. The landowner is currently working with the California Department of Water Resources (CDWR) and CDFG to complete an extensive restoration project in the reach affected by these mines. In addition to currently operating mines, a permit application has been submitted to the County for another mine in the corridor—Grossman Mine (CUA 00020).

The CDMG predicts that demand for concrete grade aggregate will continue to increase with the population growth projected for Merced County and the construction of the University of California–Merced (UC–Merced) campus. Based upon the projected 50-year aggregate demand, the aggregate sources in eastern Merced County (including the Merced River), before the addition of the Calaveras Materials Woolstenhulme Ranch permit, are predicted to be depleted in 3 to 4 years unless new resources are permitted for mining or there is an increase in import of aggregate into the area (Clinkenbeard 1999). Clinkenbeard (1999), however, was unable to quantify the potential impact of UC–Merced. This demand will place strong pressure to increase mining in the Merced River corridor.

3.2.4 Parks and Recreation

At this time, recreational opportunities along the river are very limited. Most parks and recreation areas in the corridor are located within the agricultural and grazing land uses. Five parks and public access points are located along the river from Crocker-Huffman Dam downstream to the confluence with the San Joaquin River (Figure 7). From upstream to downstream, state and local parks that provide access to the river include the Cuneo Fishing Access, Henderson Park, McConnell State Recreation Area, Hagaman Park, and George Hatfield State Recreation Area. The Cuneo Fishing Access, which is owned and operated by Merced ID, is located approximately 1.5 miles downstream of Crocker-Huffman Dam and provides river access for fishing. Henderson Park is a 74-acre county regional park located approximately one mile east of Snelling; it provides river access for fishing, ball fields and play equipment, and picnicking facilities. McConnell State Recreation Area, located two miles north of Livingston, provides 75 acres of parkland for camping and picnicking. Hagaman Park is a county park located just upstream of the Route 165 bridge and provides playgrounds, river access, and facilities for picnicking. George Hatfield State Recreation Area is a 46-acre park located near the confluence with the San Joaquin River. This park provides camping, fishing, and boating opportunities and is the only park on the river that includes public education signage. Provisions for river access and recreation may become increasingly important with the projected increase in population of Merced County, following the completion of the UC–Merced campus. It is not within the scope of the Restoration Plan to develop a public recreation and river access plan. The Restoration Plan, however, will recognize current and potential future recreational uses in the river corridor and will seek to avoid conflicts between restoration and recreation.

The Merced County Parks and Recreation Division is currently planning to develop a brochure providing information on public recreational opportunities and public access available on the Merced River from McSwain Dam to the confluence with the San Joaquin River. This brochure will be researched and developed with the public stakeholders along the Merced River. Information in the brochure will include: the history of the Merced River; a review of riparian habitat restoration; plants and wildlife found along the river; fishing regulations; public parks and recreation areas (including California State Parks, Merced County Parks, commercially operated recreation areas, and Merced ID-owned areas); boating and water safety; and appropriate and lawful public access to the river.

3.2.5 Future Land Uses

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA–MERCED

An SUDP area has been designated for the development of the UC–Merced campus. The proposed campus site is located approximately eight miles from the Merced River. This land use designation recognizes the need for specific urban land use planning around the University site in the future (Merced County 1996). In October 1996, the Merced County Board of Supervisors amended the County General Plan to acknowledge the site for the future campus and to identify an SUDP boundary for the University Community as the planning area for development adjacent to the campus. The lands within this boundary are designated "University Community Urban Reserve." In April 1997, the City of Merced completed a comprehensive update of its General Plan. Through this update, the City included the University Community SUDP within its Sphere of Influence and agreed to cooperate with Merced County in planning the University Community. In February 1998, the Merced County Board of Supervisors approved a Guidance Package for University Community Planning that clarified the relationships and roles of the various participants and outlined the subsequent planning steps. The first step in the process was a Concept Planning phase to provide an overall vision and framework for development of the University Community. The University Community Concept Planning process was initiated in April 1998 and the report was published in May 1999. The Concept Planning Report forms the basis for two subsequent planning documents: (1) The University Community Plan, which is being produced by the County of Merced as an amendment to the County General Plan and will be approved by the Merced County Board of Supervisors, and (2) The UC–Merced Long Range Development Plan, which is being prepared by the University of California and will be approved by the UC Board of Regents. Under Governor Davis' directive, the UC–Merced Campus is presently scheduled to open in 2004. The main campus will cover approximately 2,000 acres.

UC–Merced will not be located within the Merced River corridor; however, construction of the university will likely require large amounts of aggregate that would presumably come from nearby mines, including mines along the Merced River. In addition, the opening and operation of the university and associated residential and commercial development will increase the demand for water within Merced County, potentially requiring transfer of water from agriculture to urban use. The water usage for the UC–Merced campus and community is not expected to be significant based on preliminary estimates (B. Badgly, pers. comm., 2001).

CASTLE AIRPORT AVIATION AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

The General Plan specifies an SUDP area for the redevelopment of Castle Air Force Base, which closed in 1995. Castle Air Force Base is contiguous with the northeasterly limits of the City of Atwater, approximately 5.2 miles from the Merced River. A Reuse Plan has been developed and adopted to oversee and facilitate economic reuse of the former military installation. This redevelopment will lead to a mixed-use area. The reuse of the military property is not anticipated to substantially increase demand for aggregate from the river, due to the use of existing buildings and infrastructure. Presently, reuse of the property has not occurred on the scale projected under the Reuse Plan.

3.3 Water Resource Development

Water resource demands and flood control issues on the Merced River will largely determine the extent and types of restoration implemented in the corridor. The Merced River is heavily allocated for agricultural water use. The Merced ID holds pre-1914 appropriative water rights to divert flow from the river. In addition, riparian water users divert flows through seven diversion channels between Crocker-Huffman Dam and Shaffer Bridge and numerous riparian pumps throughout the river. Minimum instream flow requirements in the river are defined under Merced ID's current licenses and agreements and are intended to provide adequate flows for chinook salmon and for the Merced River Riparian Water Users Association diversions. In addition, under current U.S. Army Corps of Engineers flood control operations rules, the maximum allowable release to the Merced River from New Exchequer Dam is 6,000 cfs. Restoration projects contained within the plan must, therefore, be designed to function within the current minimum flow requirements and this 6,000 cfs flood control limitation. Project planners, however, should recognize that larger floods can occur (as experienced in 1997). Design flexibility should therefore be incorporated to include consideration of these larger flow events.

3.3.1 Water Supply and Demand

Within the Merced ID boundaries, the average annual water demand for agricultural uses, urban uses, instream flows, and environmental uses totals approximately 560,000 acre-feet. This includes approximately 430,000 acre-feet for applied agricultural uses, 40,000 acre-feet for urban uses, and approximately 90,000 acre-feet for instream flows and environmental uses. An additional 460,000 acre-feet of pumped groundwater is used annually outside of Merced ID, bringing total water demand to over 1 million acre-feet annually. The Merced Water Supply Plan (which is currently being revised) projects water demands for 2030, based on a growing population, the operation of UC-Merced, the potential for increased fish flows, and additional water for refuges (T. Selb, pers. comm., 1999). By 2030, the combined demands for surface and groundwater for all uses in the study area are anticipated to increase to between 1,180,000 and 1,284,000 acre-feet annually depending on potential instream flow requirements (CH2M Hill 1995).

The Merced Water Supply Plan (CH2M Hill 1995) recognizes several trends that influence the projected demand (the data supporting these trends are currently being revised in the Update of the Merced Water Supply Plan):

- Applied agriculture water demands within Merced ID are projected to decrease, while agricultural demands outside Merced ID (largely groundwater supplied) are anticipated to remain stable.
- Urban water uses are estimated to increase nearly three-fold. The projected increase takes into account the additional water demand associated with the new University of California campus.
- Instream flows needed for fisheries on the Merced River and downstream could increase to more than 269,000 acre-feet depending on the final outcome of deliberations between Merced ID and state and federal resource agency representatives. (An example of a Merced ID instream flow commitment implemented after the 1995 Merced Water Supply Plan is in association with the Vernalis Adaptive Management Plan [VAMP], a Delta biological experiment focused on salmonids.) In December 1999, the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) issued Water Right Decision 1641. Included in that decision is a provision for Merced ID to release up to 55,000 acre-feet, in addition to its existing instream fishery releases, for a period of 12 years in association with the VAMP. This provision provides for a reduction of this obligation in sequential dry-year periods.
- Environmental uses of water are increasing. Merced ID's current obligation is to provide up to 15,000 acre-feet to the Merced National Wildlife Refuge. Merced ID may desire to increase water sales as requested by state or federal fish and wildlife agencies.

3.3.2 Water Rights

California law establishes two kinds of water rights: riparian and appropriative. Riparian rights usually come with owning a parcel of land that is adjacent to a source of water and entitle the owner to use a share of the water flowing past the property. Appropriative water rights allow for the use or diversion of water from surface streams, other surface bodies of water, or from subterranean streams. Prior to 1872, appropriative rights could be acquired by simply taking and using water. In 1872, provisions were made for establishing a priority of right by posting a notice of appropriation at the proposed point of diversion and recording a copy of the notice with the respective County Recorder (sections 1410 through 1422 of the California Civil Code). Once acquired, an appropriative right can be maintained only by continuous use of water. Regardless of the amount claimed in the original notice of appropriation at the time diversion and use first began, the amount that can now be rightfully claimed under an appropriative right initiated prior to the enactment of the Water Commission Act of 1914 has, in general, become fixed by actual beneficial use as to both amount and season of diversion (SWRCB 1990).

The Water Commission Act of 1914 created the agency that later evolved into the SWRCB and granted it the authority to administer permits and licenses for California's surface water. The act was the predecessor to today's Water Code provisions governing water appropriation. Post-1914 appropriative rights rely on a hierarchy of priorities; in times of shortage the most recent (junior) right holder is the first to discontinue water use. The priority of each right is based on the time the permit application was filed with the State Board. Although pre- and post-1914 appropriative rights are similar, the State Board does not regulate the pre-1914 rights as closely (SWRCB 1999).

3.3.3 The Merced Irrigation District System

Merced ID holds the largest water right on the Merced River. The district's rights include pre-1914 and post-1914 appropriative water rights. The pre-1914 rights are summarized below:

- The Exchequer Mining Right permits Merced ID to divert up to 6,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) from the river when available as inflow.
- The Crocker Huffman Land and Cattle Company right is for direct diversion of 2,125 cfs and 300,000 acre-feet of storage each year from the Merced River.

The post-1914 water rights have been perfected in most cases as an insurance policy to the pre-1914 water rights. These post-1914 water rights for consumptive uses are summarized below:

- License #2685 permits direct diversion from the Merced River of up to a maximum of 1,500 cfs, and storage of 266,400 acre-feet.
- License #6047 permits direct diversion from the Merced River of up to a maximum of 257 cfs.
- License #11395 permits diversions to storage of 605,000 acre-feet and withdrawal from storage not to exceed 516,000 acre-feet (acre-feet) per year.

In addition, Merced ID holds post-1914 companion water rights that cover the storage and direct diversion of water for power use.

Merced ID supplies water to approximately 2,000 full-time agricultural customers and 300 smaller water users or "garden heads." In addition, 700 stand-by accounts do not currently receive water from Merced ID (T. Selb, pers. comm., 1999). The water supplied for agricultural and urban uses near the Merced River comes from surface water diversions and groundwater pumping. Merced ID diversions average

approximately 522,000 acre-feet annually. In addition, Merced ID currently owns and operates 230 deep wells, which it uses to satisfy water demand that is not met by the surface water supply. In 1976, Merced ID, which then operated 239 wells, experienced the highest groundwater demand in its history and pumped 182,900 acre-feet (T. Selb, pers. comm., 2000). In recent years, normal groundwater pumping has been reduced by Merced ID to approximately 10,000 acre-feet per year. Merced ID also provides water to the Stevinson Water District through an adjudicated settlement. However, this water is diverted into the Main Canal and delivered at the west side of the District, rather than flowing in the river channel.

Merced ID's infrastructure includes the New Exchequer Dam, McSwain Dam, Crocker Huffman Dam, and the Northside and Main canals (Figure 1). Merced Falls Dam, located downstream of McSwain Dam, is owned by Pacific Gas and Electric Company. The New Exchequer Dam is the largest dam on the river. It was originally constructed in 1926 and was enlarged to a capacity of 1.024 million acre-feet in 1967. This is the main storage reservoir in the Merced ID system. Downstream, McSwain Dam serves as the New Exchequer Dam's afterbay and re-regulates releases from New Exchequer Dam. Like the New Exchequer Dam, power is generated at this dam (although a much smaller amount) and water is released from the bottom of the pool. Merced Falls Dam and Crocker-Huffman Dam are the locations of the Merced ID diversions. Merced Falls Dam diverts flow into the Northside Canal, which has a capacity of 90 cfs and provides irrigation water for approximately 10,000 acres (T. Selb, pers. comm., 1999). Power is also generated at Merced Falls Dam. A fish ladder is present at this dam. Crocker-Huffman Dam diverts flow into the Main Canal diversion, which is 20 miles long and has a capacity of 2,100 cfs. No hydroelectric power is generated at this dam. Although a fish ladder is present, it has been blocked off by CDFG, and there is no fish passage over this dam. The Main Canal is a designated floodway of the California Reclamation Board, thus its capacity must be maintained for local runoff events during the rainfall season.

In addition to these dams and diversions, Merced ID operates three operational spills that discharge to the Merced River: the Northside Canal, the Livingston Canal, and the Garibaldi Lateral. The Northside Canal Spill discharges approximately five river miles upstream of Cressey, the Livingston Canal Spill discharges approximately one river mile upstream of State Route 99, and the Garibaldi Lateral Spill discharges approximately three miles downstream of State Route 99.

Minimum instream flow requirements in the river are defined under Merced ID's current licenses and agreements and are intended to provide adequate flows for chinook salmon and for the Merced River Riparian Water Users Association diversions. The required minimum flows vary, depending on month and the inflow to the reservoir. Merced ID provides flows consistent with the requirements of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), the Davis-Grunsky contract⁴ with the State of California, and riparian water user rights. Releases from the New Exchequer Dam are summarized in Table 3.

⁴ The Davis-Grunsky Act is legislation that provides financial assistance to public agencies for water development, recreation, and fish and wildlife enhancement.

Table 3. Required Monthly Releases from the New Exchequer Dam (cfs)

Month	FERC (D) ¹	Davis-Grunsky ²	Cowell Agreement Flows ^{2,3}	Approximate Range
January	75 (60)	180-220	50	230-270
February	75 (60)	180-220	50	230-270
March	75 (60)	180-220	100	280-320
April	75 (60)	---	175	235-250
May	75 (60)	---	225	285-300
June	25 (15)	---	250	265-275
July	25 (15)	---	225	240-250
August	25 (15)	---	175	190-200
September	25 (15)	---	150	165-175
October 1-15	25 (15)	---	50	65-75
October 16-31	75 (60)	---	50	110-125
November	100 (75)	180-220	50	230-270
December	100 (75)	180-220	50	230-270

¹ Flows are during normal years. During dry years the flows provided are the values in parentheses. The Davis-Grunsky Contract requires minimum flows of 180 to 220 cfs for November 1 to March 31, measured at Shaffer Bridge.

² Measured at Crocker-Huffman Dam. 50 cfs shall be maintained only when that amount is available from the natural flow of the river (inflow to reservoir).

³ Flow of 250 cfs for the month of June until the natural flow of the river falls below 1,200 cfs, at which time flows are reduced to: 225 cfs for next 31 days, 175 cfs for next 31 days, and 150 cfs for next 30 days.

Source: Ted Selb, pers. comm., 1999.

3.3.4 Riparian/Adjudicated Water Use

Riparian water rights usually come with owning a parcel of land that is adjacent to a source of water, and entitle the owner to use a share of the water flowing past his or her property. No permits, licenses, or government approval are required for this use, but the rights apply only to the water that would naturally flow in the stream. Return flows derived from groundwater use and water seasonally stored and later released are not included. Riparian rights do not entitle a water user to divert water to a storage reservoir for use in the dry season or to use water on land outside of the watershed. Riparian rights are tied to parcels, not owners, and cannot be transferred for use on another parcel of land but remain with the property when it changes hands. Furthermore, parcels severed from the adjacent water source generally lose their right to the water (for example, if the riparian strip is sold).

Between Crocker-Huffman Dam and Shaffer Bridge, Cowell Agreement and riparian water users divert up to approximately 94,000 acre-feet annually and have maintained seven main channel diversions since the 1840s-50s (Figure 8). These diversions are small wing dams consisting of rock and gravel. High winter river flows can carry this rock and gravel downstream, improving spawning areas. In addition to these diversions, CDFG has identified a large number of diversions, primarily pumps, in the 52 river miles between the Crocker-Huffman Dam and the San Joaquin confluence. During field surveys, CDFG recorded 244 diversions, which are predominantly used to supply water for agricultural use (206 diversions).

3.4 Flood Control

Flood control operation of New Exchequer Dam and Reservoir (Lake McClure) by Merced ID is regulated by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and defined in a document entitled: “New Exchequer Dam and Reservoir, Merced River, California – WATER CONTROL MANUAL”, dated October, 1981, and amended in June, 2000 (USACE 2000). The Water Control Manual is Appendix VII to the Master Water Control Manual for the San Joaquin River Basin, California. Section 7-05, entitled: “Flood Control”, states, in part:

“...Generally, water stored within the rain flood space (a maximum of 350,000 acre-feet) will be released as rapidly as possible without exceeding 6,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) in the Merced River at Stevinson (confluence with the San Joaquin River). During the snowmelt season, when inflow is predictable, flood releases will be made so as to minimize damages. A maximum of 400,000 acre feet of space is dedicated to flood control during the snowmelt season, and when any part of this space is not required for flood control, it may be used for other purposes.”

The rain flood space period is between November 1 and March 15. By November 1, Lake McClure storage must be reduced to 675,000 acre-feet by Merced ID. Depending on forecasted snowmelt runoff, Merced ID may begin storing water above 675,000 acre-feet as early as March 15. The maximum release of 6,000 cfs, as measured at Stevinson, includes releases from the New Exchequer Dam, local runoff, and inflow from Dry Creek. There could be some flooding or minimal property damage associated with this flow. During extreme runoff in January 1997, the USACE concurred with Merced ID’s emergency deviation from established operation rules in its decision to increase release from 6,000 cfs to 8,000 cfs. During this release, flow in the Merced River peaked at 8,080 cfs (measured at Snelling). In the upstream reaches of the analysis area, the channel accommodated this flow, although the Route 59 bridge had to be closed due to the danger of bridge failure from an undermined spread footing. In the lower reaches of the river, however, private levees were breached at several locations and agricultural and dairy lands were flooded (Figure 9). It has been pointed out at Stakeholder Group

meetings that the City of Livingston's sewage treatment plant is vulnerable to flooding when flows exceed 6,000 cfs (G. Davis, pers. comm., 1999).

3.5 Bridges and Other Infrastructure

In addition to the dams and diversion described in previous sections, infrastructure along the Merced River includes roadways, bridges, levees, sewage and wastewater treatment plants, and buildings associated with urban, commercial, or agricultural uses. This section provides an overview of the existing infrastructure near the Merced River, between the Crocker-Huffman Dam and the confluence with the San Joaquin River.

LEVEES

No state or federal levee system has been constructed on the Merced River and existing levees are limited to privately owned structures. The levee system is, however, extensive, especially downstream of the State Route 99 bridge (RM 20.5). Private landowners have constructed and maintain these levees, which protect their agricultural lands, operations, and structures (including homes) from flooding. Levees are mapped and discussed in volume II of this report (Stillwater Sciences 2001). These levees confine river and floodplain width and isolate the river from portions of its former floodplain. They do, however, provide necessary flood protection to numerous landowners and businesses. Opportunities for modifying levee alignment to reduce channel confinement may be available but would need to be carefully coordinated with landowners and regulatory agencies.

DISCHARGE POINTS

Turlock Irrigation District operates two spills that discharge into the Merced River: the High Line Spill and the Lower Stevinson Spill. The High Line Spill near Griffith Road discharges excess irrigation water diverted from the Tuolumne River and storm flows from the Mustang Creek watershed that are intercepted by the spill canal. The Lower Stevinson Spill discharges west of the Town of Hilmar and carries excess irrigation water diverted from the Tuolumne River and shallow ground water that has been pumped from the nearby region.

Currently, no permitted discharge points occur in the Merced River. The City of Livingston operates sewage treatment ponds on land adjacent to the river. Following the filling of its disposal ponds by floods in 1996, the City discharged (unpermitted) approximately 1,000,000 gallons/day to maintain levee integrity until it completed two new ponds on adjacent property in July 1999. Currently there are no unpermitted discharges by the City into the river (G. Petty, pers. comm., 2000).

BRIDGES

Several highways and roads cross the Merced River between the Crocker-Huffman Dam and the confluence with the San Joaquin River. From upstream to downstream the bridges include: Snelling Road, State Route 59, Shaffer Bridge (at Oakdale Road), Santa Fe Drive, Burlington Northern Railroad, Southern Pacific Railroad, State Route 99, State Route 165, and River Road (Table 4). There are also several small, private bridges that cross the river. State highway bridges are maintained by Caltrans. Other roadway bridges are maintained by the County; railroad companies maintain their own bridges.

Table 4. Merced River Bridge Information

Bridge	Type	Owner	Repair/Reconstruction Plans
Snelling Road	auto	Merced County	reconstruction in planning
State Route 59	auto	Caltrans	reconstruction in planning
Shaffer Bridge (Oakdale Road)	auto	Merced County	reconstruction in planning
Santa Fe Drive	auto	Merced County	
Burlington Northern Railroad	railroad	Burlington Northern	
Southern Pacific Railroad	railroad	Southern Pacific	
State Route 99	auto	Caltrans	reconstructed in 2000
State Route 165	auto	Caltrans	reconstructed 1979
River Road	auto	Merced County	reconstructed 1982

The State Route 99 bridge crossing the Merced River was recently reconstructed. The planned bridge design primarily considered the existing flows and anticipated maximum flow (6,000 cfs) of the river at that location (G. Erickson, pers. comm., 1999). The State Route 59 bridge is planned to receive improvements within the next several years. Caltrans planners have considered both the maximum and future flows resulting from channel and riparian work by CDFG in the design of the bridge. Changes to the maximum flows or the surface elevation of the river could compromise the integrity of a bridge (G. Erickson, pers. comm., 1999).

Caltrans requires access to the bridges for maintenance work, which may include bridge footings. Because bridge maintenance activities may affect downstream areas, the areas immediately downstream of bridges should be avoided as areas for placement of spawning gravel. In addition, instream mining activities within one mile of a bridge are prohibited. Caltrans requires an encroachment permit for work within the right-of-way of a State maintained bridge.

Currently, the County is planning to build a new bridge just east of Oakdale Road (Shaffer Bridge). The current bridge at Oakdale Road would not be removed. Generally, the County defers to Caltrans for bridge construction and maintenance standards. County bridges are inspected biannually by Caltrans for structural integrity. The County requires an encroachment permit for work within the right-of-way of a County maintained bridge (K. Price, pers. comm., 1999).

4 Ongoing Restoration Projects on the Merced River

4.1 Merced River Salmon Habitat Enhancement Project

The CDFG is working with the CDWR and local property owners on a large-scale channel and floodplain restoration effort in the vicinity of the State Route 59 bridge (Figure 10). This project, which is called “The Merced River Salmon Habitat Enhancement Project” will reconstruct the river channel and floodplain through 4.3 miles of the Merced River that have been excavated for aggregate mining. The objectives of the project are to: (1) reduce predation on young salmon by non-native fish by isolating habitat in river-captured mining pits that serve as predator habitat, (2) restore or enhance salmon spawning habitat, (3) enhance passage of adult and juvenile salmon, (4) resize the channel and floodplain to restore some natural river processes, and (5) reestablish riparian vegetation. Phase I of this project, the Ratzlaff Reach, was constructed in 1999 by the CDFG and the CDWR, with funding from the Four Pumps Agreement, Proposition 70, CALFED, and the Anadromous Fish Restoration Program. Riparian vegetation was planted in 2000/2001. The next phase, the Robinson Reach, is currently being designed, with construction planned for the summers of 2001 and 2002. This project is being designed and implemented in cooperation with the Robinson Cattle Company.

4.2 Other California Department of Fish and Game and Department of Water Resources Habitat Restoration Projects

The CDFG is leading several habitat restoration efforts in the Merced River that have already been completed or are occurring concurrently with the development of this restoration plan (Figure 10). Completed and ongoing projects include: (1) riffle reconstruction in the upper spawning reach, (2) providing spawnable gravel for construction of temporary local diversion dams, (3) acquisition of a floodplain parcel for future restoration, and (4) predator isolation.

In 1990, CDFG, working with the CDWR and with funding from the Four Pumps Agreement, reconstructed Riffle 1A, a spawning riffle at the Merced River Hatchery, and added gravel to a depleted riffle two miles downstream. Gravel was added to this site in 1996, 1997, and 1998. In 1998 and 1999, the CDFG worked with local riparian water users and Cowell Agreement diverters to introduce spawning gravel at several other locations in the river. These diverters construct temporary wing dams in the Merced River channel to divert flow during the irrigation season. These dams are typically constructed of gravel scraped from the channel bed. The CDFG, funded through Proposition 70, provided spawnable gravel to construct the dams so that when the dams wash out during high flows the gravel remaining at the site or transported downstream can be used by salmon for spawning.

In 1998, the CDFG obtained funding from CALFED to purchase the Merced River Ranch. This 318-acre parcel is located on the south bank of the river, approximately one mile downstream from Crocker-Huffman Dam. The site has been dredged for gold, and dredger tailings cover most of the property. The CDFG plans to use the site as a source of material (sand, gravel, and cobble) for future restoration projects and as a floodplain restoration site.

In 1996, the CDFG, working with the CDWR and with funding from the Four Pumps Agreement, completed the Magneson Predator Isolation and Revegetation Project. This project rebuilt a failed berm around a gravel mining pit to protect young salmon in the river from non-native predatory fishes in the pond.

4.3 James J. Stevinson Corporation Easement

The James J. Stevinson Corporation, which is owned and operated by the Kelley family, is in the process of placing conservation easements on nearly 9,000 acres of its landholdings at the confluence of the Merced and San Joaquin rivers in Merced and Stanislaus counties. The conservation easements are legal agreements in which the landowner is paid to preserve certain resources for a specified time. Easements exclude certain activities on the land, such as commercial development or residential subdivisions, to conserve the natural and agricultural resources of the land. The Stevinson Corporation landholdings proposed for conservation easements include approximately five miles of riparian habitat along the Merced River near its confluence with the San Joaquin River. By placing the land under easements, the Stevinson Corporation will retain rights to riparian and delivered water, create opportunities for habitat enhancement, and be eligible for tax benefits (Riviere 2000).

5 MULTI-STAKEHOLDER AGREEMENTS

Cooperative management of large river ecosystems has been emerging in California as a part of ecological restoration programs. Multi-stakeholder cooperative management agreements present an opportunity to facilitate restoration planning and activities. Several stakeholder agreements, which are described below, are in place that affect the Merced River.

5.1 California Department of Fish and Game and Merced Irrigation District 10-Year Biological Study

During the past six years, representatives of Merced ID and the CDFG (collectively, the "parties") have regularly consulted on potential actions to benefit fishery resources (primarily chinook salmon) in the Merced River. These consultations have focused on: (1) providing appropriate instream flows for salmon upstream migration, spawning, and egg incubation during the fall, (2) providing interim instream flow improvements for juvenile outmigration, and (3) completing studies on all freshwater life phases for salmon, including improved water temperature management for aquatic resources in the lower Merced River.

The parties have agreed, pending execution of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two agencies, upon an increase in flows during October to improve the timing and magnitude of instream flows to benefit chinook salmon upstream migration and spawning. The parties have also agreed, dependent on various factors, upon additional increases in instream flows, above the new minimum flows, during October on an interim and experimental basis to determine potential benefits for salmon. It is expected these increased instream flows will benefit salmon in the lower Merced River by providing improved habitats for the earliest migrating and spawning salmon.

The parties have also agreed on interim increased flows during a 30-day period in April and May, in association with the Vernalis Adaptive Management Plan, described below. This action is expected to benefit the downstream migration of juvenile salmon from the Merced River through improved habitat conditions and increased survival.

The MID and CDFG jointly developed and agreed upon a formal 10-year study program to determine the potential factors that may limit salmon production in the Merced River. This program is designed to evaluate the habitats necessary for increased salmon production by assessing the needs for each freshwater salmon life stage (i.e., upstream migration, spawning, egg incubation, fry and juvenile rearing, and outmigration). The joint study program defines the objectives, the basic experimental design, and the responsibilities for study implementation. The studies and instream flow scheduling will be coordinated with other studies throughout the San Joaquin basin and the Delta. Components of this program are presently underway. The completion of the 10-year program is intended to identify the long-term instream flow and other needs of salmon in the Merced River. To facilitate the studies, the parties have established the Merced Management and Technical Advisory Committees; the latter committee establishes and coordinates study protocols, study amendments, funding issues, and information sharing and exchange.

5.2 San Joaquin River Agreement

The San Joaquin River Agreement (SJRA) is a 12-year agreement among major water-right holders within the San Joaquin River Basin to implement a long-term experimental restoration plan. Under the agreement, the U.S. Department of Interior will acquire water from certain San Joaquin River Group

Authority (SJRGGA) members for use as a pulse flow at Vernalis during April and May. The SJRGGA members that will be providing water are Modesto Irrigation District (MID), Turlock Irrigation District (TID), Merced ID, South San Joaquin Irrigation District (SSJID), Oakdale Irrigation District (OID), and the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority (Exchange Contractors). The water provided by the SJRGGA will be provided by several potential means, including the increase of flows from tributary reservoirs, bypass of diversions, indirect substitution of groundwater, reduction of applied surface water, and increased system efficiency.

The basis for the SJRA is the Vernalis Adaptive Management Plan (VAMP), which is an experiment designed to assess the effects of San Joaquin River flow and Delta exports on the survival and passage of salmon smolts through the lower San Joaquin River and the Delta. The VAMP is comprised of an established set of flows and export pumping limits which, depending upon the water year type, is implemented each year. As part of the agreement, the CDWR will install and operate the Head of Old River Barrier as necessary to provide additional information about the migratory habits of salmon and to determine if increased smolt survival can be achieved by limiting their access to various Delta waterways.

6 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The development and implementation of a restoration plan for the Merced River Corridor will require compliance with laws and regulations guiding land use and zoning and property and water rights, as described above. The process of applying for and adhering to the permits required to implement a restoration plan can present a constraint to the planning process. Depending on the size and scope of the project, the permitting process can be lengthy. Funding and schedules for restoration projects should include sufficient funding and time to obtain necessary permits. In addition, projects should be designed to be consistent with these regulations to facilitate timely issuance of required permits. State and Federal laws that could affect restoration implementation are described below.

6.1 Federal

CLEAN WATER ACT

Section 404 of the federal Clean Water Act (CWA) requires a permit to be obtained prior to any activity that involves discharge of dredged or fill material into “Waters of the United States,” including wetlands. Waters of the United States include navigable waters, interstate waters, all other waters where the use or degradation or destruction of the waters could affect interstate or foreign commerce, tributaries to any of these waters, and wetlands that meet any of these criteria or that are adjacent to any of these waters or their tributaries. Pursuant to Section 404 of the CWA, the USACE regulates and issues permits for such activities. Any activity that adds material to or disturbs the bed of a water body or wetland usually requires a permit, even if the area is dry at the time the activity takes place. Many restoration actions that may be included in the plan may be covered under the USACE Nationwide Permit No. 27, Stream and Wetland Restoration Activities.

CWA Section 401 permits from the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) are required for pollutant discharges (including sediment) to water bodies. This state permit is intended to protect and minimize impacts to the quality of the surface waters of the State. Anyone proposing to conduct activities resulting in a discharge to surface waters is required to obtain a RWQCB Certification or Waiver. Surface waters of the State include wetlands, riparian zones, streambeds, and lakes. Restoration projects that could cause discharges to the river (including discharge of sediment associated with project construction) would require 401 certification or waiver.

Under Section 303(d) of the CWA, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) can list a water body as impaired by non-point source pollution for wildlife and human uses. Once a water body is listed as impaired, the EPA, through the RWQCB, is responsible for developing a management plan to attain water quality standards and restore beneficial uses for the water body. The management plan is typically referred to as a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), and it sets maximum limits on particular impacts, such as conventional pollutants or changes to temperature or sediment regimes. Once implemented, any action that could potentially contribute to the TMDL is eligible for review and potential re-design to make it compliant with the TMDL. The Merced River is listed as impaired for chlorpyrifos, diazinon, and Group A pesticides (CVRWQCB 1998). The TMDL is scheduled to be developed by 2005.

FEDERAL ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

Under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) have authority over projects that may affect the continued existence of a federally listed species or may adversely affect their designated critical habitat. If project activities may affect a federally listed species, a take permit under Section 10(a) or a federal consultation

under Section 7 of the federal ESA is required. Under the federal ESA, the definition of take includes to kill, harm, or harass a protected species. The USFWS has interpreted the definition of harm to include significant habitat modification. For species listed as threatened, the USFWS and NMFS address take prohibitions differently. The USFWS automatically applies Section 9 take prohibitions to threatened species, giving threatened species the same level of protection as endangered species. NMFS does not automatically apply the Section 9 take prohibitions to threatened species. Rather, NMFS specifies take prohibitions in Section 4(d) rules. Several species protected under the Federal ESA potentially occur in the Merced River corridor. These species include (but are not limited to) valley elderberry longhorn beetle (*Desmocerus californicus dimorphus*), steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), Sacramento splittail (*Pogonichthys macrolepidotus*), California red-legged frog (*Rana aurora draytonii*), giant garter snake (*Thamnophis gigas*), blunt-nosed leopard lizard (*Gambelia silus*), Aleutian Canada goose (*Branta canadensis leucopareia*), bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), riparian woodrat (*Neotoma fuscipes riparia*) and San Joaquin kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis mutica*). In addition, the Merced River and its adjacent riparian habitat are included as designated critical habitat for Central Valley steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*). Restoration projects in the corridor would be required to identify the occurrence of listed and proposed species and their habitat at the project sites and to comply with the requirements of the ESA.

MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT

The federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) makes it unlawful to pursue, capture, kill, or possess, or attempt to do the same, any migratory bird, or part, nest, or egg of such bird listed in wildlife protection treaties between the United States and Great Britain (on behalf of Canada), Mexico, Japan, and the former USSR. The current list of species covered by the MBTA can be found in Title 50, Code of Federal Regulations §10.13.

NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACT

Under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, a federal agency sponsoring a proposed project or activity is required to have the project reviewed by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP). The ACHP is authorized to review and comment on all actions licensed by the federal government that will have an effect on properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places, or that are eligible for such listing. The listed properties (and properties eligible for listing) are not necessarily significant nationally; rather, most are significant primarily at the state or local level. Federal actions include, but are not limited to, construction, rehabilitation and repair projects, demolition, licenses, permits (e.g., Clean Water Act 404 permits), loans, loan guarantees, grants, and federal property transfers (National Historic Preservation Act [16 U.S.C. 470 §106]). Several homesteads and other potentially eligible properties occur in the Merced River corridor. Projects implemented under the plan would be required to identify historic resources at the project site and comply with the requirements of the National Historic Preservation Act.

FEDERAL POWER ACT

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) regulates non-federal hydroelectric power projects that affect navigable waters, occupy U.S. lands, use water or water power at a government dam, or affect the interests of interstate commerce. FERC's jurisdiction includes issuing preliminary permits, issuing project licenses and exemptions from licensing, ensuring dam safety, performing project compliance activities, investigating and assessing payments for headwater benefits, and coordinating with other agencies. Operation licenses are issued for a term of between 30 to 50 years, and exemptions are granted in perpetuity. Merced ID's hydroelectric operations on the Merced River, license number 2179, will be subject to FERC relicensing in 2014.

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (NEPA)

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires a federal agency to assess the effects on the "human environment" of granting permits, constructing projects, and undertaking other activities whenever it proposes such actions. The assessment includes an analysis of the activity's effect on a particular resource and possible mitigation measures available to reduce the significance of that effect. Federal agencies are also required to consider the cumulative effects of the planned action. Actions that would be subject to NEPA analysis include, but are not limited to, the issuance of federal permits and projects receiving federal funding. NEPA documentation (i.e., an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement) would be required for Merced River restoration projects requiring federal permits or receiving federal funding.

6.2 State

STREAMBED ALTERATION PROGRAM

Through Section 1603 of the Fish and Game Code, CDFG regulates any proposed project or activity that will substantially divert or obstruct the natural flow of water, or change the bed, channel or bank of any river, stream, or lake, or use any material from a streambed. The purpose of this program is to protect and conserve plants, fish and wildlife and the habitats upon which they depend. CDFG must be notified, on a standardized notification form, of any such activity that will take place in or in the general vicinity of a river, stream or lake, including rivers or streams that only flow periodically through a bed or channel. After CDFG receives the completed notification package it determines whether the project requires a Streambed Alteration Agreement. A Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreement is a written document that includes a description of the project or activity and project conditions necessary to protect fish or wildlife resources. The project or activity can commence as soon as a representative from CDFG signs and authorizes the Streambed Alteration Agreement. Restoration projects that affect the Merced River streambed, channel or banks would require CDFG 1603 agreements.

SURFACE MINING AND RECLAMATION ACT

The Surface Mining and Reclamation Act (SMARA) of 1975 was enacted in recognition of the need for a continuous supply of mineral resources while minimizing adverse impacts of surface mining to public health, property and the environment. The Act's requirements apply to anyone, including government agencies, engaged in surface mining operations in California (including those on federally managed lands). SMARA requires all mining operators to have an approved reclamation plan for lands disturbed by surface mining activities conducted after January 1, 1976. SMARA requirements apply to surface mining operations that disturb more than one acre or remove more than 1,000 cubic yards of material. This includes activities such as borrow pitting, dredging and quarrying, and stockpiling of mined materials. SMARA permits could potentially be required for restoration actions, particularly in the dredger tailings area.

STATE LANDS COMMISSION AUTHORIZATION

The State Lands Commission (SLC) has fee title to historic river channels and public trust jurisdiction over certain public lands, such as all ungranted tidelands and submerged lands and beds of navigable rivers, streams, lakes, bays, estuaries, inlets, and straits. The SLC manages these lands for the benefit of all the people of the state for water-related commerce, navigation, fisheries, recreation, open space, and other recognized public trust uses. Activities that would require the SLC authorization include, but are not limited to, implementation of habitat plans, installation of structures, sand and gravel extraction, and dredging or disposal of dredged material on the state's land (USFWS 1997). SLC authorization would take the form of a lease agreement or a nonjudicial determination for use of state lands.

CALIFORNIA RECLAMATION BOARD ENCROACHMENT PERMIT

The California Reclamation Board is required to enforce appropriate standards for construction, maintenance, and protection of adopted flood control plans that would protect the public from floods. The Reclamation Board may issue encroachment permits for proposed activities that might affect levees, floodways, or flood control plans. The Reclamation Board has jurisdiction within the 50-year flood zone along the Merced River. The applicant must demonstrate that project-specific actions would not jeopardize the integrity and safety of flood control levees and floodways and that the project would be consistent with flood control plans. Restoration project actions within the jurisdiction of the Reclamation Board, including the planting, excavation, or removal of vegetation within any area that has an adopted flood control plan, must be approved by the Reclamation Board and a permit must be obtained before work begins (USFWS 1997).

CALIFORNIA ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

Although similar to the federal Endangered Species Act in its prohibition of take of listed endangered or threatened species, the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) has a separate process for authorizing incidental take. The process involves CDFG issuing an Incidental Take Permit, pursuant to Section 2081 of the Fish and Game Code, as amended in 1997. Regulations for CESA take permits were adopted in 1998 in the California Code of Regulations, Section 783 *et seq.* To obtain a take permit, the code requires that a project (including mitigation/compensation measures) must fully mitigate the impact of take of the species, among other requirements. In addition to species protected by the Federal ESA, species protected under the CESA that may occur in the Merced River corridor include (but are not limited to): San Joaquin antelope squirrel (*Ammospermophilus nelsoni*), greater sandhill crane (*Grus canadensis tabida*), Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*), peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus occidentalis*), little willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii brewsteri*), and bank swallow (*Riparia riparia*).

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA)

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires California's state and local agencies to: (1) identify the significant environmental effects of their actions, independently, and with consideration of other reasonably foreseeable projects; and, (2) either avoid those significant environmental effects, where feasible, or mitigate those significant environmental effects, where feasible. Compliance with CEQA requires documentation of project activities and the associated environmental impacts. If the project may have a significant effect on the environment, an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) must be prepared by the agency. If an agency determines that no significant effect on the environment will occur, a Negative Declaration is prepared. If an agency determines that the environmental impacts of the proposed project could be mitigated to a less-than-significant level, then a Mitigated Negative Declaration is prepared. The purpose of an EIR is to provide state and local agencies and the general public with detailed information on the potentially significant environmental effects that a proposed project is likely to have, to identify measures to minimize those impacts and to indicate alternatives to the project. Restoration actions under the plan that would require state or local permits (such as CDFG 1603 Agreements or County Conditional Use Permits) would be required to comply with CEQA.

7 FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Development and implementation of a restoration plan for the Merced River will require cooperation and funding from various federal, state, and local agencies. Following is a list of sources that may be available to provide funding to implement recommended restoration actions. Additional potential funding sources are listed in Appendix A.

7.1 CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Program Plan

CALFED's Ecosystem Restoration Program Plan (ERPP) goal is to "improve and increase aquatic and terrestrial habitats and improve ecosystem functions in the Bay-Delta to support sustainable populations of diverse and valuable plant and animal species." The program objectives are to:

- improve and increase aquatic habitats so that they can support the sustainable production and survival of native and other desirable estuarine and anadromous fish in the estuary;
- improve and increase important wetland habitats so that they can support the sustainable production and survival of wildlife species; and
- increase population health and population size of Delta species to levels that ensure sustained survival.

The CALFED ERPP is based on the premise that restoration of ecological processes and functions is a fundamental tool for successful ecosystem restoration. These natural processes serve to create and maintain habitats needed by fish, wildlife and plant communities. Restoration efforts based on restoration of natural processes are likely to be more cost-effective in the long-term because they should be self-sustaining and require less human intervention. Restoration of processes such as hydrologic regime is also important if habitats such as tidal, perennial, and shaded riverine aquatic are to function.

Over the last three years the CALFED ERPP has funded 195 projects for a total of approximately \$228 million. Funded projects have included fish screens and ladders, land acquisition, habitat restoration, and focused research and monitoring. Funds are obtained from stakeholder contributions, state Proposition 204 funds, and the Federal Bay-Delta Act. The CALFED ERPP funded Phases II and III of the Merced River Corridor Restoration Plan.

7.2 Central Valley Project Improvement Act

The Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA), passed by Congress in 1992, contains 40 separate titles providing for water resource projects throughout the West. The CVPIA mandates changes in management of the Central Valley Project (CVP), particularly for the protection, restoration, and enhancement of fish and wildlife, including providing 800,000 acre-feet of water dedicated to fish and wildlife annually. The Secretary of the Interior directed the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to jointly implement the CVPIA, and Section 3406(b)(1) in particular. The Anadromous Fish Restoration Program (AFRP) was developed in response to Section 3406(b)(1) of the CVPIA. This Section requires that the Department of the Interior "develop within three years of enactment and implement a program which makes all reasonable efforts to ensure that, by the year 2002, natural production of anadromous fish in Central Valley rivers and streams will be sustainable, on a long-term basis, at levels not less than twice the average levels attained during the period of 1967–1991..." Anadromous fish species addressed by the CVPIA are chinook salmon, steelhead, white and green sturgeon, striped bass and American shad. Further, sub-section 3406(b)(1)(A) requires that the program "give first priority to measures which protect and restore natural channel and riparian habitat values through habitat restoration actions, modifications to Central Valley Project operations, and implementation of the supporting measures mandated by this subsection."

The CVPIA provides for other reforms, including improving water flow in wildlife refuges, reducing current water use through water conservation, water transfer programs, water pricing and contracting reform, programs to eliminate or reduce fish losses due to flow fluctuations, replenishing spawning gravel, screening diversions, program monitoring and establishing programs for retiring agricultural land. It also provides incentives to encourage farmers to participate in a program to keep fields flooded during appropriate time periods for the purposes of waterfowl habitat creation and maintenance and for CVP water yield enhancement.

The CVPIA also established in the Treasury of the United States the "Central Valley Project Restoration Fund" and authorized the appropriation of up to \$50,000,000 per year to carry out programs, projects, plans, habitat restoration, improvement, and acquisition as required by the CVPIA. The Restoration Fund is replenished by fees on renewed water contracts, surcharges on water from certain CVP facilities, and other water use fees. Many of the specific habitat restoration and remedial actions of CVPIA require state-federal cost sharing. Potential recipients of the funding include the State of California or an agency or subdivision thereof, a Native American tribe, or a non-profit entity concerned with restoration, protection, or enhancement of fish, wildlife, habitat, or environmental values, which is able to assist in implementing any action authorized by this title in an efficient, timely, and cost effective manner.

7.3 CDWR Delta Pumping Plant Fish Protection Agreement (Four Pumps Agreement)

The CDFG and CDWR entered into an agreement in late 1986 to offset direct losses of striped bass, chinook salmon, and steelhead caused by the diversion of water by the Harvey O. Banks Delta Pumping Plant. Direct losses were defined as losses of fish that occur from the time fish are drawn into Clifton Court Forebay until the surviving fish are returned to the Delta. These losses occur in spite of fish screens located at the pumping plant, due to enhanced predator efficiency in parts of the system, very poor screening efficiency for fish less than one inch in length, and mortality caused by handling fish during salvage operations. In addition to annual obligations for losses at the pumping plant, the CDWR also agreed to provide \$15 million to initiate a program to increase the probability of fish populations quickly recovering. Recently, another \$3.7 million became available after the cancellation of a project on the Tuolumne River. Since 1999, the CDWR has funded \$18.3 million in annual mitigation projects. Projects funded have ranged from hyacinth control projects on the Merced River to a major salmon spawning gravel restoration project. Through this agreement projects are developed by the CDFG, reviewed for funding by the Fish Advisory Committee, approved for funding by Directors of the CDFG and CDWR. Approved funds are administered by the CDWR. The Fish Advisory Committee includes representatives from the CDFG, CDWR, water contractors, fishery interests and environmental organizations (Mager, pers. comm., 2000). The funds in the account are derived from the State Water Project contractors (HRG 1999). On the Merced River, the Four Pumps Agreement has provided funds for implementation of the Merced River Salmon Habitat Enhancement Plan, two riffle reconstruction projects, and ongoing gravel augmentation projects.

7.4 Wetlands Reserve Program

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to restore wetlands. Participating landowners can establish conservation easements of either permanent or 30-year duration, or can enter into restoration cost-share agreements where no easement is involved. In exchange for establishing a permanent easement, the landowner receives payment of up to the agricultural value of the land and 100% of the restoration costs for restoring the wetlands. The 30-year easement payment is 75% of what would be provided for a permanent easement on the same site and 75% of the restoration cost. The restoration cost-share agreements are for a minimum 10-year duration and provide 75% of the cost of restoring the involved wetlands. Easements and restoration cost-share agreements establish wetland protection and restoration as the primary land use for the duration of the easement or agreement. In all instances, landowners continue to control access to their land.

7.5 Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) provides technical assistance and cost-share payments to help establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat on private lands. Participants work with Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to prepare a wildlife habitat development plan in consultation with the local conservation district. The plan describes the participant's goals for improving wildlife habitat, includes a list of practices and a schedule for installing them, and details the steps necessary to maintain the habitat for the life of the agreement. This plan may or may not be part of a larger conservation plan that addresses other resource needs such as water quality and soil erosion. NRCS and the participant enter into a cost-share agreement for wildlife habitat development. This agreement generally lasts from 5 to 10 years from the date the agreement is signed.

7.6 California Riparian Habitat Conservation Program

The California Riparian Habitat Conservation Program was established in 1991 through the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) to protect, preserve, restore, and enhance riparian habitat throughout the California through acquisition of interest and rights in land and waters. The objectives of the program are to: (1) assess the current amount and status of riparian habitat throughout the state; (2) identify those areas that are critical to the maintenance of California's riparian ecosystem; (3) identify those areas that are in imminent danger of destruction or significant degradation; (4) prioritize protection needs based on the significance of the site and the potential loss or degradation of habitat; (5) develop project specific strategies to protect, enhance, or restore significant riparian habitat; (6) develop and administer a grants program for riparian habitat conservation; and (7) provide a focal point for riparian habitat conservation efforts statewide. The WCB may award grants to nonprofit organizations, federal or local agencies, resource conservation districts, and state departments for the purpose of riparian habitat conservation, restoration, or enhancement projects (HRG 1999).

8 SUMMARY OF OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

As discussed in the previous sections, property ownership, land use, zoning, water rights and water supply, flood control and flood hazards, and current funding availability define many opportunities and constraints for restoration in the Merced River corridor. These opportunities and constraints, as they currently occur, are summarized below. Many of these opportunities and constraints, however, may change over time. This summary, therefore, should be considered to be an initial starting point for identifying opportunities and constraints for restoration in the Merced River corridor.

Property Ownership, Zoning, and Land Use

Ninety-seven percent (by area) of the land in the Merced River corridor study area is privately owned. The restoration plan, therefore, must rely heavily on voluntary participation by landowners and must address landowner concerns and embrace landowner values. The suggestion of restoration for the Merced River has raised concerns from many landowners that their property or water rights could be affected. The inclusion of landowners and other river stakeholders in the restoration planning process will help ensure that the plan addresses landowner and stakeholder interests on a broad scale. By adhering to the principle that restoration actions will be based on voluntary participation of landowners at project sites, the restoration plan can ensure that landowners' interests and rights are supported at the project-specific scale. To involve landowners in the restoration planning process, Stillwater Sciences and the Merced County Planning and Community Development Department with support from the AFRP have established the Merced River Stakeholder Group and Merced River Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The Stakeholder Group represents a broad spectrum of interests in the watershed, including landowners, riparian water users, aggregate miners, dairy operators, ranchers, farmers, environmental groups, and local management and regulatory agencies. This group has been meeting approximately monthly to provide input to and review of baseline studies, define restoration goals and objectives, and identify potential restoration projects.

The land ownership, zoning, and land use patterns in the river corridor provide several opportunities for restoration. Outside of the towns of Cressey, Livingston, and Snelling, land parcels are large, are zoned almost exclusively for agriculture, and are currently in agricultural land uses. Large parcel ownership simplifies restoration design and implementation by reducing the number of people contributing to the design process, reducing the number of easements and access agreements required, and potentially simplifying the permit process. Land parcels are largest in the upper half of the project reach, upstream of Cressey.

There is some concern on the part of private landowners that they will be forced into a position of restoration in their section of the river corridor if such efforts are undertaken on neighboring parcels. It is important to note that the contractors working on the Merced River Corridor Restoration Plan have no legal right or mechanism to force such participation. Further, a commitment has been made to these landowners that no such pressure will be exerted in the foreseeable future; all participation in restoration activities is wholly voluntary. Another area of significant concern to the landowners is public access. Again, a commitment has been made that there will be no requirement for public access in order to participate in restoration activities; the use of public funds for restoration is unrelated to public access on privately-owned land.

Much of the property in the corridor has been in the families of the current landowners for several decades or generations. With their knowledge of and reliance on the river, landowners are ideal stewards of the river resource. Most landowners are currently involved in active river stewardship; many have expressed their desire to continue or to increase their stewardship of the river, and many have expressed willingness to have restoration projects on their properties. Ongoing landowner projects

include wetland enhancements, installing duck boxes along the river, innovative dairy management to avoid water quality impacts to the river, and extensive preservation of valley oak woodlands. In addition, several landowners in the vicinity of the Route 59 bridge are currently working with CDFG and CDWR to implement the Salmon Habitat Enhancement Project in that reach (described in Section 4.1).

Water Supply, Water Rights, and Riparian Water Users

The Merced River is heavily allocated for agricultural water use. The Merced ID holds pre- and post-1914 appropriative water rights to divert flows from the river. Riparian water users divert flows through seven diversion channels between Crocker-Huffman Dam and Shaffer Bridge and numerous riparian pumps throughout the river; these uses are protected by the rights held by riparian users and are not negotiable. In addition, numerous farms and dairies rely on water from the Merced River for their operations. These agricultural operations provide significant economic benefits to Merced County, and preservation of agricultural land uses is a key concern of many stakeholders.

Minimum instream flow requirements in the river are defined under Merced ID's current licenses and agreements and are intended to provide adequate flows for chinook salmon and for the Merced River Riparian Water Users Association diversions. Merced ID's FERC license for the New Exchequer Project, which has a minimum flow requirement, expires in 2014, at which time license flow requirements may change. In addition, Merced ID is coordinating with CDFG to implement studies to assess the effects of flows on chinook salmon in the river.

Restoration actions in the river must be designed to function within the current license and agreement flow requirements and must recognize the value of agricultural and other water use. In addition, restoration actions cannot adversely affect appropriative or riparian water rights. This is one of the most important constraints of the restoration plan and restoration project design from several standpoints. From the physical and ecological standpoint, flows will be a significant factor governing project design and project prioritization. Further, projects that adversely impact appropriative or riparian water rights would not be supported by the Stakeholder Group, private landowners, or Merced ID and, therefore, would not be implementable. Lastly, the restoration program has no legal right or mechanism to alter flow requirements in the river or impact water rights on the river.

Flood Control

As explained in Section 3.4, the USACE sets the standards for flood control-related operations of Merced ID's New Exchequer Dam. Current USACE flood control rules allow a maximum routine release from the Dam of 6,000 cfs. The current USACE regulations mandating specific storage capacity requirements control the amount of storage capacity which must be available to accommodate runoff from November 1 through March 31; currently 350,000 acre-feet must be maintained as a cushion except to the extent that the cushion is impinged upon by runoff caused by melting snow or extremely wet, monsoon-like tropical storms.

The U.S. Geological Survey determined in studies conducted in the 1960s that the Merced River channel can convey 6,000 cfs without overbank flooding (Blodgett and Bertoldi 1968). In January 1997, flows of up to 8,080 cfs (measured at Snelling) caused levee breaches and flooding of agricultural lands immediately above Shaffer Bridge; near the confluence of the San Joaquin River, the flooding was more pronounced and extended into dairies and agricultural land.

A cooperative comprehensive reevaluation of flood control operations throughout the Central Valley undertaken by USACE and CDWR has the potential to affect future flood control operations on the Merced River. These potential future changes would occur outside of the timeframe of this restoration plan; restoration projects contained within the plan therefore, must be designed to function within the

6,000 cfs flow limitation but must also recognize that larger floods do occur and should be provided for within the scope of the project.

Aggregate Mining

As discussed in Section 3.2.3, the demand for aggregate resources in Merced County is increasing consistent with the demands of a growing population. The proposed UC–Merced campus, slated to be marginally operational in 2002, will contribute to the depletion of available aggregate materials in eastern Merced County. Issues related to virgin aggregate resources are important to the Merced River Corridor Restoration Plan because such resources typically occur contiguous to rivers and streams. The CDMG designates the area along the Merced River between Snelling Road and Oakdale Road as MRZ-21 SG-2, meaning that the mineral deposit contained therein is suitable as marketable commodity and the deposit meets the threshold value in size. The Merced River dredger tailings area is classified as MRZ-2a; the aggregate quality is uncertain due to the dredging process. CDMG does not automatically consider dredger tailings to be of similar quality to the non-dredged floodplain deposits from which they were derived. Limited data were available to CDMG to assess the aggregate quality of the Merced River dredger tailings at the time of the report. The Upper Merced Property Owners Group is currently conducting studies to assess aggregate quality and mining feasibility in the tailings area.

Considering the Department of Conservation’s recent mineral classification, pressure for aggregate mining will be greatest in the Merced River corridor. Depending on how mining is implemented, this increase in mining could result in conversion of extensive areas of floodplain (including farmland, grassland, oak woodland, and riparian areas) to mining pits. Innovative planning and mining approaches in these floodplain areas, however, could be used to minimize resource conflicts, and current reclamation and mitigation regulations present opportunities for the aggregate producers to interface with the Merced River Corridor Restoration Plan in providing habitat grassland, farmland, oak savannas, and riparian areas. In some instances, innovative mining approaches could be used to enhance river function and habitat values. In addition, mining in the dredger tailings could be combined with extensive floodplain and riparian habitat restoration.

Infrastructure

Key infrastructure that affects restoration opportunities includes public and private bridges, the Livingston sewage treatment facility, and other development in the floodplain. The major constraint imposed by the bridges is the risk of increasing debris jams during high flow events downstream of riparian restoration projects. This risk is greatest at the Snelling Road bridge and at low private crossings. Risk of debris jams and impacts to flood conveyance at the bridges would need to be assessed as part of floodplain and riparian restoration efforts, especially in the Snelling vicinity.

The City of Livingston sewage treatment facility is vulnerable to flooding. Because the restoration plan would not increase flooding above currently allowable flood control releases, the plant does not pose constraints to restoration actions.

Lastly, several roads (both public and private), private levees, wastewater treatment plants, and other structures are located immediately adjacent to the river. Many of these structures are vulnerable to bank erosion, and many are currently protected by bank revetment or rubble placed on the banks to reduce erosion. Actions in the restoration plan cannot increase the vulnerability of these structures to damage from bank erosion.

Funding Opportunities and Easement Mechanisms

Several large funding opportunities are currently available to design, permit, and implement restoration projects on the Merced River. The largest opportunities are available through CALFED, the AFRP, the

Four Pumps Agreement, and the NRCS wetlands programs. Through these and other sources, funding could be available for large-scale restoration projects, smaller demonstration projects, and easement purchases. These funding sources represent a significant opportunity to implement restoration actions on the river in the near future.

Conservation easements between a holding agency and landowners can achieve permanent land conservation and provide tax benefits to the landowner. A conservation easement is a legal agreement between the landowner and the holding agency in which the landowner is paid to preserve certain resources on portions of or all of a parcel. In addition, the landowner may receive property tax benefits in association with the easement. Both natural resource values (such as riparian vegetation buffers) and agricultural resources values can be protected under various easement programs.

Regulatory Issues and Opportunities

Several regulations will affect restoration project design and implementation. Key regulations to consider include the California and Federal endangered species acts, the California Fish and Game Code, the California Environmental Quality Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Surface Mining and Reclamation Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Reclamation Board encroachment permit requirements. The opportunities provided and constraints imposed by these laws and regulations are outlined below. Restoration project funding and implementation schedules must contain sufficient funding and time to meet the reporting and public review requirements of these acts.

- The Merced River (including its riparian corridor) is currently designated critical habitat for Central Valley steelhead (NMFS 2000) and supports designated critical habitat for the valley elderberry longhorn beetle and other protected or sensitive species. Restoration projects would generally benefit these species in the long-term; however, construction and implementation may have short-term, adverse impacts to some species or their habitats. Such projects would require coordination with and authorization from agencies with jurisdiction over the affected species, including the CDFG, USFWS, and NMFS. This coordination should begin during the project design process and would continue through the project permitting process.
- The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires environmental evaluation and public review for projects receiving state permits or funding. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires similar evaluation and review for projects receiving federal permits or funding. Under these acts, specific environmental evaluations could be required for implementation of some restoration projects, and almost certainly would be required for implementation of large projects. Under CEQA, the State lead agency would be required to complete an Initial Study and, possibly, an Environmental Impact Report. Under NEPA, the federal lead agency would be required to complete an Environmental Assessment and, possibly, an Environmental Impact Statement. Restoration project plans should include adequate funding and time to complete the NEPA and CEQA processes.

- Permits for many restoration projects would be required under the Clean Water Act, the California Fish and Game Code, and the Surface Mining and Reclamation Act. Also, lease agreements may be required from the State Lands Commission. Restoration projects should be consistent with the regulatory mandates of these programs to ensure that permits can be readily issued so long as projects provide sufficient supporting information (such as engineering designs, wetland delineations, species surveys, and impact assessments) to the regulatory agencies. These regulatory agencies should be included in project designs to the extent feasible to ensure that their concerns are met. In addition, project budgets and schedules must contain sufficient funding and time to obtain these permits. The Regional Water Quality Control Board may also require assessments of mercury contamination for projects in the dredger tailings.
- The California Reclamation Board must permit any project occurring within the 50-year flood zone. Projects within the floodplain must demonstrate that they will not decrease flood conveyance or increase flood stage elevation. On the Tuolumne River, the Reclamation Board has been hesitant to allow planting of elderberry bushes on the floodplain as part of restoration projects due to their concern that presence of critical habitat for a protected species would limit their options in a flood fight. The USFWS is currently coordinating with the Reclamation Board to develop an agreement that would allow planting of elderberries without limiting flood fight abilities. Depending on the outcome of these negotiations, planting elderberry bushes in the floodplain will also likely be an issue for implementing floodplain and riparian restoration projects on the Merced River.

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Figures

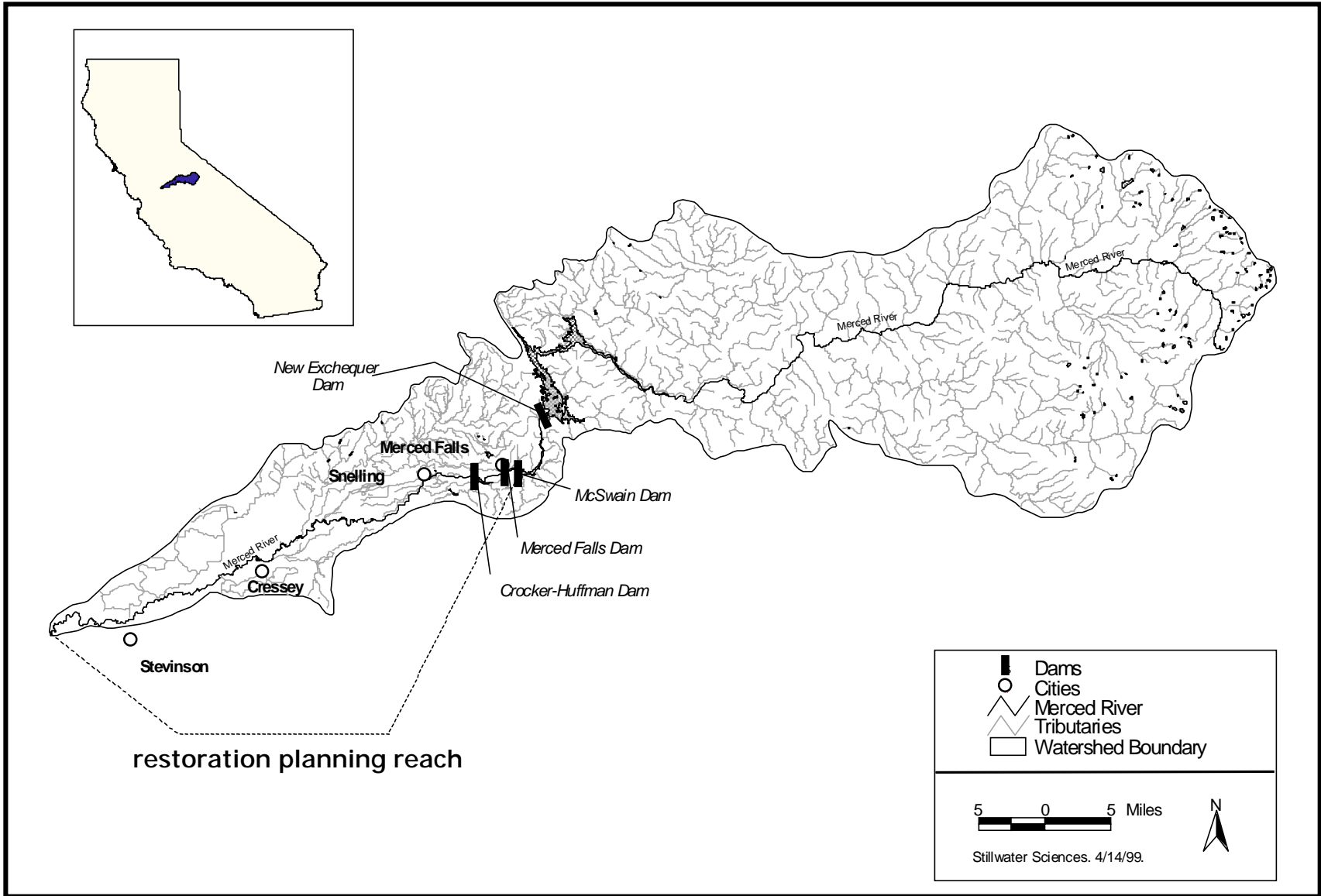


Figure 1. The Merced River watershed and the restoration planning reach.

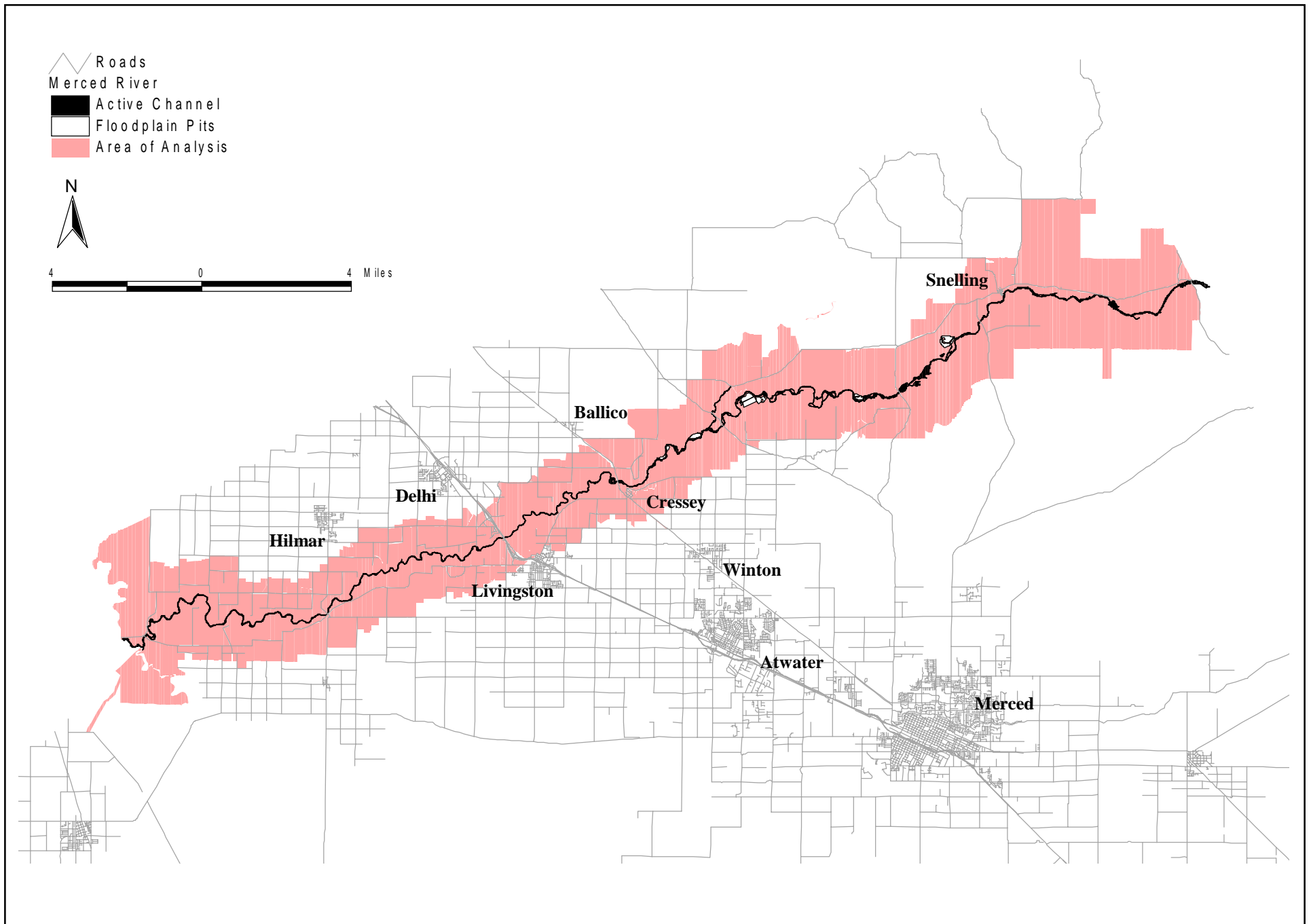


Figure 2. Area of analysis.

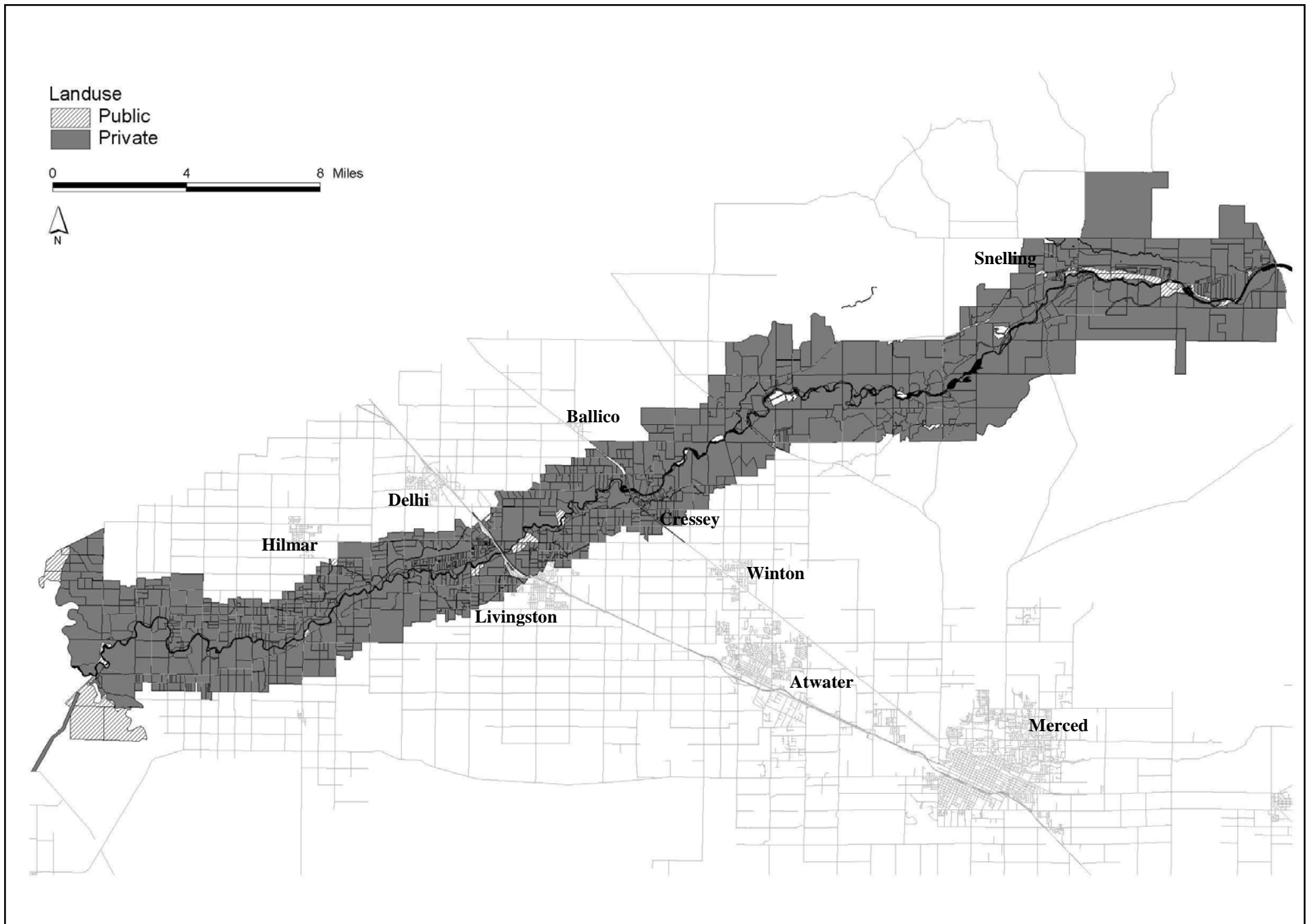


Figure 3. Property ownership in the Merced River corridor.

Source: Merced County Planning and Community Development Department

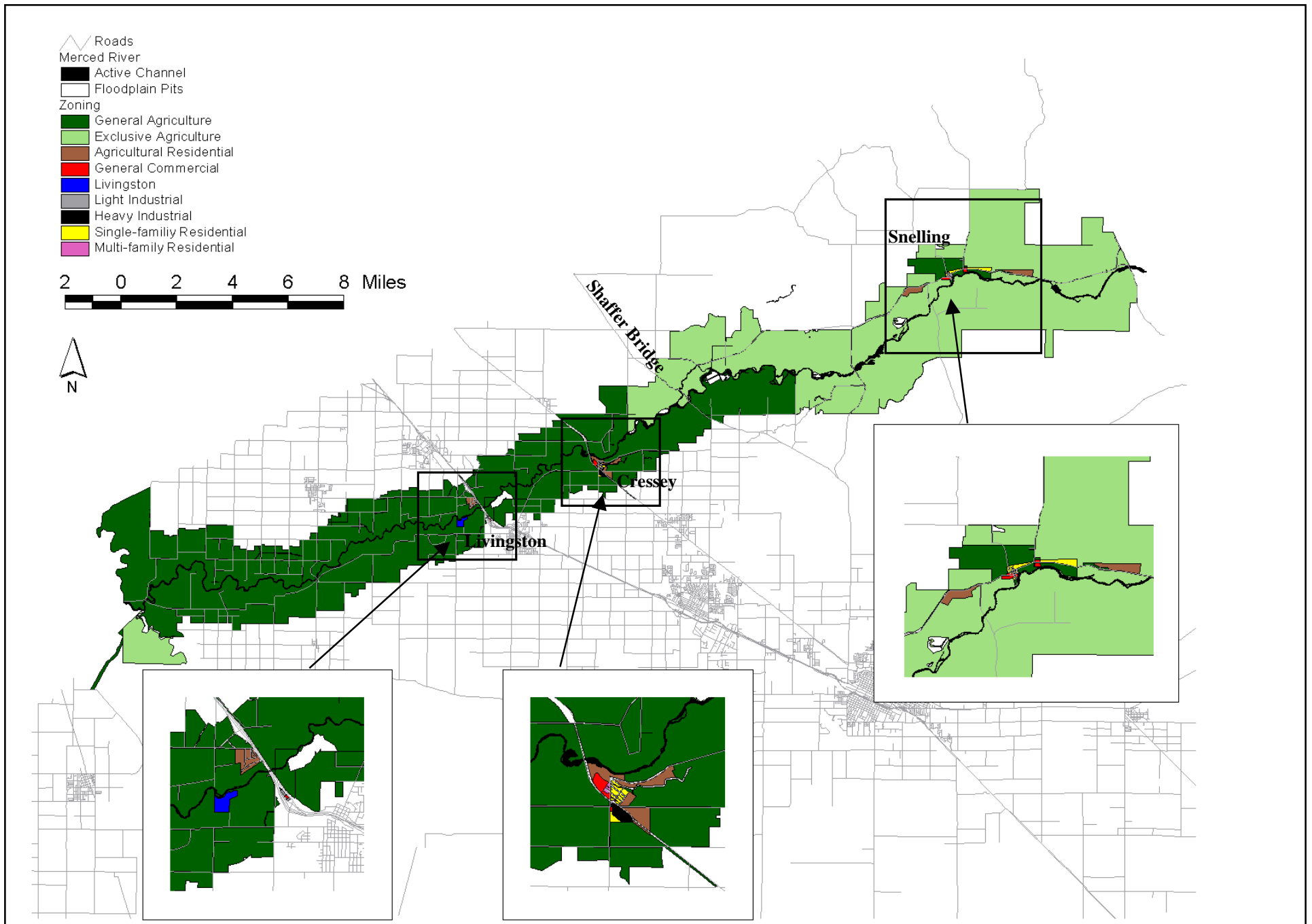


Figure 4. Zoning districts in the Merced River corridor.

Source: Merced County Planning and Community Development Department

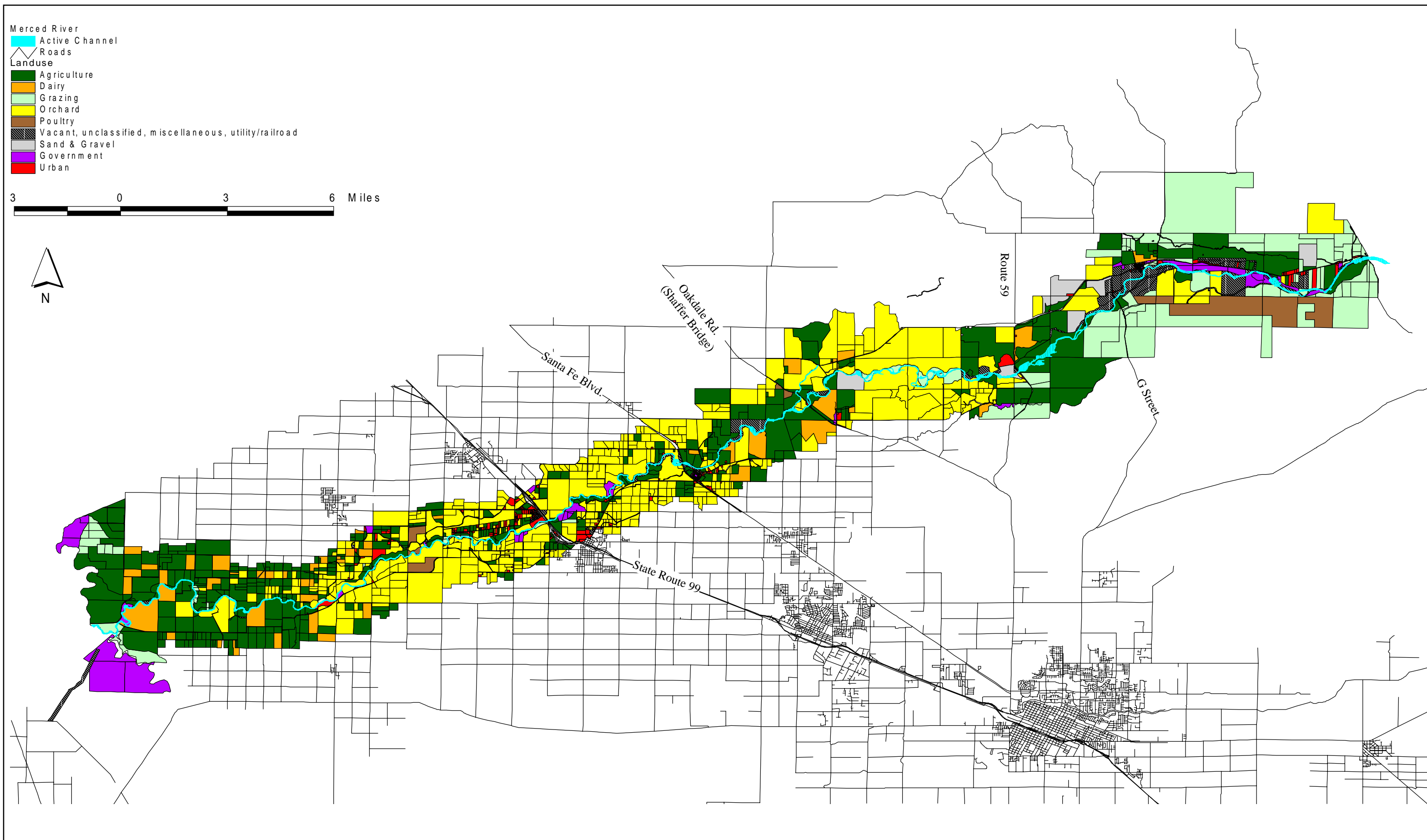


Figure 5. Land use in the Merced River corridor.

Source: Merced County Tax Assessor's Office

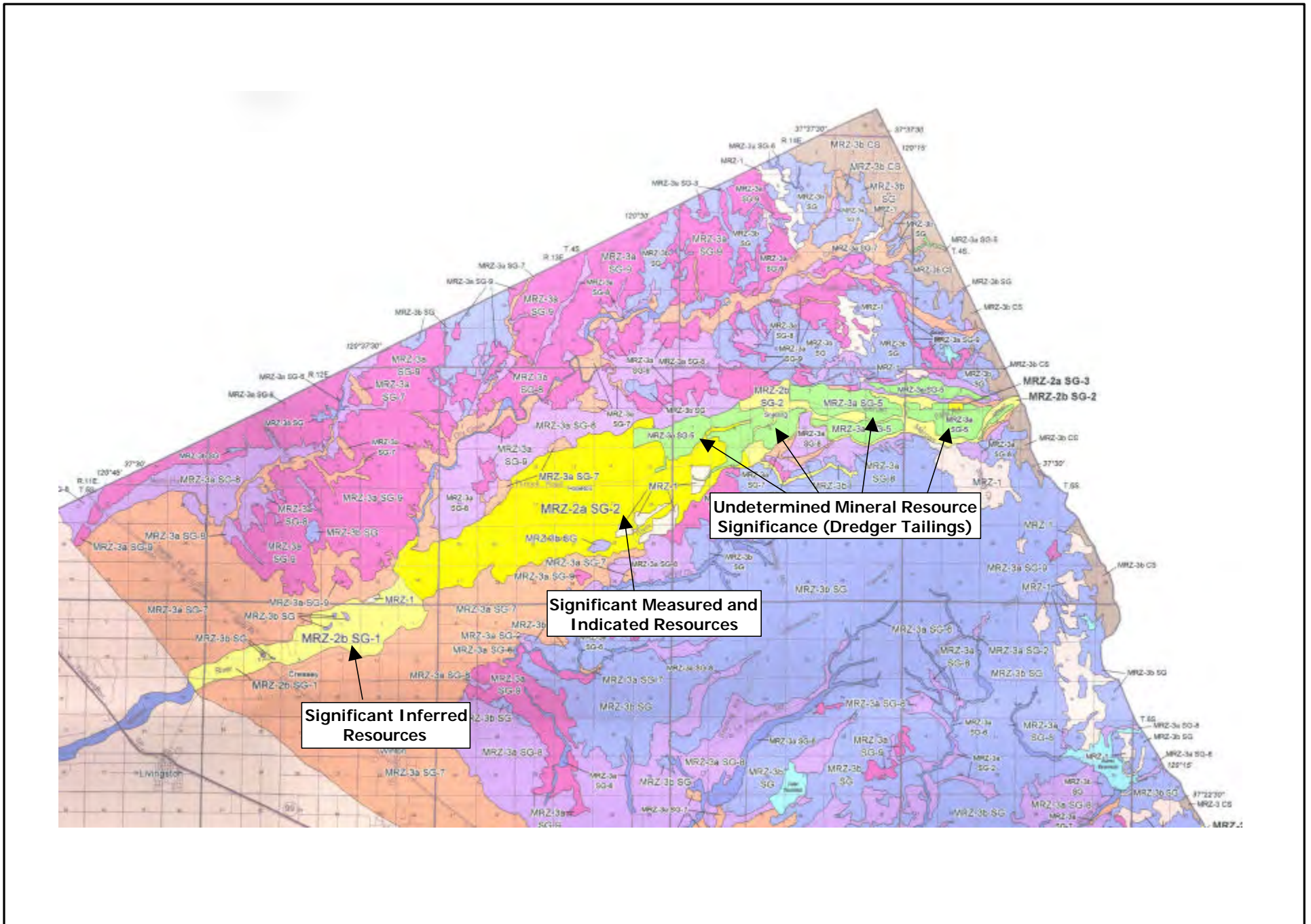


Figure 6. Mineral Resource Zones (MRZs) for concrete aggregate in Merced County.

Source: Clinkenbeard 1999

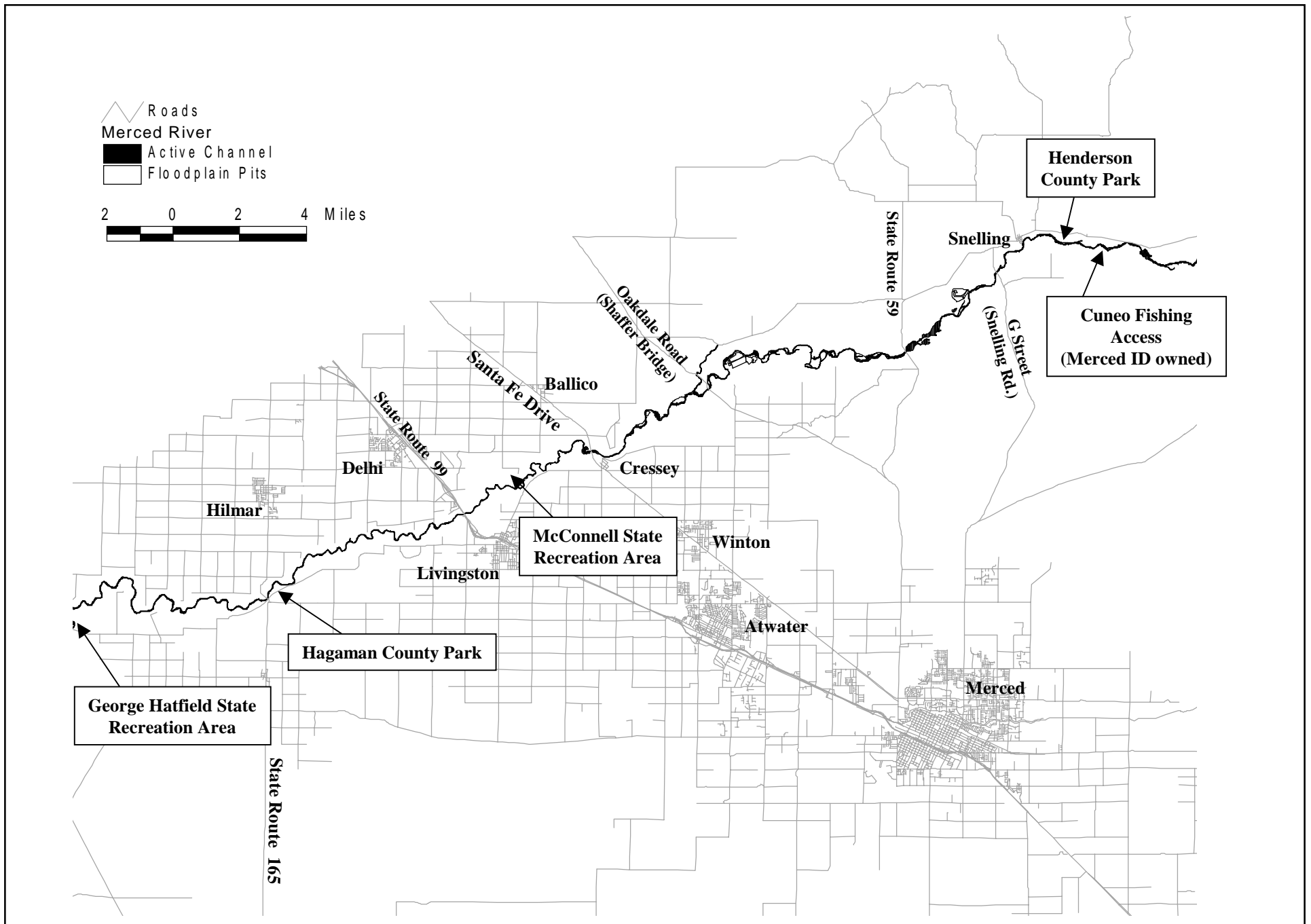


Figure 7. Public access sites in the Merced River corridor.

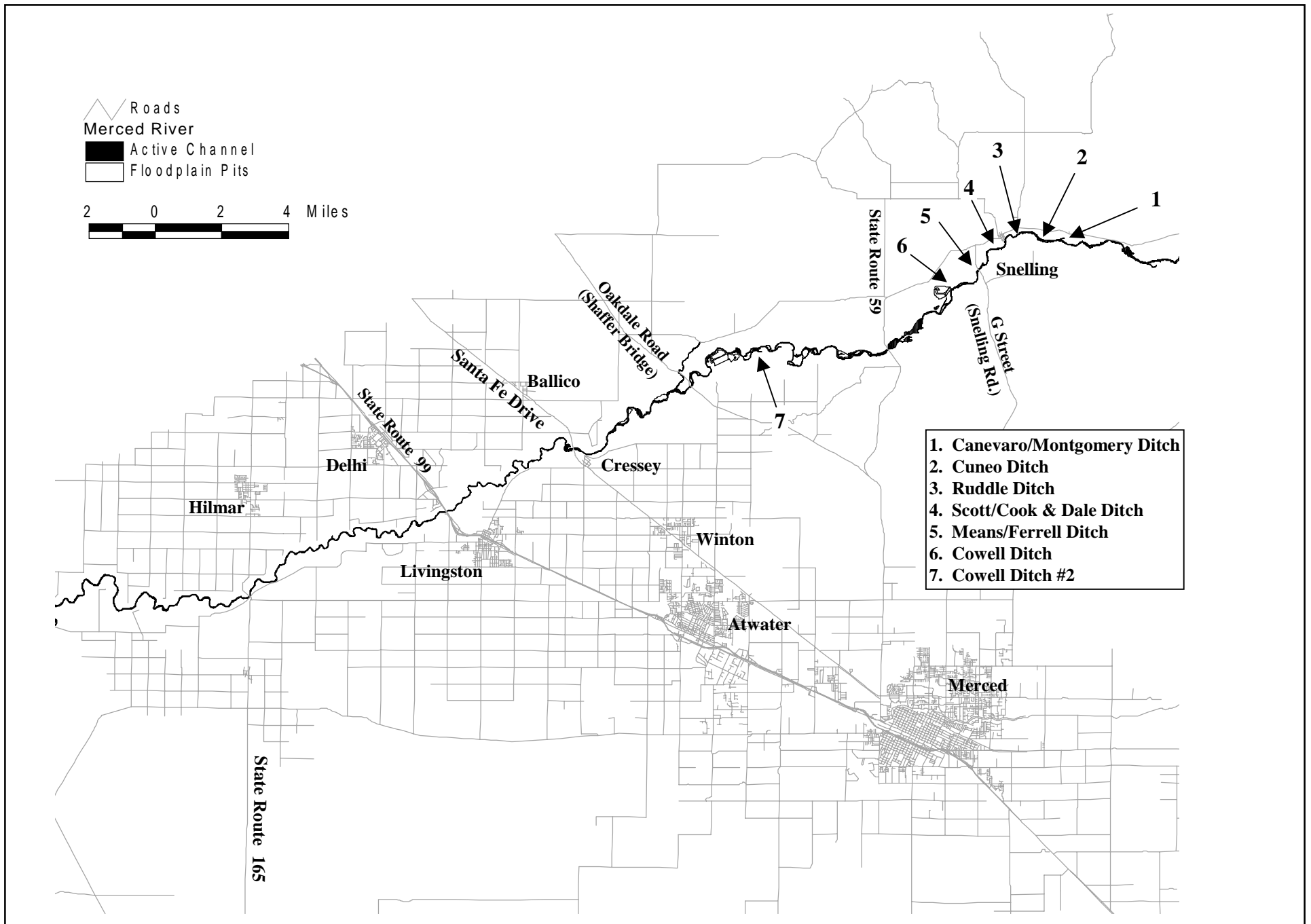


Figure 8. Riparian water use diversion ditches.

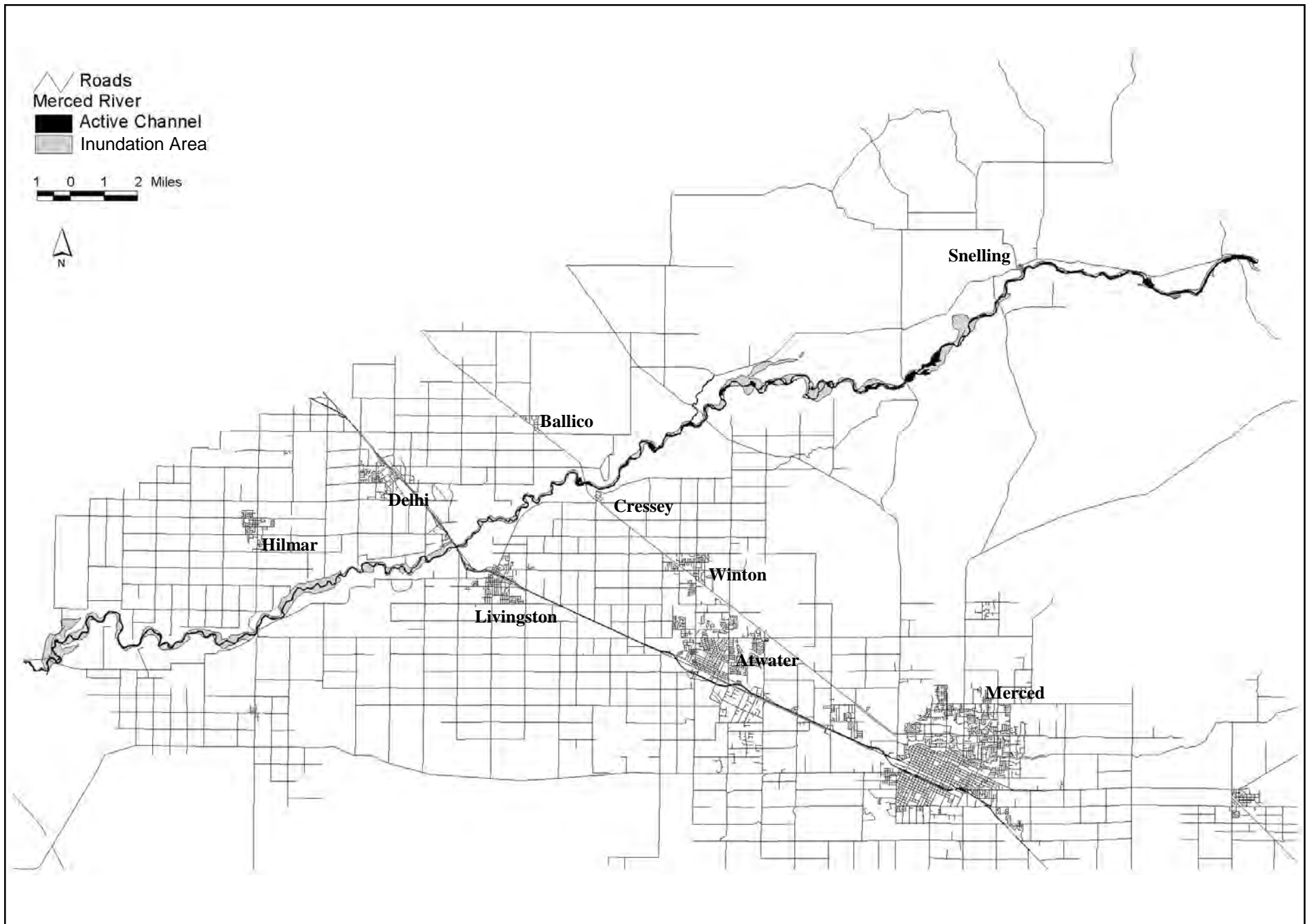


Figure 9. Area inundated by January 1997 high flows.
 Source: Corps of Engineers, unpublished data.

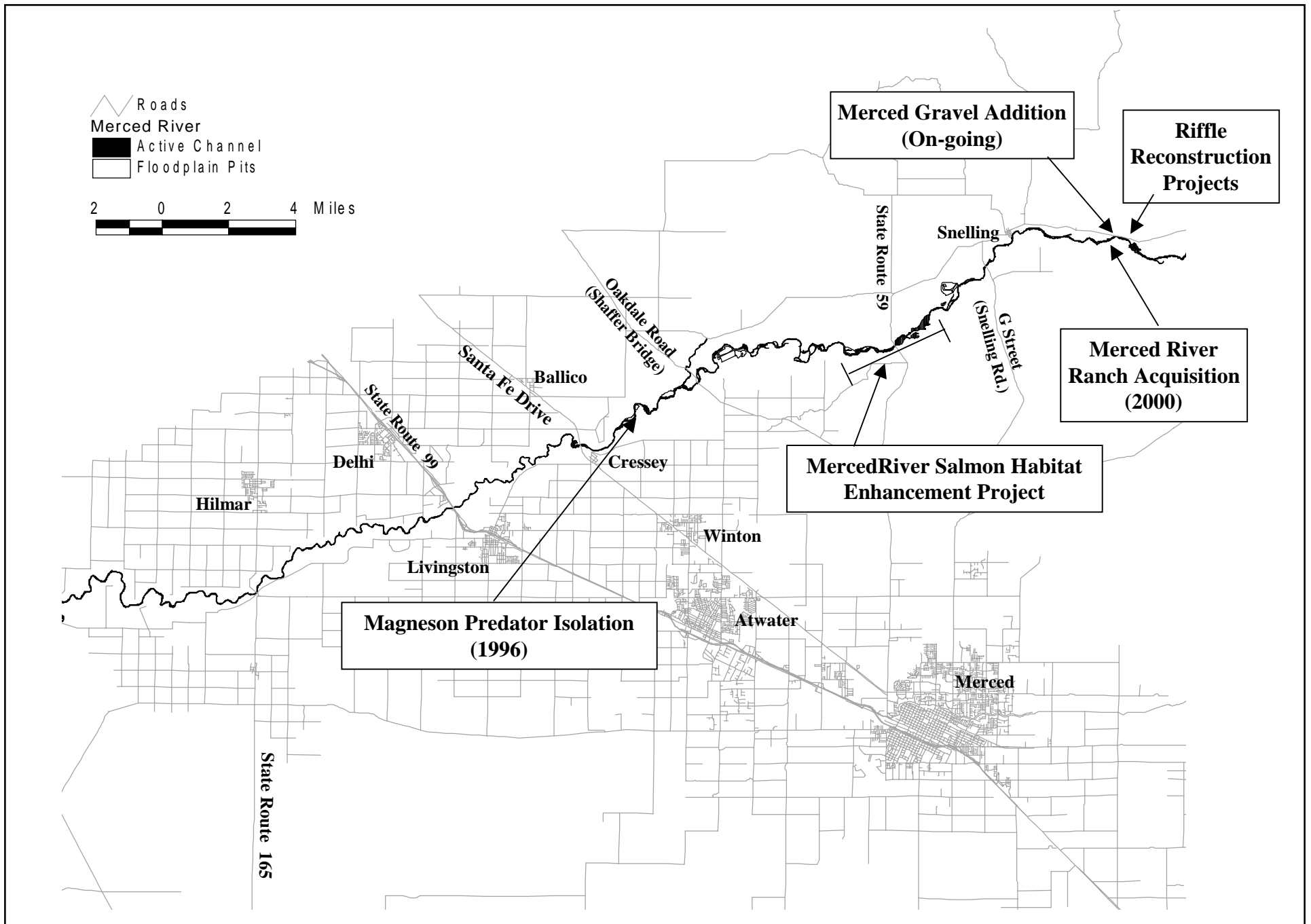


Figure 10. CDFG restoration project sites.

Appendix A: Additional Funding Sources

Additional Funding Sources

ABANDONED MINE LAND RECLAMATION PROGRAM

The Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation (AMLR) Program is designed to protect the public and correct environmental damage caused by coal and, to a limited extent, non-coal mining practices that occurred prior to August 3, 1977. AMLR provides for the restoration of eligible lands and waters mined and abandoned or left inadequately restored. AMLR is divided into two programs: the State Indian Reclamation Program and the Federal Reclamation Program. Both programs address problems such as dangerous highwalls, slides, subsidence, dangerous portals, and polluted waters.

ADMINISTRATIVE GRANTS FOR FEDERAL AID IN SPORT FISH RESTORATION PROGRAM

The Administrative Grants Program supports projects that assist with the administration and implementation of sport fish restoration programs. Funds may be used for administrative projects, including investigations, administration, and execution of the Sport Fish Restoration Act and for aiding in the formulation, adoption, or administration of any compact between two or more states for the conservation and management of migratory fishes in marine or freshwaters.

AGRICULTURAL LAND STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

The Agricultural Land Stewardship Program within the State Department of Conservation provides long-term protection of farmland through grants to local agencies and non-profits for the purchase of agricultural conservation easements.

BRING BACK THE NATIVES PROGRAM

The Bring Back the Natives Program is a national effort by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to improve the status of native aquatic species on public lands through riparian area rehabilitation, watershed restoration, and species reintroduction. Preserving the biodiversity and ecological integrity of unique areas is an essential component of the restoration strategy. The Fish and Wildlife Foundation contributes money to the program in the form of a challenge grant to USFS and BLM. To receive funding for individual projects, the project proponent must secure an equal amount of funds from non-federal sources (e.g., private, corporate, or state sources). Additionally, both BLM and USFS can contribute money to the projects.

BOSCO-KEENE RENEWABLE RESOURCES INVESTMENT FUND (RRIF)

This fund, created by 1981 legislation, receives 30% of the revenue deposited into the Geothermal Resources Development Account. Under current law (Public Resources Code, Section 34000), salmon and steelhead hatchery expansion and fish habitat improvement appear as items in one of eight listed potential uses for these funds. The amount of funding made available to CDFG varies from year to year.

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM (CRP)

The Conservation Reserve Program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm Service Agency, encourages farmers to convert highly erodible cropland or other environmentally sensitive acreage to vegetative cover, such as native grasses, trees, filterstrips, or riparian buffers. The program is intended to reduce soil erosion and sedimentation in streams and improve water quality and wildlife habitat. Participation is voluntary, with a monetary incentive to participate. Farmers receive an annual rental payment for the term of a multi-year contract and can receive cost-sharing funds to establish vegetative cover.

COOPERATIVE ENDANGERED SPECIES CONSERVATION FUND GRANTS TO STATES

The Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund Grants to States is intended to provide federal financial assistance to any state to assist in the development of programs for the conservation of endangered and threatened species. Potential programs include animal, plant, and habitat surveys, research, planning, management, land acquisition, protection and public education.

ENVIRONMENTAL ENHANCEMENT AND MITIGATION PROGRAM

The Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation Program was established by the enactment of the Transportation Blueprint Legislation of 1989 (AB 421). This program for mitigating negative effects of highways and vehicle operations is administered by the California Transportation Commission; however, the Resources Agency evaluates initial fund applications and makes recommendations to the California Transportation Commission. The enabling legislation (Section 164.56 of the Streets and Highways Code) provides a \$10 million annual appropriation through fiscal year 2000/2001 for several purposes, including grants for acquisition, restoration, or enhancement of resource lands to mitigate loss of, or detriment to, lands near rights-of-way. The program provides grants to local, state, and federal agencies and nonprofit entities to provide enhancement or additional mitigation for the environmental impact of modified or new public transportation facilities. Categories of environmental enhancement and mitigation projects eligible for funding include: highway landscaping and urban forestry; the acquisition, restoration, or enhancement of resource lands to mitigate the loss of resource lands lying within or near rights-of-way acquired for proposed transportation improvements; and acquisition and/or development of roadside recreation opportunities. Resource lands include natural areas, wetlands, forests, woodlands, meadows, streams, or other areas containing fish or wildlife habitat.

ENVIRONMENTAL LICENSE PLATE FUND

The Environmental License Plate Fund, established in Section 21190 of the Public Resources Code, offers grants to state agencies, boards or commissions, city or county agencies, the University of California, or private non-profit research organizations to support projects that help preserve or protect California's environment. Eligible projects include acquisition, restoration or enhancement of resource lands and endangered species, and development of interpretive facilities. Projects are funded in one-year increments and each must be a separate, distinct project with a clearly defined benefit. Funds from this program are administered by the Resources Agency.

ENVIRONMENTAL WATER PROGRAM

The Environmental Water Program was created by the Environmental Water Act of 1989 and provides funding for enhancement and restoration projects (not studies) that will contribute significant environmental benefits to the state. Grant monies must be matched by either an equal amount of cash, or a combination of cash and in-kind services. Eligible projects include fisheries habitat restoration and enhancement; riparian habitat acquisitions, restoration or enhancement; and wetland habitat acquisitions, restoration or enhancement. Funds for this program are administered by the California Department of Water Resources.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is administered by USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and encourages environmental enhancement of private ranch and farmland. EQIP aims to address significant natural resource needs and objectives by providing a voluntary conservation program for farmers and ranchers. EQIP provides technical, financial, and educational assistance. Nationally, half of EQIP funds are targeted for livestock-related natural resource problems, while the other half is appropriated to more general conservation priorities. EQIP participants implement activities based on a conservation plan. EQIP offers 5- to 10-year contracts that provide incentive payments and cost sharing for conservation practices needed at the site. Cost sharing may pay up to 75% of the costs of certain conservation practices, such as grassed waterways, filter strips, manure management facilities, capping of abandoned wells, and other practices important to improving and maintaining the health of natural resources in the area.

FEDERAL AID IN SPORT FISH RESTORATION ACT

The federal government levies an excise tax, paid by manufacturers, on fishing tackle and on pleasure boat and motorboat fuel. The revenues are made available to the states on a matching basis (generally three federal dollars for each state dollar) through the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act for funding fish restoration and enhancement activities, wetlands restoration, and acquisition of motorboat access to the nation's waterways. Additionally, the act provides part of the funding for Central Valley anadromous fish habitat restoration crews, as well as their equipment and facilities. Funds from this program are administered by the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG).

FISH AND GAME PRESERVATION FUND

This fund, administered by CDFG, receives revenues generated from the sales of licenses, stamps, and permits issued by CDFG for hunting, sport, and commercial fishing privileges, and other resource-related activities over which CDFG has purview. Functionally, the fund is divided into two parts: the non-dedicated portion and the dedicated portion. Expenditures from dedicated accounts within the fund are constrained to specific activities defined by their enabling legislation. In general, non-dedicated monies are available for expenditure at the discretion of CDFG for support of programs beneficial to fish, wildlife, and native plants. Dedicated Fish and Game Preservation Fund accounts that have the potential to assist in anadromous fish recovery efforts are described under separate subheadings. Funding for anadromous fish habitat restoration from the non-dedicated portion of the fund is very limited.

FISH AND WILDLIFE ENHANCEMENT BOND ACT OF 1984 (PROPOSITION 19)

The 1984 Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Bond Act (Proposition 19) provides funds through the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) to correct the more severe deficiencies in fish and wildlife habitat in California. Funds may be used only by public agencies to enhance, develop or restore flowing waterways for the management of fish outside the coastal zone. Individuals or groups must affiliate with or act as the agent of a public agency to be eligible for these funds. Funds for this program are administered by WCB.

FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT AND UTILIZATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT GRANTS AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS PROGRAM

This program is intended to increase the nation's wealth and quality of life through sustainable fisheries that support fishing industry jobs, safe and wholesome seafood, and recreational opportunities. Special emphasis is given to funding projects that respond to priorities identified in the annual solicitation. Applicants should demonstrate awareness of the fisheries resources in their region, as well as the issues

and problems involving such fisheries. Issues and problems addressed by the project should be supported by industry experience.

FLOOD MITIGATION ASSISTANCE

The Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) program helps states and communities identify and implement measures to reduce or eliminate the long-term risk of flood damage to homes and other structures insurable under the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Projects may include (1) elevation, relocation, or demolition of insured structures; (2) acquisition of insured structures and property; (3) dry floodproofing of insured structures; (4) minor, localized structural projects that are not fundable by State or other federal programs (e.g., erosion control and drainage improvements), and (5) beach nourishment activities, such as planting of dune grass.

HABITAT CONSERVATION FUND

The California Wildlife Protection Act of 1990 created the Habitat Conservation Fund and provided for an annual appropriation to it of \$30 million from the General Fund. The General Fund obligation can be reduced on a dollar-for-dollar basis by transfers to the Habitat Conservation Fund from other specified funding sources, including, among others, the Public Resources Account, the Cigarette and Tobacco Products Surtax Fund, and the California Environmental License Plate Fund. The WCB is responsible for administering annual appropriations to the Habitat Conservation Fund of up to \$11.5 million for acquisition, restoration, or enhancement of aquatic habitat for that spawning and rearing of anadromous salmonids and trout.

HABITAT CONSERVATION FUND/LOCAL AGENCY GRANTS

The Local Agency Grant Program within the Habitat Conservation Fund provides funds for the acquisition, restoration, and enhancement of wildlife habitat and natural areas. Eligible projects include acquisition and restoration of: deer and mountain lion habitat; rare, threatened and endangered species habitat; wetlands, riparian, and anadromous fish and trout habitat; and urban trail and wildlife corridor projects. Each year, \$2 million is available for four of the six project types on a revolving basis. Only local public agencies are eligible to apply, although non-profits are encouraged to participate as partners. A 50/50 local match is required.

LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

The Land And Water Conservation Fund is composed primarily of revenue from outer-continental shelf leases and royalties. Although the authorized level of funding annually is \$900 million, Congress appropriates approximately \$225 million for the acquisition of land for conservation by the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

NATIONAL FISH AND WILDLIFE FOUNDATION

National Fish And Wildlife Foundation funds are available for acquiring significant resource lands for the protection and restoration of sensitive fish, wildlife and plant species within the Wetlands and Private Lands and Wildlife and Habitat Initiatives. Other programs eligible for funding include Conservation Education, Fisheries Conservation and Management, and Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation. Federal, state, and local agencies and non-profits may apply.

NORTH AMERICAN WETLANDS CONSERVATION ACT

The North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) provides federal funds specifically to “conserve North American wetland ecosystems and waterfowl and the other migratory birds and fish and wildlife that depend on such habitats.” Eligible projects include acquisition and restoration of wetlands, among other activities.

PARTNERS FOR WILDLIFE HABITAT RESTORATION PROGRAM

The Partners for Wildlife Habitat Restoration Program provides technical and financial assistance to private landowners through voluntary cooperative agreements in order to restore formerly degraded wetlands, native grasslands, riparian areas, and other habitats to conditions as natural as feasible. Under cooperative agreements, private landowners agree to maintain restoration projects as specified in the agreement but otherwise retain full control of the land. To date, the Partners for Wildlife Habitat Restoration Program has restored over 360,000 acres of wetlands, 128,000 acres of prairie grassland, 930 miles of riparian habitat, and 90 miles of instream aquatic habitat.

PUBLIC RESOURCES ACCOUNT OF THE CIGARETTE AND TOBACCO PRODUCTS SURTAX FUND (PROPOSITION 99)

Proposition 99 provides funds for fish habitat restoration. Through the initiative process in 1988, Californians levied a tax on tobacco products and created the Cigarette and Tobacco Products Surtax Fund. Because of legal constraints, Proposition 99 funds are not available for fish rearing activities. Proposition 99 funds are directed toward habitat restoration projects only, based on the wording of Revenue and Taxation Code Section 30122(b)(5)(A), which governs expenditure of these funds. Because of the current imperiled condition of coho salmon stocks, highest priority for proposition 99 funds allocated for each target drainage have been given to projects in the drainages for coho salmon habitat restoration.

RESOURCE CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The Resource Conservation and Development Program was initiated in 1962 to help people care for and protect their natural resources to improve an area's economy, environment, and living standards. The program provides a way for local residents to work together and plan how they can actively solve environmental, economic, and social problems facing their communities. Assistance is available for planning and installation of approved projects specified in Resource Conservation and Development area plans, for land conservation, water management, community development, and environmental enhancement.

SPORT FISH RESTORATION PROGRAM

The Sport Fish Restoration Program supports projects that restore and manage sport fish populations for the preservation and improvement of sport fishing and related uses of these fisheries resources. Approvable activities may include land acquisition, development, research, coordination, and education.

TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENT ACTIVITIES PROGRAM

The federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) requires that states spend a minimum of 10% of their Surface Transportation Program funds on "transportation enhancements" or conservation-related projects such as the acquisition of scenic lands, easements, and historic sites, construction of bicycle trails, and archeological/historic preservation. Eligible projects must relate to a transportation facility and be above and beyond normal transportation projects or mitigation. Non-federal matching funds are required. State, local, and federal agencies and non-profits are eligible to receive funding, although they are encouraged to submit joint applications.

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AND APPRECIATION PROGRAM

The Wildlife Conservation and Appreciation Program provides grants to fund projects that bring together USFWS, State agencies, and private organizations and individuals. Projects include; identification of significant problems that can adversely affect fish and wildlife and their habitats, actions to conserve species and their habitats, actions that will provide opportunities for the public to use and enjoy fish and wildlife through nonconsumptive activities, monitoring of species, and identification of significant habitats.



Merced River Corridor Restoration Plan Baseline Studies

Volume II: Geomorphic and Riparian Vegetation Investigations Report

April 18, 2001

MERCED RIVER RESTORATION BASELINE STUDIES

VOLUME II GEOMORPHIC AND RIPARIAN VEGETATION INVESTIGATIONS REPORT

FINAL REPORT

Prepared by:

Stillwater Sciences
2532 Durant Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94704

April 2001

PREFACE

The purpose of this report is to provide the results of the Phase II geomorphic and riparian baseline evaluations that were conducted for the Merced River Corridor Restoration Plan. Previous drafts of this report were reviewed by Dr. William Dietrich (University of California at Berkeley – Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences), Dr. G. Mathias Kondolf (University of California at Berkeley – Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning), Dr. Joe McBride (University of California at Berkeley – Department of Environmental Science, Policy, and Management), Dr. Richard Harris (University of California Extension), Ted Selb (Merced Irrigation District), Scott McBain (McBain and Trush), Dr. William Trush (McBain and Trush), and John Bair (McBain and Trush). The draft report was also presented to the Merced River Technical Advisory Committee (on August 22, 2000) and to the Merced River Stakeholder Group (on September 11, 2000), who provided valuable review and comments.

Scott McBain and John Bair participated in the design and implementation of all field work conducted for this project and the analysis of vegetation data. Their input and insight are reflected throughout this report. Beth Hendrickson of California Department of Water Resources provided valuable field assistance and review of the draft report. Ralph Boniello and Jeff Opperman conducted much of the field work for the vegetation studies. Their assistance in data collection, methods refinement and general troubleshooting is appreciated.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

The goal of Merced River Corridor Restoration Plan project is to develop a publicly supported, technically sound, and implementable plan to improve geomorphic and ecological function in the Merced River corridor from Crocker-Huffman Dam (River Mile^a [RM] 52) downstream to the confluence with the San Joaquin River (RM 0) (Figure 1.1–1). The project is a joint venture being led by the Merced County Planning and Community Development Department (the County) and Stillwater Sciences working closely with the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), California Department of Water Resources (CDWR), Merced Irrigation District (Merced ID), and local stakeholders.

The project is being implemented in three phases as shown in Figure 1.1–2. In Phase I, which was funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Anadromous Fish Restoration Program (AFRP), the Merced River Stakeholder Group and Merced River Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) were established. In Phase II, baseline geomorphic and ecological analyses were conducted and social, infrastructural, and institutional issues and concerns that will define opportunities and constraints for restoration in the Merced River corridor were identified. This phase was funded by CALFED and began in April 1999. In Phase III, which was also funded by CALFED and began in October 2000, field and modeling efforts will be completed to develop restoration design guidelines and the Restoration Plan will be developed.

The Stakeholder Group and Technical Advisory Committee were formed to provide input to the baseline studies (Phase II) and the restoration planning process (Phase III) (Figure 1.1–3). The Stakeholder Group provides input from a broad spectrum of interests in the watershed, including landowners, riparian water users, aggregate miners, dairy operators, ranchers, farmers, environmental groups, and local management and regulatory agencies. Although Phase I initiated the Stakeholder and TAC processes, these groups are intended to continue beyond the timeframe of this project to support the long-term interest of the local community in the Merced River. Additional support for the stakeholder process has been provided through a grant from the AFRP to the East Merced Resource Conservation District. The TAC provides focused technical input to study designs and reviews draft study reports prior to presentation to the Stakeholder Group. The TAC participants are primarily agency representatives with management or regulatory interests in the river; some landowners and riparian water users also participate.

A Scientific Advisory Team provided peer review of baseline study designs, analyses, results, and conclusions. Peer reviewers included: Dr. William Dietrich (University of California at Berkeley – Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences), Dr. G. Mathias Kondolf (University of California at Berkeley – Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning), Dr. Joe McBride (University of California at Berkeley – Department of Environmental Science, Policy, and Management), and Dr. Richard Harris (University of California Extension).

^a River miles represent the distance along the river channel upstream from the San Joaquin River.

1.2 Project Objectives and Approach

The components of the Phase II baseline evaluations included the following:

- identifying social, institutional, and infrastructural opportunities and constraints to restoration projects in the corridor;
- developing a quantitative understanding of river hydrology, morphology, floodplain connectivity, and sediment supply and transport; and
- assessing riparian vegetation composition and distribution in the Merced River and identify relationships to geomorphic features and processes.

The results of the social, institutional, and infrastructural opportunities and constraints evaluation are provided in a separate report (Stillwater Sciences and EDAW 2001), which will be finalized as Volume I of the Phase II report. This evaluation identifies social, institutional and infrastructural factors affecting potential future restoration opportunities within the river corridor, including land ownership patterns, existing land use and zoning, water supply, water rights, flood control regulations, and other factors. During Phase III, the Stillwater Sciences and EDAW (2001) report and subsequent revisions will be used in conjunction with the geomorphic and riparian technical evaluations described herein to work with the Stakeholder Group, the Technical Advisory Committee, and the broader public to identify feasible restoration projects to be included in the Restoration Plan.

The results of the Phase II geomorphic and riparian vegetation evaluations are presented in Sections 4 through 6 of this report. The objectives of these baseline evaluations were to (1) develop a quantitative understanding of river morphology, floodplain connectivity, and sediment supply and transport; and (2) assess riparian vegetation composition and distribution in the Merced River and identify relationships to geomorphic features and processes. Specific tasks included: (1) identify major sources of fine sediment; (2) assess coarse sediment supply and transport; (3) assess floodplain width and connectivity downstream of Crocker-Huffman Dam to the San Joaquin River confluence; (4) map riparian vegetation assemblages from Merced County's eastern boundary to the San Joaquin confluence; (5) evaluate relationships between vegetation cover type, geomorphic position, and inundation regime; and (6) assess seedling recruitment and establishment on active channel and floodplain surfaces.

The geomorphic and vegetation baseline evaluations were conducted at two scales: river-wide and site-specific. River-wide analyses included field reconnaissance, review and interpretation of maps and aerial photographs, and development of a computer-based Geographic Information System (GIS) of the river corridor. Reconnaissance-level field surveys were conducted by plane and boat for the entire river from Crocker-Huffman Dam (RM 52) to Hatfield Park (RM 1) to gain a general understanding of the river and provide much of the information presented in the reach descriptions in Section 5.1. The GIS was developed using both available coverages and new coverages developed for this project. Coverages in the GIS are shown in Table 1. Metadata describing these coverages are provided in Appendix A. Site-specific evaluations were conducted at three sites (referred to as the "Stevinson," "Snelling," and "Cuneo" sites) to assess floodplain connectivity, transport processes, and riparian vegetation composition and year-class structure.

Table 1. Coverages Included in the Merced River GIS

Coverage	Source
Active Channel Boundary – 1915, 1937, 1967, 1979, 1993, 1998 ¹	Vick 1995 (1915–1993) Stillwater Sciences (1998)
Floodplain and Terrace Geomorphology ¹	Stillwater Sciences
Riparian Vegetation ¹	Stillwater Sciences and Chico State University
Bank Revetment and Erosion ¹	Stillwater Sciences
Levees ¹	Stillwater Sciences
Channel Bathymetry (confluence to State Route 99)	Corps of Engineers
Floodplain Topography (confluence to State Route 99)	Corps of Engineers
January 1997 Inundation Boundary	Corps of Engineers
Roads	Merced County Planning and Community Development Department
Cities	Merced County Planning and Community Development Department
Land Use	Merced County Planning and Community Development Department
Zoning	Merced County Planning and Community Development Department
Property Ownership	Merced County Planning and Community Development Department

¹These coverages were developed as part of the Phase II evaluations.

As restoration planning moves into Phase III, a better understanding of additional ecosystem attributes and biological communities in this system may become necessary. Potentially important parameters that were not assessed in the Phase II studies include water quality, water temperature, fish species composition and distribution, and ecosystem trophic structure. Merced ID is currently working with the CDFG to evaluate habitat needs for increasing chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) production in the Merced River by assessing the needs for each freshwater salmon life stage (i.e., upstream migration, spawning, egg incubation, fry and juvenile rearing, and outmigration). The CDFG-Merced ID study will supplement the Phase II studies. Components of this study, such as monitoring water temperature, chinook salmon population abundance and distribution, and chinook salmon smolt survival are currently underway.

2 BASIC CONCEPTS

The lower Merced River downstream of Crocker-Huffman Dam is an alluvial river-floodplain system. Alluvial rivers are dynamic systems that are affected by inputs and processes across a range of scales. The geomorphic and vegetation baseline evaluations are based on the conceptual model illustrated in Figure 2–1. This model attempts to illustrate linkages between physical inputs, physical processes, and biological responses. In this simplified model, natural watershed inputs (e.g., water, sediment, nutrients) combined with natural disturbance and anthropogenic alterations to these inputs drive physical processes (e.g., sediment transport, channel migration, thermal loading) that, in turn, determine geomorphic attributes of the river-floodplain system and physical habitat structure. These geomorphic attributes and habitat structure drive biological responses and are important determinants of plant and animal species abundance, distribution, and composition. For instance, flow (a watershed input) determines the timing, frequency, extent, and duration of floodplain inundation (a fluvial process). This inundation regime is an important factor in determining which riparian plant species get established on the river floodplain each year, thus, driving vegetation species composition and age class structure (habitat structure). The resulting vegetation structure provides physical habitat for bird species that utilize the riparian corridor (biotic response).

A conceptual diagram of a healthy alluvial river is shown in Figure 2–2. In this figure, the river channel is sinuous, with alternate point bars and pools at meander bends and riffles in the transitions between meander apexes. In cross section, the river channel is multi-staged, consisting of a low flow channel, an active channel, and a bankfull channel (Figure 2–2). The low flow channel carries summer and fall baseflows. The active channel includes both the low flow channel and unvegetated point bars. The bankfull channel extends to the top of the vertical channel banks. The floodplain lies outside of the bankfull channel and is inundated at flows exceeding the 1.5- to 2-year flood recurrence interval. Under natural conditions, this floodplain supports a self-sustaining riparian woodland.

Trush et al. (2000) describe key inputs and processes required to maintain a healthy alluvial river system and attributes of a healthy alluvial river system. These inputs and processes include:

- temporally variable streamflow patterns;
- channel morphology that is scaled to flow conditions and sediment supplies that are balanced with sediment transport capacity;
- frequent scour of the bed surface and periodic scour of the bed sub-surface;
- channel migration and/or avulsion;
- frequent floodplain inundation; and
- a self-sustaining, diverse riparian corridor.

These attributes and processes are described in more detail below.

Temporally Variable Streamflow Patterns

In most river systems, streamflow conditions are highly variable. In the eastside Central Valley rivers, natural flow conditions are characterized by low flows in summer and early fall, large but brief flow peaks in winter generated by rain storms, and prolonged high flows in spring generated by snowmelt from upper Sierra Nevada watersheds. Each of these components of the natural hydrograph drives processes that shape and sustain the river-floodplain system. Alteration of any of these components causes alterations to the river ecosystem structure and function.

Channel Morphology that is Scaled to Flow Conditions and Sediment Supplies that are Balanced with Sediment Transport Capacity

Channel morphology refers to the size, shape, and slope of the channel and the character of the sediment or rock comprising the river bed and banks. This morphology is determined by the complex interactions between flow, boundary shear stress, and sediment supply (Dietrich and Gallimatti 1991). Factors determining channel morphology include flow magnitude, slope, and depth; the quantity and character of sediments in motion in the channel; and the character and composition of the channel bed and banks (Leopold and Maddock 1953).

In an undisturbed alluvial system, the channel is sized to convey a certain discharge, termed the “dominant discharge” or “bankfull flow” (Wolman and Miller 1960, Leopold et al. 1964). This is the flow that over time transports most of the river’s sediment load. While the recurrence interval of this flow varies, it is often related to floods having a recurrence interval of 1.5 to 2 years (Leopold et al. 1964). Flows exceeding this discharge spill out over the channel banks onto the river floodplain.

In addition, at equilibrium the river’s sediment supply is balanced with its sediment transport capacity. Under this condition, sediment is exported from a reach at approximately the same rate at which it is supplied to the reach. This equilibrium does not imply a static condition but rather reflects a dynamic balance between sediment erosion and deposition, referred to as a “dynamic equilibrium” (Schumm 1977). In this dynamic equilibrium, sediment is transported through or temporarily stored within the channel. Banks erode, oxbows cut off, and meanders migrate, but the overall channel width, depth, and slope fluctuate only narrowly over time because they are in equilibrium with the flow and sediment supplied from the watershed.

Frequent Scour of the Bed Surface and Periodic Scour of the Bed Subsurface

Frequent scour of the bed surface is needed to maintain the active and bankfull channel morphology. As flow in the river increases, the threshold for mobilizing grains on the channel bed surface is eventually surpassed. This threshold varies depending on channel width, depth, and slope, and the sediment grain size. Looking at individual years, the channel bed may not be mobilized at all in low flow years but may be mobilized several times in flood years. In general, over the long-term the channel bed surface is mobilized on the order of once each year for a period of several days. Larger floods that exceed this threshold of surface mobilization may be required to rejuvenate alternate bar sequences. Trush et al. (2000) suggest that floods exceeding the 5- to 10-year recurrence interval are required to scour the channel bed to a sufficient depth to mobilize alluvial bars.

Periodic Channel Migration and/or Avulsion

During lateral migration, the river channel erodes floodplain and terrace deposits on the outside bank of meander bends and deposits sediment on a bar on the inside of meander bends. This process of erosion and deposition maintains the equilibrium channel width and maintains diverse in-channel and riparian habitats. As the bank on the outside of the bend erodes, sediment is deposited on the point bar at the inside of the bend, causing the bar to grow laterally. The erosion on the outside of the bend maintains deep pools, and trees falling into the river from the eroding bank provide important cover and habitat structure for many aquatic species. The new deposits on the point bar on the inside of the meander bend provide new surfaces for recruitment of native riparian trees.

Frequent Floodplain Inundation

The floodplain is the flat area adjoining the river channel that was deposited by the river under the present climatic conditions and which is overflowed at times of high flow (Dunne and Leopold 1978, Nanson and

Croke 1992). Typically, the floodplain immediately adjacent to the river is maintained at an elevation equal to the bankfull stage (Wolman and Leopold 1957, Leopold et al. 1964). Floodplain inundation provides flood peak attenuation and promotes exchange of nutrients, organisms, sediment, and energy between the terrestrial and aquatic systems. Junk et al. (1989) argue that flood pulses are the principle driving force responsible for the existence, productivity, and interactions of the major biota in river-floodplain systems. In addition, the pulse creates a dynamic edge effect, preventing long-term stagnation and allowing rapid recycling of organic matter and nutrients. All of these flood pulse processes contribute to the high rates of primary productivity documented in functioning floodplain systems. In addition, floodplain inundation is necessary to maintain a healthy riparian ecosystem, as discussed below.

Self-sustaining, Diverse Riparian Corridor

Riparian zones, defined by Gregory et al. (1991) as "three-dimensional zones of direct interaction between terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems," provide multiple benefits to instream and terrestrial ecosystems and are widely recognized as centers of biodiversity and corridors for dispersal of plants and animals in the landscape (Gregory et al. 1991, Johannson et al. 1996). Riparian forests filter nutrients and agricultural chemicals from runoff; stabilize channel banks; and provide leaf litter to aquatic food webs, large woody debris and overhead shade for fish habitat, and migratory corridors for terrestrial wildlife (CALFED 1999, Naiman and Descamps 1997, Mitsch and Gosselink 1993, Malanson 1993).

Riparian vegetation dynamics are tightly coupled to river processes. Sediment erosion and deposition as well as inundation patterns strongly influence riparian plant species composition, distribution, and age class structure and drive the process of riparian community succession. Succession is the progressive change in plant species composition over time in response to outside disturbances, such as floods and fire, or internal competition among different plant species (Oliver and Larson 1996, Malanson 1993). Along geomorphically active, meandering streams, riparian vegetation typically exhibits successional gradients perpendicular to the channel, with the youngest stands occurring closest to the active channel margin (Figure 2–2) (Gregory et al. 1991, McBride and Strahan 1984, Walker and Chapin 1986). Through the process of channel migration and formation of alternate bars, the river creates bare surfaces on which riparian pioneer species, such as willows and cottonwoods, can become established. As this vegetation matures, it traps fine sediment, thus contributing to the development of the floodplain. As the floodplain surface develops, later successional species become established and eventually replace the early pioneers. As channel migration and bar deposition continue, a series of successional bands develops on the floodplain (often in conjunction with topographic ridges and swales), with the youngest band occurring at the channel margin and vegetation age increasing inland (Johnson et al. 1976, Strahan 1984, Scott et al. 1996).

Alteration of any of the inputs or processes controlling channel and floodplain morphology can redefine the system's equilibrium state, causing adjustment to the new flow and sediment supply conditions and potentially having far-reaching effects on the structure and function of the river-floodplain ecosystem. Key alterations that have affected ecosystem structure and function on the Merced River include damming and flow regulation, levee construction, aggregate mining, bank protection, and clearing of riparian forests. These factors and their subsequent effects on the Merced River are described in Sections 3 through 6 of this report.

3 THE MERCED RIVER WATERSHED AND THE RESTORATION CONTEXT

3.1 Geographic and Geologic Setting

The Merced River drains a 1,276-square-mile watershed on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada range in the southern portion of California's Central Valley and joins the San Joaquin River about 87 miles south of Sacramento (Figures 3.1-1 and 1.1-1). Elevations in the basin range from 13,000 feet NGVD^b at its crest in Yosemite National Park to 49 feet NGVD at the San Joaquin River confluence. The basin experiences a Mediterranean climate, having wet winters and dry summers. Similar to other rivers originating from the west side of the Sierra Nevada mountains, flow in the Merced River is typified by late spring and early summer snowmelt, fall and winter rainstorm peaks and low summer baseflows. Annual water yield from the Merced River averages 996,500 acre-feet (for the period 1903-1999).

In the upper watershed, the river originates in the Sierra Nevada batholith of Jurassic-Cretaceous age and flows westward through granitic rocks of the Yosemite Valley, entering metamorphic terrain of the western Sierran foothills between El Portal and the Merced Falls Dam. The river drains about 230 square miles of the granitic terrain and about 60 square miles of metamorphic and marine sedimentary terrain. In this mountainous area, the Merced River flows through confined bedrock valleys or steep bedrock gorges.

The river leaves the confines of the upland landscape near Merced Falls Dam and enters the eastern Central Valley, which is characterized by a sequence of steeply sloping, westerly nested Quaternary alluvial fans (Harden 1987). These alluvial fans were sequentially deposited, such that younger fans overlie older fan deposits. The westward shifting of these depositional fans has been linked to progressive uplift and westward tilting of the Sierra Nevada range throughout the Tertiary and Quaternary periods (Bateman and Wahrhaftig 1966). The oldest fans in the Merced River area (the Riverbank Formation and North Merced Gravel) lie at the base of the western Sierra Nevada foothills, and the youngest fan (the Modesto Formation) lies close to the San Joaquin River in the Central Valley. During the Pleistocene, climate-driven cycles of high sediment loads and high flows resulting from glacial formation and retreat drove the formation of these alluvial fans. During this period, the Merced River underwent phases of fan construction and dissection (Wahrhaftig and Birman 1965, Marchand and Allwardt 1981). The valley floor of the modern (Holocene) Merced River is entrenched into these Pleistocene fan formations, which form the bluffs that border the valley floor.

Near Crocker-Huffman Dam (the upstream end of the study reach), the river valley broadens, and the river becomes a highly dynamic, multiple channel (anastomosing) system. (Figure 3.1-2). Historically, these channels, which included the current mainstem channel as well as Ingalsbe, Dana and Hopeton sloughs, occupied the entire width of the valley floor (up to 4.5 miles wide) in the Snelling vicinity. Downstream of the Dry Creek confluence, the valley width narrows and the historical channel was a single-thread, meandering system (Figure 3.1-2). This narrowing and conversion from the braided to the meandering system may have been a response to downstream fining of sediment texture (due to sediment transport-related gravel attrition). With this downstream fining, river bank textures become finer and less erodible, thus driving the conversion to a single-thread channel.

^b National Geodetic Vertical Datum, a standard vertical datum used throughout the United States.

The Merced River and its floodplain historically supported a dense riparian woodland. While much of the Central Valley upland and foothills were historically covered by sparsely wooded grasslands, pre-settlement riparian zones supported dense, multistoried stands of broadleaf trees, including valley oak (*Quercus lobata*), Fremont cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*), western sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*), willow (*Salix* spp.), Oregon ash (*Fraxinus latifolia*), box elder (*Acer negundo*), and other species (Thompson 1961, 1980, Holland and Keil 1995, Roberts et al. 1980, Conard et al. 1980). These riparian forests varied greatly in width, from a narrow strip in confined reaches to several miles wide on broad alluvial floodplains (Thompson 1961). Local accounts of the Merced River describe the rich aquatic and terrestrial fauna supported by riparian habitats (Edminster 1998). Katibah (1984) estimates that the Merced River and the lower San Joaquin River (from the Merced confluence to Stockton) supported over 90,000 acres of riparian forest, part of more than 900,000 acres of historical riparian forest for the whole Central Valley. No historical estimates of riparian forest extent specific to the Merced River are available.

3.2 Anthropogenic Modifications to the Merced River Corridor

The Merced River corridor has been significantly modified by dams and flow regulation, flow diversion, gold and aggregate (sand and gravel) mining, levee construction, land use conversion in the floodplain, and clearing of riparian vegetation. These anthropogenic modifications to the river system are described in the sections below.

3.2.1 Flow Regulation and Diversion

Flow in the Merced River is regulated by two large dams. In addition, flows released downstream of the dams are diverted at two Merced ID canals and at numerous smaller riparian diversions. Dams and diversions in the Merced River are described below. The effects of the dams and diversions on flow conditions in the river are described in Section 4.

3.2.1.1 Mainstem Dams and Flow Diversions

Four mainstem dams affect flow conditions in the lower Merced River (Figure 1.1–1 and Table 2). The two largest dams are New Exchequer Dam (which impounds Lake McClure) and McSwain Dam (which impounds Lake McSwain). These dams, which are known collectively as the Merced River Development Project, are owned by Merced ID and are licensed by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). Merced Falls Dam and Crocker-Huffman Dam are low diversion dams which divert flow into the Merced ID Northside Canal and Main Canal, respectively. Merced Falls Dam is owned by Pacific Gas and Electric; Crocker-Huffman Dam is owned by Merced ID. Three additional small dams—MacMahon, Green Valley, and Metzger dams—are located on tributaries upstream of the New Exchequer Dam. These dams have a combined reservoir capacity of 835 acre-feet^c. Also, Kelsey Dam impounds a small (972 acre-feet) reservoir on Dry Creek, the only major tributary to the Merced River downstream of the mainstem dams.

^c An acre-foot is the volume of water that would inundate one acre of land to a depth of one foot and is equivalent to approximately 326,000 gallons.

**Table 2. Dams Regulated by the California Division of the Safety of Dams
in the Merced River Basin**

Dam	Stream	Year Closed	Capacity (acre-feet)
Mainstem			
New Exchequer	Merced River	1967	1,024,600
McSwain	Merced River	1966	9,730
Merced Falls	Merced River	1901	900
Crocker-Huffman	Merced River	1910 ¹	200
Tributaries to Mainstem			
McMahon ²	Maxwell Creek	1957	519
Kelsey	Dry Creek	1929	972
North Fork			
Green Valley ²	Smith Creek	1957	243
Metzger ²	Dutch Creek	1956	73
		Total:	1,037,237

(sources: CDWR 1984, Kondolf and Matthews 1993)

¹A diversion dam has been operated at this location since the 1870s.

²Dam is located upstream of the New Exchequer Dam.

The New Exchequer Dam replaced the original Exchequer Dam, which was completed in 1926 and had a reservoir capacity of 281,200 acre-feet (28 percent of the total annual water yield from the basin). The reservoir was enlarged when the New Exchequer Dam was constructed immediately downstream of the original dam in 1967. The New Exchequer Dam (located at RM 62.5) controls runoff from 81 percent of the basin and creates the largest storage reservoir in the system, Lake McClure. The maximum reservoir storage capacity at Lake McClure is 1,024,600 acre-feet, equivalent to 103 percent of the average annual runoff from the basin (as measured below Merced Falls Dam, near Snelling). The New Exchequer Dam provides agricultural water supply, power generation, flood control, recreation, and environmental flows including in-stream fisheries flows and flows to the Merced National Wildlife Refuge. Merced ID's State storage water right limits the amount of water that can be stored in Lake McClure to 605,000 acre-feet per year. A minimum pool of 115,000 acre-feet is reserved in Lake McClure to maintain required instream flows for fish.

McSwain Dam is located at RM 56, 6.5 river miles downstream of the New Exchequer Dam, and is operated as a re-regulation reservoir and hydroelectric facility. Storage capacity in Lake McSwain is 9,730 acre-feet.

The Merced Falls and the Crocker-Huffman dams are low-head irrigation diversion facilities. The Merced Falls Dam, which was constructed in 1901, is located at RM 55. The dam diverts flow into the Merced ID's Northside Canal (capacity = 90 cfs) to the north of the river and generates electricity. The Crocker-Huffman Dam, which was constructed in 1910, is located at RM 52 and diverts flow into the Merced ID's Main Canal (capacity = 1,900 cfs). Both of these dams are equipped with fish ladders, but the ladders were blocked by CDFG in the early 1970s in association with the Merced ID's construction of an artificial salmon spawning channel immediately downstream of Crocker-Huffman Dam. Presently, anadromous fish generally do not pass upstream of Crocker-Huffman Dam, although some fall chinook salmon may surmount the dam during high flows (M. Cozart, pers. comm., 2000).

In addition to the Merced ID diversions, the Merced River Riparian Water Users maintain seven riparian diversions between Crocker-Huffman Dam and Shaffer Bridge (Oakdale Road) (Figure 3.1–3). At these diversions, flow is directed into diversion channels by small gravel wing dams that are constructed each year. Downstream of Shaffer Bridge, the CDFG has identified 238 diversions, typically small pumps, used to supply water for agricultural use (G. Hatler, pers. comm., 1999).

3.2.1.2 Required Minimum Flows

Minimum flow requirements in the Merced River are determined by (1) the FERC license for the Merced River Development Project, (2) a Davis-Grunsky^d contract with the State, and (3) required releases to provide flows for riparian diversions. The required minimum flow varies, depending on month and water-year-type (e.g., wet or dry). Required minimum flows in the river are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Required Monthly Minimum Flows in the Merced River

Required Flows (cfs)				
Month	FERC Normal Years (Dry Years)	Davis-Grunsky Flows ¹	Riparian ²	Approximate Flow Range
January	75 (60)	180–220	50	230–270
February	75 (60)	180–220	50	230–270
March	75 (60)	180–220	100	280–320
April	75 (60)	—	175	235–250
May	75 (60)	—	225	285–300
June	25 (15)	—	250	265–275
July	25 (15)	—	225	240–250
August	25 (15)	—	175	190–200
September	25 (15)	—	150	165–175
October 1-15	25 (15)	—	50	65–75
October 16-31	75 (60)	—	50	110–125
November	100 (75)	180–220	50	230–270
December	100 (75)	180–220	50	230–270

(Source: T. Selb, pers. comm., 1999)

¹Measured at Shaffer Bridge.

²Measured at Crocker-Huffman Dam.

^d The Davis-Grunsky Act is legislation that provides financial assistance to public agencies for water development, recreation, and fish and wildlife enhancement.

3.2.1.3 Flow Limitations for Flood Control

The New Exchequer Dam provides flood control for the lower Merced River. The flood control operations are defined by the Corps of Engineers, and a total of 350,000 acre-feet of storage space in the reservoir is reserved for the (rain) flood pool (October 31 through March 15). An additional 50,000 acre-feet are reserved for the “conditional space” associated with the forecasted spring snowmelt (March 1 through May 15). In addition, the Corps of Engineers limits maximum discharge in the Merced River to 6,000 cfs, as measured at the Merced River near Stevinson gauge, located at RM 4.4. During the January 1997 flood, the Merced ID received an emergency variance from the Corps of Engineers to release approximately 8,000 cfs from the dam. During this release, flows in the lower river reached 8,279 cfs at the Merced ID Crocker-Huffman gauge and 8,130 cfs at the Merced River near Stevinson gauge. In the upstream reaches of the project area, the channel accommodated this flow, although the Route 59 bridge was closed due to the danger of bridge failure. In the lower reaches of the river private levees were breached at several locations, and agricultural and dairy lands were flooded (Figure 3.2–1). Damage from seepage and high water tables was also reported by some landowners in the lower river.

3.2.2 Discharges to the River

In addition to the diversions described above, there are also several discharges into the Merced River downstream of Crocker-Huffman Dam, including return flow from Merced ID diversions, an interbasin transfer from the Tuolumne River and Mustang Creek, wastewater treatment discharges, and private agricultural drains. Merced ID owns and maintains three operational spills that discharge excess irrigation water and storm water runoff to the Merced River: the Northside Canal Spill, the Livingston Canal Spill, and the Garibaldi Lateral Spill. The Northside Canal Spill discharges approximately five river miles upstream of Cressey, the Livingston Canal Spill discharges approximately one river mile upstream of State Route 99, and the Garibaldi Lateral Spill discharges approximately three river miles downstream of State Route 99.

Turlock Irrigation District operates two spills that discharge into the Merced River: the High Line Spill and the Lower Stevinson Spill. The High Line Spill is located near Griffith Avenue (RM 15.6) and discharges excess irrigation water diverted from the Tuolumne River and storm flows from the Mustang Creek watershed that are intercepted by the Highline Canal. The Lower Stevinson Spill is located just upstream of the town of Stevinson. This spill discharges excess irrigation water diverted from the Tuolumne River and shallow ground water that has been pumped from the nearby region.

3.2.3 Levees

No state or federal levee system has been constructed on the Merced River, and existing levees are limited to small, privately owned structures. The levee system is, however, extensive, especially downstream of the State Route 99 bridge (RM 20.5). Upstream of State Route 99, levees are isolated and discontinuous. The extent of levees and the effects of levees on floodplain width are described in more detail in Section 5.5.

3.2.4 Gold and Aggregate Mining

The lower Merced River has been mined extensively for gold and aggregate. Placer (gold) dredging occurred in the valley from 1907 through 1952. During this period, seven gold companies operated ten dredges in the Merced River in the vicinity of Snelling (Vick 1995). Dredges had earthmoving capacities of 1.4–3.4 million yd³/yr and excavated the channel and floodplain deposits to bedrock, usually a depth of 20–36 feet (Clark, no date). After recovering the gold, the dredgers redeposited the remaining tailings in long rows on the floodplain. These tailings consist of fine sand and gravel overlain by cobbles and

boulders (Goldman 1964), a stratification pattern that likely resulted from the sluicing and discharge process. Tailings currently cover approximately 7.6 square miles of floodplain in the Snelling vicinity (Figure 3.2–2); the volume^e of these tailings is estimated to be approximately 24 million yd³. Based on preliminary field surveys, McBain and Trush (2000) estimated that approximately 3.6 million yd³ of tailings occur on lands owned by Merced ID, Merced County, and the CDFG (Table 4). Some dredger tailings on private properties are currently being mined for aggregate, including tailings near Merced Falls and near the Snelling Road bridge.

Table 4. Total Volume of Dredger Tailings on Merced River Floodplain Owned by the County, CDFG, and Merced ID

Gravel Inventory Sites	Volume (yd ³)
Merced ID	1,390,000
Merced County	355,000
CDFG	1,850,000

(Source: McBain and Trush 2000)

Large-scale aggregate mining began in the Merced River and its floodplains in the 1940s and continues today. Aggregate mines have excavated sediment directly from the river channel, creating large in-channel pits, and from the adjacent floodplains and terraces. Floodplain and terrace pits typically were separated from the channel by narrow, unengineered berms, but many of these berms have been breached by high flows, resulting in capture of the river channel by the pits. While in-channel mining has been discontinued, floodplain and terrace mining continue today.

Vick (1995) identified 24 aggregate mining sites in the river extending from RM 44.8 (near Snelling) to RM 26.5 (at Cressey). Mines identified included eight intact terrace pits, two breached terrace pits, six captured terrace pits, and eight in-channel pits. At intact mines, berms isolating the channel from the mine pit were not breached. At breached mines, the berm was broken at one location. At captured mines, the berm is broken at more than one location and the river channel flowed through the mine pit. Of these mines identified in 1995, one breached terrace pit and one intact terrace pit (both located immediately upstream of the Route 59 bridge) were captured in the January 1997 flood. Including the mines captured in 1997, in-channel and captured pits currently occupy 7.3 miles (or 40 percent) of the gravel-bedded reach of the river.

Three aggregate mines, which are operated by Calaveras Materials Inc. and Santa Fe Aggregates, are currently active in the river corridor. Calaveras Materials Inc. operates two permitted sites just downstream of the Route 59 bridge. An additional mine, the Woolstenhulme Ranch site (456-acres), is currently in the permitting process.

Santa Fe Aggregates, Inc. operates the Bettencourt Ranch mine near RM 34 and the Doolittle Mine near RM 4.6. The Bettencourt Ranch mine was permitted in 1989 and has approximately three to four years of permitted reserves, depending on market demands. The current permitted area is 160 acres. Upon completion of the mining operation, the site will be reclaimed to open space, wildlife habitat, and agriculture. The mine pits are separated from the river by a berm that is approximately 100 to 200 feet

^e This assumes an average depth of 3.5 feet, based on McBain and Trush (2000).

wide. The Doolittle Mine is located in a dredger tailings area. Tailings will be removed to the floodplain or terrace elevation.

4 EFFECTS OF FLOW REGULATION AND DIVERSION ON HYDROLOGY

As described in Section 2, many of the attributes and processes that define a healthy river ecosystem are driven by the hydrologic characteristics of the system. Typical of rivers on the east side of the Central Valley, natural flow conditions in the Merced River were characterized by low flows in summer and fall, large but brief peak flows in winter due to rain storms and rain-on-snow events, and prolonged high flows in spring and early summer from snowmelt in the upper watershed. Under pre-dam conditions, these natural flows maintained the channel width and depth, transported coarse and fine sediment, and supported floodplain and riparian processes.

Natural flow conditions in the Merced River have been modified by flow regulation (i.e., dam operation) and flow diversions. Ground water withdrawals also may have affected summer low flow conditions in some reaches. This section describes how flow regulation and flow diversion have altered seasonal flow patterns and flood peaks in the Merced River downstream of Crocker-Huffman Dam. The effects of these changes in flow conditions on sediment transport and riparian vegetation establishment are discussed Sections 5 and 6.

4.1 The Natural Hydrograph

The Merced River's natural hydrograph can be broken into four components: summer baseflows, fall and winter peak flows, winter baseflows, and spring and summer snowmelt (Figure 4.1-1). Summer baseflows begin at the end of the snowmelt recession and end with the first storm in late fall. Under pre-dam conditions, summer baseflows typically began between late June and August and ranged from 100 to 300 cfs, with monthly flows averaging 304 cfs, 123 cfs, and 224 cfs for August, September, and October respectively (based on flow at the Merced River near Exchequer gauge for the period 1902–1913, 1915–1920). Through the fall and winter, rainstorms and rain-on-snow events generated brief, sharp peaks in flow. Large-magnitude, short-duration floods caused by rain-on-snow events typically occurred in late December through February; moderate-magnitude events extended through March. Winter baseflows, which occur over the same time period as fall and winter peak flows, are the stable flows that occur between fall and winter storm events. These baseflows are fed by shallow groundwater return and generally increase in magnitude throughout the winter as soils become saturated. Prior to flow regulation, winter baseflows in the Merced River generally ranged from approximately 200 to 1,700 cfs (measured at Merced River near Exchequer gauge) depending on water-year-type. During dry and critically dry years, winter baseflows were about the same magnitude as summer baseflows. The spring and summer snowmelt period was the wettest period of the natural annual hydrograph. During this period, snowmelt from the upper watershed produced high flows that spanned several weeks or months and receded slowly beginning in late spring or early summer. Prior to flow regulation, spring and summer snowmelt on the Merced River typically began in mid-March and ended between late June and August, when flows returned to summer baseflow levels. The peak of the snowmelt typically occurred between late March and June, and the recession limb generally lasted until mid-to-late July but extended later during wetter years. Under natural conditions, these spring snowmelt flows and the slow recession limb drove many processes that characterize a healthy alluvial river system. For instance, high spring flows inundated floodplains and delivered fine sediment to floodplains and riparian zones. In some years, the slow recession limb coincided with the timing of seed release of cottonwoods and other riparian trees and supported seed germination and seedling establishment. In addition, these spring high flows supported chinook salmon juvenile and outmigrant life stages.

4.2 Effects of Flow Regulation and Diversion on Seasonal Flow Patterns

The effects of flow regulation and diversion were assessed using streamflow gauge data from the lower Merced River. A schematic diagram of gauge locations is shown in Figure 4.2–1. The combined effects of flow regulation and flow diversion have greatly reduced flow magnitude in the lower river downstream of Crocker-Huffman Dam and have shifted temporal seasonal flow patterns. Unregulated and regulated monthly flows in the Merced River are shown in Table 5 and Figure 4.2–2. Without flow regulation, average monthly flows in the Merced River were highest during the spring snowmelt peak (April through June) and lowest during late summer and early fall (August through October). With flow regulation, flow conditions at Merced Falls (i.e., the reach downstream of McSwain Dam but upstream of the Northside and Main Canal diversions) are similar in pattern though reduced in magnitude compared to unregulated conditions through the winter and spring (December through June). During summer and early fall (July through October), flow magnitude is increased by 80–880 percent as irrigation flows are delivered from the storage reservoirs to the diversion canals. Average flows in November are essentially unchanged.

Table 5. Comparison of Unregulated and Regulated Flows in the Merced River (1968–1998)

Month	Average Monthly Flow (cfs) [percent change compared to unregulated flow]		
	Estimated Unregulated Flow 1968-1998 ¹	Merced Falls Dam 1968-1998 ²	Crocker-Huffman Dam ³
October	151	871 [427]	271 [79]
November	352	389 [11]	189 [-46]
December	641	571 [-11]	270 [-58]
January	1,583	813 [-49]	415 [-74]
February	1,749	1,138 [-35]	568 [-68]
March	1,982	1,352 [-32]	545 [-73]
April	2,464	1,842 [-25]	529 [-79]
May	3,954	2,300 [-42]	498 [-87]
June	3,211	2,353 [-27]	424 [-87]
July	1,195	2,146 [80]	251 [-79]
August	279	1,753 [528]	150 [-46]
September	143	1,401 [880]	214 [50]

¹ CDWR (1994a)

² USGS Merced River near Merced Falls Dam gauge (no. 11270900)

³ Merced ID Crocker-Huffman gauge

Downstream of Crocker-Huffman Dam, flow regulation and diversion have reduced flow variability in the river. Under unregulated conditions, average monthly flows varied over an order of magnitude from a low of 143 cfs in September to a high of 3,954 cfs in May. With flow regulation and diversion, average monthly flows in the lower river vary from a low of 150 cfs in August to a high of 568 cfs in February. Flow regulation and diversion have also altered monthly average monthly flow magnitude in the lower river. Average monthly flows in September and October are 50–79 percent higher than unregulated

flows, while average monthly flows during November through August are 46B87 percent lower, with the greatest flow reductions occurring from April through July (Table 5).

Alterations to the seasonal hydrograph can be further illustrated by comparing unregulated and regulated flows for individual years representing a range of water-year-types (i.e., dry-to-wet). This analysis requires estimated or measured daily inflow to Lake McClure and daily flow data downstream of the mainstem dams and diversions. Necessary data were available for the period 1977B1996. For the analysis, five water year types ranging from critically dry to extremely wet were defined. The water year definitions were developed by identifying exceedence probabilities of the total annual water yield for all water years in the period 1902B1998. Total water yield for each of these years was ranked and plotted using the Weibull plotting position method (Linsley et al. 1975), and the resulting distribution was divided into five water year classes symmetric about the median water yield (Figure 4.2–3 and Table 6). One year having a total annual water yield within the defined range was chosen to graphically represent each water-year-type for the hydrograph components analysis (Table 6). Hydrographs showing inflow to Lake McClure, regulated flow at Merced Falls, and regulated flow at Crocker-Huffman Dam for each of the these representative years are shown in Figures 4.2–4A through 4.2–4E.

Table 6. Exceedence Probabilities and Total Water Yield of Water-Year-Types, 1902–1998

Water-year-type	Exceedence probability	Total water yield (millions of acre-feet)	Representative water year
Critically Dry	0.85 - 1.0	< 0.476	1992
Dry	0.6 – 0.85	0.476 – 0.733	1981
Normal	0.4 – 0.6	0.733 – 1.09	1979
Wet	0.15 - 0.4	1.09 – 1.56	1993
Extremely Wet	0 - 0.15	>1.56	1982

In general, flow regulation and diversion in the Merced River have reduced fall and winter peak flows, reduced winter baseflows, reduced the spring snowmelt peak, and accelerated the rate of the snowmelt recession. Summer baseflows (at Crocker-Huffman Dam) have been relatively unaffected. Additional riparian diversions downstream of Crocker-Huffman Dam, however, further reduce baseflows throughout the summer period. The effects of flow regulation and diversion on daily flows for each hydrograph component are described in more detail below.

Summer Baseflows

Overall, the effects of the dams and the Northside and Main Canal diversions have had a relatively minor effect on summer baseflow magnitude, with the exception of increasing baseflows in October. Downstream of Crocker-Huffman Dam, flows in the river are further reduced by numerous riparian diversions. Flow releases required for riparian diversions for August, September, and October are 175 cfs, 150 cfs, and 50 cfs, respectively (Table 3), which is 116 percent, 70 percent, and 23 percent of

average monthly flows measured at Crocker-Huffman Dam for the period 1968B1998 for these months, respectively. In the critically dry, dry, and median water years analyzed, riparian diversions between Crocker-Huffman Dam and Shaffer Bridge (RM 32.5) reduced summer baseflows downstream of Crocker-Huffman Dam by 60 percent, 62 percent, and 40 percent, respectively, and fell to as low as 26 cfs (based on flows measured at the Merced River at Shaffer Bridge gauge). In the wet and extremely wet years analyzed, the Merced River at Shaffer Bridge gauge was not operating. Summer baseflows at the Merced River near Stevinson gauge (RM 1.1) were 21 percent lower than at Shaffer Bridge during the critically dry year but were approximately the same as at Crocker-Huffman Dam during the dry and median years. During the wet year summer baseflows at Stevinson were approximately 35 percent lower than at Crocker-Huffman Dam. During the extremely wet year, summer baseflows at Stevinson were approximately 40 percent higher than at Crocker-Huffman Dam.

Fall and Winter Peak Flows

Flow regulation has substantially altered fall and winter peak flows. During dry and critically dry water years, the effect is not observed until late in the winter because natural winter peaks are generally absent and, when they do occur, they are of small magnitude. For the dry and critically dry years analyzed (Figures 4.2–4A and 4B), the first substantial winter peaks occurred in February and, in both years, unregulated peaks were less than 4,000 cfs. The dams stored flows from these peaks, and downstream of the dams, flows remained constant throughout the winter, spring, and summer. In the median, wet, and extremely wet years (Figures 4.2–4C through 4E), the first substantial unregulated peaks began as early as November, but these peaks were stored by the reservoirs and flows in the lower river remained constant until mid-February or later. This pattern is typical of the operation of water supply and flood control reservoirs, which are operated to store winter and spring high flows until the storage pool encroaches into the required flood control pool. For the water years shown, instantaneous winter peak flows were reduced by 50–80 percent by regulation, and regulated peaks tended to be longer in duration and smaller in magnitude than peak inflows to Lake McClure.

Winter Baseflows

Flow regulation has reduced winter baseflows in the lower river relative to unregulated conditions. For the years analyzed, unimpaired winter baseflows ranged from 697 cfs in critically dry years to 2,040 cfs in extremely wet years. For all of the years assessed, regulated winter baseflows were similar to unregulated flow magnitude until the first or second substantial storm. These storms increased unregulated baseflow, but flows downstream of the dams remained constant until mid-February in the median and extremely wet years, until April in the wet year, and throughout the winter, spring, and summer in the dry and critically dry years. These stable, reduced baseflow conditions reflect water supply and flood control operations (described above) combined with minimum flow requirements. Under the Merced ID's Davis-Grunsky Contract, required minimum flows from November through March range from 180 to 220 cfs. These required flows are eleven percent unregulated winter baseflow magnitude in the extremely wet water year analyzed and 50 percent in the critically dry water year analyzed.

Spring and Summer Snowmelt

Flow regulation and diversion have reduced the magnitude of the snowmelt peak and have accelerated the snowmelt recession limb. Under unregulated conditions, the spring snowmelt peak typically spanned several weeks or months and receded in early to mid-summer. For the water years assessed, the magnitude and duration of the peaks and the relative effects of regulation and diversion on the peaks and recession varied. For the critically dry and dry years (Figures 4.2–4A and 4B), the unregulated snowmelt peak began in late March, peaked at approximately 3,000B5,000 cfs, and receded in mid-May (during the critically dry year) and mid-June (during the dry year). During these years, the spring snowmelt was completely absorbed by the reservoirs, and no spring peak flows occurred in the lower river. During the median water year (Figure 4.2–4C), unregulated spring snowmelt began in March, peaked at approximately 8,500 cfs in May, and receded over June and early July. Downstream of the dams, the spring snowmelt peaked in March at approximately 2,500 cfs and rapidly receded in late March and early April then peaked again at approximately 1,100 cfs in late May and early June. During this year, the magnitude of the May–June snowmelt peak, which is critical for rearing and outmigrating salmon and for riparian tree germination and establishment, was reduced by 87 percent, and the duration was reduced by approximately six weeks. During the wet and extremely wet years (Figures 4.2–4D and 4E), unregulated spring snowmelt began in March, combined with rain-on-snow events. Rain-on-snow peaks occurred in April and May, snowmelt peaks of approximately 8,500 cfs occurred in late May and early June, and snowmelt peaks receded in July and early August. Flow regulation reduced snowmelt peaks to approximately 2,200B5,000 cfs, shifted the recession limb to late May and early June, and accelerated the rate of recession. What is most notable when comparing unregulated and regulated spring flows is that regulated spring flows in the wet year (Figure 4.2–4D) are approximately the same in magnitude and temporal pattern as the unregulated spring flows in the critically dry year (Figure 4.2–4A), indicating that even under wet conditions (which have an exceedence probability of 0.15B0.4) the river and its adjacent riparian corridor must function under what would be drought conditions in the unregulated system. Only during extremely wet years (which have an exceedence probability of 0B0.15), do spring flow conditions downstream of the dams and diversions approach natural median water-year-type flow conditions.

4.3 Effects of Flow Regulation and Diversion on Flood Magnitude

The New Exchequer Dam is operated both for water supply and for flood control. As such, the reservoir is operated to store peak flows for water supply while maintaining the required flood control pool. In addition, the Corps of Engineers limits the maximum flow release from the Crocker-Huffman Dam to 6,000 cfs, as measured at the Merced River near Stevinson gauge (downstream of Dry Creek). The combined effect of the water supply and flood control management is to reduce flood magnitude downstream of the dams. Floods are important drivers of the river-riparian system. As discussed in Section 2, small magnitude, frequent floods are required to maintain the channel size, shape, and bed texture, while larger, infrequent floods provide beneficial disturbance to both the channel and its adjacent floodplain and riparian corridor. As discussed in Volume I of this report, however, much of the Merced River floodplain has been converted to agricultural and residential uses, and large floods obviously conflict with the human uses in the river corridor and their related economic values. This section describes how flow regulation has affected flood magnitude and timing in the Merced River. The social and economic issues affected by flooding and flood control are discussed in Volume I (Stillwater Sciences and EDAW 2001).

Flow regulation has affected both flood timing and flood magnitude in the lower river. The effects of flow regulation on flood timing were assessed by comparing estimated daily inflow to Lake McClure to regulated flows downstream of Crocker-Huffman Dam. Under natural conditions, the highest flows of the year occurred during fall and winter from rain or rain-on-snow events or during the spring from

snowmelt (Table 7). With the operation of New Exchequer Dam, storage of snowmelt runoff has generally shifted the timing of annual peak flows from spring to fall and winter. Under unregulated conditions (represented by inflow to Lake McClure for the period 1977–1996), the annual peak flood occurred during the period from April through June in 60 percent of years. In the remaining 40 percent of years, the annual flood occurred between October and March (Table 7). With flow regulation (represented by flows at Crocker-Huffman Dam for the same period), 25 percent of the annual peaks occurred between April and June, 10 percent occurred between July and September, and 65 percent occurred between October and March (Table 7).

Table 7. Comparison of the Timing of Regulated and Unregulated Peak Flows (1977-1996)

Period	Inflow to Lake McClure		Downstream of the Crocker-Huffman Dam	
	Number of peaks	Percent of peaks	Number of peaks	Percent of peaks
October-March	8	40	13	65
April-June	12	60	5	25
July-September	0	0	2	10
Total	20	100	20	100

Flow regulation has also reduced annual flood magnitude. The effect of flow regulation on flood magnitude was assessed by comparing pre-dam and post-dam floods. Prior to flow regulation, floods exceeding 15,000 cfs were common, occurring in 11 of the 21 years of record, and the mean annual flood (Q_{maf})^f (at the Merced River near Exchequer gauge) was 16,200 cfs (Figure 4.3–1). Following the completion of New Exchequer Dam, the Q_{maf} in the reach upstream of the Main Canal Diversion was reduced by 72 percent to 4,560 cfs (Figure 4.3–1). In the reach downstream of the diversions the Q_{maf} was reduced by 83 percent to 2,793 cfs (Figure 4.3–2). Since the construction of New Exchequer Dam, peak flows below Crocker-Huffman dam have not exceeded the 1997 flow of 8,279 cfs (measured at the Merced ID Crocker-Huffman gauge).

Pre-dam and post-dam flood magnitudes for the 1.5-, 2-, 5-, 10- and 50-year recurrence intervals are shown in Table 8. This comparison indicates that flow regulation has reduced peak flow magnitude by up to 87 percent, with the greatest reduction occurring for smaller magnitude floods. Channel forming floods (represented by the $Q_{1.5}$ or Q_2) have been reduced by 85–87 percent. Prior to dam construction and flow regulation, channel forming floods were on the order of 10,000–14,000 cfs. Since dam construction, floods of this magnitude no longer occur. The largest flood that has occurred since completion of the New Exchequer Dam was smaller than the pre-dam $Q_{1.5}$, and the 6,000-cfs flood release limit imposed by the Corps of Engineers is only 60 percent the pre-dam $Q_{1.5}$. Larger floods that under natural conditions would drive channel cut-off events and support riparian vegetation recruitment and diversity have been eliminated.

^f The average of annual peak flows for each year for a given period.

**Table 8. Comparison of Instantaneous Annual Peak Floods
 Under Pre-Dam and Regulated Conditions**

Recurrence Interval (years)	Pre-Dam	Post-Dam	Percent Reduction
	Unregulated flow (WY 1902–1925) at Exchequer ¹	Regulated flow (WY 1968–1997) at Snelling ¹	
1.5	10,062	1,338	87
2	13,692	2,097	85
5	24,006	4,675	80
10	31,526	6,836	78
50	49,177	12,513	75

¹Flood magnitudes and recurrence intervals are based on a Log-Pearson III distribution of instantaneous peak flow data.

5 GEOMORPHIC AND RIPARIAN BASELINE EVALUATIONS

5.1 Reach Delineation

The Merced River downstream of Crocker-Huffman Dam can be divided into five reaches, as defined by channel and floodplain morphology and anthropogenic alterations to the channel and floodplain (Figure 5.1–1). These reaches are the:

- Dredger Tailings Reach (from Crocker-Huffman Dam [RM 52] to RM 45.2, approximately 1.2 RM downstream of the Snelling Road Bridge);
- Gravel Mining 1 Reach (from RM 45.2 to Shaffer Bridge [RM 32.5]);
- Gravel Mining 2 Reach (from Shaffer Bridge to RM 26.8, approximately 0.3 RM downstream of the Santa Fe Boulevard Bridge);
- Encroached Reach (from RM 26.8 to the Hultberg Road [RM 8]); and
- Confluence Reach (from RM 8 to the San Joaquin River confluence [RM 0]).

Reach attributes are summarized in Table 9. Geomorphic and vegetation conditions in these reaches are described in more detail below.

Table 9. Summary of Geomorphic Attributes of Each Reach

Reach Name	River Mile	Channel Slope ¹	Bed Material
Dredger Tailings Reach	52–45.2	0.0023	cobble, gravel
Gravel Mining 1 Reach	45.2–32.5	0.0015	cobble, gravel
Gravel Mining 2 Reach	32.5–26.8	0.0008	gravel, sand
Encroached Reach	26.8–8	0.0003	gravel, sand
Confluence Reach	8–0	0.0002	Sand

¹ Measured from 1:24,000-scale topographic maps (U.S. Geological Survey)

5.1.1 Dredger Tailings Reach

The Dredger Tailings Reach extends from Crocker-Huffman Dam to RM 45.2, approximately 1.2 RM downstream of the Snelling Road bridge. The reach-averaged channel slope in this reach is 0.0023 (Figure 5.1–2), and the channel bed is composed of very coarse gravel and cobbles. The median particle size of surface substrates (D_{50}) ranges from 36 to 128 mm; the 84th percentile particle size (D_{84}) ranges from 85 to 270 mm (Figures 5.1–3 and 5.1–4). The channel is armored and in many locations scoured to bedrock.

In this reach of the river, the channel and floodplain have been dredged for gold. As a result, the channel has been depleted of coarse sediment and the adjacent floodplain has been raised and covered with dredger tailings piles, which confine the channel and floodplain width (Figure 5.1–5). The combined effects of gold dredging and upstream reductions of sediment supply and peak flows have converted this reach from a complex, multiple-channel system (shown in Figure 5.1–6) to a single-thread system. The remnant channels (referred to as “sloughs”) have since been converted to agricultural irrigation and

return-flow ditches (Figure 5.1–7). Also, the confinement of the river channel width creates high shear stresses, even during moderate flow events, which scour sediment from the channel. As a result of these high shear stresses combined with the lack of a coarse sediment supply caused by upstream dams and removal of in-channel sediment, the channel in this reach is typified by long, deep pools that have been scoured to bedrock or to a coarse, cobble armor layer. Almost no alluvial bars occur in this reach.

The riparian zone on either side of the channel in the Dredger Tailings Reach is typically 100 feet wide or less. Non-native grasses and forbs dominate the tailing surfaces and floodplain areas. Non-native trees, shrubs and vines are common along roads and the edges of the tailing areas, but in general, native woody plants dominate larger riparian patches. Vegetation between the channel and the tailing piles typically consists of mixed riparian tree species. Sparse, weedy herbaceous assemblages occupy the tops of tailing piles, and cattail marsh (*Typha latifolia*) or cottonwood-Goodding's black willow (*Salix gooddingii*) assemblages occupy tailing swales. Riparian vegetation in the Dredger Tailings Reach has encroached into the channel and demonstrates a relatively mature age structure, with few young trees establishing. During reconnaissance field surveys, seedling recruitment was observed on narrow alluvial bars, but few patches of established saplings were evident. Several seedling patches were surveyed at RM 48.2 as part of the Snelling Site evaluations, which are described in Section 6.2.

CDFG and CDWR have implemented several gravel augmentation projects in this reach to increase the area of spawning habitat available to fall chinook salmon. In addition, CDFG is working with local riparian water diverters who construct wing dams on the Merced River. In the past, these dams have been constructed from gravel and cobble scraped from the riverbed. CDFG currently provides the diverters with gravel suitable for chinook salmon spawning to construct these wing dams. During high flows, spawning gravel from these dams is washed downstream and redeposited in the river.

5.1.2 Gravel Mining 1 Reach

The Gravel Mining 1 Reach extends from RM 45.2 to Shaffer Bridge (RM 32.5), just upstream of the Dry Creek confluence. The reach-averaged channel slope is 0.0015 (Figure 5.1–2), and the channel bed is composed of coarse gravel, very coarse gravel, and cobble. The D_{50} ranges from 25 to 90 mm; the D_{84} ranges from 48 to 150 mm (Figure 5.1–3 and 5.1–4). The channel-bed surface in this reach does not appear to be armored and the bed subsurface contains a large volume of sand. The CDFG and CDWR are currently assessing bed mobility in the upstream portion of this reach as part of an ongoing habitat enhancement project design.

This reach occupies the downstream portion of the multiple channel system described for the Dredger Tailings Reach above. As in the Dredger Tailings Reach, the river in this reach has been converted to a single-thread system and floodplain sloughs have been converted to irrigation ditches and drains. This reach contains some remnant off-channel oxbow and slough features, indicating former meander cutoffs and channels.

The Gravel Mining 1 Reach has been extensively mined for aggregate both on the floodplain and in the channel (Table 10, Figure 5.1–8). CDFG and CDWR are currently implementing The Merced River Salmon Habitat Enhancement Project (Figure 5.1–8), a four-phase project to reconstruct the channel and floodplain through 4.3 miles of the Merced River that have been excavated for aggregate mining. The objectives of the project are to: (1) reduce predation on young salmon by non-native fish by isolating habitat in river-captured mining pits that serve as predator habitat; (2) restore or enhance salmon spawning habitat; (3) enhance passage of adult and juvenile salmon; (4) resize the channel and floodplain

to restore some natural river processes; and (5) reestablish riparian vegetation. In addition to the mining pits being addressed by the CDFG/CDWR project, four terrace and four in-channel mines occur in this reach. Two of the terrace mines are active. The four in-channel mines occupy 4.4 miles (35 percent) of this reach.

Table 10. Terrace and In-Channel Aggregate Pits in the Gravel Mining 1 Reach

Pit Identification	Mine Name	RM	Length¹ (ft)	Width¹ (ft)	Depth² (ft)
<i>In-channel Pits</i>					
GM1 – C1	Unknown	38.9–39.3	1,500	800	No data
GM1 – C2	Unknown	35.1–35.4	1,000	200	6-9
GM1 – C3	Unknown	33.9–34.4	2,200	400	5-8
GM1 – C4	Unknown	36.3–36.9	2,000	100	4
<i>Terrace Pits</i>					
GM1-T1	Carson Pit I	—	2,800	2,300	No data
GM1-T2	Carson Pit II	—	1,100	450	No data
GM1-T3	Silva Expansion	42	No data	No data	No data
GM1-T4	Bettencourt Ranch	33.2–34.1	4,500	1,500	No data

¹ Measured from 1998 aerial photographs (scale: 1:6,000)

² Depth from water surface measured in the field (June 2000)

The width of riparian vegetation on each bank in Gravel Mining 1 Reach typically varies from 100 to 500 feet. Former aggregate mines extend to the channel margin, eliminating much of the riparian vegetation, and steep banks and pit berms do not provide the low-gradient, alluvial surfaces necessary for seedling recruitment. In parts of the channel where mining pits have been captured by the river, vegetation assemblages are highly fragmented on banks, former berm surfaces, and mid-channel bars. Remnant oxbow and slough features contain patches of marsh and seasonal wetland habitats and are typically bordered by linear stands of riparian scrub, valley oak forest, and remnant cottonwood and mixed riparian forest.

5.1.3 Gravel Mining 2 Reach

The Gravel Mining 2 Reach extends from Shaffer Bridge to RM 26.8, approximately 0.3 RM downstream of the Santa Fe Boulevard Bridge (RM 27.1). This reach includes the Dry Creek confluence and the remaining in-channel mines. The reach-averaged channel slope is 0.0008 (Figure 5.1–2), and the channel bed is composed of sand, gravel, and cobble. The D₅₀ ranges from 22 to 85 mm; the D₈₄ ranges from 33 to 130 mm (Figure 5.1–3 and 5.1–4). As in the Gravel Mining 1 Reach, the channel-bed subsurface contains large volumes of sand. The channel in this reach is incised, with documented incision of up to five feet since 1964 (Vick 1995).

As in the Gravel Mining 1 Reach, this reach has been extensively mined for aggregate both on the floodplain and in the channel, and five in-channel or captured mining pits and three terrace pits (including one pit that was isolated from the channel by a CDFG/CDWR project) occur in this reach (Table 11, Figure 5.1–8). Under current conditions, two miles (35 percent) of this reach are occupied by in-channel

or captured mines. An additional 1.3 miles (23 percent) are bordered by terrace mines that are isolated from the channel by berms.

In 1996, the CDFG, working with the CDWR and with funding from the Four Pumps Agreement, completed the Merced River Predator Control Project, Magneson Site Project (Figure 5.1–8). This project isolated a pit (referred to as GM2-T3 in Table 11) that had captured the river channel. The pond was left in place behind the repaired berm to retain recreational fishing opportunities important to the landowner. (Figure 5.1–9).

Table 11. Aggregate Pits in the Gravel Mining 2 Reach

Pit Identification	Mine Name	RM	Length ¹ (ft)	Width ¹ (ft)	Depth (ft)
<i>In-channel Pits</i>					
GM2-C1	River Rock	31.5–.2.1	2,000	600	4-13 ²
GM2-C2	Silva/Turlock Rock	30.0–30.6	3,300	400	13-19 ²
GM2-C3	Turlock Rock	28.7–28.9	1,400	200	23 ²
GM2-C4	Cressey Sand and Gravel	27.2–27.4	1,400	300	11-29 ²
GM2-C5	Turlock Rock	26.7–27.1	1,800	800	10 ²
<i>Terrace Pits</i>					
GM2-T1	Turlock Rock	31.1–31.4	2,100	900	No data
GM2-T2	Turlock Rock	29.7–29.9	800	600	20 ³
GM2-T3	Turlock Rock	29.2–29.5	1,600	500	20 ³

¹ Measured from 1998 aerial photographs (scale: 1:6,000)

² Measured from water surface in the field (June 2000)

³ Source: Vick (1995)

This reach receives large amounts of sand from Dry Creek. Much of the sand supplied from Dry Creek is being captured by the in-channel mining pits. The pit located at the mouth of Dry Creek (GM2-C1) was excavated by the River Rock mining company in the 1940s and 1950s. This pit was originally excavated as a terrace pit, but was later captured by the channel. Davis and Carlson (1952) reported the depth of the pit to be 30 feet shortly after excavation. The current depth is 11B13 feet upstream of the Dry Creek confluence and 4B10 feet downstream of the Dry Creek confluence, indicating that the pit has filled in substantially over the past 45–50 years. The Silva Gravel/ Turlock Rock pit (GM2-C2) also shows evidence of sand accumulation. Currently the channel depth in the pit is approximately 13B19 feet and a large sand bar has deposited at the pit margin.

The riparian zone width in Gravel Mining 2 Reach is narrower than in upstream reaches, approximately 50 feet (or one tree canopy width) on each bank in most places. As in the Gravel Mining 1 Reach, gravel pit berms extend to the channel margin and hinder the recruitment of riparian species because bank revetment, steep slopes, and the construction of access roads adjacent to the channel eliminate the hydrologic and topographic conditions necessary for seedling establishment. Vegetation in this reach is highly fragmented, as in the Gravel Mining 1 Reach, and also includes off-channel oxbow and slough features. Extensive revetted banks support little native riparian vegetation, and field observations indicate that they are establishment points for the invasive giant reed (*Arundo donax*). Unlike in the Gravel

Mining 1 Reach, dense stands of mature eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus* spp.) occur in this reach. The distribution of eucalyptus stands along the river is discussed further in Section 6.1.2.

5.1.4 Encroached Reach

The Encroached Reach extends from RM 26.8 (approximately 0.3 RM downstream of the Santa Fe Boulevard Bridge) to Hultberg Road (RM 8). The reach-averaged channel slope is 0.0003 (Figure 5.1–2). Within this reach, the channel substrate transitions from gravel to sand bed. This transition zone is lengthy, extending from RM 25.5 to RM 16.5 (almost half the length of the reach). No quantitative assessment of sediment character is available for this reach. The downstream portion of this reach may be subject to backwater effects from the San Joaquin River.

Within this reach, agricultural development in the former floodplain and riparian corridor confines the channel between private levees. Aerial photographs indicate that this reach historically exhibited an alternate bar-pool morphology. Flow regulation, levee construction, and elimination of channel migration have simplified the channel, and active bars are generally absent (Figure 5.1–10). Throughout most of this reach, the channel cross section is generally trapezoidal, exhibiting no clearly defined low flow channel or active bars. The riparian zone ranges from 50 to 300 feet wide on each bank and is composed primarily of mixed riparian forest and willow species.

5.1.5 Confluence Reach

The Confluence Reach extends from Hultberg Road (RM 8) to the San Joaquin River confluence (RM 0). An aerial photograph depicting typical conditions in this reach is shown in Figure 5.1–11. The reach-averaged channel slope is 0.0002 (Figure 5.1–2). This reach is entirely sand-bedded and is subject to backwater effects from the San Joaquin River. Where meanders are not armored, active sandbars and diverse riparian communities are present. The most extensive and continuous stands of native vegetation remaining along the Merced River corridor are located in this reach just upstream from the San Joaquin confluence (RM 0–3).

Riparian vegetation in the Confluence Reach typically extends from 500 to 1,500 feet on each bank from the river channel and includes dense remnant valley oak and cottonwood forests. The understories of these forests consist of box elder, Oregon ash, Goodding's black willow, blue elderberry (*Sambucus mexicana*), and California wild grape (*Vitis californica*), as well as scattered non-native species such as tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), edible fig (*Ficus carica*), and mulberry (*Morus alba*). These forest stands, which contain very large individual valley oaks up to 85 inches diameter (at breast height), occupy the river's historical floodplain and presumably were never cleared. These stands represent the nearest approximation to pre-settlement Central Valley riparian gallery forests in the Merced River corridor (Thompson 1961 and 1980, Conard et al. 1980, Roberts et al. 1980, Holland and Keil 1995, Edminster 1998).

5.2 Sediment Supply

Sediment supply from the upper watershed to the lower river is intercepted by New Exchequer Dam (and previously by Exchequer Dam). Downstream of the dams, stored sediment has been removed from the channel and floodplain by mining. As a result, current sources of sediment to the lower river are limited to bed and bank erosion and input from Dry Creek.

The historic (i.e., pre-dam) supply of sediment to the lower river can be estimated from reservoir capacity surveys. Between 1926 and 1946, the Exchequer Dam reservoir lost 3,354 acre-feet of capacity due to

deposition of suspended load and bedload (Dendy and Champion 1978). Based on an average specific weight of 62 pounds/ft³ (Dendy and Champion 1978), this volume of sediment deposition in the reservoir indicates a *minimum* sediment yield of 4.5 million tons from the 1,022-square mile contributing upper watershed during the 19.6-year period between the surveys, or an average of 231,000 tons/year. Published estimates of bedload as a percentage of suspended load range from two to six percent in lowland rivers (gradient 0.0004 to 0.0023) to 8 to 16 percent in mountainous rivers (Collins and Dunne 1989, 1990). Assuming that bedload is 5B10 percent of total suspended load in the Merced River, pre-dam annual bedload yield during this period was between 11,000–21,000 tons/year. These estimates assume that all sediment from the contributing watershed was trapped by the dam.

With the dams in place, bedload supply from the upper watershed to the lower river has been cut off. At the same time, bedload stored in the river channel and floodplain has been removed by gold dredging and aggregate mining. Vick (1995) estimated the volume of stored bedload removed from in-channel, captured, and breached aggregate mines from 1942 through 1993 based on mine area (determined from aerial photographs) and mine depths (determined from a small sample of cross sections in mining pits) and concluded that the volume removed ranged from 7B14 million tons of bedload, or 350B1,350 times the natural annual bedload supply from the upper watershed.

Because dams trap sediment from the upper watershed, bank and bed erosion and inputs from Dry Creek are the only potentially important sources of sediment to the river. Bank erosion throughout the river has been decreased by the reduction in peak flows and by bank revetment. The total length of eroding banks and bank revetment in each reach of the river was mapped during field surveys conducted in 1999 and 2000 (Table 12 and Figures 5.2–1A through 5.2–1D). In the Dredger Tailings Reach, channel banks are armored by dredger tailings. Current flow conditions are not sufficient to mobilize these tailings and initiate bank erosion; bank erosion is limited to one location covering 0.4 percent of the total reach length. In the Gravel Mining 1 Reach, bank revetment covers five percent of the total reach length, armoring the apexes of approximately half of the meanders in the reach. Four percent of the total bank length in the Gravel Mining 1 Reach is eroding. In the Gravel Mining 2 Reach, the majority of the reach consists of in-channel pits, and consequently flow velocities and potential erosive forces are low. Erosion is limited to isolated locations covering one percent of the reach, while revetment covers seven percent of the reach. In the Encroached Reach, 21 percent of the bank length is armored with revetment, and nearly every meander apex is armored. Five percent of the bank length is eroding. In the Confluence Reach, 11 percent of the bank is armored, and six percent of the bank length is eroding.

Table 12. Bank Erosion and Revetment in the Merced River

Reach	Length of Eroding Bank (feet [percent])			Length of Bank Revetment (feet [percent])		
	Left bank	Right bank	Total	Left bank	Right bank	Total
Dredger Tailings	254 [1%]	0 [0%]	254 [0.4%]	0 [0%]	0 [0%]	0 [0%]
Gravel Mining 1	3,470 [5%]	2,292 [3%]	5,762 [4%]	2,376 [4%]	3,999 [6%]	6,375 [5%]
Gravel Mining 2	0 [0%]	388 [1%]	388 [1%]	1,419 [5%]	3,041 [10%]	4,460 [7%]
Encroached	4,277 [4%]	6,091 [6%]	10,368 [5%]	21,388 [22%]	19,700 [20%]	41,088 [21%]
Confluence	3,930 [9%]	1,359 [3%]	5,289 [6%]	2,715 [6%]	6,688 [16%]	9,403 [11%]
Total	11,931 [4%]	10,130 [4%]	22,061 [4%]	27,898 [10%]	33,428 [12%]	61,326 [11%]

Dry Creek joins the Merced River at RM 32.7 and is the only major tributary to the river downstream of Crocker-Huffman Dam. Conditions in Dry Creek and the Dry Creek watershed are described in Section 5.7. Sediment supplied from Dry Creek consists primarily of sand but also includes gravel, as demonstrated by the surface texture of the delta deposited at the mouth of the creek (Figure 5.2–2). The creek, however, enters the river at an in-channel mining pit (GM2–C1), which captures most of the sediment delivered from the Dry Creek watershed.

5.3 Sediment Transport Thresholds and Bedload Transport Rate

As discussed in Section 2, under equilibrium conditions the river’s power to transport sediment is in balance with the volume of sediment supplied from the watershed. In this equilibrium, sediment is delivered to a given reach of the river at approximately the same rate at which it is exported out of that reach. When large dams or in-channel pits intercept sediment supply, the sediment transport capacity of the river (i.e., the volume of sediment that *can* be transported under current flows) can exceed the sediment supply. This excess sediment transport capacity can result in channel incision and armoring of the channel bed. Conversely, flow regulation can reduce sediment transport competence (i.e., the size of sediment that can be transported) and thus eliminate or reduce channel scour, resulting in a static-channel. This section discusses the river’s ability to transport sediment under historic and current flow conditions.

5.3.1 Methods

Sediment supply thresholds were evaluated using a combination of empirical observations and numerical modeling. Field data for this assessment were collected at two sites in the Dredger Tailings Reach B the Snelling Site and the Cuneo Site (Figure 5.3–1). An additional site in the Gravel Mining 1 Reach will be evaluated in Phase III of the project.

The Snelling Site is located 3.8 river miles downstream from Crocker-Huffman Dam, near the town of Snelling. Data collected at this site included channel and floodplain topographic cross sections, bed surface texture, and water surface elevations. Additional data were collected for the vegetation assessment (see Section 6). Seven cross sections across the active channel and floodplain were surveyed using a TopCon AT-G2 autolevel, stadia rod, and survey tape (Figure 5.3–2). Within the bankfull

channel, points were surveyed at every slope break or at five-foot intervals, whichever distance was shorter. On the remainder of each cross section, points were surveyed at every slope break or at ten-foot intervals, whichever distance was shorter. Permanent endpins were placed at each end of each cross section, and the location of the section and the pins was mapped onto aerial photographs. Bed surface texture was documented by mapping all facies units (i.e., areas in which the sediment texture is homogenous) within the active channel and conducting pebble counts (Wolman 1954) within each facies unit-type. The facies map, particle size distribution curves, and cross sections from these surveys are provided in Appendix B. Water stage was recorded at cross section 0+00 using a Global Water WL-14 WaterLogger. This depth recorder was installed on October 1999 and recorded water surface elevation at flows from 190 to 3,259 cfs.

The cross section, bed texture, and stage data from the site combined with flow data from the Merced ID Crocker-Huffman gauge were used as input to a sediment transport model used to predict flows required to initiate bed mobilization and bedload transport rates under pre- and post-dam flow conditions. Cross section 1+90 and a moderately coarse facies unit (Pebble Count 1) were used as input data. The reach-averaged slope used in the model was 0.002, as determined from U.S. Geological Survey 1:24,000-scale topographic maps and historical channel surveys (Blodgett and Bertoldi 1967).

The sediment transport model is based on a modified version of Parker's (1990a, b) surface-based bedload equation, implemented in a program developed by Stillwater Sciences. The details of this model are provided in Appendix C. Some of the assumptions of the model are as follows:

- The equation is adoptable from the original wide rectangular channel to a natural channel by replacing the water depth in the equation with a hydraulic radius;
- The reference Shields stress (i.e., the Shields stress at which sediment transport begins) is the original value given by Parker (equal to 0.0386). According to the Parker equation, sediment transport drops to an indistinguishable value (i.e., zero) if the Shields stress is less than the reference stress. Note that the normalized shield stress (ϕ_{sg0}) is the ratio between the Shields stress and reference stress, and both the Shields and the reference stresses are dimensionless.
- The roughness is assumed to be $2D_{sg}\sigma_{sg}^{1.28}$, which is an approximation of the original value ($2D_{s90}$) given by Parker, where D_{sg} is surface geometric mean grain size and σ_{sg} is the geometric standard deviation of the surface layer material. D_{s90} is the 90th percentile grain size of the surface layer.
- Channel curvature is excluded from the calculation. As a result, no convective acceleration is considered.
- The flow is assumed to be uniform throughout the reach, and one representative cross section is used to represent the whole reach.

Marked rock experiments were used to provide empirical data to compare to the model results. Marked rocks were deployed at five cross sections (1+90, 4+20, 9+60, 13+95, and 17+75) in December 1999. Rocks deployed along the cross sections were representative of the D_{84} of the facies unit in which they were placed. We assumed that mobilization of the D_{84} would represent mobilization of the channel bed as a whole. Smaller particles can also be used for these experiments, but they may be mobilized when the bed is in marginal transport and, therefore, may underestimate flows required to initiate significant bed mobilization. The rocks were placed at three-foot intervals along each of the cross sections. Rocks for each cross section were painted a unique color, and each rock was individually numbered so that it could be identified during recovery. Rocks were recovered on June 24, 2000. The peak flow experienced during the period from placement to recovery was 3,259 cfs (Figure 5.3–3). The locations of the marked rocks during the recovery surveys are shown in Appendix D.

The Cuneo Site is located 1.2 river miles downstream of Crocker-Huffman Dam at the Merced ID's Cuneo Fishing Access (Figure 5.3-1). This site was used to assess historic and current sediment texture, as well as historic and current bedload transport conditions. The site consists of a formerly active bar that has been converted to a floodplain as a result of flow regulation. Because the bar was not dredged, the sediment texture on the bar is representative of sediment that was mobilized under pre-dam flow conditions. In addition, the site is located downstream of several CDFG/CDWR gravel augmentation sites and is one of the few depositional areas observed in the river channel. Recent in-channel sediment deposits at this site are indicative of sediment texture that is mobile under post-dam hydrologic conditions. At this site, one cross section was surveyed and two pebble counts were conducted—one on the fossilized bar and one in the channel—to document historical and current bed texture (Figure 5.3-4). The cross section was surveyed using the same equipment and methods described for the Snelling Site above. Permanent endpins were placed at each end of each cross section, and the location of the section and the pins was mapped onto an aerial photograph. Data from this site will be used for sediment transport modeling in Phase III of the project.

5.3.2 Results

At the Snelling Site, the model predicted that the threshold of incipient motion (i.e., flows sufficient to mobilize the bed) is reached at approximately 4,800 cfs (approximately a 5-year flood under post-dam conditions) and that the average annual bedload transport rate (Q_b) is approximately 550 tons/year (Figure 5.3-5). In Figure 5.3-5, the normalized Shields stress is the ratio between the surface-based Shields stress and reference stress and is defined so that sediment transport drops to an indistinguishable level when the normalized Shields stress is less than one (Parker 1990a, b).

The sediment transport model results at the Snelling Site are consistent with the empirical tracer rock experiments. Flow during the time that the tracer rocks were deployed reached 3,250 cfs, which has a recurrence interval of approximately three years. Tracer rocks on all transects were transported downstream during this flow, suggesting that the bed was mobilized by the Q_3 . Recovery rates and distance transported are shown in Table 13. Tracer rocks typically overestimate bed mobility because they sit on top of the bed surface and protrude into the flow rather than being interlocked with other particles in the riverbed. As a result, the tracer particles may be mobilized at flows that are insufficient to mobilize the bed surface. The high recovery rate of the tracer rocks suggests overestimation of bed mobility; 88 percent of particles deployed were recovered. If the entire river bed had been in motion during these flows, many of the tracer particles would have been buried and would not have been recovered. The high recovery rate coupled with the propensity for tracer rocks to overestimate mobility indicates that the actual threshold of bed mobilization at this site is probably greater than 3,200 cfs, which is consistent with the model results.

Table 13. Recovery of Tracer Particles at the Snelling Site

Cross Section	D ₈₄ (mm)	No. deployed	% recovered	% mobilized	Mean distance traveled (ft)	Max. distance traveled (ft)
1+90	80	39	70	63	1.8	6.2
4+20	80	38	100	39	5.8	41.1
9+60	73, 134	35	63	27	6.4	27.8
13+95	73, 131	32	100	63	3.0	10.6
17+75	121	32	100	66	3.2	11.8

Under equilibrium conditions, the channel bed would be expected to be mobilized by 1.5B to 2B year flood. If this is the case, then under pre-dam conditions the historic bed texture would have been mobilized by flows of approximately 10,000B13,600 cfs. Flows in this range have not occurred since construction of New Exchequer Dam. The pre-dam bed texture, as indicated by the pebble count on the Cuneo Site fossilized bar, is coarser than the currently mobile sediment, as represented by the recent deposit at the Cuneo Site, indicating a reduction in the river's sediment transport competence (Figure 5.3–6).

Even though these results are based on only two locations in the river and on relatively crude data, they tell an important story about sediment transport dynamics in the Dredger Tailings Reach. First, under pre-dam conditions, the bed in this reach was coarse but was likely mobilized by small, relatively frequent floods that occurred about every 1–2 years. With the reduction in flood magnitude caused by flow regulation, the bed is currently immobile at flows up to the Q₅. As a result, the channel bed and formerly active bars are static. Potential effects of this reduction on bed and bar mobilization include increased infiltration of sand into the riverbed, which could reduce the survival of chinook salmon eggs and larvae and adversely affect benthic macroinvertebrate communities, and vegetation encroachment onto formerly active bars. Potential actions for increasing bed mobility (and thus increasing geomorphic function and habitat complexity) include increasing flows (to the extent feasible), introducing gravel of a size that would be mobilized under the current flow conditions, increasing channel confinement, or some combination of these. These alternative actions will be evaluated during Phase III of the project.

5.4 Sediment Transport Continuity

Bedload impedance reaches are locations that interrupt sediment transport continuity (McBain and Trush 2000). These reaches are typically in-channel or captured aggregate mining pits and dredger pools, where channel slope, depth, and width have been modified to the extent that all bedload being transported from upstream reaches deposits into the pit. Reaches downstream of the pit are deprived of upstream bedload supply, causing scour of the bed and banks which restores the bedload supply. Bedload impedance reaches were identified in the field by the presence of a coarse depositional lobe at the upstream end of a large pool or pit.

A total of 11 bedload impedance reaches were identified by field reconnaissance (Table 14). Two were located in the Dredger Tailings Reach; four were in the Gravel Mining 1 Reach; and five were in the Gravel Mining 2 Reach. This series of impedance reaches causes the bedload supply to be continuously reset to zero at the downstream end of each impedance reach. Efforts to improve sediment supply and transport conditions in the gravel-bedded reach of the river, therefore, must consider the effects of these impedance reaches on potential restoration benefits. For instance, gravel added to the river upstream of these sites will be captured in the impedance reaches and not delivered downstream. If the impedance

reaches are not repaired, additional gravel would need to be added downstream of each impedance reach to supply the reach downstream.

Table 14. Bedload Impedance Reaches in the Merced River

Reach Name	River Mile	Cause of Impedance
Dredger Tailings 1	50.8-51.4	Dredging
Dredger Tailings 2	50.4-50.6	Dredging
CDFG/CDWR Restoration Reach	40-43.5 ¹	Aggregate mining
GM1 – C1	38.9-39.3	Aggregate mining
GM1 – C2	35.1-35.4	Aggregate mining
GM1 – C3	33.9-34.4	Aggregate mining
GM2-C1	31.5-32.1	Aggregate mining
GM2-C2	30.0-30.6	Aggregate mining
GM2-C3	28.7-28.9	Aggregate mining
GM2-C4	27.2-27.4	Aggregate mining
GM2-C5	26.7-27.1	Aggregate mining

¹ Note that Phase I (RM 40-40.5) of the restoration project has been constructed.

5.5 Floodplain Connectivity

Floodplain extent and connectivity in the Merced River have been affected by both flow regulation and levee construction. Flow regulation has reduced flood magnitude and thus has reduced the extent and frequency of floodplain inundation. In addition, in the reach from Crocker-Huffman Dam to Shaffer Bridge, the river has been converted from a multiple-channel system to a single-thread system, and remnant sloughs have been converted to irrigation canals and drains. This elimination of channels has further reduced the surface area of inundation in this reach. The extent of the floodplain is further limited by levees, which prevent inundation in some reaches. This section describes historic and current floodplain extent and the effects of flow regulation and levees on floodplain extent in the lower river.

5.5.1 Effects of Reduced Flood Peaks

5.5.1.1 Methods

Floodplains under historic and current flow conditions were identified from review of current stereo aerial photographs (scale 1:6,000, U. S. Bureau of Reclamation 1993), historical aerial photographs (scale 1:21,000, Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service 1937), channel and floodplain cross sections (Blodgett and Bertoldi 1967), mapping of inundation during 6,510-cfs discharge (measured at the Merced River near Stevinson gauge) that occurred in June and July, 1967 (Blodgett and Bertoldi 1967) and during a 8,279-cfs discharge (measured at the Merced ID Crocker-Huffman gauge) that occurred in January, 1997 (USACE, unpublished data), and relevant geologic maps and literature (Wagner et al. 1990, Blodgett and Bertoldi 1967, Harden 1987, Marchand and Allwardt 1981, Huntington et al. 1977). The interpreted floodplain surfaces were drawn onto orthorectified aerial photographs and digitized into a GIS. The geomorphic surfaces were spot-checked in the field, but field verification was not extensive.

The data interpretation and quality control process for development of this GIS coverage are described in more detail in Appendix A.

For this analysis, the active river channel and floodplain surfaces were defined as follows:

- The active river channel is the area that is scoured under the current regulated flow conditions and includes the low flow channel and unvegetated alluvial bars.
- Current floodplains are surfaces that are inundated at a 6,000-cfs flow (the maximum release allowable under Corps of Engineers flood control rules) in the absence of levees. Some of these floodplain areas are now isolated from the river by levees.
- Current terraces/former floodplains are surfaces that were inundated by intermediate and occasional high floods prior to dam construction. These surfaces are no longer subject to inundation due to reduction in peak flows following completion of New Exchequer Dam.
- Terraces are abandoned Holocene floodplains that were not inundated under pre-dam hydrologic conditions in the recent past.

Levees were identified from stereo aerial photographs (scale 1:6,000, U. S. Bureau of Reclamation 1993). At the Ratzlaff Reach restoration project (RM 40.0–40.5), which was completed in 1999 (after the photographs used for the analysis), levees were identified from post-construction aerial photographs and project designs contained in the final project report (CDWR 2000). Levees were identified and classified based on their association with geomorphic surfaces (i.e., current floodplain or current terrace), delineated onto orthorectified aerial photographs (Merced County Planning and Community Development Department 1998), and digitized on-screen into the GIS. The GIS levee coverage was also checked against an unpublished levee coverage developed by the California Department of Water Resources using a query of their topographic data (CDWR, unpublished data). Identification of levees focused on structures that were substantial enough to alter floodplain inundation. Small roads along the river and small levees constructed to hold irrigation water on fields were not included in this analysis. The data interpretation and quality control process for development of this GIS coverage are described in more detail in Appendix A.

Historic floodplain width and current floodplain width (with and without levees) were computed using the GIS developed for this project. Measurements were made at 102 transects located at ½ mile intervals along the channel.

5.5.1.2 Results

Floodplain extent has been significantly reduced by flow reduction, elimination of floodplain channels that was facilitated by flow reduction, and gold dredging that has converted former floodplains to tailings piles. Historic and current floodplain surfaces are shown in Figures 5.5–1A through 5.5–1D. The greatest reduction in floodplain width occurred in the region that was formerly a multiple-channel system, from Crocker-Huffman Dam downstream to RM 34 (Figure 5.5–2). Under pre-dam conditions, the floodplain width in this region averaged 7,710 feet. Under current conditions, floodplain width has been reduced by an average of 7,340 feet (or 95 percent) due to a combination of flow reduction, channel elimination, and gold dredging. Downstream of RM 34, pre-dam floodplain width was much narrower, averaging 2,580 feet under pre-dam conditions. Flow reduction has reduced floodplain width by an average of 2,140 feet (or 83 percent) under current conditions.

Levee construction has also reduced floodplain width. Levees identified by this analysis are shown in Figures 5.5–1A through 5.5–1D. The extent of levees for each reach is summarized in Table 15. No

levees occur in the Dredger Tailings Reach. In the Gravel Mining 1 and Gravel Mining 2 reaches, levees occur primarily in association with active or abandoned aggregate mine pits. Levees are by far most extensive in the Encroached Reach, where they extend along 26 percent of the right bank current floodplain and 29 percent of the left bank current floodplain. In addition, levees in this reach extended along six percent of the right bank current terrace and ten percent of the left bank current terrace. No floodplain levees were identified in the Confluence Reach, though two levees extending along seven percent of the right bank current terrace.

Table 15. Extent of Levees by Reach

Reach/Levee Type	Levee Length (feet)		Percent of Total Length with Levees	
	Left Bank	Right Bank	Left Bank	Right Bank
<i>Dredger Tailings Reach</i>				
floodplain levees	0	0	0	0
terrace levees	0	0	0	0
<i>Gravel Mining 1 Reach</i>				
floodplain levees	11,671	9,877	17	15
terrace levees	0	0	0	0
<i>Gravel Mining 2 Reach</i>				
floodplain levees	1,457	5,300	5	18
terrace levees	0	0	0	0
<i>Encroached Reach</i>				
floodplain levees	28,803	26,279	29	26
terrace levees	10,357	6,263	10	6
<i>Confluence Reach</i>				
Floodplain levees	0	0	0	0
Terrace levees	0	2,978	0	7

The effect of levees on current floodplain width is shown in Table 16. Levees have no effect on floodplain width in the Dredger Tailings, Gravel Mining 2, or Confluence reaches. In the Gravel Mining 1 Reach, levees limit floodplain width by six percent. In the Encroachment Reach, levees reduce current floodplain width by 276±507 feet (mean±standard deviation), or 53 percent.

Table 16. Merced River Historic Current Floodplain Width With and Without Levees

Reach	Average Current Floodplain Width ¹ (feet)			Percent Reduction in Floodplain Width	
	Historic	Current		By Flow Regulation	By Levees
		Without levees	With levees		
Dredger Tailings	2,441±1,828	66±102	66±102	97	0
Gravel Mining 1	10,625±3,631	555±477	523±482	95	6
Gravel Mining 2	5,129±1,596	46±81	46±81	99	0
Encroached	1,793±681	521±510	245±216	71	53
Confluence	1,581±426	595±605	595±605	62	0

¹Mean ± standard deviation

Reduction in flood flows was, by far, more important than levees in reducing floodplain width and connectivity on the Merced River. Flood control and subsequent conversion of floodplains to other uses has resulted in a 91 percent reduction in floodplain area throughout the 52-mile corridor. Under current, regulated flow conditions, levees have a very limited effect on floodplain width and connectivity except in the Encroached Reach.

5.5.2 Channel Migration Potential

In addition to limiting sediment supply from bank erosion, bank revetment also prevents channel migration, a key attribute of a functioning alluvial river (see Section 2). The extent of bank revetment in each reach was discussed in Section 5.2.

Under current conditions, the potential for migration in the Merced River is limited by reduced flows, which reduces sheer stress (i.e., erosive force) exerted on channel banks, and by dredger tailings and bank revetment which armor the channel banks. Flows required to initiate channel migration on unrevetted banks have not been assessed by this study. Some level of channel migration, however, is assumed to occur because bank erosion occurs under current flow conditions. Current bank erosion and channel migration rates, however, are likely much lower than under pre-dam conditions. The most severe limits to channel migration are in the Encroached Reach, which is almost completely revetted. Revetment also limits channel migration, though to a lesser extent, in the Confluence Reach.

Channel migration could potentially be re-initiated in some reaches of the river, within certain constraints required to protect structures and other property values. In the Dredger Tailings Reach, removal of the tailings adjacent to the river may increase bank erosion and channel migration potential. In downstream reaches, particularly the Encroached and Confluence reaches, removal of bank revetment would likely increase bank erosion and migration, but to a lesser degree than under pre-dam conditions. This would require extensive coordination with property owners and would potentially require development of an easement program to compensate landowners for allowing bank erosion.

5.6 Vegetation Encroachment

In natural alluvial river systems, geomorphic processes such as flooding, erosion, and sediment deposition maintain the channel shape and cross section width. Through these processes, the river maintains a multistaged channel (which includes the low flow, active, and bankfull channels) and a floodplain (Figure 5.6–1). With reduced flow magnitude, scour of alluvial bars in the active channel is reduced, which allows riparian trees to become established in the former (pre-dam) active channel. This process is

referred to as “riparian encroachment.” Vegetation establishment on formerly active bars has caused the river channel to become narrower and has eliminated the multi-staged form of the channel (Figure 5.6–2). The resulting channel is simple in cross section, with the current active and bankfull channel limited to the pre-dam low flow channel.

Vick (1995) assessed the effects of flow reduction on channel width in the Merced River. This assessment was based on review of aerial photographs from 1937 and 1993. The active channel boundary from these photographs was digitized into a GIS. Georeferencing and rectification were accomplished by registering the photographs to known points on 1:24,000-scale USGS quadrangle maps and rubbersheeting the images. In the electronic files, 113 transects spaced at $\frac{1}{3}$ -mile intervals were overlain onto the active channel boundary maps, and change in active channel width was computed. This analysis concluded that vegetation encroachment into the active channel reduced channel width from Crocker-Huffman Dam to RM 15^g by 85±115 feet (mean±standard deviation), or 33 percent of the mean 1937 channel width. At the time of the 1937 photographs, the Exchequer Dam had been closed for 11 years. This analysis, therefore, did not document channel response in the first 11 years after dam closure and likely underestimated the reduction in channel width caused by Exchequer and New Exchequer dams.

This reduction in channel width reflects the lack of bed scour and the static condition of the channel bed. As a result, the area of aquatic habitat in the Merced River has been reduced and the river channel is currently characterized by a simplified cross section, with no active bars and no clearly defined low flow channel. In addition, the encroached riparian vegetation is not scoured and new barren surfaces for recruitment of riparian trees are not created, resulting in a relatively even-aged, simplified riparian vegetation community. This encroachment of riparian vegetation into the active channel is one of the largest scale and most difficult issues to address in the restoration plan.

5.7 Conditions in Dry Creek

Dry Creek, the only major tributary to the Merced River downstream of the dams, drains a 110-square mile watershed and joins the Merced River at RM 32.7. The watershed is underlain by a series of nested alluvial fans of the Turlock Lake and Modesto formations. Soils in the watershed are generally sand and silty loam of the Horncut, Bear Creek, and Yokohl soil series (USDA 1991). The upland valley floor formations underlying the watershed consist of semiconsolidated alluvium that under natural conditions would be expected to have lower sediment delivery rates than the geologic units underlying upper Merced River watershed (i.e., upstream of the dam). A sediment budget has not been developed for Dry Creek, but simple calculations can provide a rough picture of historic and current sediment supply from the Dry Creek watershed. Using an assumed sediment delivery rate of 130 tons/square mile/year, sediment delivery from the Dry Creek watershed to the mainstem Merced River was likely on the order of 14,000 tons/year under pre-disturbance conditions, with the majority of this sediment consisting of sand and silt.

Field reconnaissance and review of channel cross sections in Dry Creek indicate that sediment supply from Dry Creek to the Merced River under current conditions has been increased relative to undisturbed conditions by channel incision and resulting bank and terrace failures, as well as erosion from orchards in the upper watershed. Some coarse sediment is delivered from Dry Creek, as is evidenced from the sediment composition of the delta deposited at the creek mouth, which has a D_{50} of 28 mm and a D_{84} of 57 mm (Figure 5.2–2). Channel incision in Dry Creek was documented by field reconnaissance surveys and by review of bridge inspection records for bridges on Oakdale, Turlock, and Keyes roads, which cross the creek approximately 0.5, 3.5, and 11 miles upstream from the confluence with the Merced

^g The 1937 photographs covered the area from Crocker-Huffman Dam (RM 52) to RM 15.

River, respectively. These bridges have been inspected by the California Department of Transportation (CalTrans) approximately every two years (Table 17).

Table 17. Available Bridge Inspection Reports for Dry Creek

Bridge	Distance Upstream from Confluence (miles)	Construction Date	Inspection Reports
Oakdale Road	0.5	1964	1987, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1999
Turlock Road	3.5	1975	1985, 1987, 1990, 1993, 1995, 1999
Keyes Road	44	—	1987, 1989, 1991, 1992, 1994, 1996

At the Oakdale Road and Turlock Road bridges, CalTrans bridge surveys note incision of approximately three feet, which has exposed bridge footings and which was confirmed by reconnaissance surveys conducted for the Phase II studies. At Keyes Road, CalTrans surveys reported no evidence of channel incision between 1987 and 1996 and none was observed in the field. Channel incision will likely continue to migrate upstream in Dry Creek until a stable slope is achieved or a geologic control is reached. As incision migrates upstream, bank erosion rates in upstream reaches will increase and sediment delivery to the Merced River will increase.

During field reconnaissance, extensive erosion from orchards in the Dry Creek watershed was observed. Sediment (silt and sand) eroded from orchards has completely filled some small tributary channels to Dry Creek. This sediment eroded from orchards, combined with sediment supplied by channel incision and bank erosion, have greatly increased sediment supply to the mainstem river from this watershed.

6 VEGETATION BASELINE EVALUATIONS

One of the attributes of a healthy river system described in Section 2 is a self-sustaining, diverse riparian corridor. Riparian vegetation performs many functions in natural river systems such as filtering runoff and nutrients, providing habitat for terrestrial wildlife, and supplying shade, energy from leaf litter, and woody debris as habitat for in-stream organisms. Land use activities such as farming and dredger mining have cleared large floodplain areas along the Merced River, greatly reducing the extent of riparian forest compared to pre-settlement conditions. Hydrologic and geomorphic changes following flow regulation have also altered the physical processes that sustain riparian forests, changing species distributions, abundance, and successional processes. The analyses described in this section examine the current riparian zone conditions, including vegetation extent, species composition, invasion of the corridor by non-native species, and recruitment of native riparian trees.

Vegetation spatial patterns and successional processes were assessed at two resolutions: the river-corridor scale, and at a site-specific scale. The river-corridor study included: (1) classification and mapping of riparian vegetation along the 52-mile study reach plus an additional 3.5 miles upstream of Crocker-Huffman Dam; and (2) documenting cottonwood establishment along the river from boat surveys. Intensive investigations were conducted at study sites where some riparian and geomorphic processes were intact. At these sites, surveys were conducted to: (1) detect changes in vegetation distribution over time; (2) document current vegetation composition and structure; and (3) evaluate cottonwood recruitment and establishment.

6.1 Vegetation Distribution and Species Composition

Riparian vegetation was mapped along the Merced River from Merced County's eastern boundary at Hornitos Road (RM 55.5) to the San Joaquin River confluence (RM 0). The objectives of the mapping were to document the location, extent, and general composition of remaining riparian vegetation in the corridor, assess the degree of invasion by non-native species, and prioritize reaches for preservation and restoration. The vegetation maps were developed as a digital coverage in the project GIS.

6.1.1 Methods

Mapping was conducted by Stillwater Sciences and the Geographic Information Center (GIC) at California State University Chico using a combination of aerial photograph interpretation and field verification. Methods used to develop the maps are described below. Metadata and quality control procedures for the GIS coverage are provided in Appendix A.

The vegetation classification system used for the vegetation mapping was designed jointly by Stillwater Sciences, the GIC, and McBain and Trush and generally corresponds to classification systems used throughout the Sacramento and San Joaquin basins (CSUC 1998, McBain and Trush 2000, Jones and Stokes Associates 1998). The following criteria were used in organizing the classification system: (1) each cover type had a unique color infrared signature that allowed it to be distinguished as separate and relatively homogenous assemblages; (2) wherever possible, each cover type represented "functional" vegetation assemblages (i.e., assemblages that are indicative of a similar magnitude of inundation, scour, and human disturbance); and (3) cover types dominated by non-native invasive trees or giant reed were identified. In developing this system, several other classifications were considered, including those of Holland (1986) and the California Native Plant Society (Sawyer and Keeler-Wolf 1995). These systems were either too detailed for this mapping effort or did not satisfy the criteria listed above. The

classification system developed for this project reflects a compromise between the need to identify vegetation cover types that are indicators of key physical processes and the realistic limitations of photointerpretation of vegetation signatures. The vegetation classification system and the corresponding cover types from other published classification systems are shown in Table 18.

Vegetation assemblages were identified and mapped from color infrared aerial photographs (scale 1:24,000) taken in May 1999. Photographs were scanned at 400 DPI, orthorectified, and enlarged electronically to approximately 1:6,000 at the GIC. Boundaries of cover type polygons were digitized on-screen in ArcInfo (version 7.2.1). Natural color stereo aerial photographs taken in 1993 (scale 1:6,000, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation 1993) were used to resolve topographic relief and to aid in identification of cover types that could not be clearly identified from the infrared photographs, which were not available as stereo pairs.

Field verification of the vegetation maps was conducted between fall 1999 and spring 2000 from public and private access roads and in June, 2000 by boat survey within the Merced River channel. Upstream of Shaffer Bridge, polygon designations were verified at publicly accessible locations on the river, such as parks and bridges, and the study sites selected for intensive geomorphic and riparian evaluations. Downstream of Shaffer Bridge to the confluence with the San Joaquin River, polygon designations were verified by boat. Verification was based on visual estimate of canopy dominance as summarized in Table 19. Consequently, vegetation maps were ground-truthed largely in the lower half of the river corridor, and most of the verified polygons were located adjacent or close to the river. A randomized polygon verification method was considered for field verification, but property access and field logistical issues made this approach prohibitively difficult. The boat survey method that was adopted allowed a larger total number of polygons to be verified. Field-checked polygons were entered into the project GIS, and miscoded polygons were corrected.

Of the 3,008 total polygons delineated for all fifteen cover classes, 693 were field-verified, representing an overall sampling rate of 23 percent. At least 15 percent of the total number of polygons for each vegetation cover type was verified, except for the Blackberry Scrub, Marsh, and Tamarisk cover types. Reasons for undersampling these cover types include low numbers of total polygons and lack of visibility during the boat surveys because of floodplain locations that were distant from the active channel. Dredger Tailing patches were not checked, and Disturbed Riparian patches were delineated in the field. Photointerpretation accuracy for cover classes ranged from 33 percent to 86 percent of all polygons checked, and averaged 64 percent across all vegetation cover types.

Some systematic misinterpretation occurred for cover types without clear infrared signatures, and photointerpretation accuracy was higher for polygons larger than 1.5 acres. Mapping woody non-native tree species from aerial photographs was problematic because of small stand sizes and patchy distributions. The boat and ground surveys proved to be a more effective method than photointerpretation of identifying and mapping exotic species within the Merced River's highly patchy and heterogeneous riparian zone. Many of the accuracy problems were corrected in the final map version or otherwise adjusted during field checking, and the final vegetation maps are considered to be a reliable and appropriate tool for natural resource planning and management within the Merced River corridor. Map verification results and accuracy issues are discussed in more detail in Appendix E.

Table 18. Merced River Corridor Restoration Plan Vegetation Classifications, Identification Criteria, and Corresponding Classifications in Other Vegetation Mapping Systems

Classification	Description	California Natural Diversity Database (Holland 1986)	California Native Plant Society Series (Sawyer and Keeler-Wolf 1995)
Box Elder	>50% crown canopy box elder (<i>Acer negundo</i>). Box elder, a component of the mixed riparian forest subcanopy, is often found in monospecific stands where there is no overstory	Great Valley cottonwood riparian forest (61410) [in part] Great Valley mixed riparian forest (61420) [in part]	Box elder ¹ Fremont cottonwood series [in part]
Blackberry Scrub	>50% crown canopy Himalaya berry (<i>Rubus discolor</i>) or California blackberry (<i>R. ursinus</i>)	None	Himalaya berry ¹
Cottonwood Forest	>50% crown canopy Fremont cottonwood (<i>Populus fremontii</i>). Contains various subcanopy species and combinations	Great Valley cottonwood riparian forest (61410)	Fremont cottonwood series Goodding's black willow series Arroyo willow series Red willow series Mixed willow series
Disturbed Riparian	areas adjacent to the river with little native plant cover, such as revetted banks.	None	Disturbed/Misc. exotics ¹
Dredger Tailings	dredger tailings, which include bare substrate and sparse non-native grasslands, cottonwood and willow riparian stands disconnected from the channel, and wetland and pond communities	Great Valley cottonwood riparian forest (61410) [in part] Great Valley willow scrub (63410) [in part] Non-native grassland (42200)	California annual grassland series Fremont cottonwood series Goodding's black willow series Arroyo willow series Bulrush series Cattail series Bulrush-cattail series Duckweed series
Eucalyptus	>50% crown canopy eucalyptus (<i>Eucalyptus</i> spp). Found in fairly monospecific stands on heavily modified banks	None	Eucalyptus series Eucalyptus ¹
Giant Reed	clonal monospecific stands of giant reed (<i>Arundo donax</i>), often on revetted or otherwise disturbed banks	None	Giant reed series
Herbaceous Cover	herbaceous communities, including grassland terraces, tailing transitional areas, and some seasonal wetlands	Non-native grassland (42200)	California annual grassland series

Classification	Description	California Natural Diversity Database (Holland 1986)	California Native Plant Society Series (Sawyer and Keeler-Wolf 1995)
Marsh	areas with surface water supporting emergent plants, found in some backwater channels and in some dredger tailing swales	Coastal and valley freshwater marsh (52410)	Bulrush series Cattail series Bulrush-cattail series Duckweed series
Mixed Riparian Forest	riparian hardwood forest with at least three species co-dominant, composition varies along river, but often includes Oregon ash (<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>), white alder (<i>Alnus rhombifolia</i>), box elder (<i>Acer negundo</i>), valley oak (<i>Quercus lobata</i>), and willow (<i>Salix</i> spp.)	Great Valley mixed riparian forest (61420) Elderberry savanna (63440)	Fremont cottonwood series Narrow-leaf willow series Goodding's black willow series Arroyo willow series Red willow series Mixed willow series White alder series Blue elderberry series
Mixed Willow	areas almost exclusively willow, including narrow leaf willow (<i>Salix exigua</i>), Goodding's black willow (<i>S. gooddingii</i>), arroyo willow (<i>S. lasiolepis</i>), and red willow (<i>S. laevigata</i>)	Great Valley willow scrub (63410)	Arroyo willow series Goodding's black willow series Narrow-leaf willow series Pacific willow series Red willow series Mixed willow series
Riparian Scrub	early seral stage vegetation (shrubs and small trees) of various species that may indicate some form of regular disturbance or scour	Buttonbush scrub (63430) Great Valley willow scrub (63410)	Buttonbush series Narrow-leaf willow series Mixed willow series
Tamarisk	areas exclusively almost exclusively tamarisk (<i>Tamarix</i> spp.), an invasive exotic plant	Tamarisk scrub (63810)	Tamarisk series
Tree of Heaven	>50% crown canopy tree of heaven (<i>Ailanthus altissima</i>), an invasive exotic tree species	None	Tree of heaven ¹
Valley Oak Forest	>50% crown canopy valley oak (<i>Quercus lobata</i>), occurs on terraces, and younger stands have established on former floodplains that are no longer frequently inundated	Great Valley valley oak riparian forest (61430) Valley oak woodland (71130)	Valley oak series

¹ Series or vegetation types described and mapped by McBain & Trush (2000) for the Tuolumne River Restoration Plan, for which there was no good match using series described by Sawyer and Keeler-Wolf (1995).

6.1.2 Results

6.1.2.1 River-wide Distribution and Species Composition

The vegetation GIS coverage includes 3,008 individual polygons (patches) totaling 8,232 acres for 15 cover types (Table 19). In addition to the 13 vegetation cover types totaling 3,923 acres, the riparian corridor includes 31 polygons covering 4,308 acres of Dredger Tailings and 12 polygons covering 19 acres designated Disturbed Riparian. The Dredger Tailings and Disturbed Riparian cover types were included because of the historical occurrence of vegetation in these areas and their potential for future restoration but are treated separately from the vegetation cover types in calculating summary statistics, which are listed in Table 19. Floristic, structural, and ecological characteristics of the 15 mapped cover types are described in more detail in Appendix F. A list of plant species documented in the Merced River riparian corridor by these surveys is provided in Appendix G.

Table 19. Merced River Vegetation Map Patch Summary

Cover Class	Cover Type Dominated by Native Species?	Number of Patches ¹	Total Area (acres)	Percent of Total Vegetation Area	Mean Patch Size (acres)	Median Patch Size (acres)	Max Patch Size (acres)	Min Patch Size (acres)
Vegetation Cover Type								
Blackberry Scrub	Partly	108	48	1	0.4	0.3	4.9	< 0.1
Box Elder	Yes	38	19	<1	0.5	0.3	3.9	0.1
Cottonwood Forest	Yes	360	437	11	1.2	0.5	24.4	< 0.1
Eucalyptus	No	55	46	1	0.8	0.5	4.6	< 0.1
Giant Reed	No	59	12	<1	0.2	0.1	2.0	< 0.1
Herbaceous Cover	No	348	1,363	35	3.9	0.7	149.5	< 0.1
Marsh	Yes	74	65	2	0.9	0.5	5.8	< 0.1
Mixed Riparian Forest	Yes	479	880	22	1.8	0.7	84.2	< 0.1
Mixed Willow	Yes	526	404	10	0.8	0.4	10.4	< 0.1
Riparian Scrub	Yes	483	297	8	0.6	0.4	8.4	< 0.1
Tamarisk	No	2	0.4	0	0.2	0.2	0.3	< 0.1
Tree of Heaven	No	17	10	<1	0.6	0.3	1.8	< 0.1
Valley Oak Forest	Yes	416	342	9	0.8	0.3	27.3	< 0.1
Total		2,965	3,923	100				
Other Cover Type								
Disturbed Riparian	No	12	19		1.6	0.3	12.8	0.1
Dredger Tailings	No	31	4,308		138	4.3	665	< 0.1
Total		43	4,327					

¹ Patch totals represent the minimum polygon count for each cover type, in which adjacent polygons of the same type were merged during data editing. The digital GIS coverage retains the unmerged polygon configuration, which has higher polygon counts for some cover types (but the same total area for each type), because accuracy assessment data stored as polygon attributes in the GIS would have been lost during the merging process.

The Merced River riparian corridor downstream of Crocker-Huffman Dam is generally more fragmented and narrow compared to local historical accounts (Edminster 1998). Studies of changes in riparian

vegetation in the Central Valley indicate that the vast majority of historical riparian forest has been cleared since 1850. Katibah (1984) estimated that of 921,000 acres of pre-settlement riparian forest in the Central Valley, only 102,000 acres (11 percent) remain, of which 49,000 acres are in a "disturbed and/or degraded" condition.^h The 53,000 remaining acres of non-degraded vegetation represents less than six percent of the original total. No subtotal of historical vegetation coverage along the Merced River is available to compare against the current extent mapped for this project.

The extent and condition of vegetation varies considerably between reaches (Figures 6.1–1). A wide range of conditions occurs, from a thin band of trees one tree canopy wide in leveed reaches to large patches of relatively intact floodplain vegetation near the confluence of the San Joaquin River (Table 20). In the Dredger Tailings Reach, forest cover types (Mixed Riparian, Valley Oak, and Cottonwood) generally occur on the banks, often encroaching into the active channel, and the riparian zone on either bank is typically 100 feet wide or less. Non-native grasses and forbs dominate the tailing surfaces and floodplain areas. In the Gravel Mining 1 Reach, the riparian zone varies from 100 to 500 feet wide on each bank. Cottonwood and Mixed Riparian Forest occur in patches along the banks, though Riparian Scrub and non-native Herbaceous assemblages dominate revetted banks and gravel pit berms. Berms are typically steep and are poor environments for native vegetation. Downstream of Shaffer Bridge, the Gravel Mining 2 Reach riparian zone narrows to 50 feet (or one tree canopy width) on each bank in most places. Vegetation in this reach is highly fragmented, as in the Gravel Mining 1 Reach, and extensive revetted banks typically support patches of non-native giant reed but little native riparian vegetation. Dense stands of mature eucalyptus are common along Dry Creek and on the mainstem river near the Dry Creek confluence. In the Encroached Reach, the riparian zone ranges from 50 to 300 feet wide on each bank and is composed primarily of Mixed Riparian Forest and Mixed Willow cover types. Where levees bound the channel, almost all riparian vegetation occurs within the levees, and these sections are typically the narrowest riparian areas on the river. The occurrence of box elder and Goodding's black willow increases downstream through this reach. In the Confluence Reach, riparian vegetation extends from 500 to 1,500 feet from the river channel on each bank and includes dense Valley Oak, Mixed Riparian, and Cottonwood Forest stands. Floodplain areas also contain large grassland and herbaceous patches, with many old oxbow features. This reach contains the best remnant patches of native riparian vegetation along the river, which should become high priorities for preservation.

Plant species composition, age structure, and canopy structure and complexity along the Merced River exhibit distinct longitudinal patterns that are generally associated with reach transitions. Some cover types exhibit longitudinal or cross sectional shifts in species composition or canopy structure that are observable in the field but not from aerial photographs. Some of these trends appeared to be correlated with shifts in geomorphic or hydrologic conditions or changes in land use. Other vegetation trends were not obviously associated with physical changes in the landscape.

Spatial shifts in species composition were observed for the Mixed Riparian Forest and Mixed Willow cover types. Species composition within the Mixed Riparian Forest subcanopy shifted from a high

^h Katibah (1984) and The Bay Institute of San Francisco (1998) estimated the extent of pre-settlement riparian forest from the distribution of alluvial soils on soil maps, which was assumed to represent the historic floodplain. This is a reasonable assumption for the Sacramento Basin, since historical accounts document vast expanses of unbroken riparian forest (Thompson 1961). For the drier San Joaquin Basin, however, the evidence is less clear that forest covered most floodplain areas, and there appear to have been large areas of herbaceous, slough, and wetland communities in addition to the Fremont cottonwood, willow, and valley oak stands (Edminster 1998). This uncertainty about the historical extent of riparian forest coverage makes estimates of losses since settlement difficult to calculate and affects assumptions about the riparian vegetation restoration potential in floodplain areas.

Table 20. Summary of Riparian Vegetation Cover Type Patterns for Each Reach

Reach Name	Location	Riparian Zone Width, Each Bank (feet)	Dominant Vegetation Cover Types
Dredger Tailings	RM 52–45.2	100	<p><i>Along banks:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed Riparian Forest • Valley Oak Forest • Cottonwood Forest <p><i>In dredger tailings as fragmented patches:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Herbaceous (non-native) • Riparian Scrub • Mixed Willow (mostly Goodding’s black willow) • Cottonwood Forest (some senescent) • Marsh
Gravel Mining 1	RM 45.2–32.5	100–500	<p><i>Throughout reach, generally associated with modified banks and gravel pits:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Riparian Scrub • Herbaceous (non-native) <p><i>Along banks, 1–2 tree canopy width:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cottonwood Forest • Mixed Riparian Forest
Gravel Mining 2	RM 32.5–26.8	50	<p><i>On former floodplains:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eucalyptus • Cottonwood Forest (1-tree canopy width, typically senescent) <p><i>On gravel pit berms:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Riparian Scrub • Disturbed Riparian <p><i>Associated with revetment:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giant Reed
Encroached	RM 26.8–8	50–300	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed Riparian Forest • Mixed Willow (mainly narrow-leaf willow, with Goodding’s black willow increasing downstream) • Riparian Scrub
Confluence	RM 8–0	500–1,500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cottonwood Forest • Mixed Riparian Forest • Valley Oak Forest • Mixed Willow (especially Goodding’s black willow) • Herbaceous (especially non-native assemblages)

occurrence of white alder (*Alnus rhombifolia*) and London plane tree (*Platanus x. acerifolia*) in upstream reaches (Dredger Tailing Reach) to a dominance of box elder downstream of Shaffer Bridge, sometimes grading into monospecific stands (mapped as Box Elder cover type) in the lower river. In several locations where remnant patches of Central Valley gallery forest occurred, box elder trees provided an

armature for wild grape to access the canopy, and thick mats of vines completely cover the trees. Oregon ash, valley oak, and several willow species commonly occurred within the Mixed Riparian Forest subcanopy throughout the river.

Mixed Riparian Forest subcanopy species composition also varied with elevation above and distance from the channel. In the Dredger Tailings Reach, for example, understory species occurring near the channel included narrow-leaf willow (*Salix exigua*), arroyo willow (*Salix lasiolepis*), Oregon ash, California button willow (*Cephalanthus occidentalis* var. *californica*), tree of heaven (non-native), California blackberry (*Rubus ursinus*), and Himalaya berry (*Rubus discolor*) (non-native). On the higher floodplain, willow species were absent, and box elder, California buckeye (*Aesculus californica*), and edible fig (non-native) occurred. The cross-sectional pattern is likely driven by several factors, including: (1) soil moisture, which decreases with increasing elevation above the channel, favoring more drought-resistant plants on the banks and tailings; (2) differences in shade tolerance, with less tolerant species occurring on exposed bars and banks; and (3) fragmentation of the riparian zone by dredging, agriculture, and roads, which provided an introduction route for the non-native species.

The Mixed Willow cover type shifted from a dominance of arroyo and narrow-leaf willow in the upstream reaches (upstream of Shaffer Bridge) to a mix of Goodding's black willow and narrow-leaf willow downstream of Shaffer Bridge. Change in tree habit was also reflected in the species shift. Upstream willows were primarily shrubs or small trees, whereas downstream willows show a dual pattern of low narrow-leaf willow shrubs on bars and large Goodding's black willow trees on higher banks.

6.1.2.2 Species of Concern

Some native plant species and assemblages are of special concern due to their ecological importance in the riparian zone or their present scarcity within California's remnant native riparian assemblages. These species and their observed distributions in the Merced River riparian zone are described below.

Blue elderberry (Sambucus mexicana)

Blue elderberry is a native shrub or small tree and is the unique habitat for the valley elderberry longhorn beetle (*Desmocerus californicus dimorphus*), which is listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act. The valley elderberry longhorn beetle (VELB) historically occurred throughout the Central Valley from Redding (Shasta County) to Bakersfield (Kern County), but population levels are declining (Arnold et al. 1994). These beetles are dependent on elderberry plants during their larval stage; larvae bore into and feed on the pith of roots, branches, and trunks for one or two years before emerging as adults. Adults eat the foliage and possibly the flowers of the plants. In addition to their value as habitat for the VELB, mature plants produce blue-black, edible berries, which are an important source of summer food for many species of songbirds and small mammals (Martin et al. 1951).

Blue elderberry shrubs occur as an understory species in Cottonwood Forest, Valley Oak Forest, Mixed Riparian Forest, and Box Elder stands. It is common along the Merced River corridor and is typically located in fully or partially open areas higher on the bank than willow and California button willow. Its occurrence is sporadic in Dredger Tailings Reach, but densities generally increase in downstream reaches. Near the confluence with the San Joaquin River (RM 0 to RM 4), blue elderberry is a prominent understory species in various forest cover types and an overstory tree in Herbaceous cover type patches on remnant floodplains.

Western sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*)

Both historical accounts and field observations for this project indicate that western sycamore does not commonly occur in the Merced River corridor, though it is present on many other Central Valley rivers. In the Sacramento Basin, western sycamore occurs in the subcanopy of cottonwood- or valley oak-dominated stands, or co-dominates in mixed stands with Oregon ash, box elder, and white alder (Thompson 1961, Holland and Keil 1995, Conard et al. 1980). Its center of distribution is in the southern California Coast Ranges, but large stands are documented almost as far north as Redding (Griffen and Critchfield 1972). Data for the San Joaquin basin are incomplete, but several small stands have been documented on the Tuolumne and San Joaquin rivers, and larger stands have been documented on the Kings and Kern rivers (Griffen and Critchfield 1972).

During field surveys for this project, only a few western sycamore trees were observed and all were within public parks along the channel. London plane tree, which is a non-native sycamore species planted as a landscape tree, was encountered more frequently, typically as naturalized individuals scattered within Mixed Riparian Forest stands. No single factor has been identified to explain the relative scarcity of western sycamore trees within the San Joaquin basin compared to adjacent northern and southern regions; several authors have noted its uncommon distributional patterns (Griffen and Critchfield 1972; Holstein 1984).

6.1.2.3 Non-native Invasive Species

The Merced River riparian corridor, like most California landscapes, is host to many non-native invasive plant species. Descriptions of the most common non-native species, their observed distribution in the Merced River corridor, and the risk of further invasion are described in Table 21. All non-native plant species observed in the corridor are included in the species list in Appendix G.

Table 21. Primary Non-native Species Occurring in the Merced River Corridor

Non-native Species (or assemblage)	Observed Distribution within Merced River Riparian Zone	General Invasibility ¹	CalEPPC Exotic Pest Plant List ³
Woody or Persistent Perennial Species			
Eucalyptus (<i>Eucalyptus</i> spp.)	widely established on Dry Creek and on the mainstem river at the Dry Creek confluence	Moderate	A-1
Tree of Heaven (<i>Ailanthus altissima</i>)	commonly distributed throughout the river; dense patches occur at Merced Falls Road between Crocker-Huffman Dam and Snelling, McConnell Park, and along the irrigation canal at RM 3.5	Moderate	A-2
Giant reed (<i>Arundo donax</i>)	Crocker-Huffman Dam to San Joaquin confluence, primarily small patches on disturbed areas such as revetted banks	Serious	A-1
Himalaya berry (<i>Rubus discolor</i>)	widespread in disturbed riparian areas such as roadsides and revetted banks and adjacent to fields; is less common in undisturbed areas, where native blackberry is common	Moderate	A-1
Edible fig (<i>Ficus carica</i>)	occurs in disturbed riparian areas, especially in the Dredger Tailings reach, both in full sun on tailings and adjacent to fields and in Mixed Riparian Forest understory	Potential	A-2
Tamarisk (<i>Tamarix</i> spp.)	generally absent from river corridor; one patch documented on Merced Falls Road, between Merced Falls and Crocker-Huffman Dam	Serious	A-1

Non-native Species (or assemblage)	Observed Distribution within Merced River Riparian Zone	General Invasibility ¹	CalEPPC Exotic Pest Plant List ³
Tree tobacco (<i>Nicotiana glauca</i>)	common understory shrub on leveed banks downstream of Dry Creek	Moderate	not listed
Pokeweed (<i>Phytolacca americana</i>)	increasing abundance towards San Joaquin River confluence	Unknown	not listed
Mulberry (<i>Morus alba</i>)	occurs between McConnell Park and San Joaquin River confluence; assumed naturalized from landscaped areas	Moderate	not listed
Silver maple (<i>Acer saccharinum</i>)	scattered within Mixed Riparian Forest at the Snelling Study Site, presumed to occur throughout Dredger Tailings Reach	Unknown	not listed
London plane tree (<i>Platanus x acerifolia</i>)	Hatfield Park, McConnell Park, Henderson Park, and naturalized within Mixed Riparian Forest.	Moderate	not listed
Osage orange (<i>Maclura pomifera</i>)	occurs in Mixed Riparian Forest subcanopy in Dredger Tailings Reach	Moderate	not listed
Herbaceous Species			
Non-native annual grassland assemblages	high floodplains, terraces, dredger tailings, high-flow channel beds throughout river corridor	see note ²	not listed
Yellow star thistle (<i>Centaurea solstitialis</i>)	high floodplains and terraces at all study sites, large, dense patches at Stevinson Site	Serious	A-1
Black mustard (<i>Brassica nigra</i>)	occurs as significant component of Herbaceous Cover at both Snelling and Stevinson Sites	see note ²	B
Poison hemlock (<i>Conium maculatum</i>)	disturbed grasslands throughout river corridor	Moderate	B
Lamb's quarters (<i>Chenopodium</i> spp.)	gravel bars throughout river corridor	Moderate	not listed
Knotweed (<i>Polygonum</i> spp.)	river margins, high-flow channels, and wetlands throughout river corridor	Moderate	not listed
Aquatic Species			
Water hyacinth (<i>Eichhornia crassipes</i>)	not common within river channel, some patches observed in ponds in Dredger Tailings Reach	Serious	A-2
Brazilian water weed (<i>Egeria densa</i>)	distribution not well-known, but dense beds observed in the active channel and in dredger tailings ponds	Serious	A-2

¹ Sources: Randall et al. (1998), Dudley (1998), Dudley and Collins (1995), EPA/SFEI (1999), McBride, pers. comm. (2000).

² Not rated by sources cited, but already widespread (i.e. invasion has already occurred in many areas).

³ Designations from the California Exotic Pest Plant Council 1999 list of Exotic Pest Plants of Greatest Ecological Concern in California (CalEPPC 1999). The most invasive wildland pest plants with widespread distributions are designated A-1, whereas those with regional distributions are designated A-2. Wildland pest plants of lesser invasiveness are designated B.

Four of the cover types documented in the vegetation mapping—Eucalyptus, Giant Reed, Tamarisk, and Tree of Heaven—are dominated by non-native canopy species. Summary statistics, including total number and acreages of patches for these cover types, are listed in Table 19. Because the cover types reflect canopy dominance, the small acreage represented by these cover types represents a small fraction of the actual proportion of non-native species occurring in the corridor, most of which are herbaceous plants. Several woody or persistent perennial species, such as eucalyptus, tree of heaven, and giant reed have become established along the Merced River. Eucalyptus is especially pervasive on Dry Creek and on the mainstem river for five miles upstream of the Dry Creek confluence (RM 31.5 to RM 36.7). These

stands are dense and appear to exclude native riparian species. Eucalyptus is generally considered to be a benign or moderately invasive genus (Dudley and Collins 1995, Randall et al. 1998, McBride, pers. comm., 2000) and may not spread rapidly beyond its presently established areas. Tree of heaven is considered to be moderately invasive, and giant reed is considered to be seriously invasive. These species occur in dense, spreading patches at numerous points on the river and constitute a future threat. Tamarisk (*Tamarix* spp), another highly invasive species, occurs very infrequently in the Merced River corridor and does not currently appear to be a serious invasion threat. More detailed information on the invasion patterns of these species is included in the cover type descriptions in Appendix F.

In addition to cover types that are dominated by non-native species, perennial non-native species also occur as subdominant canopy species or as subcanopy species in other cover types. Several landscape or commercial trees, including mulberry, London plane tree, silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*), and Osage orange (*Maclura pomifera*) occur sporadically in the corridor and have naturalized after introduction into cultivated areas. Of these species, only mulberry appears to be spreading aggressively and constitutes a widespread invasion threat. Several pervasive non-native shrub and vine species, such as edible fig, Himalaya berry, and tree tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*), as well as pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*) (a perennial species) were observed to occur extensively within the subcanopy of many cover types. Edible fig is a domesticated shrub or small tree that invades the riparian forest understory and other places with perennially wet soils, including levees, canal banks, and dredger tailings. Himalaya berry is highly invasive in disturbed areas, such as roadsides and revetted banks, forming dense, monospecific thickets that displace the native California blackberry. Tree tobacco and pokeweed are less commonly distributed, but densities increase in downstream reaches, especially on levees and adjacent to roads.

Non-native grasses, forbs, and understory shrubs are widely distributed within and often dominate the following cover types: Blackberry Scrub, Disturbed Riparian, Dredger Tailings, Herbaceous Cover, Marsh, and Riparian Scrub. Some of the more commonly occurring non-native herbaceous species in these cover types include wild oat (*Avena* spp.), ripgut brome (*Bromus diandrus*), rabbitsfoot grass (*Polypogon monspeliensis*), bluegrass (*Poa* spp.), black mustard (*Brassica nigra*), poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), and knotweed (*Polygonum* spp.). Because these herbaceous plants are not identifiable from aerial photographs, the vegetation maps cannot accurately quantify the total degree of invasion by these species. However, when the main cover types dominated by non-native grasses and forbs (listed above and including Dredger Tailings) are aggregated, they represent well over half of the riparian area mapped in the Merced River corridor.

Because distributions for key invasive woody and persistent perennial species, particularly tree of heaven, giant reed, and to a lesser extent eucalyptus, are fairly limited within the corridor, restoration efforts should focus on early and vigorous eradication of high priority species before further invasion occurs. Unlike many other California rivers, where giant reed and/or tamarisk now dominate riparian zones, such restoration efforts are feasible on the Merced River if implemented with strong public education and support.

6.2 Intensive Site Investigations

As a complement to the corridor-wide mapping, intensive studies were conducted at three sites along the river to assess current riparian vegetation conditions and the effects of recent changes in hydrologic function. The objectives of the site-specific evaluations were to: (1) document current vegetation species composition and canopy structure; (2) assess vegetation response to flow regulation; (3) assess the relationship between vegetation distribution, geomorphic surfaces, and hydrology; and (4) assess recruitment of pioneer riparian trees. These surveys were conducted as pilot studies and focused on

assessing trends and developing hypotheses to be tested in future work. The site evaluations included analysis of time-series aerial photographs, field surveys of channel and floodplain topography, characterizations of vegetation composition and structure, and surveys of riparian seedling survival.

Table 22. Summary of Study Site Field Surveys and Analyses Used to Evaluate Riparian Vegetation Functional Relationships

Field Surveys and Analyses	Stevinson (RM 2.2)	Snelling (RM 48.2)	Cuneo (RM 50.8)
• aerial photograph analysis	X	X	X
• channel and floodplain cross section surveys		7	1
• transect(s) of vegetation cover type distribution, canopy structure, and geomorphic position	1	6	1
• species lists for common vegetation cover types	X		
• relevés (species composition and cover by canopy strata) for common vegetation cover types		X	X
• seedling surveys		X	
• water stage monitoring		X	
• hydraulic and sediment transport modeling		X	

Study sites were selected that had experienced minimum disturbance from agriculture, urban development, and gold and aggregate mining. To the extent feasible, sites were chosen that exhibited active channel bars, mixed-age stands of riparian vegetation, and actual or potential for riparian vegetation recruitment. To represent the range of natural variation in the river corridor, two sites were selected in the gravel-bedded reach at RM 48.2 (the Snelling Site) and RM 50.8 (the Cuneo Site) and one was selected in the sand-bedded reach at RM 2.2 (the Stevinson Site) (Figure 5.3–1). The Snelling Site (Figure 5.3–2) is located on an undredged remnant floodplain and was selected for study because it contains active gravel bars (which indicate some level of sediment transport and channel function), diverse native riparian vegetation, and recruitment of native cottonwood and willow seedlings. The Cuneo Site (Figure 5.3–4) is a partially-vegetated bar on the north bank of the river. It was selected because it was an active bar under pre-dam hydrologic conditions and could illustrate vegetation response to flow regulation. The Stevinson Site (Figure 6.2–1) is located in the Confluence Reach and occupies the floodplain area inside a broad river meander near Hatfield State Park. This site contains some of the best remnant stands of riparian vegetation on the Merced River and was chosen as a reference site for assessing pre-settlement conditions.

6.3 Vegetation Response To Flow Regulation

One of the objectives of the intensive site studies was to assess the response of riparian vegetation to flow regulation. In heavily altered systems, vegetation species composition, stand structure (age and size distribution), and successional processes (recruitment, establishment, and succession) can change as a result of flow regulation. As described in Section 2, typical vegetation responses include encroachment into the active channel, loss of species and stand diversity, loss of young native tree cohorts, and invasion of the riparian zone by non-native species.

6.3.1 Methods

Coarse-scale changes in riparian vegetation extent and condition along the Merced River since construction of Exchequer Dam in 1926 were assessed using analysis of time-series aerial photographs. For each study site, historical aerial photographs were reviewed from several series ranging from 1937 to 1998 (Table 23) to evaluate vegetation change over time. Because the earliest series was taken eleven years after dam construction, pre-dam conditions were inferred from tree size and recent geomorphic activity apparent in the 1937 photographs. In addition, flood maps (USACE, unpublished data) outlining areas inundated by the January 1997 flood (8,279 cfs maximum flow) were reviewed. Three periods of differing hydrologic conditions were considered in the analyses: (1) pre-1926; (2) 1926–1967; and (3) 1967–present.

Table 23. Aerial Photograph Series Analyzed for Time-series Changes in Hydrology, Geomorphology, and Vegetation Conditions

Year	Date	Photo Source	Scale	Coverage	Mean Daily Flow for Photo Date (cfs)
1937	July 31B Aug 2	ASCS ¹	1:21,000	Crocker-Huffman Dam to RM 15	276 ³
1950	Feb. 18 and Mar. 10	ASCS ¹	1:20,000	Crocker-Huffman Dam to San Joaquin River	58 (Feb. 18) ⁴ 546 (Mar. 10) ⁴
1967	May 1	ASCS ¹	1:20,000	Crocker-Huffman Dam to San Joaquin River	3,259 ⁴
1979	Not known	ASCS ¹	1:23,500	Crocker-Huffman Dam to San Joaquin River	--
1993	June 8	BOR ²	1:6,000	New Exchequer Dam to San Joaquin River	649 ⁴
1998	Aug. 21	Merced County	1:6,000	Merced County eastern boundary to San Joaquin River	854 ⁴

¹ U.S. Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service

² U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

³ USGS Merced River near Livingston gauge (no. 11271500)

⁴ Merced ID Crocker-Huffman gauge

6.3.2 Results

6.3.2.1 Snelling Site

Historically, the Snelling Site was a vegetated island between the Merced River main channel and two high-flow channels to the north (Figure 6.3–1). Mixed riparian forest lined the main channel banks, and the active channel exhibited extensive alluvial bars that were barren of vegetation. The stand of large cottonwoods that borders the high flow channel is evident on the 1937 photographs, and very likely established under pre-Exchequer hydrologic conditions. Sometime after 1950, the northern half of the site was cleared for pasture and the most northern high-flow channel was filled. In 1967, the area was freshly graded, with very few of the riparian trees remaining. The southern part of the site remained wooded, continuing the pattern of slow vegetation encroachment into the formerly active channel.

Under current conditions (see Figure 5.3–2), vegetation encroachment has narrowed the active channel. Figure 6.3–2 shows the current sequence of vegetation cover types on a cross section on the site. Vegetation on all cross sections surveyed at the site are shown in Appendix B. Cottonwood establishment along high-flow channels (located at the far right edge of Figure 6.3–2) has ceased since dam construction. The mature cottonwood stands along the high flow channels are approximately 65 to 80 years old (based on aerial photograph evidence), and field surveys confirm that these stands lack young trees and are not regenerating. Recruitment at the site may be limited by lack of bare alluvial surfaces and competition for light. Maximum life span for Fremont cottonwoods is 100 to 150 years (Braatne et al. 1996), indicating that these mature trees are late in their natural life cycle. As these trees die off, the dominant cottonwoods will be replaced by other riparian tree species. Site surveys confirm that recruitment of pioneer species such as willow and cottonwood is occurring only along the active channel margin, and that these recruits do not survive through the winter into the following year.

6.3.2.2 Cuneo Site

Prior to dam construction, the Cuneo Site was an active channel bar. By 1937, dredging had modified the entire north bank of the river except for the Cuneo bar, and dredging was still underway along the south bank. By this time, woody vegetation had established in a thin band along the bar margin and on the bar surface, but the trees were very small and likely germinated after completion of Exchequer Dam in 1926. A cluster of valley oak trees that currently occurs on the bar surface is visible only as scrub or saplings in the 1937 photograph. By 1950, valley oaks on the bar surface were larger, and vegetation at the channel edge had matured and spread further inland along the bar surface. Vegetation encroachment has continued at the Cuneo Site until the present and has likely contributed to stabilization of the bar surface and channel margin. Sediment stains on trees left by the January 1997 flood confirm that the site was inundated by the 1997 flood flow, which less than the pre-dam bankfull flow.

6.3.2.3 Stevinson Site

The Stevinson Site is located on a current floodplain. The 1950 aerial photographs (the earliest available for this site) suggest that the pre-dam active channel was not much wider than it is currently. From 1950 to the present, no overall increase in vegetation encroachment is apparent, though the area of exposed substrate and scrub vegetation varies between the photograph years. Riparian forest stands to the south of the river appear to be less dense currently than in 1950, possibly due to a combination of natural senescence within the mixed riparian forest and a lack of recruitment due to grazing. Field observations suggest that the narrow point bars in the reach are frequently colonized by cottonwood and willow seedlings, but the lack of observed sapling cohorts indicates that these seedlings do not survive.

6.4 Relationship Between Vegetation Distribution, Geomorphic Surfaces, and Hydrology

6.4.1 Methods

Vegetation species composition and structure were documented using vegetation transects and relevé surveys. These surveys were conducted in fall 1999 and spring 2000.

At the Snelling and Cuneo sites, vegetation surveys were conducted in conjunction with the geomorphic surveys described in Section 5. At the Stevinson Site, channel bathymetry and floodplain topography were not surveyed in the field, but were plotted from Sacramento-San Joaquin River Comprehensive Plan

Digital Line Graph (DLG) files. The DLG files presented data in two-foot contours, which were generated from hydrographic surveys and photogrammetric analysis (USACE, unpublished data).

At all three sites, vegetation structure and composition were documented in six-foot wide belt transects along the cross sections on both left- and right-bank floodplains. Vegetation patches were identified by cover type. For each cover type, horizontal position along the cross section, canopy structure, canopy height, species composition, and stem diameter classes were documented. Horizontal position along the cross section was documented by recording where the cover type boundary intersected the survey tape. Canopy layer heights were visually estimated.

At the Snelling and Cuneo sites, species composition and structure within common vegetation cover types were documented using relevé surveys (modified from Sawyer and Keeler-Wolf 1995). A relevé is a rapid method of assessing species composition, density, and canopy structure within a discrete vegetation patch of homogenous composition and is an alternative to the time-consuming point-intercept transect method. Once vegetation patch boundaries were delineated along each cross section, relevé plots (65.6 feet by 32.8 feet [20 m by 10 m]) were randomly located within patch boundaries. Within each plot, all species observed were listed and their canopy stratum (tree, shrub, ground) and cover class were documented. Cover classes followed the CNPS series relevé protocol (Sawyer and Keeler-Wolf 1995). Percent cover class was visually estimated. Results of all relevés are tabulated in Appendix H. No relevés were conducted at the Stevinson Site; at this site, lists of species occurring within common vegetation types were compiled.

At the Snelling Site, hydraulic modeling was used to determine water stage elevation at each of the vegetation transects for a range of flows. Flows were modeled using a HEC-RAS (version 2.2), a one-dimensional hydraulic model. Inputs to the model included the surveyed cross sections, flow data, channel slope, and a roughness coefficient for both the channel bed and floodplain. Flow data from Merced ID's Crocker-Huffman gauge were used. Water stage monitoring at cross section 0+00 was used to define the downstream boundary condition for the model. Bed and floodplain roughness coefficients were 0.045 and 0.07 respectively, based on commonly accepted values for the channel type.

In addition to using the combination of vegetation transects and hydraulic modeling to assess the relationship between vegetation species composition and inundation frequency, cores were collected from ten valley oak trees that had established on a relict bar surface at the Cuneo Site. Once the ages of these trees are determined, the year and hydrologic conditions under which they established can be identified. These cores will be analyzed in Phase III of the project.

6.4.2 Results

Many studies have documented associations between riparian vegetation assemblages and fluvial landforms (Harris 1987, Hupp and Osterkamp 1985, Osterkamp and Hupp 1984). These associations result from the interrelationships between physical processes such as inundation, scour, and deposition and plant communities that both depend on and in turn influence those physical processes. Data from the Stevinson, Snelling, and Cuneo sites also document associations between vegetation and geomorphic position and demonstrate a toposequence, or cross-sectional pattern, across the floodplain. Figure 6.4-1 represents a generalized toposequence of current riparian vegetation compiled from study site cross sections and field observations. Vegetation transects from the Cuneo and Stevinson sites are shown in Figures 6.4-2 and 6.4-3, respectively.

Understanding the relationships between vegetation assemblages and topography and the hydrogeomorphic processes which are correlated with topography will be useful for developing future restoration designs, including re-grading sites to provide hydrologic conditions (i.e., inundation frequency and duration) that favor specific plant species or assemblages. Table 24 describes general relationships observed at the Snelling Site using data from the six vegetation transects coupled with water surface elevations generated from the hydraulic model. These transects are included in Appendix B.

Table 24. Topographic Position of Cover Types with Regard to Flow Regime at the Snelling Site

Cover Types	Associated Geomorphic Surfaces	Elevation with regard to current flow regime	Evidence of change in distribution after regulation?
Blackberry Scrub	former floodplain/current terrace	Patches dominated by native or mixed native/non-native occur typically at the current Q_2	Unknown
	disturbed terraces	Himalaya berry (non-native) thickets range from $Q_{1.5}$ to Q_{10}	Yes, encroachment onto revetted banks.
Cottonwood Forest	former floodplain/current terrace	Stands of mature trees (probable pre-dam cohort) occur higher than the current $Q_{1.5}$ but lower than current Q_5 . Cottonwood seedlings recruit within current active channel, lower than current $Q_{1.5}$ elevation	Yes, current recruitment occurs lower than pre-1926 mature trees.
Herbaceous Cover	active channel and current floodplain (wetland spp.)	Located at the $Q_{1.5}$ elevation for wetland swales and high flow channels	Unknown
	former floodplain/current terrace (grassland spp.)	Between the Q_5 to Q_{10} elevations for annual grasslands	No, extent is unchanged.
Mixed Riparian Forest	current floodplain and former floodplain/current terrace	Generally under the Q_2 elevation, some between the Q_2 to Q_5 elevations	Yes, encroachment into former active channel.
Mixed Willow	active channel and current floodplain	Generally between the $Q_{1.5}$ and Q_5 elevations	Unknown
Valley Oak	former floodplain/current terrace and terrace	Generally at the Q_{10} elevation or greater	Yes, current recruitment occurs lower than pre-1926 mature trees.

Analysis of aerial photographs of the Snelling Site indicates that some of the cover types have changed their distributions since construction of Exchequer Dam in 1926, and field work confirms that some cover types (e.g., Mixed Riparian Forest) have established at different elevations since dam construction, whereas others (e.g., Cottonwood Forest) are no longer establishing at all. These shifts provide evidence that flow regulation has changed the elevation range at which certain species establish. This situation makes interpretation of vegetation topographic patterns for reference or restoration purposes more

difficult, because observed patterns may be the result of a former hydrologic regime. Distinct associations between specific vegetation cover types and geomorphic surfaces are described in more detail below.

Mixed Riparian Forest typically occurred at the edge of the post-dam bankfull channel and on low floodplains. Aerial photographs and field observations at the Snelling and Cuneo sites indicate that this cover type has encroached into the former active channel since dam construction. The Mixed Willow cover type is also associated with active channel and current floodplain surfaces and typically encroaches into the channel in response to decreased flood frequency. Because current flows are not sufficient to scour vegetation from bank areas, encroachment by these cover types will likely continue.

Mature Cottonwood Forest stands were generally associated with former floodplains/current terraces, surfaces that no longer experience the inundation frequency and overbank sediment deposition necessary for recruitment. At the Snelling Site, recruitment of cottonwood seedlings was documented within the active channel and not within the elevation range of the mature Cottonwood Forest patches (see Section 6.5.2). Mature cottonwood trees occurred on surfaces that are inundated by floods having a 1.5 to 5-year post-dam recurrence interval. This elevation range is low compared to that reported by other studies of cottonwood ecology, which document large establishment events occurring after floods with recurrence intervals of ten to one hundred years (Stromberg et al. 1993, Stromberg 1997, Rood et al. 1998, Rood and Mahoney 2000). The aerial photographs indicate that these trees established at approximately the time of dam construction, so it is unclear if recruitment occurred under the pre- or post-dam hydrologic regime.

Mature Valley Oak Forest stands typically occurred on terrace and former floodplain/current terrace surfaces that are currently inundated by 10-year recurrence interval floods or greater. At the Snelling and Cuneo sites, valley oak seedlings and small trees were establishing within Mixed Riparian Forest stands on lower geomorphic surfaces than under pre-dam conditions.

Some cover types occur on both low and high surfaces. Herbaceous assemblages on former floodplains/current terraces are typically dominated by annual grasses and non-native forbs, whereas more mesic low areas, such as seasonally wet high-flow channels on current floodplains and in the active channel, are often dominated by sedges (*Carex* spp.), waterpepper (*Polygonum hydropiperoides*), and mugwort (*Artemisia douglasii*). Blackberry Scrub occurred on current floodplains (often associated with Mixed Riparian Forest) in mixed patches of native California blackberry and non-native Himalaya berry and on high, typically disturbed terraces or tailings areas, principally as dense Himalaya berry thickets.

Major implications of these relationships for restoration project design are: (1) pre- and post-dam vegetation establishment history needs to be understood when using reference sites to design grading and revegetation plans; (2) cottonwoods, willow, and valley oak seedlings currently establish at lower bank positions than historically; and (3) encroachment of mixed willow and mixed riparian forest will likely continue to occur on restored sites unless flow and sediment supply issues are addressed.

6.5 Vegetation Recruitment and Establishment

Riparian forests require periodic seedling recruitment and subsequent establishment to replace mature and dying trees, maintain the stand through time, and reset the process of vegetation succession. Recruitment refers to seedling germination following seed release. Establishment refers to the life stage when a plant has developed a sufficient root and shoot architecture to survive annual environmental conditions (especially inundation and scour) and develop into a reproducing adult. Succession refers to a progressive

replacement of different plant communities over time in response to internal competition among different plant species or outside disturbances such as floods and fire.

Central Valley riparian forest initiation begins with the colonization of bare, moist alluvial surfaces after large floods by seedlings, typically Fremont cottonwoods, willows and other fast-growing species. These pioneer species are physiologically adapted to the highly variable hydrologic and geomorphic regimes of alluvial river floodplain systems. Willows and cottonwoods can sustain high rates of root growth (up to 1–1.5 inches per day) to keep up with rapid ground water decline (Stromberg 1997, McBride et al. 1989, Mahoney and Rood 1998). Most riparian species are also physiologically adapted to survive prolonged flooding and scour, and they maximize dispersal through high seed output, long seed-floating time, or clonal growth (Johansson et al. 1996, Braatne et al. 1996).

Successful cottonwood recruitment depends on the specific hydrology (flood frequency and duration) of the germination site combined with favorable seed dispersal timing. Site hydrology is a function of river flow, topography, and substrate composition. Seed release timing varies for riparian trees and is often related to their dispersal mechanism; light-seeded, wind-dispersed species tend to release seeds in spring, when newly de-watered banks are exposed, and large-seeded, water-dispersed species tend to release in fall and winter, when seeds can float up onto floodplains (Figure 6.5–1). This combination of hydrologic conditions and seed release timing has been formalized by Mahoney and Rood (1998) and others into a ‘recruitment box’ model (see Section 6.5).

Under natural conditions, only a fraction of recruited cottonwood seedlings will become established. Annual or seasonal fluctuations in groundwater tables, the timing and magnitude of larger flood events, substrate conditions, and biotic factors (such as competition or herbivory) all influence whether a cohort of seedlings survives long enough to successfully establish a new stand of mature trees. Certain sites, sometimes referred to as “safe sites” or “nurse sites,” are more likely than others to provide conditions conducive to successful establishment. Field observations suggest that floodplain depressions, high flow channels, and other off-channel sites that historically received overbank flooding and sediment deposition provide suitable recruitment conditions as well as protection from later floods under natural conditions. As a result, willow and cottonwood establishment is also episodic, and riparian stand structure is often dominated by several prominent cohorts that established after flood events. The coupling of the recruitment box model and the safe site concept should provide a useful tool for restoration planning.

Succession of riparian plant assemblages occurs over time, as floodplains accrete sediment and soil development occurs, providing conditions for less flood-dependent and more shade-tolerant species such as Oregon ash, box elder, and valley oak to establish and eventually dominate. Along geomorphically active, meandering rivers, riparian assemblages typically exhibit successional gradients that run perpendicular to the channel, with the youngest stands closest to the active channel margin (Figure 6.5–2). Succession can occur as a continuous process, but it is often punctuated by episodic disturbances and establishment events (i.e., large floods). The vegetation successional pattern at many sites is, therefore, patchy and depends on flood history, site topography, and local variations in physical disturbance.

If biologically important physical conditions change in a river corridor and pioneer species no longer are able to establish, the riparian forest composition over time shifts from pioneer species to later-successional species, and plant diversity, and habitat complexity become simplified. Observations from numerous reconnaissance trips and field work at the study sites indicated that establishment of pioneer species is limited on the Merced River, and natural succession and disturbance cycles are disrupted. The objectives of the vegetation recruitment and establishment analysis were to: (1) document patterns of seedling recruitment and establishment within the river corridor; (2) understand seedling survival patterns

by following a cohort of seedlings from October 1999 to June 2000; and (3) analyze recruitment and establishment patterns in relation to hydrologic and geomorphic conditions using the 'recruitment box' model.

6.5.1 Methods

River-wide recruitment and establishment of Fremont cottonwoods and willows on bars and floodplains was assessed by boat surveys conducted in fall 1999 and spring 2000. Areas where seedlings (< 1 year old) had recruited in the same year and where saplings (1 to 5 years old) had established in prior years were recorded onto aerial photographs to provide a qualitative description of spatial patterns of recruitment.

In addition to the river-wide assessment, seedling surveys were conducted on gravel bars at the Snelling Site to quantify seedling recruitment and overwinter survival. Six gravel bars were surveyed in October 1999 to document recruitment. Surveys were conducted using a 10.8-ft² (1.0-m²) plot frame laid contiguously along a transect that extended from the channel margin to the upland edge of the bar. Within each plot, seedling or sapling species and age, substrate, and surface moisture condition were recorded; age was assessed by stem buds scars. The transects were monumented with rebar for later resurveying. In June 2000, follow-up surveys were conducted. Only one transect (cross section 13+95) had a sufficient number of seedlings in both years to evaluate recruitment patterns and is the only transect discussed in the results section below. Observed seedling recruitment was compared to recruitment predicted by the box model.

6.5.2 Results

6.5.2.1 River-wide Recruitment and Establishment

During the boat surveys conducted from Shaffer Bridge to the confluence with the San Joaquin River in spring 2000, recruitment of cottonwood and willow seedlings was observed only where bare, shallow, fine-grained alluvial surfaces occurred. These surfaces were relatively scarce throughout the river corridor. Fine-grained bars and seedling recruitment patches occurred sporadically in the Dredger Tailings Reach (including the Snelling Site), at McConnell State Park in the Encroached Reach, and throughout the Confluence Reach. Most seedlings observed apparently recruited from seed, though at McConnell State Park some young Goodding's black willow shoots appeared to be vegetative sprouts from flood-damaged older trees. The wide geographic dispersal of seedling patches, combined with observations of heavy willow and cottonwood seedfall during spring 2000 indicate that seed source is not a limiting factor for establishment of pioneer riparian species.

Few patches of cottonwood or willow saplings (age 2+ years) were observed during the boat surveys, suggesting that at many locations, young seedlings do not survive to reproductive maturity. Extensive reconnaissance of the Merced River found very few saplings or young trees of these species, and of those found, their size, location, and associated flood debris suggested that most or all established following the January 1997 flood. Small groups of cottonwood saplings estimated to be three years old were observed at several locations along the river, including the lower end of the Gravel Mining 1 Reach (RM 32.5), downstream of Shaffer Bridge (RM 32.5), McConnell State Park (RM 23.3), and at the Stevinson Site (RM 2.2) on floodplain surfaces approximately three feet above summer low water stage. Other than the presumed 1997 cohort, no additional young cottonwood stands were observed on riverbanks and floodplains.

In natural river systems, inter-annual environmental conditions are extremely variable and cottonwoods and willows do not establish every year. As discussed above, these species typically establish episodically after moderate-to-large floods. Given their life history, it is reasonable to expect that several distinct age cohorts of cottonwoods and willows resulting from past flooding events would be apparent in patches along the river corridor. The boat survey observations indicated that seedling recruitment was relatively abundant (at least in 2000) but that establishment of sapling cohorts does not occur.

Though natural establishment of cottonwoods appears to be very limited, establishment is occurring on floodplain sites that have been artificially cleared or graded. Cottonwood seedlings and one- to five-year old cottonwood saplings were observed thriving in areas that were recently graded, including the Kelsey Ranch located on a terrace north of the river near RM 53, the Hardin property just downstream of the Snelling Road bridge (RM 46.4), and the GM2-T1 aggregate mine downstream of Shaffer Bridge (RM 31.5). Hydrology, topography, soil texture, and lack of competition from annual grasses at these locations likely facilitate germination, and the location away from the river channel protects seedlings from prolonged inundation. These sites may be useful as model sites for floodplain restoration; factors such as soil texture and water table dynamics at these graded sites should be studied to use as design parameters.

6.5.2.2 Observed Seedling Recruitment and Survival

To test the hypothesis that willow and cottonwood seedlings were recruiting but not surviving to maturity, a cohort of seedlings was followed at the Snelling Site to assess overwinter survival. In the initial surveys in October 1999, a total of 126 seedlings were counted within the 150-square foot transect at cross section 13+95, including a large cohort of cottonwoods less than one year old and smaller groups of arroyo willow and California button willow (Figure 6.5-3). The 1999 cottonwood cohort was located within 12 feet of the channel edge (adjacent to edge of water at summer baseflow). Maximum density was 7 seedlings/ft². Further inland on the transect, seedling densities dropped to approximately 2 seedlings/ft² or less, and composition shifted to more upland species in the following progression: silver maple (non-native), Oregon ash, and valley oak. Total elevation change was approximately four feet over the 50-foot length of the transect.

When the transect was resurveyed in June 2000, many fewer seedlings were documented than in the previous year. The maximum density was 2.3 seedlings/ft². Seedling survival from the previous year was four percent or less for cottonwood, arroyo willow, and California button willow, and 67 percent for silver maple seedlings, which were located farther from the channel edge (Figure 6.5-3). Almost all of the seedlings documented in the June 2000 survey were less than one-year-old (i.e., germinated that spring); 78 percent of the cottonwoods, 40 percent of the arroyo willows, and all of the California button willows were new recruits. Though it appeared that fewer cottonwoods recruited in 2000 than in 1999 (Figure 6.5-4), an exact comparison was not possible because there was still some potential that more seedlings would germinate following the June survey (though this was not likely, given cottonwood's early spring seed release period).

The pattern of seedling recruitment and mortality at cross section 13+95 suggests that cottonwood, arroyo willow, and California button willow readily germinate on bars in the active channel but do not survive beyond the first year (Figure 6.5-5). Seedling mortality between surveys was likely caused by either scour or prolonged inundation. Site conditions in June 2000 did not show evidence of scour, suggesting that seedling mortality was due to prolonged inundation. The seedling surveys conducted at the Snelling Site support the river-wide observation that cottonwood and willow seedlings readily recruit along the Merced River but do not survive to reproductive maturity. Because of the limited scope of these baseline

studies, these seedling data should be interpreted as suggestive, rather than definitive, of conditions elsewhere on the river.

6.5.2.3 Comparison to the Recruitment Box Model

Riparian tree recruitment depends on local hydrologic conditions during the seed release period. Early successional species such as cottonwood and willow release many seeds that are viable for a short time, typically 2–3 weeks (Braatne et al. 1996) and require bare, moist substrates to germinate. Seedling recruitment, therefore, occurs on the surfaces that happen to be moist and bare during the seed release period. Mahoney and Rood (1993, 1998) describe this window of optimal conditions for riparian plant establishment as the “recruitment box,” defined in space (topographic elevation with respect to river stage) and time (period of seed release and viability) (Figure 6.5–6). The sloping line within the recruitment box represents the maximum survivable rate of water table decline; hydrograph drops steeper than this line will not support successful establishment. New cohorts of cottonwood and willow seedlings typically form narrow bands parallel to the river channel after floods (Figure 6.5–7). These bands can be quite narrow on sloped river banks, because the recruitment box is constrained at the higher elevations by the seedling's ability to maintain contact with the receding water table following spring floods, and at lower elevations by inundation and scour the following winter.

Figure 6.5–8 shows the recruitment box conditions at cross section 13+95 at the Snelling Site. The Snelling analysis used the conceptual model developed by Mahoney and Rood (1993, 1998). The vertical axis reflects river discharge at the Merced ID Crocker-Huffman gauge for 1998 and 1999. Elevation of the cottonwood seedling cohort and (assumed) pre-dam cottonwoods are also plotted on this axis; surveyed elevations were converted to discharge using the rating curve generated by the Snelling Site hydraulic model. The rate of water table decline was also plotted using the rating curve.

The recruitment box model indicates several points:

- The 1999 seedling cohort established below the range of root crown elevations of the pre-dam cottonwoods (Figure 6.5–8). The seedlings recruited within the current bankfull channel, and the mature trees are inundated at a 1.5- to 5-year recurrence interval.
- The Merced River ramping rate was within tolerable limits (1.5 inches/day) during only the last part of the 1999 cottonwood seed release period, when flow was below 500 cfs. Before this point, seedlings would not have established because the bank dewatering rate was faster than seedling root growth rates.
- Flows in winter/spring 2000 were high enough to submerge the 1999 seedling cohort for several months. This condition could explain the low seedling survival from 1999 to 2000. It is possible that the high water table prevented the 1999 seedlings from developing deep root systems, thus making them vulnerable to being uprooted by relatively modest winter flows.
- Recruitment conditions in 2000 were similar to those in 1999. The river stage decline was very rapid during the seed release period and leveled out near baseflow levels.
- During the flow period covered by the surveys, peak flows reached the lower part of the elevation range of pre-dam cottonwoods. The only recent year that river stage reached the upper elevation range of these mature trees was 1997, when flow exceeded 8,000 cfs.

The recruitment box concept may also be used to develop hypotheses of connections between river regulation, species composition shifts, and vegetation encroachment. Reduction in peak flows since flow regulation during the spring seed-release period may favor establishment by shrub species that encroach into the active channel. Peak flows that occur in winter, which are more common since flow regulation,

are not conducive to establishment of large tree species, such as Fremont cottonwood and Goodding's black willow, because these species release seeds later in the spring. Less frequent spring peak flows combined with increased summer irrigation flows favor late summer-seeding species such as narrow-leaf willow, which tend to spread as shrub thickets onto active channel bars and banks.

6.6 Conclusions

These investigations indicate that riparian processes in the Merced River corridor are impaired in the several ways. Riparian zone area has decreased since settlement by over 90 percent by some estimates. Encroachment of riparian vegetation into the former active channel is widespread throughout the river corridor since construction of New Exchequer Dam and has resulted in a confined and simplified channel (Figure 5.6–2). This vegetation encroachment onto formerly active bars prevents establishment of pioneer riparian species and arrests natural vegetation successional patterns.

Flow regulation has also created artificially stable conditions that induce riparian seedlings to recruit lower on banks than historically, where they do not survive scour or inundation from moderate flows later in the year. Currently, spring peak flows are insufficient for cottonwood cohorts to establish on sites, such as high-flow channels and high floodplains, that are safe from subsequent scouring and flooding. Lower flood peaks and lack of sediment supply limit deposition of fine sediment on floodplains, thus cutting off the supply of bare, moist substrates away from the channel that are necessary for cottonwoods to germinate and survive to maturity. These conditions contribute to the decline of cottonwood-dominated forest stands throughout the river corridor.

Despite these impaired processes, some conditions provide key opportunities for restoration in the Merced River corridor. For example, seed source and dispersal ability for most tree species do not appear to limit regeneration of riparian forest stands. For wind-dispersed species, such as willows and Fremont cottonwood, seed source is abundant and dispersal is widespread throughout the river corridor. Valley oak, box elder, and Oregon ash, which have larger seeds and less dispersive ability, are well-distributed throughout the river corridor and are naturally establishing currently on post-dam floodplains. In contrast, white alder, which is concentrated only at upstream sites, and western sycamore, which is absent from the study reach, appear to have very limited potential for natural seed germination. It is important to note that good seed source availability does not ensure that a desired species mix will occur naturally on restoration sites; many projects may require active revegetation.

Another promising condition is that natural establishment of cottonwoods occurs on some floodplain sites that have been artificially graded or mined for gravel. Vegetation patterns, soil conditions and hydrology at these sites provide adequate conditions for establishment in the absence of natural hydraulic and geomorphic processes, and should be studied to provide model criteria for restoration projects using similar floodplain reconstruction methods. Floodplain scraping may be a viable active restoration approach where passive strategies are not feasible.

As described in Section 6.1.2.3, non-native invasive grasses and forbs dominate herbaceous communities on the Merced River, and some non-native tree and shrub species have established and pose a threat to further invasion within the corridor. However, most of the more problematic woody and persistent perennial species, particularly tree of heaven, giant reed, and to a lesser extent eucalyptus, have limited distributions in the corridor. Restoration efforts should focus on early eradication of these high priority species before further invasion occurs. Unlike many California rivers, where giant reed and/or tamarisk now dominate riparian zones, the eradication and control of some non-native tree species appears feasible.

7 GEOMORPHIC OPPORTUNITES AND CONSTRAINTS FOR RESTORATION

As discussed in Section 1, the Merced River Corridor Restoration Plan will be developed in Phase III of this project, which began in fall 2000 and will extend through December 2001. This plan will encompass a spectrum of objectives including restoration of geomorphic and ecological processes and attributes and protection of private property and water rights. The Stakeholder Group has begun exercises to define their restoration objectives and concerns. This process will continue in Phase III so that a complete set of objectives that addresses ecological as well as social issues is adopted into the plan. Achievement of these objectives will be accomplished by implementing a suite of restoration actions. Appropriate restoration actions will be developed and selected by the Project Team, the TAC, and the Stakeholder Group, based on their ability to achieve social and/or ecosystem benefits within key constraints, such as protection of riparian water rights and landowner support.

This section describes opportunities and constraints to improving geomorphic and riparian ecosystem conditions in the Merced River. Major constraints to restoring geomorphic and riparian ecological processes and attributes in the Merced River include: (1) drastic reduction in the flood magnitude, frequency, and duration and the resulting reduction in bedload transport under current dam operations; (2) elimination of floods exceeding 6,000 cfs that will likely continue due to the Corps of Engineers limit to flood releases; (3) the presence of vulnerable structures (such as the City of Livingston sewage treatment plant) and vulnerable land uses in the floodplain; (4) lack of coarse sediment supply due interception of bedload by the large dams; (5) limits to channel migration caused by reduced flows, bank revetment, and development in the floodplain; (6) the extent of bedload impedance reaches throughout the Gravel Mining 1 and Gravel Mining 2 reaches; and (7) chronic fragmentation and clearing of riparian vegetation for floodplain development. There are, however, numerous opportunities for improving or preserving channel and floodplain function within the corridor. These opportunities are briefly described below. Additional opportunities will undoubtedly be identified through the Stakeholder Group and Technical Advisory Committee coordination process. Additional opportunities and constraints will also likely be identified as this project is integrated with the results of the CDFG-MID chinook salmon study program, which will continue during Phase III.

Geomorphic and riparian vegetation issues that could be addressed by the restoration plan are summarized for each reach in Table 25. Opportunities and constraints for restoration in each reach are discussed below.

Table 25. Summary of Geomorphic and Riparian Vegetation Issues for Each Reach

Reach Name	Geomorphic and Riparian Issues
Dredger Tailings Reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of bed-mobilizing flows • Lack of coarse sediment supply • Conversion of floodplain to tailings • Channel confinement • Isolation and fragmentation of riparian stands and wetlands • Vegetation encroachment into the formerly active channel • Limited seedling establishment of cottonwood, valley oak, and other native riparian species • Risk of tree of heaven of invasion
Gravel Mining 1 Reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of bed-mobilizing flows • Lack of coarse sediment supply • Bedload transport impedance at in-channel pits • Risk of capture of floodplain pits • Bank revetment and resulting channel confinement and prevention of channel migration • Fragmentation of riparian vegetation by pits • Lack of seedling establishment sites on steep pit berms and revetted banks
Gravel Mining 2 Reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of bed-mobilizing flows • Lack of coarse sediment supply • Bedload transport impedance at in-channel pits • Channel incision and resulting floodplain isolation • Large volume of sand supplied from Dry Creek • Fragmentation of riparian vegetation by pits • Lack of seedling establishment sites on steep pit berms and revetted banks • Extensive invasion by eucalyptus (especially on Dry Creek and on the mainstem at Dry Creek confluence) • Giant reed established on revetted banks
Encroached Reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural development in the former floodplain and riparian corridor • Disconnection of the floodplain from the river by levees • Bank revetment and resulting prevention of channel migration • Elimination of vegetation successional patterns due to levees and bank revetment
Confluence Reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bank revetment limits channel migration, though to a lesser extent than in upstream reaches

Dredger Tailings Reach

In this reach, the channel is confined by dredger tailings and is scoured to bedrock or a coarse armor layer. In addition, floodplain functions are greatly reduced by conversion of the floodplain riparian corridor to tailing piles. Despite the coarseness of the substrate in this reach and the limited amount of suitable spawning substrates observed in the field, this reach is important for chinook salmon spawning. In recent redd surveys conducted by the CDFG, more than half of the redds observed in the river occurred in this reach (Table 26). During field surveys conducted in November 1999, numerous chinook salmon redds were observed in small depositional areas at the Snelling and Cuneo sites.

Table 26. Recent Fall Chinook Spawning Distribution in the Merced River

Reach	Redd Distribution ¹ (percent of redds observed)	
	1997 ²	1998 ³
Dredger Tailings	52	70
Gravel Mining 1	30	30
Gravel Mining 2	17	no survey
Encroached	no suitable habitat	no suitable habitat
Confluence	no suitable habitat	no suitable habitat

¹Based on peak redd counts. Surveys conducted by CDFG.

²Survey extended from RM 51.95 to RM 27.9.

³Survey extended from RM 51.95 to RM 32.1.

This reach has the potential to provide extensive chinook salmon spawning and rearing habitat as well as a six-mile-long contiguous riparian corridor. Opportunities for improving channel and floodplain function in this reach include: (1) re-creating the floodplain by removing tailings to an elevation appropriate for current flow conditions; and (2) adding coarse sediment to the channel that is sized to be mobile under current flow conditions. Coarse sediment would need to be added in two phases: a large transfusion to immediately increase gravel storage in this reach, and a long-term coarse sediment augmentation program to maintain storage after high flows. These actions would provide the geomorphic benefits of increasing the frequency of bed mobilization, balancing sediment transport capacity with sediment supply, increasing channel complexity, and creating a functional floodplain with a self-sustaining, diverse riparian corridor. In addition, if properly implemented on a large scale, these actions could increase flood attenuation and reduce flooding risk downstream. A possible constraint to this type of project is the potential for debris from vegetation on restored floodplains to get lodged at the Snelling Road bridge during flood events.

In Phase III of this project, Stillwater Sciences will use a reach-scale bedload transport model to develop restoration project design guidelines and evaluate the potential effects of gravel augmentation projects in this reach. The reach-scale model will predict: (1) coarse sediment transport competence and capacity based on channel morphology and flow magnitude; and (2) bed texture based on the texture of the coarse sediment added to the river by an augmentation program. In addition, the model will allow the user to vary sediment supply volume, sediment texture, peak flow regime, and channel cross section to evaluate the resulting transport rates, incipient motion thresholds, and bed texture. Although there are inherent uncertainties in numerical modeling, this approach will provide a means to conduct predictive exercises and to make quantitative forecasts for different sediment management options and to test these predictions during post-implementation monitoring.

Gravel Mining 1 Reach

The primary issue in this reach is the presence of in-channel mining pits that intercept bedload and likely provide habitat for largemouth bass. Based on studies conducted in the Tuolumne River (TID/MID 1991a, 1991b), captured and in-channel pits are thought to provide suitable habitat for largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*), which prey on juvenile salmon and can significantly reduce survival of chinook salmon smolts emigrating from the river. In an effort to reduce bass habitat in the Tuolumne River, the

Tuolumne River Technical Advisory Committee is implementing projects to reconstruct the channel and floodplain through two large, in-channel aggregate pits. Bass abundance and salmon survival are currently being monitored at the Tuolumne River pits to assess the restoration project's success at reducing predator abundance and increasing salmon survival (Stillwater Sciences 1999, 2000; McBain and Trush and Stillwater Sciences 1999, 2000). Large numbers of largemouth bass may also reside in the in-channel pits in the Merced River, and predation by largemouth bass may be an important factor limiting chinook salmon production from the Merced River. This hypothesis, however, has not been tested, and the factors limiting chinook salmon production in the Merced River have not been identified.

Another potential restoration opportunity in this reach is the eradication or management of non-native vegetation, particularly eucalyptus along Dry Creek and on the Merced River mainstem near the Dry Creek confluence. Because the trees in this stand are mature, eradication efforts would likely require vegetation removal and replanting with native species. Under the current flow regime, it is unlikely that the floodplain surfaces in this reach will be sufficiently inundated to promote recruitment by native species. A potential constraint to eucalyptus removal along Dry Creek may be the vulnerability of the banks to erosion. Still, vegetation removal and replanting could potentially be conducted along the Merced River, and the lack of large eucalyptus patches downstream of the Dry Creek confluence suggests that vegetative recolonization from upstream sites may not be a serious threat if eucalyptus patches remained on Dry Creek. Large eucalyptus trees, however, can also provide important rookery habitat for herons and egrets. Any eucalyptus eradication or management program included in the restoration plan would need to address these values and ensure that heron and egret rookeries and potential rookery sites are not adversely affected.

Gravel Mining 2 Reach

The primary issues in this reach are channel incision and the presence of in-channel mining pits. Landowners in the upper half of this reach have expressed interest in and support for restoring in-channel and terrace mining pits. As in the Gravel Mining 1 Reach, elimination of these pits could provide the benefits of: (1) eliminating bedload impedance reaches; (2) increasing channel complexity; (3) balancing bedload transport capacity with bedload supply; and (4) restoring floodplain function and a diverse riparian corridor. These projects would also likely reduce suitable habitat for largemouth bass and thus increase chinook salmon production from the river.

Encroachment Reach

The primary issues in this reach are elimination of channel migration and disconnection of the river channel from its floodplain caused by levee construction and bank revetment. Opportunities for restoring these functions in this reach are extremely limited due to the conversion of the floodplain to agricultural land uses, which limit the river-floodplain corridor to approximate 250 feet in width. Increasing floodplain connectivity and reinitiating channel migration in this reach would need to be supported by a voluntary easement program that would compensate landowners who choose to participate in restoration project. Interest among landowners in participating in these types of easements and related economic issues has not been assessed.

Confluence Reach

This reach provides some of the largest and most contiguous patches of floodplain and riparian habitat in the corridor. The major issue in this reach is the presence of revetment that limits channel migration at some locations. This reach provides excellent opportunity for preservation of floodplain and riparian habitats. The Stevinson Corporation is pursuing conservation easements on approximately 500 acres of its land at the mouth of the river, and more land may be put under easement in the future. In addition, revetment could be removed from appropriate locations to reinitiate channel migration, where feasible.

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FIGURES

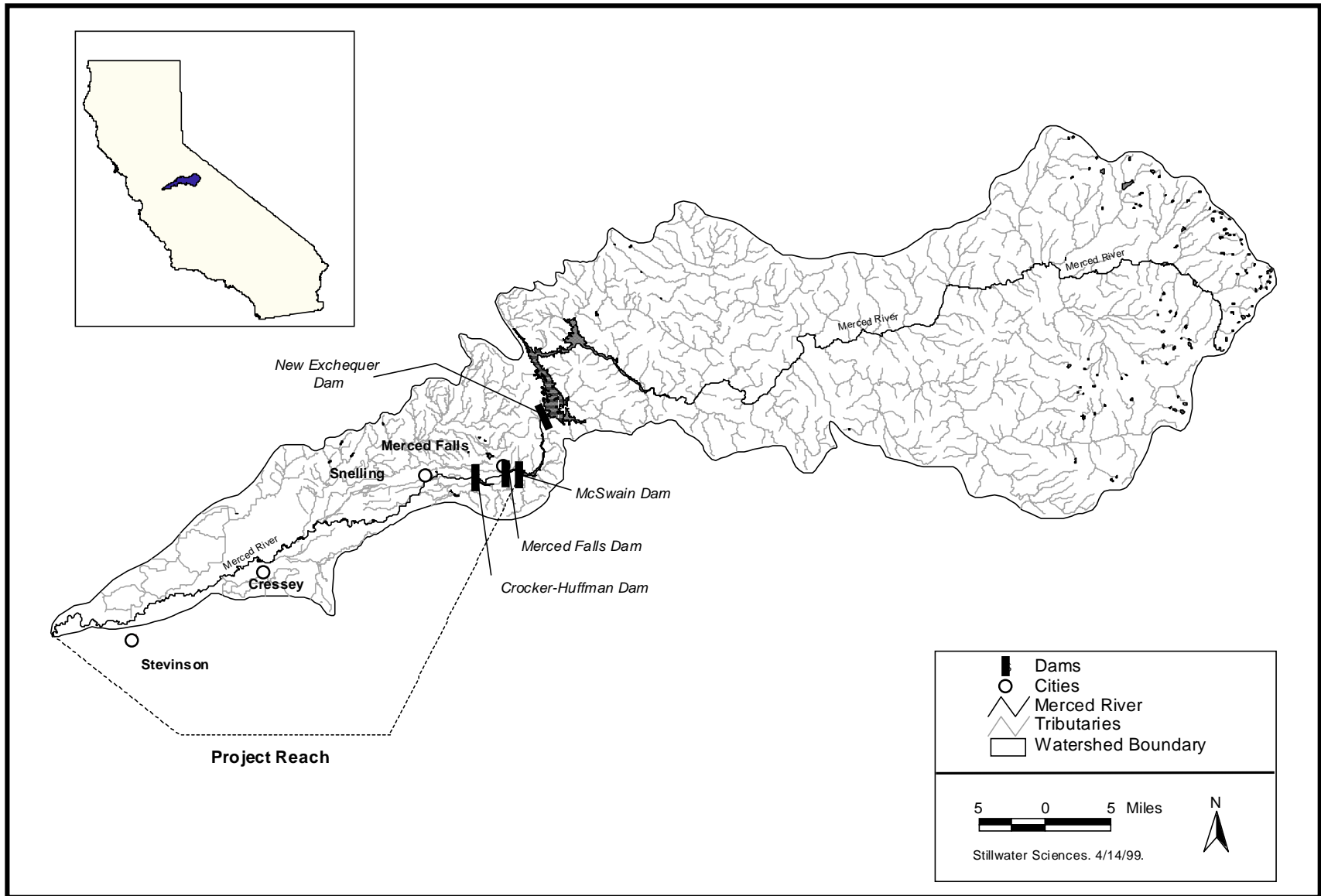


Figure 1.1-1. The Merced River watershed and project reach.

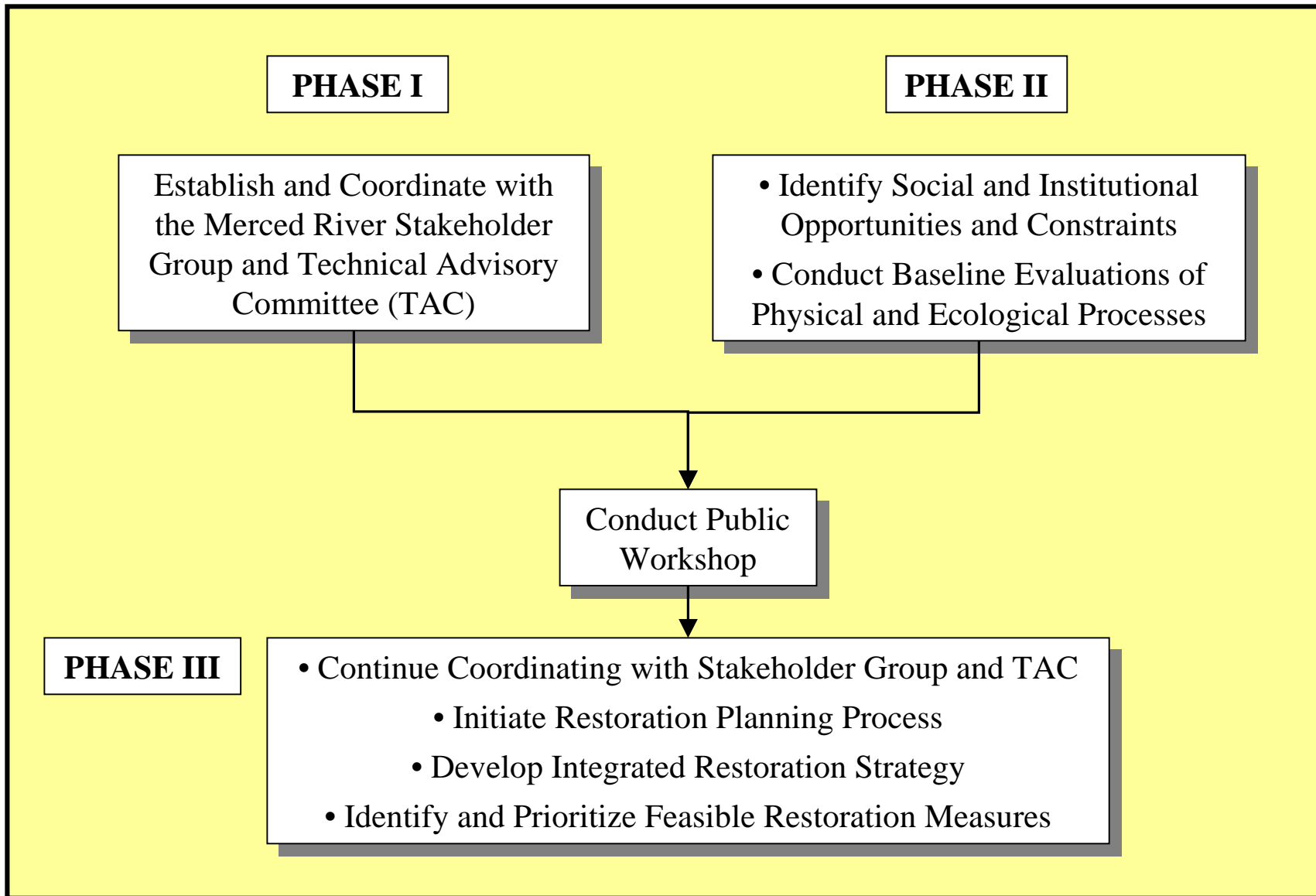


Figure 1.1-2. Merced River project phases.

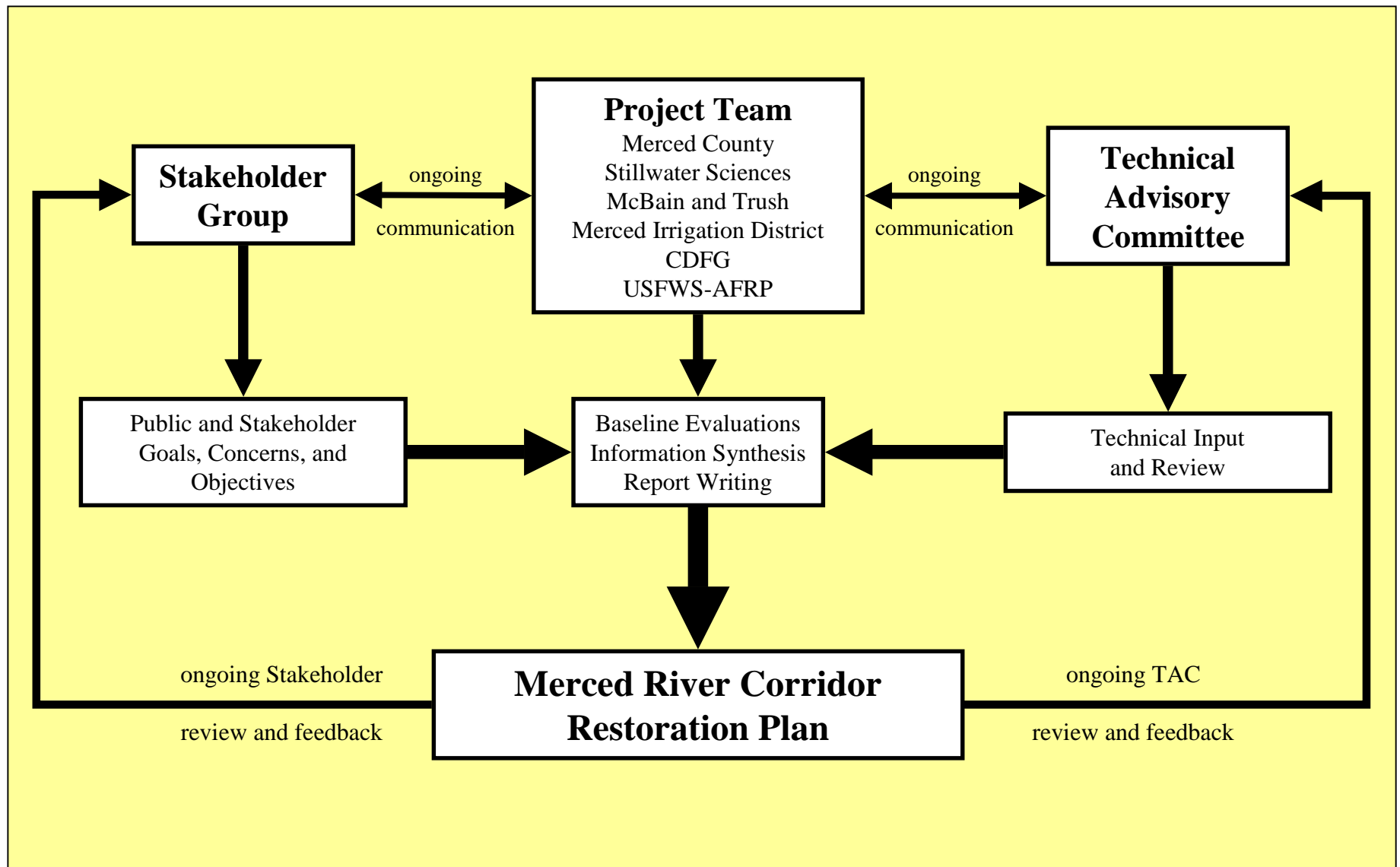


Figure 1.1-3. Merced River corridor restoration plan participants and roles.

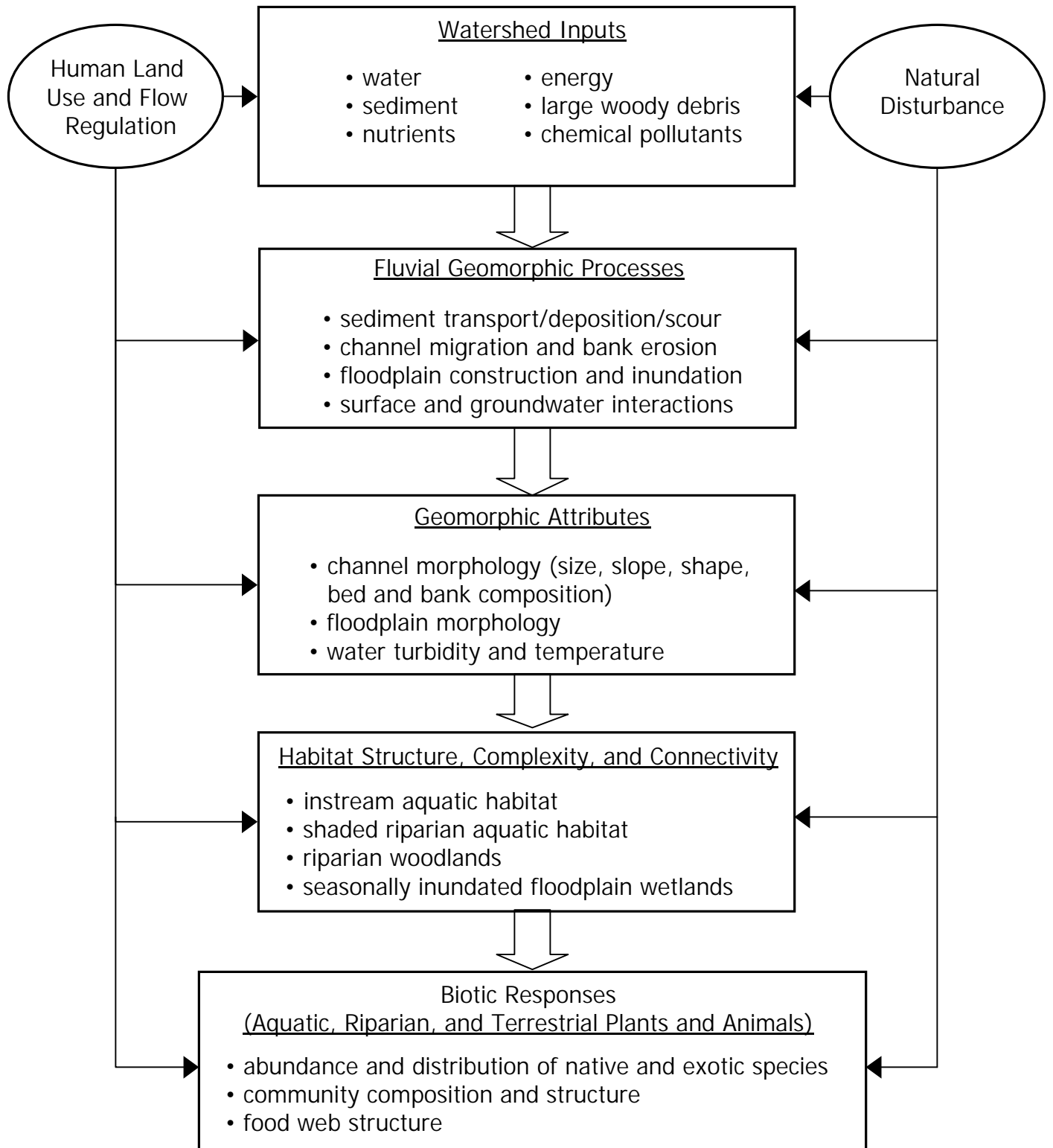


Figure 2-1. A simplified conceptual model of the physical and ecological linkages in alluvial river-floodplain systems.

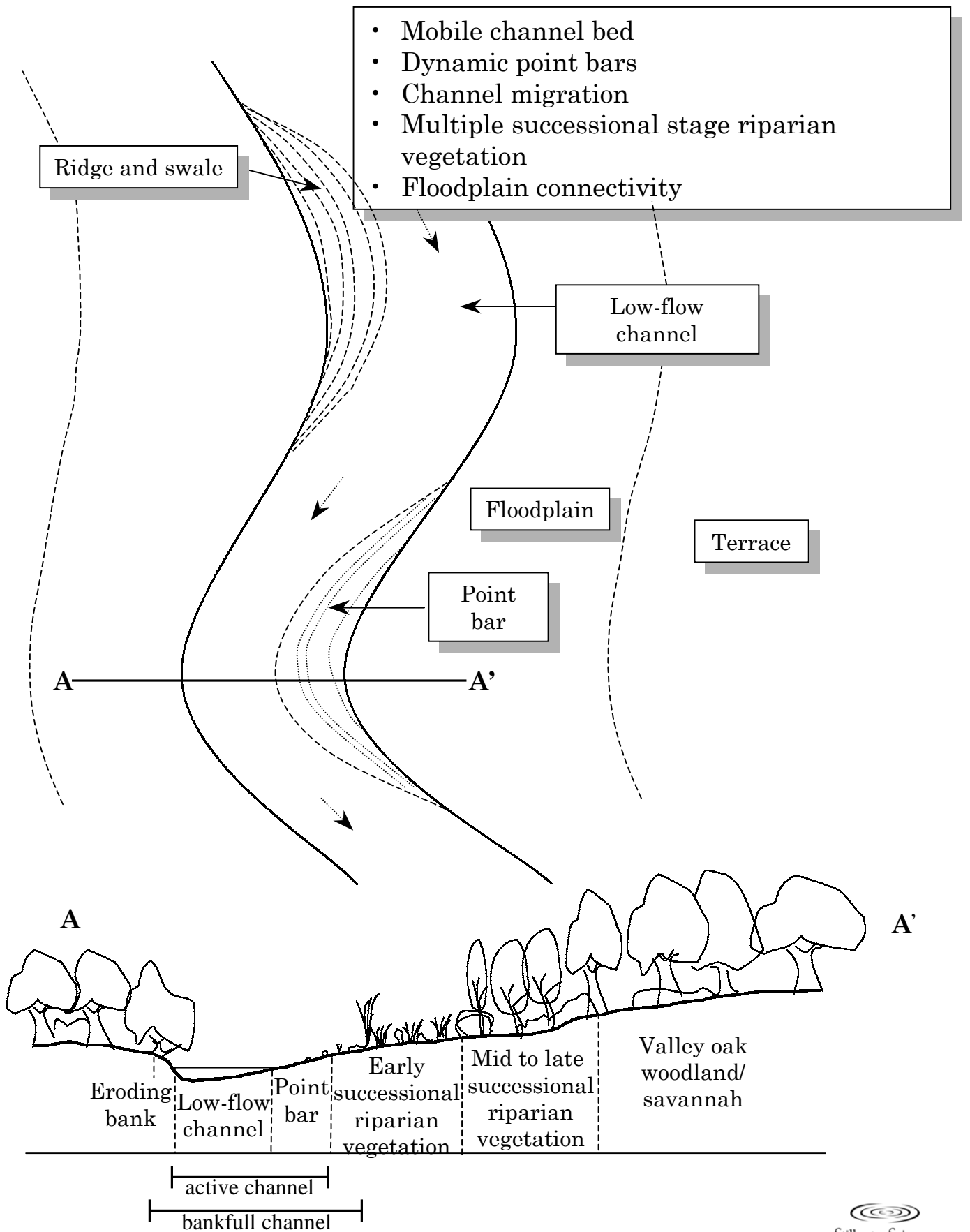


Figure 2-2. Conceptual diagram of a “healthy” alluvial river system.

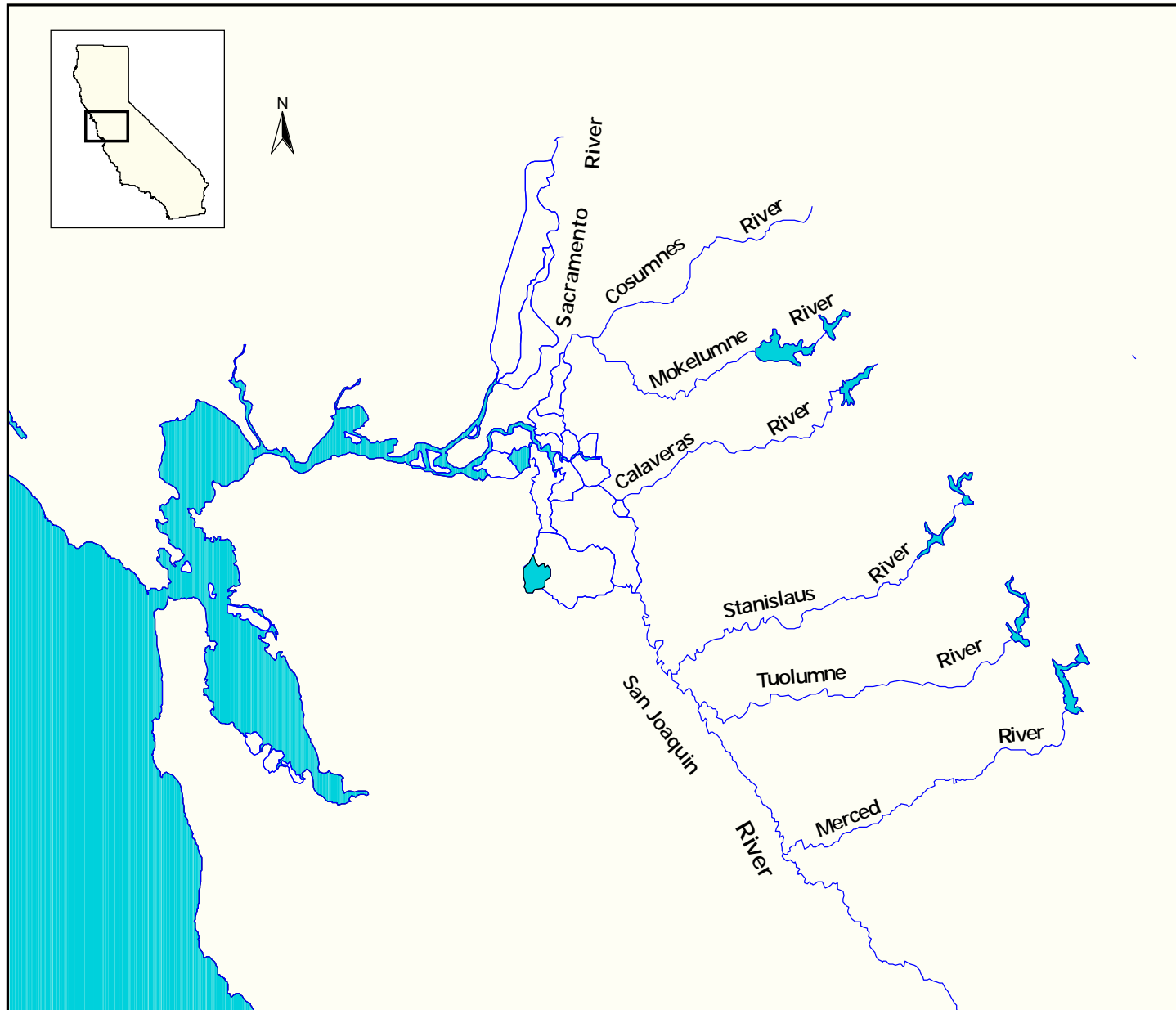


Figure 3.1-1. San Joaquin River tributaries vicinity map.

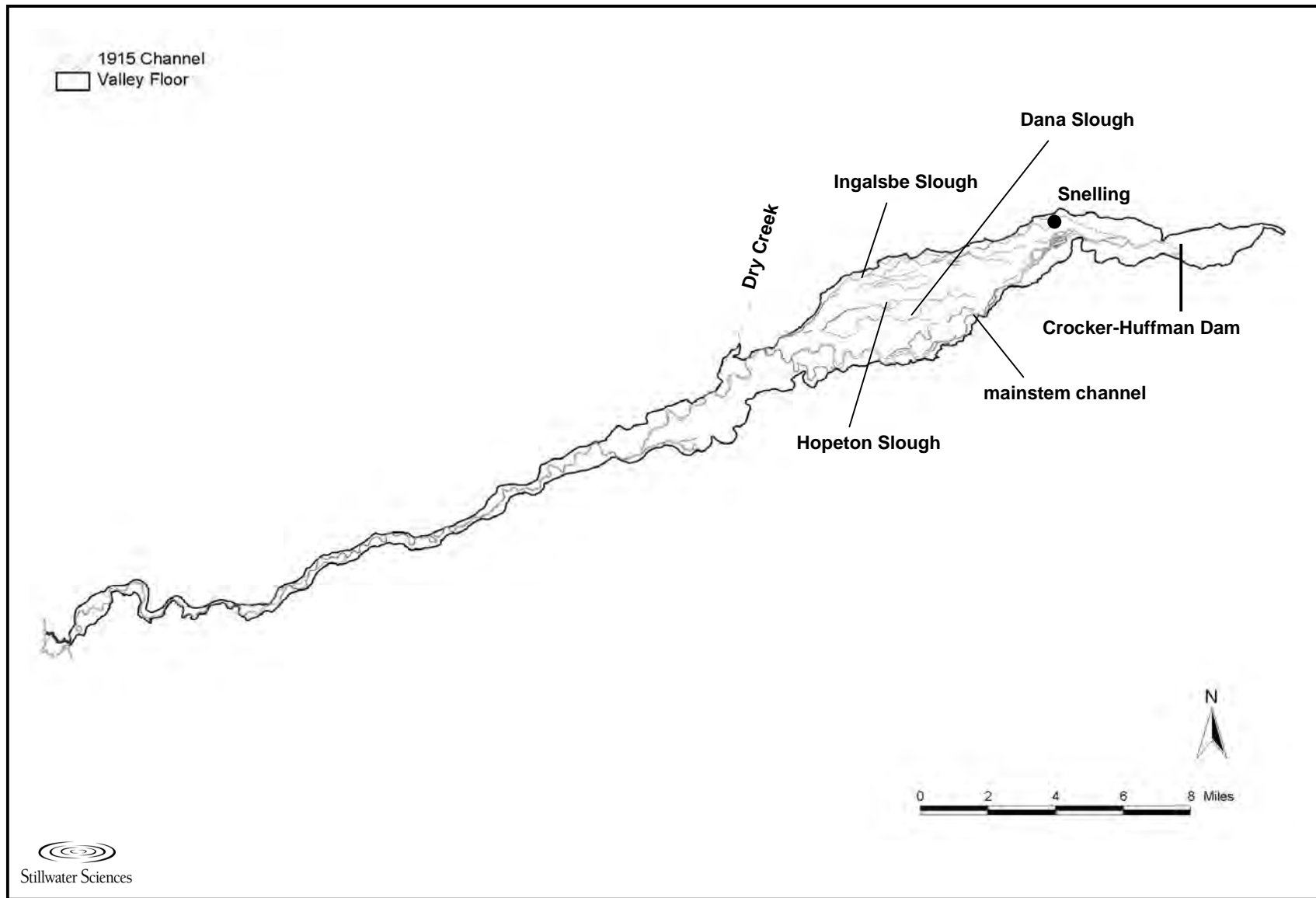


Figure 3.1-2. Merced River alluvial valley floor boundary and 1915 channel alignment.

(The alluvial valley floor was identified and digitized using geologic maps and 1:24,000-scale topographic maps. The 1915 channel alignment was digitized from historical 1:31,680-scale topographic maps.)

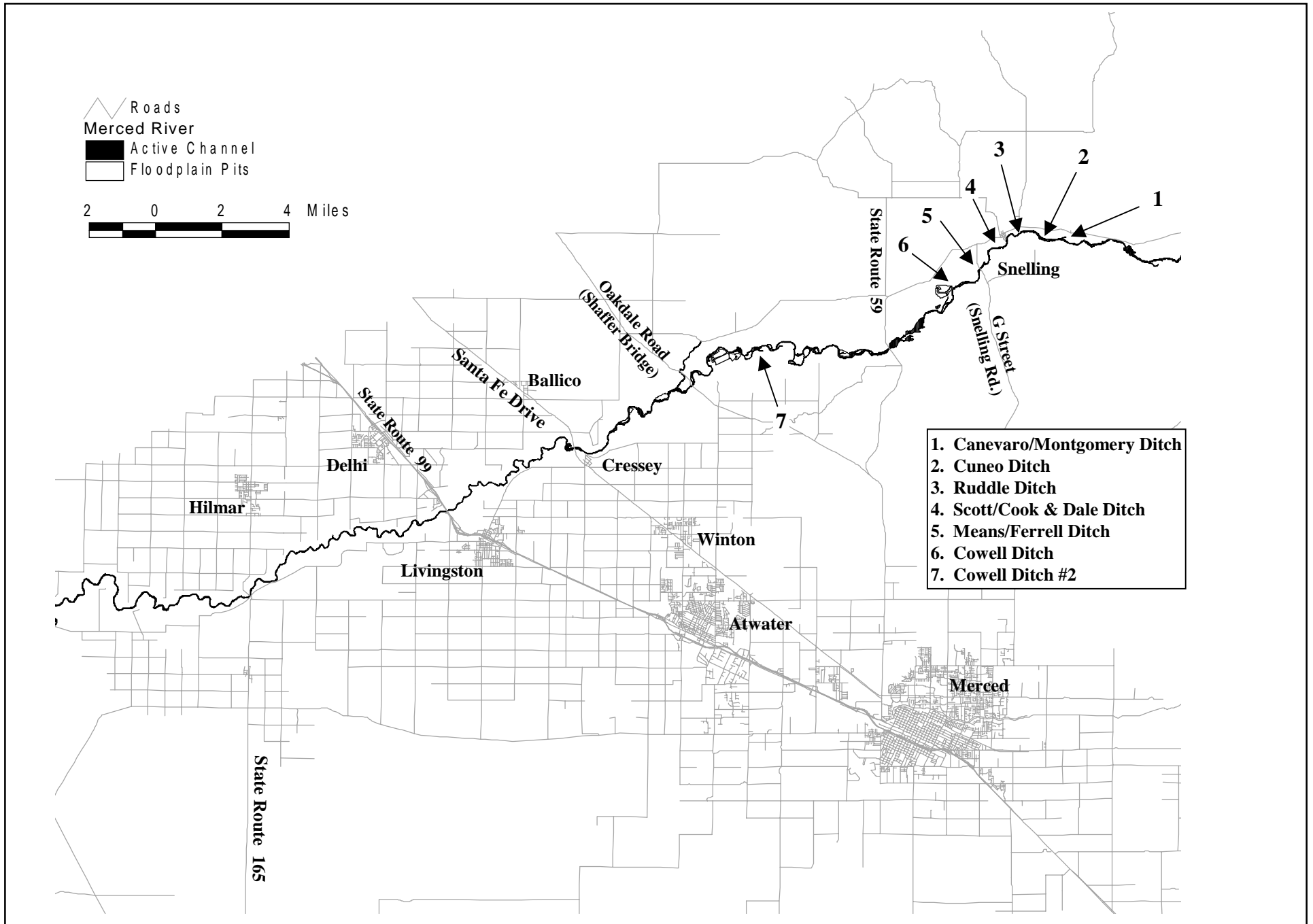


Figure 3.1-3. Merced River riparian water diversions.

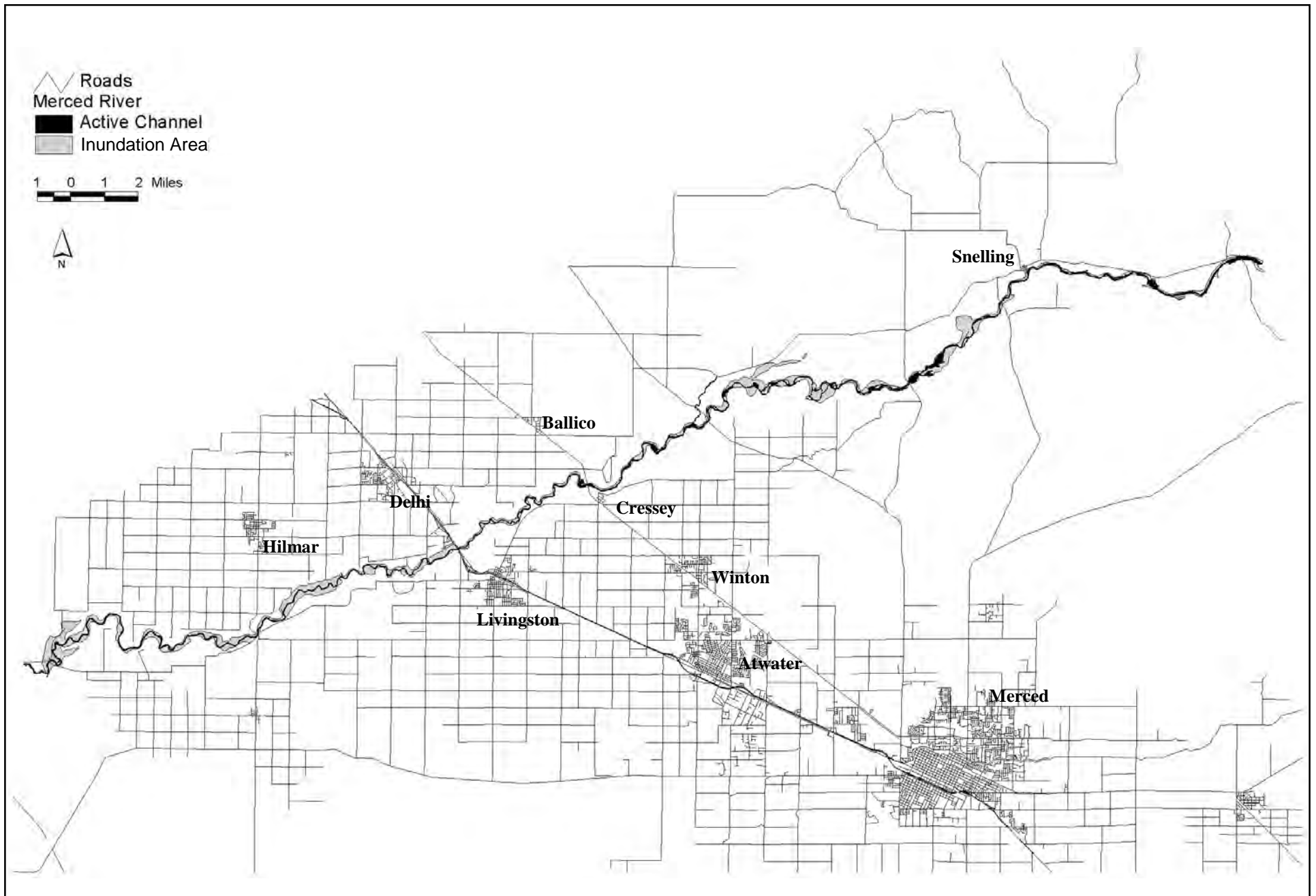


Figure 3.2-1. Area inundated by January 1997 flood.

(Source: Corps of Engineers, unpublished data)

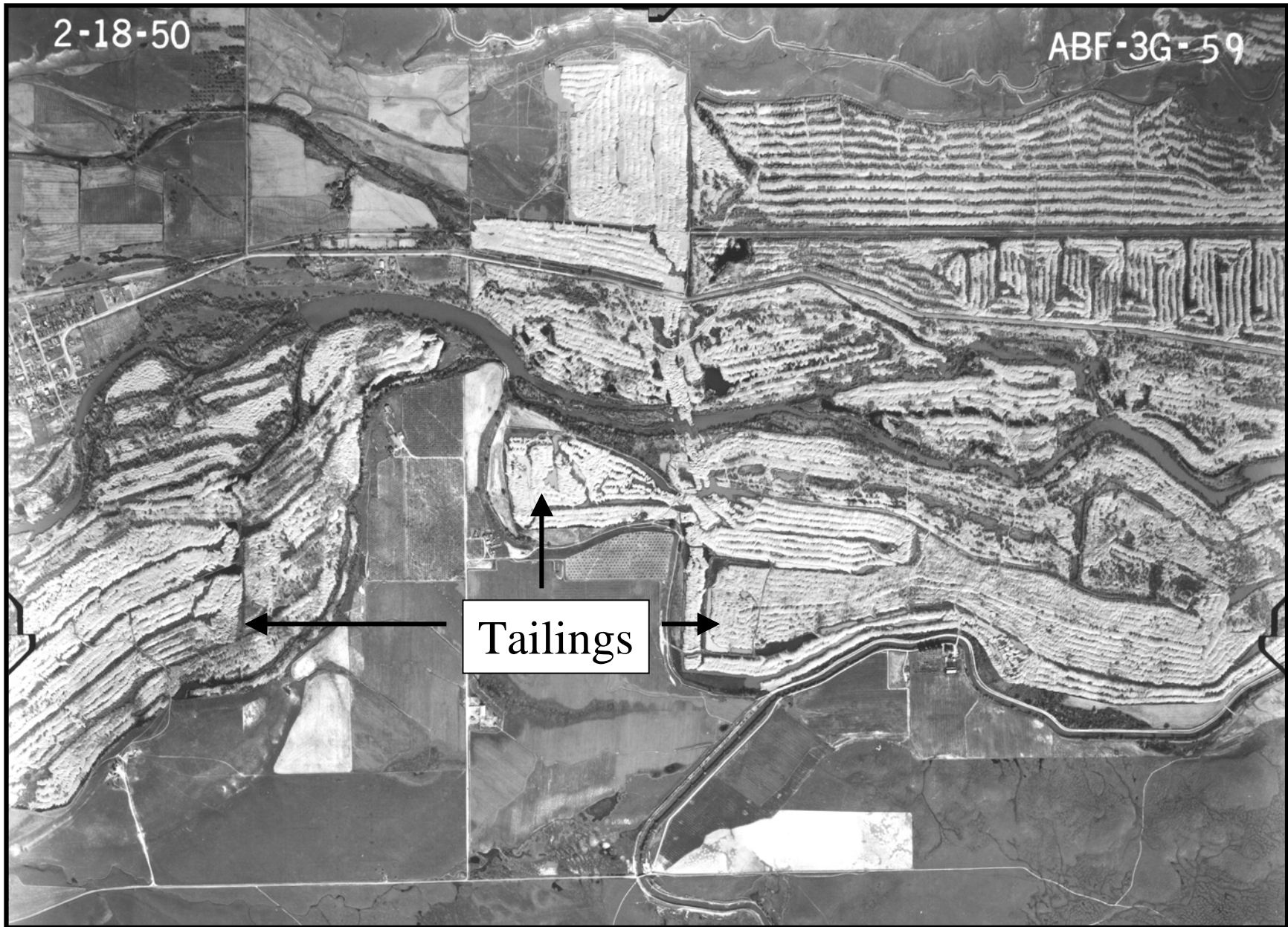


Figure 3.2-2. Dredger tailings in the Snelling vicinity.
(photograph: Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service 1950)

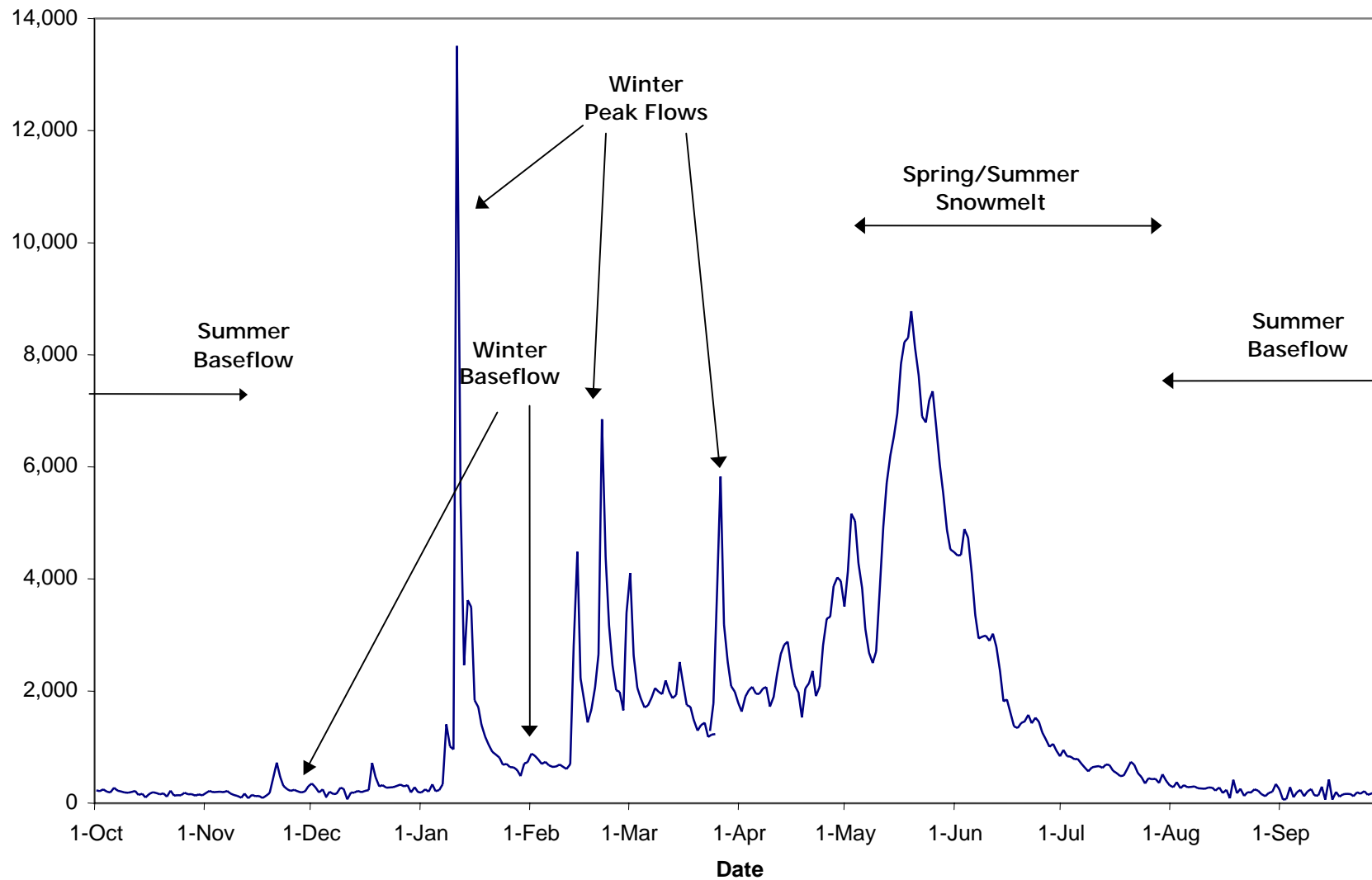


Figure 4.1-1. Hydrograph components for unregulated flow conditions in the Merced River.
 (Hydrograph shown is estimated inflow to Lake McClure for water year 1979, representative of a median water year.)
 (source: Merced Irrigation District)

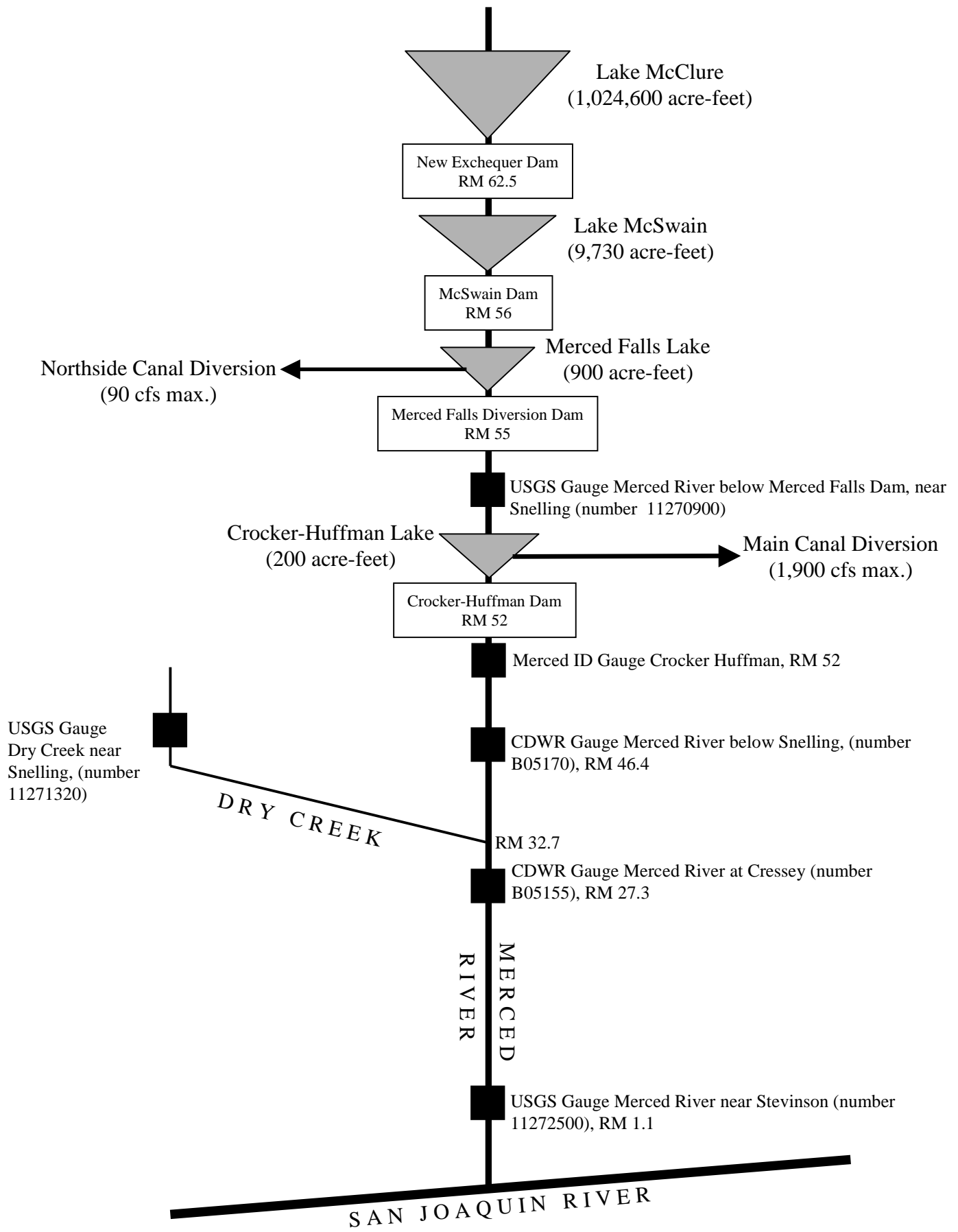


Figure 4.2-1. Schematic diagram of Merced River dams, reservoirs, diversions and flow gauges.

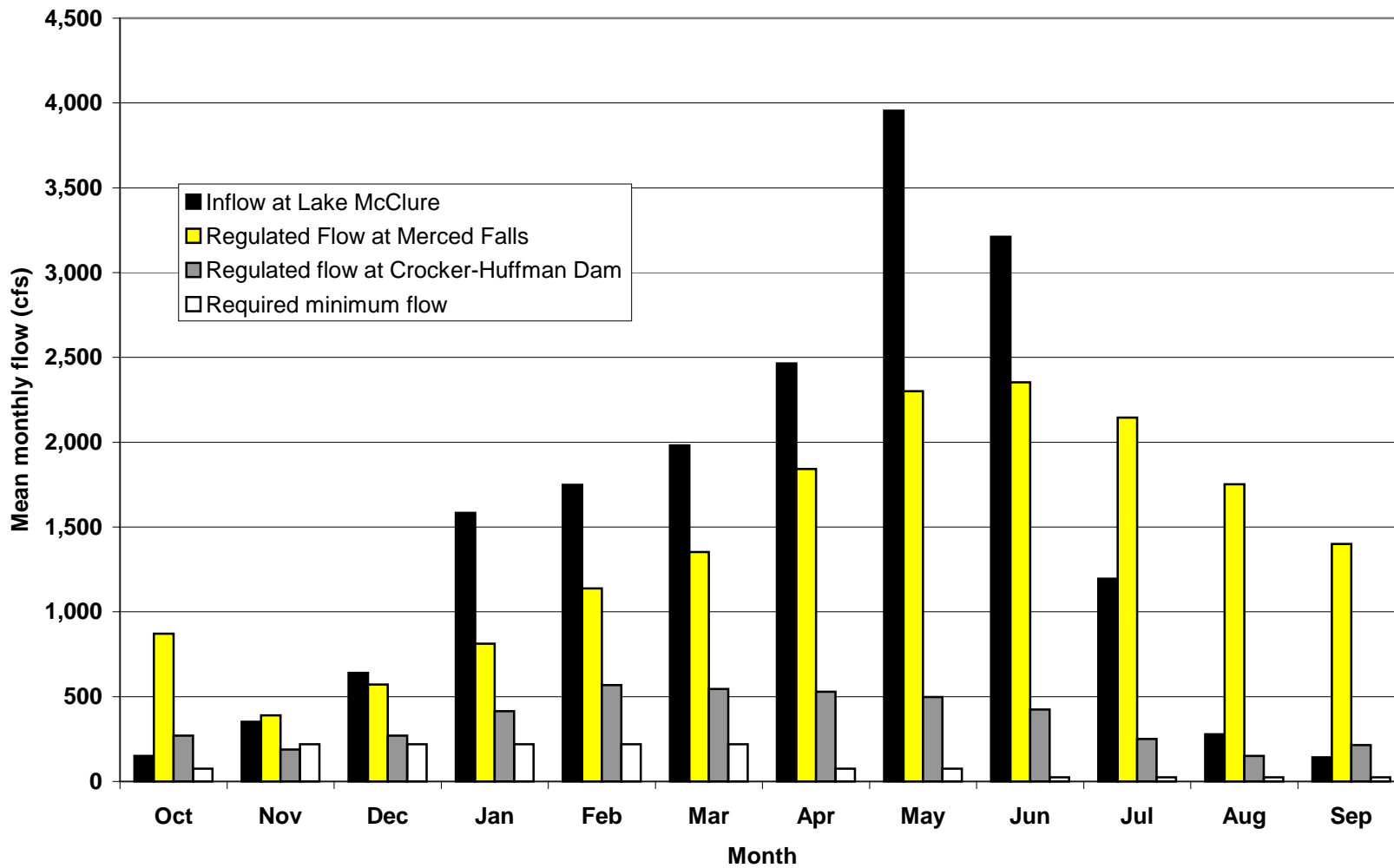


Figure 4.2-2. Unregulated and regulated monthly average flow in the lower Merced River (1968–1998).

Note: Minimum flow requirements represent FERC requirements for normal water years between April and October, and higher minimum flows required by the Davis-Grunsky contract from November through March.

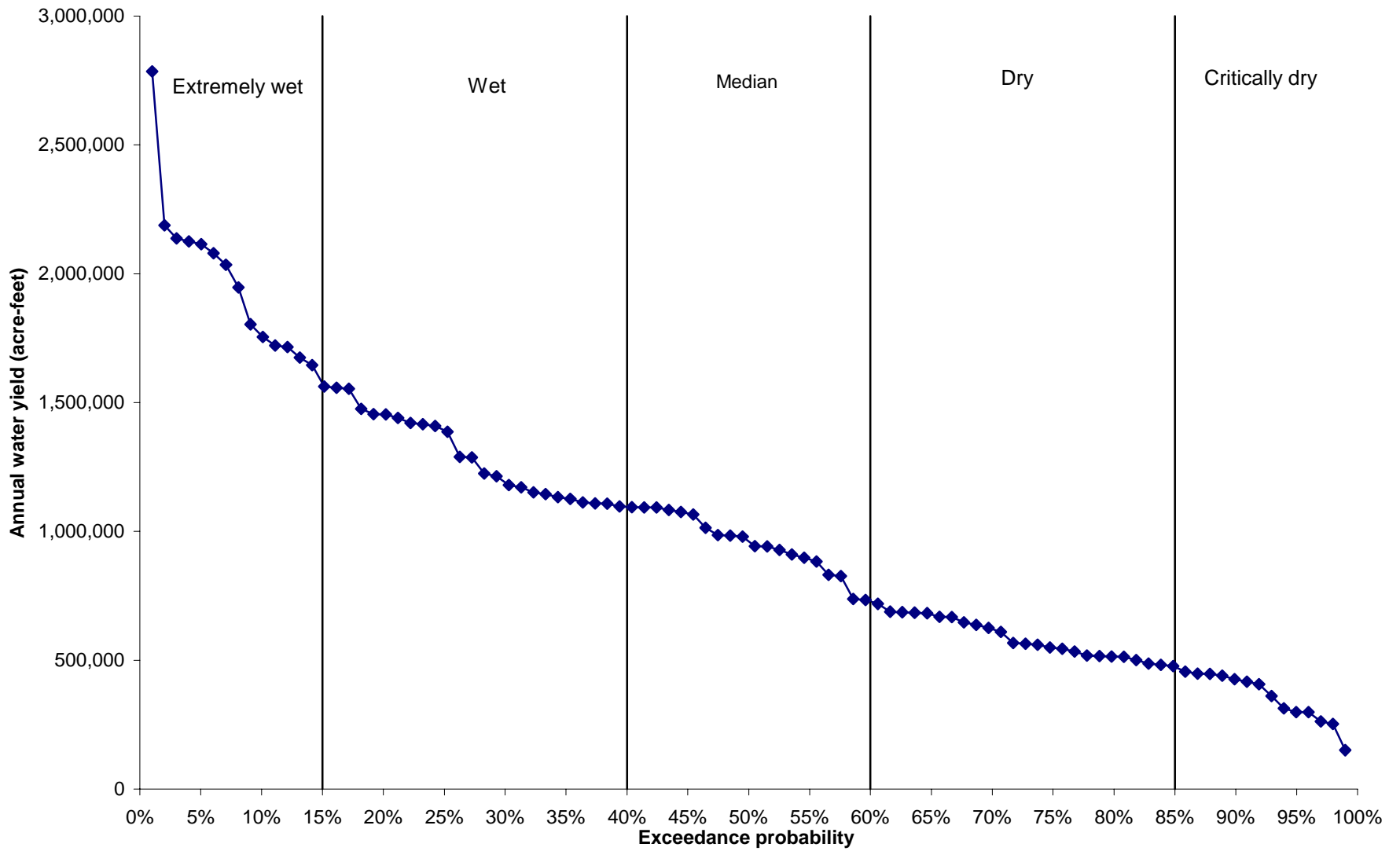


Figure 4.2-3. Cumulative plot of ranked annual water yields from the Merced River (1902–1998).

(source: Merced Irrigation District)

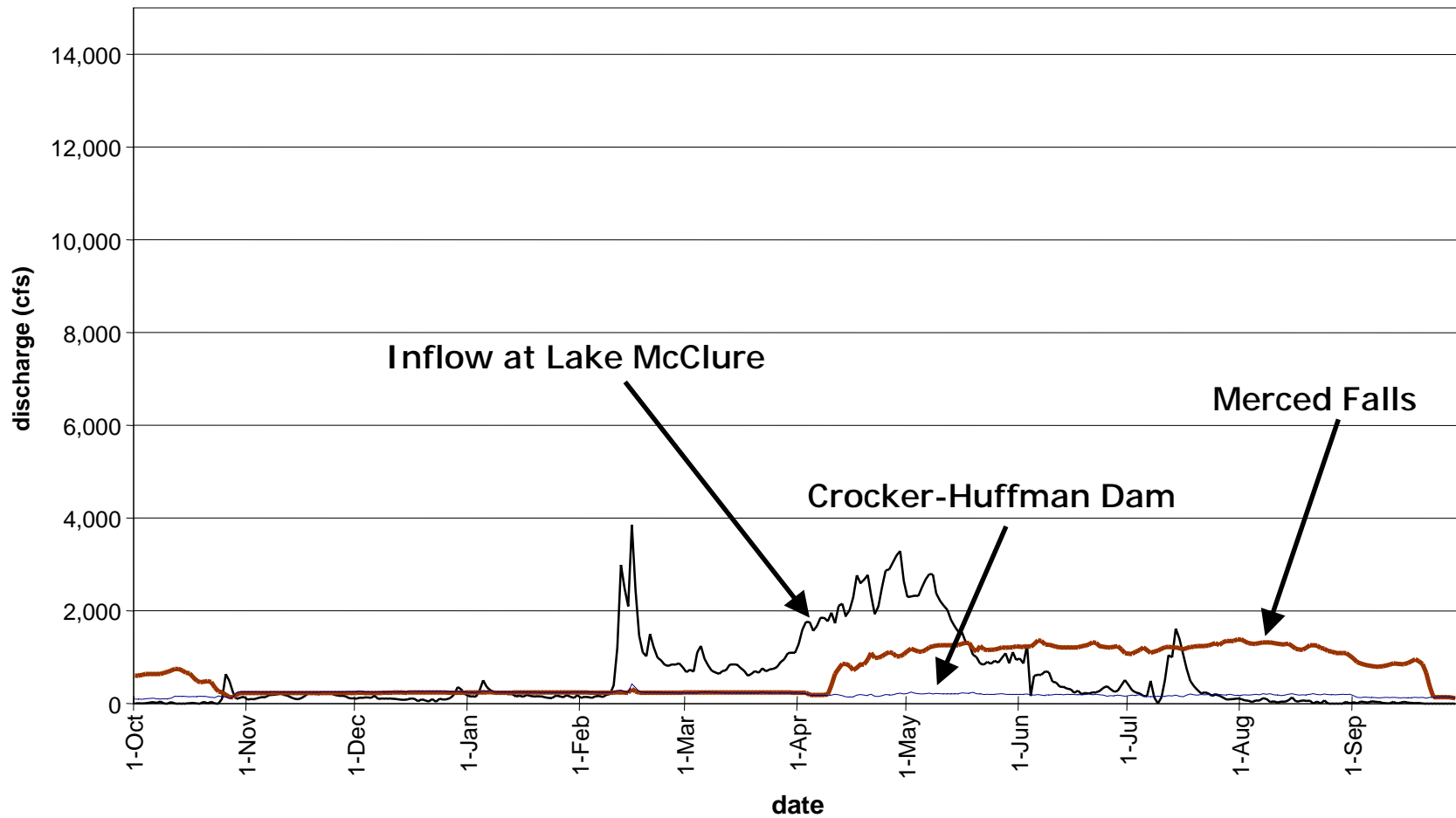


Figure 4.2-4A. Annual hydrographs of inflow to Lake McClure and flow at Merced Falls and Crocker-Huffman Dam for a critically dry year (water year 1992).

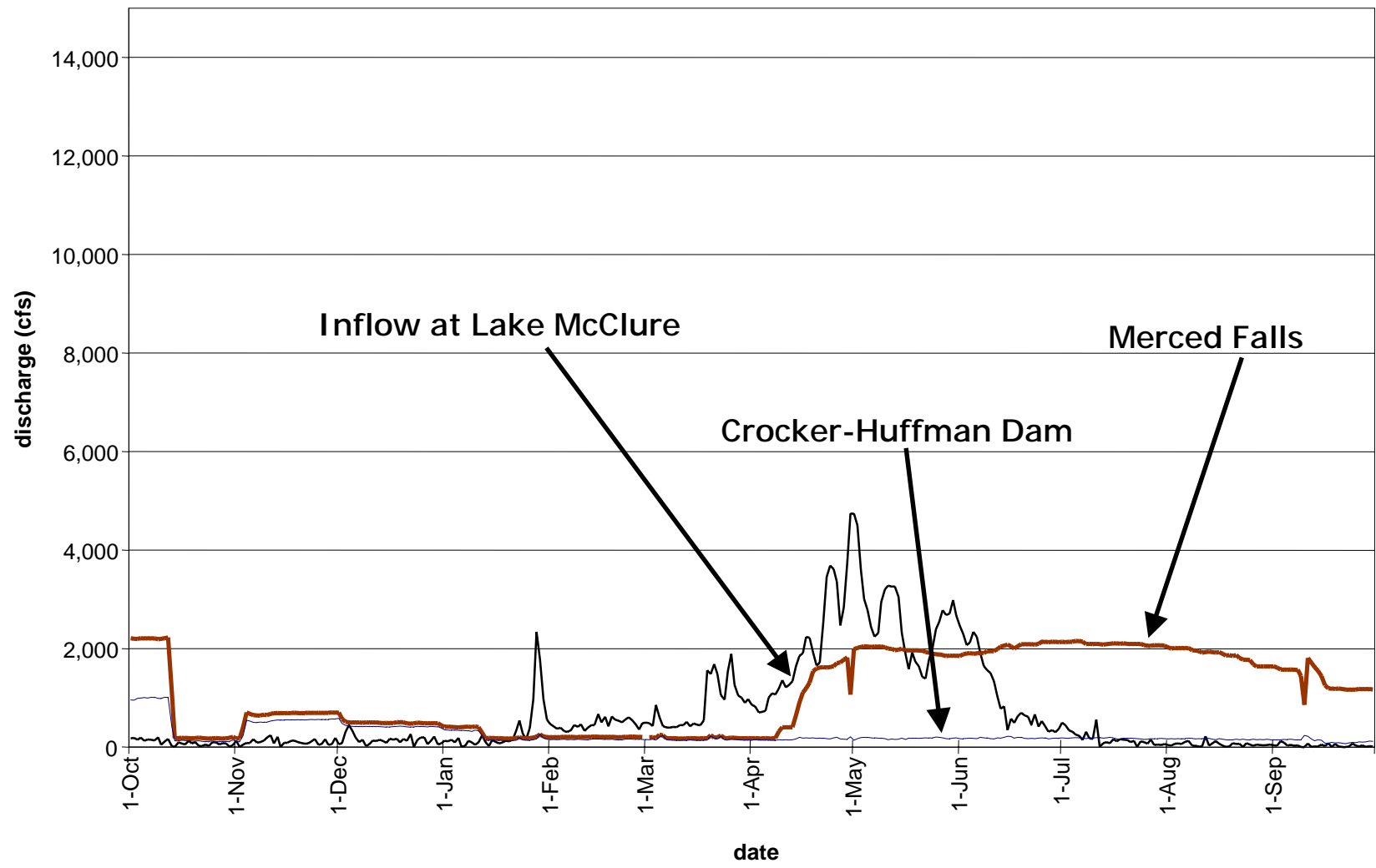


Figure 4.2-4B. Annual hydrographs of inflow to Lake McClure and flow at Merced Falls and Crocker-Huffman Dam for a dry year (water year 1981).

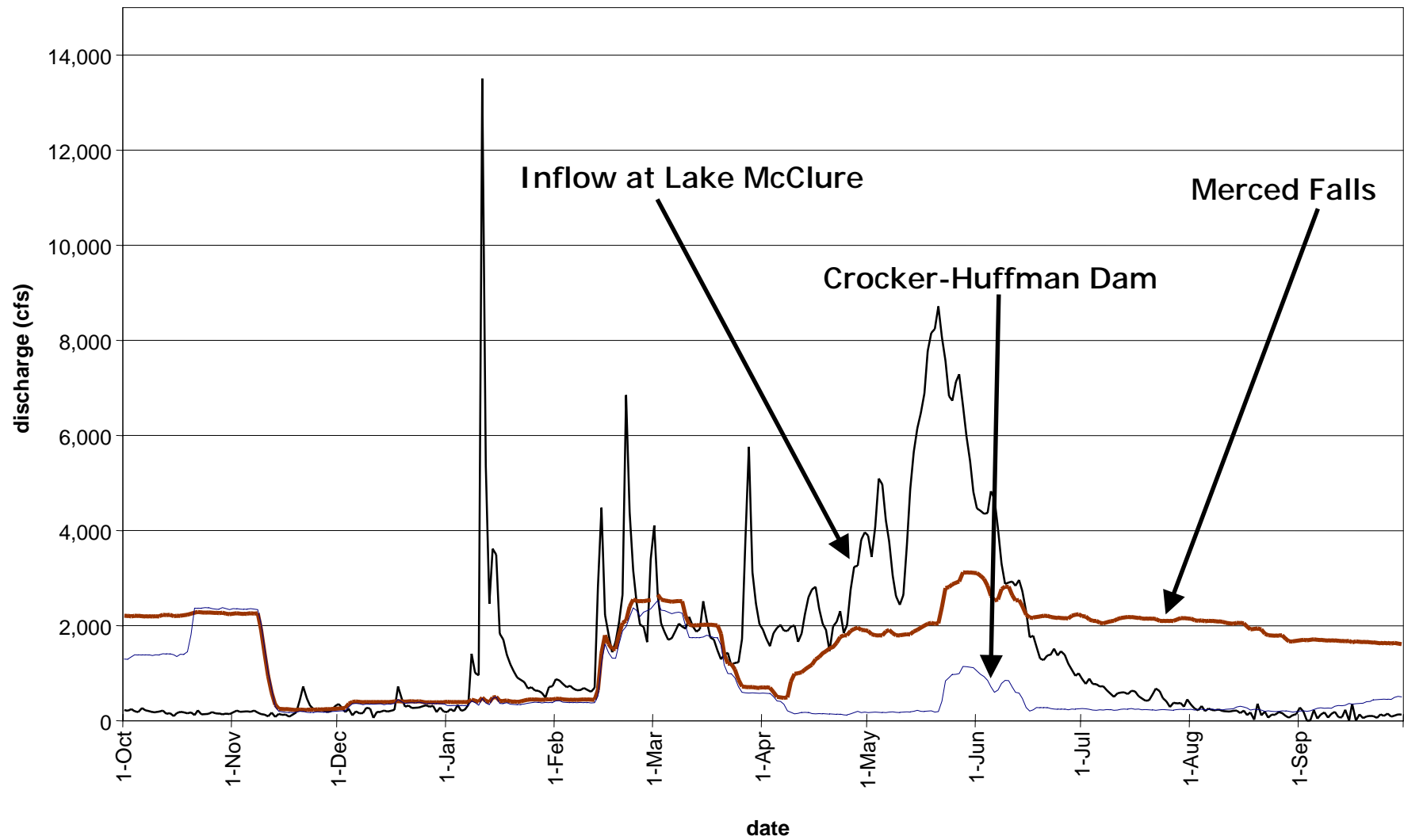


Figure 4.2-4C. Annual hydrographs of inflow to Lake McClure and flow at Merced Falls and Crocker-Huffman Dam for a median year (water year 1979).

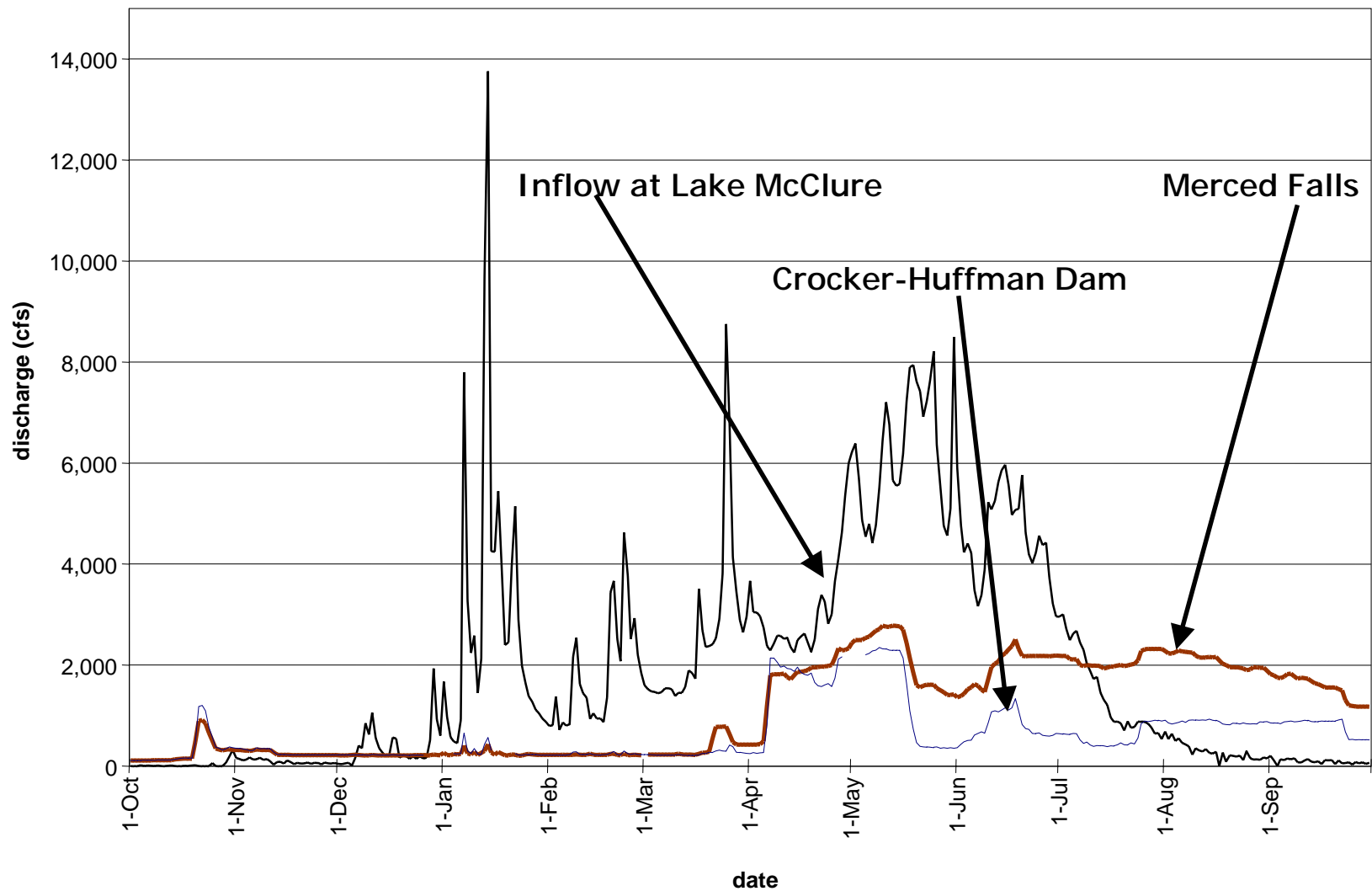


Figure 4.2-4D. Annual hydrographs of inflow to Lake McClure and flow at Merced Falls and Crocker-Huffman Dam for a wet year (water year 1993).

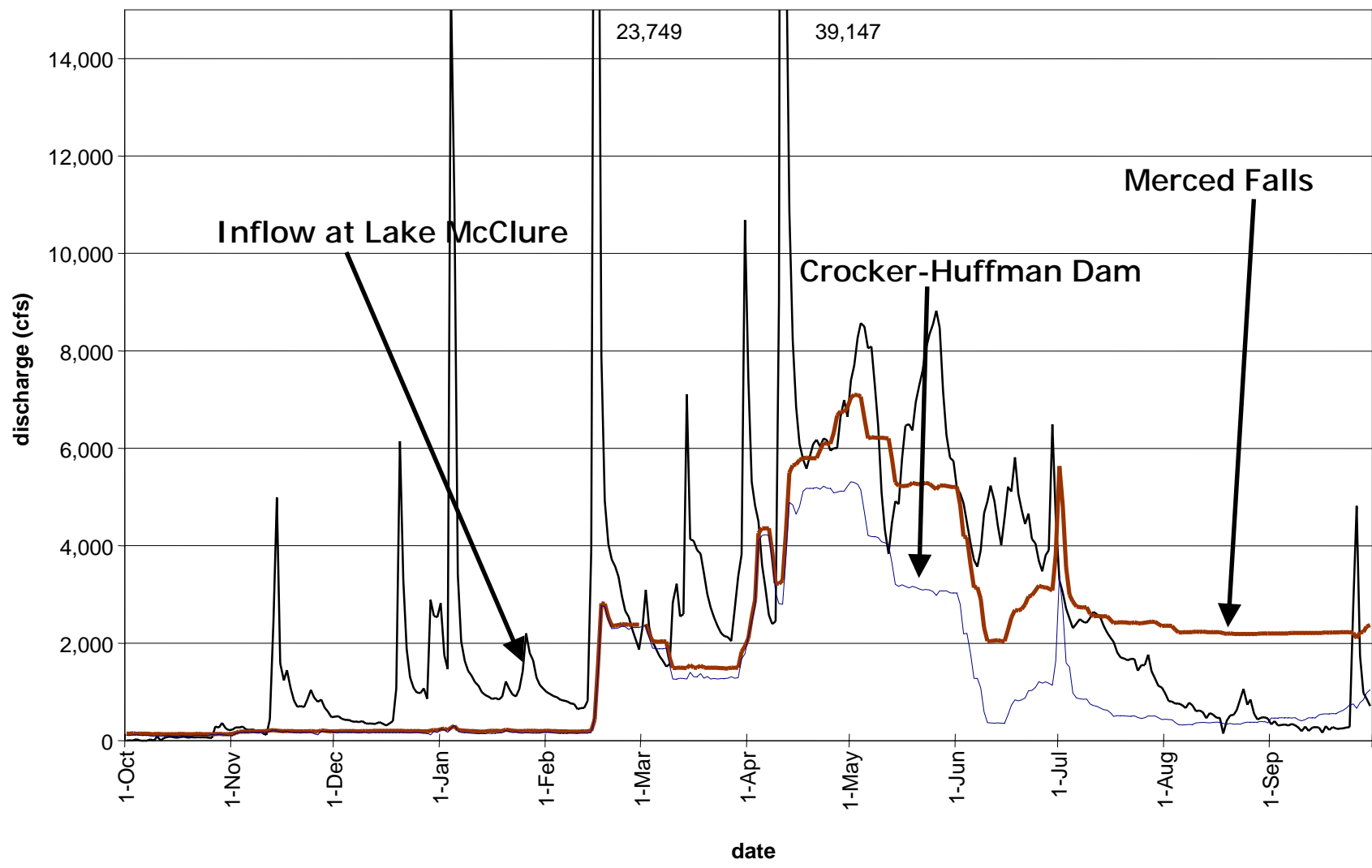


Figure 4.2-4E. Annual hydrographs of inflow to Lake McClure and flow at Merced Falls and Crocker-Huffman Dam for an extremely wet year (water year 1982).

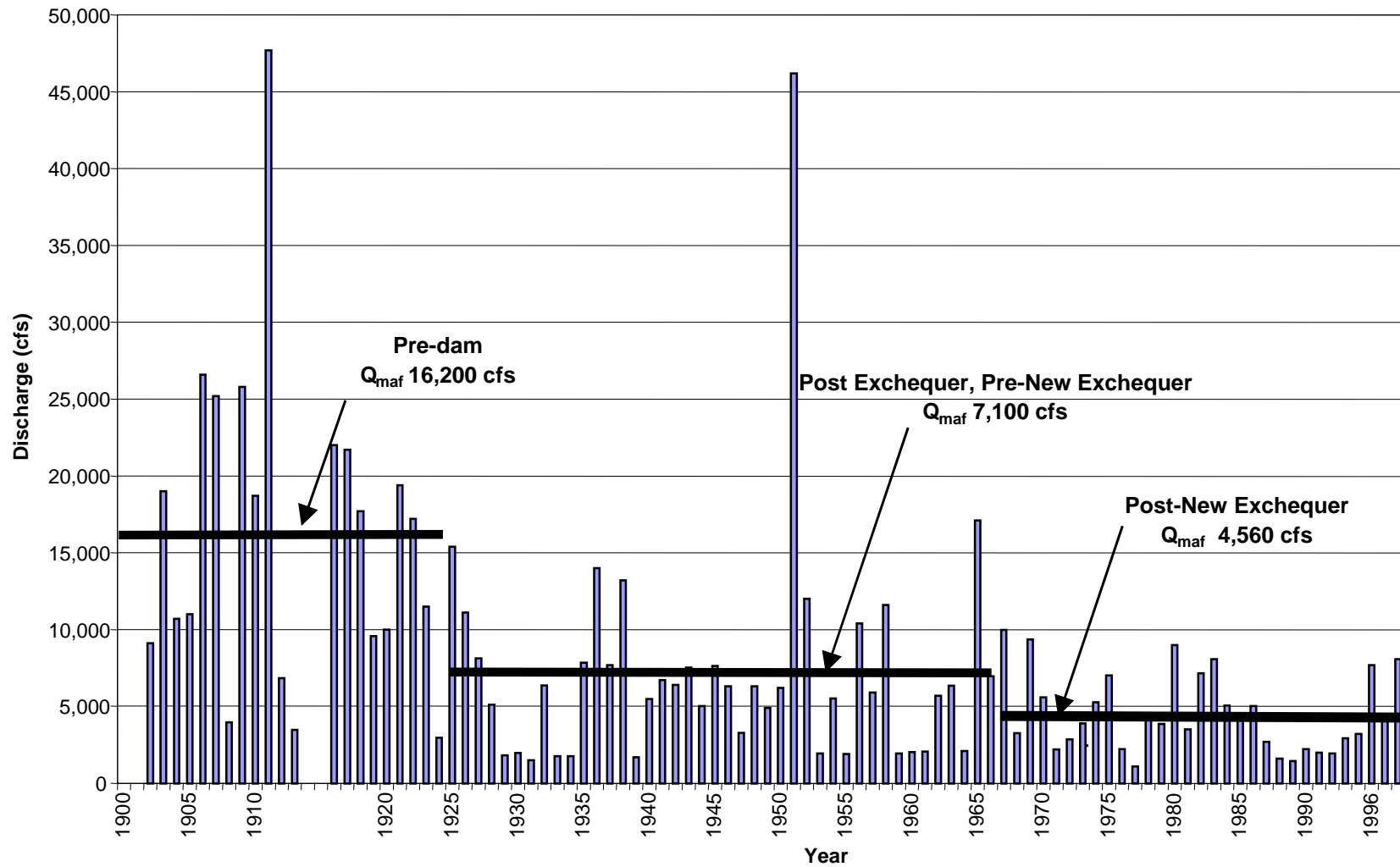


Figure 4.3-1. Maximum instantaneous flows at the Exchequer (1902–1967) and Merced Falls (1968–1998) gauges.
 (source: USGS gauge numbers 11270000 and 11270900, respectively)

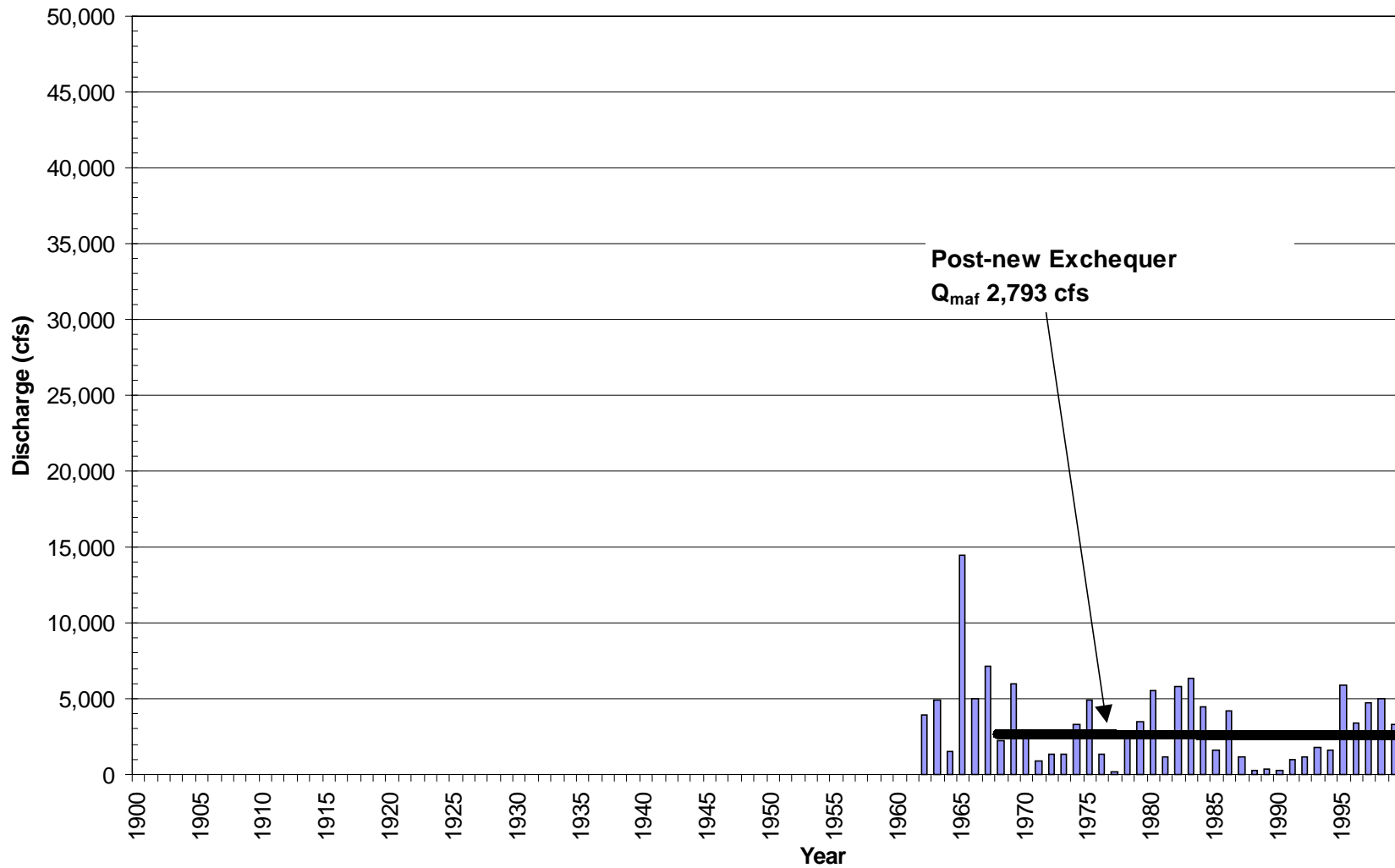


Figure 4.3-2. Maximum instantaneous flows at the Snelling gauge (1962–1998).
 (source: CDWR Gauge Merced River below Snelling, B05170)

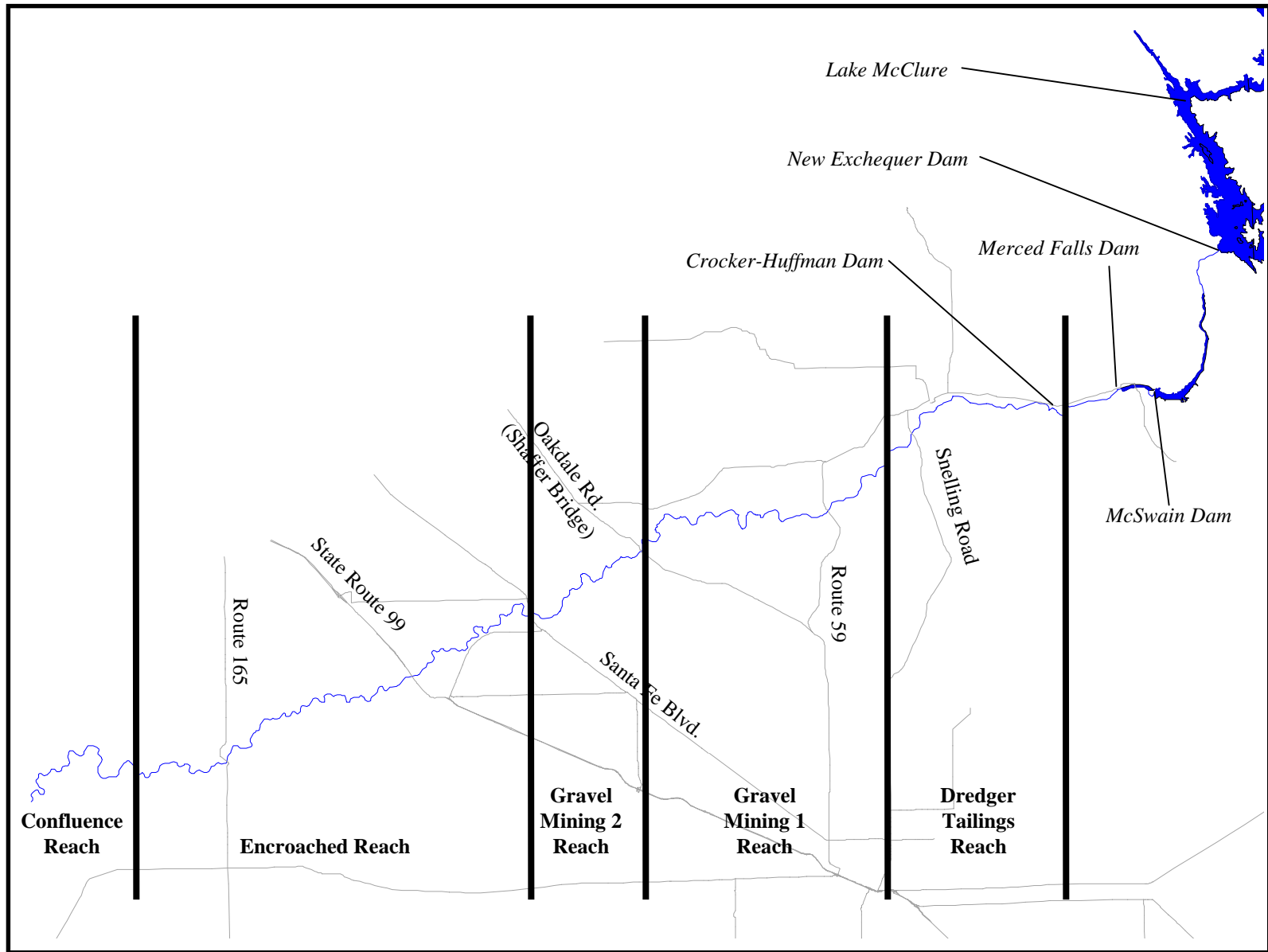


Figure 5.1-1. Merced River reaches delineation.

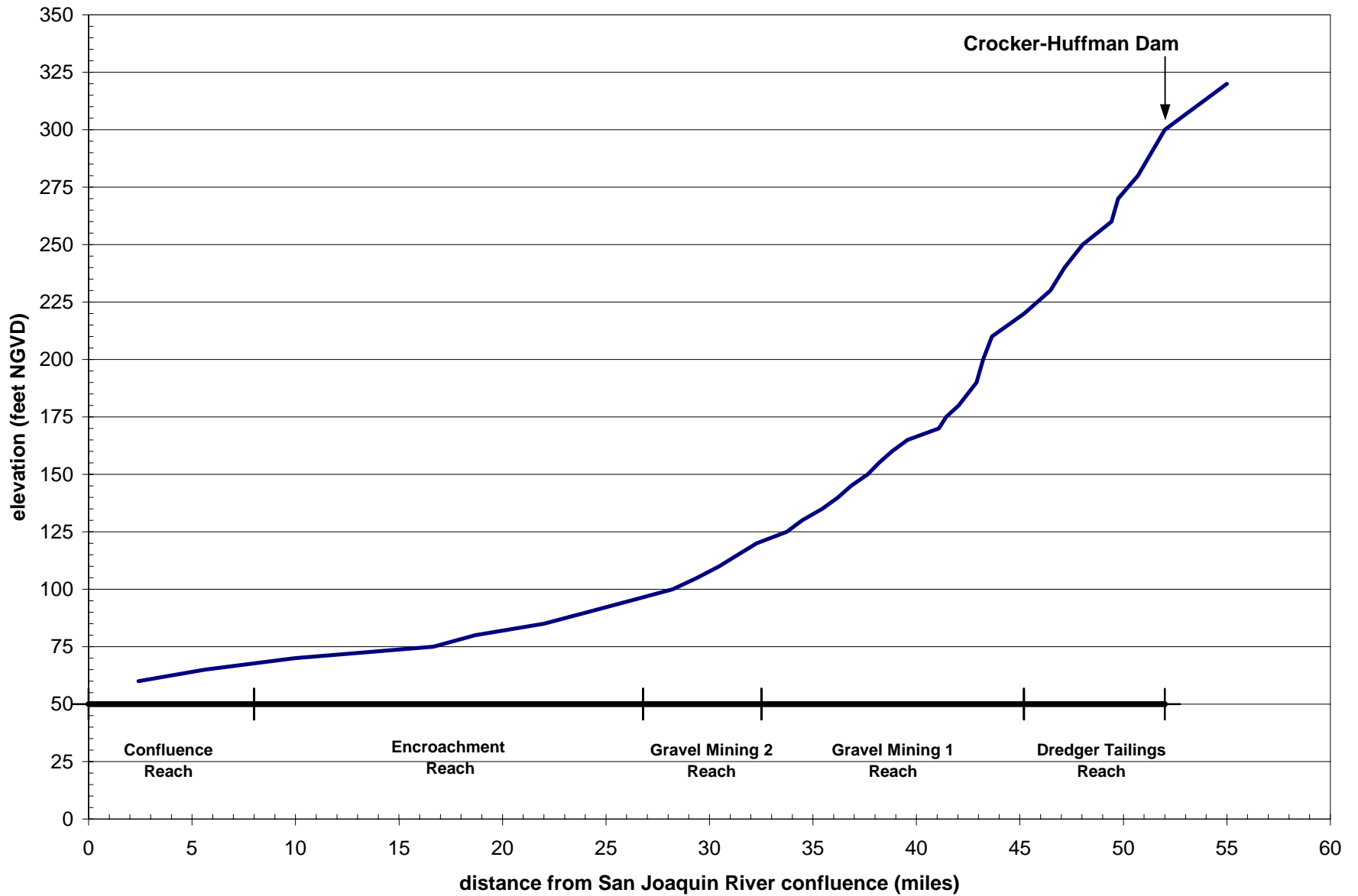


Figure 5.1-2. Merced River longitudinal profile.
 (from U. S. Geological Survey 1:24,000-scale topographic maps)

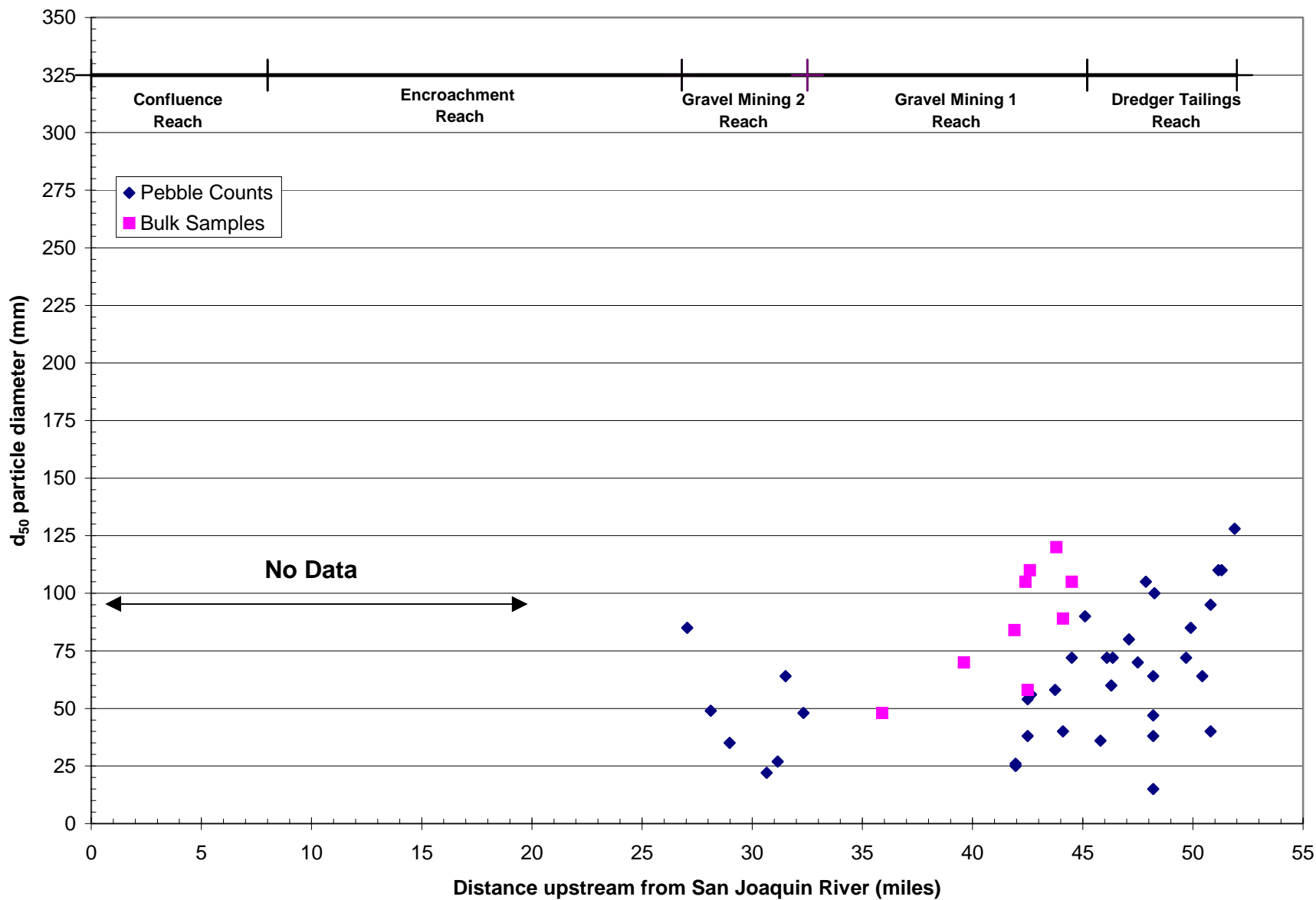


Figure 5.1-3. Merced River surface particle size - D_{50} .
 (sources: CDWR 1994b, Vick 1995)

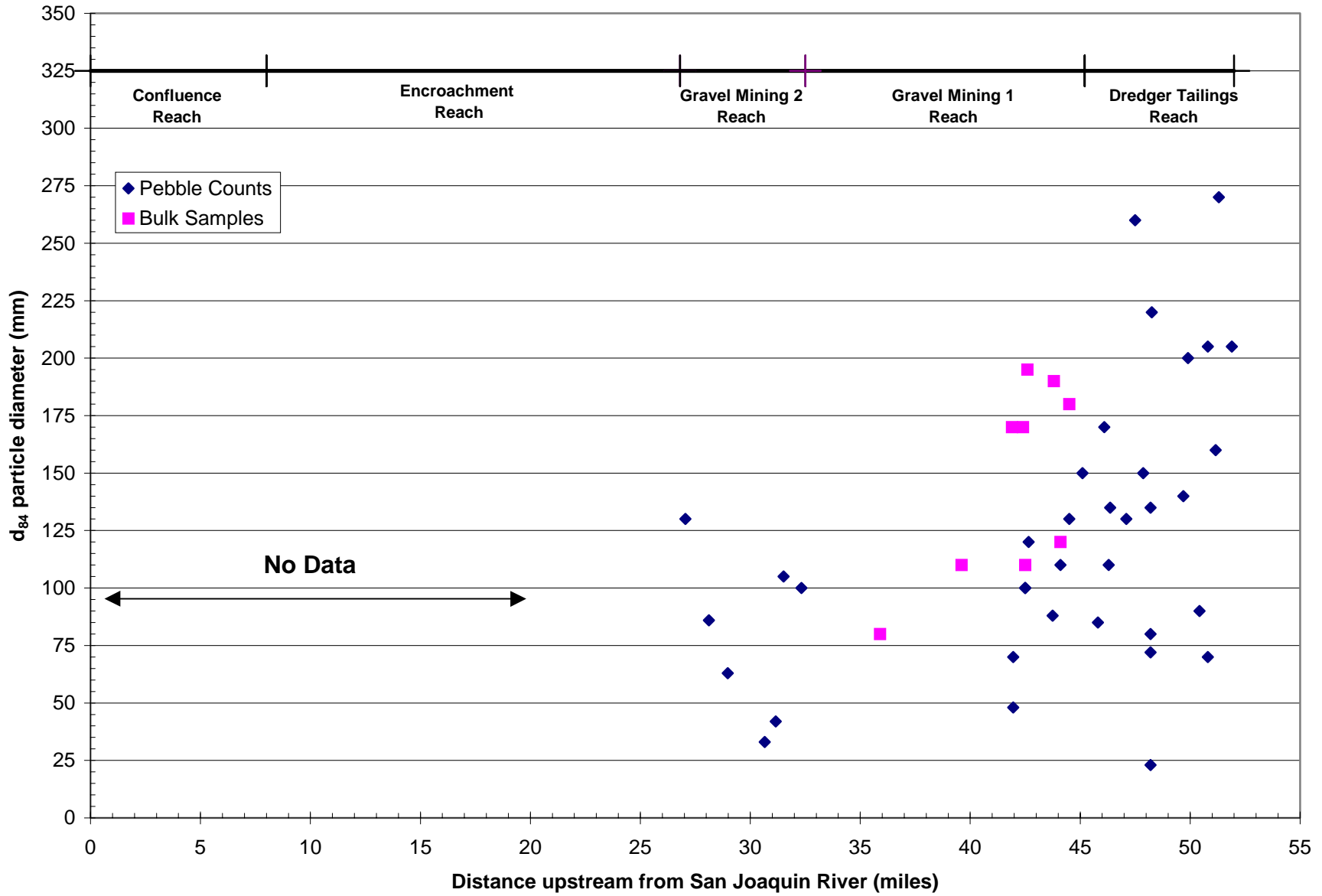


Figure 5.1-4. Merced River surface particle size - D_{84} .
 (sources: CDWR 1994b, Vick 1995)



Figure 5.1-5. Aerial photograph showing conditions in the Merced River Dredger Tailings Reach.

(photo: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation 1993)

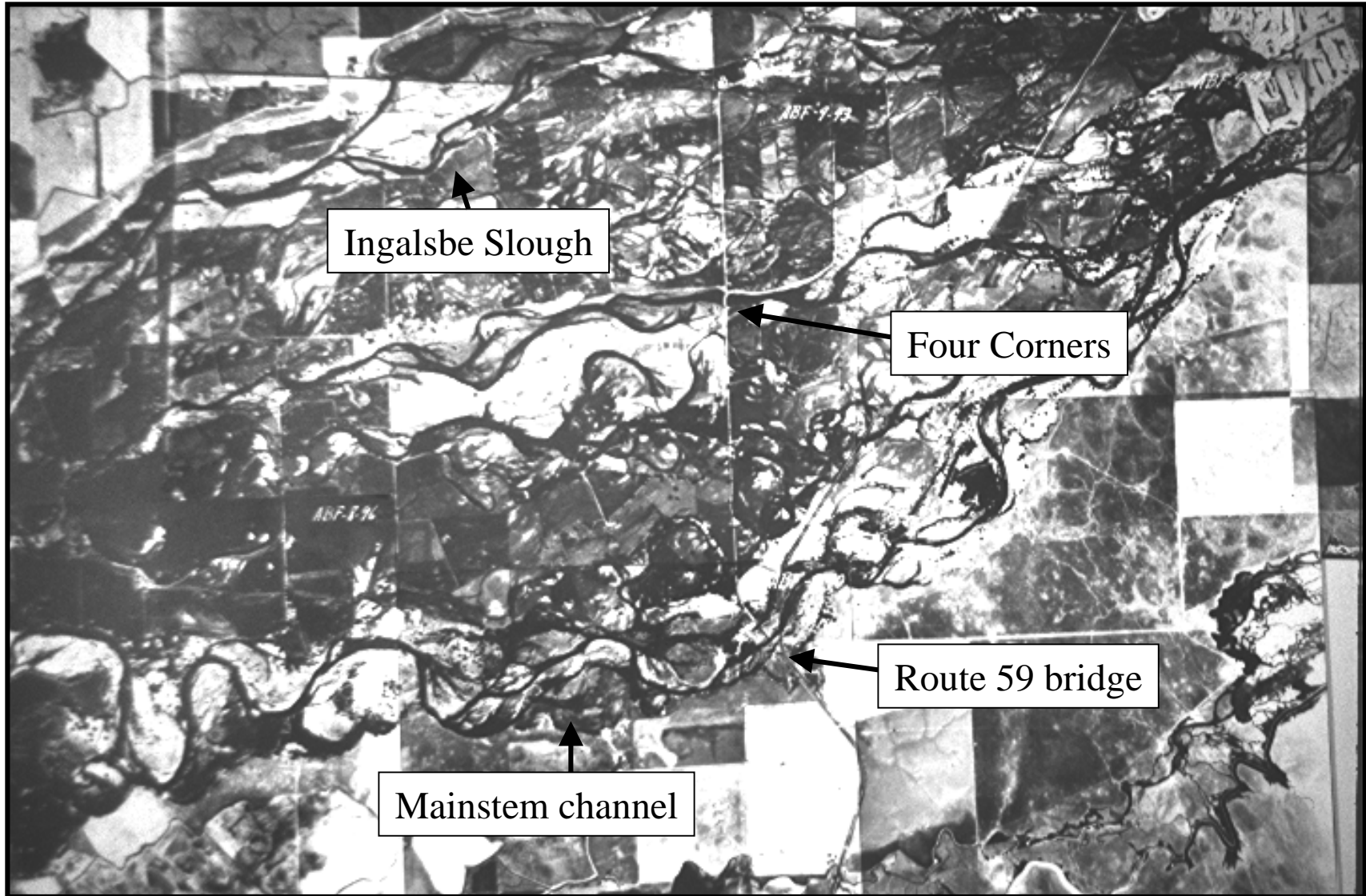


Figure 5.1-6. Merced River multiple-channel system as shown in 1937 aerial photographs.
(photo: Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service 1937)

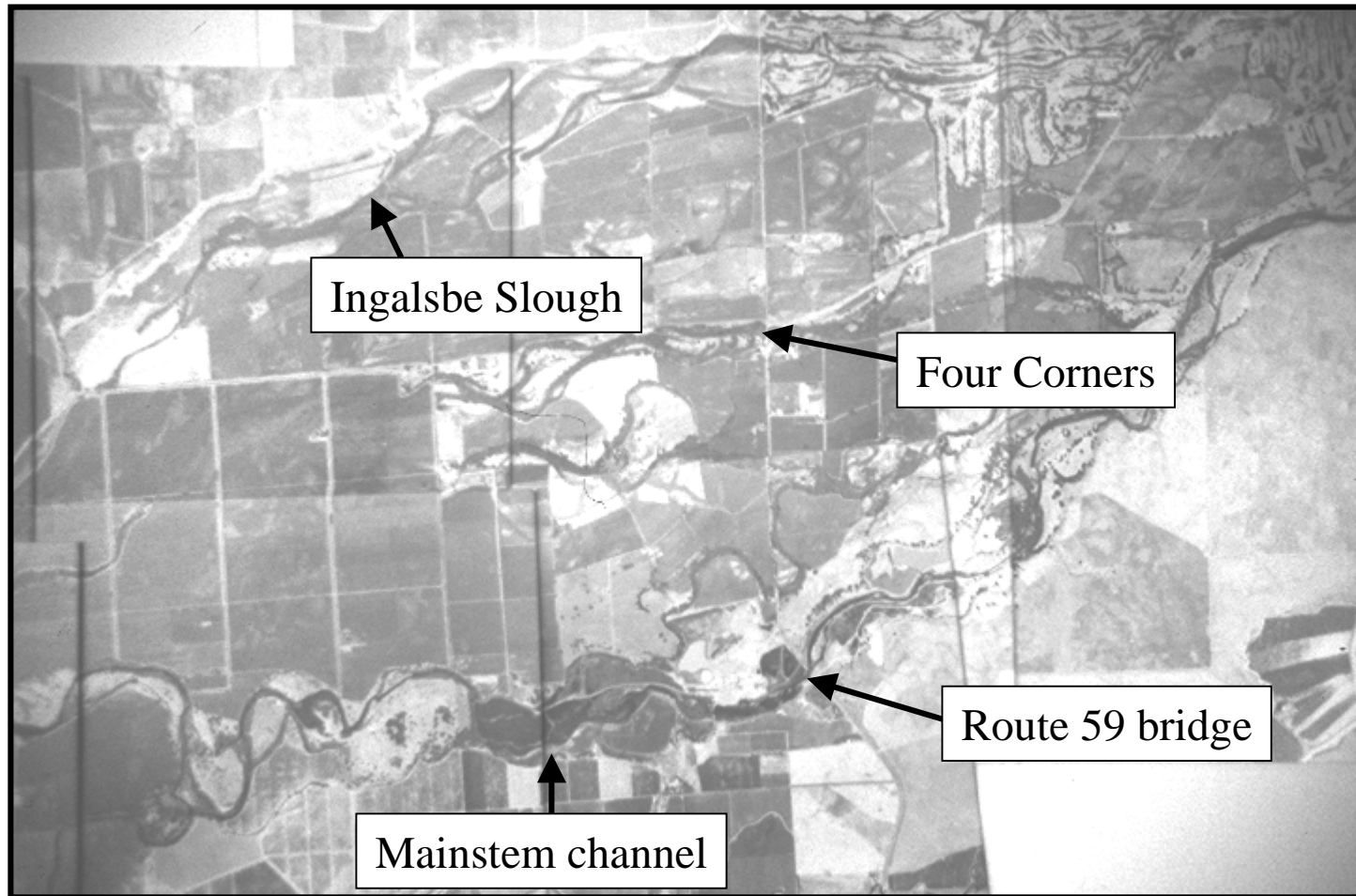


Figure 5.1-7. Merced River remnant slough system as shown in 1979 aerial photographs.
(photo: Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service 1979)

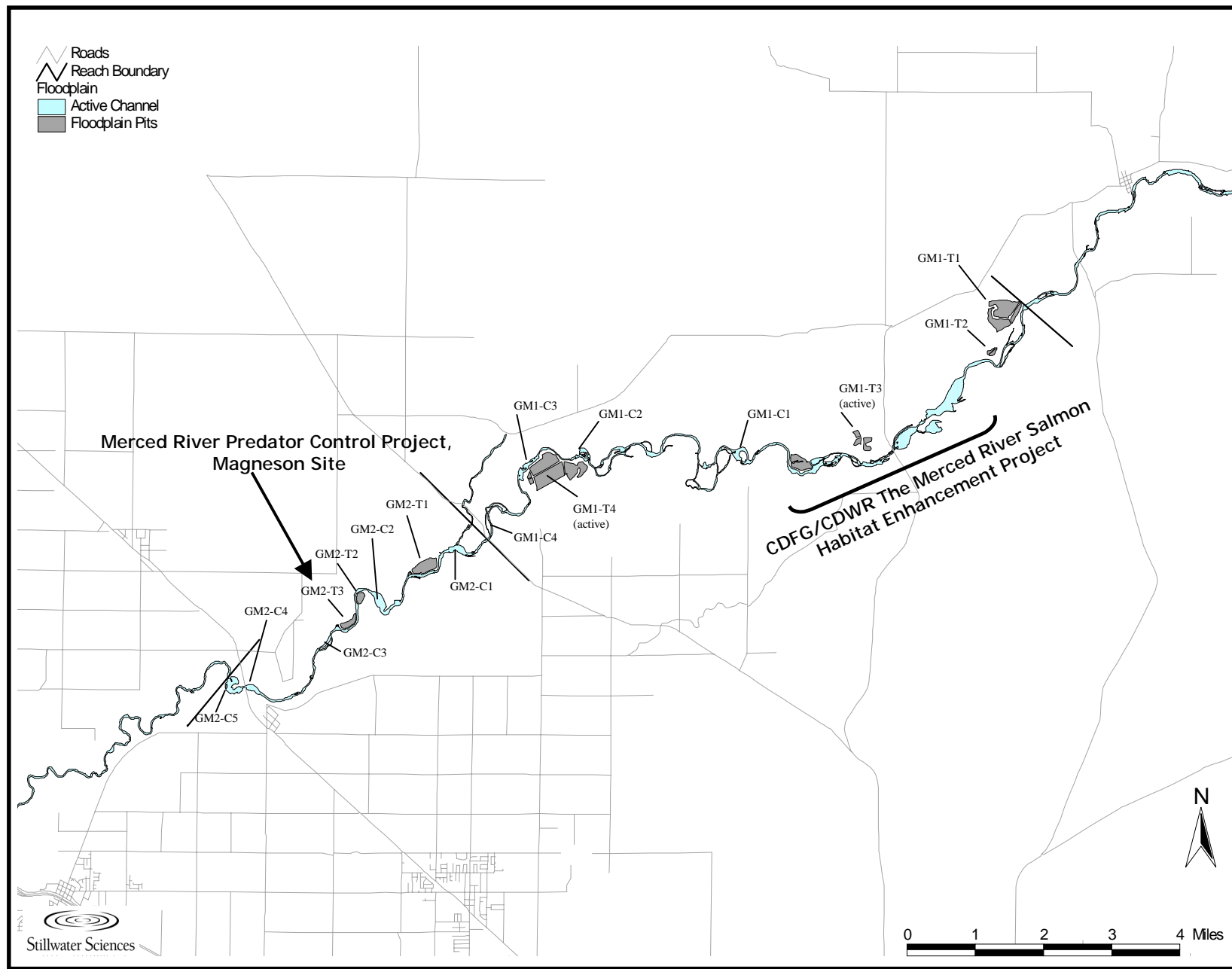


Figure 5.1-8. Terrace and in-channel aggregate mines in the Gravel Mining 1 and Gravel Mining 2 reaches.



Figure 5.1-9. Merced River Predator Control Project, Magneson Site.
(photo: Merced County Planning and Community Development Department 1998)



Figure 5.1-10. Aerial photograph showing conditions in the Encroachment Reach.
(photo: U. S. Bureau of Reclamation 1993)



Figure 5.1-11. Aerial photograph showing conditions in the Confluence Reach.
(photo: U. S. Bureau of Reclamation 1993)

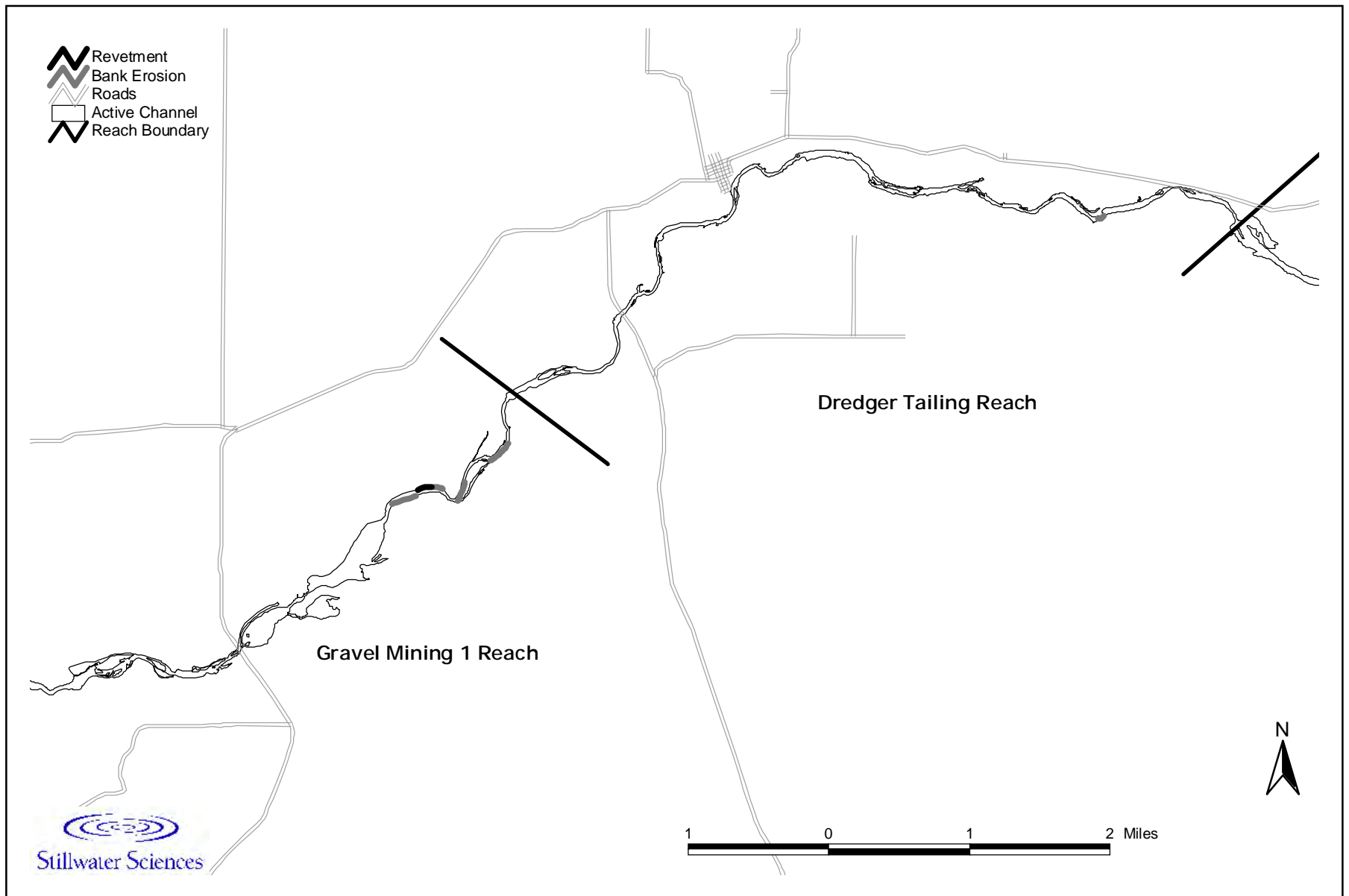


Figure 5.2-1A. Bank erosion and revetment in the Merced River.

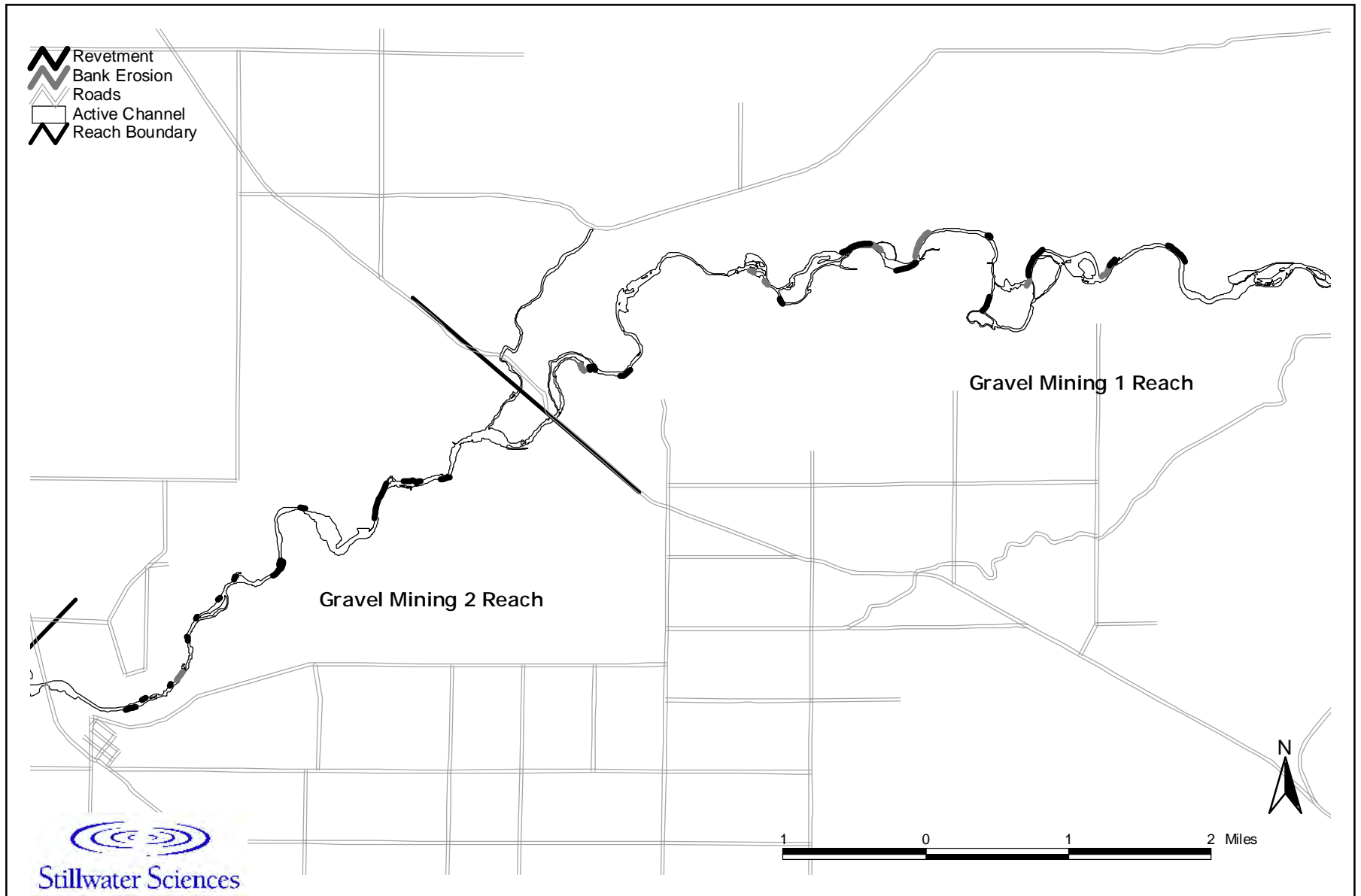


Figure 5.2-1B. Bank erosion and revetment in the Merced River.

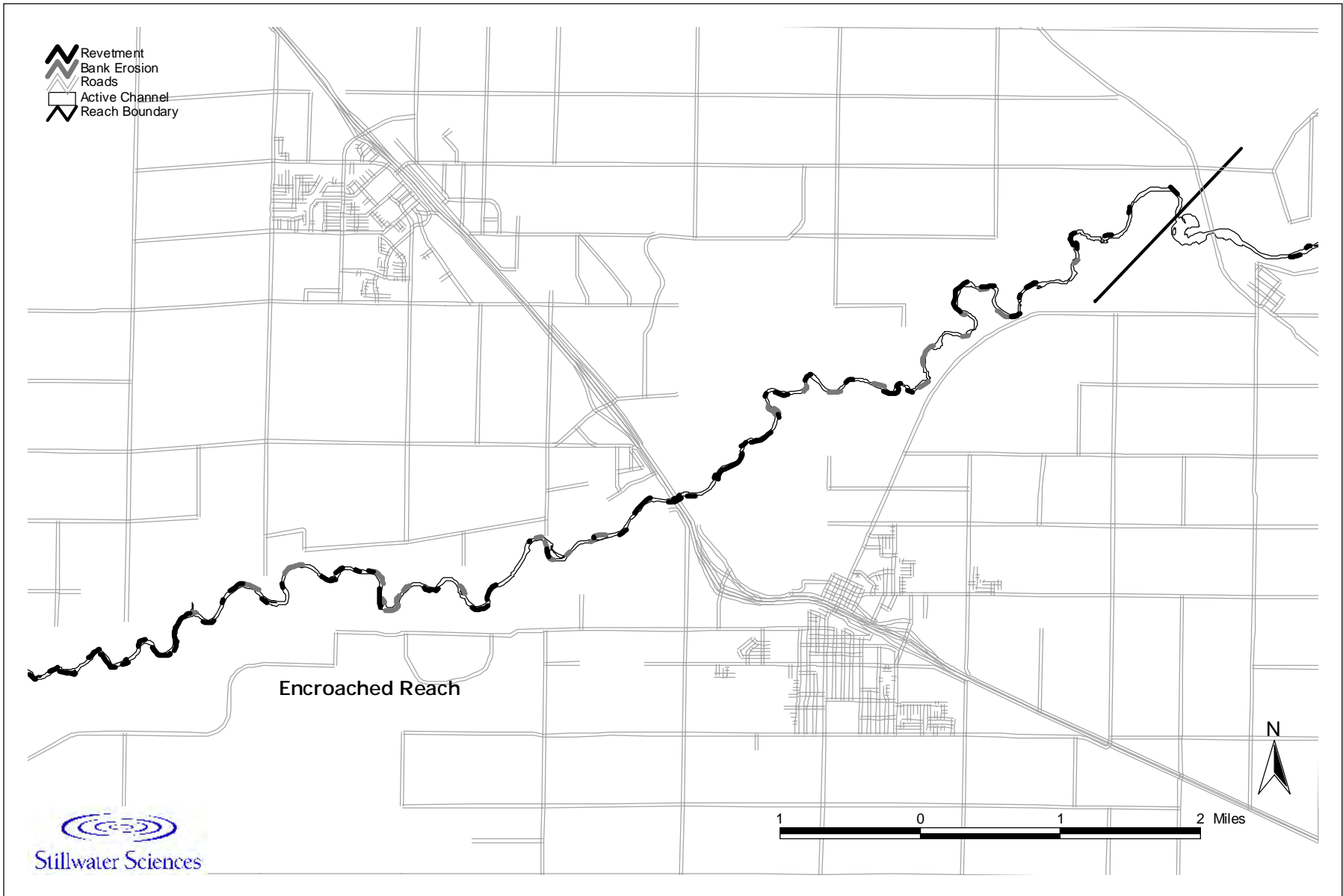


Figure 5.2-1C. Bank erosion and revetment in the Merced River

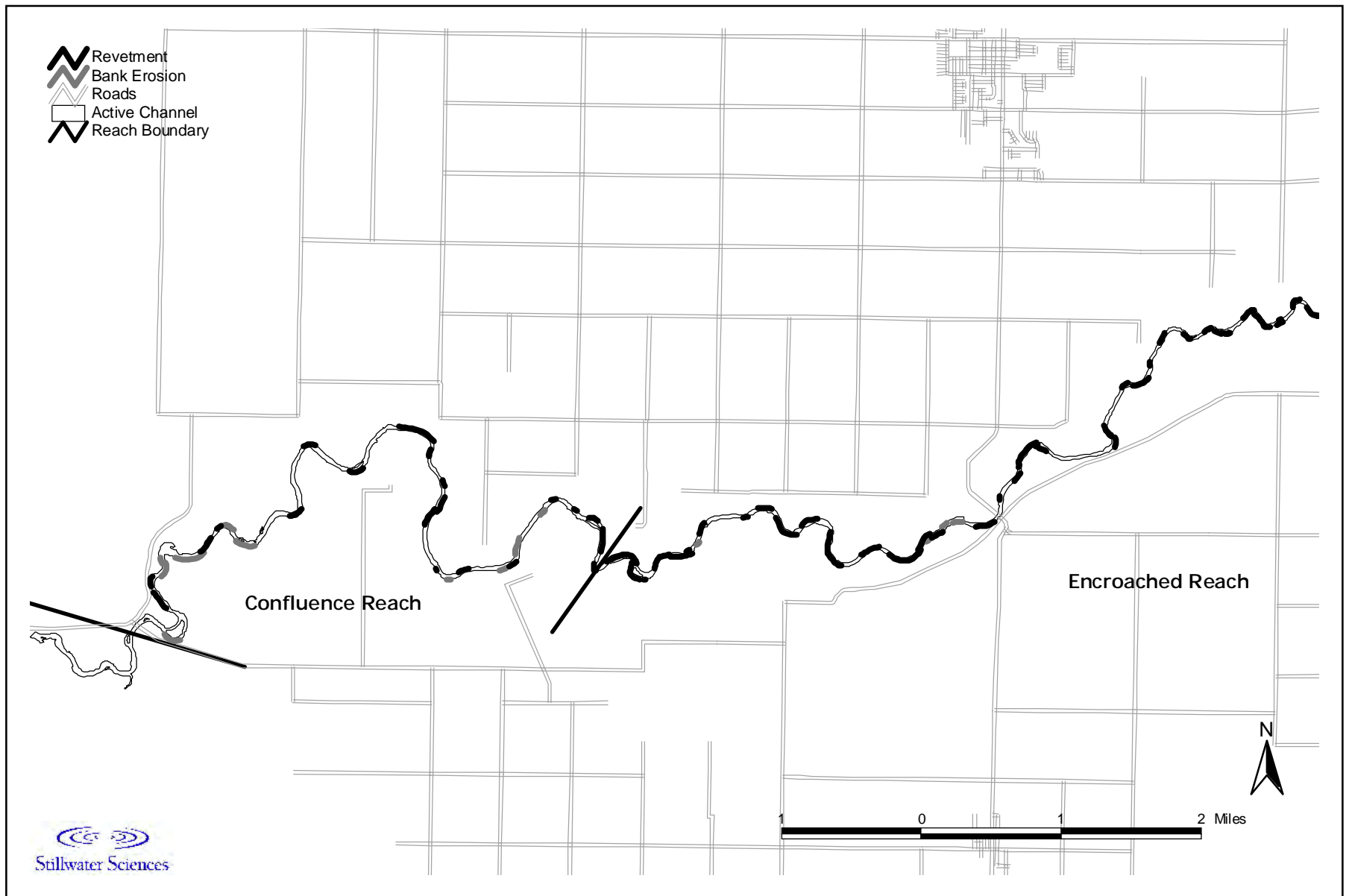


Figure 5.2-1D. Bank Erosion and revetment in the Merced River.

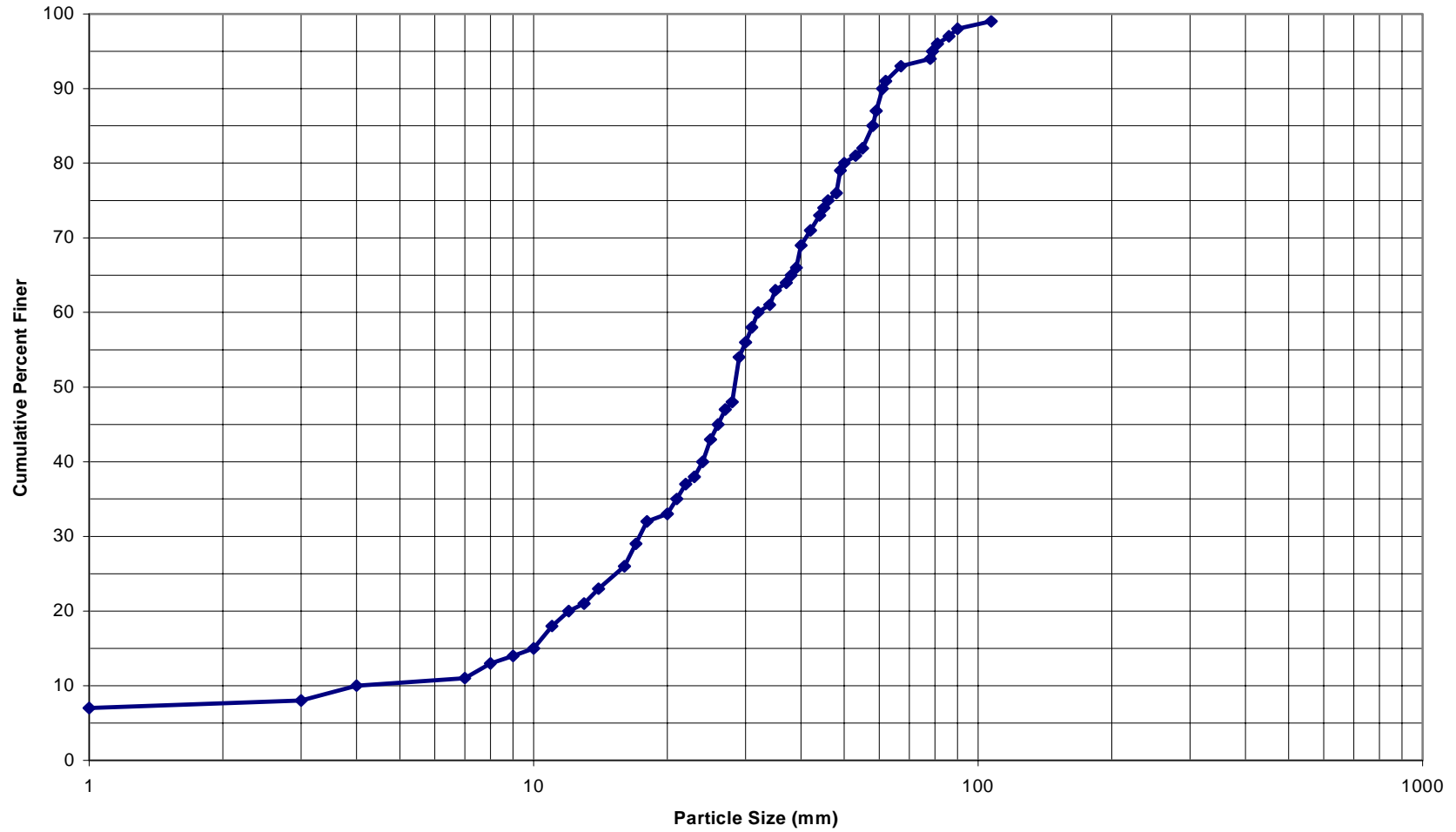


Figure 5.2-2. Pebble count on the Dry Creek delta.

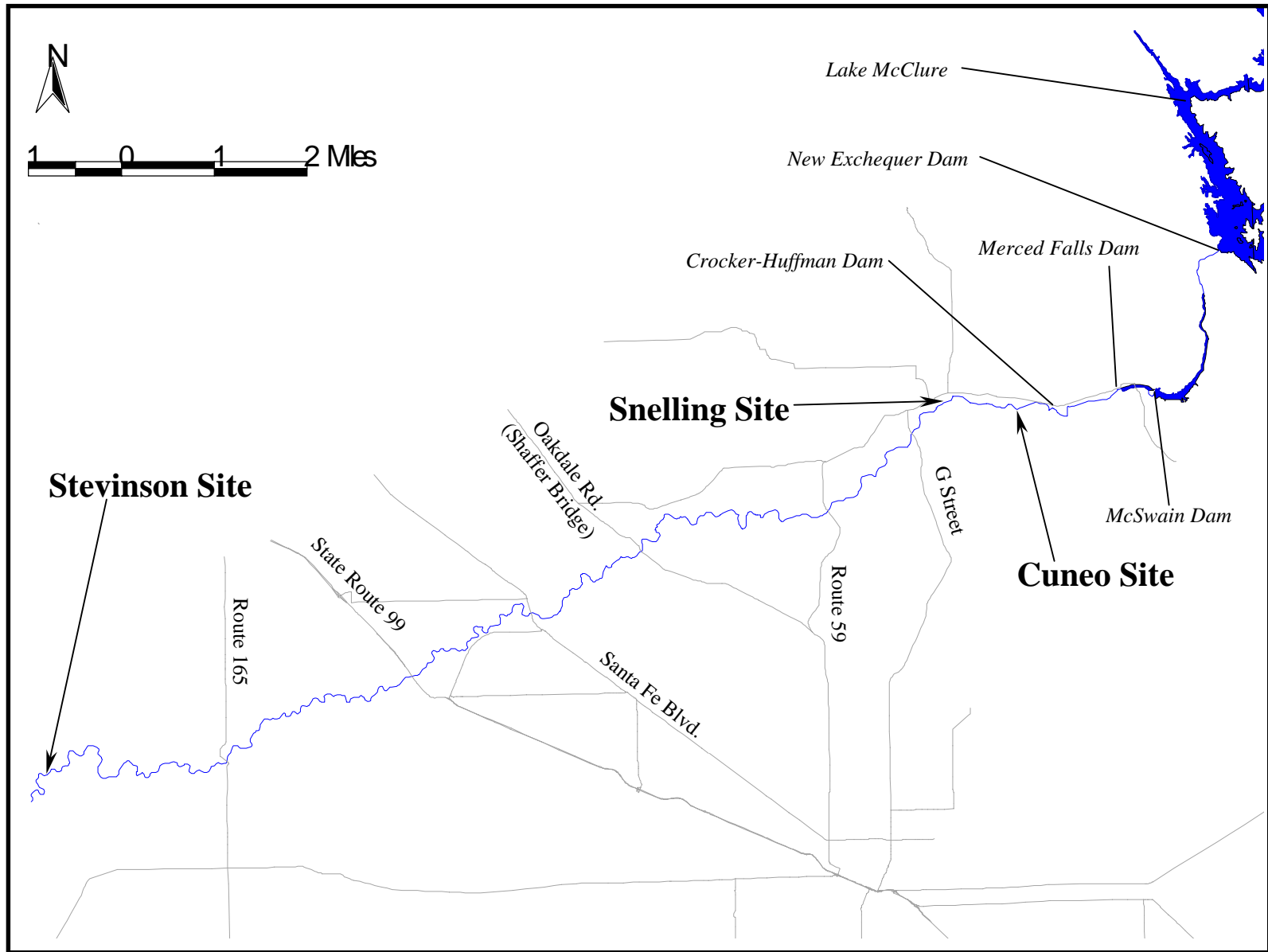


Figure 5.3-1. Location of Phase II study sites on the Merced River.

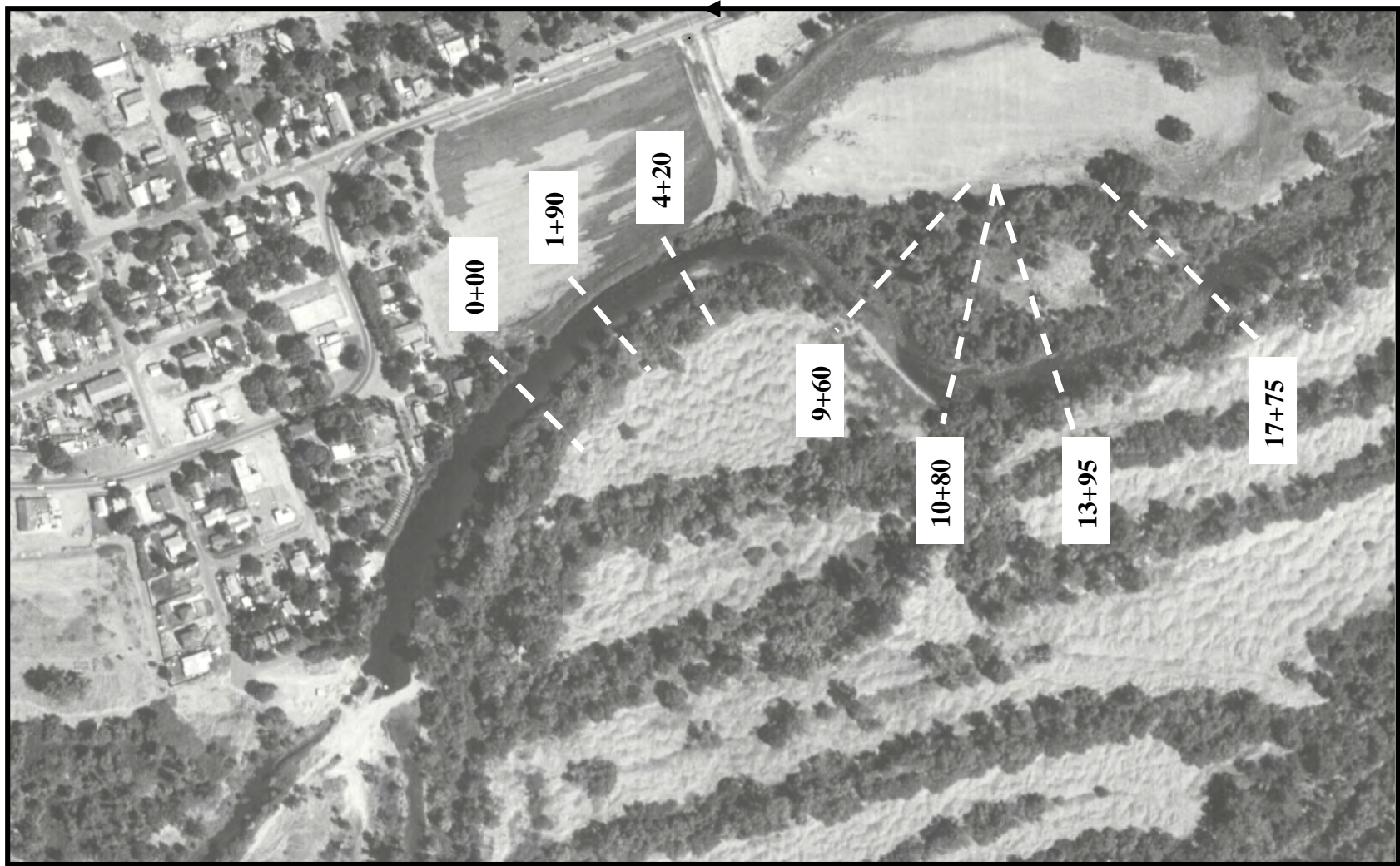


Figure 5.3-2. Cross section survey locations at the Snelling Site.
(photo: Merced County Planning and Community Development Department 1998)

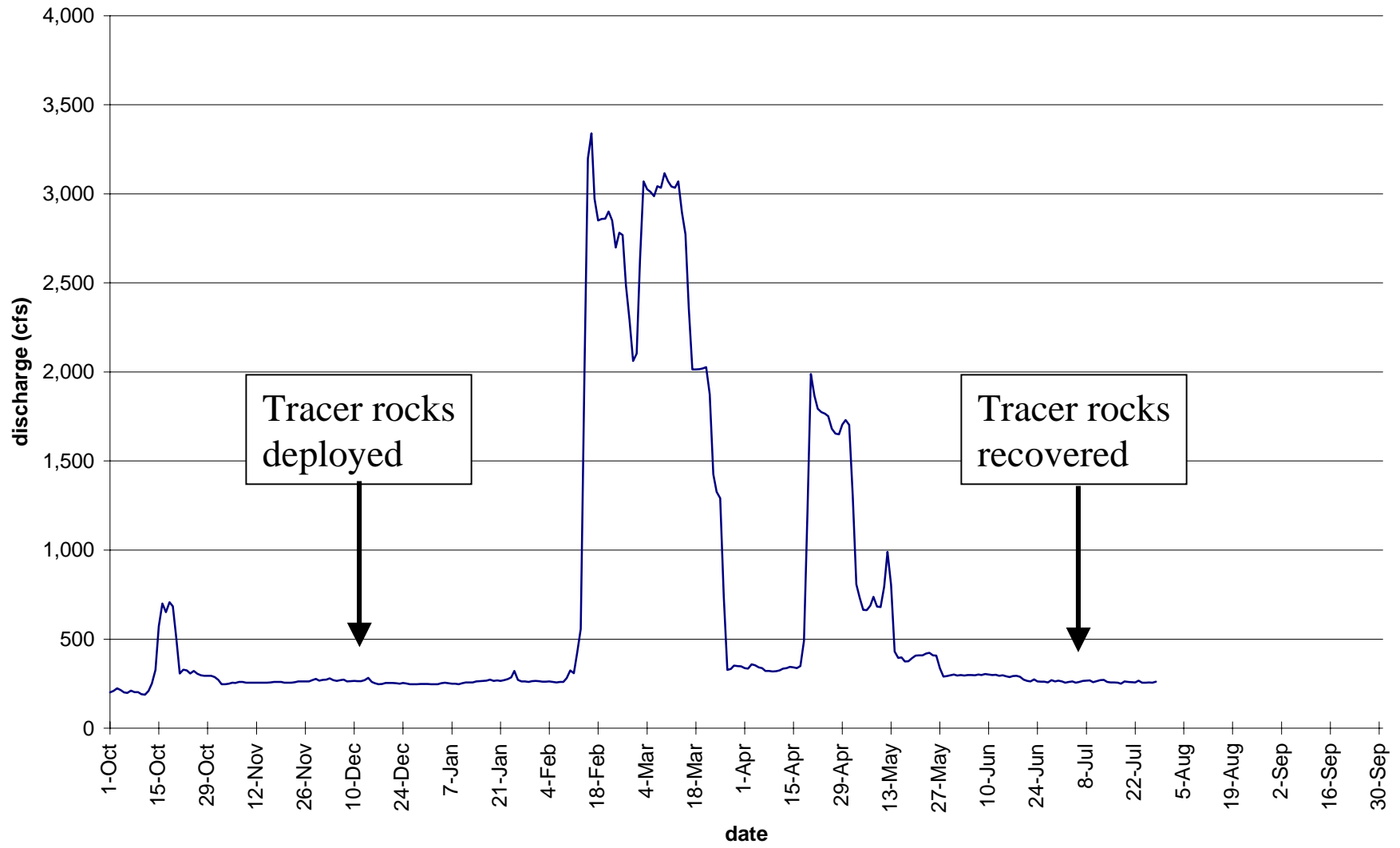


Figure 5.3-3. Flows at the Snelling Site between tracer rock deployment and recovery.
 (source: Merced Irrigation District Crocker-Huffman gauge)

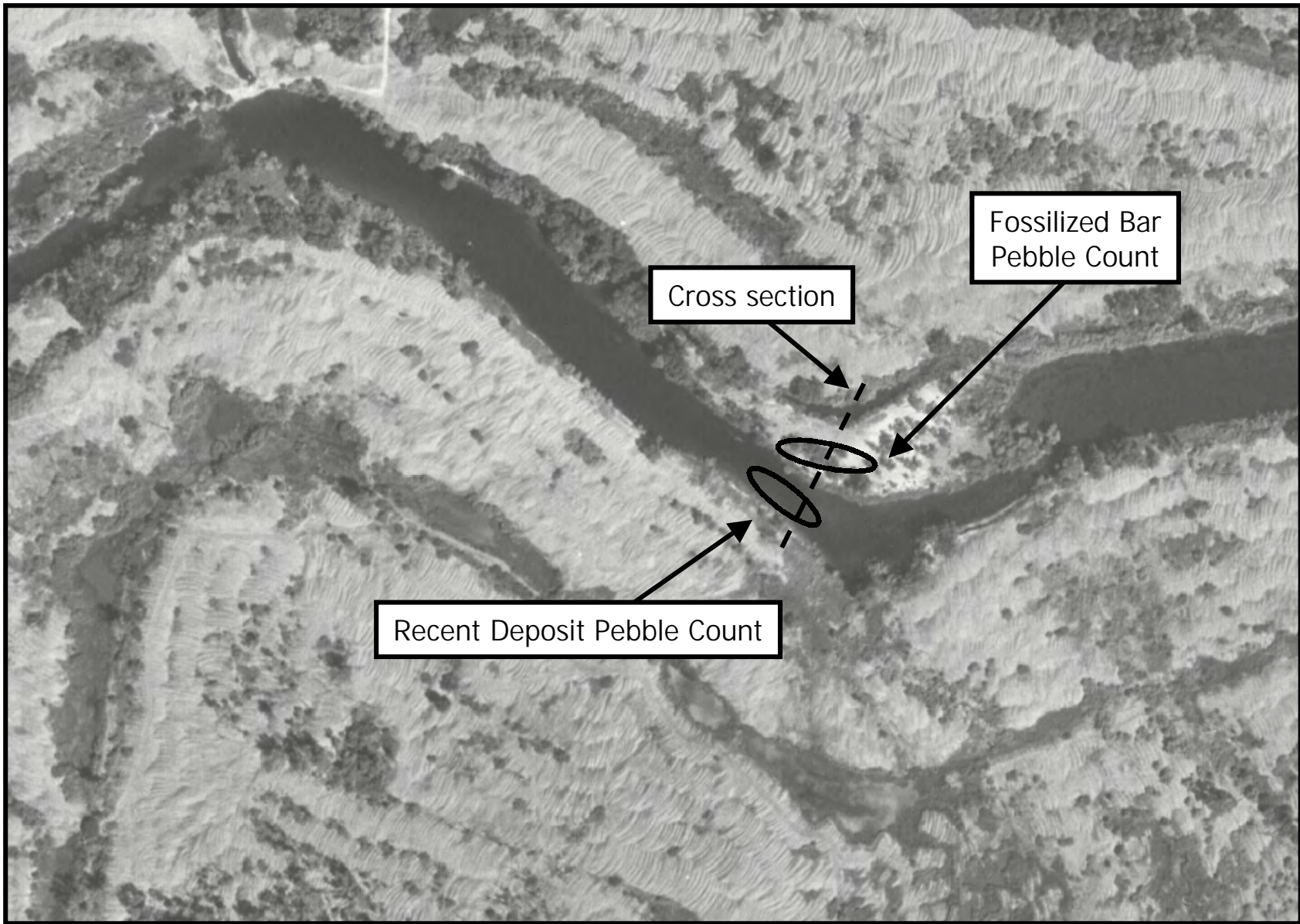


Figure 5.3-4. Cross section and pebble count locations at the Cuneo Site.
(photo: Merced County Planning and Community Development Department 1998)

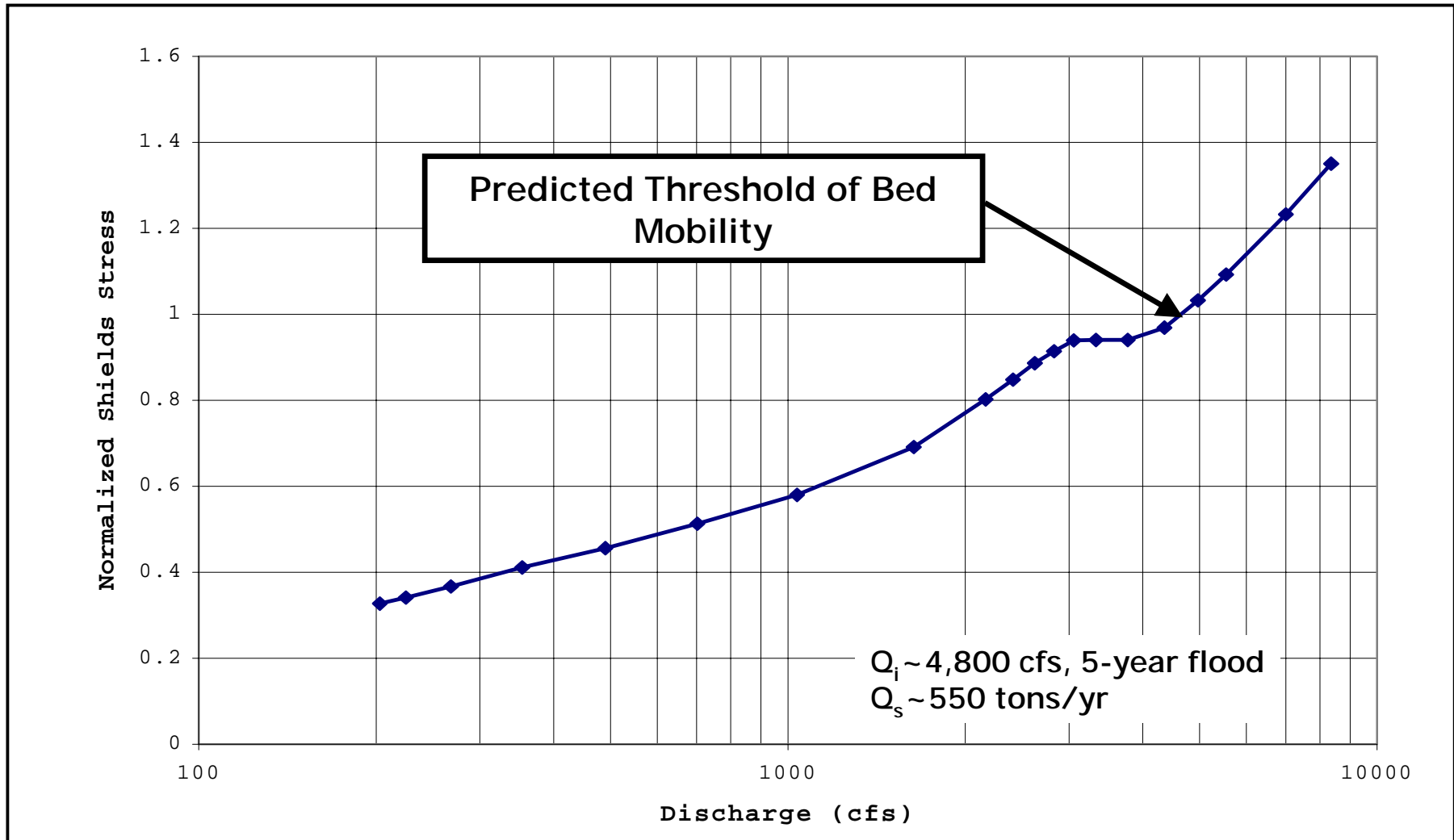


Figure 5.3-5. Normalized Shields stress versus discharge for the Snelling Site.

(The channel bed is predicted to be in motion when the normalized Shields stress is ≥ 1 .)

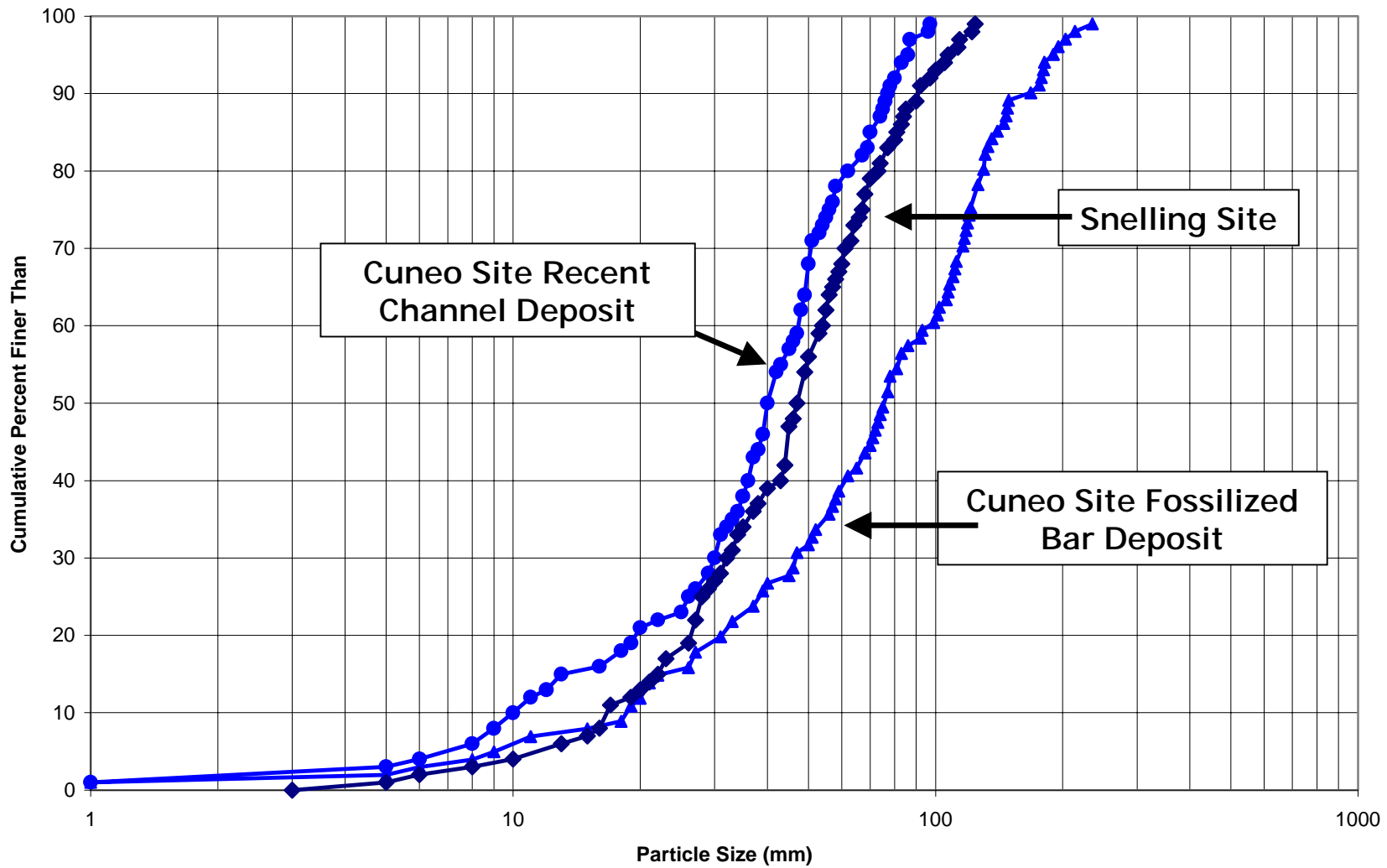


Figure 5.3-6. Cumulative particles size distribution for the fossilized bar and recent channel deposits at the Cuneo Site.

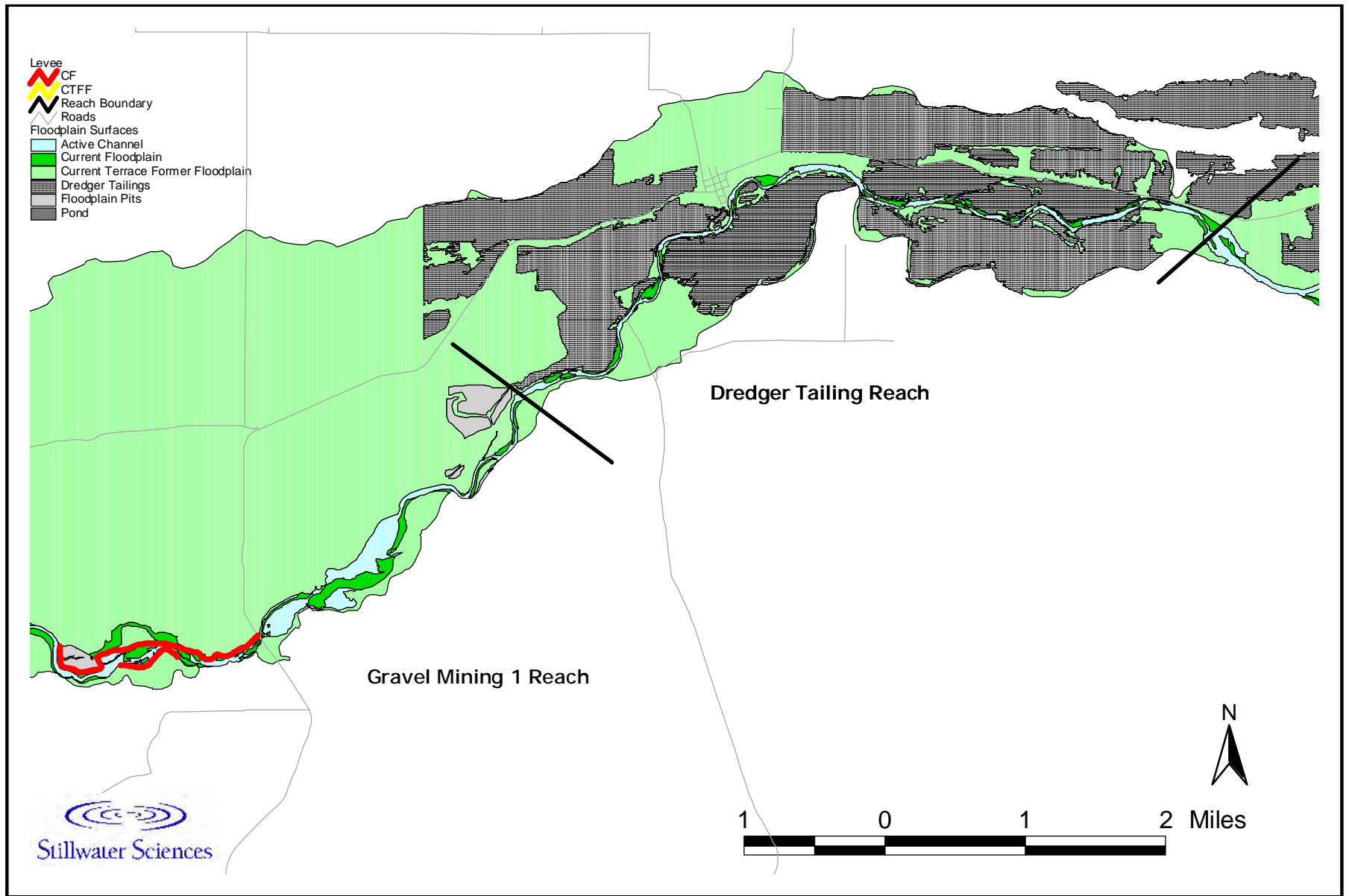


Figure 5.5-1A. Merced River current and historic floodplain and levees

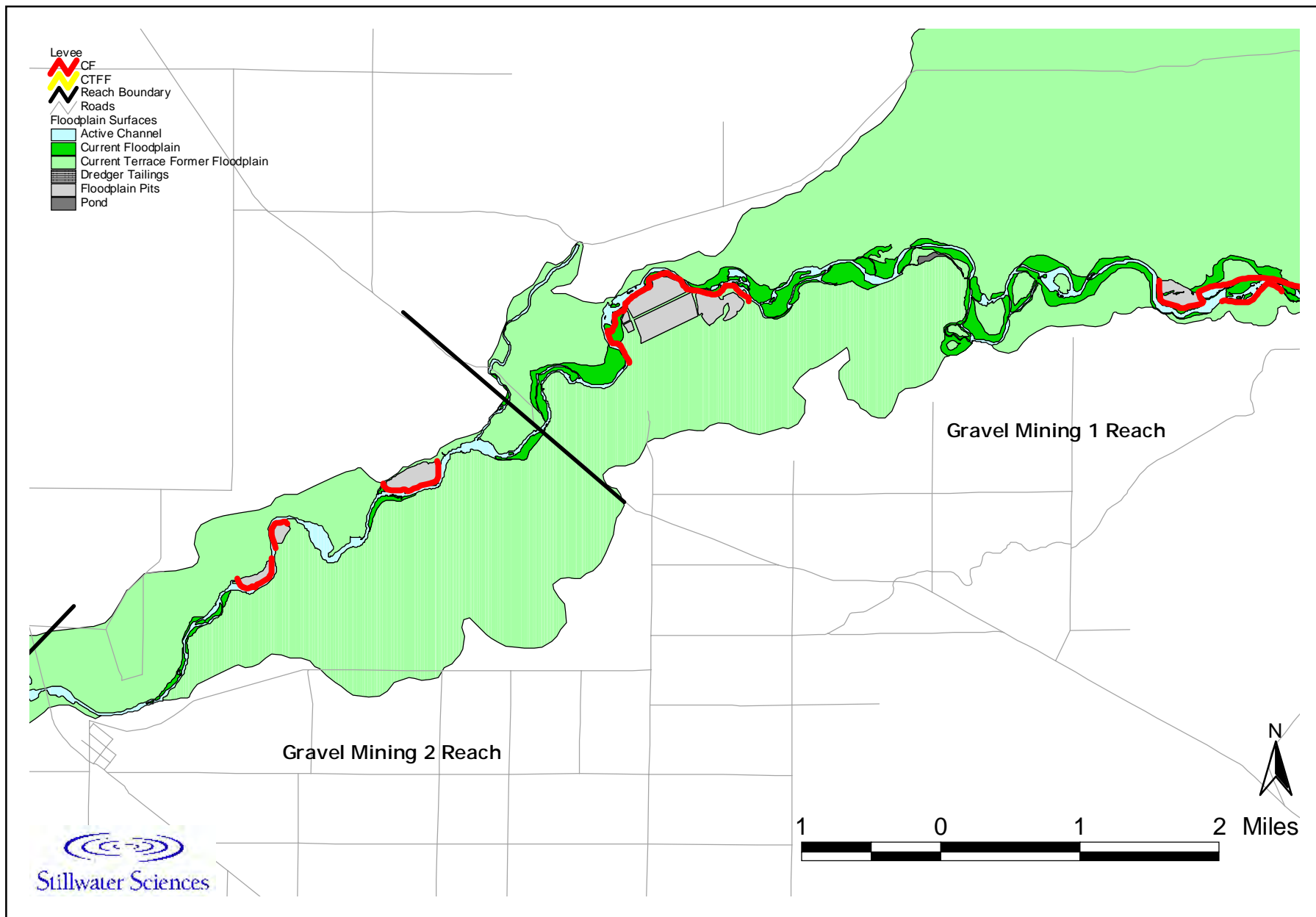


Figure 5.5-1B. Merced River current and historic floodplain and levees.

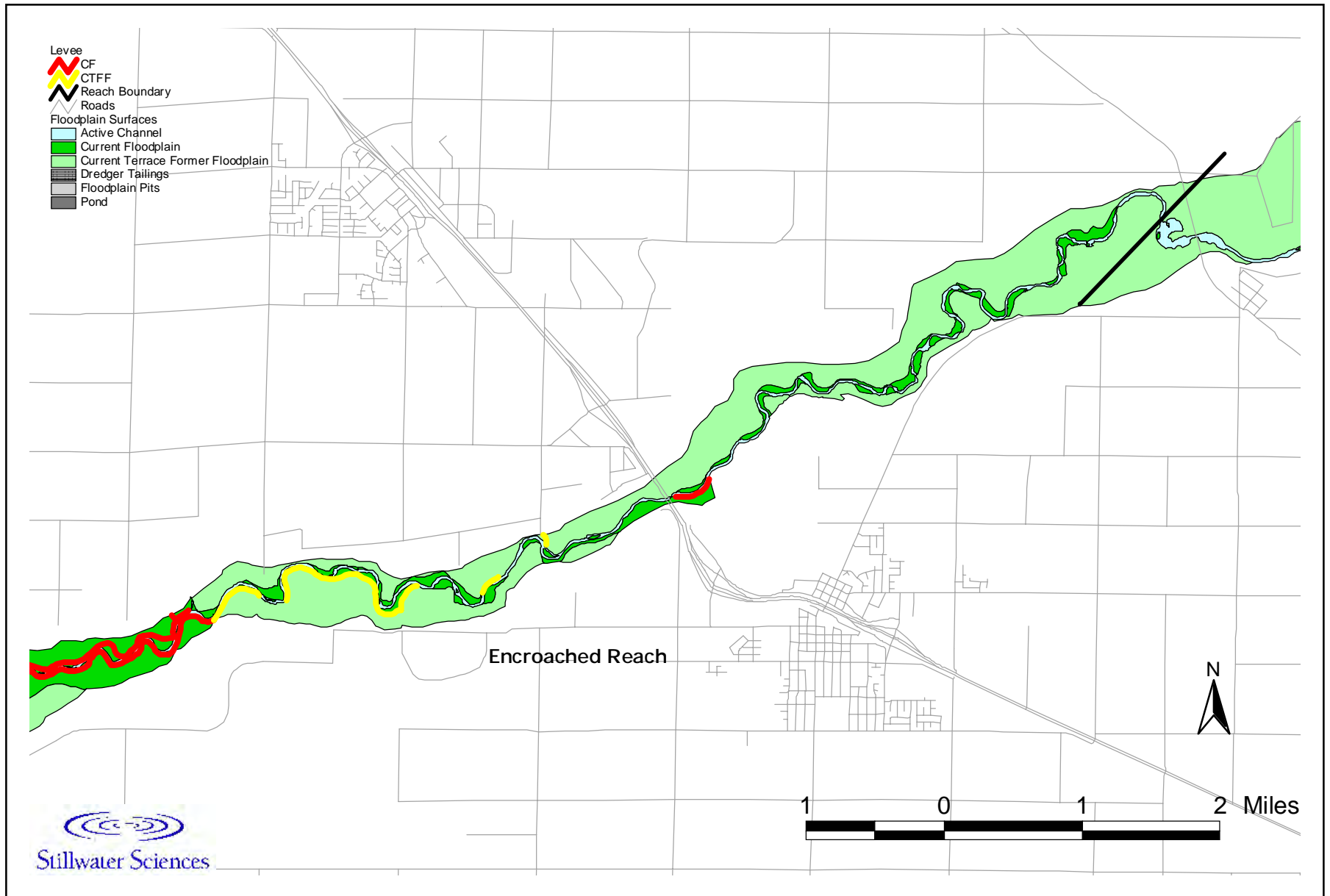


Figure 5.5-1C. Merced River current and historic floodplain and levees.

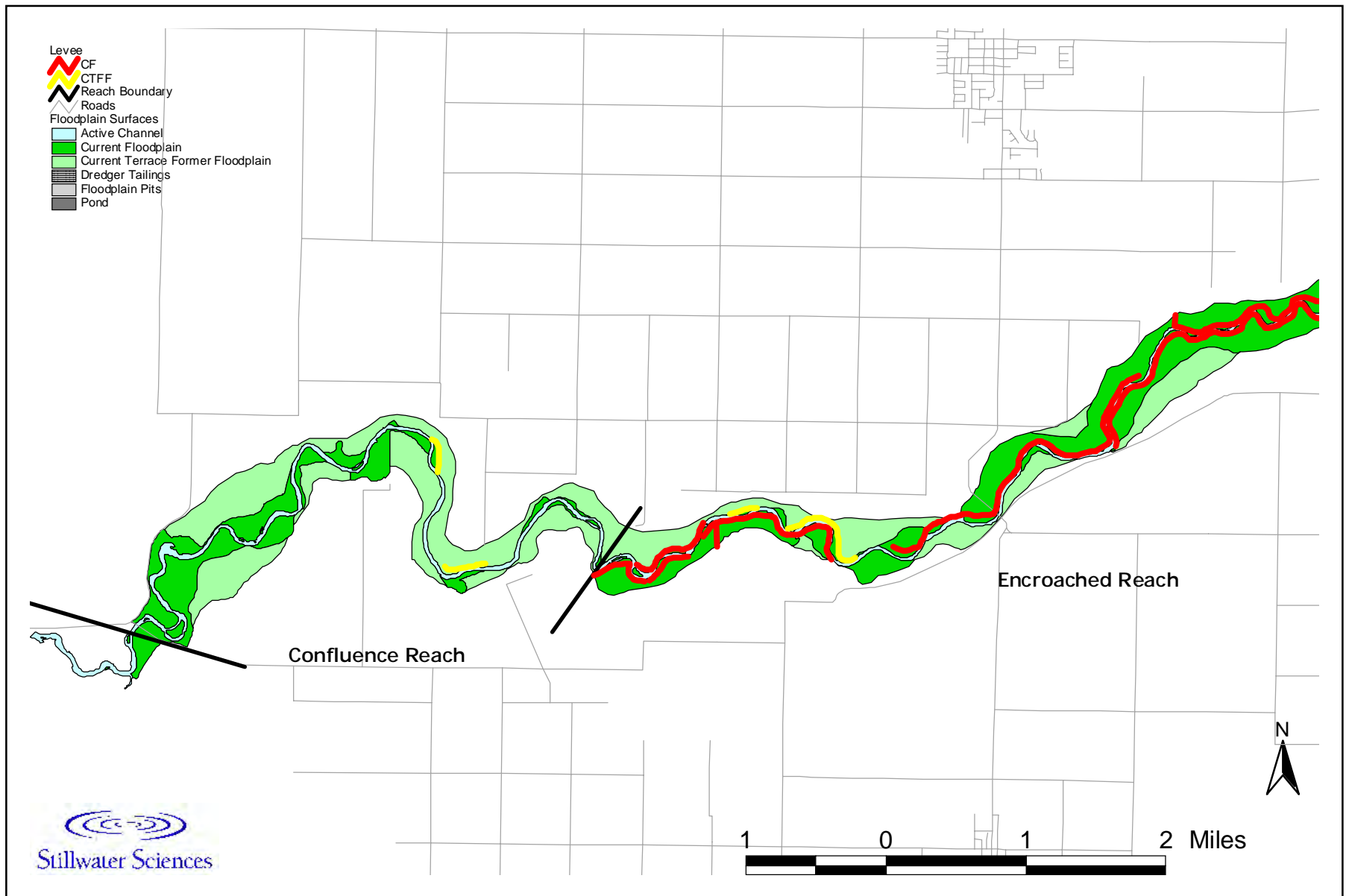


Figure 5.5-1D. Merced River current historic floodplain and levees.

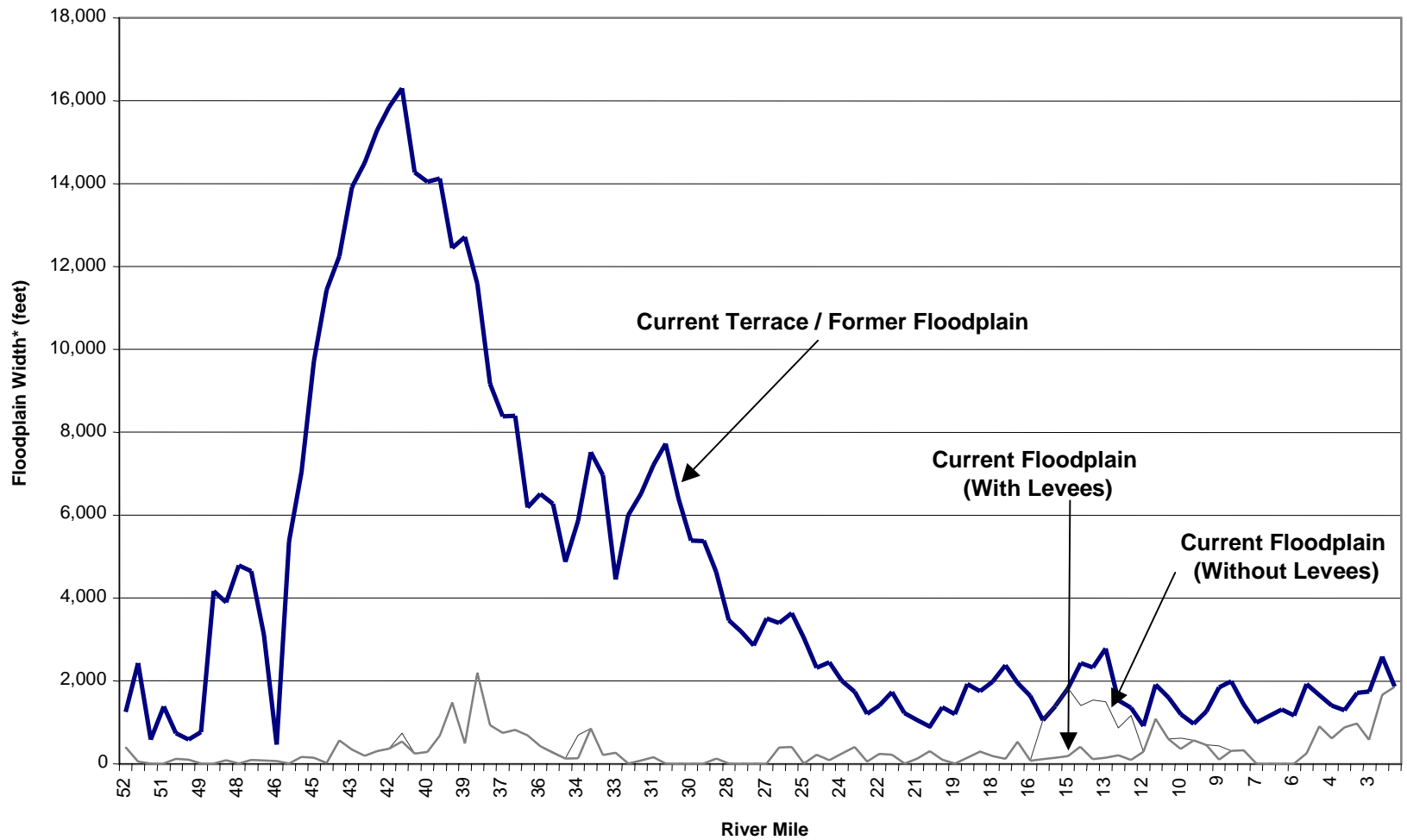


Figure 5.5-2. Historic and current floodplain width (with and without levees) in the Merced River corridor.

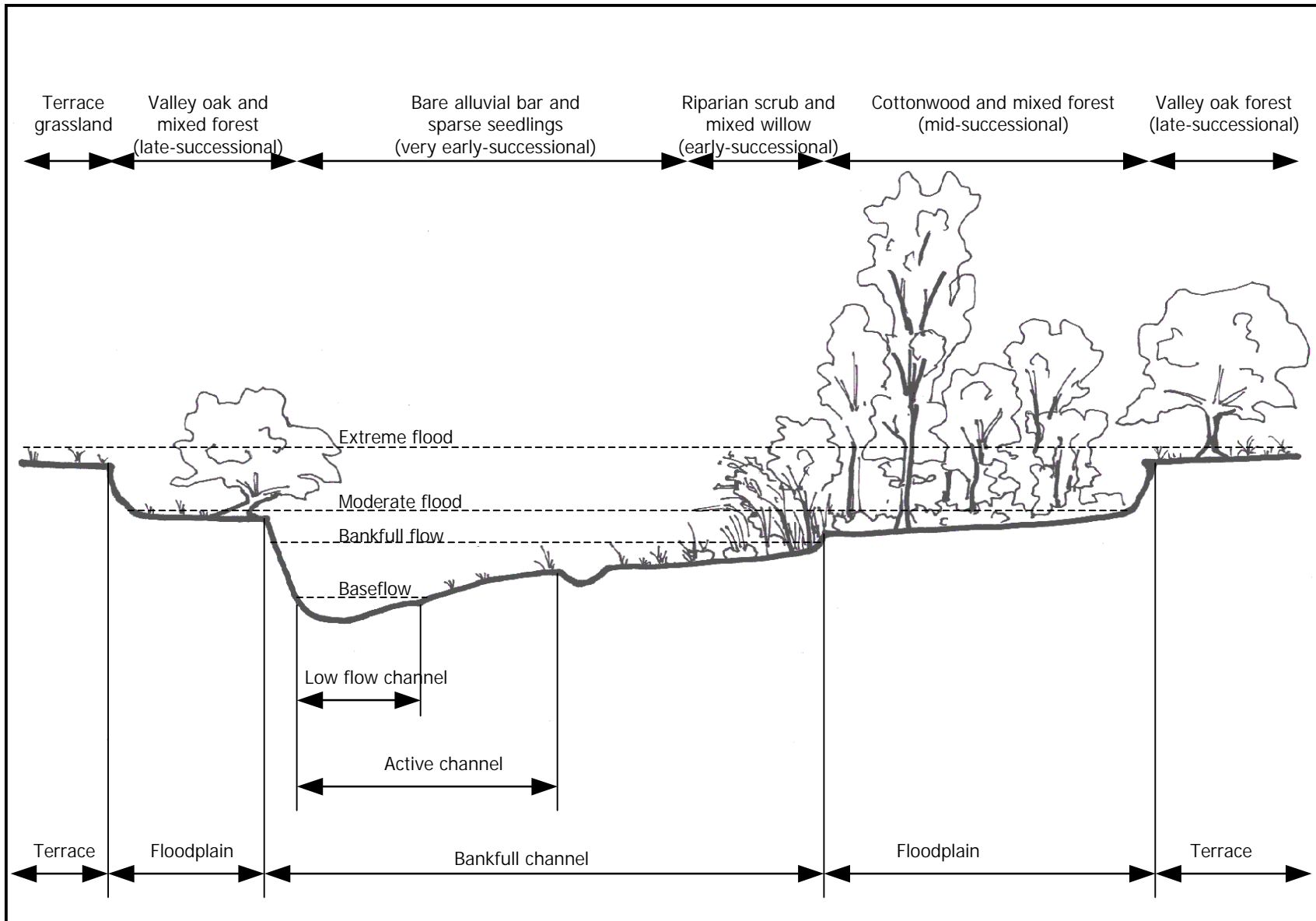


Figure 5.6-1. Schematic cross section of the "healthy" alluvial river.

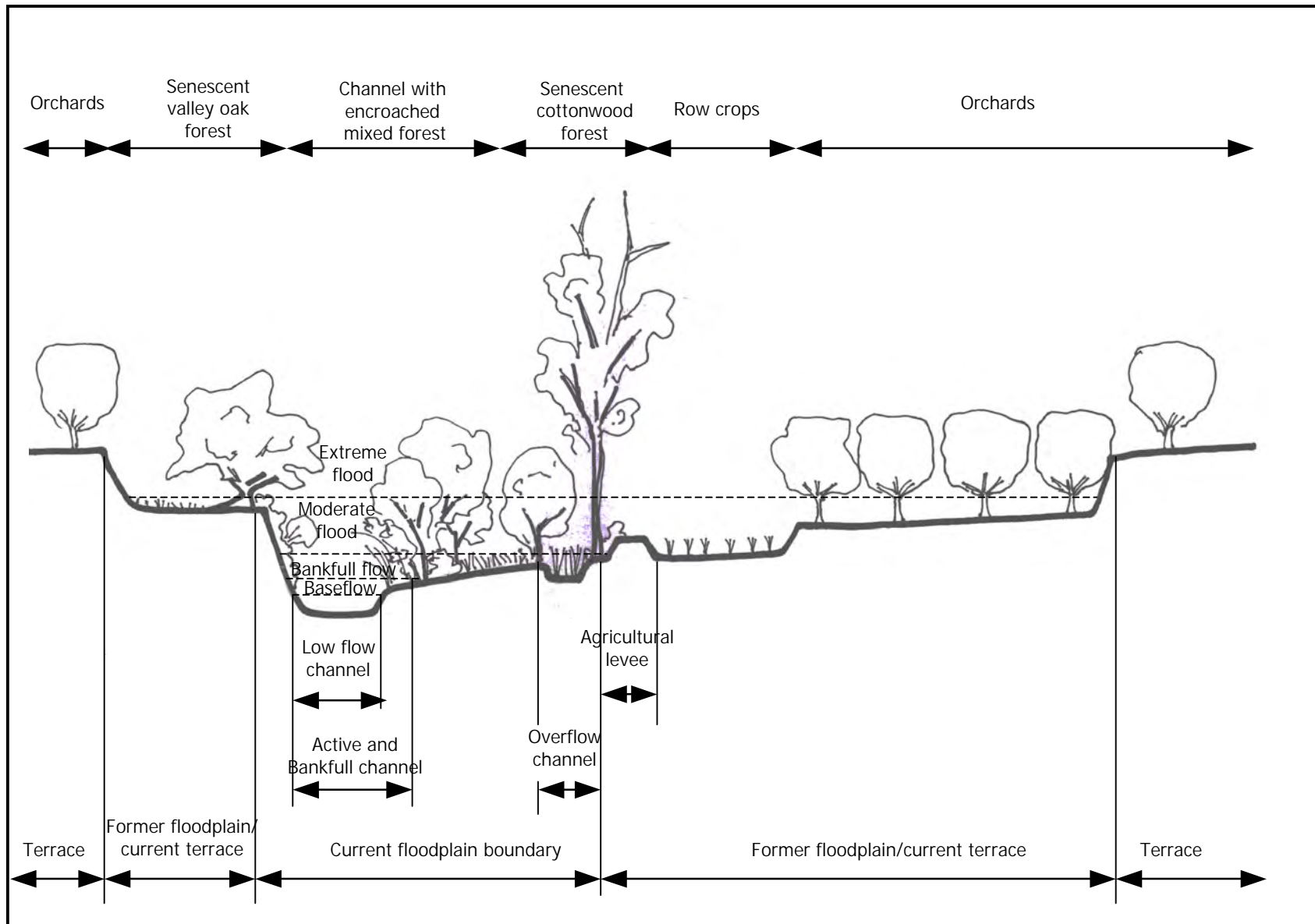


Figure 5.6-2. Schematic cross section of a river channel with encroached riparian vegetation.

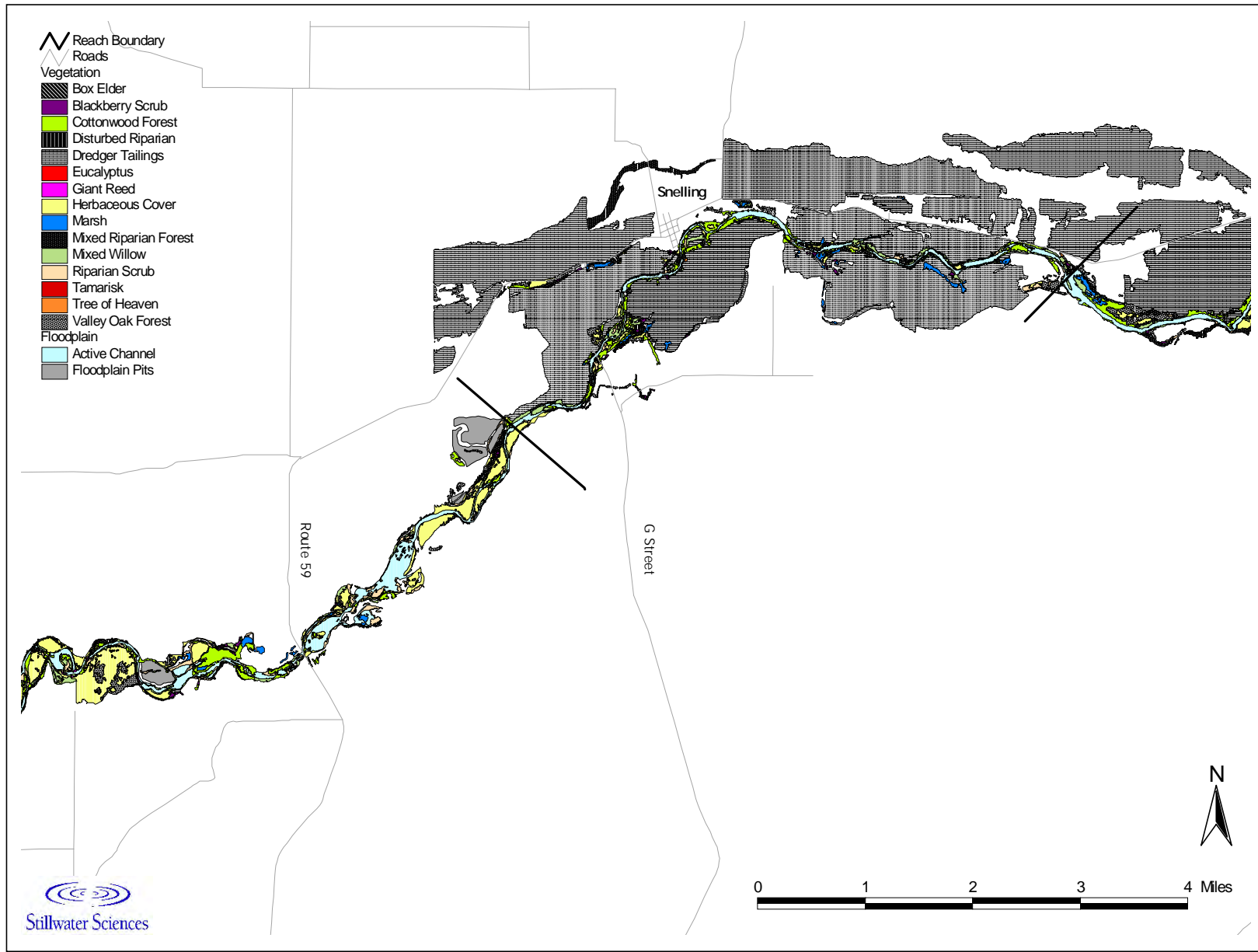


Figure 6.1-1A. Merced River vegetation distribution.

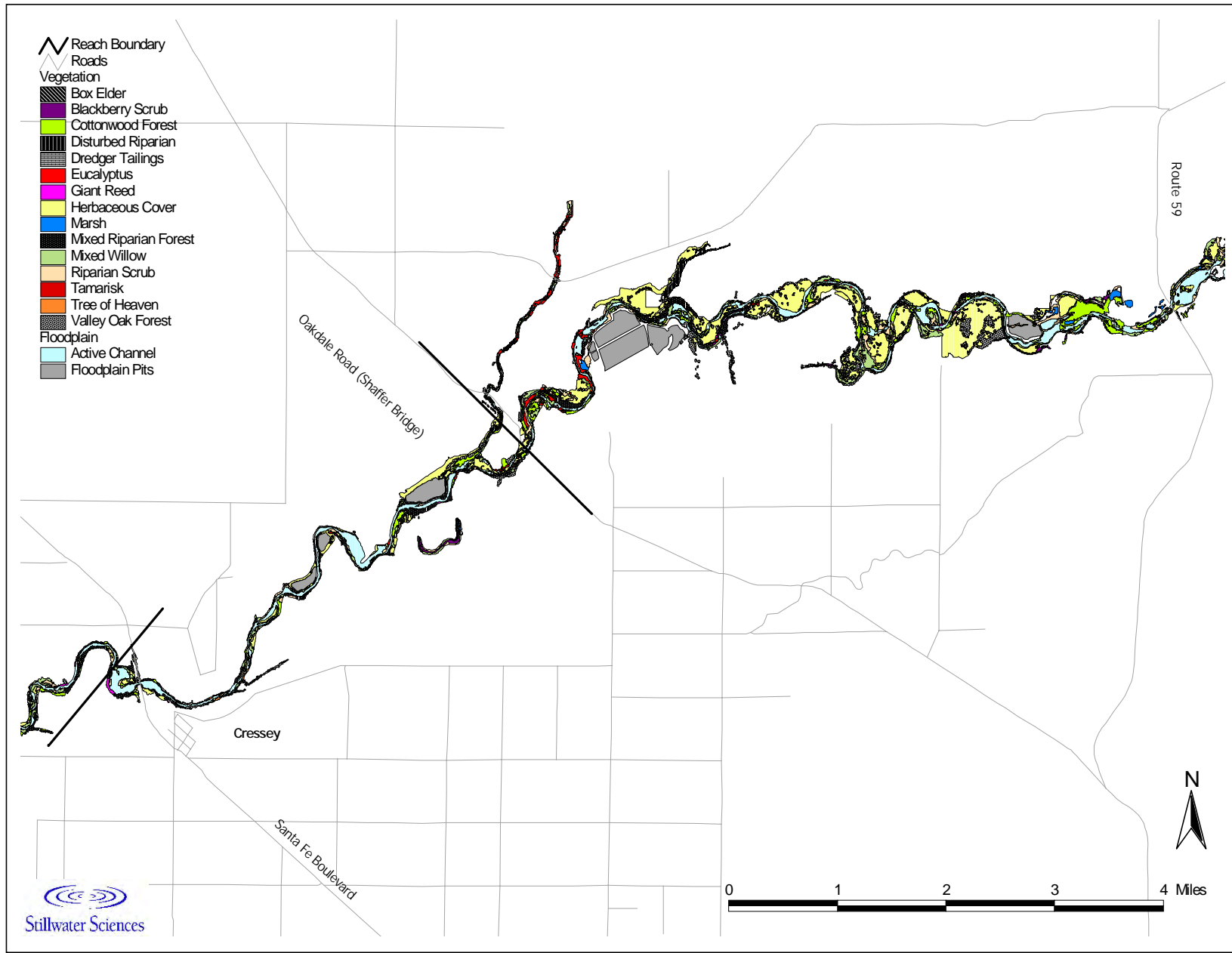


Figure 6.1-1B. Merced River vegetation distribution.

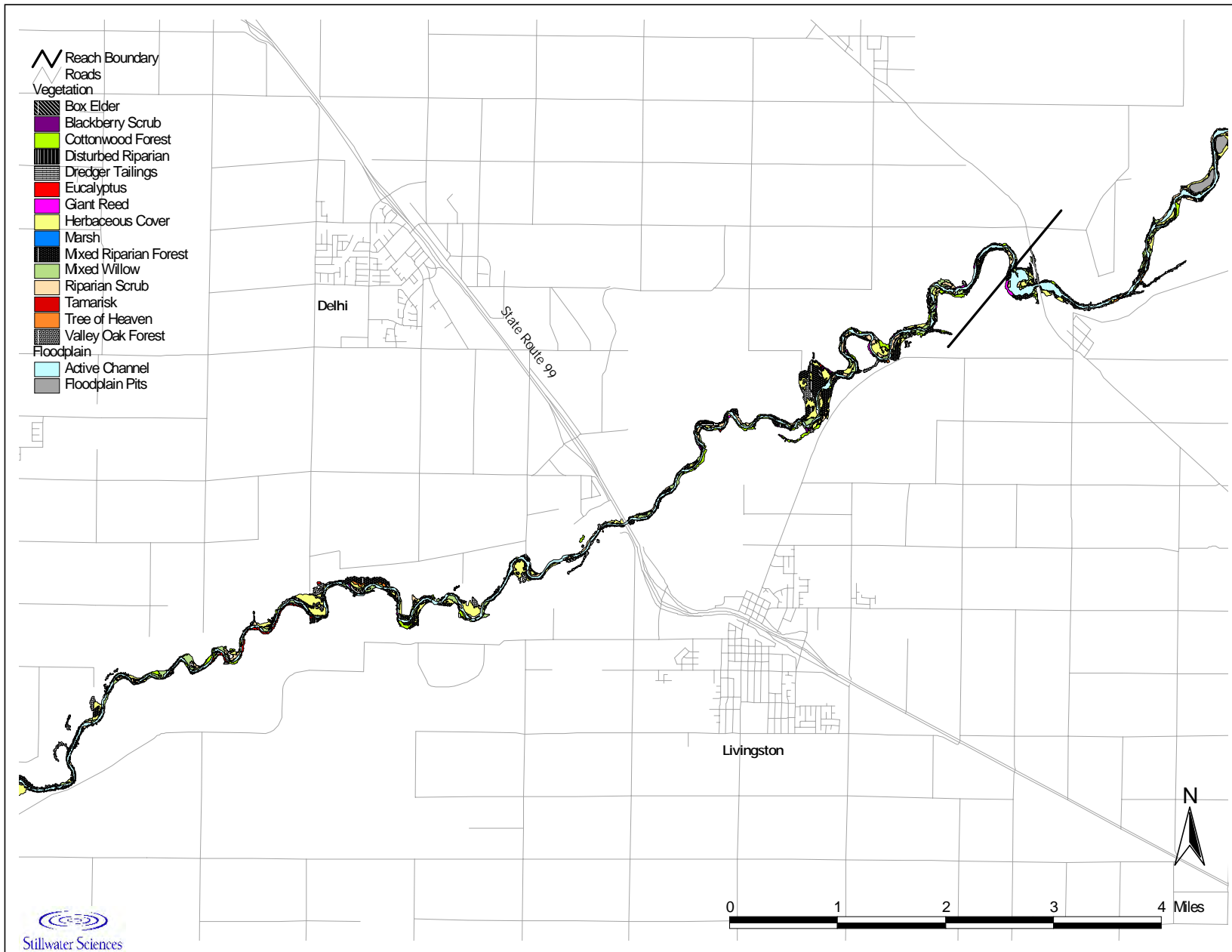


Figure 6.1-1C. Merced River vegetation distribution.

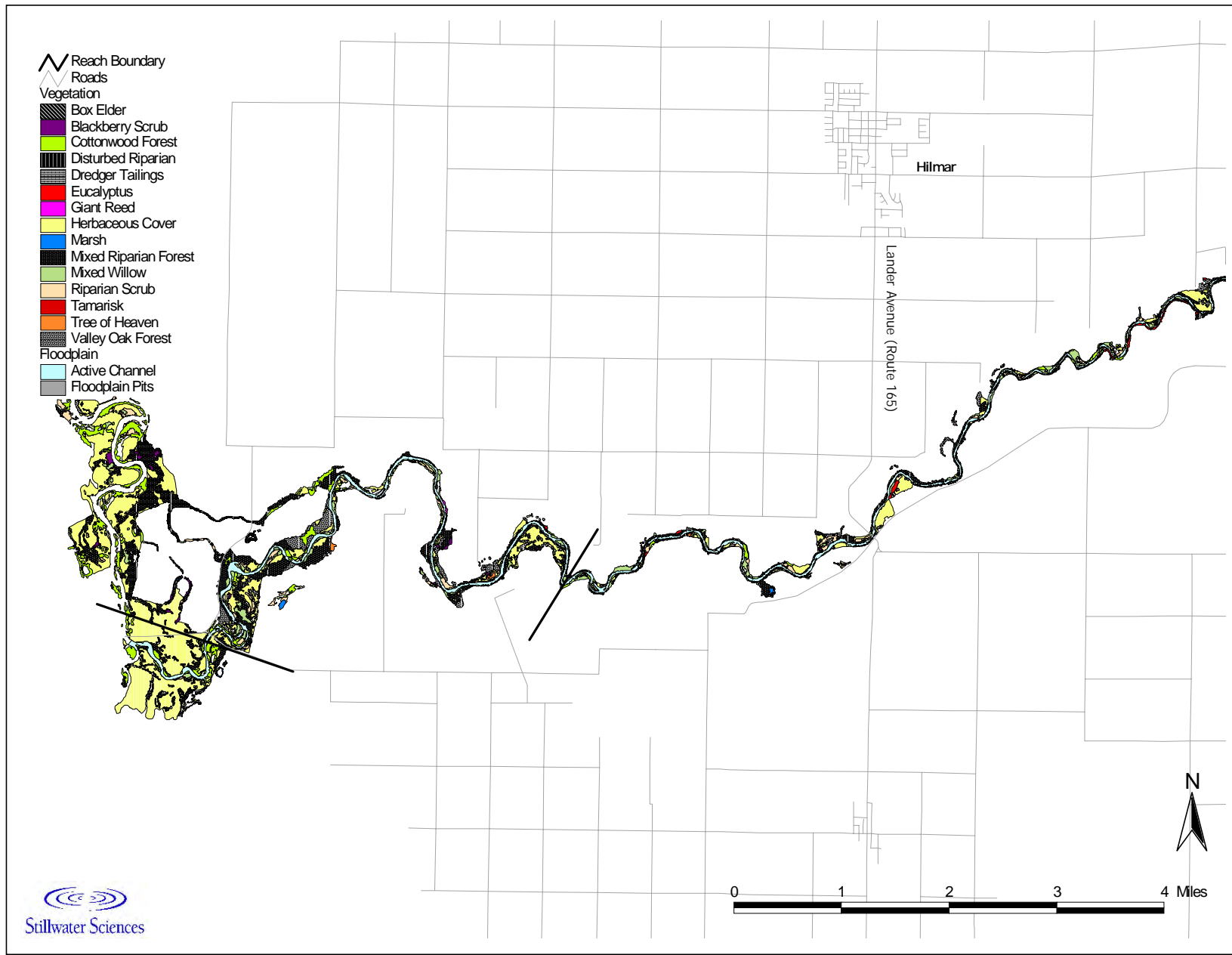


Figure 6.1-1D. Merced River vegetation distribution



Figure 6.2-1. Aerial photograph of the Stevinson Site showing vegetation transect location.
(photo: Merced County Planning and Community Development Department 1998)

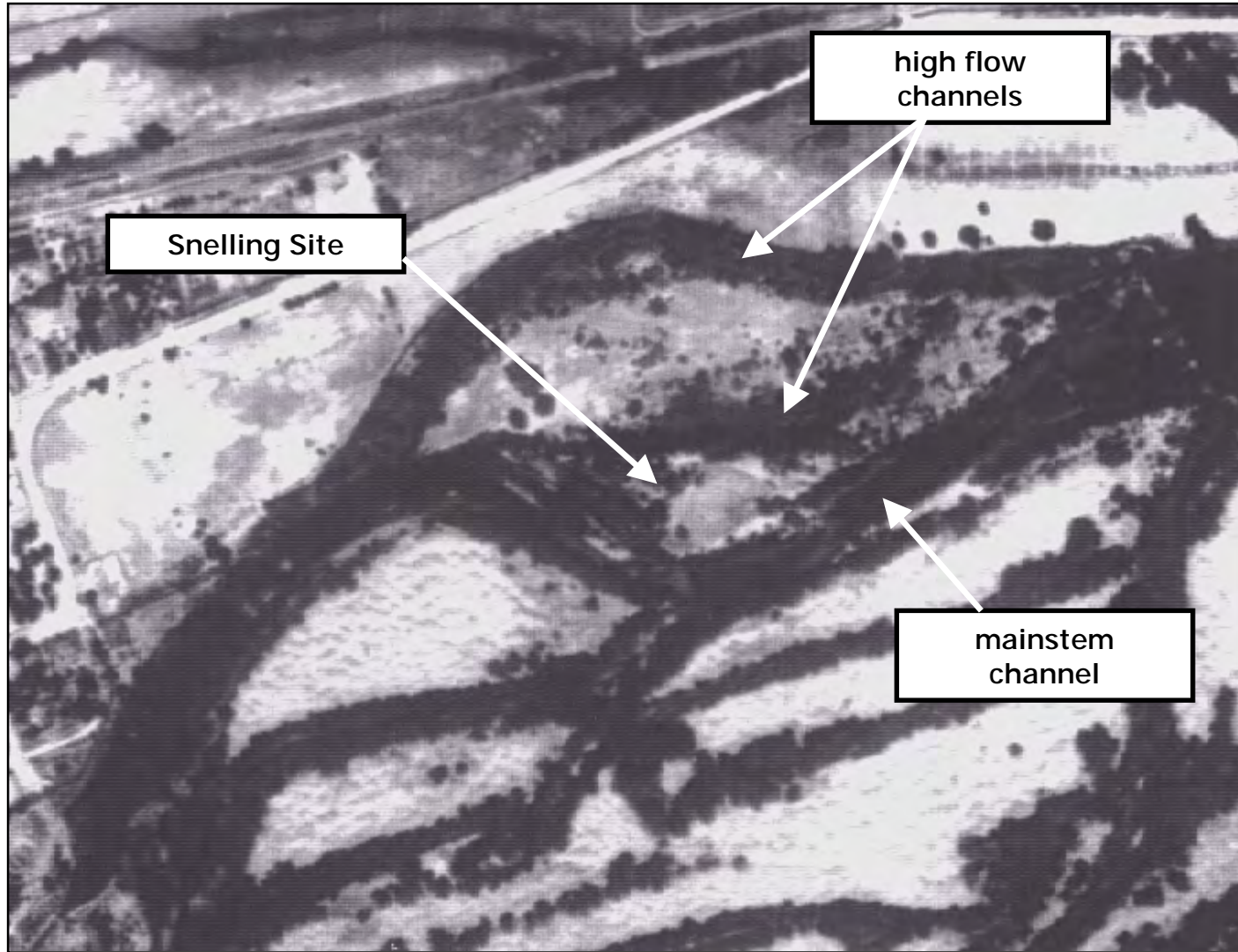


Figure 6.3-1. Aerial photograph of the Snelling Site - 1937.
(photo: Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service 1937)

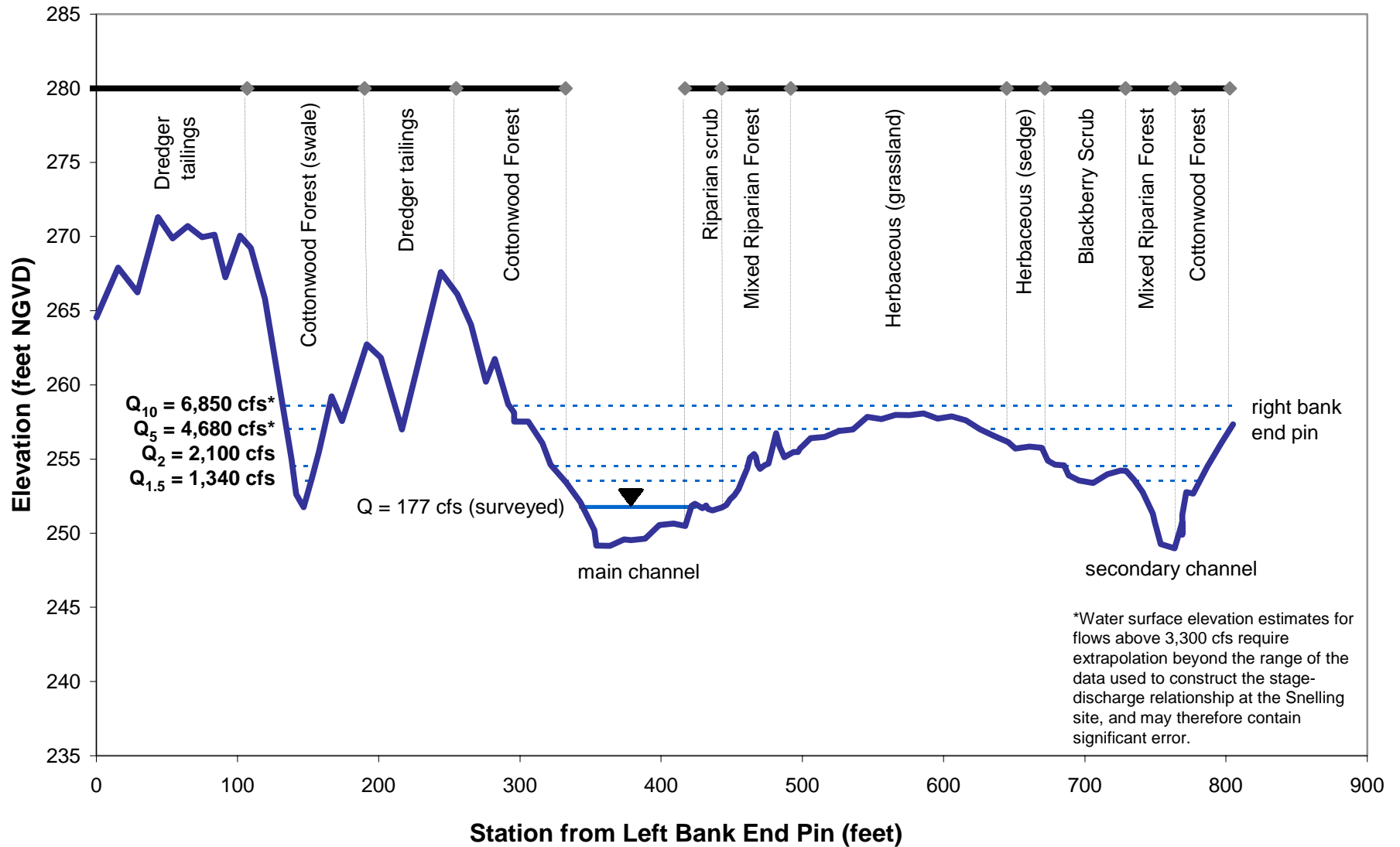


Figure 6.3-2. Snelling Site vegetation cover and topographic cross section 13+95.

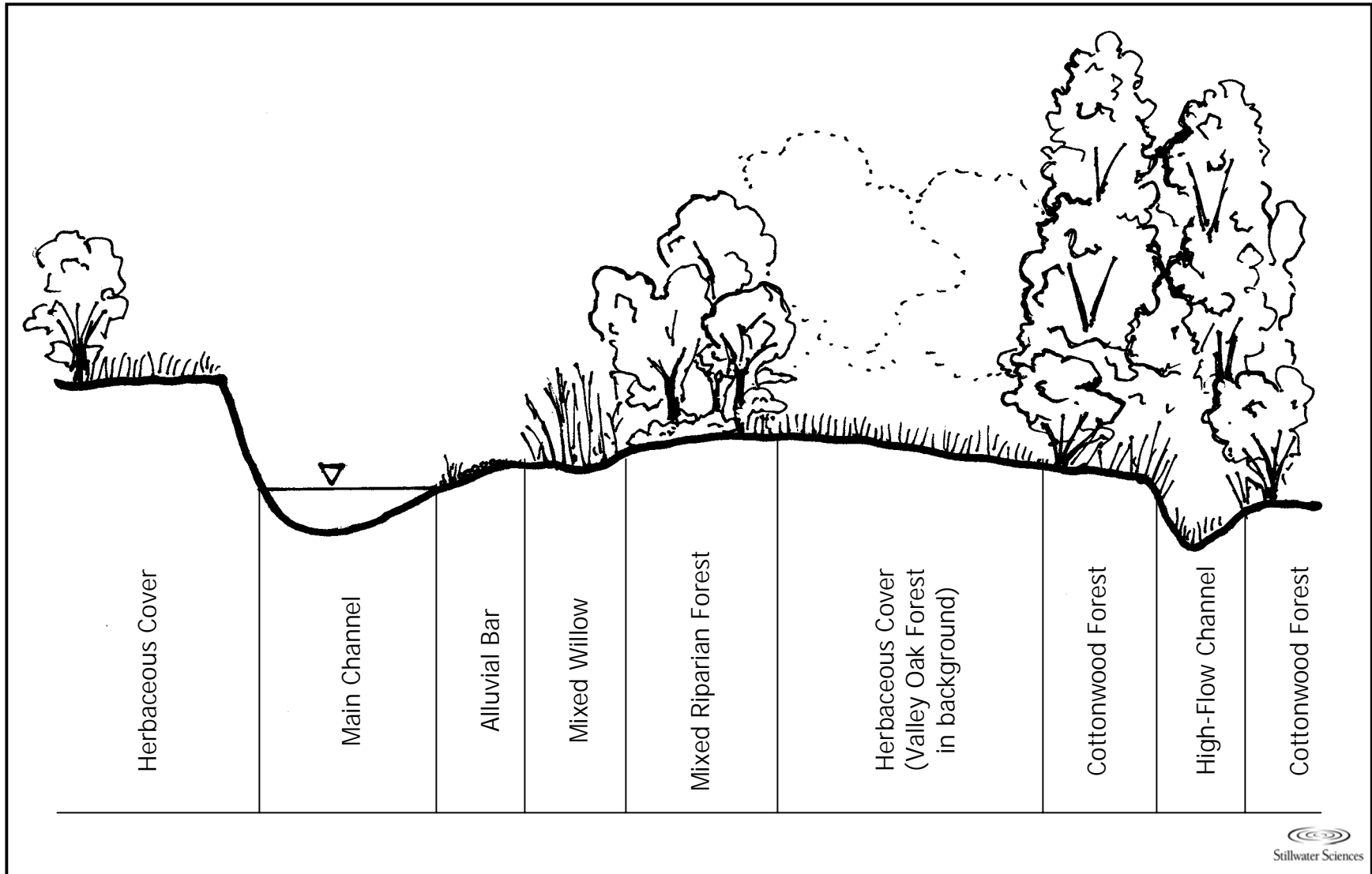


Figure 6.4-1. Generalized vegetation toposequence for least disturbed sites on the Merced River.

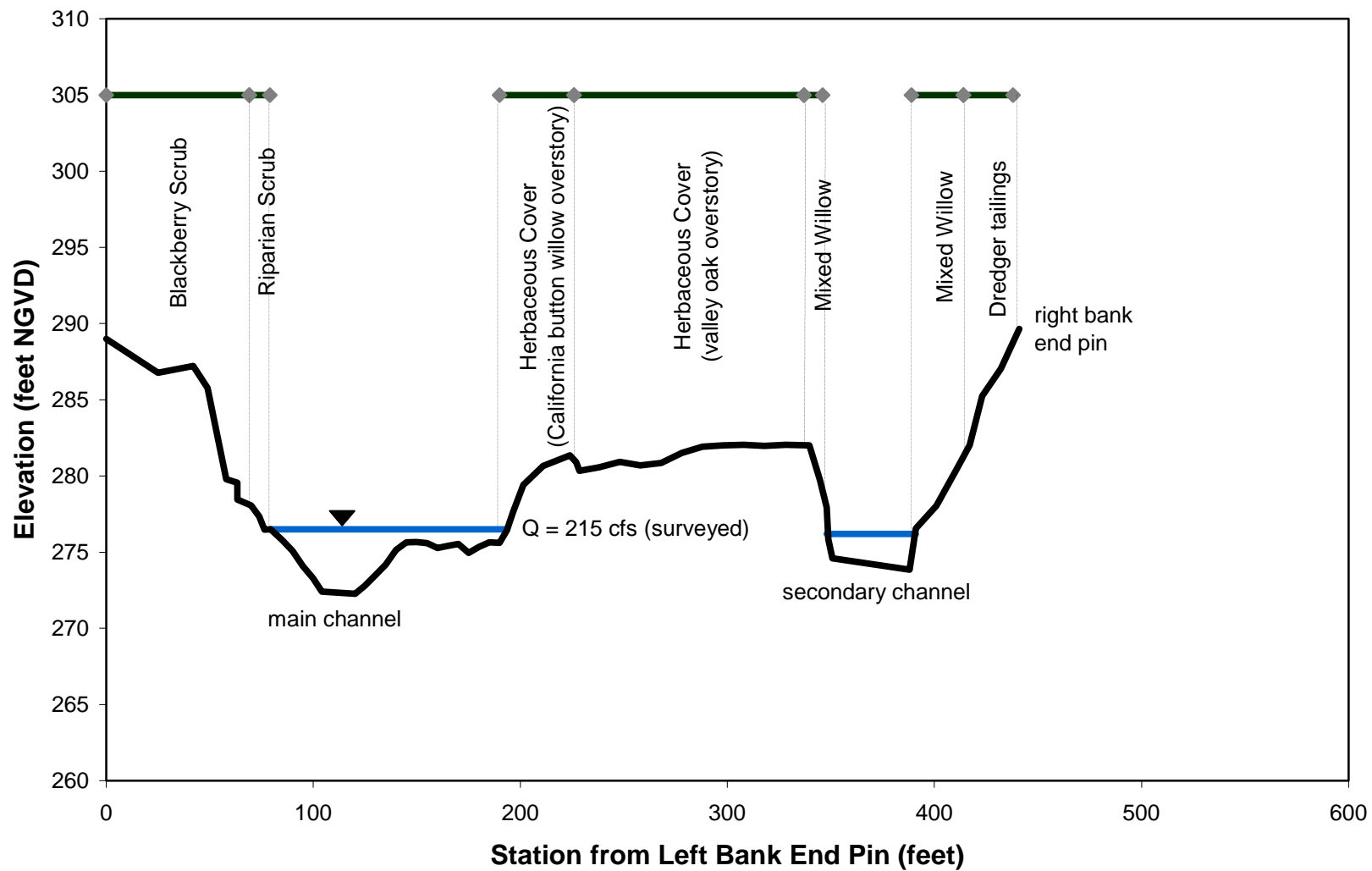


Figure 6.4-2. Cuneo Site vegetation cover and topographic cross section.

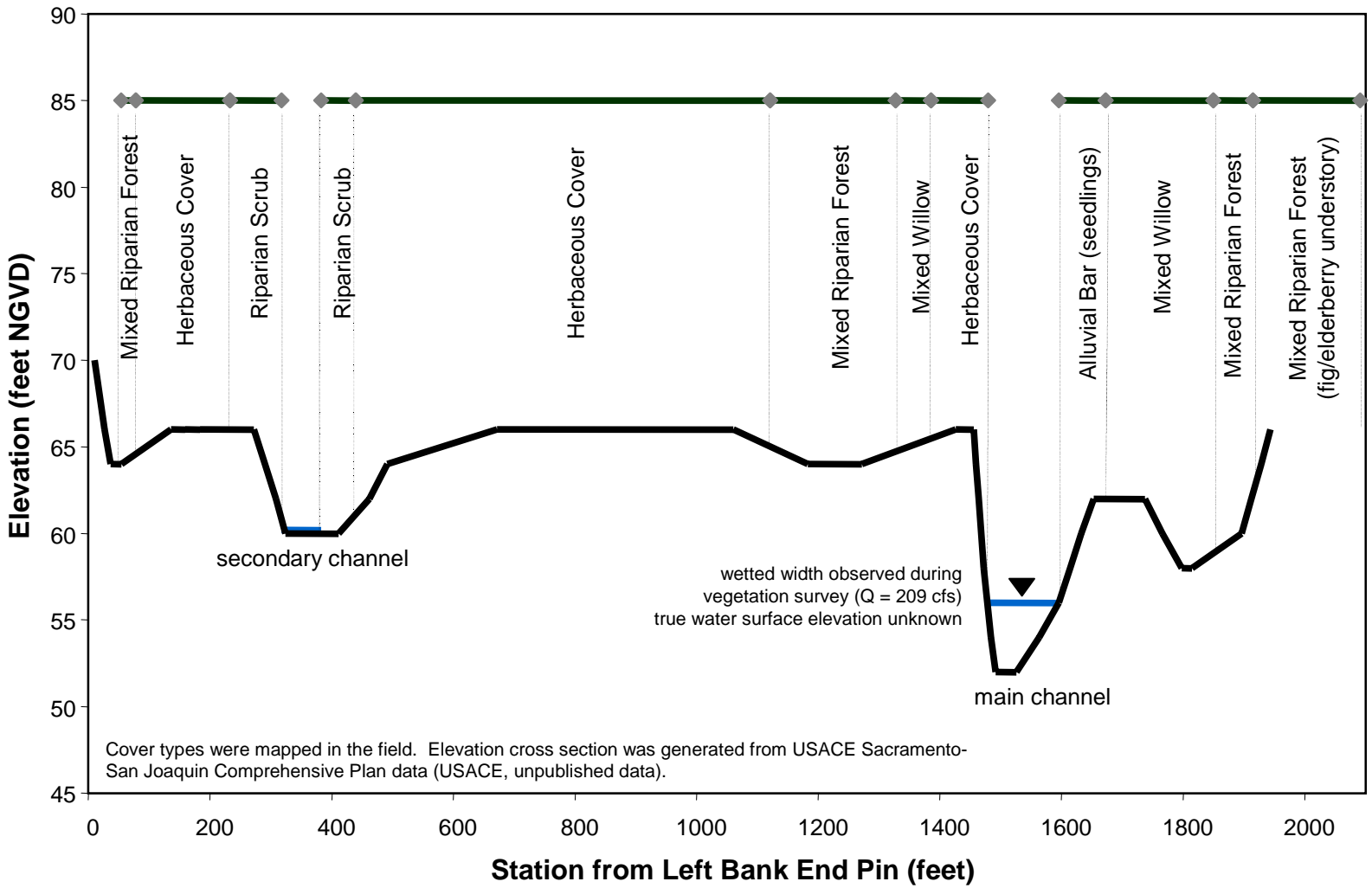


Figure 6.4-3. Stevinson Site vegetation cover and topographic cross section.

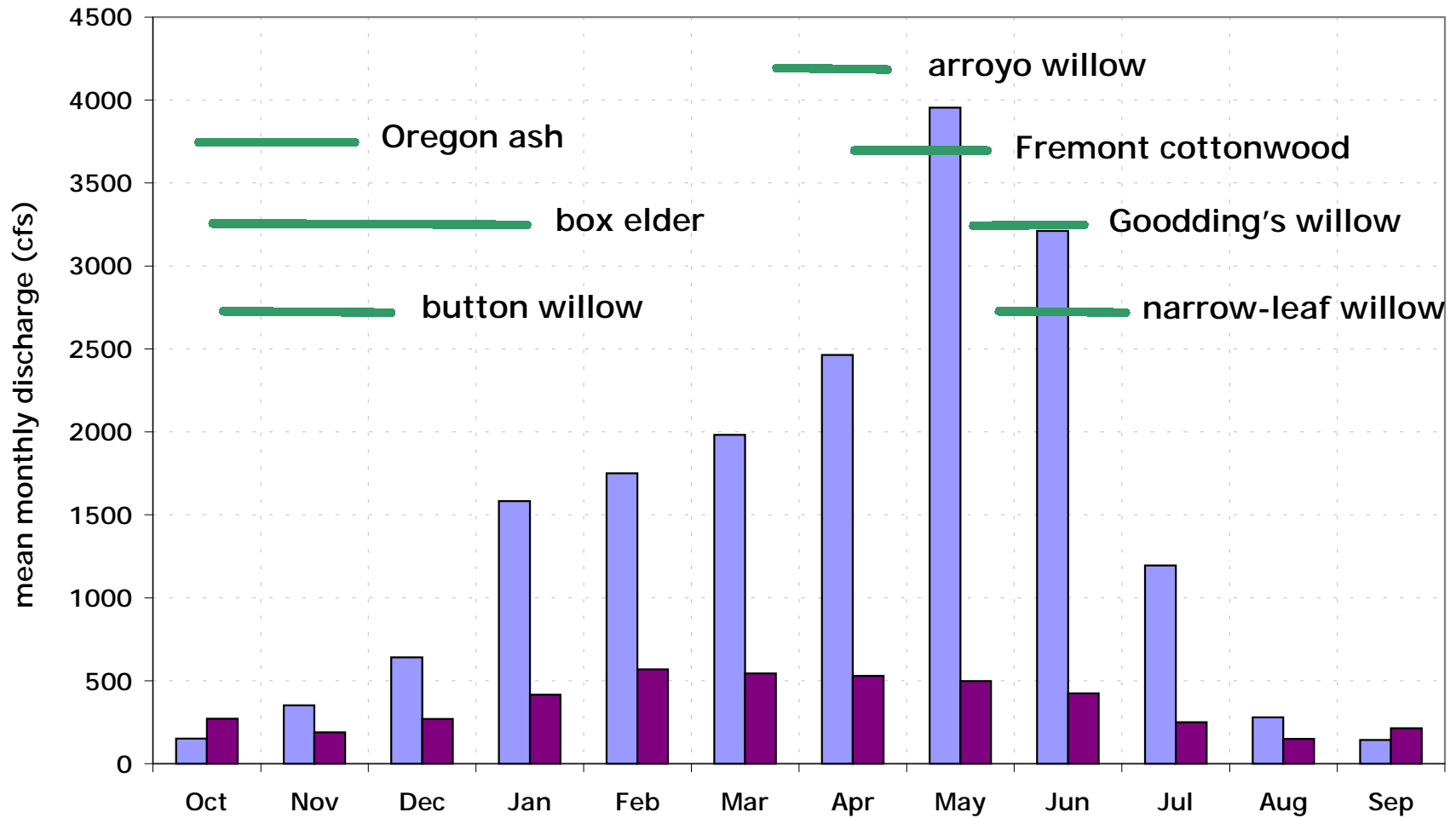


Figure 6.5-1. Riparian tree seed release periods compared to Merced River unimpaired and regulated mean monthly flow, 1968-1998. Unregulated flow (lighter bars) is estimated by CDWR (1994a). Regulated flow (dark bars) is measured at Crocker-Huffman Dam (Merced ID), downstream of all major dams and diversions. Seed release data are approximate and are taken from CALFED (2000).

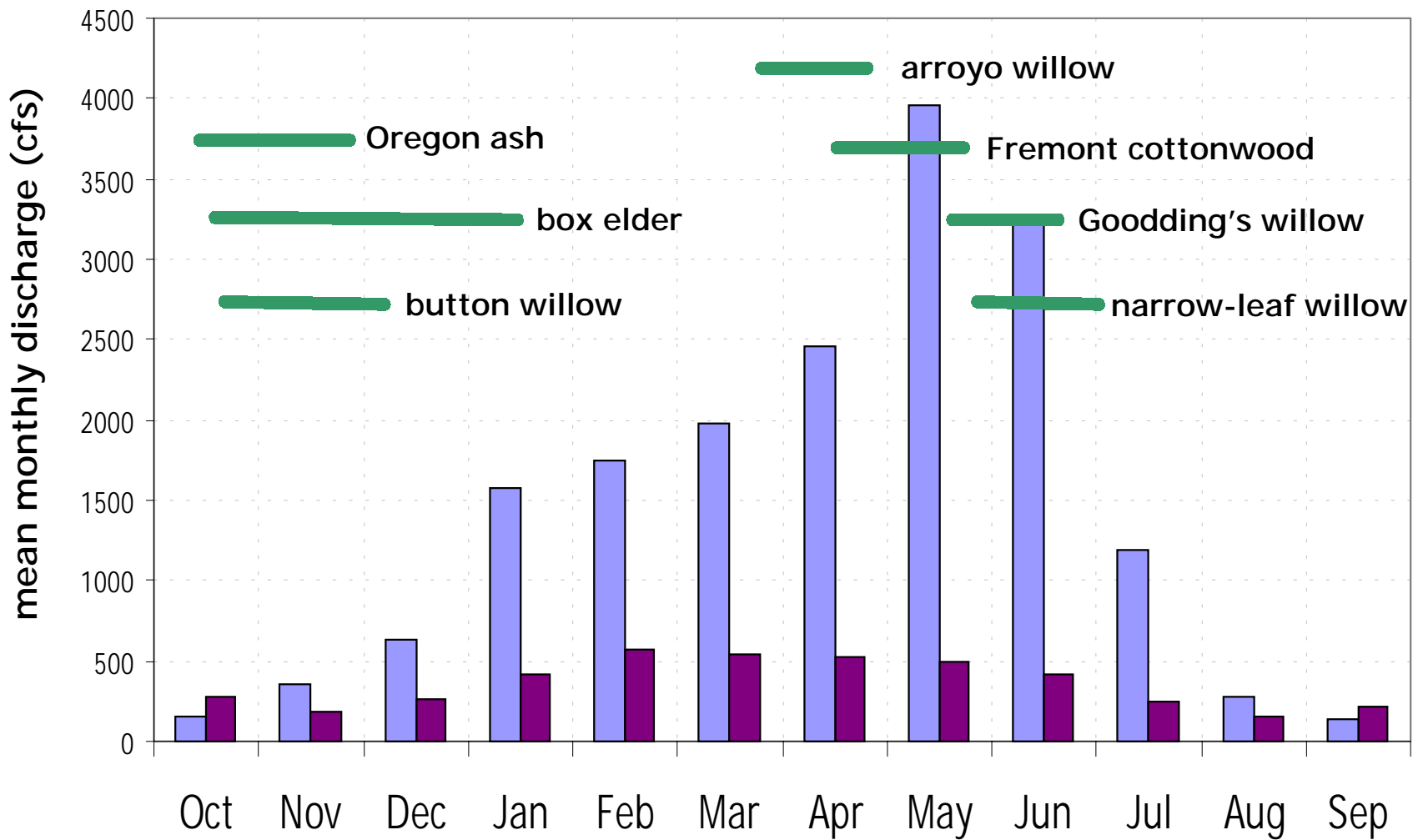


Figure 6.5-1. Riparian tree seed release periods compared to Merced River unimpaired and regulated mean monthly flow, 1968-1998. Unregulated flow (lighter bars) is estimated by CDWR (1994a). Regulated flow (dark bars) is measured at Crocker-Huffman Dam (Merced ID), downstream of all major dams and diversions. Seed release data are approximate and are taken from CALFED (2000).

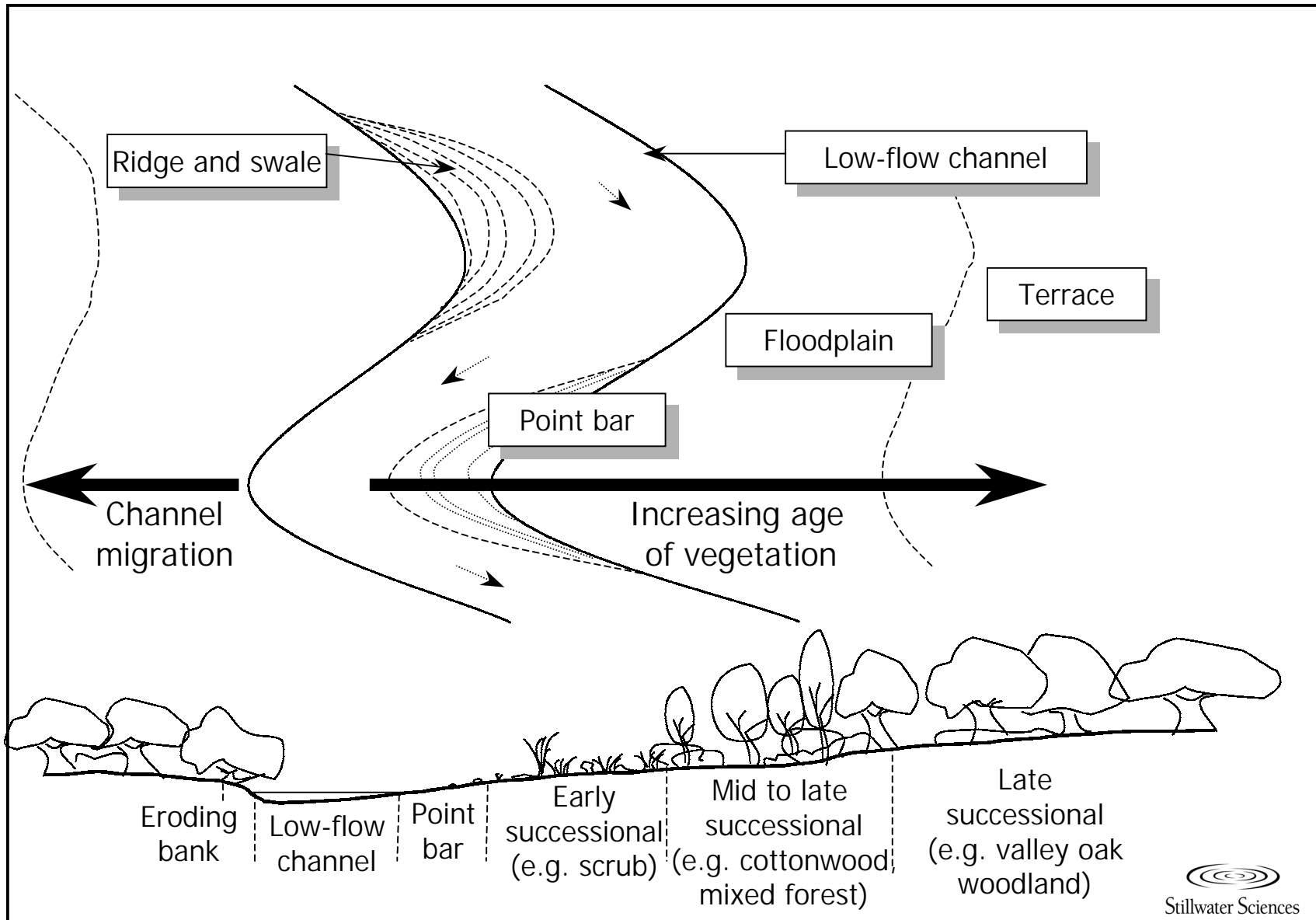


Figure 6.5-2. Schematic diagram of riparian succession.

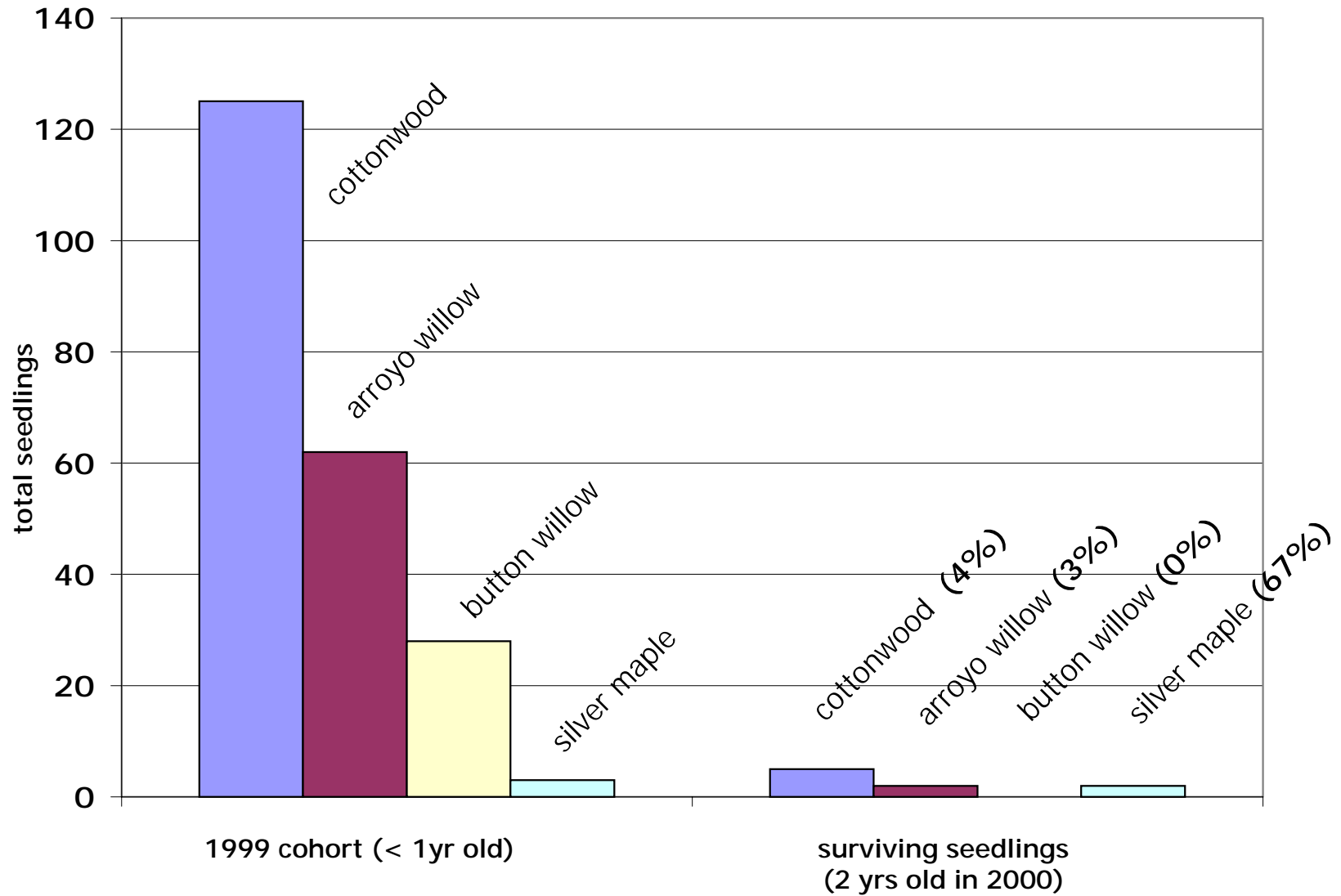


Figure 6.5-3. Seedling survival between October 1999 and June 2000, Snelling cross section 13+95. Percent survival for each species is in parentheses.

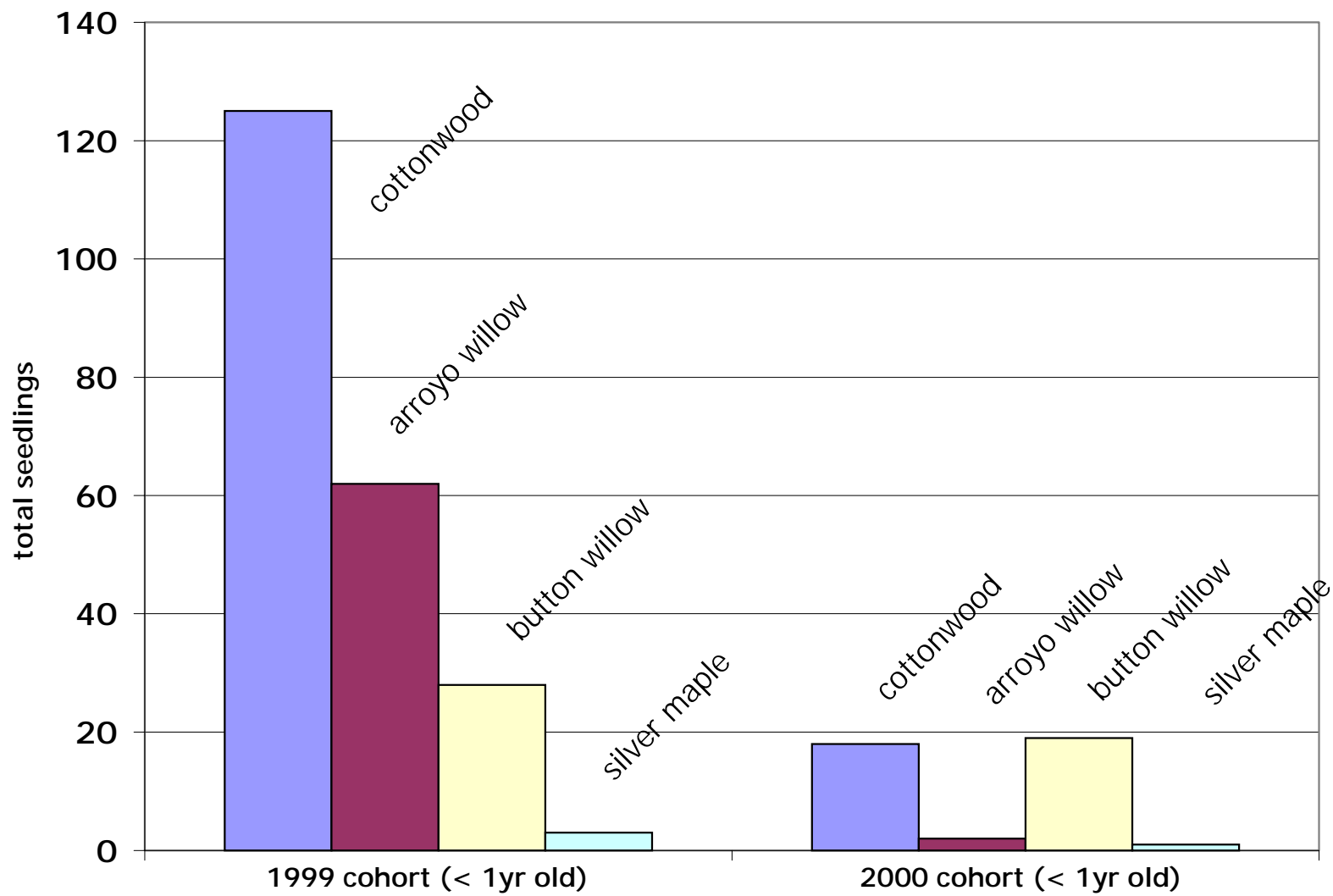


Figure 6.5-4. Annual variability in recruitment between the 1999 and 2000 cohorts at Snelling cross section 13+95.

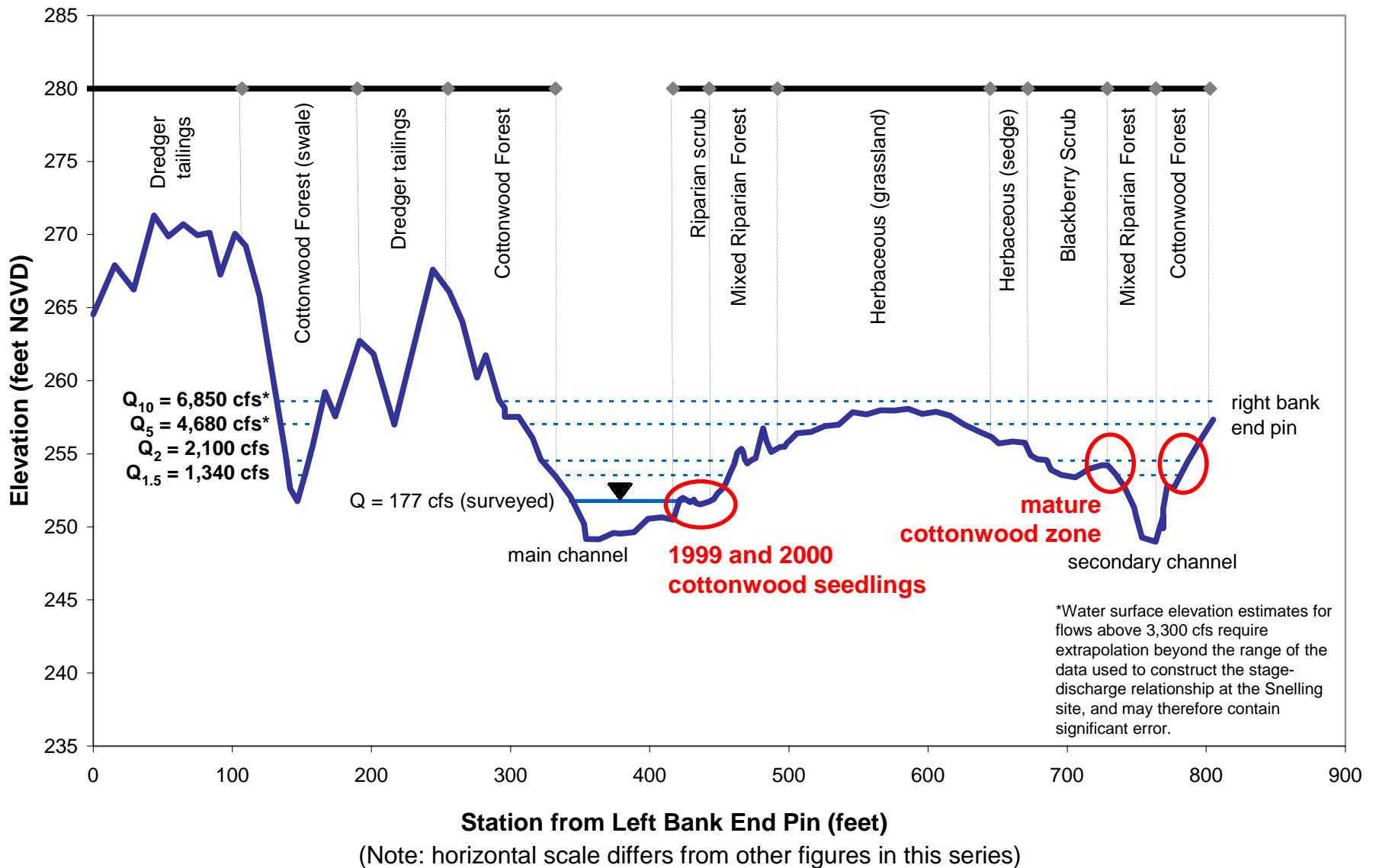


Figure 6.5-5. Snelling cross section 13+95, showing elevation and inundation frequency of current cottonwood germination zone and root crown elevation of mature cottonwoods. Current seedlings germinate within the bankfull channel. Mature trees are inundated at flows corresponding to the post-dam 1.5 to 5-year recurrence intervals.

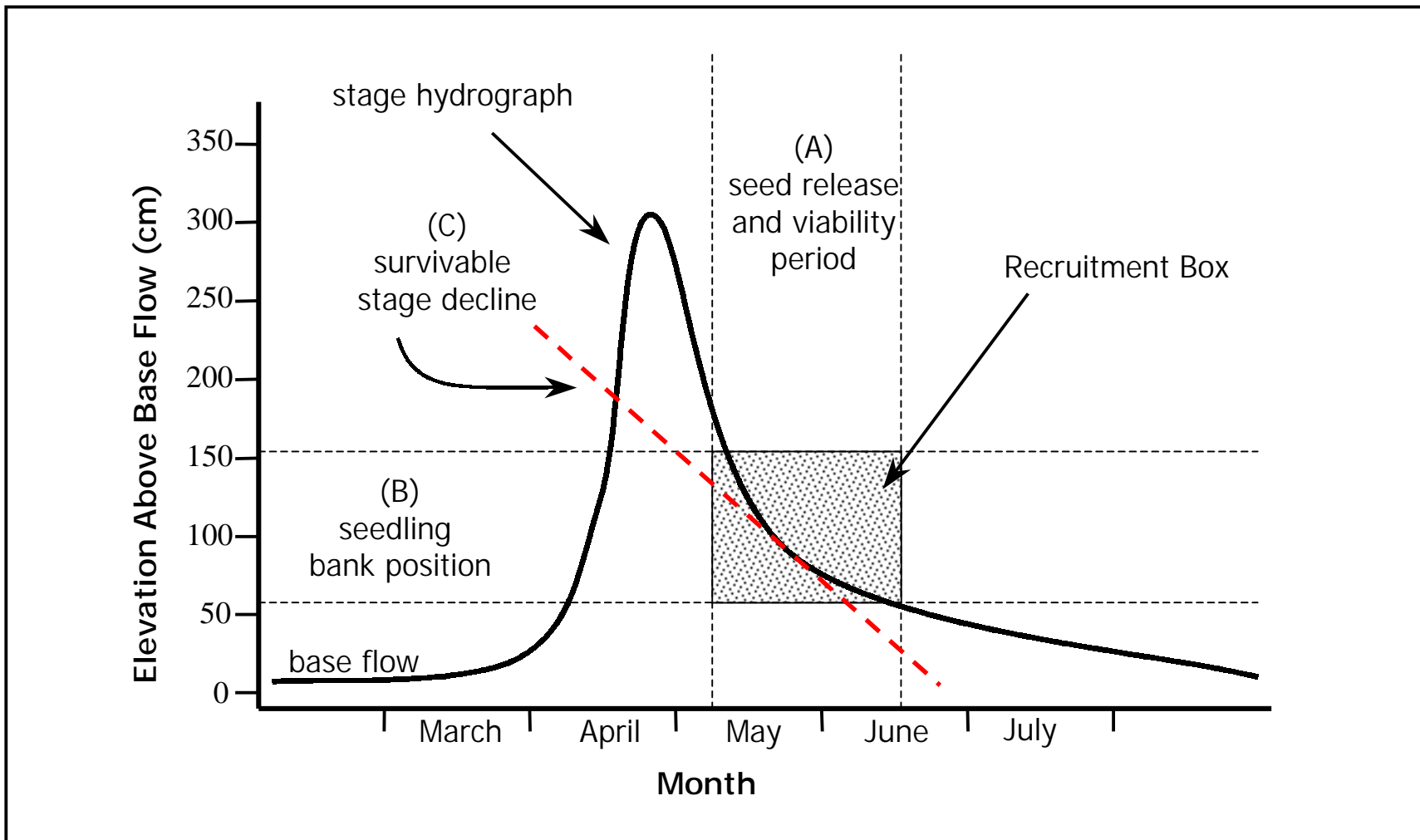


Figure 6.5-6. The 'Recruitment Box' concept (adapted from Mahoney and Rood, 1998). The recruitment box is a space defined in elevation and time in which seedlings of riparian plant species are likely to become successfully established based on stream flow conditions. The graph represents the relationship between the stream hydrograph and the timing of (A) the seed release and viability period for a particular riparian plant species; (B) the range of bank elevations (or stream stages) at which successful seedling recruitment is likely to occur for that species; and (C) the survivable rate of stream stage decline determined by the seedling's ability to maintain functional contact with the receding water table through root elongation.

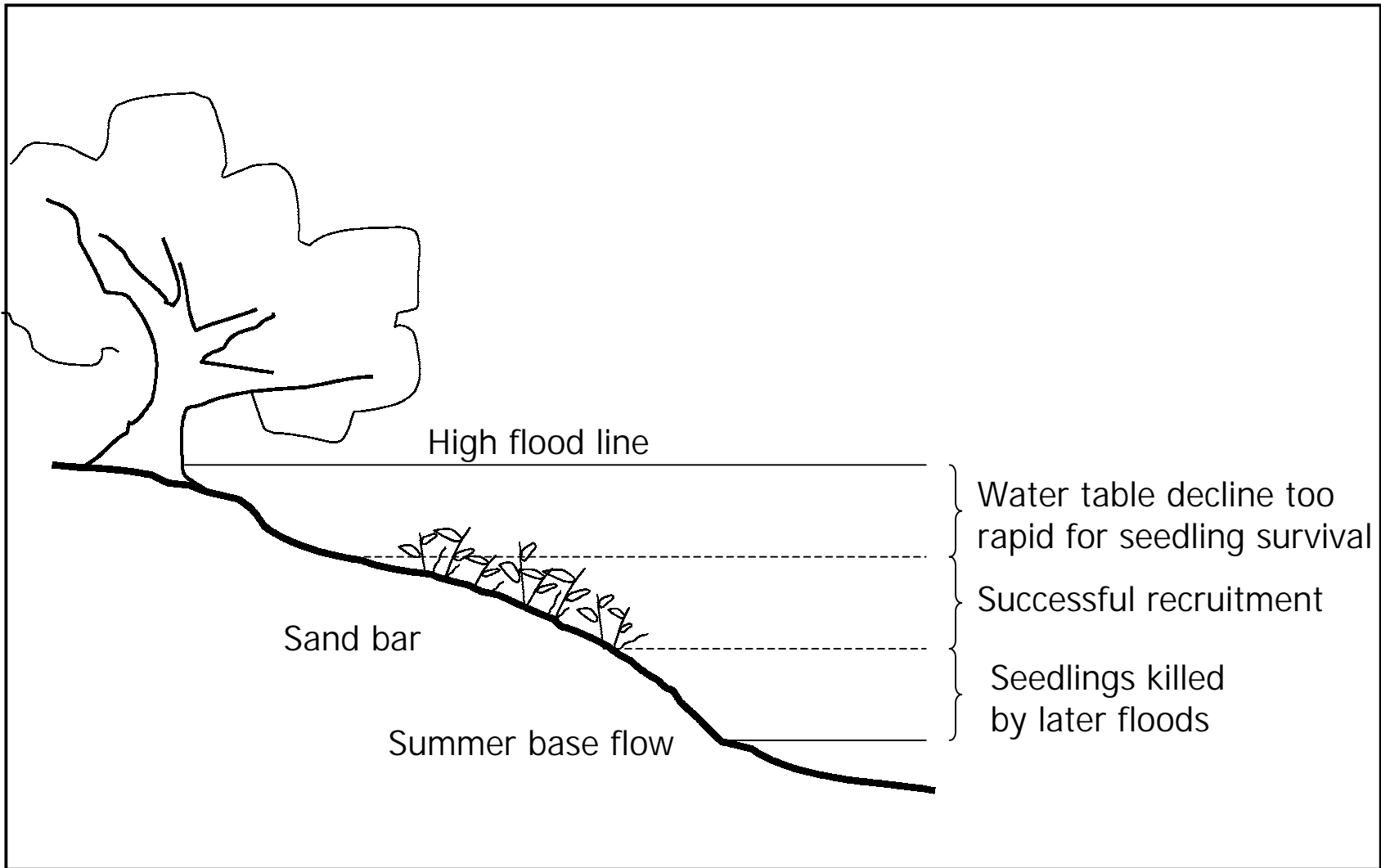


Figure 6.5-7. Cottonwood and willow recruitment patterns.

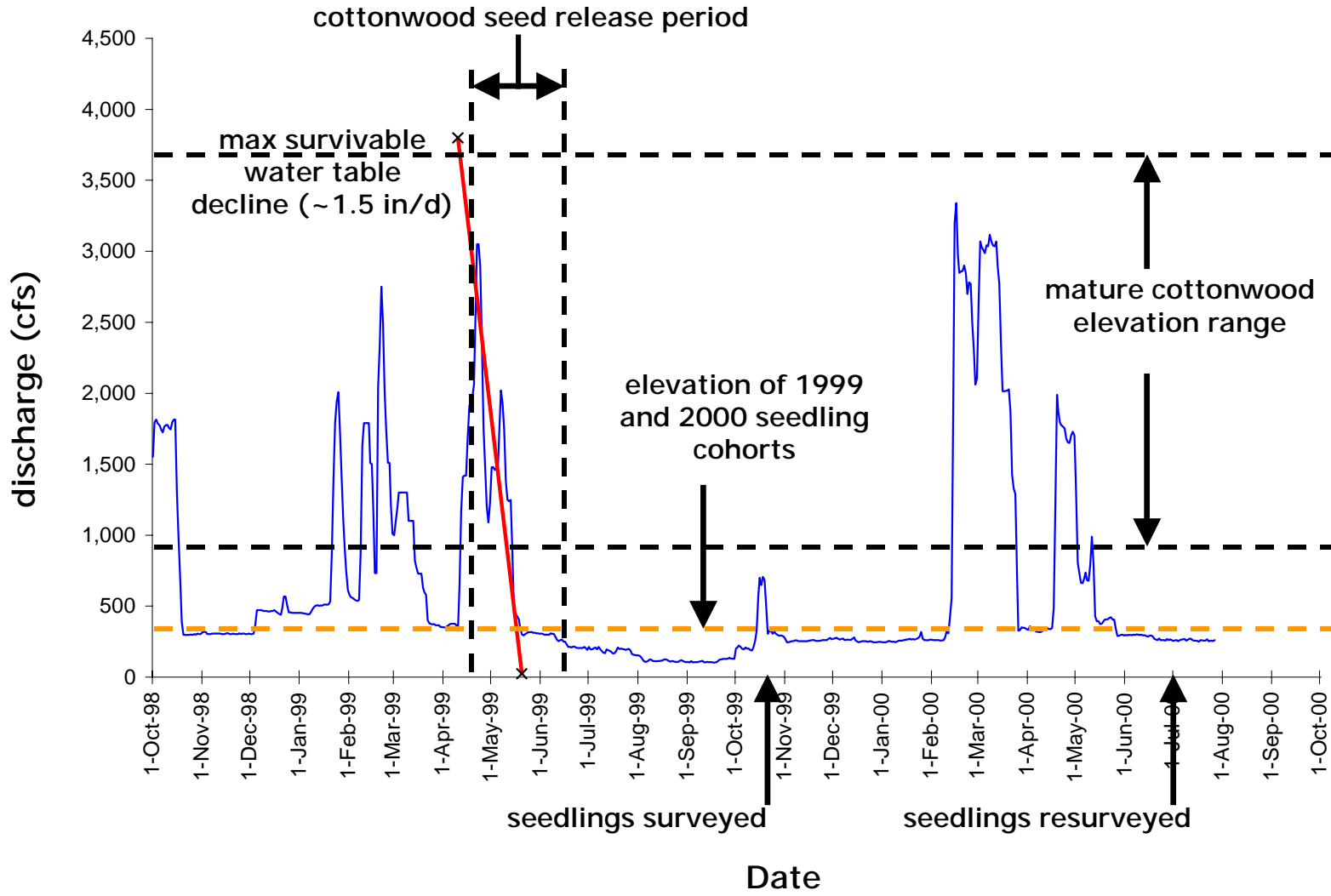


Figure 6.5-8. 'Recruitment Box' Analysis of Snelling Site.

Flow data are from the Merced ID Merced River at Crocker-Huffman gauge.

Appendix A. GIS Metadata

Merced River Geomorphic Surfaces

Summary of Geospatial Metadata

Metadata Type	Description
Datum	NAD 83
Projection	State Plane Coordinate System, Zone 3326, Spheroid GRS 1980
Units	International Feet
Source media	Stereo aerial photography, available maps and literature
Capture method	Original maps were produced from orthorectified aerial photography
File size:	792 Kb., ArcInfo 447data records.
File format	ArcInfo coverage
Coverage type	Polygon

1 IDENTIFICATION INFORMATION

1.1 Citation

Title (Theme Name):	Merced River Geomorphic Surfaces
Resource Description (Theme Abbreviation):	floodplain
Originator:	Stillwater Sciences
Publication Date:	January 12, 2001

1.2 Description

Abstract

This database displays a morphologic map of the Quaternary valley floor and channel corridor of the Merced River, CA. Specifically described in the valley morphology map are the 1) currently active river channel (including gravel pits and reservoirs) of the Merced River, 2) historical fluvial landforms (terraces, recently abandoned floodplains, and dredger tailings), and 3) floodplains inundated at 6,000 cfs, the maximum allowable flood release under U.S. Army Corps of Engineers flood control rules.

Purpose

These data were created to estimate the extent of existing and potential geomorphic surfaces inundated by the maximum flood release (6,000 cfs) and to test hypotheses regarding vegetation community composition and position relative to the fluvial geomorphic surfaces.

1.3 Status: **Final**

1.4 Spatial Domain

North Bounding Coordinate (Latitude):	2016227.951
South Bounding Coordinate (Latitude):	1948011.375
West Bounding Coordinate (Longitude):	6423289.000
East Bounding Coordinate (Longitude):	6616669.432

1.5 Access Restrictions: **None**

1.6 Use Restrictions: **None**

1.7 Point of Contact (Data Steward):

Contact Person:	Jennifer Vick
Contact Position:	Project Manager
Contact Organization:	Stillwater Sciences
Contact Physical Address:	
Contact Mailing Address:	2532 Durant Avenue
Contact City:	Berkeley
Contact State:	California
Contact Zip code:	94704
Contact Voice Telephone:	510-848-8098

1.8 Native Data Set Environment

Software:	ArcInfo 7.2.1
Computer Operating System:	Unix

2 DATA QUALITY INFORMATION

2.1 Attribute Accuracy

Each step in the data entry process was checked by an independent reviewer. A second independent reviewer checked the corrections. This process was repeated until the reviewer identified no errors. Reviews and verifications were recorded onto QA/QC forms and archived.

2.2 Logical Consistency

All polygons close and features represented in this data set are consistent with those observed in the digital imagery.

2.3 Completeness of Report

All edits complete. No additional revisions are anticipated.

2.4 Positional Accuracy

Surface boundaries were derived from georeferenced imagery. They were not, however, field verified.

3 LINEAGE

3.1 Source Information

Mapping and classification of the valley floor geomorphic surfaces was developed using geologic literature and maps, topographic maps, aerial photographs, channel cross sections, and maps of valley inundation under several flow scenarios since 1967.

3.2 Data Sources

- Aerial photography 1937
- Aerial photography 1993
- Aerial photography 1998
- Bartow, J.A. 1988. The Cenozoic Evolution of the San Joaquin Valley, California.
- Blodgett, J.C. and G.L. Bertoldi. 1968. Determination of channel capacity of the Merced River downstream from Merced Falls Dam, Merced County, California. Prepared by U. S. Geological Survey, Water Resources Division in cooperation with California Reclamation Board, Menlo Park.
- USGS (U.S. Geological Survey). 1990. Geology map of the San Francisco-San Jose quadrangle, California. Compilation by D.L. Wagner, E.J. Bortugno, and R.D. McJunkin. Regional Geologic Map series, 1:250,000.
- Harden, J.W. 1987. Soils Developed in Granitic Alluvium near Merced, California. In *Soil Chronosequences in the Western United States*, J.W. Harden ed., U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 1590-A.
- Huntington, G.L., E.L. Begg, J.W. Harden, and D.E. Marchand. 1977. Soil development, geomorphology, and Cenozoic history of the northeastern San Joaquin Valley and adjacent areas. In *California: A Guidebook for the Joint Field Session of the American Society of Agronomy, Soil Science Society of America and the Geological Society of America*, ed. M.J.Singer.
- Marchand, D.E. and A. Allwardt. 1981. Late Cenozoic stratigraphic units, northeastern San Joaquin Valley, California. U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 1470. 70 p.
- Merced River Planform Maps 1855 and 1911
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. 1997. Digital map of inundation boundary at a flow of approximately 8,080 cfs (measured at Snelling).

- Wahrhaftig, C. and J.H. Birman. 1966. The Quaternary of the Pacific Mountain system in California. In *Geology of Northern California*, ed. E. H. Bailey, California Division of Mines and Geology, USGS Bulletin No. 190.

3.3 Processing Steps

First, the Quaternary valley floor of the Merced River was inferred and delineated using available geologic and topographic information. Then, historic river planform maps, topographic and geologic maps, and aerial photographs were used to analyze the valley floor morphology and to infer and map the active channel (including in-channel alluvial features) of the Merced River and geomorphic valley floor surfaces. Geomorphic features were plotted onto orthorectified aerial photographs (1998, scale 1:6,000) and digitized in ArcInfo. The geomorphic surfaces were then classified in terms of relative age and inundation history using channel cross section data and inundation maps.

3.4 Data Resolution: **Vector**

3.5 Horizontal Coordinate System Definition

Map Projection Name:	State Plane
Units:	International Feet
Geodetic Model	
Horizontal Datum Name:	NAD83
Spheroid:	GRS1980
Zone:	3326

4 ENTITY AND ATTRIBUTE INFORMATION

4.1 Overview Description

COLUMN INDEXED?	ITEM NAME	WIDTH	OUTPUT	TYPE	N.DEC	ALTERNATE NAME
1	AREA	8	18	F	5	-
9	PERIMETER	8	18	F	5	-
17	FLOODPLAIN12#	4	5	B	-	-
21	FLOODPLAIN12-ID	4	5	B	-	-
25	GEOM	8	8	C	-	-

4.2 Attribute Description

Area:	The area of each individual polygon in square international feet.
Perimeter:	The length of the perimeter of each polygon in linear international feet.
Floodplain12#:	A unique identification assigned by ArcInfo.
Floodplain12-ID:	A unique identification assigned by ArcInfo.
Geom:	Codes describing the geomorphic surfaces.

Attribute: Geom

Code	Name	Description
AC	Active Channel	The portion of the river channel that is actively scoured under the current flow conditions. This includes the low flow channel and unvegetated alluvial bars.
CF	Current Floodplain	Surfaces that are expected to be inundated by flows of approximately 6,000 cfs (the maximum releases allowable under U.S. Army Corps of Engineers flood control rules) in the absence of levees (some of these floodplain areas are now isolated from the river by levees). Historically, this geomorphic surface was likely contained within the bankfull channel.
CTFF	Current Terrace Former Floodplain	Surfaces that are not expected to be inundated by flows of approximately 6,000 cfs. Historically, floods exceeding the pre-dam bankfull flow inundated these geomorphic surfaces
DT	Dredger Tailings	Dredger Tailings
PIT	Pit	Gravel pits
POND	Pond	Ponds
TERR	Terrace	Abandoned alluvial surfaces within the valley that, historically, would have been inundated only by large, infrequent floods.

5 METADATA DATE:

January 12, 2001

Merced River Levees

Summary of Geospatial Metadata

Metadata Type	Description
Datum	NAD 83
Projection	State Plane Coordinate System, Zone 3326, Spheroid GRS 1980
Units	International Feet
Source media	Aerial photography
Capture method	Original maps were produced from orthorectified aerial photography.
File size:	26.4KB., ArcInfo coverage, 36 data records.
File format	ArcInfo coverage
Coverage type	Line

1 IDENTIFICATION INFORMATION

1.1 Citation

Title (Theme Name):	Merced River Levees
Resource Description (Theme Abbreviation):	levees
Originator:	Stillwater Sciences
Publication Date:	January 12, 2001

1.2 Description

Abstract

This data set contains information regarding the location of levees adjacent to the Merced River, CA.

Purpose

These data were created to interpret and map levees along the Merced River, classify levees according to their geomorphic surface association, and identify 6,000 cfs geomorphic surfaces ("current floodplains") which are prevented from annual inundation by the levees.

1.3 Status: **Final**

1.4 Spatial Domain

North Bounding Coordinate (Latitude):	1993931.750
South Bounding Coordinate (Latitude):	1949583.375

West Bounding Coordinate (Longitude): 6429219.500
East Bounding Coordinate (Longitude): 6561342.500

1.5 Access Restrictions: None

1.6 Use Restrictions: None

1.7 Point of Contact (Data Steward):

Contact Person: Jennifer Vick
Contact Position: Project Manager
Contact Organization: Stillwater Sciences
Contact Physical Address:
Contact Mailing Address: 2532 Durant Ave.
Contact City: Berkeley
Contact State: California
Contact Zip Code: 94704
Contact Voice Telephone: 510-848-8098

1.8 Native Data Set Environment:

Software: ArcInfo 7.2.1
Computer Operating System: Unix

2 DATA QUALITY INFORMATION

2.1 Attribute Accuracy

Each step in the data entry process was checked by an independent reviewer. A second independent reviewer checked the corrections. This process was repeated until the reviewer identified no errors. Reviews and verifications were recorded onto QA/QC forms and archived.

2.2 Logical Consistency

Levee arcs do not overlap and are consistent with features observed in aerial photographs.

2.3 Completeness of Report

No further revisions are expected.

2.4 Positional Accuracy

This information was not completely field verified. Field verification was conducted at some locations in conjunction with other field work.

3 LINEAGE

3.1 Source Information

Mapping (including interpretation) of levees was developed using aerial photographs and California Department of Water Resources levee coverage.

3.2 Data Sources

- Aerial photography 1993
- Aerial photography 1998
- California Department of Water Resources 2000 unpublished data

3.3 Processing Steps

Stereo aerial photography (taken in 1993) was used to identify the location of all levees with respect to geomorphic surfaces (Step 1). The levees were then classified based on their association with geomorphic surfaces (Step 2). Most levees were located on a geomorphic surfaces classified as "current floodplain" (expected to be inundated by 6,000 cfs flows), "current terrace/former floodplain", or adjacent to "floodplain pits." Levees were originally drawn onto hardcopies of non-stereo, orthorectified aerial photographs (taken in 1998) (Step 3). This information was then digitized (on-screen) in ArcInfo (Step 4). The "current floodplain" levee coverage was checked against a levee coverage developed by the California Department of Water Resources using a query of their topographic data (which were developed from photogrammetry) (California Department of Water Resources unpublished data) (Step 5).

3.4 Data Resolution: **Vector**

3.5 Horizontal Coordinate System Definition

Map Projection Name:	State Plane
Units:	International Feet
Geodetic Model	
Horizontal Datum Name:	NAD83
Spheroid:	GRS1980
Zone:	3326

4 ENTITY AND ATTRIBUTE INFORMATION

4.1 Overview Description

COLUMN INDEXED?	ITEM NAME	WIDTH	OUTPUT	TYPE	N.DEC	ALTERNATE NAME
1	FNODE#	4	5	B	-	-
5	TNODE#	4	5	B	-	-
9	LPOLY#	4	5	B	-	-
13	RPOLY#	4	5	B	-	-
17	LENGTH	4	12	F	3	-
21	LEVEES3#	4	5	B	-	-
25	LEVEES3-ID	4	5	B	-	-
29	LABEL	20	20	C	-	-
49	BANK	4	5	C	-	-
53	GEOM_SURF	8	8	C	-	-

4.2 Attribute Description

FNODE#:	A unique identification number assigned by ArcInfo.
TNODE#:	A unique identification number assigned by ArcInfo.
LPOLY#:	A unique identification number assigned by ArcInfo.
RPOLY#:	A unique identification number assigned by ArcInfo.
LENGTH:	The length of the arc in international feet.
LEVEES3#:	A unique identification number assigned by ArcInfo.
LEVEES3-ID:	A unique identification number assigned by ArcInfo.
LABEL:	Name of the structure.
BANK:	The river bank location of the levee. R = right, L = left. Right and left are assigned from the perspective of a person looking downstream.
GEOM_SURF:	The geomorphic surface on which the levee resides.

5 METADATA DATE:

January 12, 2001

Merced River Revetment and Bank Erosion

Summary of Geospatial Metadata

Metadata Type	Description
Datum	NAD 83
Projection	State Plane Coordinate System, Zone 3326, Spheroid GRS 1980
Units	International Feet
Source media	Aerial photography
Capture method	Original maps were produced from orthorectified aerial photography.
File size:	40.6KB., ArcInfo coverage, 193 data records.
File format	ArcInfo coverage
Coverage type	Line

1 IDENTIFICATION INFORMATION

1.1 Citation

Title (Theme Name):	Merced River Revetment and Bank Erosion
Resource Description (Theme Abbreviation):	revetment
Originator:	Stillwater Sciences
Publication Date:	January 12, 2001

1.2 Description

Abstract

This data set contains information regarding the location of bank revetment and bank erosion on the Merced River, CA.

Purpose

These data were created to interpret and map revetment and bank erosion along the Merced River.

1.3 Status

Final

1.4 Spatial Domain

North Bounding Coordinate (Latitude):	1993931.750
South Bounding Coordinate (Latitude):	1949583.375
West Bounding Coordinate (Longitude):	6429219.500

East Bounding Coordinate (Longitude): 6561342.500

1.5 Access Restrictions: None

1.6 Use Restrictions: None

1.7 Point of Contact (Data Steward):

Contact Person:	Jennifer Vick
Contact Position:	Project Manager
Contact Organization:	Stillwater Sciences
Contact Physical Address:	
Contact Mailing Address:	2532 Durant Ave.
Contact City:	Berkeley
Contact State:	California
Contact Zip Code:	94704
Contact Voice Telephone:	510-848-8098

1.8 Native Data Set Environment:

Software:	ArcInfo 7.2.1
Computer Operating System:	Unix

2 DATA QUALITY INFORMATION

2.1 Attribute Accuracy

Each step in the data entry process was checked by an independent reviewer. A second independent reviewer checked the corrections. This process was repeated until the reviewer identified no errors. Reviews and verifications were recorded onto QA/QC forms and archived.

2.2 Logical Consistency

Arcs do not overlap and are consistent with features observed in aerial photographs.

2.3 Completeness of Report

No further revisions are expected.

2.4 Positional Accuracy

This information was completely field verified.

3 LINEAGE

3.1 Source Information

The locations of revetments and bank erosion were mapped in the field onto orthorectified aerial photographs (taken in 1998). Field work was conducted by boat in August 1999 (Crocker-Huffman Dam to Shaffer Bridge) and June 2000 (Shaffer Bridge to Hatfield State Park).

3.2 Data Sources

- Aerial photography 1993
- Aerial photography 1998

3.3 Processing Steps

Revetment and bank erosion locations were marked on maps during a field investigation. This information was digitized onscreen in ArcInfo.

3.4 Data Resolution: Vector

3.5 Horizontal Coordinate System Definition

Map Projection Name:	State Plane
Units:	International Feet
Geodetic Model	
Horizontal Datum Name:	NAD83
Spheroid:	GRS1980
Zone:	3326

4 ENTITY AND ATTRIBUTE INFORMATION

4.1 Overview Description

COLUMN INDEXED?	ITEM NAME	WIDTH	OUTPUT	TYPE	N.DEC	ALTERNATE NAME
1	FNODE#	4	5	B	-	-
5	TNODE#	4	5	B	-	-
9	LPOLY#	4	5	B	-	-
13	RPOLY#	4	5	B	-	-
17	LENGTH	4	12	F	3	-
21	REVTMENT#	4	5	B	-	-

25	REVTMENT-ID	4	5	B	-	-
29	LABEL	20	20	C	-	-
49	BANK	4	5	C	-	-

4.2 Attribute Description

FNODE#:	A unique identification number assigned by ArcInfo.
TNODE#:	A unique identification number assigned by ArcInfo.
LPOLY#:	A unique identification number assigned by ArcInfo.
RPOLY#:	A unique identification number assigned by ArcInfo.
LENGTH:	The length of the arc in international feet.
REVTMENT#:	A unique identification number assigned by ArcInfo.
LEVEES3-ID:	A unique identification number assigned by ArcInfo.
LABEL:	Name of the feature. RT = revetment, BE = bank erosion.
BANK:	The river bank location of the levee. R = right, L = left. Right and left are assigned from the perspective of a person looking downstream.
GEOM_SURF:	The geomorphic surface on which the levee resides.

5 METADATA DATE:

January 12, 2001

Merced River Vegetation

Summary of Geospatial Metadata

Metadata Type	Description
Datum	NAD 83
Projection	State Plane Coordinate System, Zone 3326, Spheroid GRS 1980
Units	International Feet
Source media	Color infrared aerial photography
Capture method	Original maps were produced from orthorectified RF 1:24,000 color infrared scans saved in TIFF format and digitized in ArcView.
File size:	2.62 Mb., ArcInfo coverage, 3575 data records.
File format	ArcInfo coverage
Coverage type	Polygon for vegetation type

1 IDENTIFICATION INFORMATION

1.1 Citation

Title (Theme Name):	Merced River Vegetation
Resource Description (Theme Abbreviation):	vegclass
Originator:	Stillwater Sciences and Geographic Information Center at California State University, Chico
Publication Date:	December 8, 2000

1.2 Description

Abstract

This data set contains polygons representing the distribution of vegetation types adjacent to the Merced River.

Purpose

These data were created to inventory riparian vegetation resources and to test hypotheses regarding vegetation cover type and position relative to fluvial geomorphic surfaces.

1.3 Status: Final

1.4 Spatial Domain

North Bounding Coordinate (Latitude): 2016207.500

South Bounding Coordinate (Latitude): 1946777.875
West Bounding Coordinate (Longitude): 6419743.000
East Bounding Coordinate (Longitude): 6616736.500

1.5 Access Restrictions: None

1.6 Use Restrictions None

1.7 Point of Contact (Data Steward):

Contact Person: Jennifer Vick
Contact Position: Project Manager
Contact Organization: Stillwater Sciences
Contact Physical Address:
Contact Mailing Address: 2532 Durant Ave.
Contact City: Berkeley
Contact State: California
Contact Zip Code: 94704
Contact Voice Telephone: 510-848-8098

1.8 Native Data Set Environment:

Software: ArcView 3.1
Computer Operating System: Windows

2 DATA QUALITY INFORMATION

2.1 Attribute Accuracy

Map accuracy was assessed using the field verification, data entry, and quality control steps described in Section 3.2. Each step in the data entry process was checked by an independent reviewer. A second independent reviewer checked the corrections. This process was repeated until the reviewer identified no errors. Reviews and verifications were recorded onto QA/QC forms and archived.

Results of the accuracy assessment for the cover type attribute are summarized in the table below. Appendix E contains a more detailed discussion of map accuracy issues. Cover type descriptions are summarized below.

Summary of Vegetation Polygon Accuracy

Cover Type	Number of Polygons Mapped ¹	Polygons Field-Checked		Polygons Correctly Interpreted		Number of New Polygons Delineated During Field Checking
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent ²	
Vegetation Cover Type						
Blackberry Scrub	108	3	3	1	33	0
Box Elder	38	17	45	12	71	6
Cottonwood Forest	360	61	17	38	62	9
Eucalyptus	55	19	35	7	37	8
Giant Reed	59	19	32	10	53	7
Herbaceous Cover	348	64	18	55	86	7
Marsh	74	0	0	N/A ³	N/A ³	1
Mixed Riparian Forest	479	176	37	120	68	11
Mixed Willow	526	142	27	69	49	10
Riparian Scrub	483	92	19	69	75	8
Tamarisk	2	0	0	N/A ³	N/A ³	0
Tree of Heaven	17	4	24	0	0	10
Valley Oak Forest	416	96	23	64	67	14
Total Vegetation	2,965	693	23	445	64	91
Land Use Cover Type						
Disturbed Riparian ⁴	12	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0
Dredger Tailings	31	0	0	N/A ³	100 ⁵	0

¹ Patch totals represent the minimum polygon count for each cover type, in which adjacent polygons of the same type were merged during data editing. The digital GIS coverage retains the unmerged polygon configuration, which has higher polygon counts for some cover types (but the same total area for each type), because accuracy assessment data stored as polygon attributes in the GIS would have been lost during the merging process.

² Percent correct is calculated as the number of polygons correctly interpreted divided by the number of polygons checked for each cover type. New polygons delineated from field visits were not included in these counts.

³ No polygons of this cover type were field-verified during the formal accuracy assessment, although occurrences of tamarisk, dredger tailings, and marsh were mapped during earlier reconnaissance surveys.

⁴ The Disturbed Riparian classification was added in the field as a land use cover type to comprise revetted banks and other highly modified environments with sparse to no plant cover. Existing polygons of other cover types were recoded to this type, as appropriate.

⁵ Dredger Tailing polygons were not formally checked as part of the field verification process, but assumed photointerpretation accuracy is 100 percent because of the distinct photographic signature and the large polygon size (mean polygon size = 138 acres) within this cover type.

2.2 Logical Consistency

All polygons close and no duplicate features exist within the data set. Polygon boundaries are consistent with objects observed in the digital imagery.

2.3 Completeness of Report

No further revisions are expected for this data at this time.

2.4 Positional Accuracy

Color infrared imagery (taken in 1999) was geo-referenced in the Albers projection system. The vegetation coverage was digitized over this imagery and subsequently re-projected in State Plane onto the Merced County 1998 black-and-white photomosaic. After reprojection, the vegetation polygon boundaries were adjusted to match the 1998 Merced County photomosaic.

3 LINEAGE

3.1 Source Information

This coverage is based on interpretation of aerial photographs taken in 1999 (scale 1:24,000) and 1993 (scale 1:6,000). A subsample of the polygons developed by photointerpretation was field verified, as described below.

3.2 Processing Steps

The Chico State University Geographic Information Center (GIC) mapped vegetation cover types from orthorectified color infrared aerial photography taken in May of 1999 (original scale 1:24,000). The 1999 photographs were not stereoscopic, therefore, color stereo photographs taken 1993 (original scale 1:6,000) were used to aid in interpretation of the 1999 photographs. Vegetation polygons were digitized on-screen. The vegetation classification developed and used by GIC is described in Section 4.2 below and was based on a similar system used to map riparian vegetation in the Sacramento River corridor.

Stillwater Sciences field-checked the polygons delineated by the GIC by spot visual observations from public and private access roads and by boat within the Merced River channel downstream of RM 34.5 (Shaffer Bridge). Choice of polygons to verify was based on ease of access and was not random. The Project Team checked 693 polygons out of a total of 3,008 polygons, representing an overall sampling rate of 23 percent (see Section 2.1).

After field-verification, vegetation maps were returned to the office for revisions. Field maps were copied for data entry and the originals archived. Correctly classified polygons were noted and misclassified polygons were corrected in the GIS database. Initial quality control checks were documented on paper maps; the final check was conducted on-screen and corrections confirmed on the paper maps. All QC map sets were archived.

The polygon totals cited in the map accuracy table (above) represent the number of patches for each cover type after adjacent patches of the same type were merged during data processing. The digital GIS coverage retains the unmerged polygon configuration, which has high polygon counts for some cover types (but the same total area for each type), because accuracy assessment data stored as polygon attributes in the GIS would have been lost during the merging process.

3.3 Data Resolution:

Vector

3.4 Horizontal Coordinate System Definition

Map Projection Name:	State Plane
Units:	International Feet
Geodetic Model	
Horizontal Datum Name:	NAD83
Spheroid:	GRS1980
Zone:	3326

4 ENTITY AND ATTRIBUTE INFORMATION

4.1 Overview Description

COLUMN	ITEM NAME	WIDTH	OUTPUT	TYPE	N. DEC	ALTERNATE NAME INDEXED?
1	AREA	4	12	F	3	-
5	PERIMETER	4	12	F	3	-
9	VEGCLASS#	4	5	B	-	-
13	VEGCLASS-ID	4	5	B	-	-
17	CLASS	4	4	C	-	-
21	ACRES	8	16	F	3	-
29	CHECK	2	2	B	-	-
31	CORRECT	4	4	C	-	-
35	RIGHT	2	2	B	-	-
37	WRONG	2	2	B	-	-
39	NEW	2	2	B	-	-
41	FINAL	4	4	C	-	-

4.2 Attribute Description

Area	The area of each individual polygon in square international feet.
Perimeter	The length of the perimeter of each polygon in linear international feet.
Vegclass#	A unique id assigned by ArcInfo.
Vegclass-ID	A unique id assigned by ArcInfo.
Class	The initial classification of functional vegetation groups or communities (see table below).

Attribute: Class (cover type classifications)

Code	Name	Description
BE	Box Elder	>50% crown canopy <i>Acer negundo</i> . Box elder, a component of the mixed riparian forest subcanopy, is often found in monospecific stands where there is no overstory.
BS	Blackberry Scrub	>50% crown canopy <i>Rubus discolor</i> (Himalaya berry) or <i>R. ursinus</i> (California blackberry).
CF	Cottonwood Forest	>50% crown canopy <i>Populus fremontii</i> . Contains various subcanopy species and combinations.
DR	Disturbed Riparian	Areas adjacent to the river with little native plant cover, such as revetted banks.
DT	Dredger Tailings	Dredger tailing areas, which include bare substrate and sparse non-native grasslands, cottonwood and willow riparian stands disconnected from the channel, and wetland and pond communities
EUC	Eucalyptus	>50% crown canopy <i>Eucalyptus</i> spp. Found in fairly monospecific stands on heavily modified banks.
G	Gravel	Depositional river bars
GR	Giant Reed	Clonal monospecific stands of <i>Arundo donax</i> , often on revetted or otherwise disturbed banks.
HL	Herbaceous Cover	Herbaceous communities, including grassland terraces, tailing transitional areas, and some seasonal wetlands.
M	Marsh	Areas with surface water supporting emergent plants. Found in some backwater channels and in some dredger tailing swales.
MF	Mixed Riparian Forest	Riparian hardwood forest with at least 3 species co-dominant. Composition varies along river, but often includes <i>Fraxinus latifolia</i> , <i>Alnus rhombifolia</i> , <i>Acer negundo</i> , <i>Quercus lobata</i> , and <i>Salix</i> spp.
MW	Mixed Willow	Areas almost exclusively willow, including <i>Salix exigua</i> , <i>S. gooddingii</i> , <i>S. lasiolepis</i> , and <i>S. laevigata</i>
OW	Open Water	Channel areas, backwaters, filled gravel mine pits
RS	Riparian Scrub	Early seral stage vegetation (shrubs and small trees) of various species that may indicate some form of regular disturbance or scour.
TAM	Tamarisk	Areas exclusively almost exclusively <i>Tamarix</i> spp., an invasive exotic plant.
TH	Tree of Heaven	>50% crown canopy <i>Ailanthus altissima</i> , an invasive exotic tree species.
VO	Valley Oak Forest	>50% crown canopy <i>Quercus lobata</i> . Occurs on terraces, and younger stands have established on former floodplains that are no longer frequently inundated.

Other Attributes (includes map verification and accuracy records):

Acres

The acreage of a given polygon.

Check

Field verified = 1, Not field verified = 0.

Correct

This item contains information regarding the accuracy of the image interpretation. 1 = Image classification is correct, 0 = Image classification incorrect.

Right

This item contains information regarding polygons that were correctly classified. The information was derived in the following manner. Class = 'X', Check = 1, Correct = 'X'. The codes for this item are as follows, 1 = right, 0 = not right or not checked.

Wrong

This item contains information regarding polygons that were incorrectly classified. The information was derived in the following manner. Class = 'X', Check = 1, Correct = 'Y'. The codes for this item are as follows, 1 = wrong, 0 = not wrong or not checked.

New

This item contains information regarding polygons that were created as a result of field verification. The information was derived in the following manner. Class = '', Check = 1, Correct = 'Y'. The codes for this item are as follows 1 = new, 0 = not new or not checked.

Final

The final classification of functional vegetation groups or communities. The codes are the same as the 'Class' item. The records in this item were in the following manner. If Check = 1 and Right = 1 then Final = Class. If Check = 1 and Right = 0 then Final = Correct. If Check = 0 then Final = Class.

5 METADATA DATE:

January 22, 2001

**Appendix B. Snelling Site Cross Sections, Pebble Counts,
and Rating Curves**

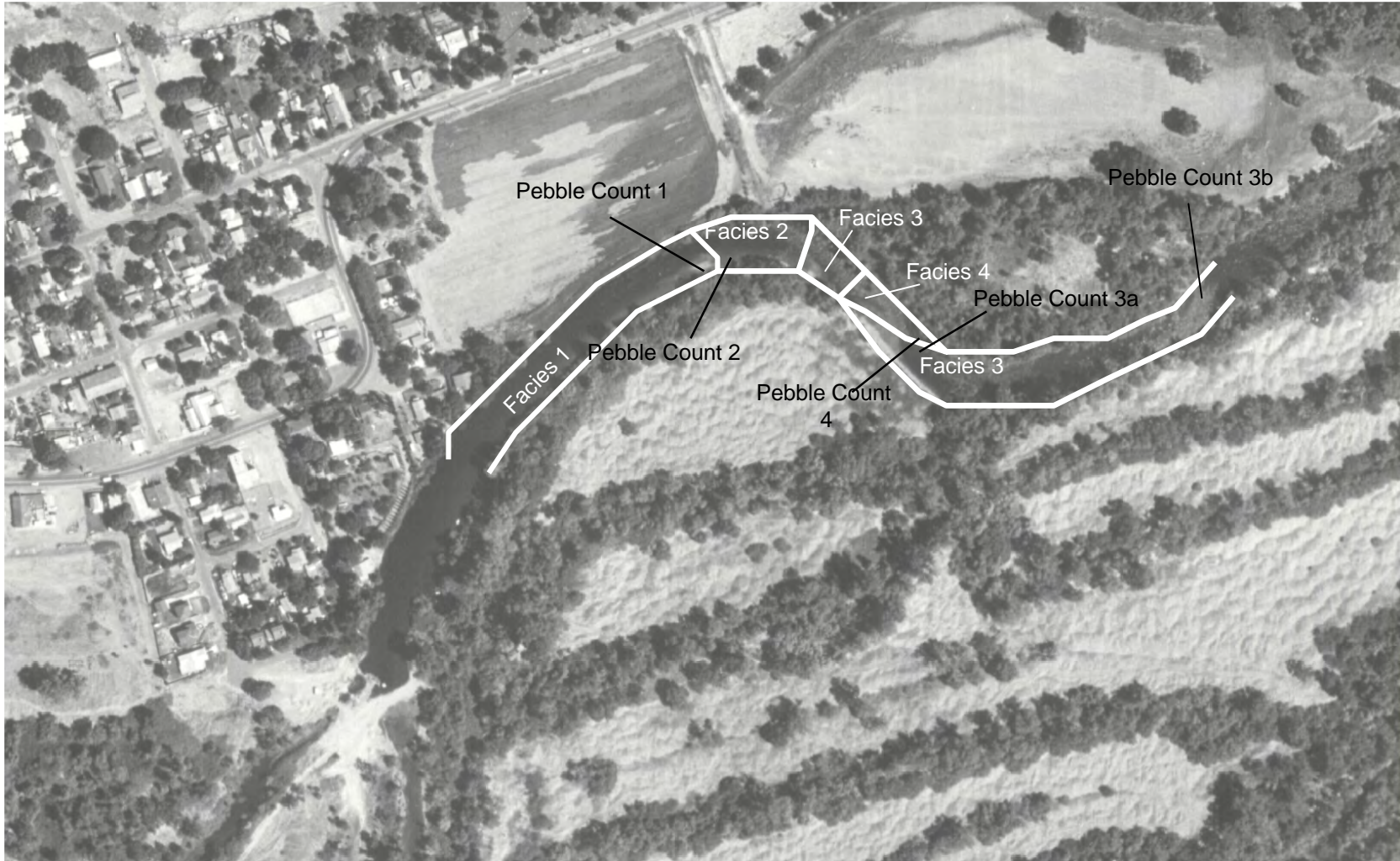


Figure B-1. Snelling model site facies map.
(photo: Merced County Planning and Community Development Department 1998)

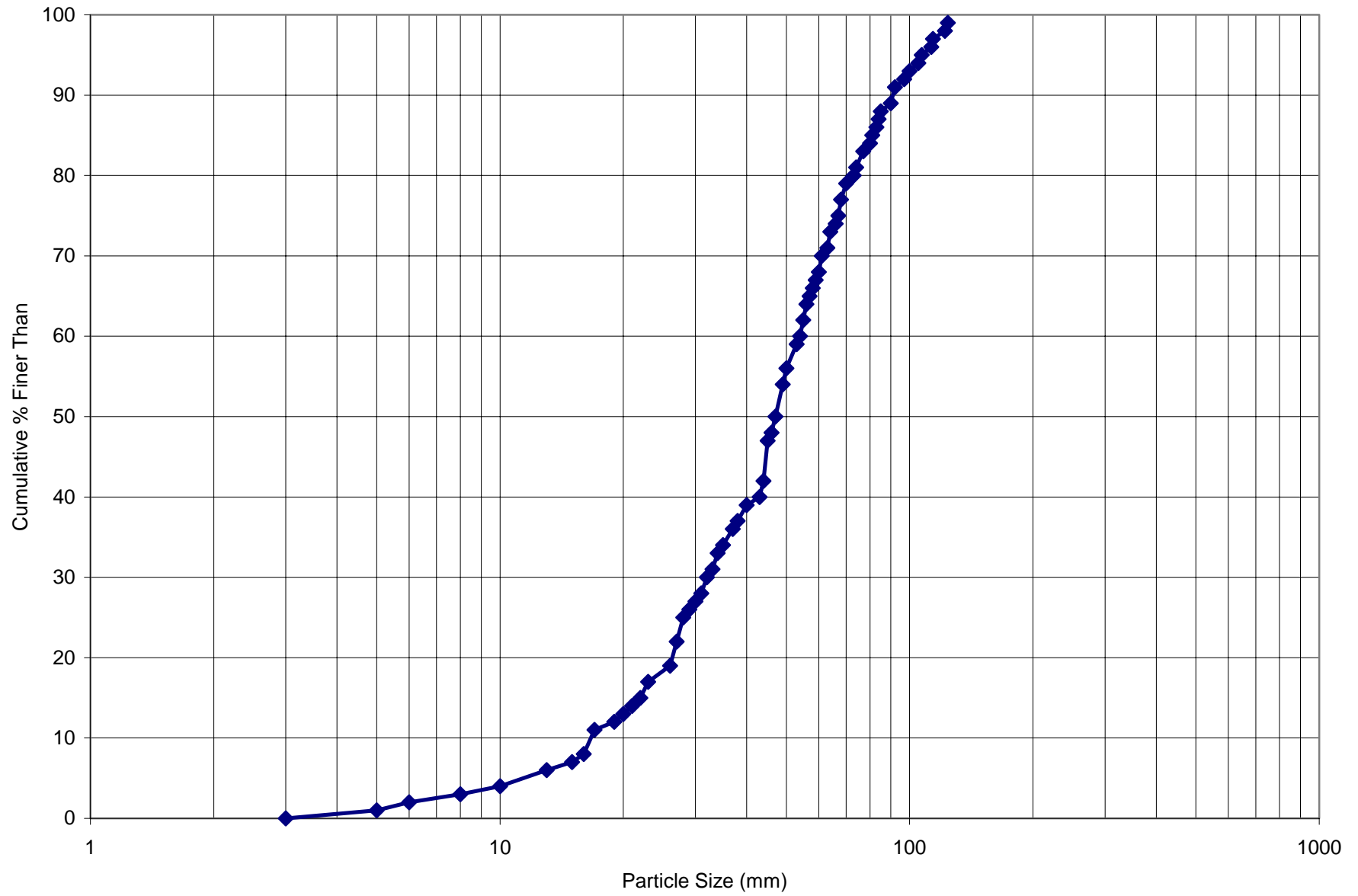


Figure B-2. Snelling site pebble count 1.

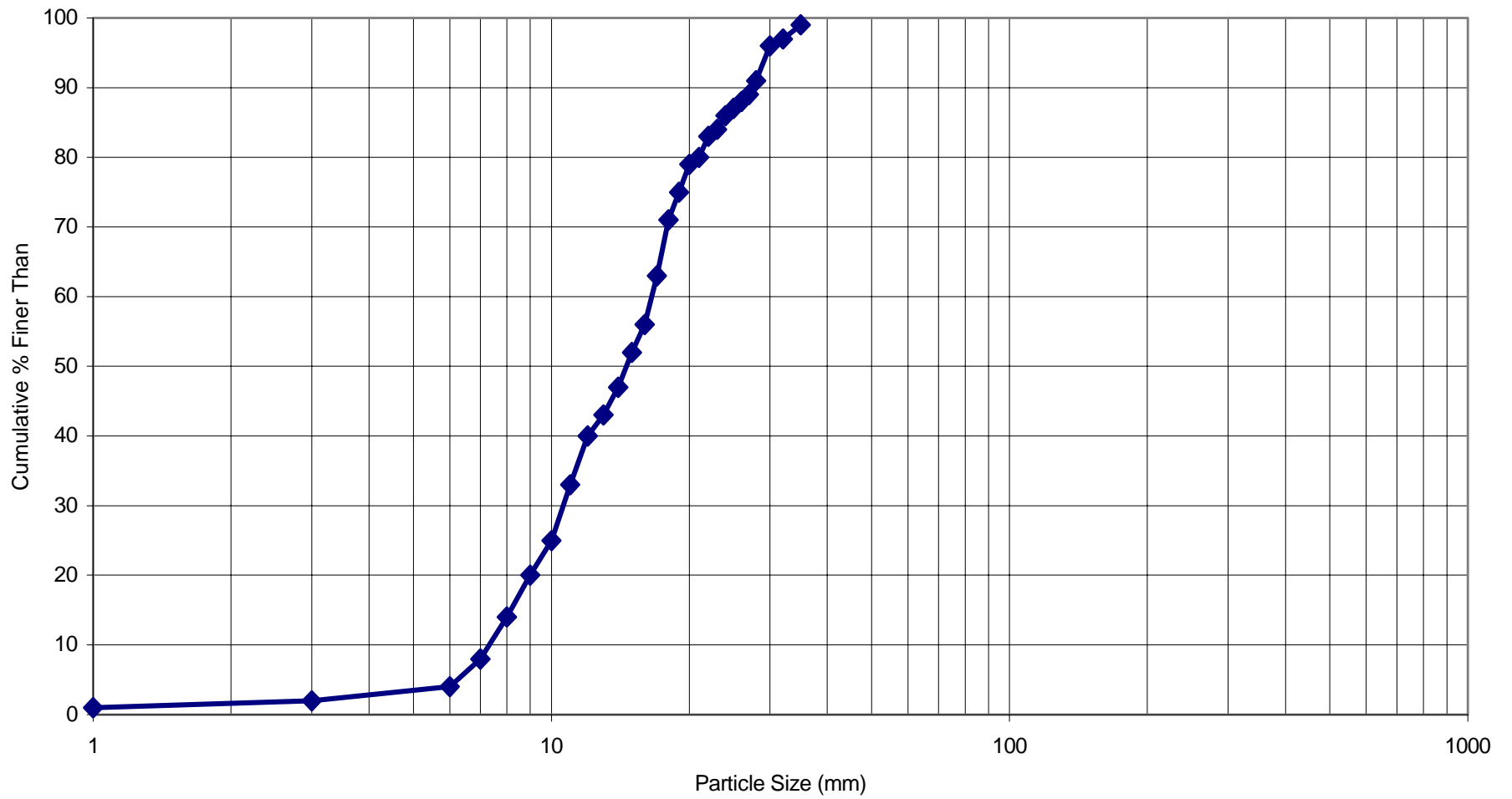


Figure B-3. Snelling site pebble count 2.

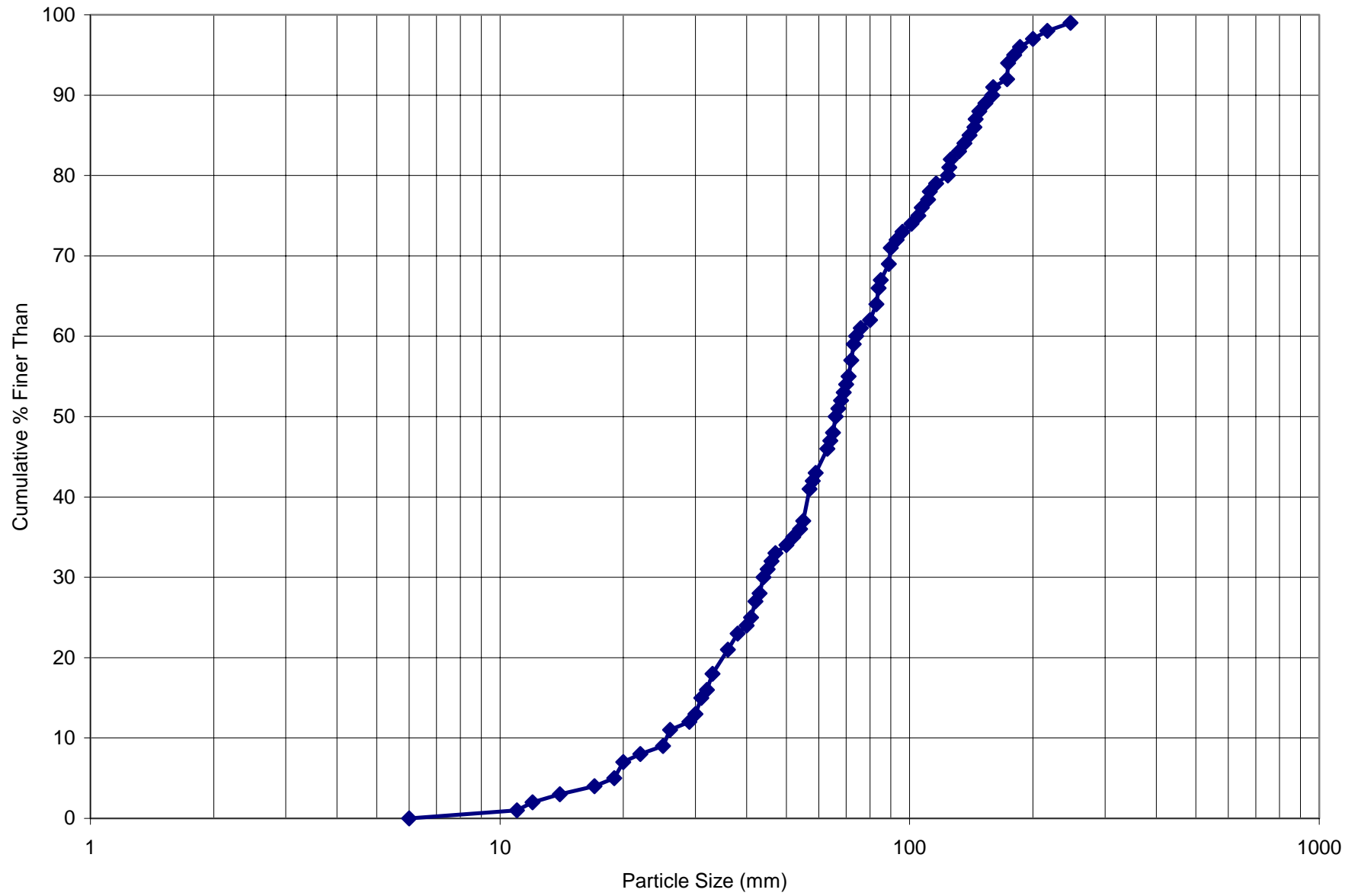


Figure B-4. Snelling site pebble count 3A.

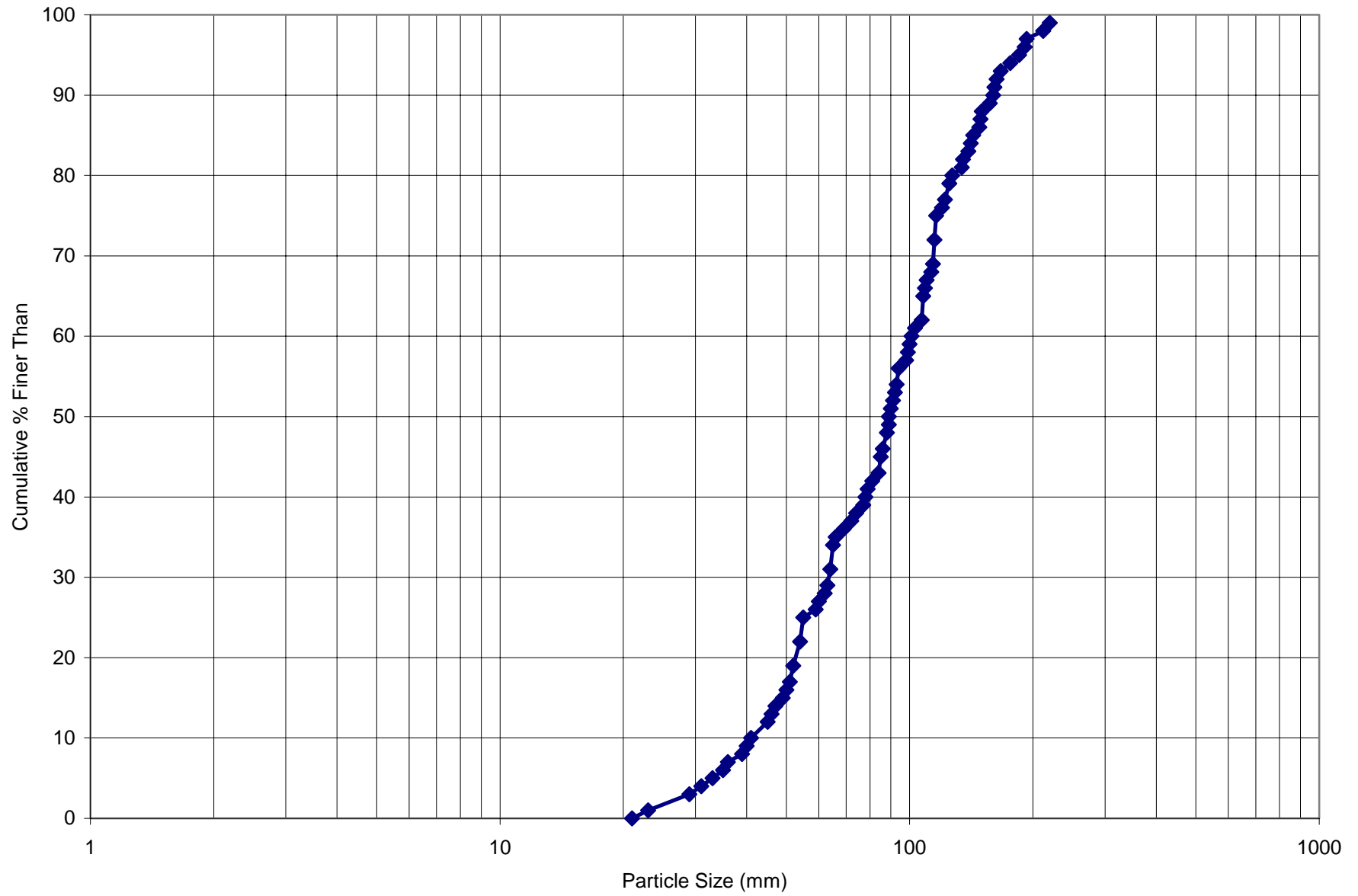


Figure B-5. Snelling site pebble count 3B.

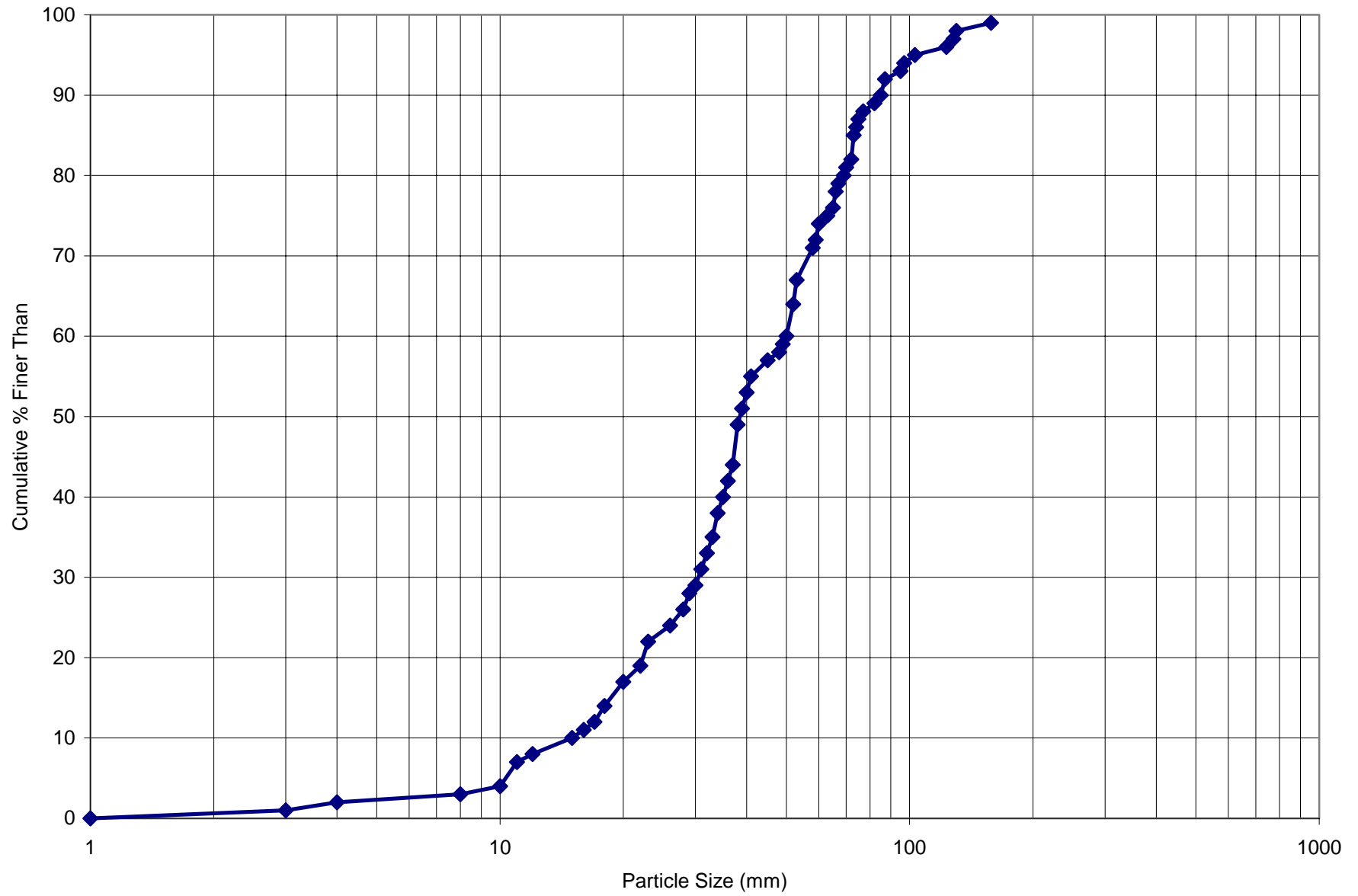


Figure B-6. Snelling site pebble count 4.

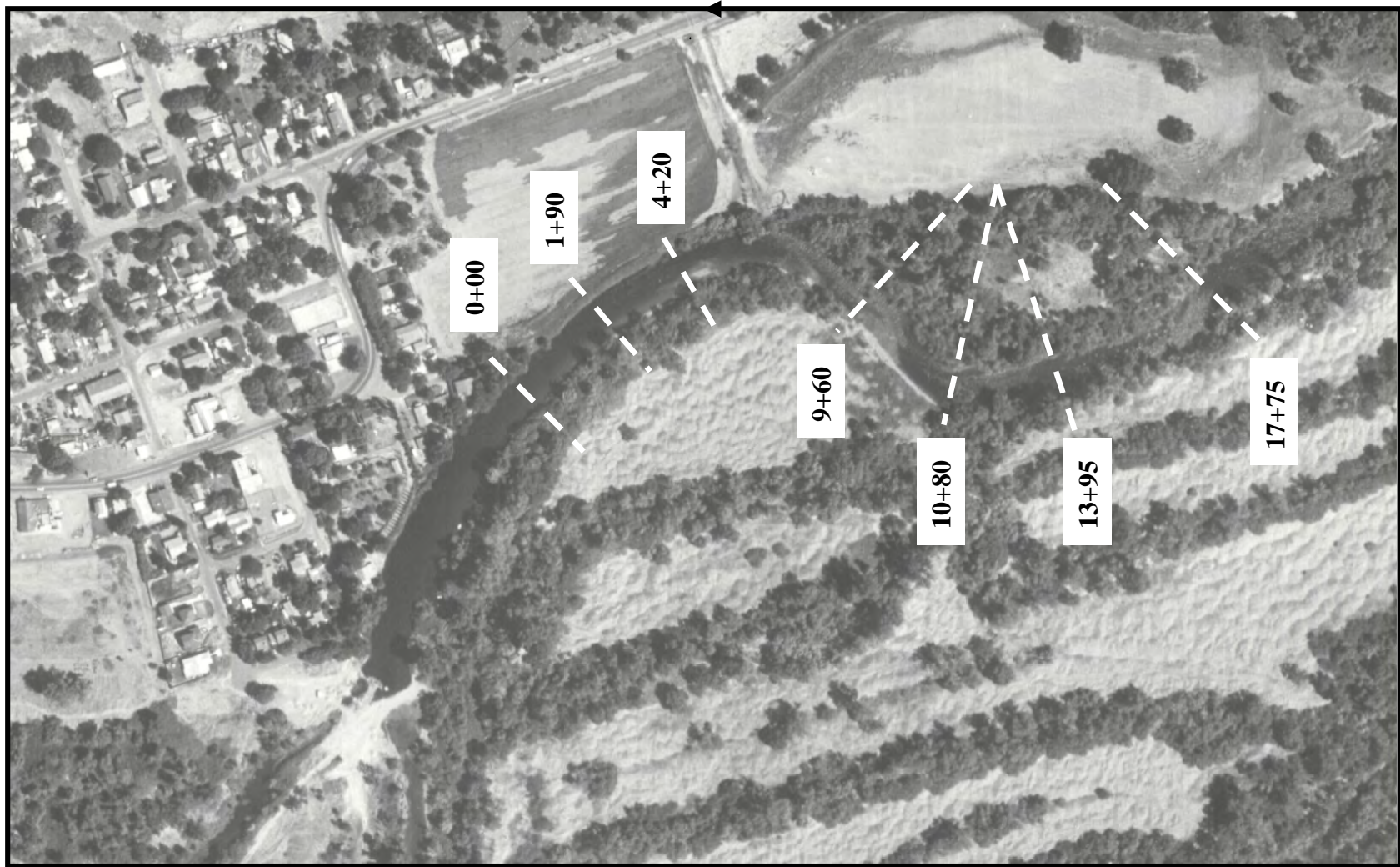


Figure B-7. Cross section survey locations at the Snelling model site.
(photo: Merced County Planning and Community Development Department 1998)

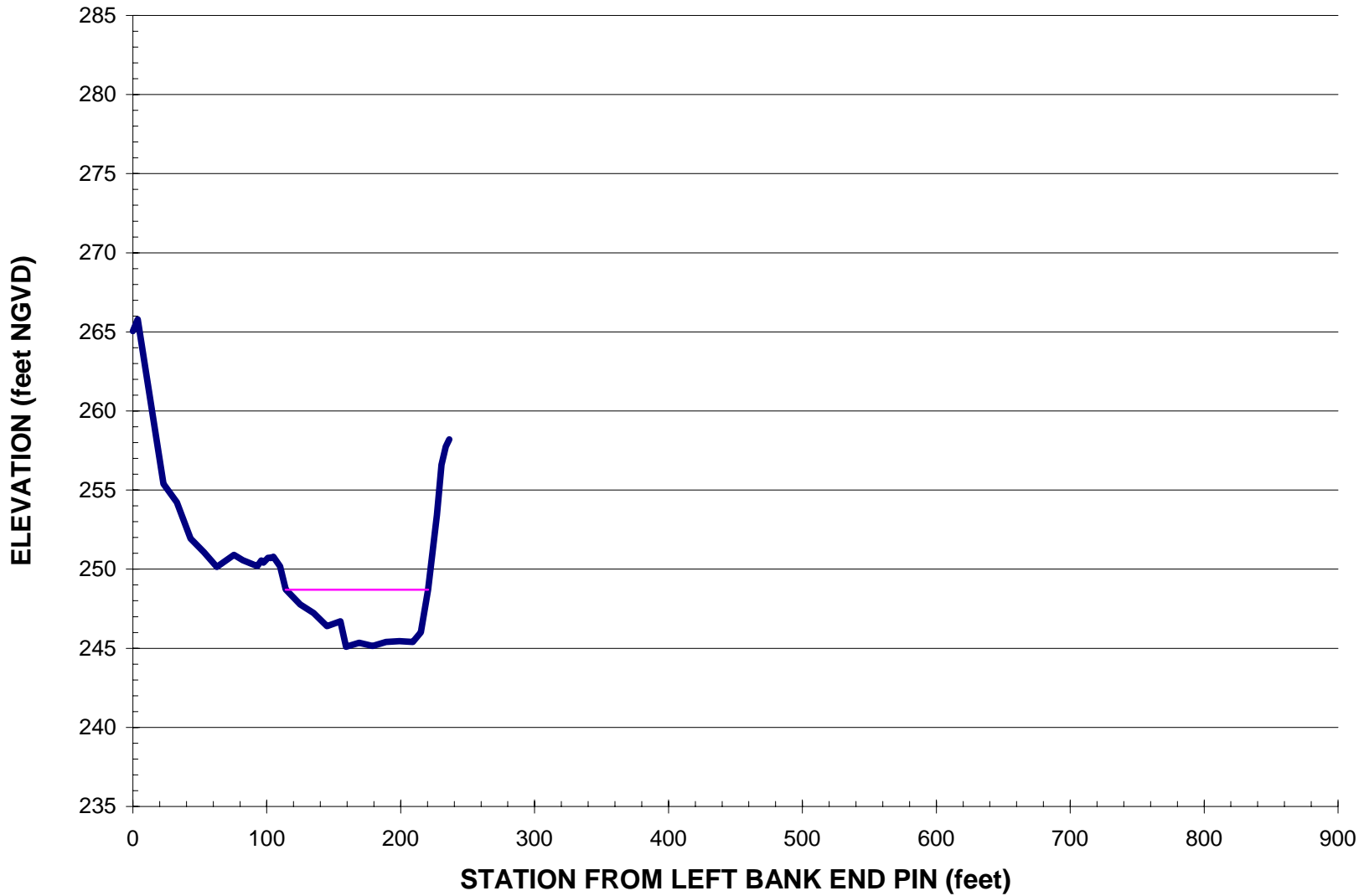


Figure B-8. Snelling Site topographic cross section 0+00.

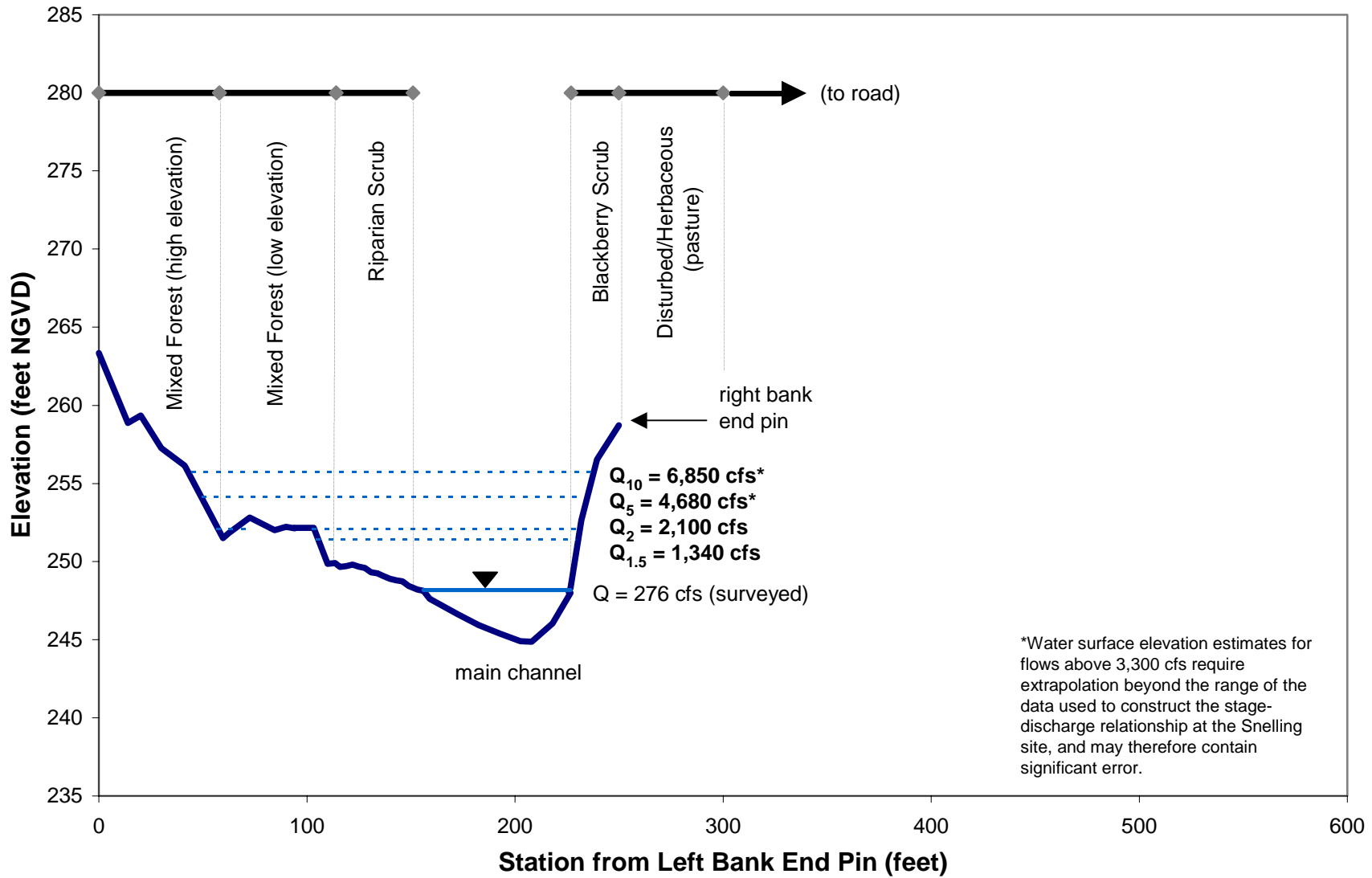


Figure B-9. Snelling Site vegetation cover and topographic cross section 1+90.

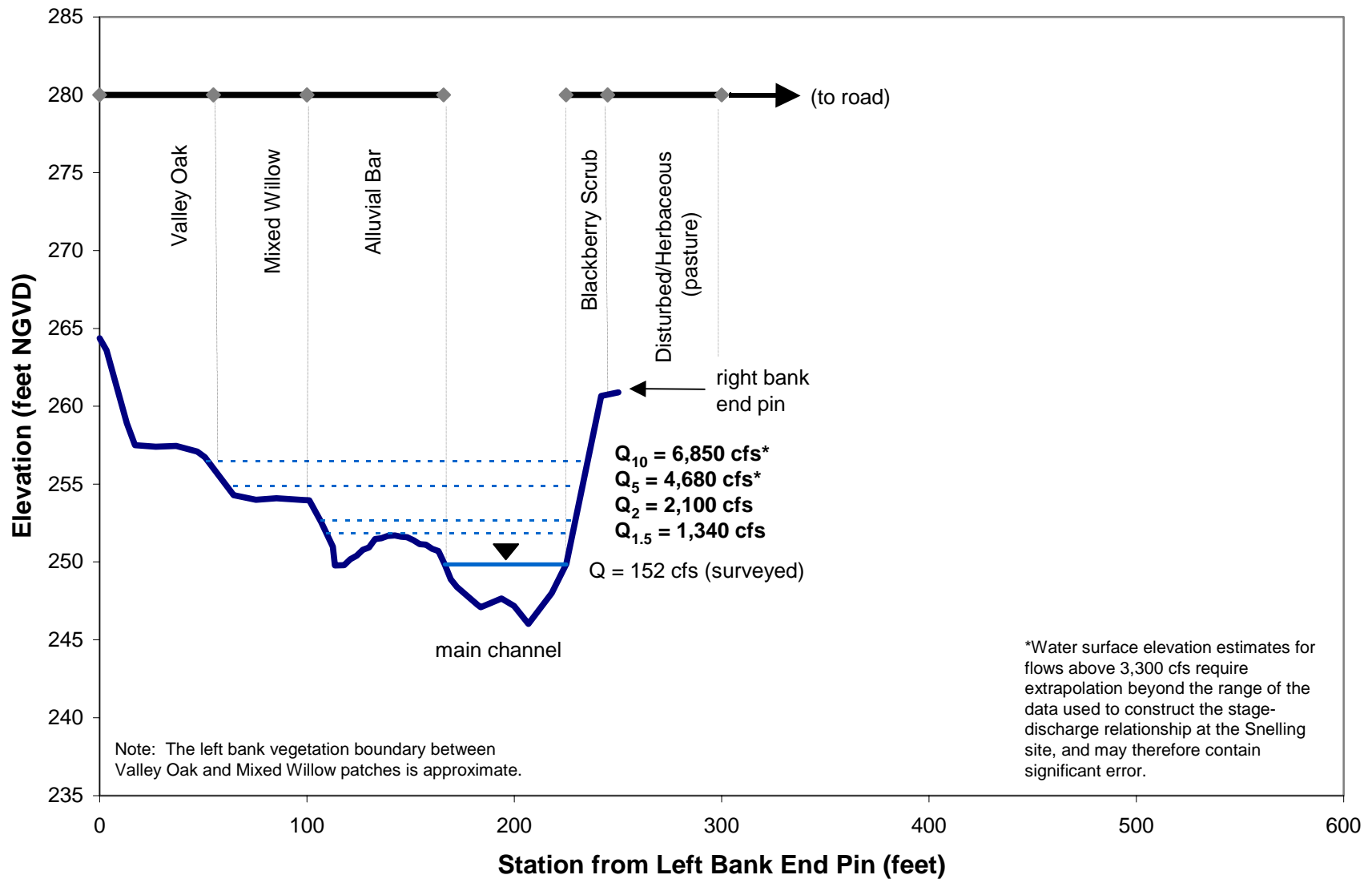


Figure B-10. Snelling Site vegetation cover and topographic cross section 4+20.

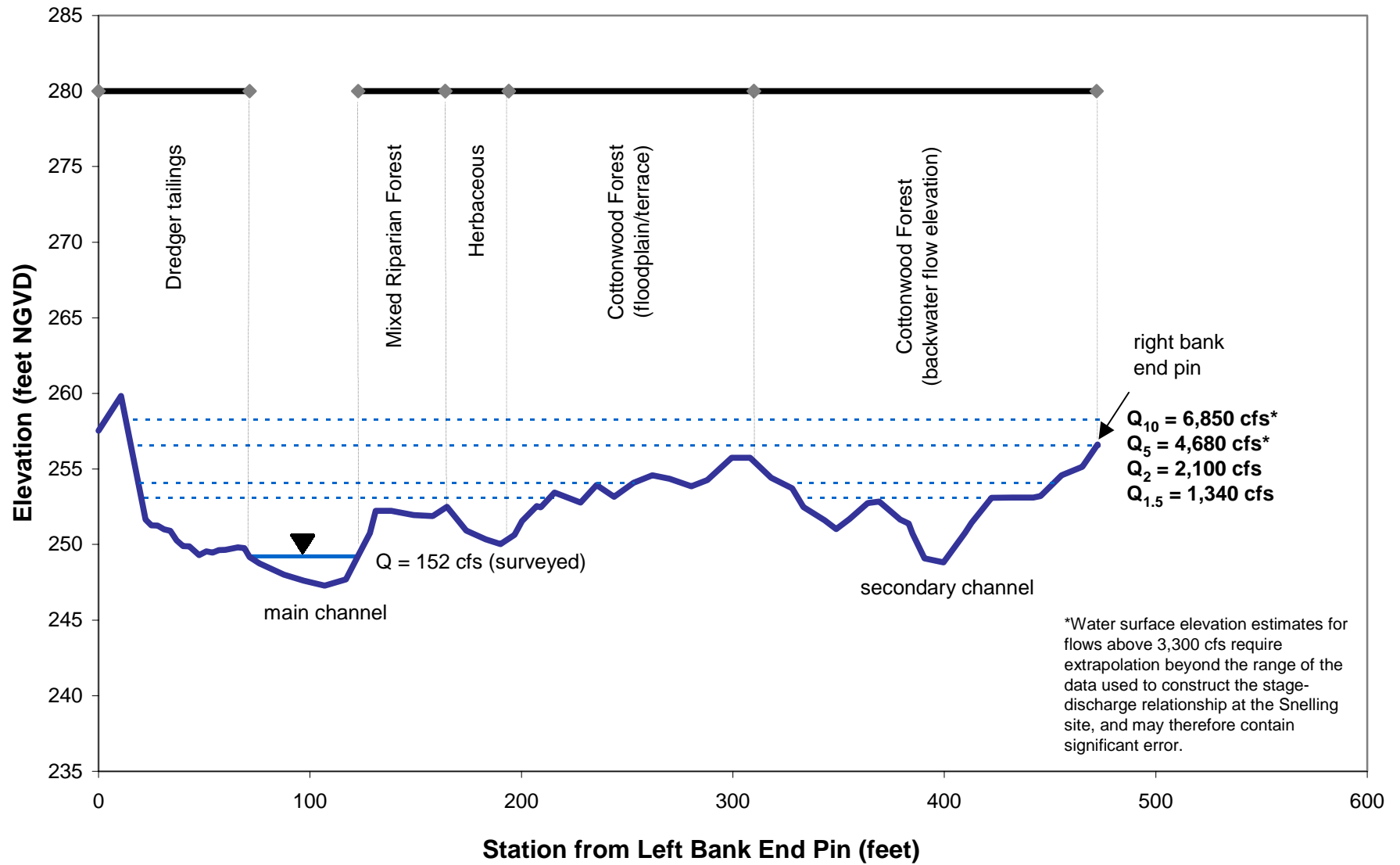


Figure B-11. Snelling Site vegetation cover and topographic cross section 9+60.

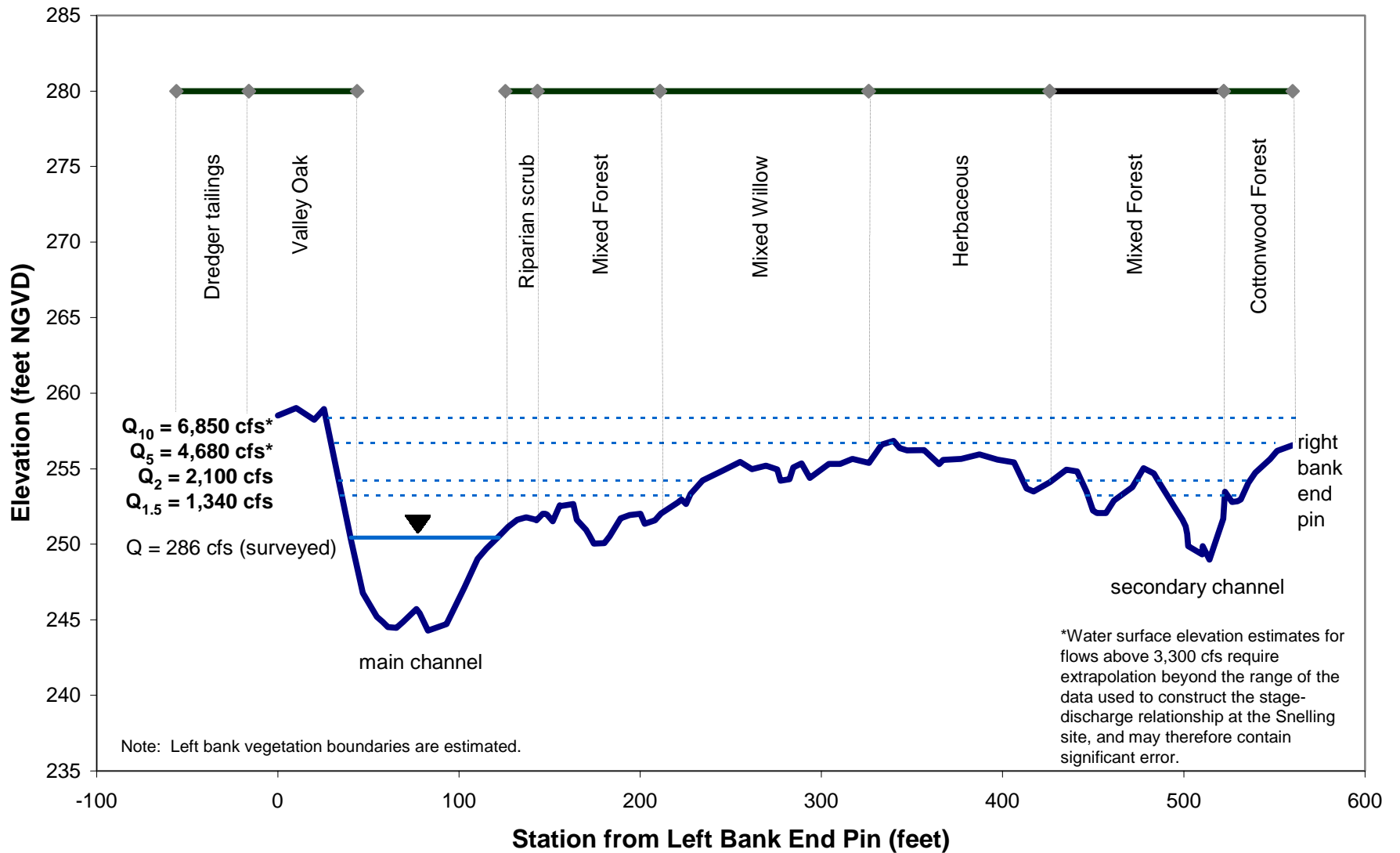


Figure B-12. Snelling Site vegetation cover and topographic cross section 10+80.

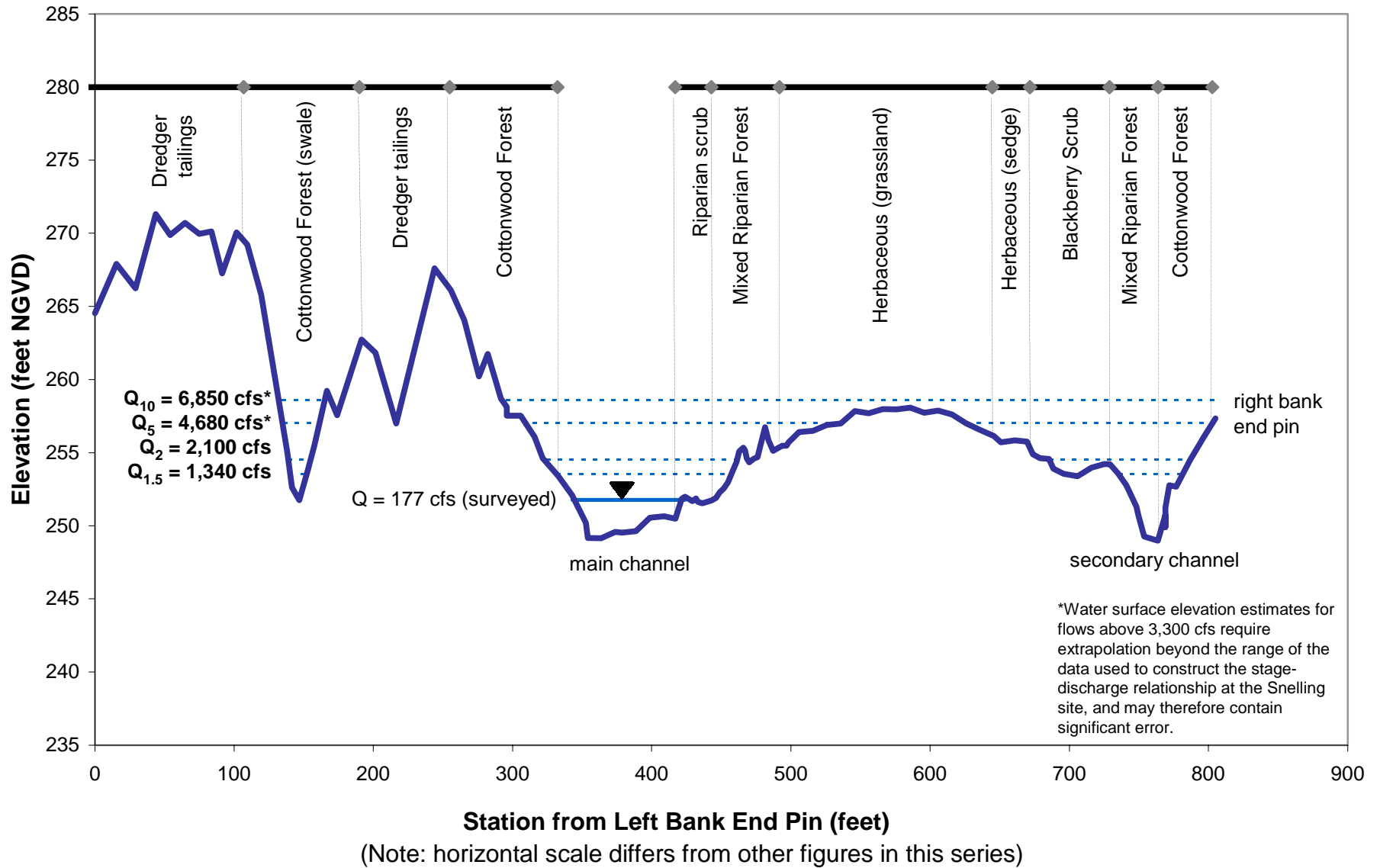


Figure B-13. Snelling Site vegetation cover and topographic cross section 13+95.

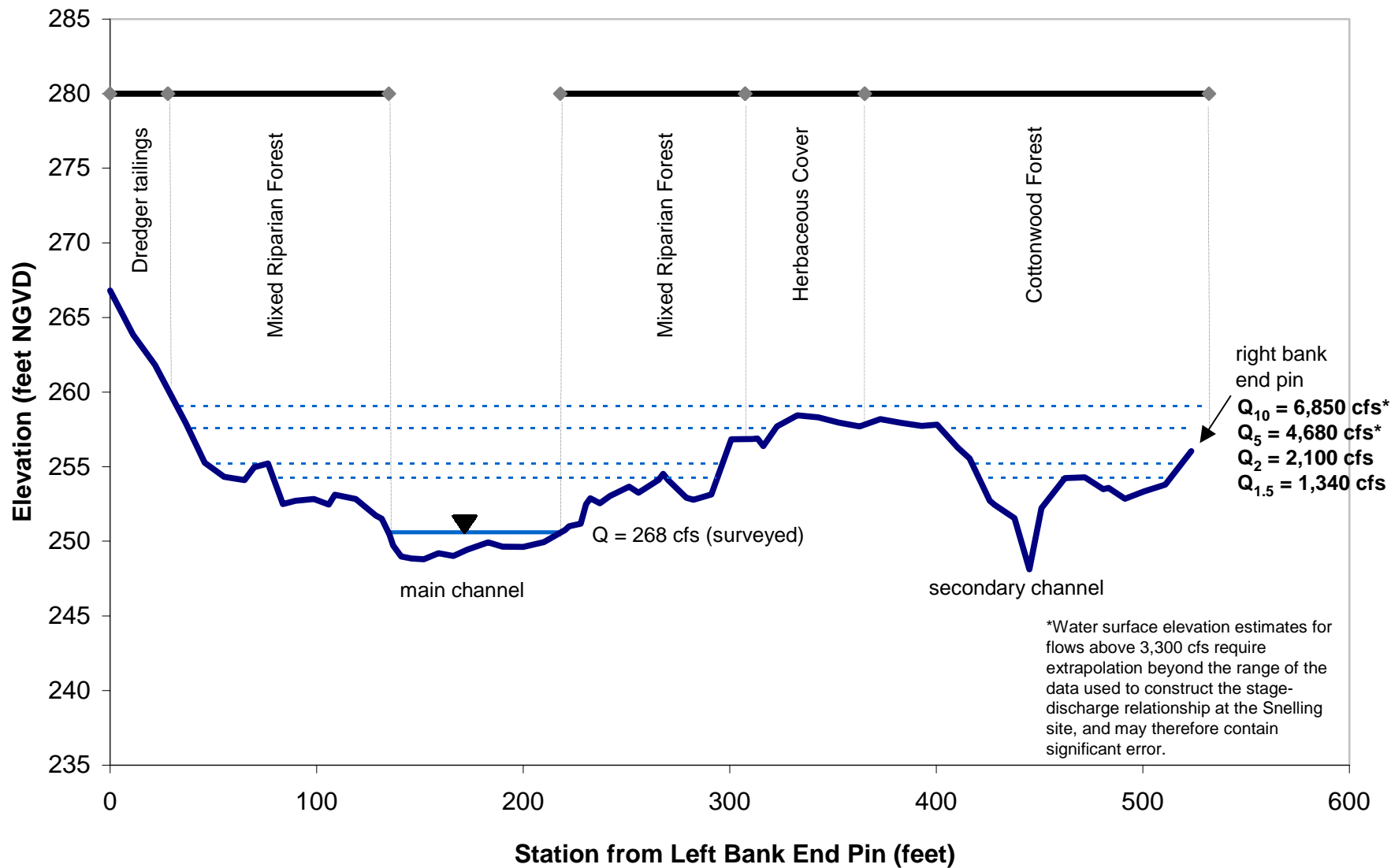


Figure B-14. Snelling Site vegetation cover and topographic cross section 17+75.

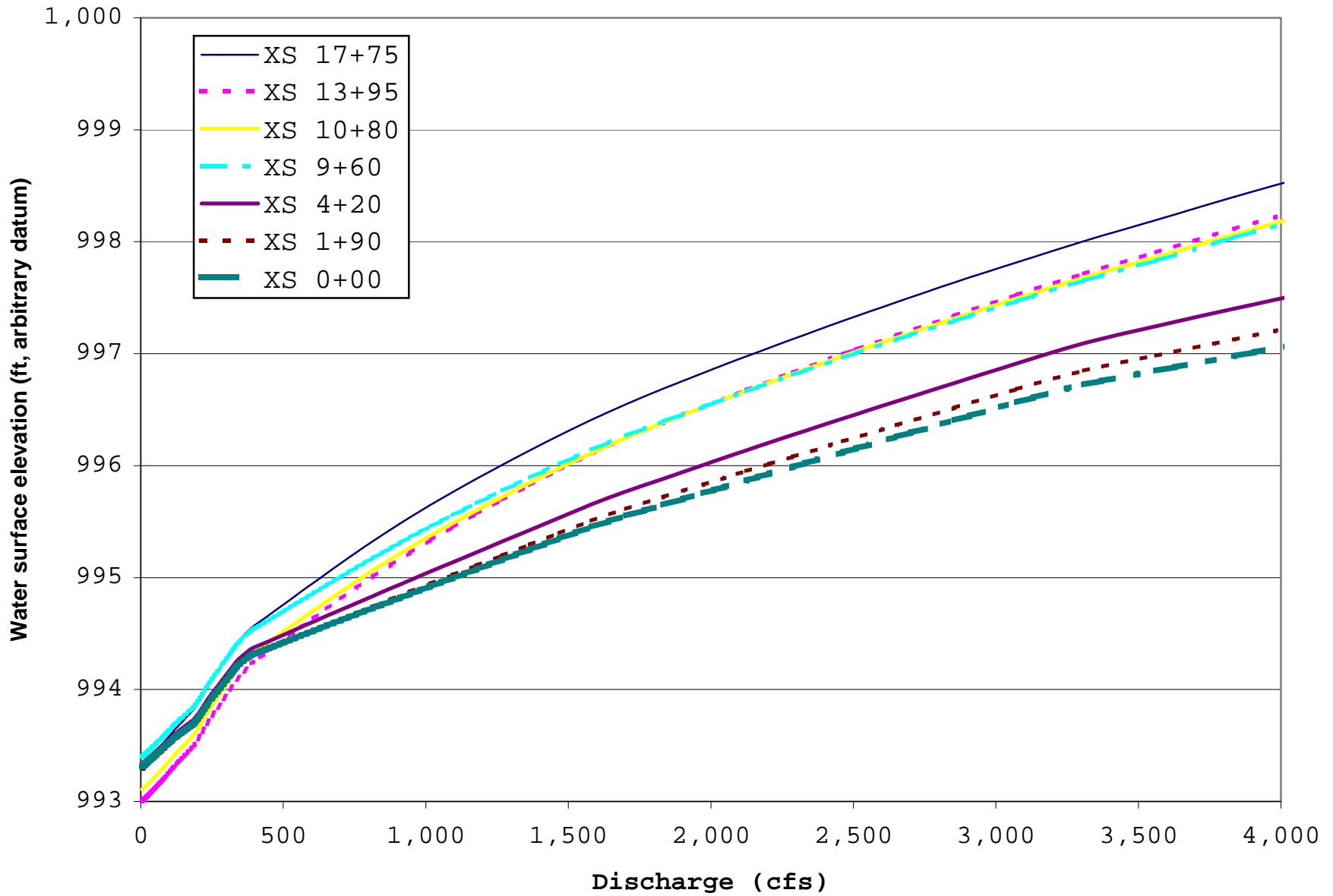


Figure B-15. Snelling model site rating curves.

Appendix C. Sediment Transport Modeling Description

The surface based bedload equation of Parker (1990a) was developed for wide rectangular channels for which channel geometry can be expressed as a channel width. Details of the surface based bedload equation of Parker can be found in the original references (Parker, 1990a,b). Here only the most essential part of the Parker equation is presented.

The surface based bedload equation of Parker (1990a) for a wide rectangular channel is as follows,

$$\frac{RgQ_G P_i}{Bu_*^3} = a F_i G \left(w f_{sgo} \left(\bar{D}_i / D_{sg} \right)^{-b} \right) \quad (1)$$

where R denotes the submerged specific gravity of gravel; g denotes the acceleration of gravity; Q_G denotes volumetric bedload transport rate; B denotes channel width; u_* denotes shear velocity; \bar{D}_i denotes the mean grain size of the i-th subrange; p_i denotes the volumetric fraction of the i-th subrange in bedload; F_i denotes the volumetric fraction of the i-th subrange in the surface layer; D_{sg} denotes geometric mean grain size of the surface layer; ϕ_{sgo} is normalized Shields stress; ω is a function of the normalized Shields stress ϕ_{sgo} and the arithmetic standard deviation of the surface layer. Coefficients α and β are given as

$$a = 0.00218 ; \quad b = 0.0951 \quad (2a,b)$$

Grain size is described both in diameter and in ψ -scale (Parker, 1990b), which is the negative of the ϕ -scale,

$$y_i = -f_i = \log_2(D_i) \quad (3)$$

The grain size is divided into N subgroups bounded by N+1 grain sizes ψ_1 (D_1) to ψ_{N+1} (D_{N+1}). The mean grain size of the i-th subrange is then given as

$$\bar{y}_i = \frac{y_i + y_{i+1}}{2}, \quad \bar{D}_i = \sqrt{D_i D_{i+1}} \quad (4a,b)$$

The surface layer mean grain size \bar{y}_s and standard deviation s_{sy} are as follows,

$$\bar{y}_s = \sum_{i=1}^N \bar{y}_i F_i, \quad s_{sy}^2 = \sum (\bar{y}_i - \bar{y}_s)^2 F_i \quad (5a,b)$$

and the geometric mean grain size is given as

$$D_{sg} = 2^{\bar{y}_s} \quad (5c)$$

Note that only particles too coarse to be transported in suspension are included in the calculation. Parker suggested that the finest grain size (D_1) be set as 2 mm (Parker 1990a,b).

Parameter ω is a function of the normalized Shields stress ϕ_{sgo} ,

$$w = 1 + \frac{s_0}{s_{sy}} (w_0 - 1) \quad (6)$$

where σ_0 and ω_0 are functions of ϕ_{sgo} given in Figure 1 (Parker 1990a). Tabulated values of σ_0 and ω_0 are also given in Parker 1990b.

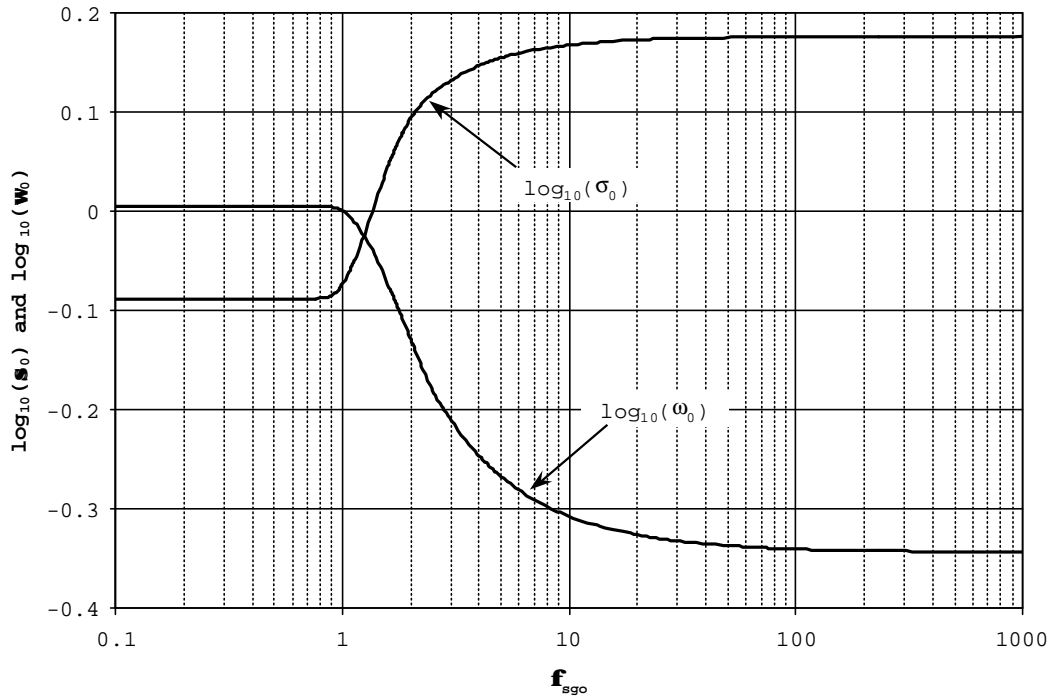


Figure 1. Parameters σ_0 and ω_0 as functions of f_{sgo} in Parker equation

The normalized Shields stress ϕ_{sgo} is acquired by dividing the surface based Shields stress t_{sg}^* by a reference stress t_{rsgo}^* ,

$$f_{sgo} = \frac{t_{sg}^*}{t_{rsgo}^*} \quad (7)$$

where the reference Shields stress t_{rsgo}^* is given by Parker (1990a) as 0.0386. The surface based Shields stress t_{sg}^* is defined as

$$t_{sg}^* = \frac{u_*^2}{RgD_{sg}} \quad (8)$$

Shear velocity u^* is assumed to be the Keulegan resistance relation,

$$\frac{u}{u_*} = 2.5 \ln \left(11 \frac{h}{k_s} \right) \quad (9)$$

in which u denotes flow velocity; h denotes water depth and k_s denotes roughness height. Roughness height is defined slightly differently from the original work of Parker (1990a,b) for simplicity,

$$k_s = 2D_{sg} \sigma_{sg}^{1.28} \quad (10)$$

where σ_{sg} denotes surface layer geometric standard deviation,

$$\sigma_{sg} = 2^{s_{sy}} \quad (11)$$

Note that the roughness height given by Equation (10) is an approximation of the original value given by Parker (1990a,b), in which the roughness height was defined as twice of surface layer D_{90} .

In case of a normal flow, shear velocity u^* can be expressed as

$$u^* = \sqrt{ghS} \quad (12)$$

in which S is channel bed slope.

Function G is given by Parker (1990a,b) as

$$G(f) = \begin{cases} 5474 \left(1 - \frac{0.853}{f}\right)^{4.5} & f > 1.59 \\ \exp[14.2(f-1) - 9.28(f-1)^2] & 1 \leq f \leq 1.59 \\ f^{4.2} & f < 1 \end{cases} \quad (13)$$

In case of an arbitrary cross section, the surface based bedload equation of Parker (Equation 1) and the Keulegan resistance relation (Equation 9) are modified as follows,

$$\frac{RQ_G P_i}{ASu_*} = a F_i G(w f_{sgo} (\bar{D}_i / D_{sg})^{-b}) \quad (14)$$

$$\frac{u}{u_*} = 2.5 \ln \left(11 \frac{R_h}{k_s} \right) \quad (15)$$

where A denotes flow area; R_h denotes hydraulic radius of the flow,

$$R_h = \frac{A}{P} \quad (16)$$

and P denotes the wet perimeter of the channel.

References

- Parker, G. 1990a. Surface-based bedload transport relation for gravel rivers. *Journal of Hydraulic Research*, IAHR, 28(4), 417-436.
- Parker, G. 1990b. The "ACRONYM" series of PASCAL programs for computing bedload transport in gravel rivers. External Memorandum No. M-220, St. Anthony Falls Laboratory, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN, February, 123p.

Appendix D. Marked Rock Recovery at the Snelling Site

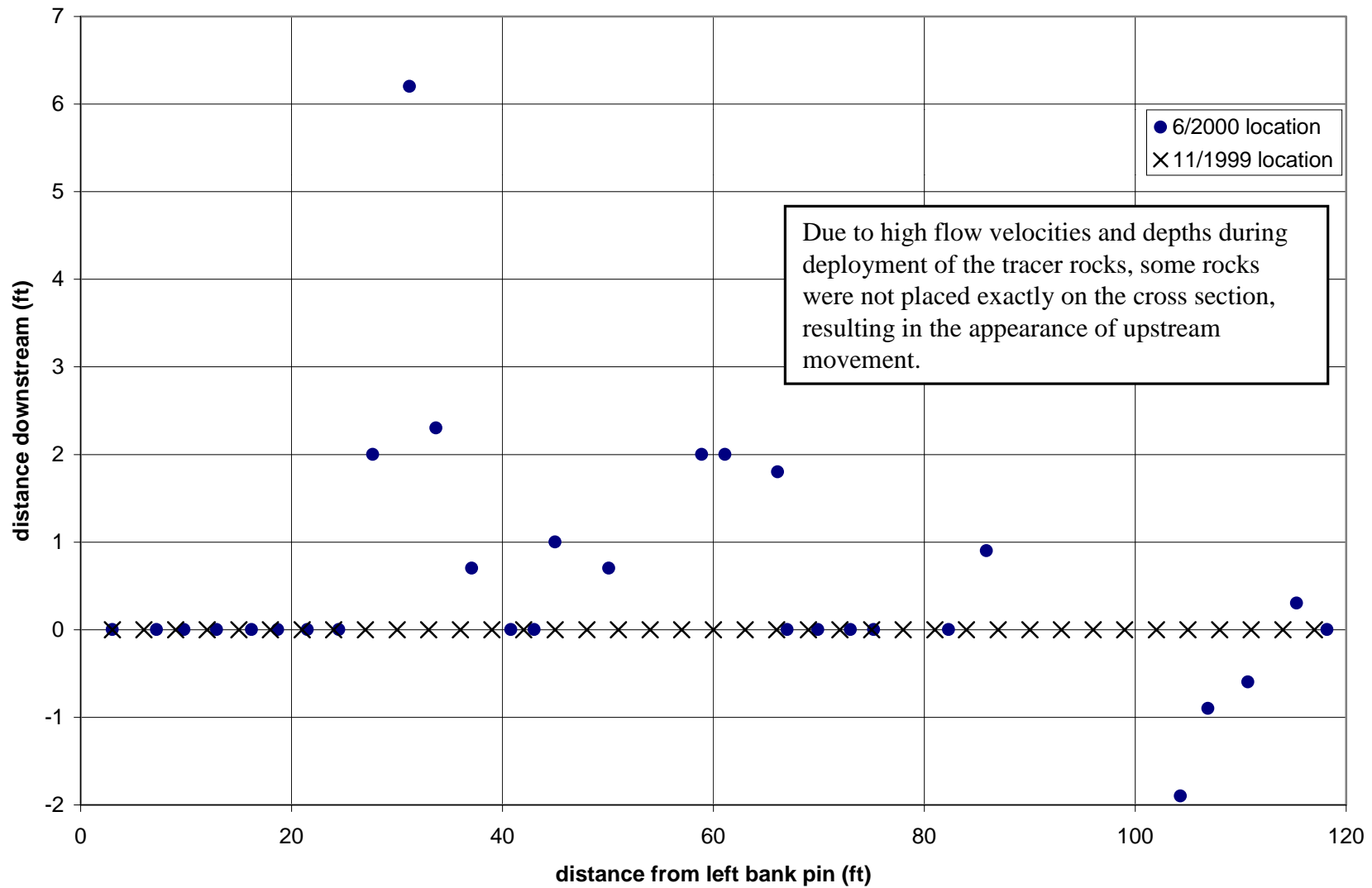


Figure D-1. Distance traveled downstream by marked rocks in Snelling Site cross section 1+90.

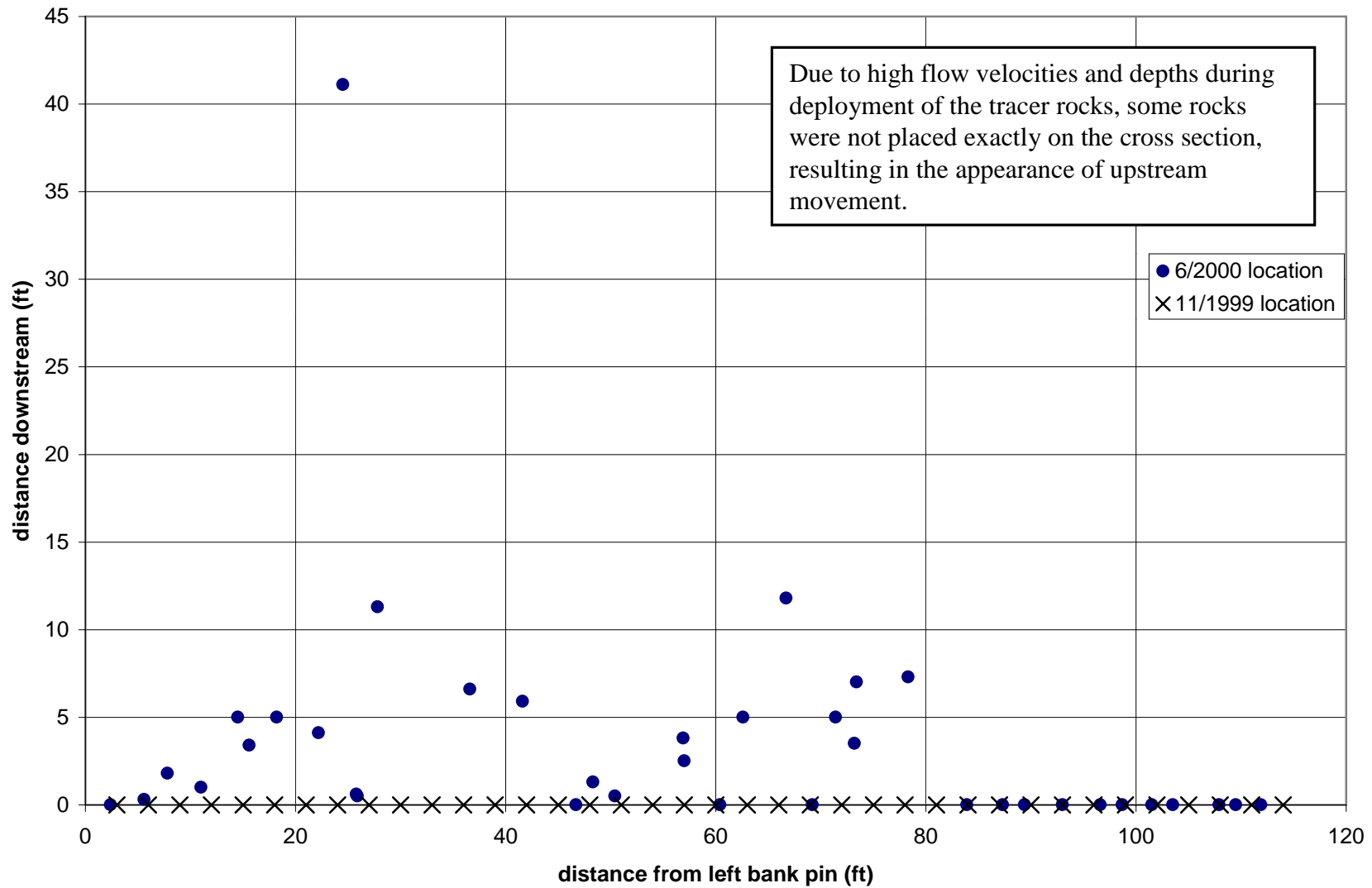


Figure D-2. Distance traveled downstream by marked rocks in Snelling Site cross section 4+20.

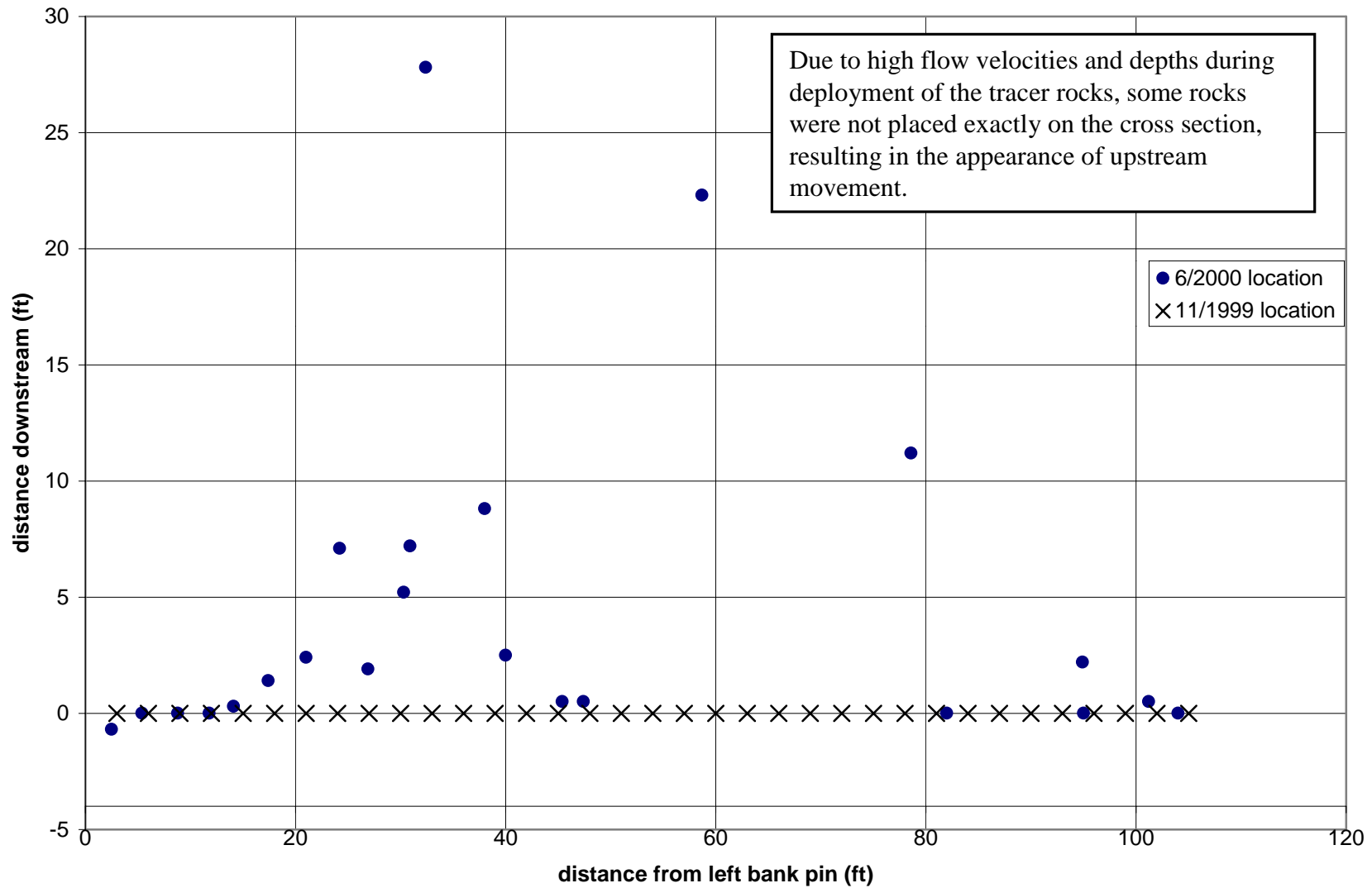


Figure D-3. Distance traveled downstream by marked rocks in Snelling Site cross section 9+60.

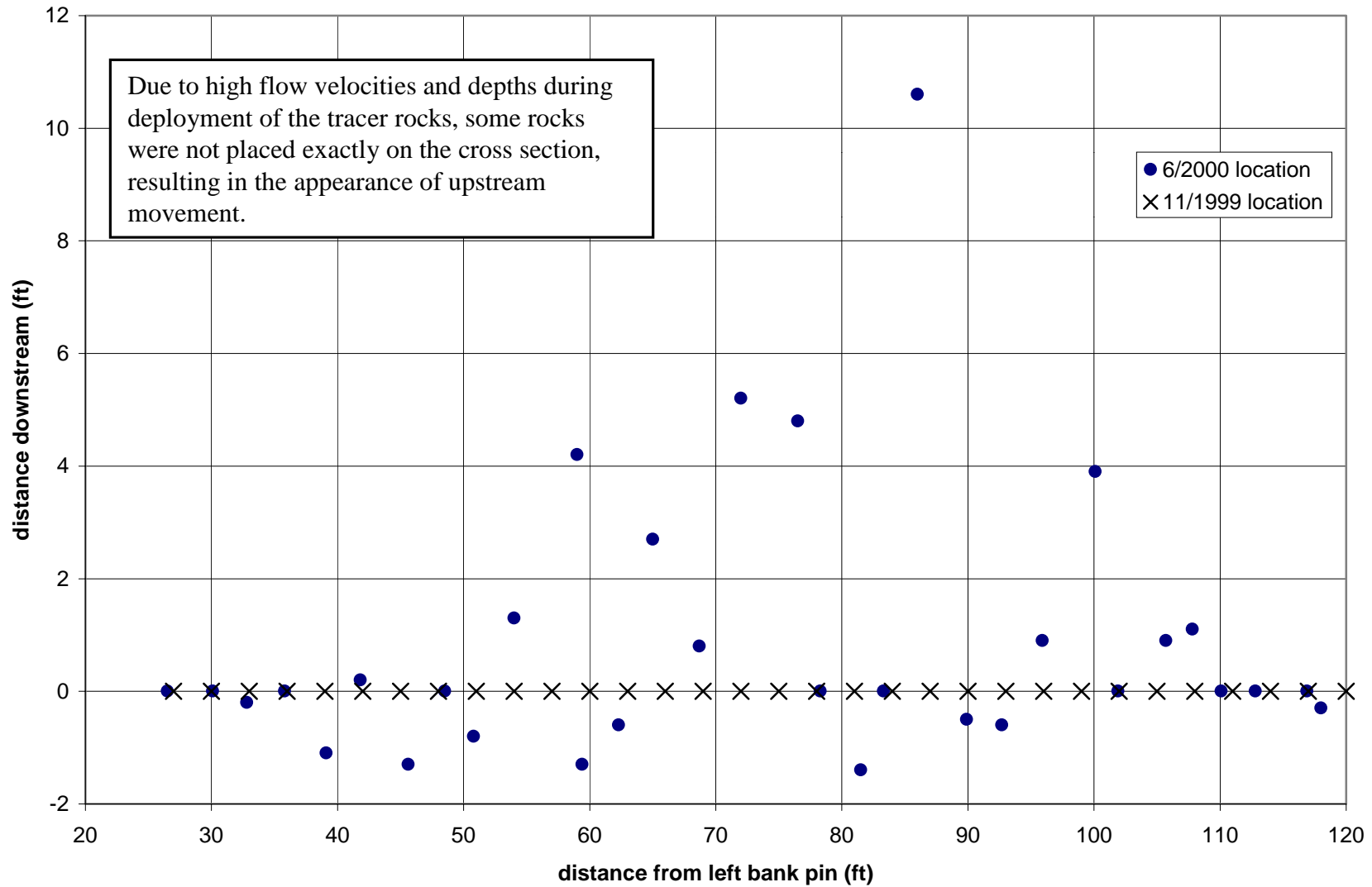


Figure D-4. Distance traveled downstream by marked rocks in Snelling Site cross section 13+95.

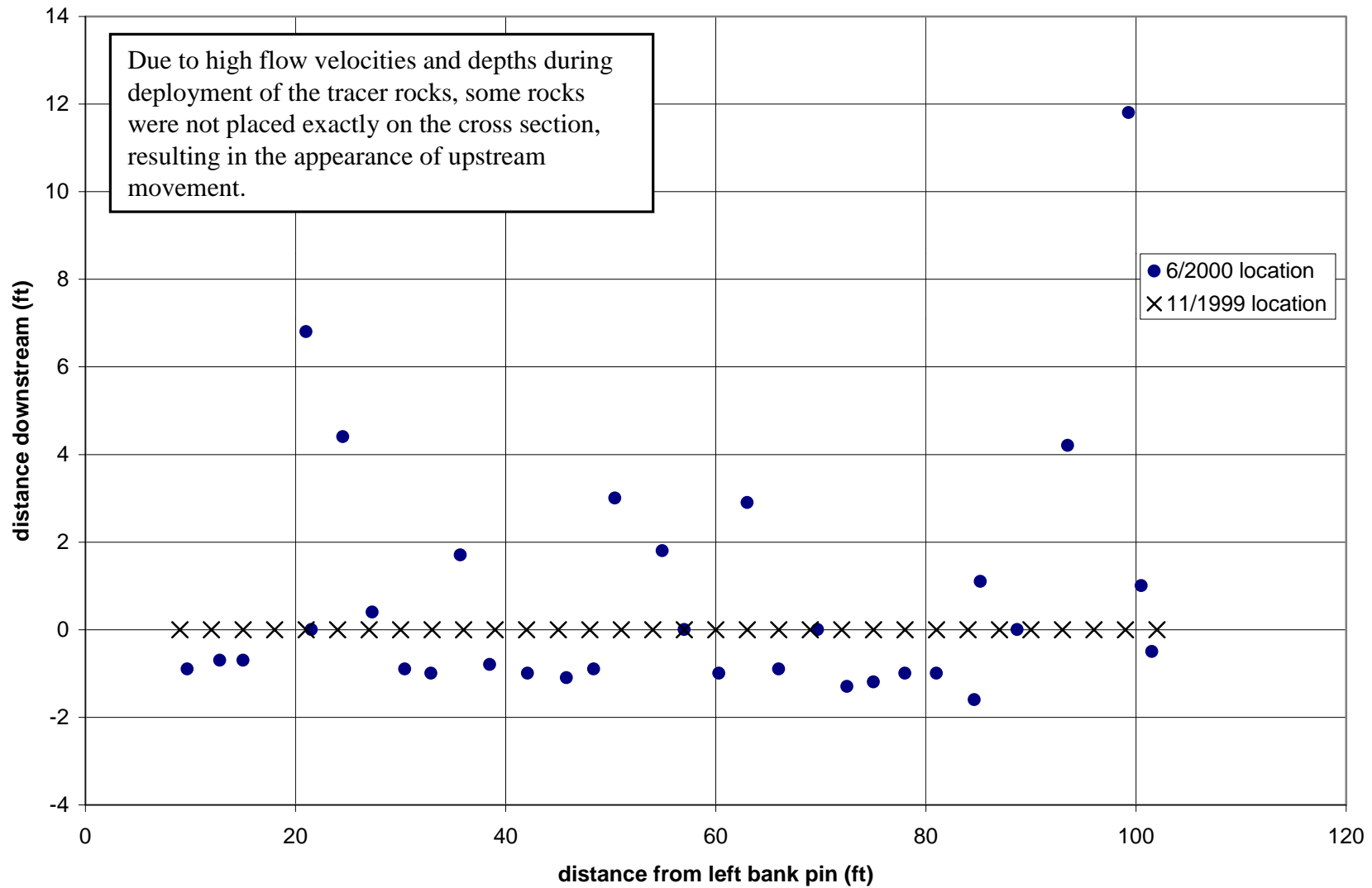


Figure D-5. Distance traveled downstream by marked rocks in Snelling Site cross section 17+75.

Appendix E. Vegetation Map Verification and Accuracy

This appendix summarizes the verification and accuracy issues encountered in developing the GIS riparian vegetation coverage for the Merced River. A description of the methods used and the resulting vegetation spatial analysis are presented in Section 6.1 of this report.

Map accuracy issues stem from the fact that it was not feasible to field-verify all vegetation polygons in the project GIS. Following interpretation and delineation of vegetation polygons from aerial photographs, a subset of polygons was field-checked by boat and land reconnaissance between Fall 1999 and Spring 2000. Because of time and logistic constraints, field verification by boat occurred only downstream of RM 34.5 (just upstream of Shaffer Bridge); consequently, vegetation maps were ground-truthed primarily in the lower half of the river corridor and most of the checked polygons were located adjacent or close to the river channels. Upstream portions of the river that were checked include public access points such as parks and bridges, and individual project study sites. A randomized polygon verification method was considered, but field logistic issues made that approach prohibitively difficult. Though the polygons verified were not distributed evenly throughout the corridor, the boat survey method that was adopted allowed a much higher number of polygons to be verified.

Accuracy and Cover Type

Of the 3,008 total polygons delineated for all fifteen cover classes, 693 were field-verified, representing an overall sampling rate of 23 percent (Table E-1). At least 15 percent of the total number of polygons for each vegetation cover type was verified, except for the Blackberry Scrub, Marsh, and Tamarisk cover types. Reasons for undersampling these cover types include low numbers of total polygons and lack of visibility during the boat surveys because of floodplain locations that were distant from the active channel. Dredger Tailing patches were not checked, and Disturbed Riparian patches were delineated in the field.

Photointerpretation accuracy for all classes except one ranged from 33 percent to 86 percent of all polygons checked, and averaged 64 percent across all vegetation cover types (Table E-1). During the field checking, 91 polygons were newly delineated to document small patches of non-native species or other vegetation. In calculating map accuracy, these polygons were classified separately from the originally delineated polygons because they were mapped at a finer resolution than intended for the original aerial photograph interpretation.

The greatest errors in cover type designations identified by the field-verification occurred for Mixed Willow and the non-native cover types. In the lower river (downstream of Shaffer Bridge), Mixed Willow patches were systematically misidentified as Cottonwood Forest because Fremont cottonwood and Goodding's black willow, a major component of mixed willow stands in the lower river had similar signatures. Spot observations upstream of Shaffer Bridge (where the boat surveys were not conducted) indicated that Goodding's black willow density is lower than in the downstream reaches, suggesting that the systematic cottonwood/willow photointerpretation error is not as great in the upper river. Also, Mixed Willow was difficult to distinguish in the field from Riparian Scrub due to significant overlap of species and similar canopy structure. In our vegetation classifications, the Mixed Willow cover type was assigned to patches that were exclusively willow, and Riparian Scrub was assigned to patches containing other species such as blue elderberry, mugwort, and non-willow riparian trees. In future mapping efforts, these two classifications should be merged because of the difficulty in distinguishing them in the field and from photographs.

Table E-1. Summary of Vegetation Polygon Accuracy

Cover Type	Number of Polygons Mapped ¹	Polygons Field-Checked		Polygons Correctly Interpreted		Number of New Polygons Delineated During Field Checking
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent ²	
Vegetation Cover Type						
Blackberry Scrub	108	3	3	1	33	0
Box Elder	38	17	45	12	71	6
Cottonwood Forest	360	61	17	38	62	9
Eucalyptus	55	19	35	7	37	8
Giant Reed	59	19	32	10	53	7
Herbaceous Cover	348	64	18	55	86	7
Marsh	74	0	0	N/A ³	N/A ³	1
Mixed Riparian Forest	479	176	37	120	68	11
Mixed Willow	526	142	27	69	49	10
Riparian Scrub	483	92	19	69	75	8
Tamarisk	2	0	0	N/A ³	N/A ³	0
Tree of Heaven	17	4	24	0	0	10
Valley Oak Forest	416	96	23	64	67	14
Total Vegetation	2,965	693	23	445	64	91
Land Use Cover Type						
Disturbed Riparian ⁴	12	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0
Dredger Tailings	31	0	0	N/A ³	100 ⁵	0

¹ Patch totals represent the minimum polygon count for each cover type, in which adjacent polygons of the same type were merged during data editing. The digital GIS coverage retains the unmerged polygon configuration, which has higher polygon counts for some cover types (but the same total area for each type), because accuracy assessment data stored as polygon attributes in the GIS would have been lost during the merging process.

² Percent correct is calculated as the number of polygons correctly interpreted divided by the number of polygons checked for each cover type. New polygons delineated from field visits were not included in these counts.

³ No polygons of this cover type were field-verified during the formal accuracy assessment, although occurrences of tamarisk, dredger tailings, and marsh were mapped during earlier reconnaissance surveys.

⁴ The Disturbed Riparian classification was added in the field as a land use cover type to comprise revetted banks and other highly modified environments with sparse to no plant cover. Existing polygons of other cover types were recoded to this type, as appropriate.

⁵ Dredger Tailing polygons were not formally checked as part of the field verification process, but assumed photointerpretation accuracy is 100 percent because of the distinct photographic signature and the large polygon size (mean polygon size = 138 acres) within this cover type.

Of the four cover types dominated by non-native woody plants, Giant Reed was most successfully identified (53 percent) despite a very small average patch size (0.2 acres), because it had a distinctive infrared signature and grew in open areas. Eucalyptus was successfully identified in only 37 percent of cases and was often confused with Cottonwood Forest or Valley Oak Forest. None of the four field-checked Tree of Heaven stands were correctly identified.

This species had a patchy distribution and a similar infrared signature to other tall canopy species. Tamarisk polygons were rare (n=2), and only those patches identified in the field were mapped. The low accuracy of identifying these non-native vegetation types indicates that ground surveys are a better method than aerial photograph interpretation for mapping exotic species that occur in patchy and heterogeneous distributions, as found in the Merced River corridor.

Accuracy and Polygon Size

A major factor influencing map accuracy was the small size of many of the polygons delineated. Table E-2 shows mean, maximum, minimum patch size for each cover type. For two thirds of the cover types, average area was less than one acre, which is smaller than many comparable remote sensing efforts.

Table E-2. Merced River Vegetation Map Patch Summary

Cover Class	Cover Type Dominated by Native Species?	Number of Patches ¹	Total Area (acres)	Percent of Vegetation Total by Area	Mean Patch Size (acres)	Median Patch Size (acres)	Max Patch Size (acres)	Min Patch Size (acres)
Vegetation Cover Type								
Blackberry Scrub	Partly	108	48	1	0.4	0.3	4.9	< 0.1
Box Elder	Yes	38	19	<1	0.5	0.3	3.9	0.1
Cottonwood Forest	Yes	360	437	11	1.2	0.5	24.4	< 0.1
Eucalyptus	No	55	46	1	0.8	0.5	4.6	< 0.1
Giant Reed	No	59	12	<1	0.2	0.1	2.0	< 0.1
Herbaceous Cover	No	348	1,363	35	3.9	0.7	149.5	< 0.1
Marsh	Yes	74	65	2	0.9	0.5	5.8	< 0.1
Mixed Riparian Forest	Yes	479	880	22	1.8	0.7	84.2	< 0.1
Mixed Willow	Yes	526	404	10	0.8	0.4	10.4	< 0.1
Riparian Scrub	Yes	483	297	8	0.6	0.4	8.4	< 0.1
Tamarisk	No	2	0.4	0	0.2	0.2	0.3	< 0.1
Tree of Heaven	No	17	10	<1	0.6	0.3	1.8	< 0.1
Valley Oak Forest	Yes	416	342	9	0.8	0.3	27.3	< 0.1
Total		2,965	3,923	100				
Other Cover Type								
Disturbed Riparian	No	12	19		1.6	0.3	12.8	0.1
Dredger Tailings	No	31	4,308		138	4.3	665	< 0.1
Total		43	4,327					

¹ Patch totals represent the minimum polygon count for each cover type, in which adjacent polygons of the same type were merged during data editing. The digital GIS coverage retains the unmerged polygon configuration, which has higher polygon counts for some cover types (but the same total area for each type), because accuracy assessment data stored as polygon attributes in the GIS would have been lost during the merging process.

Mapping accuracy for the Merced River vegetation coverage was positively correlated with polygon size. Non-parametric statistical analyses^a demonstrate that correctly interpreted polygons were significantly larger than misidentified ones ($p < 0.01$) and that polygon size threshold occurred for photointerpretation accuracy. For polygons 1.5 acres or larger, accuracy

^a The field verification results were analyzed using non-parametric logistic regression. Size distributions for correctly versus incorrectly interpreted polygons were compared using a Kolmogorov-Smirnov goodness-of-fit test.

averaged at least 75 percent across all vegetation cover types; for polygons less than one acre, accuracy was 60 percent or less. Implications for map accuracy are that many smaller polygons may be misidentified, reducing the accuracy calculation on a per-polygon basis (averaging 64 percent for all cover types). On an area basis, however, accuracy of the Merced River coverage is expected to be higher because larger polygons were generally interpreted more accurately.

In many remote sensing efforts, a minimum mapping unit or lower size threshold for polygons is determined prior to mapping; this threshold is typically one acre or larger for upland areas. A minimum mapping unit was not set *a priori* for the Merced River vegetation coverage. Riparian zones are often more highly heterogeneous landscapes than upland areas, with steep environmental gradients that shape vegetation stand composition and structure. The resulting riparian mosaic is typically composed of many small, irregularly-shaped vegetation stands, often less than an acre in area. Furthermore, specific project objectives included mapping non-native plants and identifying vegetation cover types that were associated with geomorphic surfaces. These patches often comprised very small areas, and as a result many polygons smaller than one acre were delineated on the vegetation coverage.

Although there were some accuracy issues associated with particular cover types and polygon size, many of the problems were corrected in the final version or otherwise adjusted during field checking. The final vegetation maps are considered to be a reliable and appropriate tool for natural resource planning and management within the Merced River corridor.

Appendix F. Cover Type Descriptions

This appendix describes floristic, structural, and ecological characteristics of the 15 mapped vegetation cover types, 13 vegetation categories and two additional land use cover type (Disturbed Riparian and Dredger Tailings). The distribution of these vegetation cover types in the Merced River corridor is illustrated in Figures 6.1–1 A–D and discussed in Section 6.1 of the report.^a

Box Elder

Box elder (*Acer negundo*), a common component of the subcanopy in Mixed Riparian Forest, also occurs in nearly monospecific forest stands lacking any significant contribution by other tree species. The canopy layer in these stands typically ranges from 25 to 40 ft in height. Blue elderberry (*Sambucus mexicana*) and California wild grape (*Vitis californica*) commonly occur in the shrub and vine layers, respectively. A similar Box Elder vegetation type has been observed and mapped on the Tuolumne River (McBain & Trush 2000). These box elder dominated stands share some characteristics with both the Great Valley Cottonwood Riparian Forest (element code 61410) and Great Valley Mixed Riparian Forest (element code 61420) plant communities described by Holland (1986).

The Box Elder vegetation type occurs in scattered locations along the Merced River corridor, becoming more common in the lower river (Encroached Reach and Confluence Reach) where it is typically interspersed with the more common Mixed Riparian Forest, Valley Oak Forest, and Herbaceous Cover vegetation types. The Box Elder type is uncommon, and represents less than one percent of the vegetation mapped. Thirty-eight patches (or stands) of Box Elder, covering a total of 19 acres, were mapped in the Merced River corridor. Patch sizes ranged from 0.1 to 3.9 acres, with an average size of 0.5 acres.

Box Elder stands were best delineated during field surveys. Our ability to accurately map this vegetation type from aerial photographs was limited by the relatively small size of most of these stands and the variation in the photographic signature of this type, which was caused largely by grape vines overgrowing box elder in many stands. In future landscape-level mapping efforts based on remote imagery it would probably be advisable to aggregate this vegetation type with Mixed Riparian Forest. It may be desirable, however, to identify and map Box Elder stands based on field surveys for site-specific restoration and management planning efforts.

Blackberry Scrub

This vegetation type includes any patch that has greater than 50 percent cover of blackberry species (*Rubus* spp.). Typically, patches mapped as Blackberry Scrub consist of dense, monospecific thickets of the non-native Himalaya berry (*R. discolor*). A sparse ground layer of non-native or native grasses and forbs is sometimes present. In some cases, the native California blackberry (*R. ursinus*) may be present as a co-dominant or minor component, but this species occurs more commonly as an understory species in undisturbed riparian forest stands, especially Mixed Riparian Forest. The Blackberry Scrub cover type has no clear affinity to any of the plant communities or vegetation series described by Holland (1986) or Sawyer and Keeler-Wolf (1995). Similar vegetation patches dominated by Himalaya berry have been documented on the Tuolumne River (McBain & Trush 1998).

^a Patch totals cited in the cover type descriptions represent the minimum polygon count for each cover type, in which adjacent polygons of the same type were merged during data editing. The digital GIS coverage retains the unmerged polygon configuration, which has higher polygon counts for some cover types (but the same total area for each type), because accuracy assessment data stored as polygon attributes in the GIS would have been lost during the merging process.

This cover type occurs at various elevations from the channel edge to current terrace surfaces and patches dominated by Himalaya berry are associated more with human disturbance such as levees, roads and revetted banks rather than any specific hydrologic regime. One hundred eight patches of Blackberry Scrub, covering a total of 48 acres, were mapped in the Merced River corridor. Patch sizes ranged from less than 0.1 to 4.9 acres, with an average patch size of 0.4 acres. Control of the invasive, non-native Himalaya berry is an important management consideration; the species is listed as a widespread, aggressively invading pest plant of great ecological concern (list A-1) by the California Exotic Pest Plant Council (CalEPPC 1999). If unchecked, Himalaya berry can severely limit the growth of other plants, displace native species, and prevent river access by humans and wildlife (Bossard et al. 2000).

Cottonwood Forest

Cottonwood Forest is a multilayered riparian forest type. Fremont cottonwood is the dominant overstory forming species, commonly reaching heights of 75 feet or more. Goodding's black willow (*Salix gooddingii*) is often a co-dominant tree in the overstory canopy layer. The subcanopy layer may include various willow species, box elder, or Oregon ash (*Fraxinus latifolia*). The shrub layer typically includes various willows, California wild grape, and California wild rose (*Rosa californica*) while the ground layer varies from sparse to lush with a mixture of native and non-native grasses and forbs. This type best matches the Great Valley Cottonwood Riparian Forest (element code 61410) described by Holland (1986) and the Fremont cottonwood series described by Sawyer and Keeler-Wolf (1995).

Most existing stands of cottonwood in the study area are mature and available evidence suggests that new stands are not generally being created under existing conditions. Most of these mature stands occur on abandoned floodplain sites or in low-lying areas in dredger tailings, which they appear to have colonized soon after the original disturbance. For example, examination of 1937 aerial photographs show fresh dredger tailings with little vegetation in the vicinity of Snelling Road adjacent to somewhat older tailings that had been colonized by cottonwoods and willows; these same tailings now support mature stands of Fremont Cottonwood Forest with a fairly uniform age structure and little evidence of recent successful establishment of cottonwoods. Cottonwood seedlings are commonly observed in the spring and summer along alluvial bars, but most seedlings die from scour or inundation during the following winter (see Section 6.5). Successful establishment of cottonwoods past the seedling stage appears to be a very infrequent event, although it appears that high flow events in 1997 led to successful establishment of seedlings in some "safe sites" along the river where they were protected from subsequent scour.

Cottonwood Forest commonly intergrades with Mixed Willow at lower elevations near the active channel and with Valley Oak Forest at higher elevation sites. It may also intergrade with Mixed Riparian Forest. Cross section surveys at the Snelling site indicate that mature Cottonwood Forest stands tend to occur on higher elevation, less frequently inundated sites than adjacent Mixed Riparian Forest stands. Observations elsewhere along the Merced River, however, suggest that Mixed Riparian Forest stands may commonly occur at higher elevations than adjacent stands of Cottonwood Forest (which matches the elevational relationship between Great Valley Cottonwood Riparian Forest and Mixed Riparian Forest as described by Holland (1986)).

A total of 360 patches of Cottonwood Forest, covering 437 acres, were mapped in the Merced River corridor. Patch sizes ranged from less than 0.1 to 24.4 acres, with an average patch size of 1.2 acres. Cottonwood Forest was the fourth most common cover type mapped (after Dredger Tailings, Herbaceous Cover, and Mixed Riparian Forest). Historically, this vegetation type was

much more extensive and the historical average patch size likely exceeded the current maximum patch size of 24 acres.

Disturbed Riparian

Disturbed Riparian is a generalized land cover type used for convenience to represent areas adjacent to the river that have been heavily disturbed by human land use practices and currently support sparse vegetation. Revetted banks are a primary example of sites that were mapped as this cover type, but agricultural fields and orchards, gravel mines, dredger tailings, or other large-scale land uses are not included. Twelve patches of Disturbed Riparian vegetation, covering a total of 19 acres, were mapped in the Merced River corridor. Patch sizes ranged from 0.1 to 12.8 acres, with an average patch size of 1.6 acres.

Dredger Tailings

Dredger Tailings is a generalized land cover type used for convenience in mapping to represent the complex matrix of vegetation patches found in floodplain areas that were used for dredger mining. The dredger tailings consist of piles of cobbles and boulders that were excavated from the Merced River during gold mining earlier in the Twentieth Century. Sparse cover of weedy, non-native annual grasses and forbs grows on the dredger tailings in some areas, but the general lack of soil and available moisture on the tailings greatly limits the establishment of vegetation. Some native annuals, such as common madia (*Madia elegans* ssp. *densifolia*), may be relatively common on some tailings. The vegetation typically observed on the dredger tailings represents a sparse and generally depauperate form of the Non-Native Grassland (element code 42200) described by Holland (1986).

Low-lying areas within the tailings are often connected to a perennial or seasonal groundwater supply and support a variety of wetland vegetation types (primarily freshwater emergent marsh, seasonal wetland, open water/ponds, mixed willow, cottonwood forest). Most of the smaller and/or linear patches of riparian scrub and forest are dominated by Fremont cottonwood, Goodding's black willow, and arroyo willow (*Salix lasiolepis*). Narrow-leaved, and red willows (*Salix exigua* and *S. laevigata*), edible fig (*Ficus carica*), California buckeye (*Aesculus californica*), and California wild grape are common associated species. These patches of riparian vegetation found in the tailings grade between the Great Valley Cottonwood Forest (element code 61410) and Great Valley Willow Scrub (element code 63410) communities described by Holland (1986). In the deeper swales and wetter sites, this riparian scrub/forest occurs as a band around lower elevation emergent wetlands and/or ponds. The introduced edible fig is an occasional associated species in these patches of riparian scrub or forest vegetation.

Perennial ponds are also included within the Dredger Tailings cover type. These ponds typically support floating plants, such as various duckweeds (*Lemna* and *Wolffiella*) and water fern (*Azolla filiculoides*). The introduced water hyacinth (*Eichornia crassipes*) also occurs in some ponds. Many of the ponds also contain beds of submergent macrophytes, primarily Brazilian waterweed (*Egeria densa*). Two species of floating-leaved macrophytes, pondweed (*Potamogeton* sp.) and watershield (*Brasenia schreberi*), were also noted. Marsh pennywort (*Hydrocotyle* spp.) forms dense beds in some shallower ponds.

Data collected during a biological survey and wetland delineation (Stillwater Sciences 1999) of a 137-acre dredger tailings site near the State Route 59 bridge can be used to provide a general idea of the relative abundance of different vegetation and habitat types within the areas classified as Dredger Tailings. Most of this site was mined during the 1930s. Tailing piles with no vegetation or sparse annual vegetation of mainly non-native forbs and grasses cover approximately 80

percent of the site. Cottonwood Forest and Mixed Willow vegetation (with a few patches of Mixed Riparian Forest and Valley Oak Forest also included) cover roughly 15 percent of the study site. The remaining area contains Marsh vegetation and open water (pond) habitats.

Thirty-one Dredger Tailings patches, covering 4,308 acres, were mapped in the Merced River corridor. Patch sizes ranged from less than 0.1 to 665 acres, with an average patch size of 138 acres. This was the most common cover type mapped, accounting for 52 percent of the vegetation/land cover mapping area.

Eucalyptus

This non-native vegetation type includes stands in which introduced *Eucalyptus* species dominate the tree overstory layer. The Eucalyptus vegetation type is most common on Dry Creek and along the Merced River just upstream of the confluence with Dry Creek. Individual eucalyptus trees were observed both along the margins of the active channel and on former floodplains. Fifty-five Eucalyptus patches, covering a total of 46 acres, were mapped in the Merced River corridor. Patch sizes ranged from less than 0.1 to 4.6 acres, with an average patch size of 0.8 acres.

Eucalyptus trees are non-native species considered to be moderately invasive (Randall et al. 1998, Dudley and Collins 1995). Evidence from field surveys and aerial photograph analysis suggest that the extent of this non-native vegetation type has been expanding in recent years. Eradication or control of eucalyptus species is an important management consideration. *E. globules*, the most common species, is listed as a widespread, aggressively invading pest plant of great ecological concern (list A-1) by the California Exotic Pest Plant Council (CalEPPC 1999). Ecological problems related to eucalyptus invasion include loss of biological diversity due to displacement of native plant communities and corresponding wildlife habitat, the loss of understory species because of allelopathic (chemical) inhibition from litter, and high fire danger due to large, volatile fuel loads (Bossard et al. 2000).

Giant Reed

This vegetation type includes any vegetation stand or patch dominated by giant reed (*Arundo donax*). It occurs in relatively small patches scattered in disturbed sites throughout the Merced River corridor. Giant Reed was most commonly observed on revetted banks along Gravel Mining 2 Reach from RM 32.5 to 26.8, but small patches occurred in all reaches. A total of 59 polygons covering 12 acres were mapped in the corridor. The majority of these were small patches that were mapped from field observations taken during the accuracy assessment and other field survey efforts.

Although the current extent of this non-native species along the Merced River appears limited compared to many Central Valley rivers and streams (EPA/SFEI 1999), this species is generally considered to be highly invasive. Eradication or control of this species is an important management consideration; the species is listed as a widespread, aggressively invading pest plant of great ecological concern (list A-1) by the California Exotic Pest Plant Council (CalEPPC 1999). Where it becomes widely established, giant reed displaces native plants and associated wildlife, including special status species. It provides less in-stream shade, less forage for insect populations, and greater fire danger than native riparian species. In some ecosystems it is also suspected of altering hydrologic regimes and lowering groundwater availability because of its high transpiration rate (Bossard et al. 2000).

Herbaceous Cover

This type is most commonly found on sites with poorly developed and well-drained soils, such as abandoned bars with coarse substrate and some terraces. This type represents a classification of convenience for mapping and includes a variety of vegetation series and associations, which are primarily dominated by non-native grasses and forbs. Lower elevation sites near the river that experience seasonal inundation or saturated soils may be dominated by sedges and grasses, while drier, higher elevation terrace or abandoned floodplain sites in this category may be dominated by non-native forbs and grasses, including black mustard (*Brassica nigra*), poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), yellow starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*), and ripgut brome (*Bromus diandrus*).

A total of 348 Herbaceous Cover patches, covering a total of 1,363 acres, were mapped in the Merced River corridor. Patch sizes ranged from less than 0.1 to 150 acres, with an average patch size of 3.9 acres. This was the second most abundant cover type mapped (Dredger Tailings was the most common type).

Marsh

This vegetation type includes emergent freshwater marsh and associated seasonal wetland habitats. Persistent emergent wetlands dominated by cattails (*Typha latifolia* in wetter sites, and *T. angustifolia* in drier or more seasonal wetland sites) or tules (*Scirpus acutus*) are relatively common components of the larger persistent emergent wetland patches. An introduced yellow iris (*Iris pseudacorus*) also occurs in some persistent emergent wetland patches. This vegetation type generally matches Holland's Coastal and Valley Freshwater Marsh community (element code 52410). In the wettest sites, these persistent emergent wetlands occur around the margins of non-persistent emergent wetlands or open water perennial ponds. The non-persistent emergent wetlands are dominated by waterpepper (*Polygonum hydropiperoides*), bur-marigold (*Bidens laevis*), and water primrose (*Ludwigia repens*), with common cocklebur (*Xanthium strumarium*), nutsedge (*Cyperus eragrostis*), and rabbitsfoot grass (*Polypogon monspeliensis*) as common associated species. This vegetation type seems to be a variant of the Vernal Marsh community (element code 52500) described by Holland (1986). Small patches of open water ponds may also be included in the Marsh vegetation type (see description of pond habitats and associated plant species under the Dredger Tailings description).

Seventy-four Marsh patches, covering a total of 65 acres, were mapped in the Merced River corridor. Patch sizes ranged from less than 0.1 to 5.8 acres, with an average patch size of 0.9 acres. Additional patches of Marsh vegetation are included within the Dredger Tailings cover type.

Mixed Riparian Forest

Mixed Riparian Forest includes stands dominated by three or more hardwood species. Species composition varies, but common co-dominants include Oregon ash, white alder (*Alnus rhombifolia*), box elder, valley oak (*Quercus lobata*), and various willows. The canopy layer typically reaches 40 to 50 feet in height.

Mixed Riparian Forest typically occupies one of two positions along the standard toposequence. Patches typically dominated by white alder and Oregon ash, and often with California button willow (*Cephalanthus californica*) present in the understory occur at lower elevation sites where they typically intergrade with Riparian Scrub, Mixed Willow, and the active channel. Other patches (typically dominated by box elder and valley oak) occur at higher elevation sites where they intergrade primarily with Valley Oak Forest and Herbaceous Cover vegetation types. The Cottonwood Forest type typically occupies elevational positions intermediate between these two variants of the Mixed Riparian Forest type. California buckeye occurs in some of the higher

elevation patches in the upstream reaches. Non-native species that are commonly associated with the subcanopy or shrub layers of this vegetation type include London plane tree (*Platanus x acerifolia*), edible fig, tree of heaven, (*Ailanthus altissima*), pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*), and mulberry (*Morus alba*).

A total of 479 patches (or stands) of Mixed Riparian Forest, covering 880 acres, were mapped in the Merced River corridor. Patch sizes ranged from less than 0.1 to 84 acres, with an average patch size of 1.8 acres. Mixed Riparian Forest was the third most common cover type mapped (after Dredger Tailings and Herbaceous Cover). Historically, more extensive stands of Mixed Riparian Forest were present in the Merced River corridor. In contrast, the current distribution is highly fragmented and greatly reduced.

Mixed Willow

Mixed Willow vegetation includes stands dominated almost entirely by willow species, particularly narrow-leaf willow, Goodding's black willow, and arroyo willow. The Mixed Willow vegetation type includes much variation in relative abundance and structure among patches. In general, Goodding's black willow and arroyo willow tend to dominate the overstory canopy, which reaches average heights of 20 to 35 feet. Narrow-leaf willow is often the most common component of the shrub layer, and it also contributes to the subcanopy or canopy layers in some patches. Red and dusky willows may occur as associated species in the Mixed Willow type. Nearly monospecific stands of narrow-leaf willow, located in low elevation sites adjacent to the channel that receive relatively frequent inundation and scour, are included within this type. The more common phase which is dominated by black or arroyo willows, tends to occur in somewhat higher elevation sites that are less hydraulically and geomorphically active.

A total of 526 patches of Mixed Willow vegetation, covering 404 acres, were mapped in the Merced River corridor. Patch sizes ranged from <0.05 to 10.4 acres, with an average patch size of 0.8 acres. Mixed Willow was the fifth most common cover type mapped (after Dredger Tailings, Herbaceous Cover, Mixed Riparian Forest, and Cottonwood Forest).

Riparian Scrub

Riparian Scrub is an early seral stage vegetation type dominated by shrubs, with California button-willow and narrow-leaf willow as the most characteristic species. Common associates in Riparian Scrub include seedlings or saplings of many other woody species, including as Fremont cottonwood, Goodding's black willow, Oregon ash, box elder, and white alder. Young valley oaks also occur in this vegetation type in some locations. Vegetation structure consistently includes both a ground layer (average height ranges from 0.5 to 4 feet) and a shrub layers (average height ranges from 6 to 15 feet). In some sites a subcanopy tree layer may also be present (average height, when present, ranges from 15 to 30 feet). Tree and vine layers are consistently absent in this vegetation type.

Riparian Scrub patches typically occur on alluvial bars or along the margins of the active channel, areas that are inundated and scoured frequently enough to prevent development of more mature vegetation. In the absence of scouring flows or other types of disturbance, Riparian Scrub is expected to be develop into riparian forest (Mixed Riparian Forest or Cottonwood Forest). Areas mapped as Riparian Scrub are among the most hydraulically and geomorphically active sites within the riparian corridor.

Riparian Scrub occurs throughout the Merced River corridor. A total of 483 patches, covering 297 acres, were mapped for this type. Patch sizes ranged from less than 0.1 to 8.4 acres, with an

average patch size of 0.6 acres. Riparian Scrub was the seventh most common cover type mapped (after Dredger Tailings, Herbaceous Cover, Mixed Riparian Forest, Cottonwood Forest, Mixed Willow, and Valley Oak Forest).

Tamarisk

Only two very small stands dominated by the non-native tamarisk (*Tamarix* spp.) were observed and mapped in the Merced River corridor (covering less than 0.4 acres total). Although tamarisk is considered to be a highly invasive non-native species that has replaced much of the native riparian vegetation along some Central Valley rivers and streams, it appears to represent only a moderate threat to existing native vegetation in the Merced River corridor. In spite of this, because of its highly invasive nature as demonstrated in other river systems, eradication or control of this genus is an important management consideration; four tamarisk species are listed as widespread, aggressively invading pest plants of great ecological concern (list A-1) by the California Exotic Pest Plant Council (CalEPPC 1999). Ecological problems associated with widespread tamarisk invasion include dramatic changes in river geomorphology and plant community composition, increased soil salinity and fire frequency, and decreased groundwater availability and native wildlife diversity (Bossard et al. 2000).

Tree of Heaven

The Tree of Heaven vegetation type includes all stands with the non-native tree of heaven dominant in the overstory layers. Most stands observed along the Merced River corridor include a variety of age classes, indicating that existing stands are typically self-maintaining. The presence of seedlings and saplings at some distance from the nearest mature trees suggests that some stands are actively expanding. Examination of 1993 and 1999 aerial photographs confirmed that certain stands appear to have expanded noticeably since 1993.

Seventeen patches of the Tree of Heaven vegetation type, covering 10 acres total, were mapped in the Merced River corridor. Patch sizes ranged from less than 0.1 to 1.8 acres, with an average patch size of 0.6 acres. Tree of heaven also occurs as a component of the understory and subcanopy layers in some Mixed Riparian Forest stands. Tree of heaven is considered to be an invasive non-native species. Eradication or control of this species is an important management consideration, and the tree is listed as a wildland of lesser invasiveness (list B) by the California Exotic Pest Plant Council (CalEPPC 1999).

Tree of heaven is a shade tolerant, aggressive competitor that can establish large thickets through vigorous root sprouting, high growth rates, and release of allelopathic chemicals that inhibit understory plants (Bossard et al. 2000).

Valley Oak Forest

Valley Oak Forest includes stands in which the overstory canopy is dominated by valley oak. This vegetation type is typically best established on the highest parts of the floodplain and on terraces, where it is less subject to physical disturbance but still receives annual subsurface irrigation and periodic inputs of silty alluvium during larger flood events. The canopy layer ranges from 50 to 65 feet in average height. Canopy closure in Valley Oak Forest type varies from open (representing a savanna or woodland phase) to dense (true forest).

This type best matches the Great Valley valley oak riparian forest (element code 61430) of Holland (1986). This riparian forest type is established on alluvial terraces and on low hills throughout the Central Valley from Lake Shasta to northern Los Angeles County. Historically, valley oak woodlands were mostly restricted to deep alluvial soils at low elevations, forming belts

varying in width from a few hundred meters to a few kilometers (Holland and Keil 1995). As is common throughout the Central Valley, most of these native forests along the Merced River corridor have been lost due to human development (e.g., agriculture, dredger mining, firewood harvesting, and urban development in the floodplain). The historical extent of the original woodlands is difficult to determine because many stands were cut for firewood or cleared for agriculture before any accurate records were kept (Holland and Keil 1995).

A total of 416 Valley Oak Forest patches, covering 342 acres, were mapped in the Merced River corridor. Patch sizes ranged from less than 0.1 to 27.3 acres, with an average patch size of 0.8 acres. Valley Oak Forest was the sixth most common cover type mapped (after Dredger Tailings, Herbaceous Cover, Mixed Riparian Forest, Cottonwood Forest, and Mixed Willow).

Appendix G. Merced River Plant Species List

CATEGORY NOTES

Habit: G=grass, H=herb, T=tree, S=shrub, S/T=shrub to small tree, V=vine

Native/Exotic: E=exotic, I=invasive exotic, N=native

Data Source: Species presence based on field observations by Stillwater Sciences field crews unless otherwise noted.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Family	Habit	Native/ Exotic
<i>Acer macrophyllum</i>	big-leaf maple	Aceraceae	T	N
<i>Acer negundo</i>	box elder	Aceraceae	T	N
<i>Acer saccharinum</i>	silver maple	Aceraceae	T	E
<i>Amaranthus</i> sp.	amaranthus	Amaranthaceae	H	?
<i>Conium maculatum</i>	poison hemlock	Apiaceae	H	E
<i>Hydrocotyle</i> sp.	marsh pennywort	Apiaceae	H	N
<i>Asclepias</i> sp.	milkweed	Asclepiadaceae	H	N
<i>Ambrosia psilostachya</i>	western ragweed	Asteraceae	H	N
<i>Anthemis cotula</i> ¹	mayweed	Asteraceae	H	E
<i>Artemisia douglasiana</i>	mugwort	Asteraceae	H	N
<i>Bidens cernua</i>	bur-marigold	Asteraceae	H	N
<i>Bidens frondosa</i>	sticktight	Asteraceae	H	N
<i>Carduus pycnocephalus</i>	Italian thistle	Asteraceae	H	E
<i>Centaurea solstitialis</i>	yellow star-thistle	Asteraceae	H	I
<i>Cichorium intybus</i>	chicory	Asteraceae	H	E
<i>Cirsium vulgare</i> ¹	bull thistle	Asteraceae	H	E
<i>Conyza canadensis</i>	horseweed	Asteraceae	H	N
<i>Gnaphalium luteo-album</i> ¹	cudweed	Asteraceae	H	E
<i>Gnaphalium palustre</i> ¹	everlasting	Asteraceae	H	N
<i>Gnaphalium stramineum</i> ¹	cotton-batting plant	Asteraceae	H	N
<i>Grindelia camporum</i> ¹	gumplant	Asteraceae	H	N
<i>Helianthus annuus</i> ¹	sunflower	Asteraceae	H	N
<i>Hemizonia kelloggii</i> ¹	tarweed	Asteraceae	H	N
<i>Heterotheca grandiflora</i> ¹	telegraph weed	Asteraceae	H	N
<i>Lactuca serriola</i>	prickly lettuce	Asteraceae	H	E
<i>Madia elegans</i> ssp. <i>Densifolia</i>	common tarweed	Asteraceae	H	N
<i>Picris echioides</i> ¹	bristly ox-tongue	Asteraceae	H	E
<i>Silybum marianum</i> ¹	milk thistle	Asteraceae	H	E
<i>Xanthium spinosum</i> ¹	spiny cocklebur	Asteraceae	H	N
<i>Xanthium strumarium</i>	cocklebur	Asteraceae	H	N
<i>Azolla filiculoides</i>	mosquito fern	Azollaceae	F	N
<i>Alnus rhombifolia</i>	white alder	Betulaceae	T	N
<i>Brassica nigra</i>	black mustard	Brassicaceae	H	I
<i>Lepidium latifolium</i>	peppergrass	Brassicaceae	H	E
<i>Raphanus raphanistrum</i> ¹	jointed charlock	Brassicaceae	H	E
<i>Brasenia schreberi</i>	watershield	Cabombaceae	H	N
<i>Sambucus mexicana</i>	blue elderberry	Caprifoliaceae	S	N
<i>Herniaria hirsuta</i> ssp. <i>cinerea</i> ¹		Caryophyllaceae	H	N

Scientific Name	Common Name	Family	Habit	Native/ Exotic
<i>Spergularia rubra</i>	sand spurrey ¹	Caryophyllaceae	H	N
<i>Atriplex patula</i>	spear oracle	Chenopodiaceae	S	N
<i>Chenopodium ambrosioides</i> ¹	mexican tea	Chenopodiaceae	H	E
<i>Carex</i> sp.	sedge	Cyperaceae	H	N
<i>Cyperus [esculentus?]</i>	nutsedge	Cyperaceae	H	N?
<i>Cyperus difformis</i> ¹	annual nutsedge	Cyperaceae	H	E
<i>Cyperus eragrostis</i> ¹	umbrella sedge	Cyperaceae	H	N
<i>Cyperus strigosus</i> ¹	false nutsedge	Cyperaceae	H	N
<i>Eleocharis macrostachya</i> ¹	Spikerush	Cyperaceae	H	N
<i>Lipocarpa micrantha</i> ¹		Cyperaceae	H	N
<i>Scirpus acutus</i> var. <i>occidentalis</i>	tule, hardstem bulrush	Cyperaceae	H	N
<i>Equisetum</i> spp.	horsetail	Equisetaceae	F	N
<i>Chamaesyce maculata</i> ¹	spotted spurge	Euphorbiaceae	H	E
<i>Eremocarpus setigerus</i> ¹	doveweed	Euphorbiaceae	H	N
<i>Euphorbia</i> sp.	spurge	Euphorbiaceae	H	?
<i>Lotus purshianus</i> var. <i>purshianus</i> ¹		Fabaceae	H	N
<i>Lupinus</i> sp. ¹	bush lupine	Fabaceae	S	N
<i>Melilotus alba</i>	white sweetclover	Fabaceae	H	E
<i>Quercus douglasii</i>	blue oak	Fagaceae	T	N
<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	Fagaceae	T	N
<i>Frankenia salina</i>	alkali heath	Frankeniaceae	S	N
<i>Centaurium muhlenbergii</i> ¹	centaury	Gentianaceae	H	N
<i>Erodium botry</i> ¹	red-stemmed filaree	Geraniaceae	H	E
<i>Myriophyllum aquaticum</i>	parrot's feather	Haloragaceae	H	I
<i>Aesculus californica</i>	California buckeye	Hippocastanaceae	S/T	N
<i>Egeria densa</i>	Brazilian waterweed	Hydrocharitaceae	H	E
<i>Hypericum anagalloides</i>	tinker's penny	Hypericaceae	H	N
<i>Hypericum perforatum</i> ¹	Klamathweed	Hypericaceae	H	E
<i>Iris pseudacorus</i>	yellow iris	Iridaceae	H	E
<i>Carya illinoensis</i>	pecan	Juglandaceae	T	E
<i>Juglans californica</i> var. <i>hindsii</i>	Northern California black walnut	Juglandaceae	T	NE
<i>Juncus acuminatus</i> ¹	taper-tip rush	Juncaceae	H	N
<i>Juncus balticus</i> ¹	baltic rush	Juncaceae	H	N
<i>Juncus effusus</i>	soft rush	Juncaceae	H	N
<i>Juncus xiphioides</i> ¹	Iris-leaf rush	Juncaceae	H	N
<i>Lycopus americanus</i> ¹	bugleweed	Lamiaceae	H	N
<i>Marrubium vulgare</i>	horehound	Lamiaceae	H	E
<i>Mentha arvensis</i>	mint	Lamiaceae	H	N
<i>Lemna</i> sp.	duckweed	Lemnaceae	H	N
<i>Wolffia [globosa?]</i>	water-meal	Lemnaceae	H	N
<i>Ammania robusta</i> ¹		Lythraceae	H	N
<i>Lythrum hyssopifolium</i> ¹	loosestrife	Lythraceae	H	E
<i>Rotala ramosior</i> ¹		Lythraceae	H	E

Scientific Name	Common Name	Family	Habit	Native/ Exotic
<i>Mullugo verticillata</i> ¹	carpet weed	Molluginaceae	H	E
<i>Ficus carica</i>	edible fig	Moraceae	S/T	E
<i>Maclura pomifera</i>	osage orange	Moraceae	T	E
<i>Morus alba</i>	white mulberry	Moraceae	T	E
<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	Oleaceae	T	N
<i>Fraxinus velutina</i> ²	velvet ash	Oleaceae	T	N
<i>Epilobium ciliatum</i> ssp. <i>ciliatum</i> ¹	willow herb	Onagraceae	H	N
<i>Epilobium densiflorum</i> ¹	fireweed	Onagraceae	H	N
<i>Epilobium</i> sp.	willow herb	Onagraceae	H	N
<i>Ludwigia palustris</i> ¹	false loosestrife	Onagraceae	H	N
<i>Ludwigia peploides</i> ssp. <i>peploides</i> ¹	water primrose	Onagraceae	H	N
<i>Oenothera elata</i> ssp. <i>hirsutissima</i>	yellow evening primrose	Onagraceae	H	N
<i>Eschscholzia caespitosa</i> ¹	poppy	Papaveraceae	H	N
<i>Eschscholzia californica</i> ¹	California poppy	Papaveraceae	H	N
<i>Phytolacca americana</i>	pokeweed	Phytolaccaceae	S/T	E
<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	English plantain	Plantaginaceae	H	E
<i>Platanus acerifolia</i>	London plane tree	Platanaceae	T	E
<i>Platanus racemosa</i>	western sycamore	Platanaceae	T	N
<i>Arundo donax</i>	giant reed	Poaceae	G	I
<i>Aven barbata</i>	slender wild oat	Poaceae	G	E
<i>Avena fatua</i>	wild oat	Poaceae	G	E
<i>Briza minor</i>	little quaking grass	Poaceae	G	E
<i>Bromus diandrus</i> ¹	riggut brome	Poaceae	G	E
<i>Bromus madritensis</i> ssp. <i>rubens</i> ¹	red brome	Poaceae	G	E
<i>Bromus mollis</i> ¹	soft chess	Poaceae	G	E
<i>Cynodon dactylon</i> ¹	Bermuda grass	Poaceae	G	E
<i>Digitaria sanguinalis</i> ¹		Poaceae	G	E
<i>Distichlis spicata</i>	Saltgrass	Poaceae	G	N
<i>Echinochloa crus-galli</i> ¹	barnyard grass	Poaceae	G	E
<i>Leersia oryzoides</i>	rice cutgrass	Poaceae	G	E
<i>Leymus triticoides</i> ¹	alkali rye	Poaceae	G	N
<i>Lolium multiflorum</i> ¹	Italian rye grass	Poaceae	G	E
<i>Nassella</i> sp. ¹	needlegrass	Poaceae	G	N
<i>Paspalum dilatatum</i> ¹	Dallis grass	Poaceae	G	E
<i>Paspalum distichum</i>	joint paspalum	Poaceae	G	N
<i>Paspalum notatum</i> ¹	paspalum	Poaceae	G	E
<i>Phalaris arundinacea</i>	reed canary grass	Poaceae	G	N
<i>Poa annua</i> ¹	annual blue grass	Poaceae	G	E
<i>Polypogon monspeliensis</i>	annual rabbit's-foot grass	Poaceae	G	E
<i>Setaria viridis</i> ¹		Poaceae	G	E
<i>Sorghum halepense</i> ¹	sorghum	Poaceae	G	E
<i>Polygonum hydropiperoides</i>	waterpepper	Polygonaceae	H	N
<i>Polygonum lapathifolium</i> ¹	Willow weed	Polygonaceae	H	N

Scientific Name	Common Name	Family	Habit	Native/ Exotic
<i>Rumex crispus</i>	curly dock	Polygonaceae	H	E
<i>Eichhornia crassipes</i>	water hyacinth	Pontederiaceae	H	I
<i>Potamogeton crispus</i> ¹	crispate-leaved pondweed	Potamogetonaceae	H	E
<i>Potamogeton</i> sp.	pondweed	Potamogetonaceae	H	N
<i>Rhamnus californica</i>	California coffeeberry	Rhamnaceae	S/T	N
<i>Rhamnus tomentella</i> ssp. <i>tomentella</i> ¹	hoary coffeeberry	Rhamnaceae	S/T	N
<i>Rubus discolor</i>	Himalaya berry	Rosaceae	V	I
<i>Rubus ursinus</i>	California blackberry	Rosaceae	V	N
<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> var. <i>californicus</i>	California button willow, button bush	Rubiaceae	S	N
<i>Galium</i> sp.	bedstraw	Rubiaceae	H	N
<i>Populus fremontii</i>	Fremont cottonwood	Salicaceae	T	N
<i>Salix exigua</i>	narrow-leaved willow	Salicaceae	S	N
<i>Salix goodingii</i>	Gooding's black willow	Salicaceae	T	N
<i>Salix laevigata</i>	red willow	Salicaceae	T	N
<i>Salix lasiolepis</i>	arroyo willow	Salicaceae	S	N
<i>Kickxia elatine</i> ¹	fluellin	Scrophulariaceae	H	E
<i>Lindernia dubia</i> var. <i>anagallidea</i> ¹	false pimpernel	Scrophulariaceae	H	E
<i>Mimulus cardinalis</i> ¹	scarlet monkeyflower	Scrophulariaceae	H	N
<i>Mimulus floribundus</i>	slimy monkeyflower	Scrophulariaceae	H	N
<i>Mimulus guttatus</i>	common monkeyflower	Scrophulariaceae	H	N
<i>Verbascum blattaria</i> ¹	moth mullein	Scrophulariaceae	H	E
<i>Verbascum thapsus</i>	woolly mullein	Scrophulariaceae	H	E
<i>Veronica catenata</i> ¹	chain speedwell	Scrophulariaceae	H	E
<i>Ailanthus altissima</i>	tree of heaven	Simaroubaceae	T	E
<i>Datura</i> sp.	jimson weed	Solanaceae	H	E?
<i>Nicotiana glauca</i>	tree tobacco	Solanaceae	T	E
<i>Physalis lancifolia</i> ¹	ground cherry	Solanaceae	S	E
<i>Solanum americanum</i> ¹	nightshade	Solanaceae	H	N
<i>Tamarix</i> sp.	tamarisk	Tamaricaceae	T	I
<i>Typha angustifolia</i>	narrow-leaved cattail ¹	Typhaceae	H	N
<i>Typha latifolia</i>	broad-leaved cattail ¹	Typhaceae	H	N
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	giant nettle ¹	Urticaceae	H	N
<i>Urtica dioica</i> ss. <i>holosericea</i>	hoary nettle	Urticaceae	H	N
<i>Phyla nodiflora</i> var. <i>nodiflora</i> ¹		Verbenaceae	H	N
<i>Verbena</i> sp. ¹		Verbenaceae	H	?
<i>Phoradendron macrophyllum</i>	big leaf mistletoe	Viscaceae	P	N
<i>Vitis californica</i>	California wild grape	Vitaceae	V	N
<i>Tirbulus terrestris</i>	puncture vine	Zygophyllaceae	H	E

¹ Identified in CDWR, unpublished data

² Identified in McBain and Trush (2000)

References

McBain and Trush. 2000. Habitat restoration plan for the Lower Tuolumne River corridor, final report. Prepared for the Tuolumne River Technical Advisory Committee, with assistance from USFWS Anadromous Fish Restoration Program. McBain & Trush, Arcata, CA.

Appendix H. Snelling Site Vegetation Relevés

**Merced River Patch Relevé
 Snelling Site, Cross-Section 10+80 (right bank), Patch E (Mixed Forest)**

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
Ground	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	< 1%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	< 1%
	SP-1 ¹	herb	< 1%
	SP-4 ¹	herb	< 1%
	<i>Rumex</i> sp.	dock	< 1%
Shrub	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	1-5%
	<i>Brassica nigra</i>	black mustard	< 1%
	<i>Salix goodingii</i>	Gooding's black willow	1-5%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	1-5%
	<i>Artemisia douglasiana</i>	mugwort	< 1%
	<i>Salix lasiolepis</i>	arroyo willow	< 1%
	<i>Cirsium</i> sp.	thistle	< 1%
	<i>Cercis occidentalis</i>	Western redbud	< 1%
Tree (subcanopy)	<i>Salix lasiolepis</i>	arroyo willow	1-5%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	5-15%
	<i>Morus alba</i>	mulberry	1-5%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	1-5%
	<i>Acer saccharinum</i>	silver maple	< 1%
	<i>Alnus rhombifolia</i>	white alder	1-5%
Tree (canopy)	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	25-50%
Vine (<2 m)	<i>Rubus discolor</i>	Himalaya berry	50-75%

¹"SP" designates an unknown species that occurred in the plot.

**Merced River Patch Relevé
 Snelling Site, Cross-Section 10+80 (right bank), Patch C (Mixed Willow)**

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
Ground	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	< 1%
	SP-7 ¹	herb	< 1%
	SP-8 ¹	herb	< 1%
	SP-9 ¹	herb	< 1%
Shrub	<i>Conium maculatum</i>	Poison hemlock	1-5%
	SP-2 ¹	herb	1-5%
	<i>Salix lasiolepis</i>	arroyo willow	1-5%
	<i>Salix exigua</i>	narrow-leaved willow	1-5%
	<i>Artemisia douglasiana</i>	mugwort	< 1%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	< 1%
Tree (subcanopy)	<i>Salix lasiolepis</i>	arroyo willow	15-25%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	1-5%
	<i>Acer negundo</i>	box elder	1-5%
Tree (canopy)	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	1-5%

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
Vine (<2 m)	<i>Rubus ursinus</i>	California blackberry	5-15%
	<i>Rubus discolor</i>	Himalaya berry	< 1%
Vine (>2 m)	<i>Vitis californica</i>	California wild grape	5-15%

¹"SP" designates an unknown species that occurred in the plot.

**Merced River Patch Relevé
Snelling Site, Cross-Section 13+95 (right bank), Patch C (Herbaceous Cover)**

Stratum	Scientific Name ¹	Common Name	Cover Class
Ground	<i>SP-21</i> ² (Poaceae)	grass (dried)	>75%
	<i>SP-22</i> ²	herb	15-25%
	<i>Brassica nigra</i>	black mustard	1-5%
	<i>Eschscholzia californica</i>	California poppy	1-5%
	<i>Verbascum blattaria</i>	moth mullein	< 1%
	<i>Rubus ursinus</i>	California blackberry	< 1%
Shrub	<i>Salix lasiolepis</i>	arroyo willow	1-5%
	<i>Rhamnus californica</i>	California coffeeberry	< 1%
Tree (subcanopy)	<i>Carya illinoensis</i>	pecan	1-5%
Tree (canopy)	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	5-15%

¹ Typical species that occur in this cover type and were not captured in this relevé include Oregon ash (*Fraxinus latifolia*), lupine (*Lupinus* spp.) and poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*).

²"SP" designates an unknown species that occurred in the plot.

**Merced River Patch Relevé
Snelling Site, Cross-Section 13+95 (right bank), Patch B (Mixed Forest)**

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
Ground	<i>Artemisia douglasiana</i>	mugwort	5-15%
	<i>Acer saccharinum</i>	silver maple	1-5%
	<i>Phalaris arundinacea</i>	reed canary grass	1-5%
	<i>Verbascum blattaria</i>	moth mullein	1-5%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	< 1%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	< 1%
	<i>Equisetum</i> spp.	horsetail	< 1%
	<i>SP-23</i> ¹ (Fabaceae)	herb (legume family)	< 1%
	<i>Acer negundo</i>	box elder	< 1%
	<i>Rumex</i> sp.	dock	< 1%
	<i>SP-11</i> (<i>Solidago</i> sp.)	goldenrod	< 1%
	<i>SP-24</i> (Boraginaceae)	herb (borage family)	1-5%
	Shrub	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> var. <i>californica</i>	California button willow
<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>		Oregon ash	5-15%

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
	<i>Acer negundo</i>	box elder	5-15%
	<i>Salix lasiolepis</i>	arroyo willow	5-15%
	<i>Salix exigua</i>	narrow-leaf willow	1-5%
	<i>Alnus rhombifolia</i>	white alder	1-5%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	1-5%
Tree (subcanopy)	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	15-25%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	5-15%
Tree (canopy)	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	15-25%
	<i>Acer saccharinum</i>	silver maple	5-15%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	50-75%
Vine (<2 m)	<i>Rubus discolor</i>	Himalaya berry	15-25%
	<i>Vitis californica</i>	California wild grape	5-15%
	<i>Rubus ursinus</i>	California blackberry	1-5%
Vine (>2 m)	<i>Vitis californica</i>	California wild grape	5-15%

¹"SP" designates an unknown species that occurred in the plot.

**Merced River Patch Relevé
 Snelling Site, Cross-Section 13+95 (left bank), Patch A (Cottonwood Forest)**

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
Ground	SP-21 ¹ (Poaceae)	grass	15-25%
	<i>Conium maculatum</i>	poison hemlock	1-5%
	<i>Artemisia douglasiana</i>	mugwort	< 1%
Shrub	<i>Ficus carica</i>	edible fig	50-75%
	<i>Salix lasiolepis</i>	arroyo willow	5-15%
	<i>Acer negundo</i>	box elder	1-5%
	<i>Maclura pomifera</i>	Osage orange	1-5%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	1-5%
	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> var. <i>californica</i>	California button willow	< 1%
Tree (subcanopy)	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	15-25%
	<i>Maclura pomifera</i>	Osage orange	1-5%
Tree (canopy)	<i>Populus fremontii</i>	Fremont cottonwood	25-50%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	5-15%
Vine (<2 m)	<i>Rubus ursinus</i>	California blackberry	5-15%
	<i>Rubus discolor</i>	Himalaya berry	5-15%

¹"SP" designates an unknown species that occurred in the plot.

Merced River Patch Relevé
Snelling Site, Cross-Section 9+60 (left bank), Patch D (Cottonwood Forest, High-Flow Channel)

Stratum	Scientific Name ¹	Common Name	Cover Class
Ground	<i>Artemisia douglasiana</i>	mugwort	< 1%
Shrub	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> var. <i>californica</i>	California button willow	15-25%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	1-5%
Tree (subcanopy)	<i>Alnus rhombifolia</i>	white alder	5-15%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	1-5%
	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> var. <i>californica</i>	California button willow	1-5%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	1-5%
	<i>Salix goodingii</i>	Gooding's black willow	< 1%
Tree (canopy)	<i>Populus fremontii</i>	Fremont cottonwood	5-15%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	1-5%
Vine (<2 m)	<i>Rubus discolor</i>	Himalaya berry	15-25%
Vine (>2 m)	<i>Rubus ursinus</i>	California blackberry	< 1%
	<i>Vitis californica</i>	California wild grape	< 1%

¹Other species occurring in this cover type and that were not captured in this relevé include box elder (*Acer negundo*) and less frequently, Osage orange (*Maclura pomifera*), and mulberry (*Morus alba*).

Merced River Patch Relevé
Snelling Site, Cross-Section 1+90 (left bank), Patch A (Mixed Forest)

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
Ground	<i>Artemisia douglasiana</i>	mugwort	1-5%
	<i>Aesculus californica</i>	California buckeye	1-5%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	< 1%
	<i>Rosa californica</i>	California wild rose	< 1%
	SP-12 ¹ (Poaceae)	grass (dried)	< 1%
	SP-13 ¹ (Poaceae)	grass	< 1%
	SP-14 ¹ (Poaceae)	grass	< 1%
Shrub	<i>Rubus ursinus</i>	California blackberry	25-50%
	<i>Rubus discolor</i>	Himalaya berry	5-15%
	<i>Rosa californica</i>	California wild rose	5-15%
	<i>Salix exigua</i>	narrow-leaved willow	1-5%
	<i>Aesculus californica</i>	California buckeye	1-5%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	1-5%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	< 1%
	SP-11 ¹ (Asteraceae)	herb (yellow flower)	< 1%
Tree (subcanopy)	<i>Aesculus californica</i>	California buckeye	5-15%
	<i>Salix lasiolepis</i>	arroyo willow	1-5%
Tree (canopy)	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	15-25%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	5-15%

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
	<i>Juglans californica</i> var. <i>hindsii</i>	Northern California black walnut	1-5%

¹"SP" designates an unknown species that occurred in the plot.

**Merced River Patch Relevé
 Snelling Site, Cross-Section 4+20 (left bank), Patch B (Valley Oak Forest)**

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
Ground	<i>SP-14¹</i> (Poaceae)	grass	25-50%
	<i>Artemisia douglasiana</i>	mugwort	1-5%
	<i>SP-6¹</i>		1-5%
	<i>Madia</i> sp.	tarweed	< 1%
Shrub	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	1-5%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	1-5%
Tree (subcanopy)	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	5-15%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	1-5%
Tree (canopy)	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	15-25%
Vine (>2 m)	<i>Rubus discolor</i>	Himalaya berry	5-15%
	<i>Vitis californica</i>	California wild grape	5-15%
	<i>Rubus ursinus</i>	California blackberry	1-5%

¹"SP" designates an unknown species that occurred in the plot.

**Merced River Patch Relevé
 Snelling Site, Cross-Section 9+60 (right bank), Patch B (Herbaceous Cover)**

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
Ground	<i>Phalaris arundinacea</i>	reed canary grass	>75%
	<i>Cyperus</i> sp.	nutsedge	5-15%
	<i>Polygonum hydropiperoides</i>	waterpepper	5-15%
	<i>SP-16¹</i> (Lamiaceae)	herb (mint family)	5-15%
	<i>Acer saccharinum</i>	silver maple	1-5%
	<i>Juncus</i> sp.	rush	1-5%
	<i>Eleocharis</i> sp.	spikerush	1-5%
	<i>SP-11¹</i> (possible <i>Solidago</i> sp.)	goldenrod	1-5%
	<i>SP-19¹</i>		1-5%
	<i>Carex barbarae</i>	Santa Barbara sedge	< 1%
	<i>Epilobium ciliatum</i> var. <i>watsonii</i>	Epilobium	< 1%
	<i>Hydrocotyle</i> sp.	Hydrocotyle	< 1%
Shrub	<i>Acer saccharinum</i>	silver maple	5-15%
	<i>Salix lasiolepis</i>	arroyo willow	5-15%
	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> var. <i>californica</i>	California button willow	1-5%

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	1-5%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	1-5%
	<i>Carya illinoiensis</i>	pecan	< 1%
Tree (subcanopy)	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	5-15%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	1-5%
	<i>Carya illinoiensis</i>	pecan	1-5%
Tree (canopy)	<i>Populus fremontii</i>	Fremont cottonwood	1-5%
Vine (<2 m)	<i>Rubus discolor</i>	Himalaya berry	15-25%
	<i>Rubus ursinus</i>	California blackberry	5-15%
	<i>Vitis californica</i>	California wild grape	1-5%
Vine (>2 m)	<i>Vitis californica</i>	California wild grape	1-5%

"SP" designates an unknown species that occurred in the plot.

**Merced River Patch Relevé
 Snelling Site, Cross-Section 9+60 (right bank), Patch C (Cottonwood Forest)**

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
Ground	<i>Conium maculatum</i>	Poison hemlock	15-25%
	<i>Epilobium</i> sp.	Epilobium	< 1%
	<i>Verbascum blattaria</i>	moth mullein	< 1%
	<i>Rumex</i> sp.	dock	< 1%
	<i>Phalaris arundinacea</i>	reed canary grass	< 1%
Shrub	<i>Ficus carica</i>	edible fig	< 1%
	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> var. <i>californica</i>	California button willow	1-5%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	1-5%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	1-5%
	<i>Artemisia douglasiana</i>	mugwort	5-15%
Tree (subcanopy)	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	1-5%
Tree (canopy)	<i>Populus fremontii</i>	Fremont cottonwood	5-15%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	25-50%
Vine (<2 m)	<i>Rubus ursinus</i>	California blackberry	15-25%
	<i>Rubus discolor</i>	Himalaya berry	50-75%
	<i>Vitis californica</i>	California wild grape	>75%
Vine (>2 m)	<i>Vitis californica</i>	California wild grape	15-25%

"SP" designates an unknown species that occurred in the plot.

Merced River Patch Relevé
Snelling Site, Cross-Section 10+80 (right bank), Patch B (Mixed Forest)

Stratum ¹	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
Ground	<i>Platanus acerifolia</i>	London plane tree	< 1%
	<i>Acer saccharinum</i>	silver maple	< 1%
	<i>Polygonum hydropiperoides</i>	waterpepper	< 1%
	<i>Setaria</i> sp.	grass	< 1%
	<i>Vitis californica</i>	California wild grape	< 1%
	<i>Phalaris arundinacea</i>	reed canary grass	1-5%
Shrub	<i>Platanus acerifolia</i>	London plane tree	1-5%
	<i>Morus alba</i>	mulberry	1-5%
	<i>Salix lasiolepis</i>	arroyo willow	15-25%
	<i>Salix esigua</i>	narrow-leaved willow	15-25%
	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> var. <i>californica</i>	California button willow	25-50%
Tree (subcanopy)	<i>Platanus acerifolia</i>	London plane tree	5-15%
	<i>Alnus rhombifolia</i>	white alder	25-50%
Tree (canopy)	<i>Populus fremontii</i>	Fremont cottonwood	5-15%
Vine (>2 m)	<i>Rubus discolor</i>	Himalaya berry	25-50%

¹This relevé includes part of a perennially wet high-flow channel, covering 5-15% of the plot area.

Merced River Patch Relevé
Snelling Site, Cross-Section 17+75 (right bank), Patch A (Mixed Forest)

Stratum	Scientific Name ¹	Common Name	Cover Class
Ground	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	< 1%
Shrub	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	1-5%
	<i>Alnus rhombifolia</i>	white alder	1-5%
	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> var. <i>californica</i>	California button willow	5-15%
Tree (subcanopy)	<i>Platanus acerifolia</i>	London plane tree	1-5%
	<i>Alnus rhombifolia</i>	white alder	5-15%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	5-15%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	5-15%
Tree (canopy)	<i>Acer saccharinum</i>	silver maple	1-5%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	5-15%
Vine (<2 m)	<i>Rubus ursinus</i>	California blackberry	50-75%
	<i>Rubus discolor</i>	Himalaya berry	50-75%
Vine (<2 m)	<i>Vitis californica</i>	California wild grape	< 1%

¹Narrow-leaf willow (*Salix exigua*) commonly occurred at the river channel edge and was not captured in this relevé plot.

Merced River Patch Relevé
Snelling Site, Cross-Section 17+75 (right bank), Patch C (Cottonwood Forest)

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
Ground	<i>Phalaris arundinacea</i>	reed canary grass	<1%
Shrub	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> var. <i>californica</i>	California button willow	<1%
	<i>Alnus rhombifolia</i>	white alder	1-5%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	1-5%
	<i>Morus alba</i>	mulberry	1-5%
Tree (subcanopy)	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	5-15%
	<i>Alnus rhombifolia</i>	white alder	5-15%
	<i>Maclura pomifera</i>	Osage orange	15-25%
	<i>Acer negundo</i> ¹	box elder	1-5%
Tree (canopy)	<i>Alnus rhombifolia</i>	white alder	50-75%
Vine (<2 m)	<i>Rubus ursinus</i>	California blackberry	5-15%
	<i>Rubus discolor</i>	Himalaya berry	5-15%

¹Relevé did not adequately capture the presence of box elder (*Acer negundo*), which was prominent at both edges of the patch.

Merced River Patch Relevé
Snelling Site, Cross-Section 13+95 (left bank), Patch C (Dredger Tailings, swale)

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
Ground	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	<1%
	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> var. <i>californica</i>	California button willow	<1%
	<i>Phalaris arundinacea</i>	reed canary grass	<1%
	<i>Artemisia douglasiana</i>	mugwort	1-5%
	<i>Sp-21</i> ¹ (Poaceae)	grass (dried)	15-25%
Shrub	<i>Salix lasiolepis</i>	arroyo willow	25-50%
	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> var. <i>californica</i>	California button willow	50-75%
Tree (subcanopy)	<i>Salix lasiolepis</i>	arroyo willow	5-15%
	<i>Salix goodingii</i>	Gooding's black willow	5-15%
Tree (canopy)	<i>Populus fremontii</i>	Fremont cottonwood	1-5%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	5-15%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	15-25%
Vine (<2 m)	<i>Rubus discolor</i>	Himalaya berry	1-5%
	<i>Rubus ursinus</i>	California blackberry	5-15%

¹"SP" designates an unknown species that occurred in the plot.

Merced River Patch Relevé
Snelling Site, Cross-Section 17+75 (left bank), Patch A (Cottonwood Forest)

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
Ground	<i>Maclura pomifera</i>	Osage orange	< 1%
	<i>Phalaris arundinacea</i>	reed canary grass	< 1%
	<i>Rumex</i> sp.	dock	< 1%
	<i>Salix exigua</i>	narrow-leaved willow	< 1%
	<i>Verbascum</i> sp.	mullein	< 1%
	<i>Sp-23</i> ¹		< 1%
	<i>Artemisia douglasiana</i>	mugwort	1-5%
	<i>Carex</i> sp.	sedge	1-5%
	<i>Conium maculatum</i>	Poison hemlock	1-5%
Shrub	<i>Carya illinoensis</i>	pecan	<1%
	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> var. <i>californica</i>	California button willow	1-5%
	<i>Salix goodingii</i>	Gooding's black willow	1-5%
	<i>Rhamnus californica</i>	California coffeeberry	1-5%
	<i>Salix exigua</i>	narrow-leaved willow	5-15%
	<i>Maclura pomifera</i>	Osage orange	5-15%
	<i>Salix laevigata</i>	red willow	5-15%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	5-25%
	<i>Salix lasiolepis</i>	arroyo willow	15-25%
Tree (subcanopy)	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	5-15%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	5-15%
	<i>Carya illinoensis</i>	pecan	5-15%
Tree (canopy)	<i>Alnus rhombifolia</i>	white alder	1-5%
	<i>Acer saccharinum</i>	silver maple	15-25%
	<i>Populus fremontii</i>	Fremont cottonwood	25-50%
Vine (<2 m)	<i>Rubus discolor</i>	Himalaya berry	1-5%
	<i>Rubus ursinus</i>	California blackberry	5-15%
Vine (>2 m)	<i>Vitis californica</i>	California wild grape	1-5%

¹"SP" designates an unknown species that occurred in the plot.

Merced River Patch Relevé
Snelling Site, Cross-Section 10+80 (right bank), Patch C (Mixed Willow)

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
Ground	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	< 1%
	<i>SP-7</i> ¹	herb	< 1%
	<i>SP-8</i> ¹	herb	< 1%
	<i>SP-9</i> ¹	herb	< 1%
Shrub	<i>Conium maculatum</i>	Poison hemlock	1-5%
	<i>SP-2</i> ¹	herb	1-5%
	<i>Salix lasiolepis</i>	arroyo willow	1-5%

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
	<i>Salix exigua</i>	narrow-leaved willow	1-5%
	<i>Artemisia douglasiana</i>	mugwort	< 1%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	< 1%
Tree (subcanopy)	<i>Salix lasiolepis</i>	arroyo willow	15-25%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	1-5%
	<i>Acer negundo</i>	box elder	1-5%
Tree (canopy)	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	1-5%
Vine (<2 m)	<i>Rubus ursinus</i>	California blackberry	5-15%
	<i>Rubus discolor</i>	Himalaya berry	< 1%
Vine (>2 m)	<i>Vitis californica</i>	California wild grape	5-15%

¹"SP" designates an unknown species that occurred in the plot.

**Merced River Patch Relevé
 Snelling Site, Cross-Section 13+95 (right bank), Patch C (Herbaceous Cover)**

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
Ground	<i>SP-21</i> ¹	Poaceae (dried)	>75%
	<i>SP-22</i> ¹	herb	15-25%
	<i>Brassira nigira</i>	black mustard	1-5%
	<i>Eschscholzia californica</i>	California poppy	1-5%
	<i>Verbascum thapsis</i>	wooly mullein	< 1%
	<i>Rubus ursinus</i>	California blackberry	< 1%
Shrub	<i>Salix lasiolepis</i>	arroyo willow	1-5%
	<i>Rhamnus californica</i>	California coffeeberry	< 1%
Tree (subcanopy)	<i>Carya illinoensis</i>	pecan	1-5%
Tree (canopy)	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	5-15%

¹"SP" designates an unknown species that occurred in the plot.

**Merced River Patch Relevé
 Snelling Site, Cross-Section 13+95 (right bank), Patch B (Mixed Forest)**

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
Ground	<i>Artemisia douglasiana</i>	mugwort	5-15%
	<i>Acer saccharinum</i>	silver maple	1-5%
	<i>Phalaris arundinacea</i>	reed canary grass	1-5%
	<i>Verbascum thapsis</i>	wooly mullein	1-5%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	< 1%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	< 1%
	<i>Equisetum spp.</i>	horsetail	< 1%
	<i>SP-23</i> ¹	pea?	< 1%
	<i>Acer negundo</i>	box elder	< 1%

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
Shrub	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> var. <i>californica</i>	California button willow	15-25%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	5-15%
	<i>Acer negundo</i>	box elder	5-15%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	1-5%
Tree (subcanopy)	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	15-25%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	5-15%
Tree (canopy)	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	15-25%
	<i>Acer saccharinum</i>	silver maple	5-15%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	50-75%
Vine (<2 m)	<i>Rubus discolor</i>	Himalaya berry	15-25%
	<i>Vitis californica</i>	California wild grape	5-15%
	<i>Rubus ursinus</i>	California blackberry	1-5%
Vine (>2 m)	<i>Vitis californica</i>	California wild grape	5-15%

¹"SP" designates an unknown species that occurred in the plot.

**Merced River Patch Relevé
 Snelling Site, Cross-Section 13+95 (left bank), Patch A (Cottonwood Forest)**

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
Ground	SP-21 ¹	Poaceae	15-25%
	<i>Conium maculatum</i>	Poison hemlock	1-5%
	<i>Artemisia douglasiana</i>	mugwort	< 1%
Shrub	<i>Ficus carica</i>	edible fig	>75%
	<i>Salix lasiolepis</i>	arroyo willow	5-15%
	<i>Acer negundo</i>	box elder	1-5%
	<i>Maclura pomifera</i>	Osage orange	1-5%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	1-5%
	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> var. <i>californica</i>	California button willow	< 1%
Tree (subcanopy)	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	15-25%
	<i>Maclura pomifera</i>	Osage orange	1-5%
Tree (canopy)	<i>Populus fremont</i>	Fremont cottonwood	25-50%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	5-15%
Vine (<2 m)	<i>Rubus ursinus</i>	California blackberry	5-15%
	<i>Rubus discolor</i>	Himalaya berry	5-15%

¹"SP" designates an unknown species that occurred in the plot.

Merced River Patch Relevé
Snelling Site, Cross-Section 9+60 (left bank), Patch D (Cottonwood Forest, High-Flow Channel)

Stratum	Scientific Name	Common Name	Cover Class
Ground	<i>Artemisia douglasiana</i>	mugwort	< 1%
Shrub	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> var. <i>californica</i>	California button willow	15-25%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	1-5%
Tree (subcanopy)	<i>Alnus rhombifolia</i>	white alder	5-15%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	1-5%
	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i> var. <i>californica</i>	California button willow	1-5%
	<i>Fraxinus latifolia</i>	Oregon ash	1-5%
	<i>Salix goodingii</i>	Goodding's black willow	< 1%
Tree (canopy)	<i>Populus fremont</i>	Fremont cottonwood	5-15%
	<i>Quercus lobata</i>	valley oak	1-5%
Vine (<2 m)	<i>Rubus discolor</i>	Himalaya berry	15-25%
Vine (>2 m)	<i>Rubus ursinus</i>	California blackberry	< 1%
	<i>Vitis californica</i>	California wild grape	< 1%