

“Discover your Watershed” tours 2009 come to a successful end



Left: Tim Howard, Timber Management Officer with the U.S. Forest Service, explained the benefits of forest management during a stop at a fuels reduction project site along Mormon Emigrant Trail in the upper watershed. Right: EID's Kirk Taylor, who runs the district's irrigation management service program, discussed how agricultural customers such as Madroña Winery conserve water through the use of "smart" irrigation control systems.

This summer, a collaborative series of tours brought watershed issues into focus in El Dorado County.

Melissa Marquez, a member of the AmeriCorps national service program who is working as a watershed assistant at El Dorado Irrigation District, helped organize the tours into lower, middle, and upper watershed segments. With Melissa at the wheel of the tour van, area residents took to the road and experienced how water resources connect the environment, economy, and people—all the way from the western end of El Dorado County to the headwaters of the watershed in the high Sierra. Each of the six half-day tours created opportunities for participants to experience the water connections first hand.

In June, the tours focused on the lower reaches of the watershed in the El Dorado Hills and Shingle Springs areas. Topics included wastewater treatment and recycled water production during a stop at EID's Deer Creek plant and urban and stormwater runoff while visiting Serrano community park and trails. The groups also walked to the Magnolia ranch trailhead near Coloma to learn about land conservation and endemic species.

Working their way upstream, the tours moved to the middle and upper sections of the watershed.

“In July, we explored the middle watershed,” said Melissa. “The main subjects were rafting and recreation during a stop at Chili Bar on the South Fork American River, agricultural water use while at Madroña Winery, and restoration and fire prevention when we went to Sly Park Recreation Area.”

The final tours, held in August, took participants to the upper watershed and included visits to Silver and Caples lakes for discussions of water supply and storage, hydropower production, and forest management practices and water quality at higher elevations on Eldorado National Forest.

“This was a really meaningful and well-received collaboration,” said Melissa. “Tour members were engaged and inquisitive, and the questions they asked at each stage showed how much our community cares about these issues.”

The tours were sponsored and led by a partnership that included El Dorado Irrigation District, Apple Hill growers, El Dorado County, Sacramento Municipal Utility District, Georgetown Divide Resource Conservation District, American River Conservancy, Sierra Pacific Industries, and the U.S. Forest Service. The program was developed as a component of the South Fork American River Watershed Plan—created by stakeholders and agencies throughout this watershed—as one way to offer meaningful learning experiences to local communities.