

State of California
The Resources Agency
Department of Water Resources
Northern District

RECREATION USE SURVEY OF
LITTLE LAST CHANCE CREEK, PLUMAS COUNTY

1996

Technical Information Report No. 98-1

Prepared under the direction of

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by

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This report was prepared to summarize information collected under Work Order 1500-4704 (formerly 1501-0100) to document streamside recreation and fishing in Little Last Chance Creek below Frenchman Reservoir. This report has received only limited review; it is intended for internal use and should be considered preliminary and subject to revision.

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SUMMARY

A recreation use survey of Little Last Chance Creek in Plumas County was conducted during 1996 to estimate the amounts and types of streamside recreation use and angler success. Similar studies were conducted at Little Last Chance Creek in 1988 and 1992.

A stratified random sampling procedure was used to sample five miles of Little Last Chance Creek, from Frenchman Dam downstream to the Guidici Ranch Road. Interviews of recreationists, roving use counts, and a creel census were combined to gather information on recreation activities, visitor origin, and angler success.

There were an estimated 82,000 hours of recreation on Little Last Chance Creek between April 27 and November 15, 1996. The most frequently observed activities were camping, fishing, relaxing, picnicing, and a variety of games and nature related activities. About three-quarters of the observed use occurred at Chilcoot Campground. Anglers caught an estimated 900 rainbow trout (0.12 trout per hour) and 600 brown trout (0.09 trout per hour) in 7,000 hours of fishing. The mean length of angler-caught fish was 34 cm for rainbow and 28 cm for brown trout.

A majority of recreational visitors to Little Last Chance Creek came from Nevada (about 77 percent). Visitors also came from 27 California counties. The places of residence for anglers and recreational visitors differed slightly. About 63 percent of anglers came from Nevada while 14 percent came from the Northeast counties and 11 percent came from the San Francisco Bay Area.

INTRODUCTION

Frenchman Dam was built in 1961, by the Department of Water Resources, as part of the State Water Project (Figure 1). Its purpose was to regulate Little Last Chance Creek for irrigation in Sierra Valley and to enhance local recreation opportunities (DWR, 1957). The downstream release was intended to maintain but not enhance the stream fishery. The reservoir is regulated essentially to supply downstream water rights and some water contracts.

This report describes the third recreation use survey of Little Last Chance Creek conducted since Frenchman Dam was built. The purpose of this survey was to estimate the amounts and types of recreation use and angler success occurring along the creek with augmented flow from Frenchman Reservoir, and to compare use with that observed during the surveys conducted in 1988 (J. Brown, 1989) and 1992 (Elkins, 1997).

Using a stratified random sampling procedure, the survey combined roving use counts with interviews of recreationists in order to gather information on recreation activities, visitor origin, and angler success. Estimates of use were made for the period of April 27, 1996 to November 15, 1996 (the 1996 Sierra District stream trout-fishing season). This report describes the recreation use survey, creel census, and results. A separate report, prepared by the Department of Fish and Game (DFG), Contract Services Section, described a fish population survey conducted in October 1996 (Brown, 1997).

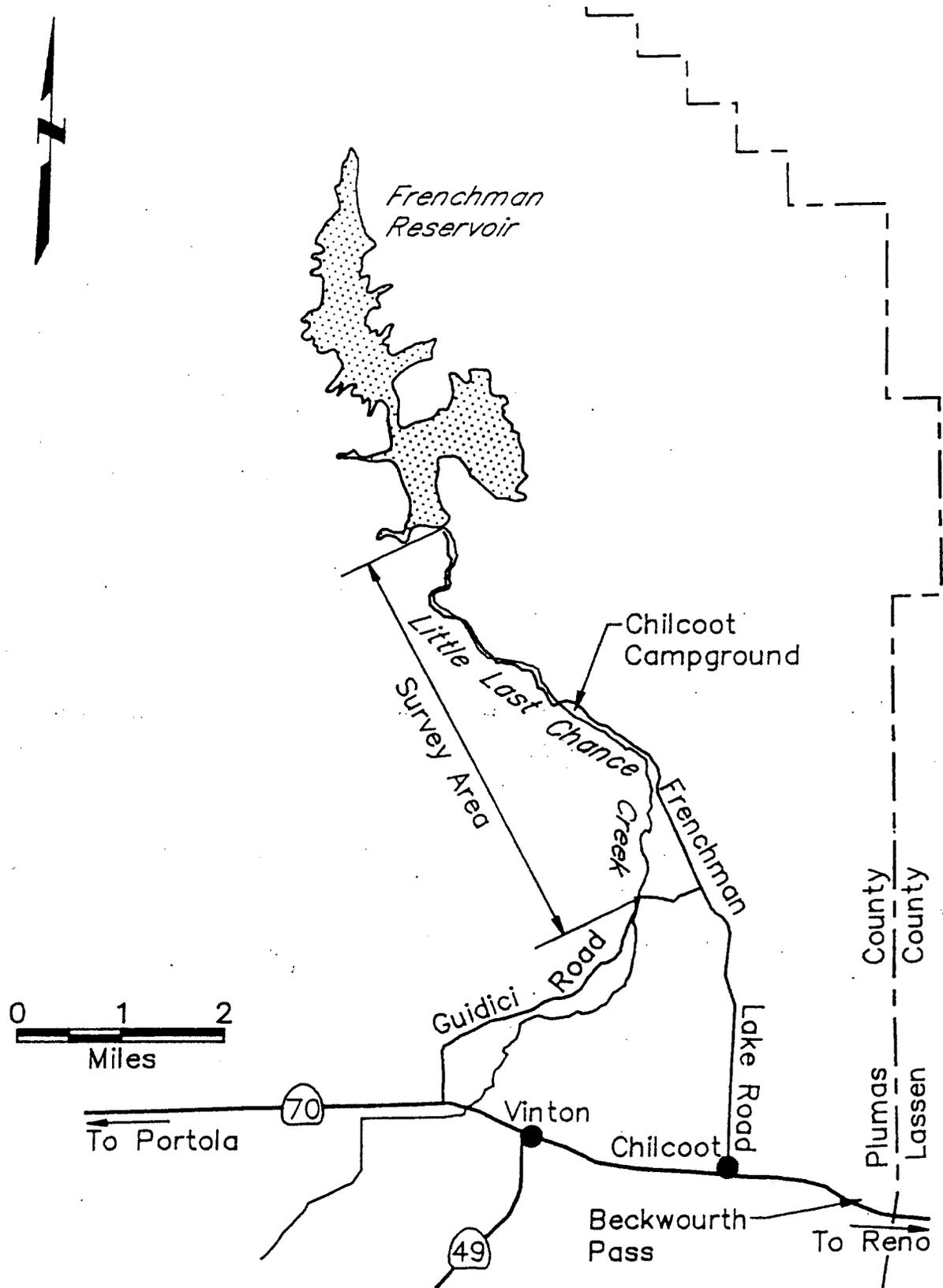


Figure 1 – Frenchman Reservoir and Little Last Chance Creek, Plumas County

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY AREA

Little Last Chance Creek is a tributary of the Middle Fork Feather River and feeds Frenchman Lake. Below Frenchman Dam, Little Last Chance Creek winds through a steep, lava-rock canyon for about four miles, and then flows through the sagebrush country of the northern Sierra Valley. Average annual runoff from the watershed upstream from the dam (81 sq. mi.) is about 28,000 acre-feet. The survey area included about five miles of Little Last Chance Creek from Frenchman Dam (elevation 5,500 feet) downstream to the Guidici Ranch Road (elevation 5,000 feet).

Frenchman Lake Road (State Highway 284) closely follows the creek and provides easy access to it and to camping facilities in Chilcoot Campground, operated by a concessionaire of the U. S. Forest Service. Chilcoot Campground is located about 3 miles downstream from Frenchman Reservoir and offers 40 campsites (35 drive-in and 5 walk-in), potable water, and restroom facilities in an attractive riparian setting. It is the only developed (and legal) camping area on the creek.

During late spring and summer, streamflows in Little Last Chance Creek below Frenchman Dam fluctuate widely depending on the available water supply and irrigation demands in the Sierra Valley. In 1996 Frenchman Reservoir spilled continuously for 110 days from the end of February to mid-June. During the stream fishing season the highest flows occurred on opening weekend when flows were at 173 cfs. The flows gradually decreased from 161 cfs on May 1 to 106 cfs on May 14. The spill began increasing on May 15 and the flows eventually peaked at 161 cfs then gradually decreased for the remainder of the month. The flow continued to drop until June 10 when water delivery began. The spill stopped on June 14. After this date and through August flows ranged from 17 cfs to 108 cfs and averaged about 60 cfs. September and most of October's flows averaged 13 cfs then declined to a minimum flow of 2 cfs on October 23 through the end of the fishing season.

Frenchman Lake was chemically treated by the California Department of Fish and Game to eradicate Northern pike in the spring of 1991. During this project virtually all of Little Last Chance Creek below the dam was poisoned as well. The Department of Fish and Game later restocked the creek with rainbow and brown trout in an effort to restore the fishery. During subsequent electroshocking studies from 1991 through 1997 DWR and DFG determined that the recovery was delayed for several years by drought. Also, at least 2 additional species of fish again occur in Little Last Chance Creek: Sacramento sucker (Catostomus occidentalis), and Lahontan redbreast (Rhinichthys osculus) (Brown 1992, 1993, 1997).

METHODS

Recreation Use Counts

Use counts were made on randomly selected dates within ten survey strata using the optimum allocation method described by Abramson and Tolladay (1959). Twenty-nine days of the 202-day period from April 27 through November 15, 1996 (the Sierra District stream trout season) were surveyed. Five 1-hour counts of recreation use were made in the study area each survey day at regular periods, scheduled according to the number of daylight hours (Appendices I and II).

The surveys were made from vehicle or on foot, as necessary, to check access and recreation sites. Recreationists (and their vehicles) were counted and recorded by recreation activity. The five daily counts were totaled and multiplied by factors that accounted for recreation use in the daylight periods not counted. Similarly, the resulting daily figures were expanded to estimate total recreation hours for all days in each stratum. Adding the stratum totals provided an estimate of recreation hours for the study period.

Creel Census and Recreation Interviews

Between use counts, recreation and angler success data were collected through personal interviews. Interviews were conducted on a per-vehicle basis. Length of stay was rounded to whole hours for day users, and nights plus one for overnight users. The activities recreationists intended to participate in, and their county of residence, were also recorded.

Anglers along Little Last Chance Creek were contacted during 25 of the 29 recreation surveys to determine fishing success (during four of the recreation surveys no anglers were available for interview). The county of residence and length of time spent fishing so far that day (rounded to the nearest quarter hour) were recorded for each angler

contacted. Fish censused were counted, measured (fork length to nearest 0.5 centimeter), and identified to species.

To determine total catch, the average catch per hour (derived from the creel census) was multiplied by estimated total hours of fishing for each stratum. Total weight of trout caught was estimated from stocking information from the Department of Fish and Game (Ron Decoto, pers. comm.).

RESULTS

Recreation Use

Total recreation use on Little Last Chance Creek below Frenchman Reservoir was estimated at 82,000 recreation hours ($\pm 13,000$ hours) for the period April 27 to November 15, 1996. With adjustments to account for the high proportion of overnight use, this is about 13,000 recreation days, or 9,000 12-hour visitor days. Based on counts of recreationists, camping and fishing were the major activities, followed by relaxing, picnicking, and a variety of campground-related uses (Table 1). About 75-80 percent of the observed use occurred at Chilcoot Campground. Use counts reflect what people were doing when we counted them, and the approximate number of hours spent on each major activity. They do not provide data on other activities that people pursued at other times during their stay.

Table 1

Recreation Hours by Activity
Little Last Chance Creek, 1996

Activity	Recreation Hours	Percent
Camping	58,000	71
Fishing	7,000	9
Relaxing	4,500	5
Walking	3,000	3
Sightseeing	1,500	2
Wading/Swimming	1,000	1
Miscellaneous*	7,000	9
Total	82,000	100

* Miscellaneous category includes bicycling, children playing, picnicking, and various other activities.

Interviews conducted during the 202-day survey period totaled 221, representing 681 people. The interviews provided more detailed information on activity participation and visitor characteristics. Interviews of campers at Chilcoot Campground numbered 148 and represented 462 people. Day-use interviews numbered 73 and represented 219 people. The average number of visitors per vehicle was 3.4.

About 65 percent of the people interviewed said they were "just relaxing", and 40 percent stated that they had or planned to fish in the creek during their stay. Thirty-seven percent picnicked somewhere on the creek, about 30 percent did some sightseeing and about 20 percent said they "walked for pleasure". About 10 percent waded or swam in the creek and about 8 percent used the beaches for various activities. Nearly 5 percent of those interviewed rode bikes or motorcycles along the creek. These percentages total more than 100 percent because many people engage in more than one activity during their visit.

Sixty-four percent (456) of the visitors interviewed camped overnight along the creek (all but 1 of these were at Chilcoot Campground). The average length of stay was three days (2 nights). Thirty-six percent (255) of the visitors interviewed used the stream corridor for day use, but did not stay overnight along the creek. About 16 percent of these day users stayed overnight somewhere in the general area, while the remainder returned home that night. The average length of day-use visits was 1.3 hours.

Of those who stayed overnight in the area, two-thirds camped at Frenchman Reservoir or Lake Davis, while the rest stayed with friends or relatives, or had other accommodations. The average length of stay for those who stayed in the area was also 2 nights.

Among the groups camping at Chilcoot Campground 55 percent said they used tents as their overnight accommodations. Eighteen percent used travel trailers, 12 percent

used tent trailers, 8 percent used a motorhome, van, or bus, 4 percent used pickup campers, and 3 percent slept out.

Most recreational visitors (77 percent) to Little Last Chance Creek came from Nevada, mostly Reno, Sparks, and Carson City. Visitors also came from 27 California counties, with the highest percentage (5 percent) from Plumas County (Figure 2). Of those visitors camping at Chilcoot Campground, 81 percent came from Nevada, with 19 California counties represented among the remaining 19 percent. Seventy-five percent of the day users came from Nevada and 12 California counties were represented in the remainder.

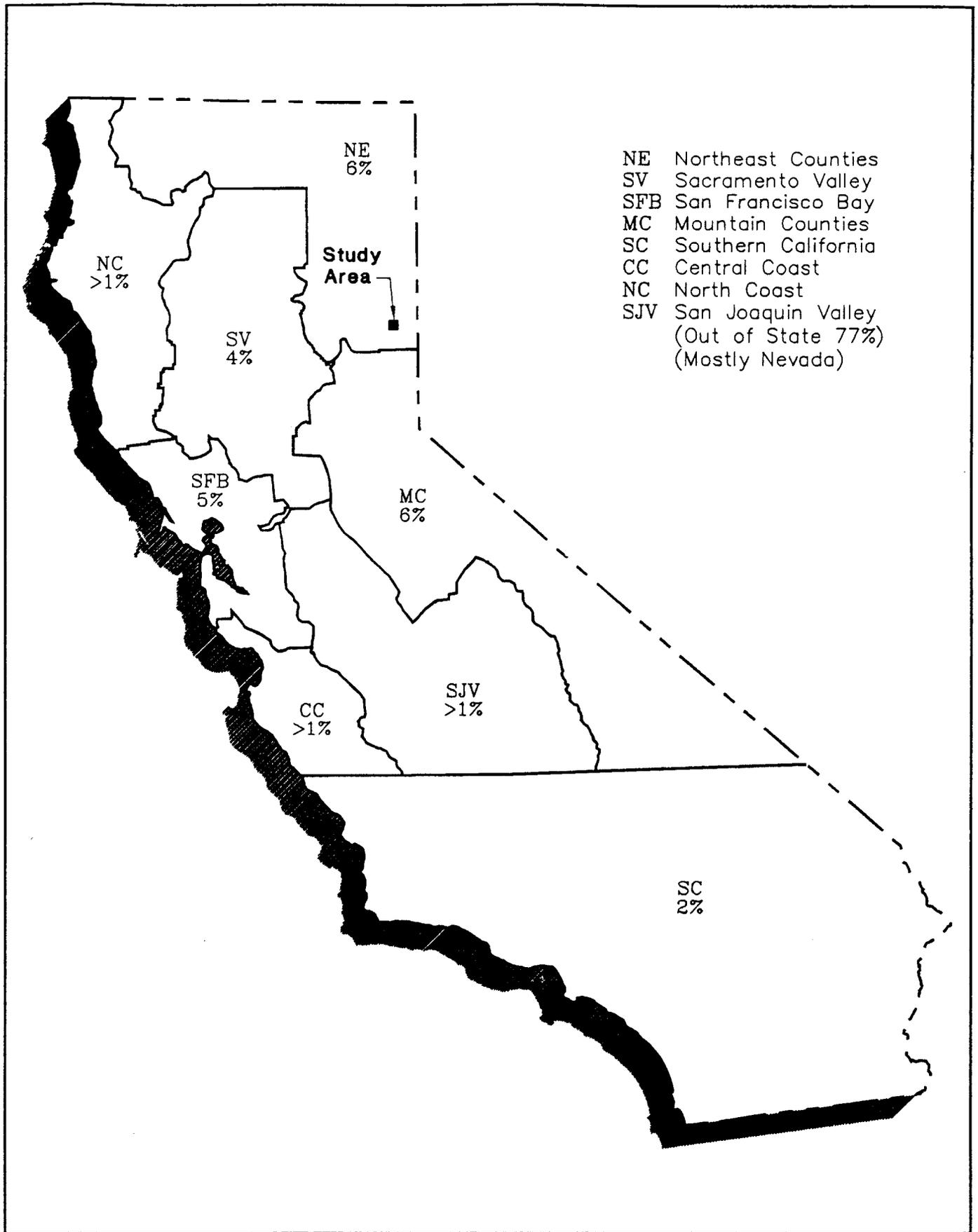


Figure 2 - Little Last Chance Creek Visitor Origin By County Groups in 1996.

Creel Census Data and Angler Success

Four hundred and two anglers were censused. They had fished a total of 729 hours and creeled 90 rainbow and 57 brown trout. Two hundred and twelve other trout were either reported caught, or reported caught and then released back into the creek. Observed catch per hour (excluding fish caught and released) for individual anglers ranged from none to 3.7. About 94 percent of the anglers fished with bait, 14 percent with lures, and 5 percent with flies. These totals add up to more than 100 percent because 13 percent of the anglers tried more than one type of terminal gear.

Total fishing use was estimated at 7,000 hours ($\pm 2,000$ hours) or about 5,900 angler-days, with an estimated catch of 900 rainbow trout (0.13 trout per hour) and 600 brown trout (0.09 trout per hour). Based on the number of fish anglers reported catching, and reported catching and releasing, as many as 2,100 additional trout may have been caught and/or caught and released. Including all fish caught, reported caught, or reported caught and released, angler success was 0.52 fish per hour.

The mean length of rainbow trout in the creel was 34 cm (13 inches) for rainbows and 28 cm (11 inches) for browns. The largest fish observed were two rainbow trout both measuring 48 cm fork length (19 inches), the first of which was caught on opening weekend and the second caught in early September.

The places of residence for anglers at Little Last Chance Creek were slightly different than that of the general recreationists. About 63 percent were from Nevada. Residents of the Northeast Counties made up 14 percent, and 11 percent came from the San Francisco Bay Area. Twenty-one California counties were represented (Figure 3).

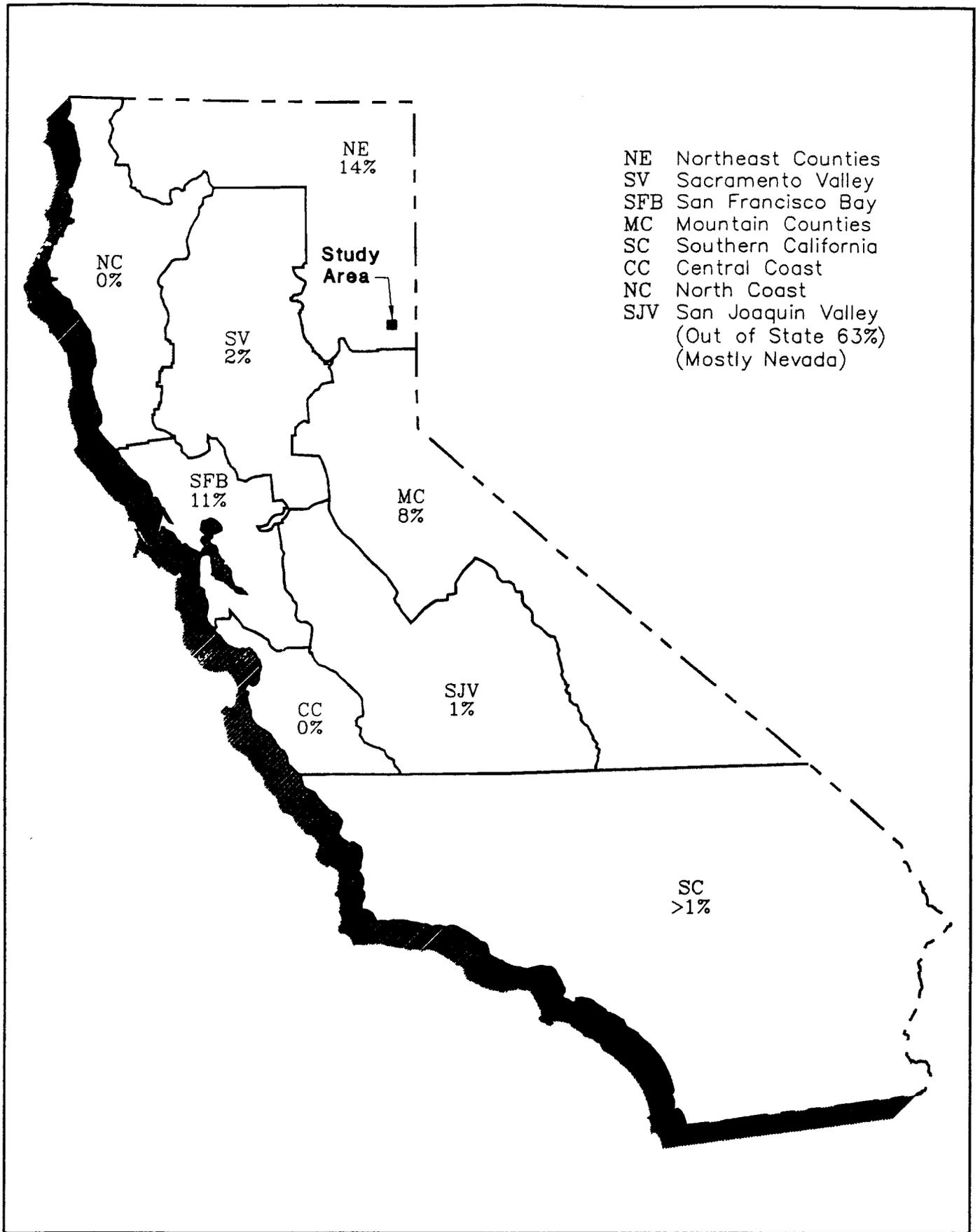


Figure 3 - Little Last Chance Creek Angler Origin By County Groups in 1996.

DISCUSSION

Understanding the limitations of the recreation use survey and the creel census helps put the data obtained in the proper perspective. This section describes the survey limitations and compares estimates of recreation use at Frenchman Reservoir and Little Last Chance Creek with the forecasts that were made when the project was planned more than 30 years ago.

Limitations of Use Counts and Creel Census

Most recreationists using the creek were easily observed during the use counts. Most vehicles along Little Last Chance Creek can be associated with recreationists, ranchers, or U.S. Forest Service workers. However, people were not found for some vehicles during the use count periods. The most difficulty we encountered in making the use counts was at Chilcoot Campground, because not everyone there was always visible. Some people may have been temporarily out of sight during use count periods; perhaps inside travel trailers, restrooms, or other locations not visible to the surveyor. We censused about 10 percent of the estimated hours of fishing use.

In general, it was our impression that much of the recreation use at Chilcoot Campground was not directly related to Little Last Chance Creek. To a large degree, the campground is a place to "get away" and "relax" for residents of the greater Reno/Sparks urban area.

Recreation surveys that DWR conducted at Big Grizzly Creek (Scott, 1995) and Indian Creek (Rischbieter, Scott, 1996) in earlier years showed that a larger proportion of visitors to these creeks were from the Northeast counties (38 and 43 percent, respectively), generally Plumas County. A survey conducted at Little Last Chance Creek in 1992 revealed that only 11 percent of both the general recreationists and anglers came from Plumas County and 14 percent of each from the Northeast counties.

Comparison of 1996 Survey Results with 1988 and 1992 Survey

Stream recreation use was higher in 1996 than in 1992 but was still less than three quarters of the use in 1988. Total recreation hours for 1996 was 82,000 hours, an increase of 15 percent from the 70,000 hours in 1992, but much less than the 115,000 hours in 1988. However, it is noteworthy that although total recreation hours increased in 1996 compared to 1992, recreation-days decreased. This is due to a significantly shorter average length of day-use stay in 1992 (harmonic mean 2.15 hours per visitor, compared to 2.74 in 1996).

In 1988 people who were seen at their campsite sitting around a campfire or resting were counted as "relaxing" during the use counts. In 1992 and 1996 people that were seen at the campground engaged in passive activities were counted as camping. This accounts for the large difference in hours for "relaxing" between 1988 and subsequent years.

Fishing hours were 7,000 for 1996, double the 3,500 hours in 1992 and similar to 1988 (7,400 hours). The estimated catch for 1996 was 900 rainbow trout (0.13 per hour) and 600 brown trout (0.09 per hour). Total estimated catch for 1992 was 900 rainbow trout (0.28 per hour) with no browns seen, and for 1988 was 3,230 rainbow trout (0.44 per hour) and 840 brown trout (0.11 per hour).

As noted above, rainbow trout and brown trout were seen in the creel in 1988 and 1996. However, in 1992 only rainbow trout were observed. There are several factors that could explain why brown trout were absent that year. Although both species were restocked after the rotenone poisoning in 1991, unusually low stream flows in fall of 1991 may have affected their persistence. Also, only rainbows were planted in 1992.

In 1995 and 1996 the Little Last Chance Creek fishery benefitted from the spill of Frenchman Lake for the first times in a decade. Many large rainbow trout are known to emigrate from the reservoir during such a spill and are a popular attraction for anglers

early in the season (DWR, 1996). These large rainbow trout were obvious in the creel census for the first month of the stream fishing season.

In August 1995 about 1,250 catchable brown trout were planted on the creek by DFG and were probably still available to anglers in 1996. In August of 1996 DFG planted 3,000 fingerling brown trout which probably did not contribute to anglers' catch that year.

Table 2

Comparison of Recreation Hours by Activity
at Little Last Chance Creek 1988 and 1992

Activity	Recreation Hours - 1988	Recreation Hours - 1992	Recreation Hours - 1996
Camping	46,000	46,000	58,000
Relaxing	45,000*	10,600	4,500
Fishing	7,400	3,500	7,000
Wading/Swimming	3,700	2,600	1,000
Sightseeing	2,900	1,500	1,500
Walking	2,200	1,300	3,000
Miscellaneous	5,800	4,500	7,000
Total	113,000	70,000	82,000

* This number reflects the methodology used in 1988. Many of these hours can be attributed to camping based on the methodology used now.

Comparison of Survey Results with Previous Estimates

In general, recreation use at the Upper Feather River lakes (Antelope, Davis, and Frenchman) has far exceeded the estimates made when these projects were planned (DWR, 1974; DWR 1989). For example, the cumulative total use at Frenchman Lake from 1962 through 1996 is about 8.5 million recreation days. The planning estimates for the same period total only about 4 million recreation days. Thus, the actual use to date has more than doubled the predicted use.

Since Frenchman Lake was not operated specifically for downstream fishery and recreation purposes, the lower reaches of Little Last Chance Creek were expected to provide poor angling and associated recreation under post-project conditions (DWR, 1957). Consequently, stream recreation use was expected to be minimal. The loss of recreation potential here was expected to be replaced by the increased stream recreation potential provided by the Indian Creek Project (Antelope, Abbey Bridge, and Dixie Refuge Reservoirs).

However, Little Last Chance Creek has proven to be a significant recreation and fishery resource. The construction of Chilcoot Campground about 1970 has provided a facility for people who prefer to camp or picnic there rather than at Frenchman Lake. The stream fishery has proved to be better than expected, considering the relatively erratic flow releases required to meet irrigation needs.

Table 3

Comparison of General Recreation, Fishing Use, and Angling Quality on Little Last Chance Creek and Other Local SWP Facilities

	1996 LLC Creek	1995 Indian Creek	1994 Big Grizzly Creek
Recreation Use (Hours)	82,000	18,000	9,000
Fishing Use (Hours)	7,000	4,100	2,200
Angling Quality (trout caught per hour)	0.22	0.31	0.81

- Estimates for Little Last Chance Creek from Pages 8-10 of this report and based on 5.2 miles of stream.
- Estimates for Indian Creek from Rischbieter and Scott (1996) (TIR ND-96-2) and based on 11.1 miles of stream.
- Estimates for Big Grizzly Creek from Scott (1995) (TIR No. 95-1) and based on 4.25 miles of stream.

Planning estimates of recreation use at Frenchman Lake and Little Last Chance Creek with and without the project area summarized in Table 4. Estimated use of Little Last Chance Creek included use of the several miles of stream now inundated by the reservoir.

Table 4

Estimated and Actual Recreation Use of Frenchman Lake and Little Last Chance Creek (in recreation days)

Year	Frenchman Reservoir		Little Last Chance Creek	
	Estimated Use	Actual Use	Estimated Use	Actual Use
1962	32,000	30,000	1,400	Unknown
1963	61,000	105,000	1,500	Unknown
1970	100,000	397,000	2,000	Unknown
1975	114,000*	148,000	2,500*	Unknown
1980	127,000	188,000	3,000	Unknown
1985	136,000*	289,000	4,000*	Unknown
1988	142,000*	230,000	4,600	18,000
1990	146,000	240,000	5,000	Unknown
1992	150,000*	300,000	5,200*	14,000
1996	156,000*	223,000	5,600*	13,000

* Interpolated figures.

Sources:

- Frenchman Reservoir and Little Last Chance Creek estimated use from DWR (1968). Little Last Chance Creek estimates represent streamside recreation use without the project. Estimated streamside use with the project was expected to be minimal.
- Frenchman Reservoir actual use from DWR (1989) and subsequent updated data.
- Little Last Chance Creek actual use from Page 8 of this report.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Environmental Specialist Douglas Rischbieter and Student Assistant Tim Drury conducted use counts, creel census, and interviews on several survey dates. Douglas Rischbieter also contributed to the analysis of data and development of some text and tables. Thanks to Mike Serna for preparing the figures and Lori Miles who typed the text and tables.

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Appendix I

Recreation Survey Schedule for Little Last Chance Creek

April 27, 1996 to November 15, 1996

Date	Holiday Period (HD) Normal Weekend (WE) Normal Weekday (ED)	Survey Stratum
April 27 April 28 April 29	WE WE WD	I I IV
May 12 May 14 May 25 May 27	WE WD HD HD	III IV II II
June 1 June 15 June 23 June 25 June 26	WE WE WE WD WD	III III III IV IV
July 4 July 6 July 18 July 21 July 29	HD HD WD WE WD	IX IX VI V VI
August 4 August 17 August 20 August 25 August 27 August 31	WE WE WD WE WD HD	V V VI V VI IX
September 8 September 23	WE WD	VII VIII
October 5 October 6 October 27	WE WE WE	X X VII
November 1	WD	VIII

Appendix II

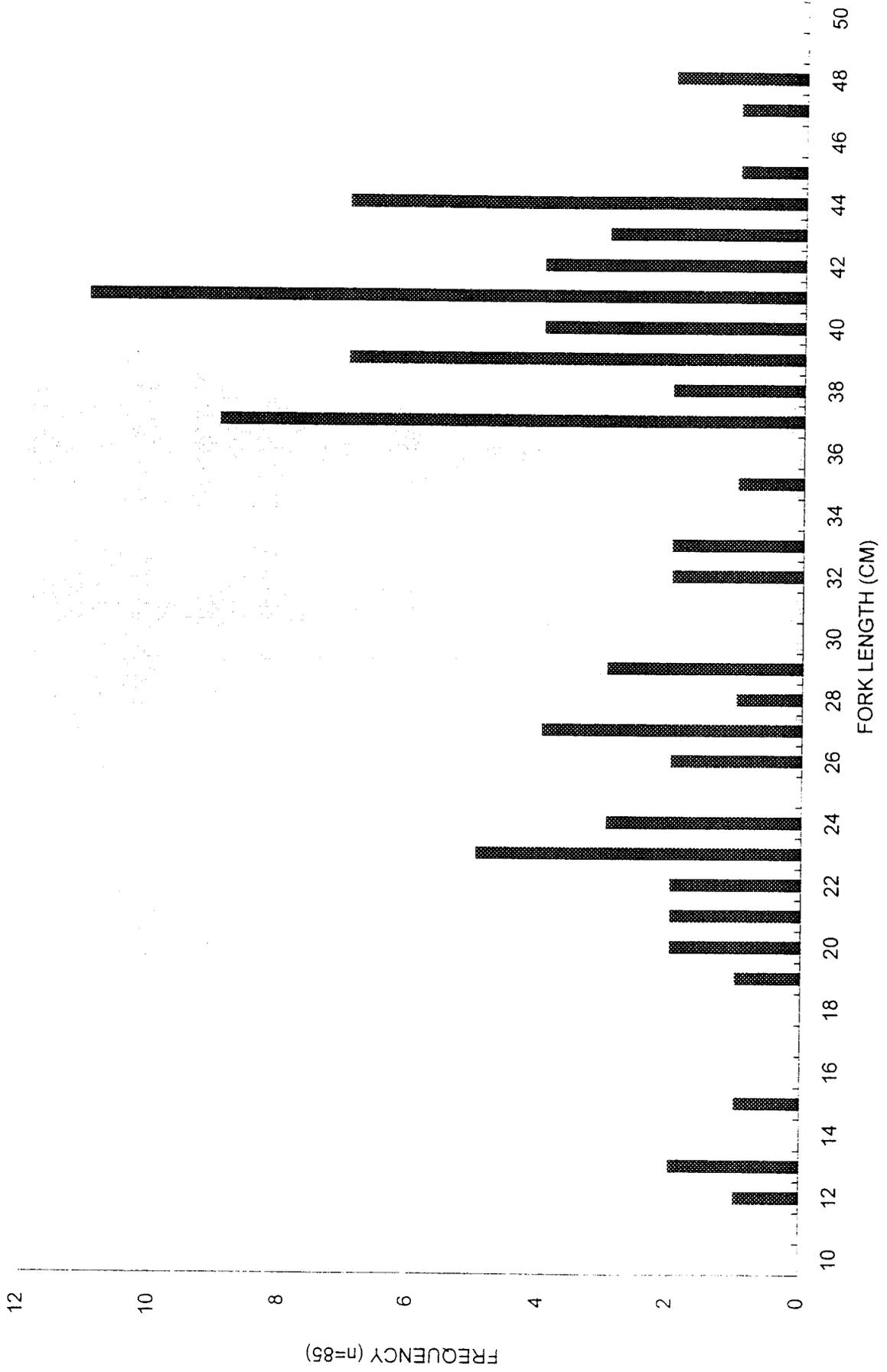
1996 Use Count Schedule

for Little Last Chance Creek

Date	Daylight Hours	Use Counts		Creel Census Time (approx.)
		Count	Time	
April PDT	15-1/2	1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th	0730-0830 1000-1100 1300-1400 1530-1630 1830-1930	0800-1200 1500-1900
May-August PDT	16-1/2	1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th	0700-0800 1000-1100 1300-1400 1600-1700 1900-2000	0800-1300 1400-1900
September PDT	14	1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th	0730-0830 1000-1100 1230-1330 1500-1600 1730-1830	0830-1230 1330-1730
October PDT	13	1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th	0800-0900 1000-1100 1230-1330 1500-1600 1700-1800	0900-1230 1300-1700
November PST	12	1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th	0730-0830 0930-1030 1130-1230 1330-1430 1530-1630	0800-1200 1300-1700

R 96

CREELED RAINBOW TROUT
LITTLE LAST CHANCE CREEK 1996



B. 1996

CREELED BROWN TROUT
LITTLE LAST CHANCE CREEK 1996

