Forks of Butte Creek Special Recreation Management Area
Commonly Asked Questions

How do I get to Butte Creek?
From Chico, take Highway 32 northeast towards Chester, past Forest Ranch, turning right on Garland Road (approximately 18 miles from Chico). Follow Garland Road to Doe Mill Road (also called 210C) to Butte Creek Bridge. From Paradise, take the Skyway north towards Stirling City, past Magalia turning left on Powelton Road (about 5 miles north of Magalia). Follow Powelton Road to Doe Mill Road towards Butte Creek Bridge.

Do I need a BLM Permit?
A BLM permit is required for mineral collection that involves use of a dredge, vacuum, pump, any motorized devise, rocker box (regardless of size), or sluice box (regardless of size). **BLM does not require a permit for gold panning, sniping, or metal detecting.**

Why do I need a BLM permit for mineral collection on Butte Creek?
Butte Creek is a unique area that was placed under protective mineral withdrawal on January 18, 1973, that segregated the area from all forms of appropriation, including the mining laws. No mining claims may be located. These sites are very popular and the permit system gives everyone an equal opportunity to collect placer gold in this beautiful area.

Do I need a Fish and Game Dredging Permit?
The California Department of Fish and Game requires permits for operating all motorized devices including but not limited to dredges. Please contact a Fish and Game office near you to receive the required permits that you may need in the Forks of Butte Creek area. Please have these permits before you submit an application to BLM.

How does the site system work at Butte Creek?
Areas open to recreational mining have been divided into approximately 100 yard sites. These sites are marked by signs with the site numbers on them. Signs are posted on trees or rocks and are visible from the creek or the Butte Creek trail. Up to eight people can reserve a site for a fee of $5.00 per site per day for mineral collecting purposes. **PERMIT FEES ARE NON-REFUNDABLE.**

What does a BLM permit give me permission to do?
A BLM permit for recreational mineral collection gives you, and your group, exclusive permission to use a dredge, vacuum, pump, any motorized device, sluice or rocker box within a specified site. **Please be aware that this is a multiple-use Recreation Area and that other users, (people fishing, swimming, picnicking, metal detecting, or panning) may still use you site for those purposes.** Your patience and cooperation is requested with other recreational users on the creek to ensure that everyone has a fun time in this unique area.

Can I camp in the area?
There are no developed campsites in this area. Primitive camping is available within this area. No water, restrooms, garbage cans, fire rings, or picnic tables are provided, so please PACK OUT all of your trash and use SELF CONTAINED TOILET FACILITIES for solid human waste. The only sites with flat ground nearby are sites 5 to 11. Remember, you are not reserving a camping space with a permit, only a mineral collection site on the creek. There is a 14 day camping limit.

How many people can use a site?
Camping and parking space is extremely limited in the area. Because this area is becoming increasingly popular, overcrowding is starting to occur. Therefore, up to eight (8) people can use a site for mineral collection purposes and camp overnight for up to 14 days in a calendar year. People using the mineral collection site must be identified on the permit application.

How long can I use a site with a permit?
A permit can be issued for up to 30 days. In order to reduce long-term camping and sanitation problems,

extensions are not authorized for camping beyond 14 days per calendar year.

Can I high bank or remove material from the land into the creek?
High banking is prohibited and is defined as any removal or earth from above the water level and sluicing or panning the material back into the creek.

How much equipment can I use in a site?
In order to disperse use and protect water quality, and limit impacts to other users, only one dredge, pump or other types of mechanized equipment is allowed to operate at a time in each site. You can have up to eight people working in a site, but only one item of mechanized equipment is allowed to use at a time. You may bring more than one dredge with you to the area, but only one dredge is allowed in the water at a time.

What are the various sites like?
Sites 5 to 11: Are the most popular because the ground is generally flat and people often camp by their permitted site. The road leading to these sites can be very muddy and four-wheel drive access may be required. These sites may not be accessible by motor vehicle during heavy rainfall years.

Sites 12 to 18b: Have fairly easy access; a short walk by trail (10-600 yards), then a steep climb down the bank (about 100 yards) into the canyon. No camping is available adjacent to these sites, although vehicle camping is allowed in the bridge parking area.

Sites 19 to 26 and 27 to 30: Can be difficult to get to, down steep canyon faces in the canyon. There is no road access directly in to the creek. Site markers are located adjacent to Butte Creek Trail.

Can I build a campfire?
You may build a campfire if you have been issued a campfire permit and the area is not posted as closed to campfires. If you build a campfire, be sure to completely extinguish your unattended campfire and scatter your rock rings before you leave. Check with California Department of Forestry and Fire (CDF), U.S. Forest Service, or BLM for current fire restrictions in the area.

Can I hike or fish?
Butte Creek Trail follows most of the western edge of the creek. The lower segments of the trail are fairly difficult, so watch your step. Fishing for Rainbow trout is pretty good in the creek. Be sure to have your fishing license.

How much water flows through the creek?
Flows on the creek are not regulated by an impoundment and vary with seasonal rainfall. Our experience on the creek is that most dredge operators are unable to use their equipment until mid June. During extremely wet years, dredging can be difficult all the way to July. You may want to call one of the many mining equipment and supply businesses in the Chico or Paradise area of Butte County to get local information about the flow conditions on the creek.

Why is there a use fee?
Before permits were required, Butte Creek was extremely overcrowded and disputes between mineral collectors, campers, and other recreational visitors were commonplace. The permit system was developed to protect the creek resources, improve the recreational experience of all visitors, and provide opportunities for mineral collection. Operation of the permit system, which includes compliance checks by BLM Rangers, costs more money than BLM is normally appropriated. Use fees collected at Butte Creek are used to help operate the permit system and improve the recreation area.

When is dredging season for Butte Creek?
Dredging season for the Butte Creek starts the 4th Saturday in May and ends October 15th of each year.