



Office of Civil Rights

## Restoring Nature

*In conjunction with National American Indian Heritage Month, Caltrans is spotlighting Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE): McCullough Construction. This is part of a series of articles showcasing Caltrans' subcontractor diversity.*

Thirty-four years ago, Hoopa tribal member Hugh “Macky” McCullough Jr. began his restoration career on his home reservation.

Now, McCullough has worked throughout California, Nevada, and Colorado restoring roads, stream channels and saving sediment for spawning fish. He is the president of Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) McCullough Construction, based out of Arcata – one hour west of the Hoopa Reservation in Northern California. The family business constructs in-stream fish habitat restoration, replaces culverts, builds roads, establishes vegetation, removes dams, thins out forests, pedestrian bridges, trails, bridges, and retaining and mechanically stabilized earth walls.



As an established DBE, McCullough advises new small, disadvantaged business owners to go into a trade they are personally good at. When he started his business, it was just his wife, Dena, himself, and a bulldozer. Dena did his books, and he did the restoration. Most of their initial jobs were on the reservation, which the banks didn’t count as they considered the small business for bonding purposes.

He learned as he went and worked his way through the different positions necessary to run a small business, including estimating. He suggests that new business owners educate themselves, acquire skills, and then go into the field.

“There are so many rules and environmental restrictions with creeks, streams and birds. On some projects, I have to have monitors watching birds the whole time,” McCullough said. “In northern

California there are noise restrictions, light restrictions and restrictions on when you can work. And then there is the weather ...”

McCullough went on to say that anytime you are moving the river over, it is a special project because it is so big. And he frequently is changing the path of rivers – sometimes as far as 100 feet due to installing shallow landforms and back water channels for fish habitat.

“We have a lot of really cool projects,” said McCullough. “We just removed the Upper York Dam that was built in 1900 for a fish and ecological habitat improvement in St. Helena.”

McCullough Construction also recently finished a Caltrans project, building a retaining wall in Napa and erected a bridge over Lost Man Creek in Orick, California. The small business also restored a road in Shelter Cove after rain washed it out. The topography on many projects is often steep and forest fires stop their work.

“It was a difficult project, but it turned out awesome,” he said.

McCullough said it takes time to build a business, and a good, honest, reliable reputation. He listens to his clients to understand their goals and deliver what they want on time and within budget.

He said the amount of Caltrans projects his company is doing is growing, but he has eight other projects his company is building for local government and non-profit organizations.

“I would advise new businesses not to put all their eggs in one basket,” McCullough said. “Diversify your clientele and build relationships so when they need someone, they think of you.”

He said it also takes time to build a skilled workforce, which is the most valuable asset any contractor can have.

“I am really lucky,” he said. “I am surrounded by a lot of great people that care about of the sometimes mundane things you need to do to be successful and I get to go play.”

In addition to his wife, McCullough’s company now employs two of his three daughters. Rachelle McCullough-Hicks who does the accounting necessary to meet state and federal projects requirements, and Janelle McCullough-Jones makes sure they can meet the staff requirements necessary to finish projects in a timely manner.

“That is one area that I know I never have to worry about,” he said.

*To get certified as a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise visit Caltrans' [Website](#).*