



STEWARDS OF THE LAND

PHOTO BY WILDLIFE AND NATURE PHOTOGRAPHER PAUL BREWER

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: SUPPORTING YOUR STEWARDSHIP

“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent; it is the one most adaptable to change.” — Charles Darwin

Farmers are familiar with surviving by adapting to change. I have learned a lot about perseverance and hope through watching farmers innovate, change tactics, hold tight and think on a generational time scale. Each decision gets to the heart of one question: how will their actions today bear fruit in the future? 2020 has asked us all to adapt again and again. I personally have an uneasy relationship with change and recently have had to dig deep to stay focused and positive. One way I have been able to stay more present, as I weigh in my mind the world’s many needs, is to simply acknowledge the things that I know someone else is focusing on. It reminds me that I can then just attend to my responsibilities—resting assured that someone else is tackling theirs.

So, while you all go on growing food, raising good and kind humans, fighting fires, caring for your neighbors, and adapting, rest assured that the Gold Ridge RCD is working diligently with our community to implement the following:

- Inclusivity & equitability of RCD programming
- Rural residential & agricultural water security
- Readiness of local communities living with wildfire
- Carbon sequestration on farms, forests & ranches

- Forest health & wildfire management
- Soil health and conservation on farms & ranches
- Stream habitat & salmon survival
- Water quality improvement
- Watershed function improvements
- Environmental and agricultural education for students during the pandemic
- Farmworker access to face masks
- Protection of endangered species, like the western monarch butterfly

It is an honor to walk alongside our community in the stewardship of this land. I am hopeful that as we work together to adapt to the unprecedented challenges before us, we can strive for the healthy, whole and resilient future we long to achieve.

With love,
admiration, and
hope,

Brittany Jensen

BRITTANY JENSEN,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



FINANCIAL REPORT: HOW FUNDING MEETS OUR RCD STRATEGIC GOALS

WHAT ARE GOLD RIDGE RCD'S STRATEGIC GOALS TO ENHANCE THE COMMUNITY, AND HOW ARE THEY FUNDED?

Last year's budget was just over 2 million. Our work is funded through federal (50%), state (26.4%) and local (0.1%) grants, fee-for-service (14.8%), foundations (6.4%), parcel tax (1.5%), and donations from our community (0.7%). Here's how those dollars were spent:

OUR STRATEGIC PROGRAM OBJECTIVES AND PLANNED ACTIONS:

CLIMATE RESILIENCY AND CARBON FARMING: We work with our partners to develop and fund programs which reduce greenhouse gases, increase carbon sequestration, improve agricultural and residential water security, and enhance wildlife habitat.

ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION COMPLIANCE ASSISTANCE: In partnership with our community, we help landowners understand and voluntarily comply with or exceed federal, state and local regulations.

STREAMFLOW ENHANCEMENT AND WATER CONSERVATION: We work cooperatively with landowners and land managers to meet domestic and agricultural water needs, while ensuring that streams in district watersheds have sufficient flow to support aquatic and riparian ecosystems.

CLEAN WATER: We work to enhance water quality, prevent non-point source pollution, and protect aquatic ecosystems.

SCIENCE, MONITORING AND PLANNING: With many partners, we assess and document environmental conditions and trends, and use this information to guide activities and evaluate proposed management projects and strategies.

WILDLIFE HABITAT ENHANCEMENT: We collaborate with and educate partners and landowners to restore and enhance habitat for native wildlife, including riparian and wetland habitat restoration, instream improvements, and promotion of on-farm biodiversity.

TOTAL EXPENSES 2019-2020 FISCAL YEAR

\$2,109,813.28



AGRICULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: We create educational experiences for our community, which inspire and encourage a connection to and an appreciation for the conservation of land and its agricultural and natural resources.

ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY: With 78 years of experience, we strive to be relevant, excellent and visible as an organization so that we can provide service to our community for decades to come.

THIS FALL, WE BEGIN CRAFTING OUR 2020-25 STRATEGIC PLAN. IT WILL INCLUDE A NEW SECTION ON FORESTRY AND FIRE MANAGEMENT. FOR NOW, READ OUR 2016-19 STRATEGIC PLAN FOR INFORMATION ON OUR MISSION, VISION, PRIORITIES, MAJOR STRATEGIES AND OBJECTIVES: [HTTP://GOLDRIDGERCD.ORG/HTM/STRATEGICPLAN.HTM](http://goldridgercd.org/htm/strategicplan.htm)



MONARCHS ON THE BRINK

SPECIES BACKGROUND: The monarch butterfly is one of the most iconic species of wildlife in all of America. These incredible butterflies undertake one of the world’s most remarkable and fascinating migrations, traveling thousands of miles over many generations from Mexico, across the United States, to Canada. During winter months, monarchs find seasonal refuge in carefully selected forested groves along the Pacific Coast and the mountains of central Mexico—these special refuges are called *overwintering sites*.

OVERWINTERING SITES provide a very specific microclimate to help monarchs conserve their energy and protect them from winter storms and freezing temperatures. Astonishingly, monarchs tend to return to the same sites—even the same trees—each fall! Favorite trees of the western monarch include:

- nonnative blue gum eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*)
- native Monterey cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*)
- native Monterey pine (*Pinus radiata*)

Western monarch overwintering sites along the Sonoma Coast once supported thousands of butterflies. However, like most other sites throughout the state, they have shown cataclysmic population declines in the past two decades. Despite the essential nature of monarch overwintering habitat, known sites remain largely unprotected in California, legally and in practice. Based on annual surveys, less than 1% of historic western monarch populations survive today; the largest impacts are the result of habitat loss, pesticide use, and climate change.

The probability that monarchs persist through the next decade is just 30%, and experts agree that this iconic species will likely go extinct within the next fifty years without widespread, immediate efforts to restore the ecological features upon which they depend.

RCD CONSERVATION EFFORTS: The team at Gold Ridge RCD is grateful to have an opportunity to address monarch conservation strategies in the **Sonoma Coast Monarch Overwintering Site Protection and Enhancement Project**, funded by the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB). We are working in partnership with coastal landowners as well as federal, state, and local partners, including Creekside Science and The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation to develop monarch habitat conservation plans for several known overwintering sites in Sonoma County, including known sites on private land, State Parks, County Regional Parks, and a WCB monarch reserve.

To find out more, contact Isis Howard, Project Coordinator, at Isis@goldridgercd.org



Researchers have determined that the most effective strategies to bolster the western monarch population include:

- Protecting and restoring overwintering sites
- Providing nectar resources along the migratory flyway
- Increasing the availability of native milkweed



GET INVOLVED

THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS WILL BE A CRITICAL TIME TO BRING THE BUTTERFLIES BACK FROM NEAR-EXTINCTION, AND WE HOPE YOU ARE AS EXCITED AS WE ARE TO PROTECT AND ENHANCE MONARCH HABITAT ON OUR LOCAL PUBLIC AND WORKING LANDS!

HOW YOU CAN HELP: If you would like to take action to support western monarchs, there are many fantastic ways to get involved. One way is to participate in annual overwintering monarch surveys! Mia Monroe, North bay resident and decades-long advocate for western monarchs, says: “My volunteer work as a community scientist is so rewarding, and this is an invaluable way for others to help document sightings, breeding success and more.”

This year the Western Monarch Thanksgiving Count runs from Saturday, November 14 to Sunday, December 6. The New Year’s Count runs from Saturday, December 26 to Sunday, January 10. You can find instructions and training videos on how to become a volunteer at: westernmonarchcount.org. If you decide to volunteer, you might meet Mia Monroe; she helps coordinate many of these events in the north bay!

To learn more about the biology and status of the western monarch, we recommend you follow The Xerces Society, Western Monarch Milkweed Mapper, and Monarch Joint Venture online or on social media. You might also search for “Monarch Nectar Plant Guides” if you feel inspired to spruce up your gardens to create vital nectar resources and breeding habitat for migrating monarchs.

MONARCHS ROOSTING ON CALIFORNIA NATIVE MONTEREY CYPRESS (*CUPRESSUS MACROCARPA*)



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION GOES VIRTUAL: GROWING FARM EXPERIENCES ONLINE



PRECIOUS LANDS

For more than ten years, Gold Ridge RCD and Sonoma RCD have provided local Sonoma County youth with a unique opportunity to visit Sonoma County's agricultural properties preserved as farmland and open space forever by Sonoma County Ag + Open Space District. The TEAM (Teaching Agricultural and Environmental Memories) Educational Program has hosted thousands of students on nearly one hundred field trips to farms. Grammar school students grades K through 6 have explored coastal dairies, sunny apple orchards, verdant creeks, bountiful produce fields, and historic family farms. They play games and activities designed to ignite curiosity about plant growth, animal life-cycles, food production, and the precious nature of open spaces. On the farm, students run, touch, explore, observe, imitate and investigate. It is an immersive and delightful experience outdoors.

BRINGING THE OUTDOORS IN

This fall, the TEAM Educational Program will be different. As teachers, students and parents hurry to create a new distanced learning environment in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, environmental educators across the nation race to re-imagine a way to bring the outdoors into a student's home. Luckily, there is no lack of creativity in our network of educators. Motivated by the knowledge that connection with the outdoors is vital to our wellbeing during this time of disruption, our educators have developed offerings that keep students virtually connected to their local ecology and agriculture.

NEW FORMAT, SAME MISSION

Video-based lessons and at-home activities transport students' minds to various Sonoma County working landscapes, call upon their imagination and ingenuity, and ensure equitable access to nature-learning. Utilizing video recordings (with Spanish language subtitles), fun experiments, and independent study activities, the TEAM program embraces Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and supports a child's time exploring the people, places and processes that make Sonoma County world-renowned for its natural biodiversity, vibrant agriculture and focused leadership in environmental conservation.

These new video-based lessons and at-home activities are supported, in part, by Sonoma County Ag + Open Space, whose work is funded by the taxpayers of Sonoma County.



FARMS WRANGLE CARBON PROMOTING CLIMATE SMART AGRICULTURE

Each year, more farmers, ranchers and forestland owners partner with the RCD to take action on climate change. Some land management practices are proven to intensify the draw-down of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and into the soil and living vegetation. **As of November, 2020, the Gold Ridge RCD team has completed carbon farm plans for twelve rural properties, detailing the carbon-beneficial practices the landowner will adopt over time.** Plans were crafted for land uses as diverse as the county itself: rangelands, dairies, orchards, vineyards, and forestland. The CFP process can be helpful for landowners in achieving their conservation goals, and it improves their future funding opportunities.

Along with providing the public good of reducing greenhouse gases, the practices detailed in carbon farm plans offer numerous benefits for working lands, including improved soil health and productivity, increased soil water-holding capacity, restored habitat for local wildlife, forage for pollinators like bees and hummingbirds, shade for livestock, and improved agricultural production, in some cases.

If implemented, the twelve completed plans will collectively draw down nearly 3,600 metric tons CO₂e (or "carbon dioxide equivalent gases," a standard unit for measuring carbon footprints) annually. This number is the equivalent of removing 778 passenger vehicles from the road each year. But the effects last longer than a single year. A windbreak planted in Year 1 will continue to sequester carbon for decades, if maintained. Similarly, biologically active compost applied on pasture in Year 1 will continue to have a sequestering effect for years to come. The benefits are particularly long-lasting if the ground and vegetation are not disturbed by tillage or discing and are maintained over time.

The impacts of carbon farming could be significant. If, for example, Californians were able to sequester just one metric ton of carbon per hectare on half of CA rangelands, we would offset enough CO₂e to balance out the annual GHG emissions from all CA energy use in the commercial and residential sectors¹. **If accomplished at a large enough scale, carbon farming practices have the potential to begin reversing the catastrophic effects of climate change².**

Interested in obtaining a carbon farm plan for your rural property? Please contact the Gold Ridge RCD by emailing admin@goldridgercd.org.

¹ Marin Carbon Project www.marincarbonproject.org

² Green America <https://www.greenamerica.org/food-climate/what-carbon-farming>



A few common carbon farming practices included:

- Perennial woody hedgerow plantings
- Compost application
- Silvopasture establishment (planting trees in grazed grasslands)
- Riparian restoration



JESSICA ROWLAND PHOTOGRAPHY



ADAPTING TO WILDFIRE

PRESCRIBED FIRE CAN IMPROVE FOREST ECOLOGY AND REDUCE THREAT OF WILDFIRE

WILDFIRE HAS TOUCHED ALL PARTS OF OUR LIVES

That's why we're taking multiple approaches to support our community in adapting to it. We're listening, learning and shepherding in a new relationship with wildfire. Our vision for Sonoma County is a fire-resilient community—one that can withstand fire being part of our ecosystem and actually benefit from its crucial ecological role. One that can experience fire without heart-wrenching loss and hefty burden on our heroic firefighters. It requires that we embrace new scientific research and California's long history with fire.

BETTER TOGETHER

Our county desperately needs reliable resources for what we're facing now. In the wake of the 2017 north bay fires, Sonoma County RCDs and Fire Safe Sonoma, the county's fire safe council, have been adamantly pursuing ways to leverage each other to expand public wildfire planning and prevention services. So far, we have jointly worked on several grants to:

- support the formation of local fire safe councils,
- develop localized Community Wildfire Protection Plans,
- expand public education opportunities
- provide technical assistance that integrates environmental and fire-wise best management practices

FUELED BY AMERICORPS

We are excited to announce the latest development in our partnership: Sonoma County RCDs and Fire Safe Sonoma jointly hired an AmeriCorps fellow, Cailin Notch, to assist with public outreach and education, project coordination, technical assistance and planning. Having a full-time

coordinator will help our organizations meet the community's ever-growing demand for support and information. Watch for news and workshops on our social media, websites, and e-newsletters.

CAMP MEEKER PREPARES FOR WILDFIRE

Gold Ridge RCD is proud to partner with the community of Camp Meeker to develop a plan to locally reduce and mitigate wildfire risks. For this high risk community, we're focusing on safe evacuations, redwood forest-friendly vegetation management, neighborhood support groups, and coordination with the surrounding camps, preserves and larger acreage landowners. Learn more:

www.firesafecampmeeker.org

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PROTECTION PLAN (CWPP)?

- A plan that assesses a community's current wildfire risks, identifies mitigation measures, and develops grant-ready project concepts to fulfill those needs
- It is necessarily collaborative, gaining input from all stakeholders
- It must be approved by CAL FIRE, County supervisors, and others
- The plan increases the likelihood of receiving grant funding for projects
- Stands as a living document that should be updated every five years

Camp Meeker is one of seven communities in Sonoma County to develop a CWPP. Others include: Upper Mark West, Diamond A, Occidental, Fort Ross, Sea Ranch, Mayacamas Mountain, Oakmont. The County authored its first CWPP in 2016. An update to this plan has been granted funding and will occur over a two-year period beginning in 2021.

California's forests are some of the most diverse and abundant ecosystems in the entire world. When in balance, these forests provide ample timber, wild foods and medicine, wildlife habitat, recreation opportunities, support to watersheds, and significant carbon sequestration. When out of balance, they suffer from overgrowth, disease, pest pressure and invasive plants, and they sustain intense wildfire. It's our goal to connect forest landowners with the resources they need to steward the forest back to a healthy balance.

RCD FOREST MANAGEMENT PLANNING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

In 2018, the Gold Ridge and Sonoma RCDs hired Jason Wells, registered professional forester, to jump start the RCDs' new Forest Management Planning program. Jason has helped numerous landowners prepare holistic management plans that will be used to access funds from EQIP (NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program) and to guide the landowner's actions long-term and achieve their management goals. For more information, contact Jason Wells, Jwells@sonomarcld.org

SONOMA COUNTY FOREST CONSERVATION WORKING GROUP

This group is a diverse network of forest landowners, managers and natural resource professionals, a catalyst for collaborative projects, a source of information, and a point of contact for the community. Learn more and get involved: www.sonomaforests.org



THE NORTH BAY FOREST IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Starting January 2021, the North Bay Forest Improvement Program (NBFIP) will support planning and implementation of projects on private forested lands to reduce risks of wildfire and promote forest health. The program will provide financial incentives to landowners to conduct this critical work. For more information:

<https://rebuildnorthbay.org/innovate/taking-action/nbfip/>

UC ANR FORESTLAND STEWARDS WORKSHOP SERIES

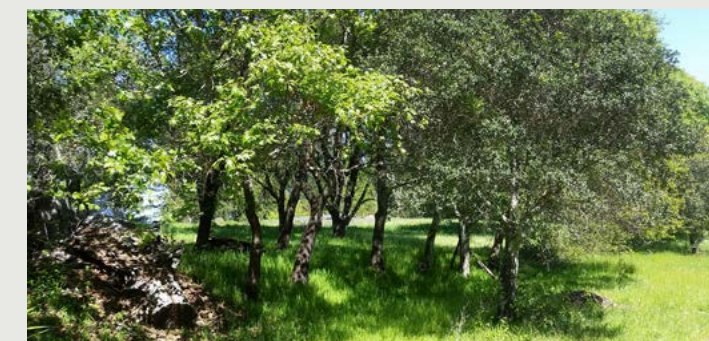
We encourage forest landowners to participate in this essential program hosted by the University of California. This workshop series will help landowners develop plans to improve and protect their forest lands in an ecologically and economically sustainable manner. Learn more:

<https://ucanr.edu/sites/forestry/>

THE GOOD FIRE ALLIANCE

The Good Fire Alliance is a group of private landowners and land managers in Sonoma and Marin Counties who have come together to learn how to manage the vegetation needs of their properties through cooperatively conducted controlled burns and other techniques. Learn more:

<https://calpba.org/good-fire-alliance>



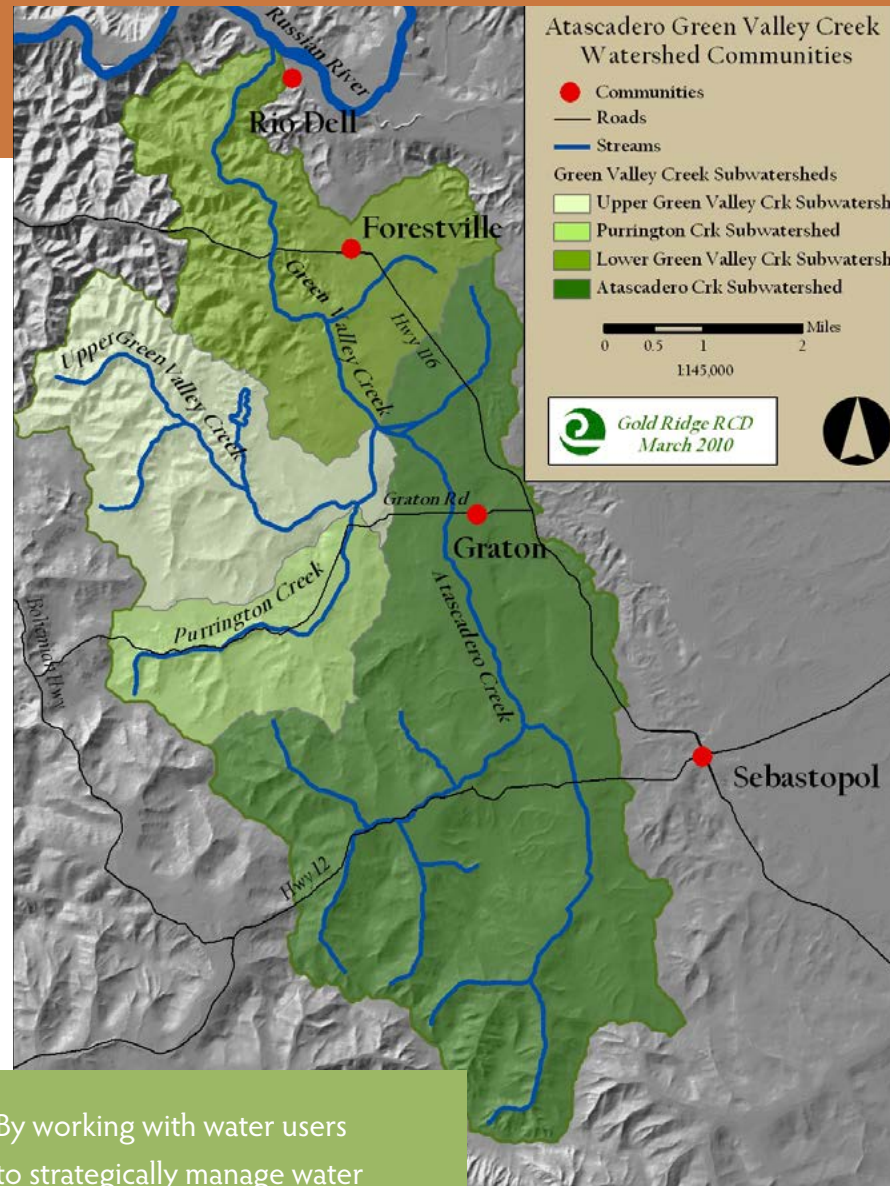
STREAMFLOW IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR GREEN VALLEY

The Gold Ridge RCD is proud to be a member of the Russian River Coho Water Resources Partnership. This partnership has worked to carefully craft a Streamflow Improvement Plan (SIP) for the Upper Green Valley Creek Watershed. Finalized in December 2019 as part of the Russian River Coho Keystone Initiative, **this document serves as the road map for increasing dry season stream flow in this diverse western Sonoma County watershed.**

Aptly named, the Green Valley Watershed stretches from its furthest headwaters in the forested hills of Burnside Road, through the verdant valley west of Sebastopol and Graton and flows north to its outlet directly into the lower Russian River. The Upper Green Valley Creek watershed is its northwestern arm.

While known locally for high wintertime flows, the summer months can leave Green Valley Creek with precious little surface water, which challenges residents and agricultural operations who rely on its water resources and threatens the survival of keystone aquatic species like Coho salmon and Steelhead trout.

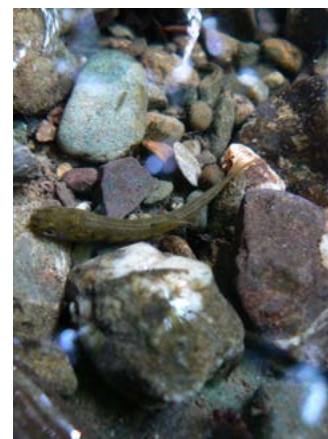
The purpose of the SIP is to identify specific measures to moderate the impact of dry season water demand, thereby improving instream flow for Coho salmon and ecosystem function as a whole. To make the plan a reality, the Partnership applies a systematic, watershed-scale approach that brings together landowner interests; streamflow and fish monitoring; technical, planning and financial assistance; and water right and permitting expertise to modify water use and management to improve instream flow. What would this look like in practice? **Some water conservation strategies include storing water when it is abundant in the wet season for use in the dry season, encouraging winter water to recharge into the ground instead of flowing off the surface, reconnecting natural springs to tributaries, or releasing impounded water to the creek in the dry season if possible.**



By working with water users to strategically manage water resources and maintain a steady summer flow in Upper Green Valley Creek, we can protect habitat that is critical for salmon at each of their various life history stages and improve watershed function that serves us all.

To learn more about the Coho Partnership and to read the Plan, visit shorturl.at/ezCUV

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT ECOLOGIST SIERRA CANTOR, SIERRA@GOLDRIDGERCD.ORG



STEWARDS OF THE LAND



RCD WATER QUALITY MONITORING EQUIPMENT IN THE ATASCADERO MARSH.

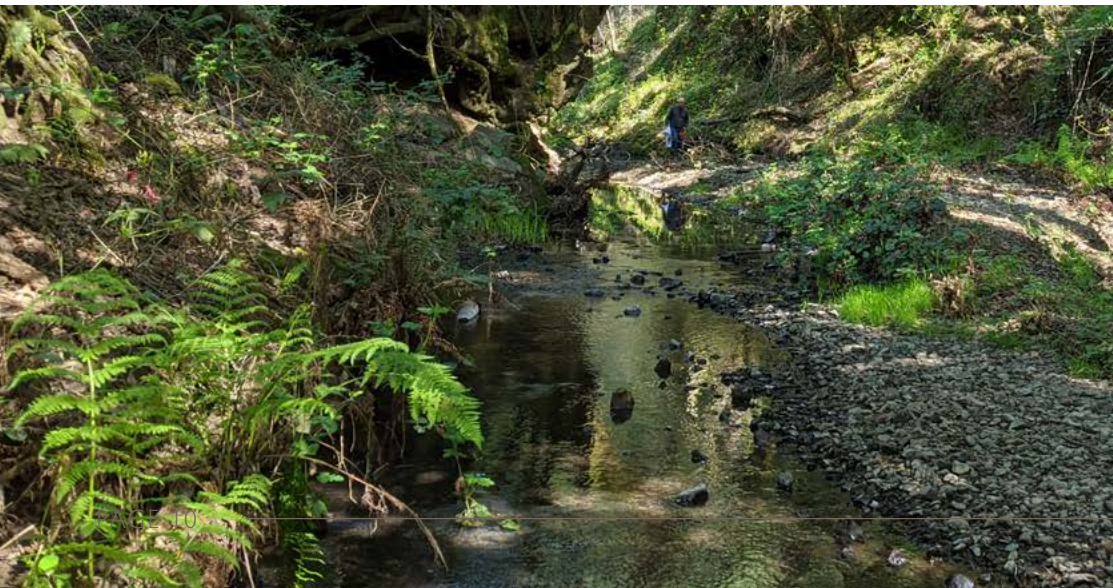
IMPROVING STREAM CONDITIONS IN THE ATASCADERO MARSH

Through funding from the Department of Fish and Wildlife's Proposition 1 program, the Gold Ridge RCD and our partners continue our planning work in the Atascadero subwatershed, the primary tributary of Green Valley Creek. Lower Atascadero Creek, with a 233-acre wetland complex above its confluence with Green Valley Creek, provides critical marsh habitat for migratory birds and other wetland species. It serves as low-gradient, refuge from high water flows for over-wintering and out-migrating juvenile salmonids moving downstream from prime spawning reaches of upper Green Valley Creek.

Despite not harboring coho salmon in recent decades, the upper Atascadero Creek watershed has proven to provide suitable habitat for juvenile coho salmon, leading the Russian River Coho Salmon Captive Broodstock Program to begin stocking Redwood Creek with coho juveniles in 2017. Outmigration monitoring found several had left the watershed the following spring, giving hope of an eventual self-sustaining population.

Sedimentation in Atascadero near its confluence with Green Valley has locally aggraded the channel and formed a closed depression in lower Atascadero that prevents drainage and has caused perennial inundation since the 1980s, backwatering to cause frequent flooding of Green Valley Road upstream. Downed riparian trees are evidence of increasing saturation. Limited inflows during the summer are impounded, with decaying plant material in the marsh, creating stagnant, anoxic conditions—conditions so toxic, they are believed to have killed out-migrating coho salmon from upper Atascadero in 2019.

Working in coordination with a team of fisheries biologists, wetland specialists, geomorphologists, engineers, and permitting agencies, the Gold Ridge RCD will develop plans for removal of accumulated sediment to improve wetland health, water quality, and fish passage in the Atascadero Marsh. This work is being done in close collaboration with Sonoma Water's efforts to address the Green Valley Road flooding upstream of the marsh.



GOLD RIDGE RCD



PRSRD STD

US POSTAGE

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS

Third Thursday of every month
3:30-5:30PM (*unless otherwise posted*)
Gold Ridge RCD Office
2776 Sullivan Road,
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Meetings are open to the public

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