

Sonoma Creek and the wildlife corridor remain at risk at SDC

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Protecting the Sonoma Valley Wildlife Corridor was one of the main drivers of the push to secure the Open Space at Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) in addition to habitat protection, biodiversity preservation, wildfire risk reduction, and defense against climate change. While these lands are on their way to permanent protection, there are several concerns that still need to be addressed.

Most importantly, Sonoma Creek and significant tributaries that serve as riparian corridors at SDC do not appear to have been included in the transfer of the Open Space that has been conveyed to State Parks. The creeks run through the campus which is slated for major development.

That is of concern, because riparian corridors are often some of the most frequently traversed parts of a wildlife corridor system. These waterways knit together various parts of the broader web of the Corridor. At least the Sonoma Creek riparian setback was widened in the Specific Plan to 100' from each bank. As minimally adequate as that is, it is better than the 50' on each side, which is all that protects Hill/Mill Creek.

Riparian corridors serve as habitat, access to water, wildlife transit corridors, protection from humans and transportation interactions, and so much more. At risk salmonids and frogs live in the creeks. Knowing where the boundaries of the riparian corridors and setbacks are, and what buildings and roads or paths, if any, fall within those setback boundaries is a crucial piece

of information to protect those spaces. And as far as I can tell no specific mapping has been done of those areas.

I am also concerned that leaving the protection of those riparian corridors up to the developer/s of the SDC campus subjects the corridors to serious risk. Developers are not experts at habitat restoration, stream rehabilitation, wildlife movement, or salmonid migrations. Groundwater restoration, stream bank erosion control, and protection from water pollution caused by runoff from surrounding roads, landscaping and construction will all need to be addressed among other potential problems.

Instead, could Federal or State Fish and Wildlife create a plan for protecting the corridors? I know they are underfunded and not necessarily the optimal overseer, but they might engage due to the recovering salmonid population in the Sonoma Valley Creeks. Alternatively, Ag+Open Space, Sonoma Land Trust or Sonoma Ecology Center might be persuaded to acquire an interest in the corridors to ensure oversight through an Open Space Preserve or outright ownership.

I fear if this matter is not addressed early in this multi-pronged process of development it might be left too late to solve. Plus, I'd like to relieve the developer/s of any temptation to bargain away the riparian corridor protections.

— **Nancy Kirwan, Sonoma Mountain Preservation**