

## Santa Rosa Creek(/index.php/news/publications)

### Lower Santa Rosa Creek Enhancement Plan

To be most effective, conservation efforts must understand the big picture—the interaction and interdependency of natural and human systems. With this in mind, in 1992 Greenspace commissioned a long-range, comprehensive aquatic and riparian ecosystems in the Creek and its lagoon since 1970.' The consultants determined that the decline has resulted from 'increased human population, increased groundwater pumping, increased non-point source pollution and a natural drought cycle.'

Historically, Santa Rosa Creek flowed year round providing a vital water source for aquatic and terrestrial animals, and the riparian forest that supported them. The most notable loss of habitat has been the lack of summer flows and persistent pools.



The Enhancement Plan has four goals:

Acquire and preserve open space along the creek.

Enhance the natural resources of its lower reach by:

1. Restoring year-round flow
2. Protecting and enhancing riparian habitat

3. Preserving and restoring natural floodplain functions
4. Preserving and restoring the San Rosa Creek lagoon
5. Reducing erosion and sedimentation
6. Improving the quality and quantity of water in the upper and lower watershed
7. Increasing habitat diversity

Develop and maintain an information base for the creek.

Increase community awareness and enjoyment of the creek.

Wisely, the consultants pointed out that achieving these goals and objectives requires 'the involvement of the entire community—upstream farmers, ranchers, watershed residents, local businesses and public agencies.'

## Fifteen Years of Work

Over the years since the Plan was published, a number of projects have been undertaken to address specific problems associated with the creek and its larger watershed. In most cases they parallel recommendations made by the consultants. It is important to note that a number of entities are concerned with the health of the creek and have contributed to conservation efforts.

## Fiscalini Ranch Preserve

The plan encourages erosion control projects to improve water quality. The CCSD completed a stream bank erosion project on the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve by reconstituting an eroded stream bank that was endangering public infrastructure and needed habitat for steelhead trout. The CCSD has another project pending to reconstruct 300 feet of eroded stream bank directly across the channel from the earlier project.

## Land Acquisition

The plan recommends acquiring key properties that protect the hydrological functions of Santa Rosa Creek, like flood plains and other open space properties. Notable in this regard are acquisition of what was called the East-West Ranch and a Mid-State Bank property, and now called the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve.

Greenspace's contribution to this acquisition effort was the purchase of a 1.6-acre property in 1999, that we have named the Greenspace Creekside Reserve (GCR). It is located on Center Street in the East Village and was paid for entirely with donations from Greenspace supporters.

Our purpose in this acquisition was to preserve the site's natural character and create an instructional nature trail and demonstration area about sound management of creek frontage. The creek-side environment provides habitat for steelhead trout, red-legged frogs, tide-water gobies (all threatened), as well as more common wildlife such as deer, mountain lions, bobcats, foxes and many types of birds.

Interpretive exhibits will highlight ecological processes and issues in the North Coast Area. The GCR is open daily for the public, from dawn to dusk.

## Public Education: Santa Rosa Creek is Our Watershed

Five articles about steelhead trout appeared in the Greenspace Watershed newsletter, which is mailed to all residents; a presentation on urban runoff was produced and given to various community groups and at CCSD meetings; and a watershed workshop was conducted with representatives of regulatory agencies and stakeholders as participants. This was supported with a grant in 2002 by the California Department of Fish and Game.

## Culverts and Fish Passage

A 2003 grant allowed Greenspace to conduct an inventory and evaluation of road culverts associated with coastal streams. With California Conservation Corps help we assessed the extent to which these culverts at road crossings affect fish passage in streams that have either historic or current steelhead migrations. This information could help San Luis Obispo County prioritize and design repair or replacement of culverts. Santa Rosa Creek was one of the creeks studied. The final report can be seen on our website under 'Publications - Reports.' [ADD LINK to page](#)



### Burton Bridge Barrier Removal

A large section of concrete (called an apron) was removed from under the Burton Drive bridge in the East Village . It had prevented fish passage during 65% of the year. The apron was removed by the California Conservation Corps during the fall of 2005 and 2006 when Santa Rosa Creek is typically at its lowest flow rate. The project was funded by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).



## Upstream Bank Restoration

Just north of Coast Union High School, Santa Rosa Creek had eroded the stream bank creating thirty-foot vertical walls, along with thousands of cubic yards of sediment and loss of valuable farm land.

In 2006, with a grant from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, we restored 350 feet of eroded stream bank by creating a new stream channel and flood terrace. In relation to the Enhancement Plan goals, this project 'improves the quality of water from the upper watershed.'

## Downstream Bank Restoration

Greenspace successfully realigned an eroded creek bank near the Highway One Bridge in 1992 (before the Enhancement Plan had been published). Community volunteers planted native vegetation, including hundreds of willow trees.

## Ferrasci Road Barrier Removal

Just upstream from Coast Union High School was a nearly solid causeway across Santa Rosa Creek. It was ranked the highest (most serious) barrier to migration of steelhead trout in San Luis Obispo County. Greenspace received grants to replace this barrier with a bridge so that fish migration can occur without obstruction. Subsequently the county of San Luis Obispo took over the project which was completed in Dec. 2011. This was a complex project requiring cooperation from various agencies, organizations and individuals.



Old Ferrasci bridge pictured above and the new bridge is shown below



## Watershed Management Plan

Greenspace worked with Stillwater Sciences and Central Coast Salmon Enhancement to prepare a Santa Rosa Creek Watershed Management Plan to address the strategic and scientific needs for watershed management, restoration planning, and recovery of south-central California coast steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*). The plan was funded by California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) through their Fisheries Restoration Grant Program. The plan was completed in 2012.

## Annual Creek & Beach Cleanup

Every year for the past 20 years, Greenspace and community members take part in California's annual Coastal Clean-up Day to eliminate litter on state beaches. Greenspace leads clean-up crews along Moonstone Beach and the mouth of Santa Rosa Creek and has collected many tons of litter and recyclables.

## Partnerships

Recognizing the need and importance of cooperation in restoring and enhancing not only Santa Rosa Creek, but the entire North Coast Area, Greenspace is a contributor/participant in a number of organizations.

We are members of the Tri-County Fish Team (TCFT) which includes representatives from San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties. Some of the projects that the TCFT is undertaking are restoration permit streamlining and restoration best management practices. In addition, the TCFT conducts workshops on culvert placement and road crossing structures on steelhead streams. Greenspace has taken an active role in these important improvements in permitting and educating contractors who conduct this type of work. In addition, Greenspace is a member of the San Luis Obispo County Steelhead Initiative.

To implement specific projects, Greenspace has partnered with many organizations and state and federal agencies including the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the County of San Luis Obispo, the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo, the California Conservation Corps, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, and the California Coastal Conservancy.



## Future Work

One project that we anticipate introducing on the North Coast Area is stream water monitoring, including urban runoff pollution. Through this we could begin to contribute importantly to the information base called for in the Enhancement Plan. In short, we would test the water in local streams (including Santa Rosa Creek) at specified times of the year and in this way develop a long-term picture of pollutants. Having this information could provide direction in remediation.

We want to monitor the 'first flush' of water entering Santa Rosa Creek through culverts at the beginning of the wet season. Finding ways to prevent urban runoff pollution by filtering water before it enters waterways is a high priority for many agencies and watershed groups in California.

Land acquisition and sound management, stream bank restoration, public education and advocacy are continuing concerns for which we will seek funding and partners.

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