



Viewpoint: Work underway to aid Santa Rosa Creek watershed restoration

By Wayne Attoe

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Community members (stakeholders) representing diverse interests (farming, ranching, business, ecology, etc.) are contributing their experience and knowledge to benefit the threatened steelhead trout population in Santa Rosa Creek. In a process that began in September 2009, they are developing a plan that will identify and prioritize watershed restoration measures.

Central Coast Salmon Enhancement, based in Arroyo Grande, is facilitating meetings and the input from the stakeholders group and a technical advisory committee. Members of the latter live or work in the watershed and/or the county and have local expertise needed to objectively review the data that are developed. Salmon Enhancement has previously worked with stakeholders in Pismo Beach, Nipomo, Arroyo Grande and Nacimiento and San Antonio Creek watersheds to develop similar plans. Some of those plans can be reviewed at www.centralcoastsalmon.com.

Stillwater Sciences, a consulting group from Berkeley, is collecting and analyzing information about sediment generation and movement, and creek channel changes of the waterways that make up the Santa Rosa Creek watershed. They approach watershed science and restoration “with rigorous science, innovation and a collaborative decision-making process,” about which more can be learned at www.stillwatersci.com.

This 18-month planning project has been organized by Greenspace—The Cambria Land Trust, and funded by a \$300,000 grant from the California Department of Fish and Game Fisheries Restoration Grant Program.

The information collected by consultants and stakeholder input will be used to identify and recommend priority activities to address factors that are limiting steelhead populations. The recommendations will be outlined in a Watershed Management Plan. Implementation of the plan will be voluntary.

What sorts of restoration projects might be recommended? Two major concerns are fish passage (up and down stream) and fish habitat (for various stages of the life cycle).

Removal of antiquated fish ladders and removal of barriers to migration are examples of fish passage projects that might be recommended. Other projects could be use of appropriate creekside vegetation, stream bank stabilization, monitoring water quality and flood plain enhancement to increase capacity to hold sediment.

Greenspace has been working for nearly two decades on creek restoration projects suggested by an earlier plan, the Santa Rosa Creek Enhancement Plan of 1992, which considered only the lower reach of the creek. They include:

- Removal of a large section of concrete from under the Burton Drive bridge in the East Village. It prevented fish passage during 65 percent of the year;
- Restoring 350 feet of eroded stream bank just north of Coast Union High School. Erosion had created 30-foot vertical walls, along with thousands of cubic yards of sediment and the associated loss of valuable farm land. The answer was to shape a new stream channel and flood terrace; and
- Assessment of how culverts at road crossings affect fish passage in streams that have either historic or current steelhead migrations.

The current Santa Rosa Creek watershed planning process is much more comprehensive than the 1992 plan. It's examining the entire watershed — not just the lower reach — and is employing newer, more sophisticated modeling techniques. Perhaps just as important, participation by people who know the watershed personally will give this plan a foundation on which even more projects can be accomplished.

In addition to stakeholder meetings, three public meetings have been scheduled, the second of which will be in July or August.

The Santa Rosa Creek Watershed Management Plan should be completed in early 2011. Greenspace is seeking funding to conduct a similar community-based watershed management plan for San Simeon Creek.

For periodic updates, minutes and agendas of meetings for the Santa Rosa Creek watershed planning process, go to www.greenspacecambria.org. For more information about projects already completed in the creek, at the same website go to 'About Us,' 'Accomplishments.'

Wayne Attoe is president of Greenspace — The Cambria Land Trust.

<http://www.sanluisobispo.com/2010/05/20/1146746/viewpoint-work-underway-to-aid.html#storylink=misearch>