

FOCUS PROGRAM: Priority Conservation Area Designation Nomination Form

Enter information in the spaces provided. E-mail this completed nomination form and attachments requested as part of this form to FOCUS@abag.ca.gov by **August 17, 2007**. If e-mailing is not possible, a hard copy of materials can be mailed to Jackie Guzman, Association of Bay Area Governments, P.O. Box 2050, Oakland, CA 94604-2050.

PART 1: AREA INFORMATION

Area Name	Upper Mark West Watershed
Area Location (city, town, county)	NE of Santa Rosa, Sonoma County
Total Acreage	20,000

Map Attached

PART 2: NOMINEE CONTACT INFORMATION

Lead Nominating Agency/Organization	Sotoyome Resource Conservation District
Contact Person	Kara Heckert
Address	P.O. Box 11526
Phone Number(s)	1-707-569-1448
E-mail address	kheckert@sotoyomercd.org
Partnering Agency(ies)/Organization(s)	Friends of the Mark West Watershed, Department of Fish and Game, Sonoma County Water Agency, Monan's Rill Institute

PART 3: AREA CRITERIA

Level of Consensus

Consensus and collective action in the Upper Mark West Watershed (also historically known as "Alpine Valley") are rooted in the community's construction of the Alpine School in 1868. In 1940's the community built Alpine Hall, initially for a place to vote, hold social gathering and as a place for the graduation ceremonies. The one-room, 1st – 8th grade school and its successors, were then, and remain today, the Community's gathering place.

The Alpine Club, a "social benefit" organization for the residents of the upper watershed was formed in the 1940's. We have photographs of the group cleaning up Mark West Creek in 1954. Today the Alpine Club has over 120 member families.

The Friends of the Mark West Watershed (FMWW) formed in 2001 as the environmental advocacy arm of the Alpine Club. The FMWW first challenged a proposal to subdivide and develop estate homes on 1300-acre Saddle Mountain Ranch. Containing the headwaters of both Alpine and Weeks Creeks, important Mark West tributaries, and arrayed with a mosaic of diverse habitats, Saddle Mountain is home to reproducing steelhead and Coho and an especially diverse cast of song birds, raptors and wildlife. At the end of the day, the Friends promoted a win-win solution partnering with the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, the Coastal Conservancy and others in the public acquisition of the property. Open Space and RCD staff along with the former owners of Saddle Mountain were the guests of honor at the FMWW Annual Harvest Moon Dinner Dance in October of 2006 celebrating Saddle Mountain as forever wild.

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The FMWW is active in the watershed community with ongoing partnership projects that include:

- With the Sotoyome Resource Conservation District and the Department of Fish and Game, a \$600,000 private road sediment reduction project involving more than 70 different land owners. RCD and FMWW received Environmental Achievement Awards from Congressman Mike Thompson for the project.
- With the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, established and operate the Saddle Mountain “trail-watchers” volunteers program. Trail watchers regularly hike the mountain, report what they see and work closely with Open Space as interim stewards of this valuable resource.
- With the Rincon Valley Fire Department, hosted Urban/Wildlands Interface Fire Response training drills for more than 50 engine companies on private properties in the watershed.
- In September 2007 FMWW, Jim & Betty Doreksen and Monan’s Rill Institute will host UC Extension Forest Stewardship Workshop at MR community hub.
- With Sonoma County Public Works and Waste Management Company, conduct semi-annual creek cleanup events.
- With the Sotoyome RCD, and trained Creek Keepers, established and maintain upper Mark West Creek water monitoring programs.
- With its Campaign Committee, raised and donated \$5,500 to the Measure F campaign, walked precincts and manned the telephone bank in support of reauthorizing the Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District.
- Host an annual ‘Hike & Hoot’ event where naturalists, geologists and birders share their knowledge in hands on hiking and exploration of the watershed. This is done in partnership with Monan’s Rill Association, an intentional community of eleven families that also donate their community hall for the Hike and Hoot event.
- Annual Harvest Moon Dinner Dance fundraising event. This year the event will move down stream to the historic Mark West Lodge, to expand and create partnership with midstream residents. Through November of 2006, FMWW raised \$35,282 in contributions and an additional \$43,859 of in-kind contributions from the community.
- With community volunteers and professional equipment owned by FMWW, hosts an annual event to eradicate invasive species such as scotch broom on private and public land; improve and preserve the riparian corridors and replant native species.
- Publish an annual newsletter, host and maintain markwestwatershed.org to assist in open communication, education and stewardship efforts.
- FMWW is available to residents for assistance in watershed restoration preservation projects. Over the last five years in response to requests for assistance, watershed volunteers have assisted in large animal relocation away from the waterway, constructed manure holding pens, improved drainage systems, installed waddles and hay bales to prevent erosion and run off into the creek,. FMWW regularly advises residents as to best management practices in the application of ‘fish friendly farming.’ Friends of the Mark West Watershed is fiscally sponsored by the World Stewardship Institute (www.ecostewards.org), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. WSI’s mission is to cultivate environmental stewardship within individuals and organizations. Contribution to FMWW are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. WSI Federal Tax ID # 77-0422218

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- In partnership with Rincon Valley Fire Dept. and Alpine Club and FMWW has begun development of a community emergency and communication plan. Volunteers are collecting vital statistics from local residents and organizing rescue information and a network database.

Describe the level of community support and/or political will for protection of this area, mentioning any existing plans that identify this area. Some examples of plans include an organization/agency's strategic plan, general plan, habitat conservation plan, etc.

Protection of the watershed is consistent with Sonoma County's General Plan open space and environmental policies and is strongly endorsed by the County's Franz Valley Area Plan which promotes retention of the wild and resource values of the watershed as mitigation for loss of habitat to development in other parts of the County.

The Mark West Watershed is an important element of the Department of Fish and Game's Coho Salmon Recovery Strategy (CDFG, 2004) and it's Draft Russian River Basin Plan (CDFG, 2001). NOAA'S National Marine Fisheries Service has recently identified Mark West Watershed as habitat crucial to maintaining genetic diversity in the Russian River's Coho population.

Describe how this area might promote collaboration between multiple organizations and/or jurisdictions.

Protection of the Mark West Watershed and its fishery is an objective of the full compliment of resource protection and regulatory agencies including, in addition to the Department of Fish and Game and NOAA, Sonoma County and the Sonoma County Water Agency, the Regional Water Quality Control Board (TMDL's), NFWS (endangered species), Army Corp of Engineers (wetlands),

The demonstrated high quality natural resources and extensive community engagement of the upper Mark West Creek watershed makes it an ideal area to bring together a wide array of agency, organization and jurisdictional interests.

Describe any work underway to protect this area and who is involved.

The Friends of the Mark West Watershed is currently preparing a Strategic Plan to guide its future activities. The planning is supported by the Monan's Rill Institute and member donated funds. A recent graduate of Sonoma State's Organizational Development Program has agreed to facilitate development of the strategic plan.

The Sotoyome RCD has \$10,000 of Sonoma County Water Agency funding which it is using to compile the available environmental database for the Mark West Watershed and to develop a stewardship planning work program that will combine the priorities and recommendations of all agencies with the aspirations of the community into a single, integrated implementation plan.

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Other ongoing work includes:

- \$600,000 Road Upgrade/Sediment Reduction Project (10% local match).
- CDF funded forest improvement projects (30% local match).
- UC Extension sponsored Forest Stewardship Workshop.
- Water quality and biological Monitoring programs by the SRCD, SCWA and UCCE.
- SWAT modeling (NASA, ARS): the Soil Water Assessment Tool is a joint USDA and NASA Applications project. It is a GIS based river basin model developed to predict the impact of land management practices on daily water, sediment, and agricultural chemical yields in watersheds with varying soils, land use and management conditions. The Mark West Creek Watershed is one of the pilot areas being used in the SWAT development.

B. Regional Significance

Mark West Creek has been identified as a high priority stream for preservation and restoration by several state, federal and local agencies. The significant aquatic resources reflected by the high water quality, significant in-stream and riparian habitat, and endangered species occurrence in the area make the upper Mark West Watershed extremely regionally significant for conservation and protection.

Resource agencies, including the Sonoma County Water Agency, California Department of Fish & Game, Sonoma State University, NOAA Fisheries, and Sotoyome RCD have conducted focused monitoring and fish population studies in the upper Mark West watershed, thereby documenting the extensive natural resources in this region. Additionally, the area has been a high priority region for conservation easements and public lands acquisition by both the Sonoma Land Trust and Sonoma County Agricultural and Open Space District; the latter of which, recognizing the largely intact riparian area as high priority for both fish and wildlife and human needs, chose upper Mark West Creek for a proposed riparian easement pilot program.

The recovery of federally endangered Coho salmon populations is a primary focus in the Russian River watershed. The Coho Salmon Recovery Strategy prepared by the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG, 2004) states that during targeted surveys coho salmon were found in Mark West Creek in 2001 detected in 1993 and 1994, thus making mark Mark West Creek one of the few Russian River tributaries where Coho salmon have been recently observed. The Coho Salmon Captive Broodstock Program has identified upper Mark West Creek as a potential future site for the release of Coho salmon.

In addition, in a summary of the recent "Coho Salmon Summer Rearing Habitat Delineation for the Russian River Watershed (Draft, 8/15/07)", NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service states that based on the final estimate of habitat distribution which shows the total amount of available habitat in the Russian River to be extremely limited and fragmented, Mark West Creek shows the only habitat suitable for Coho salmon east of Healdsburg. This is significant in that "a. it is very isolated, b. it is the only representation of habitat in the inland context, and c. the loss of this habitat would likely reduce the environmental diversity and potentially genetic diversity of the population." The summary goes on to state that addressing the limiting warm water temperatures in Mark West Creek, either by improving habitat or improving access to

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existing high quality habitat in the upper watershed, "it will likely greatly improve a limiting condition for the species" (D. Hines, personal communication, 8/15/07).

The Upper Mark West Creek watershed was selected as a keystone watershed for the SRCD Russian River Creek Stewardship and Volunteer Monitoring Program (RRCSP) in 1999. The watershed was selected by a multi-agency Technical Advisory Committee due to the significant aquatic resources and the relative interest, awareness and stewardship ethic shown by landowners and residents to restore and protect the watershed. This effort has resulted in the implementation of habitat restoration projects that address the two highest restoration priorities: to enhance riparian habitat to increase shade cover and riparian diversity and to upgrade rural roads to reduce excess sediment from entering and impacting the creek.

In addition to the existence of critical wildlife habitat, there are a number of resources that provide critical connections for people in the upper Mark West watershed. The significant number of properties with conservation easements in place, coupled with the extensive cooperation of the landowners, has allowed this area to be the site of a wide range of outdoor and environmental education opportunities that are offered through the Sonoma Land Trust, LandPaths (the educational arm of the Sonoma County Agricultural and Open Space District), Acorn Soupe, University of California Cooperative Extension, the Forest Stewardship Group and the Sotoyome RCD.

The Pepperwood Foundation and the Santa Rosa Junior College have recently joined forces to manage educational and public access to the Pepperwood Preserve in the upper Porter Creek watershed. The educational program consists of a variety of educational opportunities in subjects ranging from natural history, botany, zoology, natural resource management, anthropology and astronomy.

The Saddle Mountain Ranch, recently acquired by SCAPSOD protects 6.5% of the upper Mark West Creek watershed, including significant portions of the Weeks, Alpine and Van Buren Creek creeks. The Open Space District is drafting a Saddle Mountain management plan, funded by the State Coastal Conservancy to protect the sensitive wildlife habitats and identify future facilities and trails for public access. The Sotoyome RCD, working with the FMWW community is coordinating with the SCAPSOD to dovetail the Watershed and Saddle Mountain planning to create a comprehensive Upper Mark West Creek Restoration and Stewardship Plan.

References:

- California Department of Fish and Game. "Coho Salmon Recovery Stragety." 2004.
- David Hines, Personal Communication via email. 8/15/07.
- NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service. "'Coho Salmon Summer Rearing Habitat Delineation for the Russian River Watershed." Draft, 8/15/07.

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Urgency

Describe the existing or potential threats to the ecological integrity of this area or to the efforts to protect this area.

Current County Planning and other regulatory tools are not sufficient to protect the existing resources let alone accomplish restoration. Conversion of natural lands to vineyard and the development of estate homes currently threaten the area.

Describe any existing or potential opportunities for the protection or restoration of this area and how ready the process is to proceed.

See Regional Significance above.

Describe the need for protection of this area if this description does not duplicate the answer in Part 3B.

See Regional Significance above.