

# Friends of the Mark West Watershed



## 2008 NEWSLETTER

Vol 1, No 5 (12/08)

*We are a watershed community dedicated to preserving, protecting, and restoring the Mark West Creek and its watershed as a natural and community resource.*

### FMWW Opposes Winery Proposal

by Ray Krauss

FMWW members and neighbors joined in vigorous opposition to a new winery proposed for the upper watershed at the top of Wappo Road. Appearing before the County Board of Zoning Adjustments at their November 13th meeting, FMWW urged the Board to consider more carefully the impacts of the proposed 18,000 square foot winery on the special resources of the Upper Mark West Watershed.

Citing numerous deficiencies in the environmental studies prepared for and by the County, FMWW argued that the project threatens to degrade the quality of the spawning and rearing habitat desperately needed by the threatened and endangered Coho Salmon and Steelhead Trout that still reproduce in Mark West Creek. Excessive grading, existing landslides, and unpermitted clearing of vegetation have and will continue to release sediment to the creek. Project water use and changes in site runoff will further diminish the groundwater critical to maintain late fall stream flow, as oak woodlands and unique chaparral habitats are irretrievably altered and destroyed.

After hearing the public comments, the Board listed about 20 questions for the PRMD staff to address and agreed to continue the meeting at a yet-to-be-set date. The BZA asked for more information including assessments of the project impacts from the Department of Fish and Game and the North Coast Water Quality Control Board. Both agencies have since submitted letters supporting the FMWW concerns. Almost all of the permit documents, including FMWW comments and the Fish and Game and Water Board letters, are on the FMWW website at: [www.markwestwatershed.org](http://www.markwestwatershed.org).

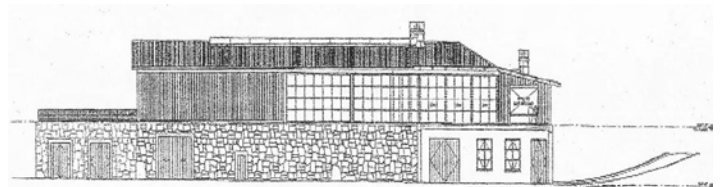
Much work remains if we are to successfully protect our watershed from the unnecessary impacts of this excessive and insensitive proposal. Interested FMWW members are invited to join the Land Use Committee. Contact Harriet at [hbuckwalter@wildblue.net](mailto:hbuckwalter@wildblue.net) to join the committee's email list (list serve).



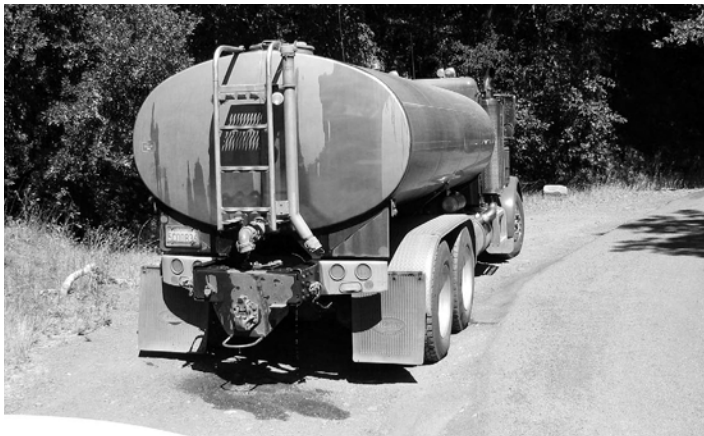
*In 2005, the winery site was apparently cleared of trees and chaparral, then graded, without permits.*



*A 2006 landslide on the Cornell property caused an estimated 10,000 cubic feet of sediment to enter the Mark West Creek.*



*The winery application is for 18,670 square feet of winery/hospitality buildings and 8670 square foot of caves.*



## Water Hauling

by Griffin Okie

This past summer (and indeed in 2007 also) residents of our neighborhood frequently faced the unpleasant task of driving behind or—much worse—driving toward a behemoth 3,200 gallon water-tanker truck plying our narrow country road.

The tanker trucks ran continuously for days and weeks, more than eight hours per day, six days per week. They started shortly after 7 AM and went until about 5 PM, hauling water from a well located on the Mark West Stables property all the way up the 6+ miles to the Pride Family Vineyards, near the Napa County line.

I have contacted the family that owns the Stables, but was told in an email: “Regarding the water we provide to Pride Winery, this well goes down 750+ feet. It is one of several that we have on the property and aside from frost protection, it is never used. Furthermore, there are no laws prohibiting us from selling our water. Additionally, you are inaccurate as per number of gallons and number of trucks daily suggested on the sign you posted on our property. In any case, this has nothing to do with the creek. This is a matter between us and Pride.”

It is so incredible for me to live in a state of anxiety over my well running dry so my neighbor can sell or donate their water to a winery operator who has over-planted their property in order to sell \$80.00 bottles of wine. Where will this stop? It could stop if our friends and neighbors demand that it stop!

The county evidently does not want to pursue this problem and I was told that, lacking proof that there was a financial transaction involving the water, “there is nothing we (the county) can do.” Stay tuned.

## Planning to Plan

FMWW Strategic Plan

by Penny Sirota

On May 17, 2008, FMWW held a retreat to craft a revitalized group infrastructure and long-term vision. The meeting was held at the Monan’s Rill Community Hub from 8:30am to 3:30pm. It was a very full, productive day which created a new foundation for the organization.

There were two inspirations for this retreat. First, it is our responsibility, as a partner with Sotoyome RCD, to create a clearly-defined strategic plan as part of the development of a broader Restoration and Stewardship Plan for the Upper Mark West Creek. Second, we believe that a transparent working structure will ensure that all members feel valued and supported, and will help everyone to be more effective advocates for the watershed, ultimately ensuring the sustainability of FMWW and hopefully the watershed itself. It was a day of hard work, good food, and great conversation. As a result, many important aspects of FMWW were explored and redesigned, including:

- Working agreements for meetings to help us stay both positive and effective
- New leadership structure for meeting facilitation and committee business
- Elements and practices of a FMWW consensus decision-making process
- Definition and requirements of membership
- Pros and cons of becoming our own non-profit organization
- Revised Committee structure
- Clarified Budget process

For details of the retreat, please see our minutes of May 17, 2008. Many thanks to the planning committee, which accomplished a great deal of groundwork prior to the retreat to clarify goals and objectives for the day. We hope these new ways of doing business will encourage everyone to join in on the fun!

## Creek Report

by Richard Baril

The beautiful and diverse upper Mark West Watershed continues to harbor relatively abundant wildlife and spectacular wildflowers, chaparral and forests. The streams, MW Creek, and its tributaries continue to flow, fed by numerous year-round springs. These springs are the source of much of the health and richness of this watershed. Unfortunately, by my observation and by other accounts,

these springs—a true harbinger of watershed health—have diminished over the last few years.

Though water quality measurements (PH, conductivity, dissolved oxygen, temperature) are for the most part in a healthy range, stream flows (water quantity) are low and dropping unusually fast after each rain. These lower flows can mean higher water temperature in some places in the summer months. The lack of a consistent flow and higher creek temperatures are great challenges faced by our watershed.

On a more positive note, spawning steelhead have been witnessed in many places this year in the upper MW Creek and some tributaries. An unusual phenomenon occurred this year with these incredible fish: in a least six separate pools, adult steelhead became stranded, unable to migrate and forced to “summer over.” This happened in MW Creek and Weeks Creek. That they are able to survive without much food and evade predators is a testament to these incredible creatures. This continues to inspire me to do everything possible to help salvage and restore the habitat they need to survive. With Kenny, I witnessed this year for the first time steelhead fingerling in the North Fork of MW Creek in late spring. This means that adult fish, to enter and cross the culvert under St. Helena Rd, had to jump four to five feet high during high water flow in search of suitable spawning grounds. Phenomenal!



*Steelhead have managed to pass through this N. Fork culvert, shown here at low water, during high water periods.*

Other wildlife sightings continue to inspire and give hope. Mountain lion, gray fox, bobcat and skunk have been spotted along with many raptors, including spotted and great horned owls, which Katherine and I hear regularly. The varied

thrush and red-breasted sapsucker, winter migrants, have visited my yard. It has also been my pleasure to see winter wren, vireo, downy woodpecker, tufted titmouse, chestnut-backed chickadee, junco, and goldfinch, plus one of my favorites, the pileated woodpecker. However, some of our old friends are missing lately: coyote, merganser, kingfisher, wren, heron.

The wildfire that occurred in late spring on the Fish and Smith properties has resulted in a resurgence of much of the chaparral and brilliant and prolific new shoots of Manzanita, coyote bush, chemise, and ceanothus plus new growth of madrone and redwood. Sue Smith reported an unusual flowering of coyote mint late in the year. I look forward to a wildflower renaissance in this area this Spring.

My dream is to help build a model watershed community that other communities can follow. Call me with any suggestions or comments. Richard 538-2673.

## New Website Capabilities

by Bill Blake

There's over 160MB of new information at [www.markwestwatershed.org](http://www.markwestwatershed.org), virtually all of it about the controversy surrounding the proposed Cornell Winery. On 11/13/08, the county's Board of Zoning Adjustments was swamped with documents opposing the development; many of those public record documents are now available for downloads as Acrobat PDF files.

Just go to [www.markwestwatershed.org](http://www.markwestwatershed.org) and click on the Cornell links at the top of the page. To see all FMWW web documents, click on the side menu labeled “Documents”... there you'll find minutes from past meetings, past newsletters, and important studies and plans that affect the Mark West Watershed. If you have a document you think should be on the website, forward it to [williamcblake@wildblue.net](mailto:williamcblake@wildblue.net) and include a brief summary as to why you think it should be posted.

## Support the Creek by Supporting its Friends!

Did you miss the Harvest Moon Dinner Dance this year—its great food, auction, and local art? For five years we have thrown the Dinner Dance as our one annual fundraiser, and the money we raised sponsored all our free programs, including the Hike & Hoot and the Creek & Road Clean-Up. This year, however, FMWW decided to devote its time and energy to developing a long-term vision for the organization (see “Planning to Plan,” article). This will enable us to act more effectively to carry out our core mission.

*And it's already working! Over the past few months, FMWW has been working swiftly and energetically to understand and block the approval of a flawed new winery permit.*

This is a crucial struggle, that will have an impact not just on our own creek, but on broader Sonoma County permitting processes for sensitive and rural areas. But this work, and the absence of the Dinner Dance, makes your generous support even more important than usual right now.

We remain an all-volunteer organization, passionate about connecting with the local community and protecting and restoring the precious resource that is our watershed. The steelhead and salmon, the redwoods and the oaks, have neither lawyers nor pocketbooks; they need our voices and our support.

**Please join us, by making a generous, tax-deductible donation to FMWW as soon as you can.** As a guideline, *please consider giving what you might have spent at the Harvest Moon Dinner Dance.* You can use the envelope in this newsletter to submit your donation. We thank you deeply for your continued loyalty to our watershed home.



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## JOIN US!

Friends of the Mark West Watershed is an all-volunteer organization striving to protect a very sensitive and ecologically important resource.

Your donation pays for basic costs, like our website, email list serves and this newsletter.

It also pays for ongoing programs, including our annual springtime events: the Creek & Road Clean-Up and the environmental/educational social aptly titled "Hike & Hoot."

FMWW is in the beginning stages of creating a Strategic Plan for what the group wants to focus on and accomplish. We urge you to partake in this process. Our monthly meetings are typically the third Thursday of each month and are held at Monan's Rill. For additional information, including upcoming meeting agendas, visit [www.markwestwatershed.org](http://www.markwestwatershed.org) or call 707-539-4330 (we'll respond to messages within a week).



**YES!** We want to support the programs and efforts of Friends of Mark West Watershed with a tax-deductible contribution:

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Email (optional; if you would like to join our general email list, we'll send you an email invitation.) \_\_\_\_\_

\$20       \$50       \$100       Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I want to volunteer and/or learn more about FMWW; please call me.

Please make checks payable to "WSI/FMWW." Please mail this form and your check to: FMWW, 6985 St. Helena Rd, Santa Rosa, CA 95404.

For additional information: [www.markwestwatershed.org](http://www.markwestwatershed.org), tel: 707-539-4330, fax: 206-309-0680, email: [hbuckwalter@wildblue.net](mailto:hbuckwalter@wildblue.net).

Friends of the Mark West Watershed is fiscally sponsored by the World Stewardship Institute ([www.ecostewards.org](http://www.ecostewards.org)), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. WSI's mission is to cultivate environmental stewardship within individuals and organizations. Your FMWW contribution is tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. WSI tax ID: 77-0422218. Please note: FMWW doesn't share your information with anyone.