

# Friends of the Mark West Watershed



## 2009 NEWSLETTER

Vol 1, No 6 (11/2009)

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

### Partnership Aims To Improve Five Creeks for Coho

By Sierra Cantor,  
Sotoyome Resource Conservation District

In response to the precipitous decline of Coho salmon in the Russian River watershed, the Russian River Coho Water Resources Partnership has received funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to develop a systematic approach to improve streamflow and water supply reliability in five Russian River tributaries critical to the recovery of endangered Coho salmon. The multi-disciplinary Partnership includes the Center for Ecosystem Management and Restoration, Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District, Occidental Arts and Ecology Center WATER Institute, Sotoyome Resource Conservation District, Trout Unlimited, University of California Research and Extension Center Hopland GIS Lab and UC Cooperative Extension.

Initial efforts will focus in five first-priority streams -- Dutch Bill, Grape, Green Valley, Mills and **Mark West** Creeks. The Partners will work with landowners to develop a science-based approach to identify the areas that have the greatest opportunity for implementing alternative water management strategies and to identify, study, permit, and finance solutions that improve conditions identified as limiting recovery of Coho salmon. "Over 95% of the target watersheds are held in private ownership, and the guiding principal of this project is that water for both human uses and Coho salmon can be secured through careful planning and water supply management" said Kara Heckert, Executive Director of the Sotoyome Resources Conservation District.

Just as the Mediterranean climate of the Russian River watershed can place pressures during the dry season, it can provide opportunities to ameliorate those pressures during the rainy winter. Using a suite of tools ranging from innovative conservation strategies to increased storage opportunities for use during critical flow periods,

the multi-disciplinary team of the Partnership is committed to working with landowners and water users to address complex issues related to salmonid recovery and provide well-developed, long-term solutions for communities and the environment. The long-term goals of the Partnership are to 1) restore a more natural flow regime for spring, summer and fall; 2) increase viability, and ultimately numbers of Coho salmon in the Russian River watershed; 3) increase water reliability for water users in each watershed; 4) develop governance mechanisms to carry out these efforts; and 5) develop a template for others to follow.

To meet the needs of the landowners, the regulatory agencies, and the resources, a science-based approach is being employed to identify the areas that have the greatest opportunity for implementing alternative water management strategies and **work with those landowners to identify and incentivize solutions that improve streamflow.** The first year of the program will be focused on collecting information to lay a scientific foundation to develop streamflow and water use management plans for each watershed and working with the landowners and water users to identify tools and solutions to improve water reliability and flows. Projects identified for implementation in future years of the program will **range from water storage such as residential roof catchment systems to agricultural reservoirs, and agricultural conservation practices that may include alternatives to frost protection and summer irrigation such as micro-sprinklers and fans.**

For more information, please visit [www.cohopartnership.org](http://www.cohopartnership.org) or contact your local Resource Conservation District; for Mark West Creek, contact Sierra Cantor, 569-1448 x107, [scantor@sotoyomercd.org](mailto:scantor@sotoyomercd.org). The Sotoyome RCD will be holding a Mark West Creek watershed planning meeting, which will highlight the Partnership's efforts on December 8, 2009 from 6:00 to 7:30PM. Please visit [www.sotoyomercd.org](http://www.sotoyomercd.org) or contact Sierra Cantor for more information.

## What's Next, Emergency Prep?

by Bill Blake

The Alpine Club/FMWW's Emergency Preparedness Committee's Phone Alert System (PAS) now has over 100 households signed up with 300 different phone numbers. We tested the system in July (at the time, we had 274 numbers) and the reported failure rate of undelivered calls was nine. We estimate that approximately 1/3 of eligible households have taken advantage of this free, very local, emergency alert system. (Additional households are welcome! Go to [markwestwatershed.org](http://markwestwatershed.org) to download a full explanation of the system with sign-up form. We also still need Road Captains for Erland and Alpine Roads.)

The Committee is discussing which projects to pursue next. Based on Committee members' voting, we have prioritized the following potential projects:

1) Alternative Communications (e.g. CBs) for the Key Communicators. This would be for worst-case scenarios, like an earthquake knocking out cell towers. The PAS may not be operational, but at least the KCs could communicate with each other and the Road Captains could visit KCs (by car or by foot) to get updates.

2) Community Emergency Education. Ideas include a simple flyer for Alpine Club meetings that explains the EPC and resources available...to a new resident "welcome kit" that lists resources for newcomers.

3a) (tie) Home Address Signs per Fire Dept's specifications. Either the EPC promotes the current guidelines or we create signs for sale as a small fundraiser.

3b) (tie) Mile Markers on Roads. Due to county jurisdiction, we assume this will be a long-term campaign.

4) A program to aid property owners with Defensible Space (clearing). Any grants available? Another approach: organize groups of volunteers who help create defensible space for one another, one house at a time.

5) A program to aid property owners in making their overgrown Fire Roads useable again.

6) Broadcast Texting capabilities during emergencies, such as Twitter.

7a) (tie) EPC Recruitment, i.e. more Committee members. We hope to recruit by selecting projects (such as this list) that have the most support within the community.

7b) (tie) Emergency Home Kits/Community Supplies. Helping households create their own emergency kits and possibly creating a few key supply centers, e.g. at Alpine Hall, etc.

What do you think? Which projects would you participate in and/or support? **Please tell us by using the enclosed "Feedback Please!" survey.**

## Update On Saddle Mountain Plan

By Kathleen Marsh, SCAPOSD

The Draft Saddle Mountain Preserve Management Plan has been completed and is currently being reviewed by Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (SCAPOSD) staff. The schedule for management planning for the property has been extended due to the discovery of a population of the federally listed Clara Hunt's milkvetch (*Astragalus clarianus*) on the property. Please contact Kathleen Marsh, SCAPOSD ([KMARSH@sonoma-county.org](mailto:KMARSH@sonoma-county.org)) or Katherine Gledhill ([kgledhillconsulting@comcast.net](mailto:kgledhillconsulting@comcast.net)) for more information.

## Special attention for the Creek

by Grif Okie

The Upper Mark West Watershed is receiving long-deserved special attention from conservation organizations and from local, state, and federal agencies that are concerned with clean water and endangered fish populations. **This year, FMWW has worked with the Community Clean Water Institute, Sotoyome RCD, Sonoma County Water Agency, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, among others.** We have continued to monitor the creek for quantity and quality on a monthly basis, counted fish by species, and put in sophisticated water-monitoring equipment for further studies. All this is meant to lead to the reintroduction of steelhead and Coho salmon—if the creek has enough water at cooler temperatures. Stay tuned.

## Attention History Sleuths!

By Linda Sartor

The history committee has recorded three interviews with senior residents of the Upper Mark West Watershed—Jim Hegarty, MaryLou Head, and Sandy Torgeson. We intend to eventually have all of our archives available to the public via a new website.

We have also met with anthropologist Benjamin Benson at the Jesse Peter Museum at SRJC to talk about the cultural resources of the watershed. Ben invited us to bring sample artifacts (projectile points, mortars, pestles, etc.). He can offer a basic assessment of relative dates and styles, as well as other observations to help us better understand the prehistory of our properties. As far as we know, the upper Mark West falls within territory ancestrally associated with Wappo groups.

Please contact Linda Sartor at [lsartor@inreach.com](mailto:lsartor@inreach.com) if you want to join the committee or be interviewed.

# Creek Report

by Richard Baril

Mark West Creek, a source of cold clean water, is one of the significant spawning streams of the Russian River watershed. Considering the water concerns of the county, the value of MWC as a natural resource cannot be overemphasized.

For many years we have documented anadromous fish and other aquatic critters, bobcat, raccoon, gray fox, deer and mountain lion. Bird sighting "life lists" continue to grow, including raptors (red-tail hawk, red shoulder hawk, American Kestrel, black-shouldered kite) plus numerous owls. Winter migrants such as varied thrush, ruby-crowned kinglet and red-breasted sapsuckers continue to delight as well as chestnut-backed chickadee, gray titmouse, western bluebird, downy woodpecker, red-shafted flicker, vireo, goldfinch, pileated woodpecker, and many other avian residents.

We also extensively document the flora (wildflowers, trees and shrubs) of the watershed. Often considered trashy and a fire hazard, chaparral is an undervalued element of this ecosystem. Chaparral is an important habitat for many animals and birds as well as serving to anchor ground, often serpentine or poor soil in which it tends to grow.

Mark West Creek now suffers from having much less water in summer months. Stream levels also now seem to drop much more rapidly after rains, indicating faster run-off and less ground saturation. This likely contributes to the decline of anadromous fish and micro-invertebrates (frogs, salamanders, turtles, etc.) and other aquatic critters that were more common not long ago.

There is still a slight streamflow in the mainstream at summer's end. Before the first October rains, water temperature at 10°C, and conductivity and pH readings are all within the healthy range. A few steelhead fingerlings were spotted in isolated pools of M.W. Creek in late summer, and in Weeks Creek and Alpine Creek, so some adult steelhead successfully spawned this year.

Conclusions: We all need to be aware and limit our impacts on our watershed. Water conservation has a fundamental and immediate benefit, as does limiting traffic, pollution, and sediment release from roads, vineyards, yards, orchards, gardens, etc. Proper septic system operation is a must. Eradication of invasive plant species helps the health of native plants.

The county needs to enforce existing environmental regulations and enact ordinances to protect streams, including restrictions on setbacks, grading and clearing, particularly on hillsides. In my opinion, the county should stop permitting vineyards (monocultures) and wineries in unsuitable areas, which are often contrary to its own General Plan. The Cal. Dept. of Forestry should look closer at the effect of their timber harvest plans in mixed woodlands and "piecemealed" clearings done on multiple small parcels.

# 2009 Accomplishments

by Ray Krauss

FMWW held its 5th Annual Hike & Hoot in 2009 highlighted by four outstanding naturalists: Sonoma State Professor Carolyn Christian, Historical Ecologist Arthur Dawson, Pepperwood's Nature Photographer Greg Damron and local Botanist Sue Smith. One guest summed it up as "good hike, good food, and good people!" This year's one-day Creek/Road Clean-Up turned out to be half a day of cleanup with a delicious lunch—a great success on both fronts.

The RCD's Phase 1 Upper Mark West Watershed Management Plan gave us a wonderful tool for educating the public and our leaders about the area's special attributes. **This was especially useful in our meetings with three of our five County Supervisors.** Efrén Carrillo was most curious about the plan and passed it on to PRMD. Shirlee Zane arranged a visit to the Creek by new Sonoma County Water Agency Assistant General Director Grant Davis and the agency's chief fishery biologist. Our District 1 Supervisor Valerie Brown suggested and encouraged FMWW to become familiar with the General Plan and the Franz Valley Plan and to work with Permit & Resource Mngt Dept. to seek their full implementation.



## 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."

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).

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.



Friends of the Mark West Watershed  
 6985 St. Helena Rd.  
 Santa Rosa, CA 95404  
 www.markwestwatershed.org  
 Tel: 707-539-4330

PRSRRT STD  
 US POSTAGE  
 PAID  
 AD-VANTAGE  
 MARKETING

## For Cornell Winery Application Updates, go to [markwestwatershed.org](http://markwestwatershed.org)



Co-Chair: Linda Sartor, [lsartor@inreach.com](mailto:lsartor@inreach.com)

Co-Chair: Harriet Buckwalter, [hbuck@sonic.net](mailto:hbuck@sonic.net)

Secretary: Josh Tracy, [jdt@wildblue.net](mailto:jdt@wildblue.net)

Treasurer, Webmaster & Newsletter Editor: Bill Blake, [bblake@sonic.net](mailto:bblake@sonic.net)

The views expressed in this newsletter reflect those of the submitting writer(s). They do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the Friends of the Mark West Watershed or its members. The FMWW does not warrant or assume legal liability or responsibility for the accuracy, completeness, or usefulness of any information disclosed. FMWW encourages any and all community members and interested persons to attend our monthly meetings to discuss these watershed issues.

## Feedback Please!

FMWW is only as strong as its community backers make it. And we get support when we work on issues that people truly care about. In an effort to better understand which issues we should be working on, and to further expand our membership and community support, please take a minute to answer the following questions. **1 = Not Important At All 10 = Extremely Important**

- 1) For several years, FMWW has orchestrated a Road/Creek Clean-Up in the Spring. For 2010, we are thinking of expanding the Clean-Up area to include Calistoga Road and parts of Porter Creek/Mark West Road (where it can be done safely!). How important do you consider the clean-up? (1 to 10) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) We need to know if there is enough interest to expand the Clean-Up or not. The Clean-Up is from 9AM to noon on a Spring Saturday. If it worked with your schedule, would you consider volunteering? (Y or N) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) We also use the Clean-Up afternoon to continue our Scotch Broom eradication efforts. (Scotch Broom is an extremely prolific, highly-flammable, non-native plant.) How important do you consider Scotch Broom removal? (1 to 10) \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Development activity, such as timberland conversions to vineyards, can have a significant impact on the creek, particularly in the upper watershed. Recently, FMWW has attempted to monitor watershed development through the use of aerial photos to gather information not otherwise available. Some residents, however, consider this "spying" and inappropriate. How important do you consider aerial monitoring of the watershed? (1 to 10) \_\_\_\_\_

- 5) Each Spring, FMWW hosts a free "Hike & Hoot" day of ecologically-oriented educational hikes, talks, and potluck dinner. Have you attended a Hike & Hoot? (Y or N) \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) What types of experts would you like to see at the next Hike & Hoot? \_\_\_\_\_
- 7) FMWW's History Committee is gathering very local information to share on a new website (see article in this issue). How interested are you in watershed history? (1 to 10) \_\_\_\_\_
- 8) The Alpine Club/FMWW's Emergency Preparedness Committee is prioritizing future projects (see article in this issue). How important do you consider the EPC's work? (1 to 10) \_\_\_\_\_
- 9) Our goal as a watershed organization is to preserve, protect, and restore the creek and watershed as a natural and community resource. Given that goal, what projects do you think FMWW should be working on? \_\_\_\_\_
- 10) Do you have negative impressions of FMWW? What are they? \_\_\_\_\_
- 11) Please take this opportunity to tell us what you think of FMWW and how we can improve our organization: \_\_\_\_\_

FMWW might wish to find out more about your opinions based on your comments. Providing your name and phone number is completely OPTIONAL; they will not be published or shared with any other organization:

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Please use the enclosed envelope to return your survey. (You do not need to make a donation to use the envelope.) Thank you!