

STEWARDS OF THE LAND

NEWSLETTER OF GOLD RIDGE RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

FALL 2008

Protecting our natural resources benefits our economy and environment,
contributing to our quality of life, now and in the future.

VOLUME 8, ISSUE 1

A Boost for Ranchers' Conservation of the Salmon Creek Watershed



A \$610,000 grant was awarded to the Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District by the State Coastal Conservancy (Conservancy) to support the efforts of eight Sonoma County ranchers to protect and restore streams that flow into Salmon Creek. The Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District used the funding in its work with landowners to improve water quality, reduce erosion, and restore habitat along stream banks and wildlife corridors. All of the landowners volunteered to share in the costs and maintain the completed projects for 25 years.

Improvements have been made on all of the properties to reduce erosion and prevent soil from being washed into Salmon Creek, and on most properties fencing was installed to manage livestock in sensitive areas. A variety of engineering techniques and plant-

of stream banks and down-cutting of gullies. Along with the Conservancy, additional contributors included the State Water Resources Control Board, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Community Foundation of Sonoma County, and the Sonoma County Fish and Wildlife Advisory board. From these critical partnerships over \$1,000,000 in funding was obtained with the primary goal of keeping family farms in western Sonoma County both environmentally sustainable and economically viable.

*For more information please contact
Lisa Hulette, Executive Director at
(707) 874-2907 or lisa@goldridgercd.org*

“Unless Someone like you cares a whole awful lot, Nothing is going to get better. It’s not”
- Dr. Seuss, from The Lorax

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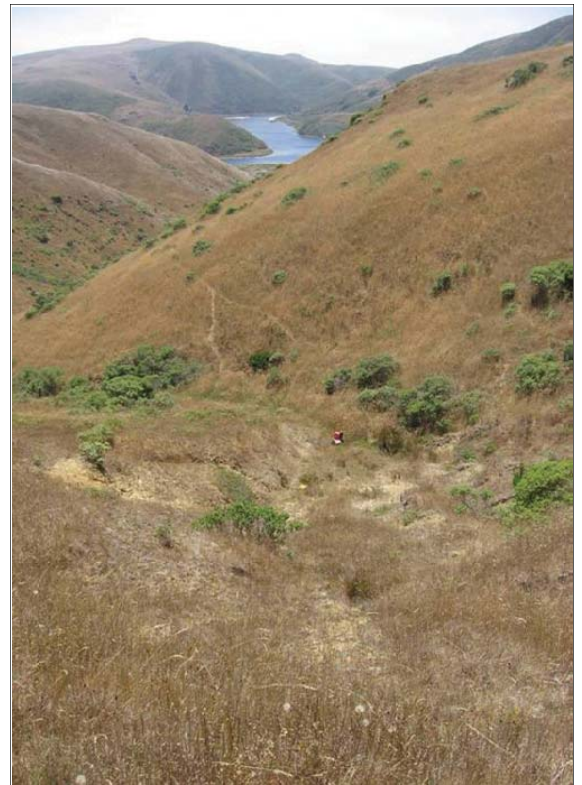
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Estero Americano Sediment Survey

Accelerated erosion since the time of European settlement has resulted in the sedimentation of streams, estuaries and bays along the Marin and Sonoma coasts. Several of the waterbodies in this region, including the Estero Americano, are listed by the State Water Resources Control Board as impaired due to excessive sediment. This influx of fine sediment has drastically altered natural sediment transport regimes and compromised chemical and biological processes in these diverse and sensitive habitats.

In response to this problem, Gold Ridge RCD contracted with the University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) during the summer of 2007 to assist in inventorying sediment sources in the Estero Americano Watershed. The primary goals of the survey were to identify and characterize critical erosion sites and to prioritize future implementation of soil conservation practices.

The survey area covered approximately 4,842 acres of land. In all, 114 sites on 12 ranches and dairies were assessed and characterized. The survey found that 12 percent of sites surveyed contributed approximately 70 percent of deliverable sediment to the estuary. GRRCD currently has funding to restore 5 to 10 of these top erosion sites. We will continue to seek grant funding for the repair of these larger sites and to address smaller erosion sites with the potential to deliver substantial sediment to the Estero and its tributaries.



All agricultural landowners are encouraged to apply for NRCS' EQIP funding in order to provide cost-share for projects funded under this program. Livestock operators with EQIP contracts can receive conservation planning assistance through the NRCS' Petaluma Field Office. Please call (707) 794-1242 x 3 for more information.

CALIFORNIA WILD TURKEYS— RESIDENT NON-NATIVE

California's wild turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo*) now occupy about 18 percent of our state. Originally from the Rio Grande area of Texas, turkeys are a valuable upland game bird and they can be a nuisance to residents who live in Sonoma County. Turkeys can devour gardens, rip out vegetation with their claws which can cause erosion, roost on cars scratching the paint and prey on or displace native wildlife. Wild turkeys move into residential areas and prosper there due to the large amount of resources available (food, shelter, lack of prey). In many communities this is exacerbated by people feeding them. A few stray visitors soon become a flock of permanent residents that have lost their natural fear of humans. Landowners in the Gold Ridge RCD have asked us what can we do about this pest?

As much a nuisance as they are, you cannot just start shooting wild turkeys as they are regulated by the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG). There are two ways to hunt (take) turkeys. One is to get a DFG hunting license for wild turkeys; this is a highly regulated license, Hunting regulations are available from DFG offices and online at www.dfg.ca.gov/regulations. The second way is to obtain a depredation permit awarded to landowners whose property is damaged by turkeys. This permit allows you to take turkeys, and allows people to remove wild turkey from areas outside defined hunting zones.

Prevent problems by discouraging wild turkeys from becoming too comfortable on your property. The following are suggestions from DFG: If turkeys begin feeding under hanging bird feeders, remove the feeders until the turkeys leave the area. If turkeys are causing problems in your yard, install motion-detecting sprinklers. Wild turkeys typically will not enter yards with dogs. To find out more about depredation permits, contact the DFG Wildlife Helpline at 707.944.5531.



Dairy Operators Supported with Funding and Technical Training

On October 8th, over 50 people attended a *Pasture-Based Dairy Farming Workshop* hosted by the Gold Ridge RCD in Valley Ford. This workshop came at an opportune time for local dairy farmers in Sonoma and Marin counties, as forage production in the region reached only about 60% of average in 2008 due to drought. October is also the month when many dairy farmers are applying manure to farm fields. Presenters at the workshop emphasized the recycling of manure as fertilizer for grazing lands, which serves the dual purpose of promoting forage growth and reducing nutrient run-off to watercourses. The workshop was funded as part of *The Estero Americano Watershed Dairy Enhancement Project*, a collaborative planning effort to assist dairy farmers in the region to remain economically viable while at the same time meeting environmental performance standards. The workshop was organized and funded with assistance from Clover-Stornetta Farms, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.C. Cooperative Extension, the State Water Resources Control Board, the Sonoma County Water Agency, and Arolo Company Inc. Topics addressed by workshop presenters included appropriate rates of fertilizer application to pasture and silage fields, equipment options for spreading liquid manure, the economic and environmental values of manure composting, forage seed improvements for coastal rangeland, and grazing practices to improve forage productivity and milk production. The Gold Ridge RCD and its partners will continue to organize and host workshops and seminars on how to keep our food production local.

Contract Patricia Hickey, GRRCD Program Director for more information.

Watershed Planning Underway in the Green Valley Creek Watershed

The Gold Ridge RCD has recently received funding from the State Coastal Conservancy to develop a Watershed Management Plan for Green Valley Creek. The purpose of this plan is to identify priority streambank and upland restoration sites and to develop a systematic strategy to enhance habitat for native coho salmon and steelhead trout. Green Valley Creek is one of one of only five remaining streams in the Russian River Watershed where wild populations of coho salmon are known to exist. Staff at Gold Ridge RCD will be contacting landowners in the watershed to ask for their assistance with this important project. Participation in this process is completely voluntary and provides landowners an opportunity to be proactive in addressing watershed concerns.

Maintaining a healthy watershed will benefit both people and wildlife alike by providing a healthier landscape for all to enjoy. A public meeting will be held in the Green Valley Creek Watershed in November or December to provide more specific information. The RCD will also be hosting a series of water conservation workshops in the area in the months to come.

If you are interested in potentially participating or you would like notification about the winter meeting or upcoming Green Valley workshops, please contact Diana Hines, RCD Fisheries Biologist, at Diana@goldridgercd.org

CONTACT INFORMATION

Gold Ridge RCD

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RCD Website:
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NRCS Sonoma-Marin Office

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Petaluma, CA 94954
Phone: 707-794-1242 ext.3

NRCS Russian River Office

405 South Orchard Ave
Ukiah, CA 95482
Phone: 707-468-9223 ext.3

Gold Ridge RCD Welcomes Diana Hines, Biologist, to Our Staff

Diana Hines is a fisheries biologist recently hired by the Gold Ridge RCD. After graduating from Sonoma State University with a degree in Biology she spent the next ten years working in fisheries related jobs for the timber industry, NOAA Fisheries and Fish and Game. She has extensive experience conducting surveys for salmonids and assessing their habitat needs, particularly in tributaries of the Russian River watershed. She is excited to be employed at Gold ridge RCD where she can apply her knowledge of salmonid and watershed issues to helping maintain biodiversity in the local agricultural community.

You can contact Diana Hines at (707) 874-2907 or Diana@goldridgercd.org



Photo by Steve Killey



Gold Ridge Hires New Conservation Planner

Noelle Johnson brings to the RCD a diverse set of experiences combining sustainable agriculture and natural resource conservation. Growing up in rural Illinois, she developed an early interest in food production systems and an intimate connection with the landscape, leading her to receive a B.S. in International Nutrition from UW-Madison, and later an M.S. in International Agricultural Development from UC-Davis. She began her professional career overseas, first as a Peace Corps Volunteer in West Africa, then a graduate researcher in Thailand, and eventually as a coordinator of sustainable agriculture projects in Rwanda. The challenges she witnessed in these countries inspired her to explore ecological restoration work, and she returned to California in 2004 to manage restoration projects for Circuit Rider Productions. She is excited to build upon these experiences and contribute to the RCDs efforts to incorporate biodiversity conservation into working landscapes.

“To Know that one life has breathed easier because you have lived, that is to have succeeded.”

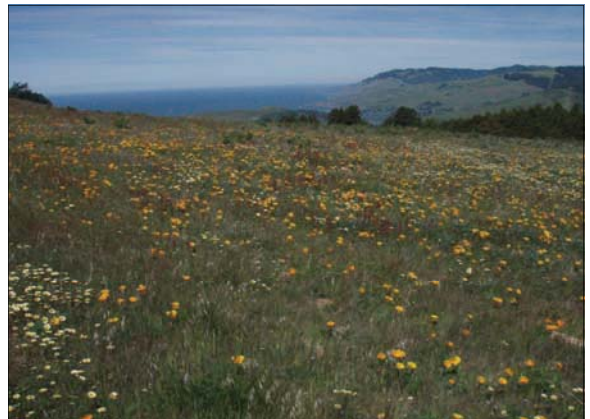
-Ralph Waldo Emerson

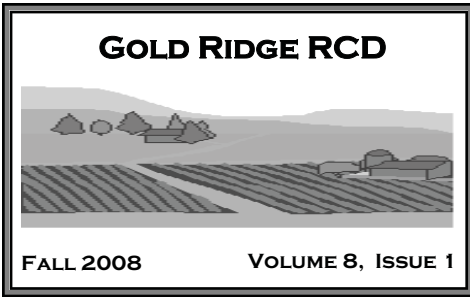
You can contact Noelle at Noelle@goldridgercd.org

A New Partnership with the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

Gold Ridge RCD is currently organizing the property’s multiple stakeholders for preliminary discussions of its management considerations, while bringing together a technical consultant group to address issues regarding wildlife, natural and cultural resource protection, public access, and open grassland conservation. Contributors to this process potentially include SCAPOSD, Landpaths, the Coastal Conservancy, the Coastal Prairie Workgroup, State Parks, and many others. Of special focus is the property’s historical significance, as it has been grazed for generations by a local ranching family (families), and its value as a working landscape plays an integral role in preserving both the rural character of western Sonoma County and the disappearing coastal grasslands that require careful management. The RCDs lead role in the development of the plan provides the organization with a unique opportunity to build new partnerships within the arena of coastal land management and to work towards the cooperative preservation of this unique property.

The Gold Ridge RCD is working in partnership with the Sonoma County Agricultural





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RCD Mission and Vision:

The mission of the Gold Ridge RCD is to assist landowners in addressing concerns by maintaining a presence in natural resource conservation work in all watersheds within the District. The GRRCD can provide a conduit for landowners through whom local, state, and federal monies can be obtained to support and implement restoration programs and practices. The Vision of our District is to ensure the continuation of strong, productive, and viable agricultural endeavors in Western Sonoma County by improving soil and water quality in order to provide an economically and ecologically viable and healthy agricultural community.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS:

Third Thursday of each month at 6:00 pm

14775 'B' Third St
Occidental, CA 95465

MEETINGS ARE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

THE GRRCD STAFF

- Lisa Hulette**
Executive Director
- Joe Pozzi**
District Manager
- Patricia Hickey**
Program Director
- Brittany Heck**
Project Manager
- Diana Hines**
Fisheries Biologist
- Noelle Johnson**
Conservation Planner
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- Kristan Flynn**
Range Management Specialist
- Jennifer Gabor**
Soil Conservationist
- Brooke Cole**
Agricultural Engineer
- Phong Ly**
Soil Conservationist Intern

Newsletter support is provided by the USDA Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), California State Coastal Conservancy, California Department of Fish and Game, the State Water Resources Control Board and locally by the Sonoma County Water Agency.