

STEWARDS OF THE LAND

NEWSLETTER OF GOLD RIDGE RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

SUMMER 2009

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

VOLUME 9, ISSUE 1

A Dutch Bill Creek Dam Removal — *the Beginning of a New Era for Camp Meeker*



The Camp Meeker Dam on Dutch Bill Creek in western Sonoma County was built in the 1950s to create a seasonal swimming hole and beach area, but now the dam is identified as one of the worst barriers to fish passage in the Russian River Watershed. Another is a culvert at Market Street in nearby Occidental.

With federal, state and local funding, the Gold Ridge RCD and the Camp Meeker Recreation and Park District will remove the dam and reconfigure the culvert to restore free passage for salmon and steelhead. In place of the dam, a prefabricated 80-foot steel pedestrian bridge will be installed, improving public access across the creek. As part of this project, stream banks will be stabilized and revegetated, and a more natural meander and grade change will be created. These improvements will help return the natural transport of gravel from upstream and provide better fish habitat.

Those are the nuts and bolts of the project, but for those who have fond memories of learning to swim in the swimming hole above the dam, or have watched patiently as the blackberry has taken over the stream corridor and sediment has quickly filled in the channel, it is so much more. The removal of the dam has evoked a wide range of emotions, but one thing is certain—everyone involved in the project wants to see a beautiful and revitalized area below the Post Office in order to have a safe, serene place to have picnics, family gatherings and community events once again. The RCD and the CMR&PD are committed to the goal of a beautiful gathering place.

Construction is going to start August 15, 2009—and initially its going to be messy, it's going to be ugly, but in the end it's going to be a place that Camp Meeker will be proud of. I am going to post weekly updates on the Gold Ridge

Website: www.goldridgercd.org. Right now, I want to officially thank all the people that have walked before me in order to make this project happen (and if I have left anyone out, please let me know!):

Brock Dolman, Amy Lemmer, Tara Cantua, Kat Harrison, Karen Vogel, David Berman, the Dutch Bill Creek Watershed Group, the Camp Meeker Recreation and Park District Board, Lori Ford, Gary Helfrich, Aimee Crawford, Fred Meyer, Cathy Anderson, Questa Engineering, Streamline Engineering, Prunuske Chatham, Inc., and all the residents, past and present, of Camp Meeker.

Funding and Support Agencies include:

Coastal Conservancy, CA Department of Fish and Game, NOAA Fisheries, the County of Sonoma (in particular 5th District Supervisor Efren Carrillo), the National Association of Counties, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Sonoma County Water Agency.

If you have any questions or comments, I would love to talk to you.

Lisa Hulette, Executive Director, Gold Ridge RCD
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Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world;
indeed, it's the only thing that ever has. - *Margaret Mead*

Removing Gorse

Gorse, or Irish Wind as some locals call it, has become a serious issue on coastal ranches. Gorse can take over grasslands and can be seemingly impossible to get rid of. Through funding from the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Gold Ridge RCD has been working with a landowner near Bodega for the past year to remove gorse and restore the property back to grazing land.

Two years ago the Gold Ridge RCD received a flier about a piece of equipment that could quickly and efficiently grind gorse stands into mulch. However, this “Masticator” was located in Oregon and would be too expensive to drive down to Bodega. Luckily enough a few months later we heard that a masticator operator had moved into Pt. Reyes Station. Since Fall of last year we have hired the masticator to demolish nearly 20 acres of Gorse.

Although the thick stands of gorse are ground near to soil level, this bush will send up shoots from the roots long after it has been mulched. The next phase of our project is to treat the shoots and seedlings with an herbicide that kills the re-growth and contains a pre-emergent that prevents the sprouting of more seeds.

Many landowners have called the Gold Ridge RCD asking for assistance in removing this dreadful weed. At this time there is no funding to help cost-share for the expense of the masticator or any herbicide application. We will be holding a workshop in late summer to talk about the removal of gorse and what treatments we have found to be most economical and effective. There will be an herbicide specialist, agricultural professionals who have worked to remove gorse, and landowners to testify how they are succeeding in reducing this weed.

Plant Biology and Description

Gorse is a weed of concern in Marin and Sonoma Counties. It is a spiny evergreen shrub with bright yellow pea-like flowers. In California, it typically grows 3-6 feet tall and is common on infertile soils and disturbed areas, especially in formerly cultivated fields and over-grazed pastures. It also has the ability to penetrate undisturbed sites in open areas. Originally from Western Europe, gorse was introduced to California about 100 years ago and has spread through California’s coastal and Cascade/Sierra Nevada foothill regions. It ranges from sea level to 1,300 feet in elevation; however it is limited to relatively moist, lower elevation areas.

For more information contact Brittany Heck,
Project Manager at 707-874-2907 or
Brittany@goldridgercd.org



Above: Masticator grinding through a thicket of Gorse in the Estero Americano

Why is gorse a problem?

Gorse grows outward from the center, forming very dense stands. This growth form prevents desirable plants from taking hold and obstructs wildlife movement. Plant oils and concentrated dead material at the center of the plant make gorse highly flammable. Its seeds are known to be viable for up to 30 years (some have suggested that gorse seed is viable up to 100 years) and the vegetation can re-sprout if damaged.

Gold Ridge RCD Assumes Greater Role in Area Weed Management



Top Photo: Brittany Heck and Noelle Johnson (Gold Ridge RCD) conducting grassland monitoring;

Middle: Purple starthistle, *Centaurea calcitrapa*, (photo by C. Kanard, 2003);

Lower: Purple Velvet Grass. *Holcus lanatus*

Gold Ridge RCD Conservation Planner Noelle Johnson has taken on the role of Rapid Response Coordinator for the Marin-Sonoma Weed Management Area (MSWMA).

WMAs are local organizations that bring together landowners and managers (private, city, county, State, and Federal) within a geographical area to coordinate efforts and expertise against common invasive weed species.

The Marin-Sonoma WMA current consists of several dozen partner organizations, including park services, conservation nonprofits, agricultural commissioners' offices, state government agencies, municipal water districts, private land trusts, RCDs, Caltrans, citizen groups, and others.

The MSWMA's Rapid Response Program was created under a grant from the California Department of Food and Agriculture to identify and remove incipient populations of harmful invasive plants before they can grow into large and costly control projects, a "stitch-in-time" approach which proactively prevents the damage caused by these invaders; educates citizens regarding natural resource stewardship; and dramatically eliminates the need for the planning, labor, and effort to control large established invasive plant populations. The project coordinates with the emerging Bay Area Early Detection Network (BAEDN), a partnership of regional land managers and invasive species experts coordinating Early Detection of harmful invasive plants across the nine county Bay Area, to prioritize infestations for removal. Additional funding for the program was provided by the local Milo Baker Chapter of the California Native Plant Society. As Rapid Response Coordinator, Noelle will work with MSWMA partners and the public to ensure that the highest priority targets are treated, and will track treatments to ensure eradication.

To learn more about MSWMA, the Rapid Response Program, and how to report infestations, please visit the MSMWA website at:

<http://marinsonomaweedmanagement.org>

or contact Noelle directly at Noelle@goldridgercd.org.

Coho Salmon in Salmon Creek !!

Coho salmon have been absent from Salmon Creek since the early 1990's. As part of the California Department of Fish and Game's (CDFG) Coho Broodstock Program, DFG staff along with local residents and members of the Salmon Creek Watershed Council planted 310 adult Coho salmon into Salmon Creek, just upstream of the estuary, in December 2008.

Spawning surveys conducted by Gold Ridge RCD and other biologists in the winter of 2009 found four live adult coho salmon and 16 redds (salmon nests) indicating there was some successful spawning activity in the watershed. A survey this June found roughly 100 juvenile coho salmon and over 300 steelhead juveniles in Fay Creek, tributary to Salmon Creek, indicating that indeed there was successful spawning and survival of the both juvenile Coho and steelhead. If these Coho juveniles survive to make it to the ocean they will be expected to return to the Salmon Creek Watershed the winter of 2012.

Gold Ridge RCD, in collaboration with local biologist Michael Fawcett and Jennifer Michaud (PCI), has submitted a proposal to CDFG to obtain grant funding in order to monitor the success of these fish. Continued monitoring will provide information about whether or not salmon are present and where they are distributed throughout the watershed.



The monitoring program, if approved, will begin the summer of 2010 with juvenile snorkeling surveys to determine presence and distribution of juveniles throughout the mainstem and tributaries of Salmon Creek. With landowner permission, we are hoping to cover most of the potential habitat in the watershed. It is our hope that with the cooperation of all, Salmon Creek can live up to its name and once again have a healthy and viable population of coho salmon.

According to NOAA Fisheries Biologist, Joe Pecharich, "[It is] very exciting to see coho salmon where they haven't been since 1996 or longer."

For more information, please contact Diana Hines, RCD Biologist at diana@goldridgercd.org

CONTACT INFORMATION

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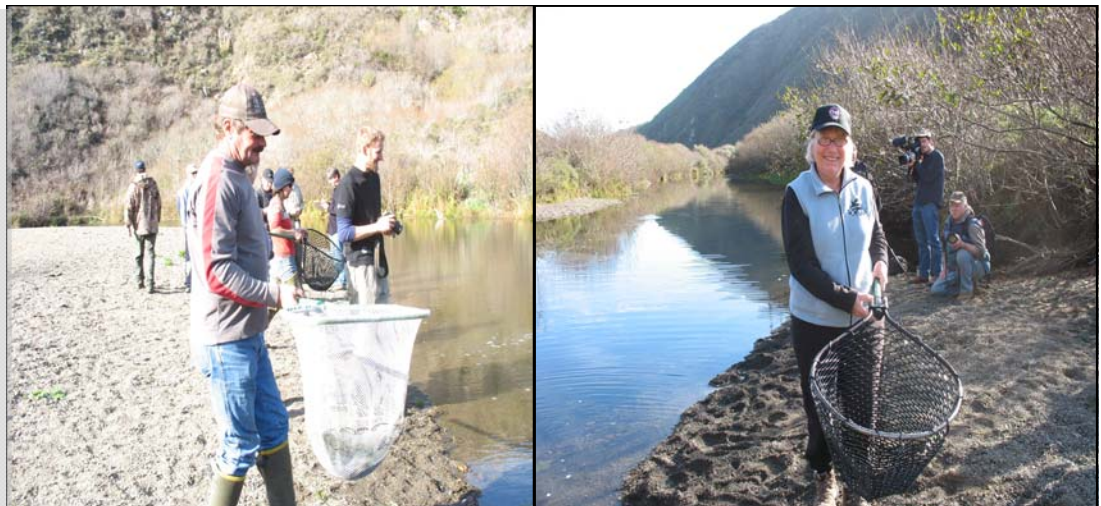
RCD Website:
www.goldridgercd.org

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1301 Redwood Way, Ste 170
 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



Above Right Top: Coho "Young of the Year" in Fay Creek, June 30, 2009
 (Photo by J. Pecharich, NOAA Fisheries)

Above: Salmon Creek Landowners Ann Cassidy (New Gold Ridge RCD Director) and Dennis Gilardi (Rancher) participating in 12/2008 Release of Coho Salmon into Salmon Creek

Laguna de Santa Rosa TMDL (Too Many Darn Lawyers??)

In the fall of 2008, Western United Dairymen (WUD), North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (NCRWQCB) staff, the Gold Ridge and Sotoyome Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs), and local dairy operators met to discuss future regulatory requirements that may be imposed on landowners in the Laguna de Santa Rosa Watershed. The federal Clean Water Act requires EPA and the local Regional Water Boards to develop plans with goals and pollution control targets for improving water quality in watersheds where minimum water quality standards are not met. This is accomplished by establishing limits known as Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) for each pollutant exceeding the standards. TMDLs set levels for pollutants that allow water bodies to achieve their beneficial uses. During this fall 2008 meeting, NCRWQCB staff explained the pollutants of concern for the Laguna were both nutrients (phosphorous and nitrogen) and sediment. Regional Water Board staff also described the monitoring program that will be used in order to ascertain how these “limits” for the pollutants will be reached. Obviously, of primary concern for the dairy operators was “Are the dairies going to be blamed for all the pollution in the Laguna?” The short answer to the question is: *No, but they will still need to prevent runoff from manure and other sources of nutrients into the waterways of the Laguna.* While the dairies are one potential source of nutrients going into the watershed, the NCRWQCB recognizes that the primary impacts are probably coming from urban runoff.

Dairies have been a part of the Sonoma County landscape for over 100 years. Sonoma County was one of the first locations in the state to have domesticated cattle to produce cheese and butter, mainly to sell to San Francisco’s crowd. The lush rolling hills and climate of Sonoma County has made it one of the best places to produce milk in the State. Today’s dairies look a little different but are still a big part of Sonoma County’s appeal.

New Board Members Join Our RCD family— Ann Cassidy and Martin Albini

Ann Cassidy joined the Gold Ridge RCD Board of Directors in the summer of 2008 as an Associate Director, and became a full Director this past December. A Marin native, she and her husband Alastair have lived in the town of Bodega for the past sixteen years. Concerned about her watershed’s widely recognized water issues, Ann serves as a member of the Salmon Creek Watershed Council, and practices sustainable living at home, where they have installed water catchment and solar electric systems. Ann is an avid horse owner and rider, and strong supporter of the Bay Area Barns & Trails program.

Photo Above: Paul Bianchi, Estero Americano Dairyman, with new fertigation equipment purchased with funding assistance by RCD

Martin Albini joined the Gold Ridge RCD as a new director in December, and brings with him a lifetime of experience in west county ranching traditions. The Albini family purchased their ranch in the Estero Americano Watershed in the 1920s, and Martin continues to ranch sheep and cattle there. Martin has strong connections to the area’s history of resource conservation efforts, as his father served as director on the Marin RCD board for many years, and lifelong ties to the Valley Ford community, a central focus of Gold Ridge’s efforts.

Please help us welcome Ann & Martin!

Dairy Facts (For the Good of the People, NRCS, July 2007)

In 1 day, one cow produces 5.4 gallons of milk or 2 pounds of butter or 4.6 pounds of cheese.

A typical dairy cow weighs 1,400 pounds and produces more than 46 pounds of milk per day. A cow converts roughage like hay and grains not used by people into high energy foods.

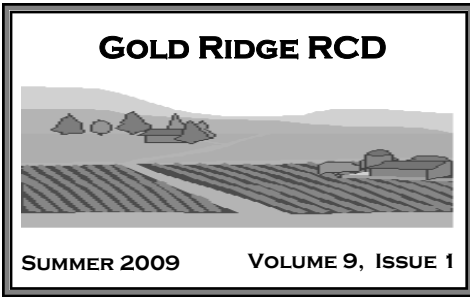
In 1 day, one cow consumes 35 gallons of water, 20 pounds of grain, and 35 pounds of hay and silage.

Today, 99 percent of farms in the United States are owned by individuals, family partnerships, or corporations with fewer than 10 stockholders

(Non-family coporations = 1%, Family Coporations = 3%, Family partnerships = 6% and Individuals = 90%).

Agriculture is the nation’s largest employer. More than 23.8 million people work in some phase of agriculture – from growing food and fiber to selling it





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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

Brittany Heck
Project Manager

Diana Hines
Biologist

Noelle Johnson
Conservation Planner

Nick Crump
Field Technician

Alex Pozzi
Office Technician

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Don Peterson

Ann Cassidy

Martin Albini

Joe Dutton

Barry Fisher

THE NRCS STAFF

Charlette Epifanio
District Conservationist

Chester Gin
Soil Conservation Tech

Jessica Sternfels
Soil Conservationist

Kristan Flynn
Range Management Specialist

Jennifer Gabor
Soil Conservationist

Brooke Cole
Agricultural Engineer

Phuong Ly
Soil Conservationist Intern

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