



Salmon Protection And Watershed Network

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SPAWN and the VALLEY'S SALMON ENHANCEMENT PLAN:

SEPARATING FACT FROM FICTION

WHAT IS THE SALMON ENHANCEMENT PLAN?

In early 2007, Marin County hired two highly qualified scientific consulting firms (Stillwater Sciences and Prunuske Chatham, Inc) to review the condition of federal and State-listed endangered coho salmon in the San Geronimo Valley and make recommendations on improving habitat for this endangered species.

The consultants' "Existing Conditions Report (ECR)" was completed in 2008; their current 2009 draft "Salmon Enhancement Plan (SEP)" summarizes the scientific data and makes recommendations for voluntary actions and regulatory changes to protect and restore critical habitat for these endangered salmon. Contrary to rumor, SPAWN is not the author of the ECR or SEP. The public, including SPAWN and its members, have been invited to comment on this draft report.

Before these studies began, the County created a committee composed of scientists and local homeowners to provide advance guidance to inform the upcoming study. This committee is comprised of one large and one small San Geronimo Valley landowner, as well as SPAWN and various government agency representatives, including the California Department of Fish & Game, the National Marine Fisheries Service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the State Water Board. The County has also held three public meetings at the Woodacre Improvement Club to update the community and discuss the process before and during the study.

WHY DID THE SEP HAVE TO HAPPEN?

Our coho salmon have been listed under the federal and State Endangered Species Act and the County has a legal responsibility to protect them and their habitat.

WHAT DOES THE SEP DO?

The SEP informs County decision-makers and the public regarding the current state of salmon and habitat conditions specifically in the San Geronimo Valley. It makes recommendations for protecting and improving habitat through a combination of voluntary incentives and regulatory changes that could be implemented through public County rule-making. The plan is not an ordinance and has no force of law. It is a series of science-based recommendations that County Supervisors can implement, modify, ignore or reject. The study, conducted by independent scientific review of the best available scientific information available, does confirm many of the points SPAWN has raised for years:

- The Lagunitas population of coho is critically endangered and is teetering on the verge of extinction.
- Protecting and recovering our local population of coho salmon is crucial to the success of recovery efforts for the species throughout Central California.
- Watershed habitat is a critical component of their life-history and if we make no changes to the current system of land management, Lagunitas coho will probably become extinct fairly soon.

DID SPAWN WRITE THIS PLAN?

No, we are not the authors of the ECR or SEP.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The public, including SPAWN, has a chance to comment on the plan. These comments will be considered by the County as the final plan is completed over the next several weeks. County Supervisors will then consider what steps to take next. These may include innovative funding strategies to help landowners make habitat improvements, as well as modifications to current ordinances or new ordinances to improve the coho salmon's chance of survival. Any changes in County ordinances will be subject to the normal public process as required by law, including noticed public hearings and opportunity for public comment.

DOES THE SEP RECOMMEND MANDATORY REMOVAL OF CURRENT PERMITTED HOUSES OR LONG-STANDING UNPERMITTED STRUCTURES OR GARDENS?

No. If someone has told you this they are either sorely misinformed or lying. We have never advocated this, and it has never been our intention.

We do support a program to implement a voluntary legalization process for unpermitted structures. A number of towns and cities across Marin are far ahead of us in this respect.

WHY DOES THE SEP ADDRESS SEPTIC SYSTEMS?

Failed or failing septic systems in the SGV is a long-term problem that has more to do with public health than salmon, and is an issue the County has been looking for ways to deal with for many years before the SEP was conceived. Results of a recent Tomales Bay Watershed Council water-quality monitoring effort indicates that the Valley is the #1 polluted site for fecal coliforms in the Tomales Bay Watershed (which includes Inverness, Point Reyes, the Valley area, etc). The County has an legal obligation to regulate septic discharges into the environment to protect human health. If you live on a creek and come into contact with your creek water or you go swimming in the creek at the Inkwells, Swimming Hole Bridge and other sites in S.P. Taylor State Park, you should be concerned.

SPAWN recognizes that no landowner wants to have a leaking septic but that costs are extremely high for the average landowner to repair/replace a system. SPAWN is urging the County to take steps to help landowners maintain and repair septic systems in a cost effective and innovative manner. We also support innovative programs such as the anonymous "Septic Matters" program which helped landowners assess the health of their system and implement behavioral changes which avoided costly replacements.

There is also an emerging science that suggests that it is likely that household wastewater impacts salmon health through the leaching of pharmaceuticals and other chemicals which don't outright kill salmon but impair their quality of life and ability to migrate, reproduce and escape predators. Thus, this issue is included in the SEP.

WHY IS THE SAN GERONIMO VALLEY SO IMPORTANT FOR COHO SALMON?

The Valley is critically important to the survival of Lagunitas coho. The 9 sq. mi. area of the San Geronimo Valley (less than 9% of the total Lagunitas Creek Watershed land area) currently functions as upwards of 50% of spawning habitat and 40% of juvenile nursery habitat for Lagunitas coho salmon.

The Lagunitas coho population as a whole makes up 10-20% of the State's total wild coho salmon population, and is arguably, the most important watershed left for coho salmon in the State of California. Nonetheless, this population has already seen a 90% reduction in population since the early 1900s due to dams, logging, water diversions, and loss of floodplains and riparian areas. The coho here are considered the last remaining hope for recovery of wild populations throughout Central California.

DO PROTECTIONS REDUCE PROPERTY VALUES?

Some people believe the recommendations in the SEP, if implemented, will reduce property values. This attitude overlooks the important fact that the recommendations seek to help landowners reduce the very threats that absolutely reduce property values including:

- Flooding that wreak havoc on existing homes;
- Failing creekbanks that threaten structures and wash away yards;
- Creeks that smell from sewer water

West Marin and the San Geronimo Valley are beautiful areas that most people from across the Bay Area only dream of inhabiting; that's why real-estate values are high. People tend to forget that the beauty and serenity and precious ecology that characterizes this area is the direct result of hard-won efforts to protect our ridgelines, protect and restore our waterways and Bay, and reduce environmental degradation. Setting aside the recent widespread economic downturn, for which salmon cannot be held to blame, the presence of the wild salmon and the conditions that support them don't automatically decrease property values -- it often actually increase values

This plan seeks to provide economic assistance to landowners to prevent and reverse these assaults to property values.

Over the past 2 years, home sale prices in the SGV have closely mirrored those throughout Marin, suggesting neither the moratorium nor the fear of new regulations has not impacted home sale-prices.

HOW DOES SPAWN FEEL ABOUT THE SEP?

SPAWN supports a strong restoration plan. We are supporting a balance between landowners and those of coho salmon. Our vision is one of a community that coexists in a healthy relationship with streams and with the coho. Therefore, we hope that our Supervisors will create both strong incentive programs for landowners to make much-needed voluntary improvements on their properties, as well as improve rules to guide new development along creekside parcels to prevent further habitat degradation. This will ensure that coho salmon can continue to exist in the San Geronimo Valley and throughout Central California, as they have done for eons.

We believe that retrofit and redevelopment of existing structures can occur in a creek-friendly manner, and we hope that the County will develop incentives and ordinances that allow and guide landowners to do so. We also hope that new incentives can reduce runoff from roofs and driveways along creeks that damage salmon habitat and cause flooding of downstream homes, and that rules will be implemented for new development that encourage the best available

practices to prevent runoff. Such Low Impact Design practices are already in place in locales such as Davis, California and Portland, Oregon. These common-sense practices and techniques protect the integrity of the environment on which we all depend.

We are also seeking stronger protections for creekside trees and forests. The current tree ordinance conflicts with best-management practices for sustaining a healthy forest ecosystem that protects salmon and promotes biodiversity. These creek buffers are critical and help salmon and landowners by filtering runoff, providing critical shade and shelter, preventing soil erosion and subsequent property loss and generally help keep streams healthy.

Voluntary actions are commendable and should always be encouraged, but they do need to be balanced with sensible regulation.

MORE ABOUT WHAT SPAWN *REALLY* DOES

SPAWN's mission is to protect and restore coho salmon and the health of the Lagunitas watershed for all wildlife and its human residents. We focus on coho salmon because they are an environmental "indicator species" that reflects the biological health of our lands and the streams. Coho salmon are our watershed's equivalent of the "canary in the coal mine." Our local coho represent one of the last remaining strongholds for wild coho salmon in Central California and we feel a special responsibility as local residents to help protect and restore this precious biological resource.

SPAWN came together as a volunteer effort in the Valley in 1997; until 2008 we had only one full-time staff person. Now we have two full-time staff, 6-8 high school and college-level and graduate interns each year, and hundreds of dedicated volunteers from the Valley and across the Bay Area who assist with all our weekly restoration and monitoring projects. We do a lot with very few resources!

As many landowners can attest, SPAWN has worked collaboratively with residents, other organizations, and the school in the Valley to restore riparian areas by removing invasive species and planting native species. We grow native plants which we have been providing free of charge to Valley residents. We have helped design and fund the repair of private dirt roads in the Valley in partnership with landowners. We have helped design and fund streambank repairs for private landowners. We rescue fish from drying streams and relocate them to safer areas. We teach in local schools, including the Lagunitas School. We help fund green projects at the Lagunitas School such as the rainwater harvesting projects for the organic garden project.

SPAWN leads creek cleanups to remove trash from local streams. We monitor the salmon's seaward migration and monitor spawning populations. We work with the Lagunitas School District in the classroom and on campus "green" projects. We help landowners with streambank repair designs and with grant-writing for their projects. We train creek naturalists and lead public field tours. We implement rainwater harvesting projects; and test water quality. We review County policies and development projects. We are not "fish police" patrolling the neighborhoods, and when neighbors see a creek problem we are usually the first to get a call asking for help and we do our best to help when asked.

DO YOU WANT MORE INFORMATION ON SPAWN'S OBJECTIVES?

Please contact us at 663-8590 x103 or ValleyCreeks@SPAWNusa.org. Our website is <http://www.SPAWNusa.org>.