

Developing a Watershed Action Plan for Carpinteria Creek

By Tom Lockhart, Cachuma Resource Conservation District

Cachuma Resource Conservation District (CRCD) is a local special district that was set up in the dust-bowl days to provide soil erosion control assistance to farmers and ranchers. The federal government created the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) at the same time to act as the technical staff for CRCD. This cooperative relationship set-up in a similar fashion in most counties of the United States and though the agency names and tools were different back then, the relationships and methods remain the same.

Erosion is related to water run-off and water runs from the ridgeline down to the ocean. To control erosion, the entire watershed must be addressed and therefore working at a watershed level is not new to CRCD. Since creation CRCD has responded to landowners requests and concerns from a stance of addressing water entering and water leaving their properties. What is new to CRCD is cooperating with all of the different stakeholders or interested parties. In Carpinteria the CRCD is working with the Carpinteria Creek Watershed Coalition, which is a voluntary consortium of community members and agency staff with the common goal of improving the aesthetics and environmental conditions of Carpinteria Creek.

CRCD is conducting an assessment of the creek for the coalition, funded by the California Department of Fish and Game. What that means so far is that we are contacting all of the landowners along the creek and identifying their concerns related to the stability of the streambanks, riparian vegetation, sediment and nutrient additions deposition into the creek. With the landowners permission we will then conduct stream surveys to estimate the quality of habitat for fish. Carpinteria Creek is excellent habitat for steelhead trout, which is an endangered species. This assessment will identify potential improvement projects in the creek and along the streambanks that will improve steelhead habitat. When it is complete, the assessment will serve as a workplan that can be used to prioritize projects. Prioritization will be related to the amount of environmental benefit, the expense both in dollars and permitting requirements, and the landowners willingness to allow the work to be done. The fact that Carpinteria Creek is endangered species habitat can be a funding mechanism to pay for improvements that benefit the watershed.

We are attempting to conduct this project in a “grassroots” fashion as opposed to “from the top-down”. This means that community support and involvement is critical to the success of the watershed assessment, and the goals of the Carpinteria Creek Watershed Coalition. If you would like to be involved in this assessment or if you want to know more about Cachuma RCD, please call Tom Lockhart at (805) 928-9269 ext. 110.