

Progress Made on the Watershed Plan for Carpinteria Creek
By Tom Lockhart, Cachuma Resource Conservation District

Cachuma Resource Conservation District (CRCD) is developing a Watershed Action Plan for Carpinteria Creek. The plan is sponsored by 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. As part of the preliminary work for plan development, CRCD is conducting an assessment of the creek. With funding from the California Department of Fish and Game, we are identifying concerns related to the stability of the streambanks, riparian vegetation, sediment and nutrient additions to the creek, and conducting stream surveys to estimate the quality of habitat for fish. This assessment will identify potential projects in the creek and along the streambanks that will improve steelhead habitat. The assessment will provide a basis for prioritizing projects related to the amount of environmental benefit, the expense both in dollars and permitting requirements, and the landowner's willingness to allow the work to be done.

I would like to herald the fact that THERE ARE FISH IN CARPINTERIA CREEK. Fish in the lower reaches are difficult to see because of algal growth. Fish in the middle reaches are present only when there is water; because water flows only during a couple of months each year, most of these fish are not steelhead. Fish in the upper stream reaches are easy to see, plentiful and are at least related to steelhead. They are rainbow trout, which would become steelhead trout if they spent time in the ocean.

In the upper reaches of Carpinteria and Gobernador Creeks before their confluence, there is plenty of pristine habitat and a year-round supply of fresh water. Carpinteria Creek is a beautiful mountainous stream, with boulders the size of cars and sycamore trees tall and shady. Just add cool clear water and great fish habitat is there. Fish like to be able to hide, but they also must have oxygen to breath, and water temperatures in the 50s are the best.

Moving down the creek, the effects of civilization begin to show at the debris basins on both creeks. These debris basin are dams that were built to reduce the dangers of flooding, primarily after fires, by retaining logs, trash and sediment while allowing water to pass on down to the ocean. Physical habitat, such as boulders and fallen trees still exist, but silt often covers the rocks and the dense vegetative canopy, which keeps the water cool, becomes more intermittent. Human development can be seen in the creek in the form of several concrete low-water crossings and stretches of denuded banks, which can lead to bank failure. Carpinteria and Gobernador Creeks come together just above the bridge across Highway 192. From this confluence down to around the 8th Street bridge there are two concrete crossings, the channel is fairly straight, and invasive weed species begin to dominate the creek banks. Surface flowing water is present here only two or three months each year.

From the 8th Street bridge downstream to 300 yards below the pedestrian bridge at 6th Street, water is present throughout the year. Usually some water is better than no water, unless water quality is very low. If pollutants exist in the water and if algae is consuming

all of the oxygen in the water, then it is not healthy for fish. The quality of water in the downstream reach of Carpinteria Creek can decrease within a few weeks of a storm event. *Arundo donax*, which is an invasive, non-native, bamboo-type grass, is abundant on both sides of the channel, and German and English ivy are consuming the stream banks and trees in many places. Below the downstream edge of the Singing Springs Condominiums the creek becomes influenced by the salt water in the estuary and the steelhead trout are lured to the ocean.

Plenty of good fish habitat exists in the upper reaches of Carpinteria Creek. If a few low water crossings can be retrofitted or replaced by bridges, and if it rains enough to for water to flow, then the lower and middle reaches will provide adequate passage to the excellent habitat in the upper reaches. Active efforts by the Carpinteria Creek Watershed Coalition will likely result in four steelhead barriers being removed during the next three years. Restoring long-term habitat to the lower and middle reaches is more related to water being present rather than barriers.

Local groups remove trash and debris from the creek, remove invasive weeds, replant native plants for bank stabilization and work on habitat restoration. Donations of advice, labor and money could be available for appropriate restoration projects. If there are fish passage barriers, failing banks or invasive weeds that you would like to do something about in Carpinteria or Gobernador creeks, please contact Tom Lockhart, at Cachuma Resource Conservation District, (805) 928-9269 extension 110.

Captions:

Upstream_reach3.jpg: The upper reaches of Carpinteria Creek provide good steelhead habitat, with large pools and robust canopy cover to keep water temperatures cool.

Midstream_reach2.jpg: The middle reaches of Carpinteria Creek are characterized by gentler slopes, with smaller rocks that form riffles. Although canopy cover is good, more invasive plant species occur in this zone due to surrounding development.