

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Creating A Resilient Russian River As the Weather Gets More Extreme

Over the last two years our research into improving the health of the Russian River has led us in many directions with one common theme emerging at every turn – we are extremely vulnerable to changing weather patterns on the Russian River. We see our weather patterns shifting dramatically from the last 50-100 years of records, lining up with predictions of disasters from too much or too little rainfall. We're already seeing these issues in Healdsburg- in the middle of a multi-year drought we had a major flood on Foss Creek on December 11th and today are right back into drought conditions.

The source of vulnerability in our community is two fold - first, we channelized our creeks to make more room for buildings and second, we replaced permeable soils with concrete, pavement and rooftops. The hard surfaces cause rainfall on developed areas to rapidly move to under-sized creeks, carrying all the pollutants from hard surfaces right into our water supply. We've also reduced the Russian River's width by up to 90% in some reaches as we've deepened the river from historic gravel mining and upstream dams. As the channel deepened, landowners cleared former riparian forests and filled in backwater sloughs and wetlands for farming.

Today, instead of a productive river system, we have a grossly unnatural deep ditch that speeds water into the ocean and is extremely erosive, resulting in banks collapsing in flood events due to too much energy in such a small space. This ensures that little, if any, groundwater recharge occurs...it's like having a savings account you only withdraw from. This is a great recipe for economic and environmental problems and greater tension between the two – this is a false choice as a strong economy and healthy river are mutually supportive of each other and go hand in hand.

In our perspective water is always the most important subject in our community and we would expect that any climate change adaptation measures would focus on water. The Climate issue is a water issue. To us at Riverkeeper water, especially in California, is the most critical ingredient to anything- no water no tourism, no water no farms, no water no fish and no water....no river.

For our economy and river ecosystems to not just survive but thrive in the next drought we can take four steps that are key to creating a Resilient Russian River:

1. Permanently reduce our per capita water use, whether on city water or private wells
2. Invest in groundwater recharge, from farms to homes to schools, to bank more water
3. Invest in reducing pollution levels to protect and preserve more potable water
4. Increase the width of the river to dramatically improve groundwater recharge



By building more Rain Gardens like this one at Healdsburg High School, downtown can avoid flooding!

The great thing is that many of our current programs like Clean Campus Clean Creeks already incorporate all of these elements by creating rain gardens and bioswales to slow down water to reduce floods, letting the water sink in to recharge groundwater, cleaning up pollution with plants and soil and avoiding water use by using native plants. We will be detailing the specific actions our community needs to take to reduce our vulnerability in future droughts and floods in a Resilient Russian River program later this fall and are seeking your support. We'll be making a big announcement at the October 3rd River Awards Gala at Shone Farm – join us to learn more!

In the meantime – great job on conserving water!
Best Fishes,
Don

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Board of Directors Updates

Welcome new Riverkeeper Board Members! In early 2015 Russian Riverkeeper welcomed four new members to our Board of Directors, bringing new skills and knowledge to better assist us in fulfilling our mission to inspire the community to protect the Russian River forever!

Russ Anger, Forestville: Russ is a big fan of the Russian River and has worked to defend nearby Steelhead Beach County Regional Park from wastewater facilities and large weekend parties that leave a mess in their wake. Russ brings a load of energy to the board and is very active in volunteering at various community events, parades, cleanups and local Chambers of Commerce. Russ is the Vice-President of Lending at Community First Credit Union in Santa Rosa.

Paul Dolan, Healdsburg: Paul is a pioneer of organic grape growing which aligns with his belief that business leaders can help to make a better world. He sees Mendocino County and the Russian River watershed as fertile ground to grow his vision. In Paul's time at Fetzer Vineyards he led a transformation that put the company at the forefront of organic viticulture and business sustainability and continues in his efforts to improve sustainability. His ultimate intention is to develop the agricultural community into an example of sustainability for the rest of the business world. Paul's passion is winegrowing at his family's Dark Horse Ranch in Mendocino County near the Russian River.

Beth Rudometkin, Guerneville: Beth is a shining example of what it means to give back to your community. She has been recognized for her work volunteering for numerous community organizations and is a recipient of the Spirit of Sonoma County Award. Beth grew up along the banks of the Russian River in the Oddfellows Community and still resides on the Russian River, which has a big place in her heart and life. Beth is the Real Estate Loan Officer at Community First Credit Union in Guerneville.

Ruth Wilson, Healdsburg: Ruth has been a Bay Area resident since the late 1980's where she worked with early stage software start-ups for more than 20 years. She and her husband moved to Healdsburg in 2010 where she has become increasingly involved in efforts to preserve and protect the Dry Creek Valley and the Russian River watershed as a Board member of both the Dry Creek Valley Association and Russian Riverkeeper.

We're pleased to welcome our new Board members to the Riverkeeper crew!

Russian Riverkeeper Advisory Council – Connecting to the Wider Community!

Last year Russian Riverkeeper organized and convened our first Riverkeeper Advisory Council, comprised of 24 of our community's leaders to assist Riverkeeper in fulfilling our mission. The purpose of the Advisory Council is to provide technical expertise, advice and recommendations as well as facilitate connections to organizations and individuals throughout the community. In the first meeting, the Council discussed and brainstormed on incentives and programs to improve the health of riparian areas. A number of great ideas were generated and several are being implemented such as the [Stewardship Guide for New Russian River and Streamside Property Owners](#) that is being distributed by lower river Real Estate professionals to their clients. Advisory Board member Susan Packer and Board member Beth Rudometkin assisted Riverkeeper staff to create the booklet that explains the laws protecting the Russian River and steps we can all take to improve the River's health...and our property values. You can find a copy on our website. Recently the Advisory Council focused on the question, "How can we reduce permanent water demands to prepare for future droughts and a growing population"? Their answers are steering our planned activities in the coming years to not just save water in a drought but in good years too so we're better prepared for the next drought. Several Riverkeeper education and policy initiatives are being developed to take advantage of the wisdom and advice from our Advisory Council. For a complete listing of the Riverkeeper Advisory Council members please visit our website.

Staff Updates

Felicia Heron, our hardworking Education Coordinator, recently left to take her dream job leading a sustainability camp for youth early this summer. Felicia led a number of initiatives in her time at Riverkeeper and will be tough to replace. If you know of any good candidates for Education Coordinator please let us know as our job announcement will be posted soon!

Keep in touch on our website, Facebook and Twitter!

Please visit our website at www.russianriverkeeper.org and join our Facebook and Twitter pages for up-to-date announcements and interesting links to all things water!

Russian Riverkeeper has three major programs to achieve our mission to inspire the community to protect the Russian River forever. We **Advocate** to support good decisions and prevent bad ones from happening in our watershed. We **Educate** our community about the river and its wildlife to increase their understanding of what we need to do to be good stewards of the River. We **Celebrate** the River by hosting or supporting fun events that help the community enjoy the benefits of a healthy river.

Advocate

Vineyard Water Quality Monitoring

As our watershed grapples with diminishing water supplies, both in surface water and groundwater levels, it becomes clear that we all need to step up our efforts to keep this precious resource free from pollutants. One of the most visible pollutants in our waterways is excess fine sediment and every part of the Russian River is listed as “Impaired” or more simply put badly polluted. Riverkeeper has worked for the last 12 years to control sediment from construction, industrial and urban lands that are all regulated. The only sector of our community that is not regulated is Agriculture, although regulations are scheduled for development in the near future. We discovered that there is no water quality data being collected from vineyards that would be critical to develop intelligent effective regulations so we saw a huge data gap.

During the 2014-2015 rainy season, Riverkeeper embarked upon a monitoring effort aimed at collecting data on vineyards with the goal of developing recommendations on what “Best Management Practices” (BMPs) are most effective at minimizing sediment loss during rain events.



Maintaining a cover crop during the rainy season is crucial to water quality

Preliminary results have shown that maintaining a cover crop and thus keeping soil from moving in the first place is crucial. This is known as Source Control and is usually the least expensive method. Most vineyard BMP’s are “treatment controls” aimed at removing sediment once rain and runoff get it moving. We found that treatment controls applied in vineyards with bare soils did

not significantly reduce sediment in runoff as we saw extremely poor results after water went through treatment areas. This is similar to our findings in all our years of urban stormwater testing where we found that Source Controls – keeping pollution from being entrained in rainwater in the first place – almost always performs far better than trying to get sediment out of moving water. Our goal is to inform growers and regulators what is working and what is not so regulators can write an intelligent, informed policy and growers feel confident in spending money on erosion solutions that result in compliance with regulations... and ultimately resulting in a cleaner Russian River!

Riverkeeper is in the process of upgrading our monitoring equipment so that we may better calculate and quantify (by using Federal EPA Total Suspended Solids methods) how much soil loss is occurring. In this way, we can better inform vineyard owners which BMPs or BMP “trains” are the most effective at minimizing soil loss. We are seeking funds for new equipment and for supplies such as calibration and reagent solutions for the upcoming rain season as well as volunteers in the field and lab. You can volunteer or donate to support our work right on our website “Get Involved” link!

Hanson Pit Restoration Project Update

Riverkeeper has been working with Endangered Habitats Conservancy, NOAA Fisheries and a number of agencies as well as Hanson, the owner of the 350 acre former gravel pit complex on Eastside Road south of Healdsburg, to shift from a reclamation to a restoration design for the four gravel pits. The goal is to design a project that re-contours the pit complex landscape to re-connect with the River at high flows providing increased groundwater recharge and reduced flooding and erosion. The biggest benefit of the project is dramatically increasing feeding opportunities for Coho and Steelhead fry at the most critical stage of their lifecycle when we lose 90% of juvenile salmon. Reducing those losses could increase the numbers of returning adults more than any other project to date. For the last year consultants on the Project lead by EHC have been working to complete the Feasibility Study that will identify project alternatives and possible issues arising from each alternative. The Feasibility Study is due out any day and will detail all of the alternatives to be studied in the next project phase, the environmental review of alternatives. This project is exciting as it presents a great opportunity to provide multiple benefits to improve the resilience of the Russian River to future droughts and floods...and help the fish survive!

Educate

Clean Campus Clean Creeks Program – Thank You Community Foundation!

We’re thrilled to announce our recent grant from the Community Foundation of Sonoma County’s Environmental Education program that will support the Clean Campus program at Healdsburg, Cloverdale and El Molino High Schools this coming school year! We’re also very grateful to the Sonoma County Office of Education and the eight county high schools for their time and efforts seeking funds from the Drought Response Program for Schools grant program that was created based on the Clean

Campus program. We submitted a very competitive proposal for \$754,000 to build rain gardens, bioswales and rainwater harvesting features to clean up stormwater and increase groundwater recharge – just what we need in a drought! The tiny amount of funds available for Northern California went to an underprivileged district up by the Oregon border. The good news is several other grant programs are being pursued that might provide funds for those eager schools and teachers. A number of new projects were constructed with students in the last year with the most recent being a small bioswale at El Molino High School to clean pollutants from runoff near the school garden with AP Biology teacher Kate Oitzinger and her students. If you are interested in volunteering to help build rain gardens and bioswales at Healdsburg, Cloverdale or El Molino High Schools this fall please send us an e-mail or give us a call!



Students in Algebra Academy using their math skills to design a rain garden

Riverkeeper Stewardship Park Is Now Open!

On June 27th we celebrated the Grand Opening of Riverkeeper Stewardship Park in Guerneville and the hard work of over a thousand volunteers in the last ten years! Stewardship Park is designed to provide habitat for wildlife on over 3 acres of riverbank and educate local students and the community about the river and how we can improve its health. Since 2005, starting with the incredible and courageous employees at Marmot, over a thousand volunteers have transformed what used to be



known as “Liquor Store Beach” to an oasis of restored riparian habitat with an ADA walking trail and interpretive signs to educate park visitors. Over a hundred volunteers and members of the community joined RRK staff and 5th District Supervisor Efren Carrillo and Sonoma County Ag Preservation and Open Space District General Manager Bill Keene in celebrating the completion of the park project that the County supported with both redevelopment and Open Space funding. The River Parkway Grant Program funded by Prop 84 and managed by the

California Natural Resources Agency, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Ernie Carpenter Fund for the Environment and Dr. Stephen Ungerlieder (Riverkeeper Advisory Council member) also provided funding for the project. We are especially grateful to Marmot, REI (Santa Rosa store), Medtronic, Keysight (formerly Agilent), Jack Murray and his Boy Scout Troop #32 from Santa Rosa and students from Annova School, SR Junior College, Sonoma State University, Sonoma Academy and local high schools who all came out and rolled up their sleeves and worked to make the Park what it is today – a true community park! The park is located in downtown Guerneville between the bridges and the entrance is near the foot of the pedestrian bridge; you can find a map of the Stewardship Park on our website.



Our regular volunteer crew led by Victoria and Julie continue to work on restoring the native plant community each Wednesday morning from 9 a.m.-Noon and we invite interested volunteers to join them; for more information visit our website.

Public Access on Russian River Under Attack

Since Roman times people have had the right to access our coasts and rivers to fish, recreate or just enjoy nature under the public trust doctrine. Despite many changes in the notion and application of the public trust doctrine, the public's right to use low lying beaches below the Ordinary High Water Mark (OHWM) has been confirmed in several lawsuits that were settled by our state and federal Supreme Courts. There are limits on our public rights at the same time that we need to be equally aware of to avoid charges of trespassing on private property. The public can ONLY access the river and the public easement along the length of the River from public access points such as our Sonoma County Regional Park beaches. No one has a right to cross private land to access the river unless you have permission to do so. This summer we have received numerous complaints of people being kicked off beaches or asked to pay fees and this is not legal in most cases. One incident involved a Sonoma County Sheriff's Deputy kicking two people off of a Fitch Mountain beach when they had the right to be there – thankfully the Sheriff's Department has addressed this issue. If you are asked to leave a beach by anyone, even a Deputy, call the Sheriff's Dispatch at 707-565-2121 and let them know what is happening as they can help sort out the law with both errant Deputies and property owners. Please let us know so we can address issues with the County and property owners too. Of course never forget our rights need to be balanced with respect for others by not littering or other bad behavior – of course we know our readers are great stewards and likely pick up trash and pet waste instead of leaving it – Thank you!

Windsor Creek Improvement Project Coming this Fall

Thanks to funds from the Sonoma County Airport Expansion Project and former Supervisor Mike McGuire, Riverkeeper will begin work this fall on the Windsor Creek Improvement Project. The improvement project will improve food and shelter for native wildlife and decrease delivery of fine sediment to improve water quality. The project is located on Windsor Creek from Brooks Road downstream to Natalie Drive and is scheduled to start in early fall. The project has two elements aimed to improve water quality and wildlife habitat by reducing fine sediment delivery and enhancing the native plant community along the Creek. The bank layback project will remove a perched section of overhanging bank with several larger trees that will fall into the channel in a future storm event. Since the creek runs through a residential neighborhood this will also decrease the likelihood of channel obstruction and local flooding of homes from the trees falling into the narrow channel. New oak trees and native grass species will be planted to replace removed trees and stabilize the banks. The native plant enhancement project will remove invasive non-native plant species such as Acacia (dealbata), periwinkle (Vinca major), giant cane/reed (Arrundo donax), pyracantha (coccinea), Fennel (Foeniculum vulgare), French Broom (Genista monspessulana) and several noxious weed species. Local native species such as Coast Live Oak, Valley Oak, Snowberry, Manzanita, Elderberry, Mugwort and Creeping Wild Rye will be planted to improve sources of food and shelter for native wildlife. The project is funded through mitigation funds from the Sonoma County Airport Expansion Project and is on property owned by the Sonoma County Water Agency.

The Russian River: All Rivers is available on DVD

Many of you have seen the new documentary film Russian River: All Rivers – The Value of An American Watershed. This is an important film that looks at the history of the river and the issues it faces. The producers are now offering DVD's and Blu-ray discs for sale on their website. You can search for "Russian River All Rivers", or use the link from the Riverkeeper website front page to get your copy...a must-see for river lovers!

Russian River Watershed Cleanup September 26-27

It's that time of year again! Go to russianrivercleanup.org to register for the annual Russian River Watershed Cleanup in Sonoma County. You can choose between nine canoe routes from Asti all the way to Guerneville with plenty of opportunities to walk beaches for the cleanup. We'd like to see another 100 volunteers this year so if you helped out last year, please tell a few friends to join you this year...It's a fun way to get out on the River and help clean it up before winter rains wash all the trash



into the ocean!

Riverkeeper has also been teaming up with Chris Brokate of Clean River Alliance and doing quarterly clean-ups mainly along the lower river. We've had support from the County and the Ratto Group along with the Guerneville Chamber of Commerce and hundreds of volunteers. Thank you to everyone who has helped to remove the mountains of trash that sadly get left along the river banks, especially after flood events. Knowing that there is a massive island of garbage in the ocean called the Pacific Gyre, it's going to take everyone's part to keep more trash from entering our waterways.

Save the Date for our new River Awards Gala Oct. 3!



We are excited to announce the date for our new fall event, the River Awards Gala, on October 3rd from 4-8 p.m. at Santa Rosa Junior College's Shone Farm near Forestville. We are seeking additional event sponsors and individual tickets are on sale at: <https://riverawardsgala.eventbrite.com>.

The River Awards Gala will be another fun-packed evening with Russian Riverkeeper featuring Chef Michael Matson of Vintage Valley Catering and sumptuous local organic food, great music, local beer and wine, videos of Riverkeeper's work, a silent auction and everyone at Riverkeeper from our incredible Board of Directors to our hardworking staff. Although it's always hard to top a hilarious, action-packed live auction with Senator Mike McGuire, the highlight will be the River Awards. Our theme for the Awards is "defining sustainable" and features the Marty Griffin Friend of the Russian River Award and awards for Business Water Conservation Hero, Leadership in Vineyard Sustainability, and Volunteer of the Year award. We hope you will join us!

Wildlife Spotlight: North American Beaver, *Castor Canadensis*

Let's bring back the beaver! Beaver were hunted for fur and as a nuisance by landowners and were wiped out from California by 1840. As once said in a movie, "nature finds a way" and sure enough beavers are making a comeback across the state and even in the Russian River watershed – this is good for people and wildlife! Beavers have been spotted in Glen Ellen, Spring Lake, Oakmont, and along Santa Rosa Creek. It's likely that before you ever see a beaver you'll see signs of its industrious work when you see small trees that have been fallen with that classic conical chew mark of the beaver (pictures below). Beavers are the most effective ecosystem engineers in creating wetlands and ponds with their dams that reduce downstream flooding, increase groundwater recharge and create better salmon habitat than any human can build...all for free!

For the last 60 years the beaver was considered a non-native pest based on a 60-year-old report by well-regarded naturalist Joseph Grinnell. By the time Grinnell started his research beavers had been gone for 75 to 100 years so no records existed to document their presence. Starting in 2012 with a paper by several authors, including local Brock Dolman of the Occidental Arts and

Ecology Center, evidence was presented that beavers lived in the Sierra Nevada range. Another report published last year showed that almost all of California, except the southwest corner, had beavers. San Jose was a gigantic beaver wetland with tens of thousands of elk and flocks of waterfowl so big they could darken the sky. A report from 1856 noted that early Sonoma County resident S. H. Torrance built a cabin directly across the Russian River from Guerneville, and “engaged in trapping beaver and in hunting, dressing the skins and making them into gloves for sale”.



Today, we know the North American beaver is a California native and better understand the valuable role they could play in restoring our damaged waterways that are the foundation of our economy in California. Understanding that beaver are native to the north coast and the San Francisco Bay is important to contemporary management of beaver populations and the myriad species that depend upon the habitat they create, especially endangered coho salmon. Brock and his co-worker Kate Lundquist are leading the “Bring Back the Beaver” campaign, working with the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) to educate citizens and shape future policy regarding beaver management. As recently as 2013, DFW issued 172 depredation permits each allowing for the removal of multiple beavers on a single site. Brock and Kate have published guides for landowners on how to work with beavers to manage land and how to relocate beavers to more suitable habitat when conflicts arise.



You can help by keeping an eye out for beaver activity – those gnawed tree trunks – and reporting any evidence of beavers to Riverkeeper. You can also search for Beaver Mapper by Riverbend Sciences and log in any beaver sightings so they can see where they are moving and help landowners avoid conflicts. We have a great opportunity to improve the resilience of our streams if we can get the help from the natural Ecosystem Engineers, the North American Beaver!

Celebrate

Our “celebrate” efforts are meant to inspire local people to re-discover what a great treasure we have in the Russian River!

Great Russian River Race 2015 Recap – 2016 new Location?

On May 2nd we held the 5th annual Great Russian River Race with over 200 paddlers taking to the water and over 100 runners from Healdsburg Running Company joining us for their River Rat Edition. Once again the weather smiled on us with sunny skies for the big Race Party at Sonoma County Regional Park’s Veteran’s Memorial Beach where our friends Cahoots played their great mix of originals and everyone’s favorites. The two events raised over \$17,000 for our high school education program Clean Campus Clean Creeks, which increases the resilience of the Russian River. For 2016 we are exploring shifting the Race to the lower River and shifting the date by a few weeks so stay tuned for more details for the 2016 Great Russian River Race! Thank you to all the Racers, Sponsors, Donors, Volunteers and Party-Goers for another successful Race!



Our post-race survey asked, “What did you like about the Race?”

“It was like a big party! The race itself was beautiful and fun and the after party with the music and food and comraderie was a blast!!”

“My husband and I loved the chance to float down the Russian River, with a little exercise mixed in.”

“The atmosphere, the amount of involvement from volunteers (safety on the river), and the prizes!”

“3rd year! Love it!”

“It’s our favorite day of the year. We look forward to it.”



THANK YOU!

The generosity of Russian Riverkeeper's supporters makes it possible to continue our vital work in the watershed. We thank all of the individuals & organizations who contributed from July 2014-July 2015. We could not do this work without you!

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MARKETING

ARE YOU A MEMBER OF RUSSIAN RIVERKEEPER?

Do you care about clean water? Do you enjoy swimming and fishing in the Russian River? Do you appreciate that Riverkeeper is a voice for the River, ensuring that our agencies enforce the laws to keep our River clean and safe, with enough water in it for recreation and fish? As a non-profit, we rely on our members and donations from the public to help fund the important work we do. Renew or become a member today!

FUTURE EVENT DATES

August 20 - Paddle on the River with Riverkeeper and SCCA

September 19 - Foss Creek Clean-Up

September 26-27 - Russian River Clean-Up

October 3 - River Awards Gala at Shone Farm

Every Wednesday 9-Noon Volunteer Workdays at Riverkeeper Park



RIVERKEEPER WISH LIST

We are in need of the following items in good working condition:

Auction items for Fundraisers (Wine, Vacation rentals, tours, etc.)

Newer Digital Camcorder & Camera • GPS devices

Donated items are tax deductible!!



ADVANTAGEOUS WAY TO SUPPORT RRK

The Russian Riverkeeper relies on donors' support to sustain our commitment to the Russian River Watershed. Gifts of appreciated stock are an easy and beneficial way to make a donation. You receive credit for the full market value of the gift, and you avoid capital-gains tax. If you would like to make a donation please call or have your broker call us at 433-1958. *Please consider making a gift of stock today!*