



Draft San Geronimo Valley Salmon Enhancement Plan

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the purpose of the Salmon Enhancement Plan (SEP)?

The purpose of this plan is to provide a road map for improving and protecting salmon and steelhead habitat while also sustaining the character and quality of life in the Valley. The plan focuses on what fish need to thrive while recognizing that many people live and work in the San Geronimo Valley, balancing their needs with the restoration of habitat. Most of the recommended actions in the SEP are voluntary or address habitat restoration actions that would be funded and undertaken by government agencies. The County's approach to plan implementation will be one that seeks to balance voluntary actions and incentive programs with policy and ordinance updates and restoration actions by local government agencies. This type of plan is critical to securing funding from outside partners such as state and federal agencies.

Will the building permit moratorium in the San Geronimo Valley continue after the Salmon Enhancement Plan is approved?

State Law (Govt. Code Section 65858 et seq) mandates that building permit moratoriums end after two years. The two year San Geronimo Valley building permit moratorium will end on February 11, 2010.

What is a Stream Conservation Area?

The County of Marin developed the first Stream Conservation Area (SCA) policies as part of the 1994 Countywide Plan (CWP). These policies were recently updated in the 2007 CWP update. The SCA in west Marin is defined as the greater of:

- (a) 50 feet from the outer edge of woody riparian vegetation associated with a stream, or
- (b) 100 feet landward from the top of bank, on both sides of any stream that runs during any time of the year.

The SCA policies can be viewed on-line beginning on pg. 2-28 of the CWP at:

http://www.co.marin.ca.us/depts/cd/main/fm/cwpdocs/CWP_CD2.pdf

Do the County's Stream Conservation Area policies apply to ditches?

The SCA policies apply to all "*natural or once natural flowing open drainage channels with an established bed and bank*" even if they only flow one day a year during the largest storms. Regardless of the watercourse type, County creek permits along with state and federal permits may be required to do work within or next to a watercourse. The SCA policies do not apply to man-made ditches constructed to carry stormwater.

According to the plan, will all structures in the 100' Stream Conservation Area have to be removed?

The SEP does not mandate that existing permitted structures be removed. Certain types of development are currently allowed in the SCA, such as decks, fences, gardens or landscaping not subject to building permit requirements. In addition, existing permitted or legal nonconforming structures can be repaired or retrofitted within the existing footprint subject to some conditions. The SEP does make recommendations to decrease the impact of these existing structures on fish habitat.

Does the plan ban gardens, sheds, driveways, decks, chicken coops, etc. on parcels next to the creek?

The Plan does not mandate the removal of existing gardens, sheds and other structures. The plan recommends that these types of structures be removed when possible from the area within 35 feet of the creek. The County will explore options to provide assistance and incentives for landowners who voluntarily remove these types of structures next to the creek.



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Will County employees enter private property to look for infractions without permission?

No, Public Works and Community Development Agency employees will not enter private property without the permission of the property owner, with certain exceptions. All County inspections are subject to the provisions contained within existing County codes. The SEP does not provide the County with any additional enforcement authority.

Will landowners be forced to replace septic systems at great expense if this plan is approved?

The SEP does not propose any additional regulations or inspections for septic systems; these systems are already regulated by the County's Environmental Health Services (EHS). EHS typically only makes inspections at the request of the landowner or based on a complaint. The plan does recommend that leaking septic systems be repaired, particularly those located in the Stream Conservation Area. This is consistent with existing County code, which is intended to protect human health and safety.

Who would be responsible for implementing the recommended actions in the SEP?

The County and community members will be responsible for implementing recommended actions. Everyone who lives and works in the Valley could become involved in implementing these recommendations. Property owners next to the creek can take voluntary steps to restore native vegetation, restore creek banks, and remove or modify structures close to the creek. The SEP also recognizes that even landowners in upland areas outside of an SCA can implement actions to improve fish habitat. Water quantity and quality can be improved through water conservation, limiting impervious surfaces, directing runoff to areas where it can soak into the ground, and avoiding the use of toxic chemicals and insuring their proper and safe disposal. The County can support these actions by providing education, resources, and incentives.

Will the recommendations in the Salmon Enhancement Plan be turned into ordinances that will be enacted by the County without input from residents?

The development of an ordinance requires many steps, including required public notification and hearings. At this point in time, the County is considering revisions to one ordinance, the Tree Ordinance (Ch 22.27), to increase protection of native riparian vegetation.

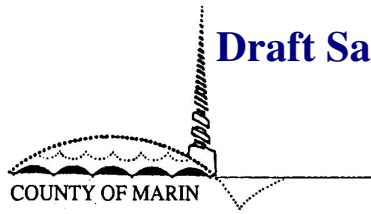
Won't implementation of the SEP lower property values in the Valley?

Healthy, functioning creek habitat can actually enhance property values by reducing the risk of erosion and flooding, providing scenic beauty, and by decreasing the threat of polluted water. Studies have shown that residential property values increase with proximity to restored creeks. In a 1995 study to measure the economic benefits of California's Urban Stream Restoration program in Contra Costa, Solano, and Santa Cruz Counties, a positive correlation was found between an increase in property values and the number of lineal feet of nearby restored creek.¹

Ocean conditions seem to be the major culprit in salmon decline. Why are Valley property owners being targeted for restoration?

Ocean conditions are cyclic, which means there are good years and bad years for salmon survival in the ocean. Because of this, the larger the fish that leaves San Geronimo Creek the better chance of survival they will have in the ocean. Improving habitat and flow can increase the number of healthy salmon returning to the ocean which should make the population more resilient to ocean conditions.

¹ Streiner, C. and Loomis, J.B. (1995) Estimating the Benefits of Urban Stream Restoration Using the Hedonic Price Method. Rivers, 5(4): 267-278.



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Where can I submit comments?

Please submit comments to Liz Lewis at the Department of Public Works at lizlewis@co.marin.ca.us or call her at (415) 499-7226.

- The plan can be viewed and downloaded at www.marinwatersheds.org.
- Comments on the plan are due **October 23, 2009**.
- A community meeting is scheduled for **October 15** from **7-9:30 p.m.** at the Lagunitas School Multi-Purpose Room.