

TOP STORY: **EROSION DAMAGE FEARED**

Water district targets rogue Mt. Tam trails



By Mark Prado
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The Marin Municipal Water District embarked on a pilot project Monday to rid Mount Tamalpais of rogue trails that officials say scar the landscape and damage the environment.

The new initiative, dubbed "Project Restore," aims to remove unofficial trails throughout the Mt. Tam watershed that people have carved over the years and to restore those sites to natural habitats.

"Many of these trails are on bad slopes and they cause erosion, which really damages the mountain," said water district ranger Phil Johnson, who was working near Bon Tempe reservoir Monday. "And many of the trails duplicate what we have and do not connect with anything else."

Some of the trails have been the result of people wandering off the beaten path; others have been carved by renegade hikers and mountain bikers using tools. Some

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Angel Caamal (left) and Saul Majiz, members of the California Conservation Corps, move rocks and trees Monday to remove undesirable trails on the Mt. Tamalpais watershed area above Fairfax. The Marin Municipal Water District says the illegal trails threaten the long-term health and even survival of native habitat and wildlife populations.

IJ photos/Robert Tong

Erroneously attributed. This is a Conservation Corps North Bay crew.

MT. TAM: Water district works to get rid of rogue trails

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have been around so long they have unofficial names.

The district's 2005 road and trail management plan identified more than 53 miles of undesirable trails on Mt. Tam. The water district's natural resources management staff said several miles of illegal trail construction has occurred since then.

During the trial phase, the district is targeting three trails that total about a mile. Those three trails slated for restoration include: Hidden Cove Trail, off Bon Tempe Road; Madrone Trail, between

Pumpkin Ridge and Sky Oaks Road; and the Casey Cutoff Trail, near the Rocky Ridge Fire Road.

The work will take place over the next two to three weeks at a cost of \$25,000. Initially the trails will be fenced off, then California Conservation Corps crews will move earth to cover the trails and plant new plants on them.

"I don't think people realize how destructive these trails can be in terms of erosion impacts to vegetation and habitat," said Libby Pischel, water district spokeswoman. "For people who use these

trails they shouldn't be too upset; there are more than 100 miles of trails that we provide."

Many of the rogue trails fragment native habitat and disrupt wildlife populations, threatening their long-term health and even survival, as in the case of endangered coho salmon. The trails, because they are not built to standards, increase erosion into reservoirs, potentially affecting water quality. They also provide pathways for invasive weeds to penetrate native wildlands, Pischel said.

After the work is done,

the district will monitor the areas for the next two to three months to see if visitors stay off the trails and to determine how the re-planted terrain responds. If the pilot plan proves successful, more work will be done.

"The water district has a good plan," said Larry Minikes, president of the Tamalpais Conservation Club. "Because of the impact it has on the watershed, you have to bring these rogue trails under control."

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