

- > Obituaries / C2
- > News from across Marin / C3
- > HMO authority officials say federal bill a threat / C3

MARIN

Project aims to stop erosion and protect creek



IJ photo/Marian Little Utley

HARD AT WORK: Jesus Chan (left) and Michael Kolosey from Marin Conservation Corps work on a section of steps as part of the Mt. Tamalpais Watershed erosion control project. Approximately 40 steps are being installed to help prevent erosion.

Runoff from Mt. Tam trail is harming habitat of endangered fish

By Haley Nolde
IJ reporter

“(Sediment) fills in the pools where young fish are rearing. There is less habitat so fewer fish can be supported.”

— Gregory Andrew,
Marin Municipal
Water District
fisheries biologist

In an effort to curb sediment that rushes off trails and roads to the San Anselmo-Corte Madera Creek, the Marin Municipal Water District has launched an erosion control project in the Mt. Tamalpais Watershed near Fairfax.

The creek is home to the endangered steelhead trout, and sediment hurts fish habitat.

“We have a responsibility as land managers to take better care of our lands, to improve our trails so they drain better and reduce sediment,” said Mike Swezy, a natural resource specialist with MMWD.

The road and trail work, dubbed the Watersheds of Fairfax project, will encompass 2.5 miles of trails and four miles of fire roads in the

Deer Park and Cascade Canyons. MMWD crews will do much of the labor, and a 10-man crew from the Marin Conservation Corps is working now on the Moore Trail near the Marin stables.

At the bottom of the trail, gullies scar the ground. They were first etched by hikers and horses picking their paths, and gradually scoured into ditches that are a foot deep in places.

“Water gathers in these gullies created where horses and people travel, and soon you have a flow that carries all the loose soil down into the creek,” said Jim Long, a field supervisor with MMWD.

Steelhead trout enter waterways like the San Anselmo-Corte Madera Creek from the ocean to spawn, laying eggs in the gravel bottom of the creek. Their eggs hatch in the spring and young fish spend a year or two there before

migrating back to the ocean.

“What’s detrimental about sediment,” said MMWD fisheries biologist Gregory Andrew, “is that it fills in the pools where young fish are rearing. There is less habitat so fewer fish can be supported. Sediment also covers the gravel where fish have spawned and can literally smother the eggs.”

To keep dirt on the Moore Trail and out of the creek, workers from the Marin Conservation Corps are building steps into a new set of switchbacks in the trail. A mini-excavator was used to shape the slope so that water can run downhill off the side of the trail, instead of streaming down the length of it, picking up speed and sediment.

In the trail’s old path, the crew placed seedless straw to hold the soil until the native vegetation

See Trail page C2

Trail

From page C1

grows back. The new switchbacks cut the steepness of the trail, curbing runoff. Finally, crew supervisor Peter Jarausch said, “we cut drains into the steps as well, to prevent erosion in the switchbacks.”

The San Anselmo-Corte

Madera creek runs from Mt. Tam through the towns of the Ross Valley, and empties into the San Francisco Bay near San Quentin. MMWD is unsure how much sediment this project will keep out of the creek, but the trails and roads they are targeting near Fairfax account for 20 percent of the sediment that ends up in the creek downstream, near Ross, Swezy said.

MMWD has completed improvements on the Junction and Six Points trails. Still slated for erosion control work are the Lower Bald Hill Trail, Upper and Lower Taylor trails, Deer Park Road, Worn Springs Road and Cascade Canyon Road. The trail work will span two years at a cost of \$150,000. Over the same time, about \$200,000 will be spent on road improvements, Swezy said.

The California Coastal Conservancy supplied a \$100,000 grant for the work.

“Sedimentation is quite a big problem in Bay Area creeks,” said Brenda Buxton, a project manager at the Conservancy. “I think we should do more of these evaluations all over the Bay Area.”

Contact Haley Nolde via e-mail at citydesk@marinij.com