

Emergency Watershed Protection Program responds to New Year floods

NRCS WOODLAND FIELD OFFICE AND LOCAL FLOOD CONTROL DISTRICT COME TO THE RESCUE

by Phil Hogan

Imagine it's a little past midnight on New Year's Eve, and just as you've nodded off for a long winter's nap, you're awakened by a loud rushing noise outside of your house.

The previous day's gentle rains have given way to torrential downpours, and the small creek on your property has swollen and carved a new bank within inches of your home.

That is what Capay Valley's Lisa Stallings experienced, an anxious night filled with carrying her prized sheep to higher ground. Stallings, a geomorphologist and ecological restorationist by profession, knows all too well that it is the nature of California's creeks to meander. But balancing that technical knowledge with the emotions of nearly losing her home to Pierce Canyon Creek, a tributary to the better-known Cache Creek, was difficult.

"It rained almost four inches overnight," said Stallings. "I have never seen the creek run that full."

Her training and background led her to immediately conclude that increased bedload and aggradation of the creekbed forced the creek to meander so that it could maintain its capacity. "There is sediment and gravel deposition in spots I've never seen before," she said. "Downstream the creek actually did go over its bank, threatening my mother's house and depositing sediment in the orchard."

... continued on Page 2

SONOMA COUNTY CONSERVATION PROFESSIONALS SECURE AID FOR LOCAL NEWLYWEDS

by Wendy Rash

On New Year's Eve, heavy rains caused flooding across Northern California. Sonoma Creek swelled into a raging torrent, destroying a section of riprapped bank 70 feet long beneath the home of a newlywed

couple in Glen Ellen. The flood took much of their landscaped yard with it and endangered their 1950's era home.

"If the creek rose again, if the bank loses 5 to 8 feet more, the house will be in critical danger," said Liz Hilkert, a Natural Re-

sources Conservation Service agricultural engineer in the Petaluma Service Center.

Neighbors of the couple had been through a similar event in the winter of 1997-1998, and recommended applying for the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program. EWP is a program administered through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to repair damages from natural disasters. Certain conditions must be met for EWP

... continued on Page 3



Damage due to the flooding of Sonoma Creek endangered the home of Glen Ellen residents.

YOLO COUNTY EWP, cont.

NRCS District Conservationist Phil Hogan suggested that Stallings apply for the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP). Within a few more days, Hogan had Acting Area Engineer Tom Benson survey the damage, and he agreed that this situation could be repaired by EWP.

Hogan and Benson approached the Yolo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District (YCF-CWCD), and they agreed to act as the local sponsor. After conferring with District General Manager Tim O'Halloran and Assistant General Manager Christy Barton, Hogan filed a Damage Survey Report (DSR) and NRCS headquarters appropriated the funds quickly for the project. The job was estimated to cost \$25,000 or less, which saved time as it was not necessary to solicit bids.

It was determined that about 100 feet of the stream-bank would have to be armored with rock riprap of at least 36 inches in size, and be angular in shape to prevent rolling.

The contractors moved in on January 26, and had the job completed within a couple of days. Field Office Engineer Ha Truong inspected the project and was quite pleased with the results. "The contractor did a great job, with an experienced crew and the right equipment for the job," stated Truong. "This is a very successful project that will stabilize the creek bank and prevent Ms. Stallings' home from being destroyed."

Jenny Drewitz, a Yolo County Resource Conservation District employee and coordinator for the Capay Valley Watershed Stakeholders, feels that this project will serve as a focal point for landowners within this Cache Creek subwatershed. Both Stallings and Drewitz are excited about the future prospects of work that can be done here to further enhance this riparian area to protect water quality, decrease erosion, and provide for wildlife habitat.

"This was a team approach, and illustrates what can be done when government, the private sector, and landowners get together to solve an urgent problem," stated Hogan. "I am especially grateful to Christy Barton of the Yolo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District for stepping up to the plate and agreeing to act as the local sponsor. Without the District's willingness and ability to serve in this capacity, Ms. Stallings could well have lost her home."



A front-end loader carefully places large, angular rock along the creek bank beneath Stallings' home. The equipment rides on rubber tracks that put only 8 psi of pressure on the ground, reducing soil compaction.

STEMPLE CREEK STUDY CONTRIBUTES TO CONSERVATION EFFECTS ASSESSMENT PROJECT (CEAP)

by Vern Finney and Wendy Rash

The Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) was launched in 2003 by the USDA to quantify the environmental benefits of conservation practices used by private landowners participating in conservation programs authorized in the 2002 Farm Bill.

CEAP is looking at conservation programs in several different ways. First, there is the National Assessment, which estimates program benefits in four different components: cropland, grazing lands, wildlife, and wetlands. Second, watershed case studies are being carried out in selected watersheds across the nation to provide detailed information about special resource concerns. Last, literature reviews and bibliographies will document the current state of knowledge about the effectiveness of conservation programs.

In California, the Stemple Creek watershed was chosen as a Special Emphasis watershed. Stemple Creek runs through Sonoma and Marin Counties and enters the Pacific Ocean through the Estero de San Antonio. The creek has been designated an impaired water body for dissolved oxygen, temperature, pH, ammonia, and sediment; and also contains the California freshwater shrimp, and endangered species. The creek is included in the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary.

... continued on Page 3

STEMPLE CREEK, *cont.*

The Stemple Creek study will evaluate the environmental benefits and effects of USDA conservation programs that include Best Management Practices (BMPs) implemented to enhance water quality and upland erosion to reduce sediment yield. Specific BMPs to be addressed include dairy waste management systems and riparian restoration.

Suspended sediment (inorganic and organic), turbidity, TKN, un-ionized ammonia, nitrate-N, dissolved oxygen, and temperature are being measured using automated samplers, triggered by water level, deployed to sample storm events on an hourly frequency. The data is collected with continuous data recorders. This continuous data will be correlated with laboratory analysis of water samples taken with the automated samplers.



Stemple Creek winds through pastures in Sonoma County.

The watershed models AGNPS (Annualized Agricultural Non-Point Source), CONCEPTS (CONservational Channel Evolution and Pollutant Transport System) and REMM (Riparian Ecosystem Management Model) will be validated and applied to assess contaminant watershed trends. Conservation management practices applied on the watershed will be evaluated using AGNPS for the impact on water quality. BMPs will be implemented as designated within the model. Additional chemical processes not currently supported by AGNPS will be developed and incorporated into the model.

The project has been a collaboration between NRCS, the Marin and Sonoma County Resource Conservation Districts, USDA-ARS, UC-Davis, California Department of Fish and Game, USEPA, Sonoma Farm Bureau and the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board.

SONOMA COUNTY EWP, *cont.*

to be applied. There must be a local project sponsor who can partially fund the project, and the damage from the natural disaster must have created a threat to life and property. Once these conditions are met, a Damage Survey Report is drawn up and the work is approved by NRCS. Then EWP funding must be approved, and the work must be completed within 10 days of signing the project agreement with the local



The creekbank protection project, as installed. The work was completed by January 21, 2006.

sponsor.

The application process for the Sonoma Creek project was facilitated by the South Sonoma County Resource Conservation District, and the Sonoma County Water Agency agreed to act as the sponsoring agency. NRCS committed \$50,000 to the project, with the local sponsor adding \$25,000. The landowners also contributed financial resources to the project effort.

The project consisted of placing angular rock riprap along the bank with heavy equipment, while impacting the environment as little as possible. The project was carefully designed to keep equipment out of the water, to preserve existing vegetation, and to avoid excavating the stream bottom.

Contractors were on site to give bids on the project on January 10, and the work was completed in on January 21. Homeowner Ryan Garrison appreciated the financial assistance and the quick project turnaround. "The outcome has really ended up as a huge relief," he said.

With information from the Press Democrat (Santa Rosa CA), the Sonoma Index-Tribune, NRCS, and South Sonoma County Resource Conservation District.

**CALIFORNIA CHAPTER
NUMBERS 188, AS OF JANUARY
1, 2006**

by Walt Bunter

If any of your colleagues are not listed, please encourage them to become a member of SWCS.

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Contact Walt Bunter at
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NEW MEMBERS JOIN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER by Walt Bunter

We extend a GREAT BIG WELCOME to the following members who recently joined or rejoined the SWCS and our California Chapter or transferred in from another state chapter.

Kenneth A. Frazen - Hemet
Christopher R. Giovannoni - Watsonville
Richelle Leggett - San Luis Obispo
Karen Sweet - Livermore
Bruce G. Williams - Weaverville

See you in San Diego!

2006 ANNUAL CONFERENCE IS "PUTTING CONSERVATION PROGRAMS TO WORK"

by *Mark Steffek*

This year's California and Nevada Chapter SWCS conference in San Diego from March 22nd to the 24th offers technical presentations from California NRCS and the International Erosion Control Association (IECA) related to a variety of programs that can be used to implement conservation practices in the rural and urban landscapes.

The Conference will open with a welcome from Hank Wyman, President of the California Chapter of the SWCS. A local welcome will be given by Donna Frye, City Council Woman for San Diego. Councilwoman Frye and her husband operate a surf shop in San Diego whose business was threatened by a loss of customers due to degrading beach and water quality conditions. Councilwoman Frye led a successful campaign to clean up the beaches and streams entering the ocean. Ms. Frye will give her personal account of "putting conservation programs to work" for her constituents.

Our Keynote Speaker will be Sara Braasch, Regional Assistant Chief-West, for the USDA-NRCS. Ms. Braasch will speak to us about Conservation Title Farm Bill programs delivered through NRCS Service Centers.

The Conservation Programs and Partnership panel Thursday morning includes presentations from Jay Chamberlin, California Resources Agency, and Ed Burton, State Conservationist, USDA-NRCS in California.

Thursday afternoon and Friday morning will host an NRCS expert staff of soil scientists and conservationists who will provide information ranging from using a web based soil survey to developing conservation plans on private lands. The IECA will deliver presentations about revegetation on drastically disturbed soils and storm water runoff on construction sites. Certified Professional in Erosion and Sediment Control (CPESC) testing will be held on Friday.

The registration fee will be \$175, or \$200 after March 10. Contact Mark Steffek, Chapter President-elect, 530-233-8868, or at mark.steffek@ca.usda.gov, for conference agenda, registration materials and a SWCS membership application form.

SAN DIEGO CONFERENCE STARTS WITH FIELD TOUR ON MARCH 22

by *Walt Bunter*

Our Chapter's annual Conference will be held in San Diego on March 22-24 at the Red Lion Hanalei Hotel. The Conference theme is "**Putting Conservation Programs to Work**" and the first agenda item is a conservation tour on Wednesday, March 22, 2006.

The deluxe motor coach will leave the hotel at 12:30

PM and travel to the Buena Vista Lagoon near Carlsbad and Oceanside to observe habitat restoration, tidal influence, urban development, and funding sources. The next stop will be in San Marcos at the Rote Greenhouse that uses automated state-of-the-art micro-irrigation, tail-water collection and reuse systems, and automated climate control. They are



An heron hunts at the Buena Vista Lagoon. Photo from Buena Vista Lagoon Conservancy.

participants in the California energy efficiency program and EQIP - the USDA Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Avocado production will be discussed as the tour travels up Hwy 15 and then West on Hwy 76 through Pauma Valley with discussions on Indian Reservations and ground water. The next stop is at the Tierra Miguel Farm, which is an organic farm. They are Community Supported Agriculture participants in the USDA Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program and the EQIP.

The last stop is at the San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park near Escondido that includes taking the Sunset Railway Tour to see endangered species and their water quality projects followed by a buffet dinner and presentation. It will be a great way to start the Conference.

Society Shorts

SUBMIT NOMINATIONS FOR CHAPTER RECOGNITION AWARDS BY FEBRUARY 20

by Walt Bunter

Now is your chance to showcase the outstanding conservation work of your colleagues. Nominate someone you know for a Chapter Award.

Send your nominations for Chapter awards to the Chapter Awards Committee by February 20. Please send them via e-mail to: Phil.Hogan@ca.usda.gov



Our goal is to recognize outstanding members and other conservation leaders in California at the Chapter Annual Conference planned for San Diego on March 22-24. Nominations will be accepted for Chapter Recognition Awards, Merit Awards, Distinguished Service Awards, and Outstanding News Media Awards.

Nancy Stein from Martinez, Phil Hogan from Sacramento, and Mark Steffek from Alturas serve on the committee. The committee also recommends individuals for several categories of the National SWCS awards.

MAIL YOUR CHAPTER ELECTION BALLOT NOW!

by Walt Bunter

The Executive Council encourages all members to return their mail ballots by the March 3 deadline. We have 188 members now and the goal is for at least a 60 percent return.

A total of 79 mail ballots were received last year including four without names on the envelopes but those votes did not change the winners. There were 97 ballots returned for the 2003 election.

The President-Elect position is a two-year term with the person advancing to Chapter President in their second year. Executive Council Directors serve for two years and this year we are electing three directors to fill the positions now held by Jason Jackson from Grass Valley, Phil Hogan from Sacramento, and Tina Vander Hoek from Templeton. Tina was appointed last May to fill the remaining term when Mike McElhiney of Modesto resigned his directorship.

Installation of newly elected officers will held during the luncheon on Thursday - March 23 as part of our Annual Conference in San Diego.

CALIFORNIA CHAPTER OFFERS SCHOLARSHIP WORTH \$1,000

by Walt Bunter

The Scholarship Committee has announced that the California Chapter is offering one \$1,000 scholarship this year, rather than two \$500 scholarships. Colleges and universities have received the announcement and application forms, and applications are due by May 1, 2006. Application forms are also available on our Chapter website at: www.caswcs.org.

The winner will be selected in August, in time for the start of the 2006-2007 school year.



The Chapter's goal is to encourage undergraduate students interested in soil and water conservation to obtain technical expertise and to pursue careers in soil and water resources.

Applicants must (1) have successfully completed two years of study at an accredited college or university, (2) be enrolled in an undergraduate curriculum related to soil and water resources, and (3) have a cumulative grade point average of 2.5 or better on a 4.0 scale.

Chapter Executive Council Director Tina Vander Hoek, Soil Conservationist with the USDA-NRCS at Templeton, chairs the Scholarship Committee. Katie Banister in Bradley and Student Chapter Representative Richelle Leggett in San Luis Obispo also serve on the committee.



Don't forget about the SWCS International Conference in Keystone, Colorado, July 22-26, 2006!

CALIFORNIA CHAPTER SWCS
430 "G" STREET #4172
DAVIS, CA 95616-4172



Inside RunOff...

Emergency Watershed Protection at work in California	1-3
Stemple Creek project contributes to CEAP effort	2
California Chapter membership list	4-5
See you in San Diego!	6
Society Shorts- Scholarship Opportunity!	7

FIRST CLASS

CALIFORNIA CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2006

RunOff is the official California Chapter SWCS newsletter.

Publisher:

Walt Bunter- wbunter@pacbell.net

Editor:

Wendy Rash- wendy.rash@ca.usda.gov

Please submit articles via email to the Editor. RunOff reserves the right to edit all submissions.

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Phil Hogan, Director

Jason Jackson, Director

David Rose, Director

Tina Vander Hoek, Director

Richelle Leggett, Student Representative

RunOff Photo Contest

Submit photos of soil and water conservation in action! Winners will be featured in future issues of RunOff. Please include photographer credit and a descriptive caption.

Visit our Website!

www.caswcs.org

Deadline to submit articles, news items, and photos for the next issue of RunOff is April 10, 2006. Send items to the Editor via email.