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Management and Restoration



Gold Ridge Resource  
Conservation District



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**News Release**

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**Russian River Receives Major National Grant to Benefit Endangered Coho Salmon**

*Foundation awards \$696,000 to partnership working to improve stream flows,  
water supply reliability*

Sonoma County, Calif. — The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation today announced an award of \$696,000 to the Coho Water Resources Partnership, which is working to improve stream flows and water supply reliability in five tributaries of the Russian River critical to the recovery of endangered coho salmon.

The number of coho salmon in the Russian River watershed has declined precipitously in recent decades. Although multiple factors have harmed the population, resource agencies have found that low flows and water diversions can be especially problematic in the Russian River tributaries.

“The severity of the coho population decline and the importance of the Russian River to coast-wide recovery efforts made the Foundation place special programmatic emphasis on the watershed,” said Jeff Trandahl, the Foundation’s executive director. “Our coho recovery investments are backed by a comprehensive, scientifically sound business plan that highlights the path to recovery.”

Initial efforts will focus on five first-priority streams: Dutch Bill, Grape, Green Valley, Mark West and Mill creeks. Fueled by the grants, partners will work to find areas that have the greatest opportunities for better water management, solutions that knock down hurdles to recovery, and ways to finance necessary permits and on-the-ground work.

“More than 95 percent of the target watersheds are held in private ownership, and the guiding principal of this project is that water for both human uses and coho salmon can be secured through careful planning and water supply management,” said Kara Heckert, Executive Director of the Sotoyome Resource Conservation District.

The multi-disciplinary Partnership includes the Center for Ecosystem Management and Restoration, Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District, Occidental Arts and Ecology Center WATER Institute, Sotoyome Resource Conservation District, Trout Unlimited, University of California (UC) Research and Extension Center’s Hopland GIS Lab, UC Cooperative Extension, and Sonoma County Water Agency.

“Just as the climate of the Russian River watershed can place pressures on coho and water users during the dry season, the rainy winter can provide opportunities to ameliorate those pressures,” said Mary Ann King, Stewardship Coordinator with Trout Unlimited. “One of the critical challenges is to identify the timing and mechanisms through which water can be acquired and stored to enhance streamflow for coho salmon.”

The long-term goals are to restore a more natural flow regime during the dry season, increase the number of wild coho salmon, and augment water storage capacity for a variety of land uses in each watershed.

“We are all very excited about the potential to implement creative and innovative solutions that will address the needs of both fish and people,” said Lisa Hulette, Executive Director, Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District, “and we are committed to working with landowners on a voluntary basis with the primary goal of creating a collaborative foundation from which landowners and agencies will work together to create reliable water supplies for future generations.”

- The Center for Ecosystem Management and Restoration (CEMAR) is a nonprofit, environmental research company. CEMAR – in conjunction with the University of California Hopland Research and Extension Center -- will provide scientific and technical guidance for creating and validating water management models.
- The Gold Ridge and Sotoyome Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) are local public agencies that engage stakeholders and landowners in land management practices that promote resource conservation. The RCDs will lead initial outreach and develop the primary outreach mechanisms for communicating objectives and benefits with landowners.
- The Occidental Arts and Ecology Center’s (OAEC) Watershed Advocacy, Training, Education, & Research (WATER) Institute was created to catalyze local and regional water policy and sustainable water management practices. OAEC will coordinate outreach and education efforts with the RCDs and provide technical guidance.
- Trout Unlimited (TU) is a nonprofit organization that has been working on water rights reform and streamflow protection along California’s North Coast for 20 years. TU will work with landowners and agencies to break through the legal and institutional barriers to progress on stream flow restoration.
- The University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) in Sonoma County provides university research-based outreach on natural resources management, and, in collaboration with state and federal agencies, coordinates the Russian River Coho Salmon Captive Broodstock Program. UCCE will provide monitoring and technical expertise related to understanding coho population dynamics in the watershed.
- The Sonoma County Water Agency is a wholesale provider of water to 600,000 people in Sonoma and Marin counties. The Agency will provide critical technical support and expertise. Funds for implementing the Russian River Biological Opinion will be used as matching funds for this project.

For more information, please visit: [www.cohopartnership.org](http://www.cohopartnership.org).

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