



County of Santa Cruz

COMMISSION ON THE ENVIRONMENT

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March 22, 2018

The Honorable Zach Friend, Chair
Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors
701 Ocean Street, Fifth Floor
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Subject: Riparian Conservation in the Vision Santa Cruz County Process

Dear Chair Friend and Members of the Board:

The County of Santa Cruz Commission on the Environment thanks you for the opportunity to provide input as an advisory body to the Board of Supervisors. We support the Vision Santa Cruz County planning process and would like to recommend that riparian conservation be included as a priority in planning for our county's future.

A partnership of local agencies and non-profit organizations has joined together to improve the health of the San Lorenzo River through the creation of a riparian conservation program, and we request that the Board support this effort. While the program is still being created, we bring it to your attention due to the timing of the Vision Santa Cruz County process.

The riparian conservation program will likely include elements focused on public education and outreach, restoration projects, policy and ordinance implementation and data collection for measurement of success. The program is one component of a larger partnership by the City of Santa Cruz, County of Santa Cruz, Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County, San Lorenzo Valley Water District and the Coastal Watershed Council, who are working together to improve the health of the San Lorenzo River watershed, the largest watershed in the county.

The partnership focuses on lasting improvements in the healthy function of the watershed, including flood risk reduction, habitat enhancement for salmonids and other species, as well as quality of life, recreation and economic vitality for our citizens. Alignment of all partners on highest priority projects with multiple benefits for the community will serve the County and the broader community by increasing the chances of securing state and federal grants to implement these projects, particularly from state agencies investing in parks and water bond funding.

As a result of development and other human pressures over decades, riparian corridors (the forested land adjacent to a creek or river) have been severely degraded in some areas, and generally suffer throughout much of the county. Unhealthy riparian corridors negatively impact endangered and threatened species habitat, reduce rates of groundwater recharge, degrade creek and river water quality, exacerbate impacts from erosion and limit the natural flood control capacities of creeks and rivers. With increased frequency of intense storms anticipated as part of climate change, protection of riparian areas for all of the County's waterways will become even more important, and riparian restoration represents an area where the County can improve the community's climate-change resiliency.

The Board of Supervisors has previously shown support for the protection of the San Lorenzo River and all County riparian areas through:

- Adoption of the County of Santa Cruz Steelhead and Coho Conservation Strategy (2015) and
- Approval of the County of Santa Cruz Climate Action Strategy (2013).

At this time, we ask you to direct the County Administrative Officer to work with County department heads to consider how riparian conservation can be considered within the County's Vision process as well as during the two-year budgeting process currently under way. While County resources are limited, careful attention to how the County can work with partners to secure outside grant funding may benefit all County watersheds and the County's financial outlook in the long run. Without County staff time to work with partners, however, grant funds will go to other counties and Santa Cruz will be left out.

Thank you for considering this request. We also encourage the Board to consider similar recommendations from the Fish and Wildlife Commission and the Water Commission, as our Commission has discussed the importance of this issue as part of our ad hoc Inter-Commission Coordination Working Group, which works to coordinate and broaden consensus on the recommendations we offer from the three advisory bodies. Thank you again for your leadership and protection of the unique and precious environment that County residents enjoy and depend upon in a changing world.

Sincerely,



Dr. John Hunt, Chair
Santa Cruz County Commission on the Environment

Cc: Water Advisory Commission
Fish and Wildlife Advisory Commission