

April 22, 2013

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Mr. Eric Shott
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Re: MRC 80-Year HCP/NCCP/TMP

Dear Gentlemen:

My name is Linda MacElwee. I work as the Navarro Watershed Coordinator for the Mendocino County Resource Conservation District. I have lived in the Navarro watershed and have been actively studying, working in and observing the watershed's landscape and ecological processes since I moved here thirteen years ago. In my work as Navarro Watershed Coordinator I am encouraged that the watershed seems to be in a natural process of recovery from the legacy logging practices and other historic land use activities. With the updated forestry practice rules and other best land management practices that are being implemented throughout the working landscapes found here, the watershed seems to be reflecting and benefitting from better stewardship.

Since 2000 the MCRCD has been actively implementing restoration projects to help address the accumulated and accelerated sediment loads through upgrading roads throughout the watershed by making them hydrologically invisible in the landscape and keeping sediment from delivering to the streams. I mention this simply because I have had the opportunity to observe positive changes in the system, with seemingly improved gravel and spawning areas.

As you are well aware, the Navarro is also listed for temperature TMDL on the 303(d) list for impaired watersheds. I am encouraged to hear that the temperatures have been decreasing on the North Fork Navarro over the past five years. I work closely with Kirk Vodopals and David Ulrich on restoration projects and have helped coordinate tours of MRC's restoration projects, the downstream migrant fish trap, and also a walk into Ray Gulch. I am very appreciative of MRC's efforts in restoration as well as their monitoring efforts, which we rely on greatly.

I feel that all of these efforts are part of what is making a “difference” here in the Navarro. This is a very important time in the watershed. We have a very tangible opportunity to restore and improve habitat conditions for steelhead and coho salmon and recovedring the fish populations here. Mendocino Redwood Company plays a vital role in these efforts by being the owners of roughly one quarter of the watershed, and a very important part of the watershed. Most of MRC’s lands in the Navarro are located in what the Department of Fish and Wildlife has designated as the Core Coho Area.

Scientific understanding is constantly evolving and we have only recently begun to understand all the habitat needs for the requirements of the salmonid life cycle. One example is the role that winter refugia plays in helping the fish to sustain through the winter and the spring months to get out of the high flows when storms come, having places where the fish can take and find refuge.

One such place that I was recently introduced to less than a year and a half ago is Ray Gulch, a very unique and special landscape in the Navarro. The size of this backwater/pond/marsh habitat area was described by Doug Albin, Department of Fish and Wildlife fisheries biologist, “to perhaps be large enough to support the entire coho population in the Navarro watershed for taking refuge in during the winter months.” Apparently areas like this are where the smolts can hang out get out of the winter flows, but can also put on weight and size before heading out to the estuary before they transition from fresh water to ocean conditions.

With coho listed as an endangered species and all of the dollars and resources that are being directed toward keeping this species from extinction, I would like to see Ray Gulch included in the Core Coho Area of the MRC-HCP. I understand and learned from the presentation that MRC gave here in Boonville that these areas are designated as such particularly for implementing restoration rather than for adding any additional protection. However, even if there are no real plans for work in the Ray Gulch sub basin or that not much in the way of “improvements” needs to made to it, I feel that if Ray Gulch is included in the Core Area it will benefit by simply being pointed out for its unique and important function and habitat value in the watershed.

Thank you so much for your consideration. I personally look forward to continuing to work closely with MRC for years to come in partnering on restoration and stewardship efforts in the Navarro watershed.

Sincerely, Linda MacElwee

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