

PO Box E,  
Graton, CA 95444  
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### Atascadero Creek

I have lived at this address on Graton Road since 1971. Our property boundary adjuncts and follows Atascadero creek for about 550 ft. . We are situated downstream and opposite an area in Graton zoned industrial.

Up until 1985 I would look forward to May when it was possible to walk down to the creek bank on dry ground. There were tule grasses growing in open areas and various types of shrubby and upright willows, and upright Oregon ash grew in a 30 foot wide strip from the creek bank. It was a fun place to go on a summer evening and my daughter and friends would play down there and climb the trees. I would often see adults and children fishing off of the bridge on Graton Road.

In 1986 after a late spring flood the flood waters did not recede. It stayed flooded approx. 75 ft from the creek bed and it was impossible to get to our fence line for 4 years or so. *These were the famous California drought years.* During that time the Oregon ashes, which were then sitting in standing water throughout the year died and the open area grew cattails way out into our pasture where it was then swampy. At the same time skeletons of dead oaks became visible upstream, looking across Graton Road to the south. Those oaks had been large trees probably at least 100 to 150 years old.

The water quite suddenly retreated *I believe* in the summer of 1990? Coincidence, maybe, but it was within the same 3 months that Graton Beverages and Chateau St Jean had been required by Public Health to hook up domestic water waste to the Graton Sewer. Our pasture has not been flooded to the same extent since but there is more water running through the creek area during the summer months than there used to be. If during the summer you look at the water running through this creek in Mill Station Road and Ragle Park - it is a trickle. Suddenly at Occidental road it is a lot of water. At Graton Road Bridge there is enough water to drown in during the summer

Now it is swampy close to the creek bed and not easy to get to the actual creek during the summer. The continually swampy ground cannot support the variety of vegetation that it used to do. The taller willows do not seem to be able to stand for long. The area with willows is now a tangle of dead Oregon ash or toppled willows. It is a mess! The annual winter floods with tremendous currents used to clean it out but it doesn't seem to any more.

Even the County seems to acknowledge that the creek is degraded. From afar the valley between Occidental and Graton Road is scenic but the scenic designation stops at Occidental Road. Even in the Fish & Game "Study of Atascadero Creek" studying

Atascadero creek stops at Occidental Road and does not follow it to its junction with Green Valley on its way to the Russian River.

I have not seen any one fishing from the bridge in years. In 1995 suddenly huge bullfrog tadpoles and mosquito fish appeared in the water at the bridge. I brought children to look at them. In 1996 the creek was dead again. No living moving creature in the water. Just a little hiatus from industrial activity with the change over from Graton Beverage leaving and AVG moving in.

The creek could recover given the opportunity!

Margaret Brown