



Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed

Post Office Box 415 Larkspur, California 94977

May 1, 2001

Christine Kennelly
BayKeeper
PO Box 29921
San Francisco, CA 94129-0921

RE: Corte Madera Creek

Dear Ms. Kennelly,

Several weeks ago BayKeeper called Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed while compiling a list of impaired water bodies for the Regional Water Quality Control Board to ask whether there was information about pollutants that threaten the beneficial uses of Corte Madera Creek. We are pleased that BayKeeper will evaluate Corte Madera Creek and its tributaries as a watershed that is impaired and should be targeted for protection. We have identified the following reasons, using the criteria of the Unified Watershed Assessment, for including Corte Madera Creek Watershed in the list of Category I Watershed:

Resource Goal: Water Quality

Criteria of Determining Impairment: Water Body has impaired beneficial uses (water quality, fisheries)

1. **Excessive sediment:** A recent study conducted as part of a plan to improve water quality and reduce flood hazard in the watershed found sediment to be excessive. Stetson Engineers, Inc. hired by the County of Marin in cooperation with Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed focused on sediment sources and identified several problems affecting the health of the creek. Their study presents a preliminary estimated bedload sediment budget for Corte Madera Creek at one location in the watershed, and evaluates whether or not the sediment load there is unnaturally high. They found that due to persistent upland land use impacts, the Corte Madera creek watershed's bedload sediment yield can be considered to be unnaturally high.
2. **Chemical pollution:** Studies by the RWQCB has indicted high levels of diazinon in Corte Madera Creek (Fall '1996).
3. **Bacterial pollution:** The water in Corte Madera Creek has levels of *E. coli* that are too high for water-contact recreation. Although the creek is used extensively for boating at this time, in the past it was a popular spot for swimming. That is no longer considered safe because of the bacterial contamination.
4. **Thermal pollution:** Steelhead trout and beneficial uses for coldwater fish are at risk due to high temperatures in portions of the watershed. A.A. Rich and Associates,

fisheries and ecological consultants hired by Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed with a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation identified some of the limiting factors for steelhead trout. Temperature was one such factor. Although water temperatures were higher than optimal in most of the creek, temperature monitoring results demonstrated that, despite potentially thermally stressful conditions in many areas of the watershed, there are some deep pools that provide thermal refugia where trout reside during the hotter summer months. The concrete flood control channel had dangerously high temperatures during steelhead emigration periods.

Resource Goal: Fish and Aquatic Species

Criteria of Determining Impairment: Aquatic and wetlands species proposed or listed under state or federal endangered species laws are present

1. **Steelhead:** Corte Madera is one of the few streams flowing into San Francisco Bay that retains a population of threatened steelhead trout and an assemblage of five other native freshwater fish. The creek was identified by Robert Leidy, EPA biologist, as one of the watersheds that should be targeted for protection. Although the A.A. Rich study in 1999 included the first quantitative fish population survey conducted in the watershed, informal counts and anecdotal information suggest that populations have declined in the last few decades.
2. **Salt marsh harvest mouse and clapper rail:** The California clapper rail and the salt marsh harvest mouse are found in the Ecological Reserve in Corte Madera and the California clapper rail is also found at Creekside Park in Kentfield.
3. **California red-legged frog:** The California red-legged frog is known from nearby areas in Marin County. Although surveys have not been conducted for this frog, suitable habitat is found in the watershed.


Resource Goal: Habitat Protection

Criteria of Determining Impairment: The quality of aquatic and riparian systems is impaired as identified by the professional judgement assessment (PJA)

1. **Stetson Engineers and A. A. Rich Studies:** Stetson Engineers and A.A. Rich are experts in their respective fields. The reports they prepared document hydrograph changes, streambed changes, loss of riparian habitat, land use and human impacts, increased water temperature, and water quality degradation.

Thank you for considering Corte Madera Creek for impaired status. If you have questions please call Sandra Guldman at 415 456-5052 or Carole d'Alessio at 415 454-8608.

Sincerely,


Carole d'Alessio
Co-chair


Sandra Guldman
Co-chair