



Austin Creek Rural Road Improvement Program

The delivery of road-related sediment to a stream is analogous to death by a thousand paper cuts. In any watershed, runoff from hundreds of miles of poorly drained, unpaved roads affects both water quality and aquatic habitat by delivering large volumes of fine sediment to the stream system. The steep terrain, erosive soils, and high annual precipitation of the Austin Creek Watershed

exacerbate this process, causing serious impacts to a variety of fish habitat conditions. Excessive fine sediment can fill pools that fish use for resting and cover, reduce in-stream habitat complexity, and degrade spawning habitats. In addition, excessive erosion can have dramatic effects on the functionality of the road, potentially restricting emergency access during fire events, and requiring much higher road maintenance for landowners.

The Austin Creek Watershed has undergone significant disturbance due to timber harvest, mining, and rural residential development activities over the past century. This disturbance, coupled with steep terrain and highly erodible geology, results in an erosion-prone landscape. The Austin Creek Watershed Assessment concluded that the dense network of unpaved rural roads in the watershed has caused excessive erosion and delivery of fine sediment in to Austin Creek and its tributaries. This conclusion is supported by monitoring data collected through Phase 1 of the Coastal Tributary Improvement Program.

Working with landowners throughout the Austin Creek Watershed to assess ongoing erosion and sediment delivery issues, and repair the problems that result in these issues, will be the focus of the Rural Road Improvement Program. To date, the SRCD has received interest agreements from landowners yielding over 35 miles of road that could be assessed if funding is procured for this program. Addressing these incremental “paper cuts” will have positive, far-reaching effects on water quality in the region.

“In Austin Creek there is a clear need to focus on and address the legacy roads and skid trails and restore slope and runoff processes which will support and sustain healthy creek habitats.”

-Austin Creek Watershed

Assessment,

Laurel Marcus & Associates