



Sotoyome RCD Austin Creek Watershed Restoration Program

The Sotoyome RCD has developed an innovative program focused on assessing the habitat conditions and restoration priorities in the Austin Creek Watershed by establishing baseline monitoring on several significant tributaries, assessing the watershed based on historic and current land use records, and providing outreach to landowners and residents about watershed health.

From ridgeline to channel substrate, the Austin Creek Watershed Restoration Program aims to build and expand upon the efforts and partnerships established by the RCD and to address habitat restoration within the entire watershed. The Program includes working throughout the upper watershed to assess and improve unpaved private roads (over 40 miles assessed thus far) and other sediment sources to reduce the amount of fine sediment runoff that reduces pool depth and water quality and clogs salmonid spawning gravels in vital tributary habitat downstream. Also included in the program is the expansion of the Lower Austin Migration Improvement Project (LACMIP). The LACMIP is based on a unique partnership between gravel mining company Bohan Canelis, NOAA Fisheries, DFG, and Sotoyome RCD. This innovative approach to restoration addresses the aggraded channel condition and lack of available habitat for migration and rearing of salmonids in lower Austin Creek by creating necessary pool habitat and connectivity to the Russian River through channel excavation and placement of scour structures. The LACMIP aims to facilitate salmonid recovery in conjunction with the Coho Broodstock Program by re-establishing the habitat conditions necessary for the successful re-colonization of Coho salmon in the watershed. The RCD is currently outreaching to landowner upstream of this successful project to hopefully implement more instream projects using this approach.

Annual monitoring activities associated with the LACMIP, which are used to evaluate project success, include:

- Early winter deployment of a remote underwater video camera used to document the instream migration of adult fish, particularly focused on capturing evidence of adult coho moving into Austin Creek to spawn.
- Spring installation of a rotating screw trap to census and inventory (catch and release) out-migrating smolts.
- Complete annual digital terrain mapping of the channel to track the geomorphic effects of LACMIP activities.

"Austin Creek is a great watershed for restoration in part because it has fewer threats to Coho salmon habitat than perhaps any other Coho stream in the Russian River. Historically, it was also a major contributor to the lower Russian River population, which in turn was the largest and most important source population in the species' range. This makes Austin Creek strategically important to the species' recovery as well."

*-David Hines, Fishery Biologist,
NOAA's National Marine
Fisheries Service*

- Continuous temperature monitoring of over-summer pool habitat throughout the project reach.

As with all RCD programs, adaptive management is a key tool. We will rely on monitoring and community feedback to gauge the effectiveness of the projects and use this information to refine and improve our implementation strategy.

Program Partners and Funders: Private Landowners, Pacific Watershed Associates, Department of Fish and Game, California State Coastal Conservancy, NOAA Fisheries

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