

**A Call by Leading Scientists to Increase Protections for  
Endangered Central Coast California Coho Salmon in Marin  
County, CA  
September 2007**

Wild coho salmon populations have undergone a ninety-percent decline in California since the 1940s<sup>1</sup>. The causes of this decline such as urbanization, dams, and logging operations are well known and documented. All California coho were listed as “threatened” by the US government in 1997 and the Central California Coast Evolutionarily Significant Unit (CCC ESU) coho salmon was down-listed to “endangered” status in 2005. The State of California listed the populations north of San Francisco as endangered in 2002.

As scientists concerned with the health and recovery of salmonid populations throughout California, **we support increased habitat protections for the largest remaining wild population of CCC ESU coho salmon, located in the Lagunitas Creek Watershed**, west Marin County. This population makes up 10-20% of the fish in the ESU.

Lands in the lower reaches of the Lagunitas Creek watershed are relatively well protected (they include State Parks, National Parks and Recreation Areas, and County and Water District property) and maintain habitat values important to coho and other native species. But, thirty-one percent of spawning in the Lagunitas Creek Watershed occurs in the un-dammed headwaters of the Lagunitas Watershed, in the San Geronimo Valley. And the first year of out-migration research in 2006<sup>2</sup> documented that approximately 1/3 of Lagunitas Creek coho rear in these headwater reaches.

The San Geronimo Valley supports a growing human population whose lands are governed by elements in the Marin County General Plan and by the County Board of Supervisors. Increased erosion and sedimentation and stormwater runoff as a result of increasing impervious surfaces, loss of riparian areas and floodplains to development and invasive species, and leaking septic systems pose significant threats to the survival of coho salmon.

**We, the undersigned, call on Marin County Supervisors to:**

1. Adopt a moratorium on any new construction in the County’s 100-foot Stream Conservation Area (SCA) until such time as a **Cumulative**

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<sup>1</sup> LARRY R. BROWN, PETER B. MOYLE, AND RONALD M. YOSHIYAMA. Historical Decline and Current Status of Coho Salmon in California. North American Journal of Fisheries Management Vol 14 no 2 May, 1994

<sup>2</sup> Stillwater Sciences 2007. Lagunitas Limiting Factors Analysis. Prepared for Marin Resource Conservation District. Final draft in Progress.

**Impact Analysis**, as required under California’s Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), has been completed that can inform the County on degradation thresholds and the limits of development that coho can withstand;

2. Enact a **Native Riparian Forest Management Policy and Ordinance** that prohibits removal of streamside native vegetation. Right now, there is NO special protection for streamside trees and landowners are permitted to remove five trees/year without a permit;

3. Implement **strict enforcement of violations and illegal development** in the 100-foot Stream Conservation Area;

4. Require any new development in coho watersheds to meet a **zero net increase in storm-water run-off**;

5. **Close loopholes in the Stream Conservation Area ordinance.** Modify the draft County-wide Plan to eliminate provisions that allow new construction in the SCA and that increase NOT decrease protections for coho salmon and creek-side habitats;

6. Marin County Supervisors should work with non-governmental organizations and other agencies to begin a process to **identify and acquire undeveloped land parcels** before they are compromised by impervious surfaces, lost or degraded riparian habitats, declines in water quality, and other urban impacts.

In recognizing that measures which protect coho salmon in their freshwater habitat will also benefit a wide range of species including threatened steelhead trout and chinook salmon, and over 225 birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians depend on California’s riparian habitat,<sup>3</sup> we urge the County of Marin to take urgent actions to implement the highest standards of protections for the San Geronimo Valley headwaters region. Sincerely,

Signatures as of \_\_\_\_\_, 2007.

**NOTE: All affiliations for identification purposes only**

Name	Affiliation
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<sup>3</sup> Riparian Habitat Joint Venture. 2004. The riparian bird conservation plan: a strategy for reversing the decline of riparian associated birds in California. California Partners in Flight. <http://www.prbo.org/calpif/riparian.v-2.pdf>

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<b>Additional organizations endorsing this</b>	
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<b>letter:</b>	
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Storm Cunningham	Executive Director, Revitalization Institute
Robert T. Burke	Director, Atascadero/Green Valley Watershed Council
Helge Hellberg	Executive Director, Marin Organic
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