

COUNTY OF MARIN FAILS TO PROTECT CRITICAL HABITAT FOR ENDANGERED COHO SALMON

Leading Aquatic Scientists Call on Supervisors to End Delays for Coho Stream Protections

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Olema, CA- Leading aquatic scientists are publicly calling on Marin County Supervisors to take immediate action to protect critical habitat for the Bay Area's last-remaining wild run of endangered coho salmon habitat, and end their delay tactics.

The letter to Marin's Supervisors signed by over 150 scientists, including two of the world's most prominent salmon and aquatic scientists, Dr. Peter Moyle, Professor of Fisheries Biology at U.C. Davis, and California Academy of Sciences Senior Scientist and Chair of Aquatic Biology, Dr. John Mc Cosker, calls for immediate enforcement of existing rules and the implementation of new protective measures to support salmon recovery. For the letter and more background info see <http://spawnusa.org/pages/page-324>.

The County of Marin has continued delaying implementation of necessary protective measures for important spawning and nursery habitat areas in headwater reaches of the Lagunitas Creek Watershed in West Marin County, despite the species being on the verge of extinction. Earlier this year the Federal government declared an "extinction crisis" for Central California coho salmon and called for urgent watershed protections.

"The lack of habitat protections in the headwaters of the Lagunitas Watershed for this wild run of salmon could impact the recovery status of extirpated populations along the entire central California coast. We are asking that the County stop stalling and implement strong, enforceable habitat protections for endangered Lagunitas coho," said Dr. Peter Moyle. Dr. Moyle is one of the lead authors of the recent report called "SOS: California's Native Fish Crisis" which determined that coho salmon are the most endangered salmon species in California and face sure extinction if current habitat degradation trends persist. Lagunitas coho salmon, despite their low numbers, are currently represent the largest-remaining wild run of this species along the entire Central California coast

Among the key recommendations supported in the scientist letter is the thorough and full enforcement of all existing habitat protection laws and regulations and the enactment of a native riparian forest management ordinance that protects the core streamside habitat salmon rely on for survival. Currently, Marin County allows landowners along streams to cut down up to 5 trees along streams every year without any permits, mitigations or accountability. Scientists are also calling on Marin to close loopholes in the Stream Conservation Area ordinance for new construction directly along streams resulting in the net loss of critical riparian habitat. The County continues to publicly acknowledge that they are aware regulations are inadequate but have failed to act for over 3 years.

“What little, if any, progress the county is currently making is occurring at such a glacial pace that the fish are headed for extinction, not recovery, said Paola Bouley, SPAWN’s Conservation Director. She added, “For the past 3 years the County has promised reforms of habitat protections they fully know are inadequate, yet to date and after countless meetings and delays, we have yet to see any protections manifest for these public trust resources.”

Deborah Sivas, Luke W. Cole Professor of Environmental Law and Director of the Stanford Environmental Law Clinic Stanford Law School, concluded "Wild populations of coho are hanging on by a thread across California, while the County allows ongoing destruction of habitat and continues to approve developments that compromise the species’s future in the most important watershed we have left." She continued, "The coho salmon is an indicator species, the proverbial canary in the coal mine. Without meaningful regulations to protect habitat and balance restoration efforts, and without the political will to enforce such protections, we will lose this treasured California species and the ecosystem which it defines."

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