



DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

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JUN 08 RECD

June 1, 2004 #1823

GRAND JURYJacob Bayless, Foreman
The Sonoma County Grand Jury
Post Office Box 5109
Santa Rosa, CA 95402

Dear Mr. Bayless:

As you requested in your letter of May 26, 2004, the Department of Fish and Game (DFG), Central Coast Region has reviewed your report entitled "Adobe Creek Debacle and Restoration". This report discusses the impacts of channel maintenance work conducted by the Sonoma County Water Agency in Adobe Creek, in Petaluma, upstream of Sartori Drive. This site was inspected on October 7, 2003, shortly after completion of work, by Mr. Bill Cox of my staff. Mr. Cox is the District Fishery Biologist for Sonoma and Marin counties where he has served since 1980. A significant part of Mr. Cox's duty has been to work closely with the flood control agencies in both Sonoma and Marin counties.

During his inspection of Adobe Creek on October 7, 2003, Mr. Cox found that all work had been confined to the area upstream of the Sartori Drive bridge. No work had been done in approximately the first 50 feet upstream from Sartori Drive. This area had been very sparsely vegetated prior to the start of work by the Sonoma County Water Agency. No trees had been removed or trimmed within this reach.

From approximately 50 feet upstream of Sartori Drive to approximately 350 feet upstream of Sartori Drive, a distance of about 300 feet, willow trees in the channel bottom had been thinned and low-growing branches had been trimmed to reduce the resistance to water flow. Mr. Cox found that the density of trees which had been left in the channel bottom was about half of what he would have preferred be left. All the trees that had

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been removed were growing on the channel bottom, and not on the stream banks. The removal of this vegetation removed some cover over the low flow channel of the stream, but did not result in any impediment to fish passage.

From approximately 350 feet upstream of Sartori Drive to approximately 900 feet upstream, a distance of about 550 feet willows in the channel bottom had also been thinned and the low growing branches on the retained trees trimmed. In this area it is Mr. Cox's opinion that an appropriate tree density was retained to maintain cover over the low flow channel.

Upstream of the point approximately 900 feet upstream of Sartori Drive there was no evidence of any tree thinning, trimming, or other work done by the Sonoma County Water Agency.

Prior to the start of any work by the Sonoma County Water Agency, Adobe Creek in this area upstream of Sartori Drive suffered from an excessive density of willows in the channel bottom. This was probably due in part to a natural early successional stage revegetation of a flood control channel that was not being regularly maintained. It was also due in part to the planting of willow cuttings in the channel bottom, in what was probably an inappropriate location. In a natural environment these willows would have grown up, in places the willows and debris trapped in the willows would have blocked the channel, the banks would have eroded, the stream would have meandered, larger trees would eventually have grown to a point where the willows would have been shaded out, and, after a period of 40 to 80 years, the stream may have reached some level of stability. In an urban setting, this natural process is often not acceptable.

Rather than the planting of willows in the channel bottom, what Adobe Creek needs is the planting of native riparian trees, such as cottonwood, live oak, and big leaf maple, along the mid and upper banks to shade the stream, and to shade out the willows that tend to grow in the channel bottom. Ultimately this would lead to a healthy stream system with habitat for aquatic life as well as for a diversity of terrestrial and avian wildlife. Unfortunately, these trees will take a very long time to grow. In the meantime, some willows need to be retained in

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the channel bottom, but these willows will need to be maintained to keep them from choking the stream.

Based on our observations, we disagree with the conclusions of the Grand Jury that there has been a "clear-cutting" of vegetation in Adobe Creek at any place upstream of Sartori Drive. There had, in fact, been only a "selective thinning". Within a reach of about 300 feet this "selective thinning" had removed more vegetation than we would have recommended.

The DFG disagrees with Finding F2 in that the United Anglers of Casa Grande fish hatchery operation does not include steelhead trout. It did at one time, but steelhead have not been reared in the hatchery since 1995. Hatchery operations are currently limited to Chinook salmon and domestic rainbow trout. The United Anglers of Casa Grande has been involved with the rescue of stranded juvenile steelhead trout from Adobe Creek and the immediate release of those fish to places in the creek which can better support them.

The DFG agrees with Recommendation R1 that the Streambed Alteration Agreement with the Sonoma County Water Agency should be updated. It may not, however, be appropriate to enter into that process "immediately". The ongoing Section 7 consultation process between the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, Sonoma County Water Agency, and NOAA Fisheries, and the CEQA process that will follow, will determine the character of future flood channel maintenance. It will be appropriate to wait until the Section 7 Consultation process is complete before updating the Streambed Alteration Agreement.

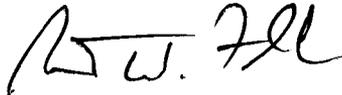
We agree with Recommendation R5 that the DFG should participate in the five year pilot program for environmental education at the Petaluma high schools, and the restoration of Adobe Creek, along with the Sonoma County Water Agency and NOAA Fisheries. Our participation will be limited by the availability of funding and staff time, but we agree that this will be a valuable endeavor.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on your report on Adobe Creek and look forward to working with the Petaluma School District, the Sonoma County Water Agency, and other concerned parties in the restoration and better management of Adobe Creek.

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If you have any questions regarding our observation of Adobe Creek, or on other matters related to stream management, please contact Mr. Cox, District Fishery Biologist, at (707) 823-1001.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R.W. Floerke". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underlining the first part of the name.

Robert W. Floerke
Regional Manager
Central Coast Region