

Guest Report

Marin RCD obtains large grant for ag

By George Clyde

With this year's severe drought, hopefully coming to an end, and with all the government shutdowns and sequestrations and cutbacks to agricultural programs last year, at last there's some good news for agriculture in our area. The Marin Resource Conservation District has received a \$600,000 government grant to improve conservation practices at fifteen farms and ranches, including projects in the Tomales Bay and San Antonio Creek Watersheds.

The RCD will use the funds to implement practices that improve water quality. These include improving livestock trails and walkways, plantings of native trees and shrubs in critical areas, protections for fish streams, construction of sediment basins and fencing off creek beds. The California Department of Water Resources awarded the grant, but other government agencies will be contributing to the projects, as will the individual ranchers.

"In these tough times, I'm thrilled and so proud that the RCD's work has been recognized with this large grant," said Hank Corda, President of the RCD. He said that the funds would allow continuation of the RCD's "Conserve our Watersheds" program, which already has similar projects totaling \$2.6 million completed or underway on 25 local ranches.

Many of the projects are designed to address the sediment and nutrients that have caused Tomales Bay to be deemed an impaired water body. The successful spawning of Coho salmon in Walker Creek, which the RCD helped restore for over 25 years, is the most recent demonstration of the impact of the RCD's watershed restoration program.

Nancy Scolari, Executive Director of the RCD, said the organization had run out of funding for future projects of this sort, so a lot was riding on the grant request. "What great news!" she said. "This gives us the ability to continue our ag conservation work well into 2016." Based in Point Reyes Station, the RCD has overseen more than \$27 million in resource conservation projects since it was formed in the 1960s.

The RCD will be using this latest grant for projects in West Marin and elsewhere in Marin and southern Sonoma County. Partners include MALT, the Sonoma County RCD, the University of California Cooperative Extension Service and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The author resides in Marshall and serves as an Associate Director of the Marin RCD.

Controversial watchdog aims at DBOC

By Summer Brennan

The controversial Sonoma-based environmental litigation group, California River Watch, has filed a lawsuit against the Drakes Bay Oyster Company, accusing it of "polluting the national park waters and ocean with waste water, plastic, and invasive species."

The group announced their intent to sue DBOC back in July, and finally filed the petition this past Friday, February 7.

"River Watch has filed a completely meritless suit," said Peter Prowse, an attorney for oyster farm owners Kevin and Nancy Lunny. "The only explanation for filing this suit is that it must think Drakes Bay will prevail in its litigation against the Department of the Interior before the U.S. Supreme Court."

When River Watch announced their intent to sue last year, Kevin Lunny was incredulous and more than a little put out.

"There are no pollutants," Lunny told KQED at the time. "The discharges that they're talking about? From our shucking and packing operation? That all goes into a septic tank and into a septic system that's pumped over the hill and disposed of under ground into a septic system. None of that meets receiving waters."

River Watch in turn argues that DBOC has been "repeatedly cited by state agencies for its pollution, failure to obtain permits, and violations of environmental protection laws," according to a press release.

"The Drakes Bay Oyster Company's lack of adherence to the federal Clean Water Act pollutes our national park waters and degrades one of the most ecologically important wilderness areas established in the United States," said group representative Larry Hanson.

As previously reported in the Citizen, River Watch has a contentious history. As in other litigation cases, their lawsuit against the Lunnys is not based on new research or information, but on existing – and contested – ongoing complaints. Some California city officials have accused River Watch of misusing environmental laws to reap financial gains.

Established in 1996 by former personal injury lawyer Jack Silver and his brother Paul Silver – also of Silver & Silver LLP of Santa Rosa – the group makes a profit by filing lawsuits against companies, cities and other entities in the name of protecting Northern California's waters. In many of the cases, large cash settlements were reached out of court, with money going directly

Opinion

DBOC files cross-complaint against Coastal