

May 20, 2011

Honorable Mayor Al Boro
San Rafael City Council
1400 Fifth Avenue
San Rafael, CA 94901

Re: San Rafael Watershed Planning – Gallinas Creek

Hon. Mayor Al Boro:

When Leslie...left her waterfront house on April 29, she expected to be returning soon. She knew the Mississippi River was rising and had even taken the precaution of removing her possessions from her home with a friend's trailer. But Leslie...a native of Tunica, Miss., had dealt with floods before --- and besides, her house was built on stilts. "I took it for granted that we'd automatically go back afterwards," she said. It was "a slap in the face" when, on her 52nd birthday, she was shown the first pictures documenting the damage done to her home....¹

What's happening with the Mississippi River? All the channelization, levees and dams upstream are diverting Nature from doing the work it knows best how to do. Now, the S. F. Bay Area Delta is in danger of this happening as well. Due to failing levees and wetlands destruction, our Delta is no longer available to act like a sponge to hold water during the rainy season. An important part of this big picture is getting our San Rafael watersheds to work effectively.

Marin County is taking the lead by initiating the watershed planning process for Gallinas Creek and is seeking municipal and neighborhood support. The headwaters of Gallinas Creek are in north San Rafael and the watershed plan must include this area to be viable and worthwhile.

As the largest neighborhood association in San Rafael, we urge the City to partner with the County in this significant opportunity. This will enable the Gallinas Watershed to be treated as a whole system across City and County boundaries. Only with long-term stormwater management will the potential to restore the Gallinas Creek be achieved.

At the headwaters, we have invasive riparian species threatening our native plants and animals. Then, the waters flow to an entombed trash-filled creek in the middle of Freitas Parkway. The speeding storm water causes sewage overflows, creates flooding and contaminates our beautiful Bay and ocean. These are all evidence of an out-of-balance environment. While the U.S. Army Corps culverts and storm drains were considered best practices in the 1950s and 1960s---when Terra Linda was being developed---we now know that this approach kills streams and exacerbates flooding downstream. What was once a lively and vital salmon habitat is now an algae- and trash-filled ditch.

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We know that we are facing painful budget cuts now...but we also know that next month the federal regulations on stormwater pollution prevention become effective.² A coordinated watershed planning process will go far toward meeting the new regulations. We feel that a collaborative spirit should incorporate San Rafael residents and the many neighborhood associations that are directly impacted by this issue. In the long run, planning now will result in a more viable community, healthier ecosystem and cost-effective management.

Other Bay Area cities, such as El Cerrito, have found that creek restoration actually reduces flooding and increases property values for those areas. In addition, watershed planning is essential for federal and state funding support. These funds are currently only available to multi-use, multi-benefit projects, such as the North San Rafael Promenade---as described in our Vision Plan---which stretches along much of Freitas Parkway and Gallinas Creek. Let's put the utilities underground, not the creeks.

We support the City of San Rafael's environmental and community leadership (along with Novato, San Anselmo, Ross and Fairfax). As past partners with the City on the Recreate the Creek project, remember that Santa Margarita Neighborhood Association is ready to help in ways you think best. Please assure us of your support and cooperation with the County to plan a restored watershed for Gallinas Creek.

Sincerely,

SANTA MARGARITA NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

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Mr. Bob Brown, Director of Community Development
Ms. Liz Lewis, Principal Planner, County of Marin Public Works – Water Resources
Gallinas Watershed Council
Northbay Watershed Association

¹ Courtney Hutchison, ABC News Medical Unit, May 12, 2011

² <http://www.ci.el-cajon.ca.us/content/forms/SWPPP.pdf>;
http://www.epa.gov/oaintrnt/documents/epa_swm_guidance.pdf