Plan for Wildfire

You probably know that the worst fires happen during days of low humidity and high temperatures and winds. Did you know, however, that many of these big fires have occurred in early spring or late fall — outside the “normal” fire season? And with multiple fire events on those days, responders were stretched thin, making matters worse. Other than the 2008 Tar Fire, our upper watershed has been largely missed. That means, unfortunately, we have huge fuel loads in our unburned areas. How dangerous a fire becomes is a factor of fuels, weather, and topography (steeper is more hazardous). The only factors we can control are the amount of fuel and our own human behavior.

When (and it’s “when” not “if”) a wildfire comes our way, we have 3 choices: 1) Full evacuation: Get out early so as not to block or distract firefighters from saving our structures, 2) A pre-identified refuge area: A wetlands or other low-combustion area or well-defended building, or 3) Shelter-in-place: Based on the theory that by the time your building catches on fire, the fire outside has already passed. Sheltering-in-place is not passive however: you must be patrolling all the time.

Homes catch fire from radiant heat and embers. Receptive fuel beds include duff between boards on a deck, plastic chairs and other deck furniture, brooms, and other readily flammable items. Embers will pile up in the same places where leaves and duff already collect. Whether your home survives depends on its ignitability and the 100+ feet around it. As explained in CalFIRE literature (available online), your fire prevention priorities are: 1) roof edges, 2) eaves and vents, 3) defensible space (e.g., trim up limbs and separate shrubs, move propane tanks 50 ft. away, etc.), 4) under deck storage, 5) the decks themselves (use a fire retardant finish), and 6) siding.

Use shaded fuel breaks beyond your 100’ defensible space. Shaded fuel breaks are the selective thinning and removal of the more flammable understory vegetation while leaving the larger, more fire-tolerant tree species in place. The understory needs to be cleared yearly to be effective. Note: when cutting (highly flammable) bay trees, leave one or two stems — the tree will put its energy into those remaining stems, instead of sprouting out in all directions and becoming a thick bush.

Our Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) will be identifying our priorities for fire readiness in the upper watershed, and providing opportunities for additional funding for the actual work. Come to the April 22nd Hike & Hoot for more info.

Sonoma RCD Watershed News

Grants: Together with Trout Unlimited, Sonoma County Regional Parks, and the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation & Open Space District, the Sonoma Resource Conservation District (RCD) has submitted a grant proposal to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to fund in-stream habitat and floodplain enhancement, as well as riparian revegetation work, on a private property upstream of the confluence of Mark West and Porter Creeks.

Recent news on proposals submitted to Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB): funding is likely for a Mark West Creek watershed flow model/pilot study (a partnership with Pepperwood Preserve, O’Connor Environmental, Inc., and Sonoma County Regional Parks). Unfortunately our larger multi-benefit proposal for rainwater catchment and road improvement on multiple properties was not approved. Sonoma RCD is pursuing funding for smaller parts of this proposal.

Program Updates: Our upcoming Strategic Plan for the RCD will include input for key partners, including FMWW. We are also collaborating with regional partners to develop a LandSmart® Plan template for Forestlands for late Spring 2017. The template will help us assist forest landowners with evaluating their properties and identifying ways to improve forest health, sequester carbon, improve water quality, and enhance wildlife habitat.

The Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program, coordinated by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), can assist landowners with responding to imminent hazards to life and property caused by natural disasters. If you’ve experienced significant damage to your property from recent weather events and would like to learn more, please contact the RCD today: 707-569–1448.

Funding Opportunities: Sonoma RCD is looking for landowners for the following project opportunities:

1. Assist a limited number of grape growers in the Mark West Creek watershed with irrigation system evaluations, water management and conservation plans, irrigation equipment upgrades, and soil and plant stress monitoring. Contact Keith: kabels@sonomarcd.org.

2. We are always interested in developing in-stream habitat restoration projects in the Mark West Creek watershed, particularly installing large-wood structures for fish habitat and refuge. (See photos on back page.) If your property includes a stretch of creek and you’d be interested in enhancing in-stream fish habitat, contact Aaron: afairbrook@sonomarcd.org.

Contact the RCD at www.sonomarcd.org or 707-569–1448.
Please join us for all or part of the festivities:

1:30 PM  
Begins: meet your neighbors, sign-up for hikes, and visit tables hosted by our presenters.  
Plus, free Comet Corn Popcorn!

HIKES:
2:15  Native Wildflowers & Plants with Botanist Sue Smith (STRENUOUS hike)
2:15  Indoor presentation, then walk with Matt O’Connor, Geohydrologist
2:30  Pond Ecology with Steve Williams
2:45  Kids’ Nature Walk with Krista Gasper from LandPaths
TBD  Alternative family walk with Greg Damron
TBD  Alternative Native Wildflower hike with Richard Baril to tall overlook
4:00  Meet back at the HUB for popcorn and beverages
4:10  Short talk: CWPP and wildfire protection efforts in the watershed
4:15-5:00  Main Speaker: Lisa Micheli from Pepperwood Preserve on Climate Change in the Watershed

5:30-6:15  Potluck Supper: Please bring enough to serve 12 and label ingredients. If you invite friends, have them bring food too!  
Last name: A to I = Bring desserts;  
J to S = Bring salads or appetizers;  
T to Z = Bring entrees, sides, or vegetables
6:15-6:40  Silent auction: Bring cash, CREDIT CARDS, or checkbook. Proceeds go to cover H&H costs.
6:40-7:00  Potluck clean-up
7:00-9:15  Fire-circle (weather permitting) with storytelling and music jam
8:15-9:15  Owl Hike: Night hike with Greg Damron calling (hoot) for owls, while fire circle continues (sunset is 7:54 PM)
9:15 PM  Close down and clean-up

Location: 7899 Saint Helena Road (7899 Puff Lane)

Please join us for all or part of the festivities:  
Hiking shoes or boots, sunscreen, water bottle and flashlight recommended. Children and musical instruments welcome! Car-pooling strongly encouraged.

Monan’s Rill House Rules:  No smoking, no pets, and stay away from the ponds. All guests sign a release form when checking in at HUB.

Directions to Monan’s Rill:  7899 St. Helena Rd, Santa Rosa CA 95404. Approx. four miles up St. Helena Rd. from Calistoga Rd, look for the Hike & Hoot signs. On a sharp right turn, there are several mailboxes on the left, at the base of “Puff Lane,” a one-lane gravel road. Follow the H&H signs up Puff Lane: it’s approximately one mile to HUB building. Drive pass HUB to parking areas as designated by signs or attendants.

Questions? info@markwestwatershed.org or call 538-5307
Wildlife Camera Report

When FMWW started the Wildlife Camera Program more than two years ago we had goals in mind to learn about the following:

• Presence of various species within the watershed
• Relative abundance of various species within the watershed
• Rough distribution of species in both time and space (e.g., are certain species only present at certain times of the year?)

In addition we said “We are hoping to eventually capture photos of the more rare species believed to live in this area, including bear, ringtail, or badger”.

We now have multiple bear pictures over a multi-year stretch of time, so they’re definitely our neighbors! And thankfully not yet into our trash. Although we have no shots of ringtail or badger, we do have pictures of a river otter — a whole “raft” in fact.

We still don’t have a wide enough distribution of cameras feeding into the system to understand the spatial distribution of animals. But we can draw some interesting conclusions from the 4888 events we have captured and categorized from the 8 cameras which are feeding us images.

• Deer are the vast majority of our events with a count of 3740.
• Deer are common at any time of the day but seem to have a particular affinity for evening. The hours of 5, 6, 7 PM have twice as many events as the average for the remaining 21 hours.

See actual photos of pumas, bears, otters, and more at the Hike & Hoot!

Puma camera “captures” by hour of the day:

![Puma camera captures by hour of the day](Image)

Puma captures by month:

![Puma captures by month](Image)

FMWW - LandPaths Partnership

By Richard “Mapache” Baril

As a founding member of Friends of Mark West Watershed (FMWW), I have watched this grassroots organization develop and grow over the last 16-17 years. In 2001, local citizens opposed the development of 900 acres on Saddle Mountain in the upper Mark West Watershed. FMWW was born. Working together with Sonoma County Open Space and the landowners, the property became a “forever wild” nature preserve.

To help bring awareness to our beautiful watershed, FMWW has forged a wonderful relationship with LandPaths, as explained by Lee Hackling, Assistant Director at LP:

“In 2016 LandPaths made the final payment to Jim and Betty Doerksen to purchase Rancho Mark West (RMW), a 120-acre pristine property on the upper Mark West Creek watershed, as a ‘learning landscape’ in perpetuity. Jim and Betty are where our story starts, stewarding the land for over 40 years and actively hosting the public — thousands of kids — to their property. Now LandPaths will become more involved at RMW. All our activities will continue to support our mission — to foster a love of the land.

“LandPaths: 1) hosts outings to spark people’s connection with nature, with special attention given to reducing barriers to getting outside; (2) builds comfort and confidence — belonging — in the outdoors, forging a community culture around land; (3) fosters commitments to nature and community — people become stewards for life; (4) models values-based leadership for conservation success. People and partnerships are front and center to how LandPaths accomplishes our mission. We depend on neighbors and the surrounding community to be partners in the land, especially around our preserves (we currently own 5).

“LandPaths and FMWW have a shared vision, as demonstrated in our joint participation in Hike and Hoot and the family-oriented Holiday Gathering. LandPaths envisions RMW to be a community hub where LandPaths, FMWW and the larger community come together to discover, learn, and steward the watershed. From programs that we already host at the site — In Our Own BackYard with schools, Owl Camp for nature-filled summers, a Yoga/Hike/Garden class — to new initiatives in water catchment, Citizen Science and other efforts, LandPaths aims to continually remind and enrich people’s connection with nature. LandPaths looks forward to envisioning a common future of a nature-based culture with FMWW.”

Meg Hamill, Field Programs Manager at LP, invites watershed residents to participate in a new RMW program, RAIN: Rancho Aficianados Inspired by Nature.

“Commit to volunteering a number of hours a year to RMW in exchange for passive access to the property. That includes its pond for boating and swimming, hiking trails, and a

(see back cover)
March 24 A diverse group of stakeholders will gather at Shone Farm in Forestville to launch a multi-generational plan to enhance and revitalize the Russian River watershed. The group includes farmers, members of several tribes, ecologists, local agency representatives, paddlers, and elected officials. The Russian River Confluence will incorporate information gleaned over nearly a year of gatherings in the watershed. Organizers of the Confluence will present a One Watershed vision and speakers include Dave White, former chief of the Natural Resources Conservation District, who will provide the gathering’s keynote with inspiring examples of watersheds nationwide that have removed species from endangered species list, improved water quality and created sustainable economies: Open to all, register at: www.russianriverconfluence.org

FMWW & LandPaths (cont’d)

pristine stretch of Mark West Creek.” Orientation starts soon: contact meg@landpaths.org.

I have worked with LandPaths as a volunteer for over ten years, helping with stewardship projects at Bayer Farm, Riddell Preserve and others. More recently my time is spent at RMW, helping to steward the land, developing the community garden with wife, Dolores Dandelion, participating in IOOBY outings and particularly Owl Camp for four weeks during summer. I find all the LandPaths staff a fun and easy bunch of folks to work with. I admire their commitment to the LandPaths’ mission. I see a similar commitment from the volunteer workforce of FMWW to their mission — preserving, protecting and restoring Mark West Creek and its watershed. As a long-term volunteer of LandPaths and FMWW, I look forward to continued progress in this collaboration.

Donations To FMWW Needed!

Friends of the Mark West Watershed is now officially its own 501(c)(3) non-profit, meaning your donations are tax deductible to the extend allowed by law. Please visit www.markwestwatershed.org to see our educational activities. Like what you see? Then please use the enclosed envelope to help us continue our work. Lost your envelope? Please make your checks out to “FMWW” and mail to: FMWW, 6985 Saint Helena Rd, Santa Rosa, CA 95404. Thank you!