

WATERKEEPER ALLIANCE CONFERENCE IN SALT LAKE CITY

by Dan Wickham

Your Russian Riverkeeper, Don McEnhill, and I just had an extraordinary education in the power of joining a national organization. The Waterkeeper Alliance, a group formed by Bobby Kennedy Jr. and several of the extremely influential Waterkeeper programs in the country, just held its annual conference at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. Don and I immersed ourselves in 4 days of workshops, discussions, presentations and parties that helped us forge links and learn from over 84 other Waterkeeper programs ranging from the Puget Soundkeeper, the Grand Traverse Baykeeper, the Hudson Riverkeeper, and even the Great Salt Lakekeeper.

Many of the groups are large, old, powerful and experienced in working to protect their watersheds. Others were brand new, eager to learn from the "pros." We were probably in between, having a long track record in Russian River issues, but new to the Waterkeeper model of advocacy.

The first evening started out with a striking recitation of recent successes as each Waterkeeper introduced themselves. The range of watershed size, urban status, and level of environmental threat were all over the map, just like the water bodies themselves. Yet each is in a state of crisis to greater or lesser degrees. It was truly inspiration to see how often the individual Waterkeepers, along with their dedicated sponsors and volunteers, achieved real and significant victories over the forces working to degrade our most important community asset, our water.

I have been a professional in aquatic ecology for a long time but I learned just what a novice I am in making this experience count in public. This conference opened my eyes. Bobby Kennedy was ever present bringing his experience and enormous political connections to bear, along with the signature "Kennedy Touch Football Game" with he and a dozen Waterkeepers foundering about in the shallows of the Great Salt Lake tossing an impromptu plastic water bottle football around.

But Bobby is by no means the "driver" of this group. The power of bottom-up grassroots effort was the very core of this group. Waterkeepers are as individual in their approach

as their water bodies. They all share, however, putting the protection and restoration of their watershed first and a willingness to fight their environmental battles to the finish.

Don McEnhill will be able to share what he learned at the conference and I have enclosed some more specific thoughts in this newsletter issue.

DON'S NOTES FROM CONFERENCE:

For four days 84 US Keepers, 8 International Keepers, Alliance staff and various guest speakers and met and worked on furthering our goal of cleaner and more healthy waters.

Work session topics included: Evidence Gathering and Pollution Case Building, Stormwater Issues, TMDL's (clean-up plans for polluted waters), Macroinvertebrate & Visual Stream Survey, UNC Subsidized Water Testing, What to Try Before Litigation, Fund Raising, Military Environmental Compliance and other topics.

One of the highlights was a trip to Antelope Island on the Great Salt Lake with a dinner talk by Greg Wetstone, chief lobbyist for Natural Resources Defense Council, who talked

about the changing regulatory climate in Washington DC. Greg related how the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts are being rewritten using "guidelines" issued from the Office of Management and Budget with no public review.

Recent examples are the removal of provisions for upgrading pollution control devices when coal power plants renovate, which allow more airborne mercury from old Midwestern power plants to pollute lakes in the Northeastern US. Guidelines also reclassify the definition of allowable fill discharged into waters of the US to include coal-mining waste, essentially filling valleys and erasing streams is Ok now.

Greg did point out that many of these guidelines are open to legal challenge and many people are writing their representatives to complain about this unprecedented attack on the Clean Air and Water Acts.



The 84 Waterkeepers gather at Salt Lake City on June 15, 2002.



FORESTS, FORESTS, FORESTS

by Dan Wickham

I have been a passionate advocate of forests as our most important environmental "Service Industry", dedicated to the protection of our essential watersheds, for much of the last decade. It was, therefore, gratifying to listen to a presentation by Dr. Bern Sweeney, director of the Stroud Water Research Center, at our Waterkeeper Alliance Conference in Salt Lake City.

Bern has conducted some of the most comprehensive and detailed research yet on watershed dynamics in river systems. Unlike most academic scientists he has an extraordinary ability to get the essence of his work across to any non-scientist that loves and cares about our rivers. He presented

River. The River itself was less than 10% of the watershed. The sobering message of this study was how important the activities of each of us, the First, Second and Third Order stream proprietors, are. Washing our car, culverting under the driveway, parking outside so our car can drip oil, fertilizing or using herbicides on our lawns, ignoring our septic tank. All these tiny impacts start the degradation of our main river and are completely invisible to the professional regulators we task with the protection of this resource.

More to the point of the forest in the title is a second component of his research on the absolute requirement for intact riparian forests along all these stretches if we are to protect

the River. His photos of the same stretch of small creek as it passed from a dense forest into an open meadow were stunning displays of the power of the forest ecosystem. Virtually all the biological action in a stream is in the bottom sediments. Bacteria, algae, worms, insect larvae, crustaceans, mollusks, make up the benthos (bottom dwellers) that contribute to the purification of the water and the sustenance of the birds, fish and mammals that we treasure in these waters.

Under the riparian forest canopy the stream was broad and shallow with a large vibrant benthic community. The very instant that the stream passed out into an open meadow, it narrowed by a factor of three. The stream now

was little more than a thin channel cutting deeply into the soil. The benthic area was a denuded shadow of itself with just a fraction of the biological productivity seen under the forest. The reason was simple. Grass steadily encroached on the bank, strangling the watercourse as it grew towards the center. The forest canopy was essential to shading out these grasses thereby allowing the river to maintain its broad flow and generous benthos.

The difference between forested and un-forested stretches grew ever more extensive as the stream order decreased. What does this mean to those of here along the Russian River? Every homeowner, vineyardist, cattle rancher, municipality should be doing everything within their power to restore the vital riparian buffers that should cover every single First, Second or Third Order creek flowing to the Russian River. This would represent a vast contribution to the task we at FORR and Russian Riverkeeper have dedicated ourselves to. As Pogo Possum once said "We have met the enemy and he is us!"



Photo: Don McEnhill

Flanked by vineyards and a highway, this creek-bed is nearly decimated.

some extraordinary findings that all of us who live within the Russian River watershed need to consider.

Most striking was a quantification of the elements of a river. He worked along a five-mile stretch of White Clay Creek in the Piedmont Mountains of Pennsylvania. Rivers such as this are categorized into Stream Orders. A First Order stream is that little rivulet that starts from a seep in the backyard or from a winter rain in a slight swale. These single rivulets create the entire watershed and are the responsibility of each property owner in the watershed. Two First Order streams come together to form a Second Order stream. Many a back yard will give birth to such bodies as the rivulets combine. Second Order combine into Third Order and so on until the river proper may be a Fifth or Sixth order watercourse.

Bern measured the length of the various components in his stretch of White Clay Creek and found 81 miles of First, 49 miles of Second, 19 miles of Third, and 16 miles of Fourth Order creeks feeding his small 5-mile stretch of Fifth Order

IN THE NEWS RECENTLY

USGS studies of 139 streams in 30 states show 80% of streams have traces of **antibiotics, steroids, synthetic hormones and other commonly used drugs**. Although concentrations are generally low and within drinking water guidelines, recent research into sub-lethal effects on fish and frogs suggest potential problems with aquatic life. A recent study performed by Marin Municipal Water District has turned up traces of Estridol, a synthetic estrogen compound, in the Russian River on several occasions. *You can make a difference by disposing of unused medicines in the garbage instead of the toilet.*

A panel of the National Academy of Sciences issued a report saying over 85% of the 29 million gallons of **oil spilled in the US** is from cars, businesses and boaters. This amount is equal to an Exxon Valdez spill every 8 months. You can make a difference by checking under your car for spots and cleaning them up. The easiest way to do this is buy a bag of kitty litter (cheap) and spread some over spots, rub it in with your shoe and sweep it up. This will pick-up most of the oil and keep it from getting into our waters!

In Sonoma County, the Board of Supervisors recently voted to set-up a panel to shape a **new agricultural grading ordinance**. The panel will include farmers and environmentalists and make recommendations on how to protect small farmers and the environment.

A recent court decision involving the **Garcia River** ruled that the EPA could set limits on logging and agricultural run-off. The ninth circuit court of appeals upheld an earlier decision that allow EPA to force states to come up with ways to reduce pollution in rivers contaminated solely by run-off. This should help efforts in the Russian River and around the country to start addressing run-off or non-point source pollution.

California Department of Fish and Game recently released their "**Draft Russian River Basin Plan**" for Coho recovery. It is available on the Russian River Watershed Councils website at www.rwrc.net

CITIZEN OVERSIGHT SPOTLIGHT

As citizen oversight is the most important "check and balance" of the community, we will highlight others working for the Russian River in future Currents issues.

FEATURED ADVOCATE

Brenda Adelman of the Russian River Watershed Protection Committee has been following water issues for over 20 years and is a wealth of knowledge about the Russian River, its problems, and its history and current issues. Our Riverkeeper, Don McEnhill often gets advice and counsel from her. Brenda has a very busy schedule attending meetings of SCWA's Water Advisory Committee, Santa Rosa City Council and Board of Public Utilities, Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, Russian River Watershed Council and Regional Water Quality Board hearings.



Photo: Don McEnhill

Next time you see her in a meeting, introduce yourself and follow her comments, they are usually the most astute made in any of the forums she follows. To get her monthly newsletters call 869-0410 or see her as she is working the gate at the Russian River Appreciation Festival on September 15th, and don't forget to tell her Thanks for all her hard work!



The 11th Annual River Appreciation Festival is happening at the Historic Hop Kiln Winery on September 15th from 3-6pm. Hosted by Joyce and Marty Griffin, the Festival benefits FORR's Russian Riverkeeper project, Russian River Environmental Forum and Sonoma County Conservation Council, which operates the Environmental Center in Santa Rosa. This year's Festival will feature keynote speaker Rick Dove of the Waterkeeper Alliance, who is a former Marine, Judge Advocate, lawyer and Neuse Riverkeeper. Rick spent over ten years working to protect the Neuse River from giant corporate hog farms, which put more hogs into the Neuse watershed than people in New York City! Several awards will be given out including a lifetime achievement award to Ann Dwyer, the first Annual Martin Griffin activist award from RREF and the citizen advocate award from Russian Riverkeeper. A sumptuous BBQ, pouring of Russian River Valley wines, environmental booths, a silent auction and entertainment all await you at this year's Festival, please come enjoy yourself and help support river protection!

Tickets are \$35; sponsorships start at \$100, for reservations or info please call 578-0595, or visit www.monitor.net/~ec/riverfest.htm for a mail-in form!

River Appreciation Festival!

September 15 • 3-6pm
Hop Kiln Winery

Updates on River Protection
Displays by many groups
Keynote Speaker
Rick Dove, *Waterkeeper Alliance*
Delicious Barbecue
Vegetarian Option
Silent & Live Auction
Fun & Surprises

GRAVEL



Photo: Don McEnhill

Syar's mining on The Russian River is creating a pit larger than 3 football fields. Nearly 20 feet of gravel has been stolen from the River.

Sadly, it's mining season again. Syar is bar skimming in the middle reach, Shamrock is starting up in the Cloverdale area and two other firms have permit applications pending. Syar and Shamrock will potentially take almost 500,000 tons of gravel from the Russian River this summer. The mining is allowed based on the assumption that "excess" gravel exists in the Russian.

According to an August 1996 report by SCWA, "History of salmonid decline in the Russian River," a 60,000-ton a year gravel deficit occurs due to Warm Springs and Coyote dams holding back sediment. Mining in excess of the seasonal replenishment rates causes erosion of tributary streams beds, leads to increased bank erosion rates, and removes gravels which are necessary for listed Chinook to spawn in the mainstem of the Russian River. In a July 1999 study of fishery impacts from mining in Alexander Valley; "direct mortality of individual salmonids may result from extraction; noise, vibration and other mining impacts may disturb migrating and holding patterns; extraction could elevate stream turbidity; extraction can result in degradation of spawning and juvenile rearing habitat."

Looking at the mined areas in Alexander Valley compared with non-mined areas, it is easy to see the difference. Mined areas are broad, shallow and lacking in riparian vegetation, whereas non-mined areas have more intact riparian areas close to the low-flow channel, which is deeper and cooler and much more suitable for endangered salmonids. It is curious how the gravel miners are allowed to discharge sediment from building stream crossings, but Del Rio summer



Photo: Don McEnhill

One scoop of Syar's 10 cubic yard front end loader can completely fill a haul truck.

dam was denied a permit for the similar sediment discharge. Removal of gravel also threatens the natural filtration system for drinking water enjoyed by over 600,000, which will be even more important if Santa Rosa is allowed to discharge their wastewater into the Russian in Alexander Valley.

We have taken two years of pictures of the middle reach and Alexander Valley areas and will observe how the river is changed due to mining after the winter rains. Even while we spend millions of dollars and countless hours of time in fishery and watershed restoration, the destructive practice of bar skimming continues.