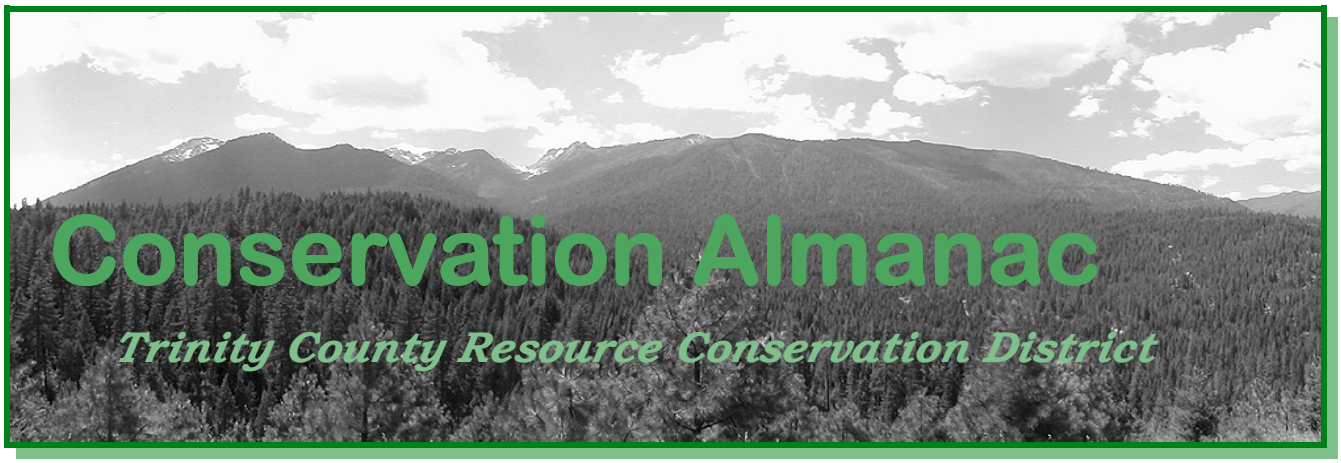


Conservation Almanac

Trinity County Resource Conservation District

Spring 2001 Vol. X No. 1

Weaverville Basin Trail

Trail Head Dedication Day

April 21st

On April 21st at 10 a.m. the Weaverville Basin Trail Committee, the US Forest Service, and the California Conservation Corps will be celebrating California Trail Day and Earth Day by holding a Trail Head Dedication at the East Weaver Parking Area about one mile up East Weaver Road.

Activities include the unveiling of an informational kiosk, refreshments, historical and botanical information about East Weaver Creek and the trails will be available, activities for children, and of course a hike (or two!) on the trail system.

The Weaverville Basin Trail System is developing into a comprehensive trail system for hikers, mountain bikers, and horse riders for Weaverville residents and visitors. These trails foster an appreciation for our natural surroundings, plants and wildlife of the area. Through maintenance of a trail network

around town the many historical features, such as mining camps and ditches, are being preserved and interpreted along with ensuring public access in a developing town. This trail system is intended to serve the community with cultural, educational, and recreational opportunities.

Please join us for an enjoyable morning and help celebrate the existence of the special trails we have available to us in and around Weaverville.

Also In This Issue:

TRINITY COUNTY RCD IS AWARDED WATERSHED COORDINATOR GRANTS

The California Department of Conservation recently awarded $2 million in grants that will allow Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) around the state to kick start efforts that ultimately can lead to cleaner water, scenic preservation and improved natural wildlife habitat.

The pilot grant program will enable 26 RCDs, including Trinity County RCD, to have Watershed Coordinators help assess local watersheds and bring together local government, landowners and community groups in order to improve the health of the watersheds. A watershed is the area drained by a river or river system.

Trinity County RCD was awarded Watershed Coordinator Grants for two projects—— the Trinity River Watershed and the South Fork Trinity River Watershed. The goal of these projects is to improve watershed conditions in the Trinity and South Fork Trinity River and their tributaries.

"There's a real need throughout the state for the coordination of efforts at the local level to improve and protect our watersheds," Department of Conservation Director Darryl Young said. "Everyone lives in a watershed, and the health and vitality of each one is an important measure of the quality of life in California."

Resource Conservation Districts are locally governed agencies set up as special districts under California law with their own locally appointed or elected boards of directors. There are 103 RCDs in the state. In addition to watershed planning and management, RCDs are authorized to undertake projects such as agricultural land conservation, recreational land restoration, irrigation management, forest stewardship, wildlife habitat enhancement and conservation education.

"Resource Conservation Districts play an important role in the state's overall land and water conservation efforts at the grass-roots level," Young said. "RCDs do a tremendous amount of beneficial work that those of us concerned with conservation appreciate."

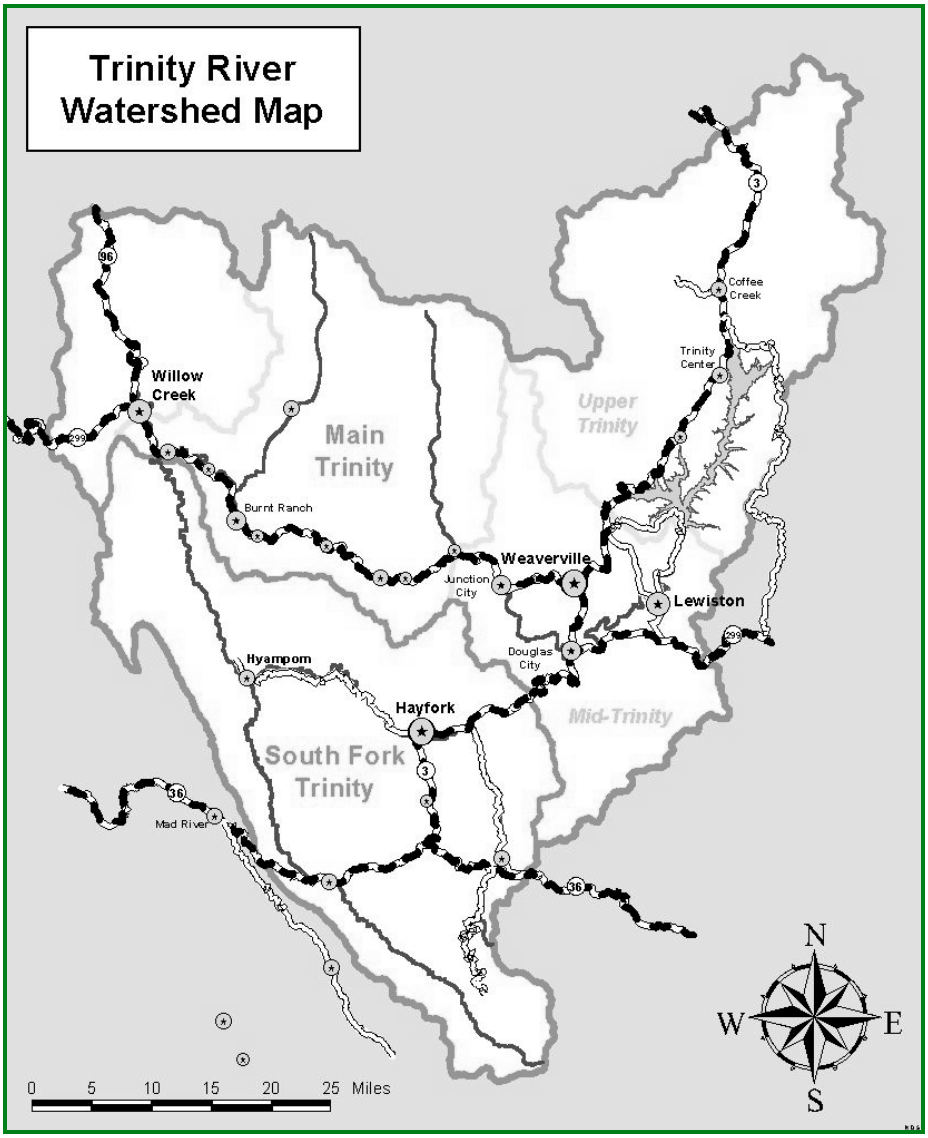
DOC's Division of Land Resource Protection received 78 applications requesting more than $5 million in funding. A committee comprised of representatives of state and federal agencies as well as a working watershed organization reviewed the applications. Tom Wehri, executive director of the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts, was pleased at the response to the pilot program.

"From our perspective, it's very encouraging to see that so many of our RCDs applied," he said. "it means that they're willing to put in the effort, that they have good ideas and a strong desire to make changes for the better in their local watersheds."

The Trinity River watershed coordinator's objectives are to establish a Coordinated Resource Management Planning group (CRMP) for the Upper Trinity River (area above Trinity Dam) and Mid-Trinity (tributaries below Trinity Dam) to identify and prioritize watershed improvement projects. The Trinity River watershed coordinator will also work to obtain funding to implement on the ground watershed improvement projects, track fisheries habitat improvement, and enhance education and outreach regarding Trinity River Restoration issues and Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) implementation.

The South Fork Trinity River watershed coordinator's objectives are to participate in the South Fork CRMP to identify and prioritize watershed improvement projects, enhance education and outreach regarding South Fork Trinity River restoration issues, prepare landowners for the TMDL implementation plan in the SFTR, obtain funding to implement on the ground watershed improvement projects, and track improvements to water quality.

Watershed Coordination Location Map



This map depicts the watershed areas covered by the two Watershed Coordinator grants. The Upper Trinity River and Mid-Trinity areas will be initial area of focus with the development of Coordinated Resource Management Planning groups to address watershed problems and to prioritize watershed improvement projects. The South Fork Trinity River has an ongoing CRMP process in place for this purpose.

GET INVOLVED!

If you are interested in participating in the planning process for either the Upper Trinity River, the Mid-Trinity River or South Fork Trinity River Coordinated Resource Management Planning efforts to identify and prioritize restoration projects, please give us a call at (530) 623-6004. We will be developing a mailing list to let landowners know what will be taking place in their watersheds and when.

This is the first significant opportunity we have had to address landowners concerns (particularly sedimentation) for the watershed above Trinity Dam. For the Mid-Trinity area we will be focusing efforts on Indian Creek, Rush Creek, Weaver Creek, and Browns Creek subwatersheds, where problems have already been identified.

Get involved in your watershed. Find out what you can do to:

- Protect your drinking water supply
- Minimize erosion
- Enhance fisheries habitat
- Minimize the threat of catastrophic wildfire
- Encourage wildlife
- Provide input to the TMDL Implementation Plans

Noxious Weeds to Watch in Trinity County: "yellow" Scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius*)

The area on either side of the border between Shasta County and Trinity County has soil that is coarse and highly erosive, because it was formed from decomposed granite (DG). Any disturbance in areas with DG, such as road cuts, may take a long time to stabilize, can become an expensive, maintenance challenge, and may have serious ecological consequences by contributing sediment to waterways. With these factors in mind, Scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) was planted along the Highway 299 in Shasta County, east of Buckhorn Summit, to stabilize steep cut banks and fill slopes associated with the road. Unfortunately, Scotch broom does not stay where it is planted. In fact, this shrub displaces native plant and forage species, is toxic to livestock and deer, makes reforestation difficult by out competing tree seedlings, and can increase the frequency and intensity of wildfires. It is slowly creeping along the roadways of the county from infested sites such as the one on the east side of Buckhorn. If one looks closely at the roadside when traveling west on Highway 299 from the Buckhorn Summit to Weaverville, small populations of broom can be detected and have the potential to spread into important streamside habitats.

Scotch broom is native to Europe and North Africa and was originally introduced to California in the 1860s as an ornamental. In the spring, this perennial, evergreen shrub is awash in bright yellow, fragrant flowers. Later, it was used to prevent erosion, because of its fast growing nature, ability to fix nitrogen, and ability to grow on harsh sites. It can grow up to 10 feet tall and form impenetrable thickets effectively out competing any species on sunny sites. Scotch broom is generally found in disturbed areas such as riverbanks, road cuts, and forests clear cuts, but it can also invade undisturbed grasslands, shrublands, and open canopy forests below 4000 feet. Not only does this plant produce seed prolifically, seeds are also known to survive at least five years in the soil and as long as thirty years. Seeds are dispersed when the seedpod bursts at maturity. Birds and ants do their part in moving seed around. Humans tend to move the seed to new sites on vehicles, muddy boots, and heavy equipment.

Fortunately, Scotch broom is still found in only limited areas in the county. The largest known populations are along Trinity Dam Boulevard, in Junction City along Highway 299, and along Highway 3 within the recreation areas upstream of the Trinity Dam. Small populations and individual plants are found along many roads throughout the county. Addressing these small infestations and limiting the spread of large populations is an important task not only to protect botanical diversity and wildlife habitat, but also to minimize fire hazard and negative impacts to working lands in the county. Manual techniques can be an effective method of controlling this invasive weed. Small plants can either be hand pulled during the rainy season or mowed at the driest time of the year, which minimizes resprouting. Large plants with well-established roots need to be removed so that the majority of the root system is not left in the ground while soil disturbance is minimized. Areas from which large plants have been removed should be monitored afterwards to eliminate any regeneration of broom from the seedbank.

For the gardening enthusiast, there are several cultivars of *Cytisus scoparius* available at local nurseries that have sterile seeds and do not naturalize. One should be sure to avoid planting French broom (*Genista monspessulana*), Portuguese broom (*Cytisus striatus*), Canary Island broom (*C. canariensis*), and Spanish broom (*Spartium junceum*), which are closely related species and have the potential to be invasive. If you know of a population of Scotch broom in the county that may be a problem, call us because we are trying to get a better idea of the distribution of this noxious weed.

Trinity County Backyard Conservation

Backyard Restoration with Natives

Daylily, forsythia, lilac, and sweet gum are all plants commonly used for landscaping that are not native to Trinity County. While these plants add beauty to our flower beds, borders, and gardens, they often seem somewhat out of place in the forests and woodlands of Northern California. In fact, most common landscaping plants do not originate from the western United States. Native wildfowers, perennials, shrubs, and trees are often overlooked as landscaping plants. Native plants are well adapted to the local climate and generally require significantly less water and care. A native garden is not only beautiful and low maintenance, but will attract birds, butterflies, and other wildlife that might otherwise be displaced by a traditional garden.

Another issue to keep in mind when choosing a landscaping plant that is not native to the area is whether or not the plant easily naturalizes. Many plants utilized for landscaping, food, and windrows have naturalized and are now altering and degrading natural plant communities. Most residents of Trinity County are familiar with the impenetrable thickets of Himalayan blackberry (*Rubus discolor*) that grow along the banks of rivers and creeks. Collecting blackberries is a joy in the late summer, but these plants also significantly alter riparian plant communities by preventing regeneration of other species and create barriers to wildlife around water sources. Himalayan blackberry was introduced to North America in 1885 as a cultivated crop and was naturalized along the West Coast by the forties.

Perennials …

Blue Dicks (*Dichelostema capitatum*), Bolander's phacelia (*Phacelia bolanderi*), Coral bells (*Heuchera* sp), Silver lupine (*Lupinus albifrons* var. *collinus*), White trillium (*Trillium ovatum*), Wild strawberry (*Fragaria* sp), and Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)

Yarrow

Vines and Shrubs …

California mugwort (*Artemisia douglasiana*), Coyote bush (*Baccharis pilularis*), Deerbrush (*Ceanothus integerramus*), Greenleaf manzanita, (*Arctostaphylos patula*), Honeysuckle (*Lonicera hispidula*), Oregon grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*), Western redbud (*Cercis occidentalis*), Western virgin's bower (*Clematis ligusticifolia*), Whiteleaf manzanita (*Arctostaphylos viscida*), and Wild grape (*Vitis californica*)

Vine maple

Trees …

Big-leaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*), Incense cedar (*Calocedrus decurrens*), Madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*), Oregon ash (*Fraxinus latifolia*), Pacific dogwood (*Cornus nuttallii*), Vine maple (*Acer circinatum*), and White alder (*Alnus rhombifolia*)

… Just to name a few.

Trinity Gateway Project

The Trinity County RCD has joined a partnership of local organizations to help bring the Trinity Gateway project from the drawing board to reality. The Gateway is a parking lot paving project and a lot more. Trinity County received a grant from CalTrans to improve parking at Lee Fong Park and the Lee Ranch House. The County Department of Transportation is designing the new parking facility, which will include a Trinity Transit stop next to the Lee Ranch House, create paved parking with handicap parking and access, realign Bremer street to improve the flow of traffic and add lighting to the parking lot.

The RCD is coordinating the environmental enhancement and educational elements of the Gateway. Our partners include the Trinity County Resource Conservation & Development Council, NRCS, Trinity County Arts Council, the Weaverville/Douglas City Park & Recreation District, Trinity River Conservation Camp and the Trinity High School Interact Club (High School Rotary Club). New landscape features will be added at the Lee Ranch House, the intersection of Bremer Street, the parking lot and along the edges of the parking lot. A key feature of the landscaping design will be the use of native plants. Gateway signage and informational kiosks will be added to direct visitors to Weaverville destinations and sites of interest throughout Trinity County. Streamside plantings of native trees and shrubs are included to improve habitat along Sidney Gulch. The existing trail at Lee Fong Park will be improved and there are limited funds available to assist with the acquisition of easements for expanding the trail system leaving the park.

The success of the Gateway project will depend on the community. Volunteers are needed to help install the landscaping, new picnic tables and trash receptacles, and to assist with the design, construction and installation of Gateway signs. If you are interested in lending a hand, please call the District at 623-6004.

Water Quality Monitoring

Have you seen someone standing on a bridge in the middle of a rainstorm this winter and wondered "Why would someone be out in weather like this? Don't they have enough sense to come out of the rain?" These dedicated technicians and volunteers are out there for a reason. They are a part of two projects to measure the amount of sediment running into Trinity County streams during heavy storms. The information that they gather will help us understand what is happening in some of Trinity County's waterways. We all can use these data in a variety of ways:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of projects that we have implemented to reduce the amount of dirt being washed into streams.
- Measure the success of streambank restoration.
- Identify watersheds that are having severe erosion problems.
- Locate sources of unstable soils.
- Support efforts to base decisions on science not best guesses.

The Trinity County RCD is receiving funding for the next 3 years to assist with monitoring in the South Fork Trinity River watershed. A small grant from the Trinity River Restoration Program has allowed us to set up a volunteer-based monitoring project this winter. The South Fork Coordinated Resource Management Planning (CRMP) group has organized the volunteer network, while Graham Matthews & Associates, a Weaverville hydrologic consulting firm, and the USFS in Hayfork helped set up the monitoring sites, train the volunteers and collect some of the data. Grants from the California Fish & Game (SB271) and the State Water Resources Control Board (Clean Water Act) will allow the District to establish a more permanent monitoring system to evaluate efforts to restore fisheries habitat in the South Fork watershed and to influence the Total Maximum Daily Load implementation plan being developed by the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board.

That may all sound well and good, but what does this mean to you? Less fine sediment means better fish habitat. Less sediment being deposited in streams helps protect your property from flooding. Less silt and sand in the water means that your domestic water system will need less maintenance, if you get your water from a stream. Less dirt in the streams means that the county and state road departments spend less money cleaning out culverts.

Carol Fall, water chemist, prepares to filter water quality samples collected from the South Fork Trinity River.

Meet our New AmeriCorps Member

We are pleased to introduce Sandra Pérez, the District's new AmeriCorps Watershed Stewards Project member. Sandra joined us in January and has begun working on projects related to watershed restoration, including classroom education.

Sandra attended Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, graduating in 1998 with a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry. After her graduation Sandra spent two years working for Diagnostic Products Lab, purifying and analyzing antibodies, and antigens for medical research. While working in the biochemistry lab, Sandra volunteered for various community groups. She then joined the AmeriCorps Watershed Stewardship Project, based in Fortuna, in Humboldt County. This group recruits volunteers with scientific backgrounds and assigns them to placement sites throughout northwestern California.

Sandra will be assisting the District on several projects in the near future, including working with the Fire Safe Council, South Fork Trinity River Coordinated Resource Management Planning group, water quality monitoring and education and outreach. The Annual Trinity County Salmon Festival is a special project in which Sandra will be involved.

Born in Columbia, Sandra moved with her family to Los Angeles at age three. "Moving to Weaverville has been a refreshing change from L.A. Here, the mountains are gorgeous, the air is clean, and people seem friendlier". After sampling snowboarding and snowshoeing, she is looking forward to participating in additional activities Trinity County has to offer such as hiking and rafting.

While Sandra enjoys science, she is also drawn to community-oriented work. She hopes, by working with the AmeriCorps Watershed Stewards Project to realize whether her future education will be in the sciences or policy arena.

District Manager's Corner

Pat Frost

Like many words, the term "watershed" has different meanings for different people. Most simply a watershed is all of the land that drains to a stream, river or lake. In this sense a watershed is a drainage basin. In a larger sense, watersheds are everything within that drainage basin. The watershed is the hills and valleys, the gulches and draws that direct the flow of water. It is the soil that holds moisture. The plants that cover the ground influence the way that the watershed moves water through the landscape. Vegetation holds the soils in place. Forests provide shade and traps moisture in the air. Different plants have different effects.

Many native plants in Trinity County are adapted to dry (xeric) conditions. These plants use little water. Other plants grow along the banks of streams. These riparian plants tolerate wet conditions. They hold the banks in place during winter rains, provide shade and keep the water cool in the middle of the summer.

A watershed is habitat. The various combinations of water, soils, and plants result in the wonderful diversity of habitats that we have in Trinity County – the mountain meadows, alpine lakes, fir and pine forests, salmon and trout streams. Watersheds provide for us. They are our sources of drinking water. We get electrical power and water to irrigate our fields and gardens from our watersheds.

Watersheds give us endless pleasure – forests to hike or hunt, rivers to boat and fish, favorite swimming holes, grand vistas and the soothing song of water tumbling over rocks. Watersheds are our homes. We all live in a watershed. We all work in a watershed. We all have a responsibility to be good stewards of our homes – of our watersheds. Everyone can help keep their watershed healthy and productive. Problems will arise, but they can be solved. If everyone in a watershed works together and thinks about how their lives and their livelihoods are linked by water, complex environmental problems can be addressed.

The Trinity County RCD is inviting you to join us to look at your watershed to find common ground among people with different interests, because we are all linked together by our common need for healthy watersheds. To help us start a group in your watershed, call us at 623-6004 or drop us a note at: tcrcd@snowcrest.net.

Speakers Available

Keep in mind that the TCRCD has speakers available to present a variety of topics to your group. Topics include backyard conservation, riparian enhancement, watershed restoration, water quality monitoring, and native plants. If your group would like to hear about any of these important issues give us a call!