

Blue House Farm Project



San Gregorio Creek in San Mateo County is one of the more important spawning and nursery streams for steelhead and coho salmon on the central California coast. Historically, this watershed was a stronghold for native steelhead, but this population has been hard hit by impacts including reduced late summer streamflow -- due in part to summertime water diversions that irrigate the rich farmland along the lower end of the creek.

To increase streamflow during the late summer months to improve habitat for steelhead and coho salmon, Trout Unlimited (TU) and the San Mateo Resource Conservation District (SMRCD) are implementing a series of water projects in partnership with farms along San Gregorio Creek. Our project at Blue House Farm, an organic farm owned by the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST), is the largest of these to date.



Figure 1. The project team discusses water management with Ryan Casey of Blue House Farm.

For this project, we constructed a 30.5 acre-foot off-stream storage pond and secured a new water right to fill it in the winter when flows are high. In exchange for this reservoir, plus upgrades to the property's irrigation system and help with the water rights, POST and its tenant Blue House Farm agreed to forbear from diverting water during the three driest months of the year, August through October, and rely on the stored water instead. The pond also enabled the farm to reduce its summer rate of diversion from 300 gallons per minute (gpm) to 90 gpm.

As a result of this and similar projects at farms upstream and downstream of Blue House, TU and SMRCD have eliminated the largest sources of summertime diversion from San Gregorio Creek, improving instream conditions during periods most critical to fish while providing more secure water supplies for the farms.



Figure 2. The more than 60 acres of prime farmland at the Blue House Farm property are an important source of organic vegetables to markets in the Bay Area.



The project was made possible by the California Wildlife Conservation Board, the California Department of Water Resources, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Project partners include the San Mateo Resource Conservation District, the Peninsula Open Space Trust, and Trout Unlimited.