

Tres Pinos Agricultural Watershed Plan Annual Report

June 2005

The Tres Pinos Watershed Working Group, in cooperation with the San Benito County Farm Bureau's Agricultural Water Quality Program, prepared the following watershed plan.

Description of Tres Pinos Watershed

The Tres Pinos Watershed originates in the Diablo Range along the east-central edge of San Benito County. Forests to the north and grazing lands to the south dominate the top of the watershed. The primary tributary is Los Muertos Creek. The lower watershed of Tres Pinos is a mixture of agricultural (primarily orchards, vineyards and row crops) and rural residential. The Creek flows to the San Benito River at the southern end of Hollister. Tres Pinos Creek is intermittently dry in late summer though it has flowed well into the summer months in recent years.

Anticipated changes to the watershed include continued pressure for rural residential development, that would result in increased runoff in the watershed due to added impervious surfaces.

The watershed has been identified as having critical habitat for steelhead and red-legged frogs.

Tres Pinos Creek is a tributary to San Benito River, which is a tributary to the Pajaro River on the Central Coast of California. The Pajaro River and the San Benito River are listed as impaired waterbodies by the State of California (as designate for the U.S. EPA under provisions of the federal Clean Water Act). The pollutants of concern are nutrients, fecal coliform and sedimentation/siltation. These three watersheds are listed as impaired for these pollutants. The state is required by law to set Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) for the amount of each of the listed pollutants the river can handle on a daily (or annual) basis. Both the nutrient and sediment TMDLs are underway. The Nutrient TMDL was supposed to be released in May 2005 but the Central Coast Regional Board (Regional Board) now says that it will be delayed for at least one year as a state task force discusses how to set water quality standards for nutrients and bio-stimulation (there are currently only standards for nitrates). The Sediment TMDL, which was also supposed to be released in May 2005, is currently waiting for Technical Peer Review and legal review. The Regional Board staff is hoping to have that document ready for public discussion in the fall.

Goals of The Tres Pinos Watershed Working Group

We have identified 53 active growers in the Tres Pinos Watershed. They farm more than 28,412 acres (note that we only have acreage that is registered by the Ag Commissioner for pesticide or

organic and self reported acres, we do not have all of the ranch and non-pesticide using acreage so, particularly in this watershed which is heavily ranching area, actual farmed acreage in the watershed is greater than 28,412. This watershed has much larger acreages on average, and any growers did not give information on their acreage. Only 3 (6%) of the growers in the Tres Pinos Watershed farm 5 or fewer acres and 4 (8%) farm 10 or fewer acres). Of the 53 identified growers, 18 (34%) are active in the watershed workgroup. The 18 growers who are active have reported that they cultivate 8705 acres – which is 31% of the identified acreage in the watershed.

Established in July 2003, the Tres Pinos Watershed Working Group is an association of agricultural landowners, managers and operators within the watershed, who have organized to address agricultural non point source pollution concerns. The agricultural landowners in the Tres Pinos Creek watershed want to proactively address water quality problems in a way that is practical and feasible for agriculture. As a watershed-working group, the agricultural landowners are developing this watershed plan to submit to the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board for consideration.

It is the goal of the Tres Pinos Watershed Working Group to improve water quality by voluntarily implementing farming practices that successfully reduce sedimentation and agricultural non point source pollution. The Watershed Working Group seeks to achieve and sustain environmental improvements while maintaining the economic viability of the agriculture. The Working Group agreed on the following items as the next steps for protecting water quality in the Pajaro watershed:

Watershed Working Group Action Items

1. Compliance with Water Quality regulations: The focus of the past year has primarily been on completing Notice of Intents, Short Courses, and Farm Plans. Growers began to develop individual, confidential Farm/Ranch Water Quality Plans, or Vineyard self assessments; attended short courses or Central Coast Vineyard team's Program; submitted their Notice of Intent to the Regional Water Quality Control Board; and developed and implemented "self monitoring" to track progress.

Status: 19 growers (16 ranches) in the watershed attended the short course, 10 have completed their Farm/Ranch Water Quality Plans, and 18 ranches are active in the watershed-working group.

2. Perpetuate or implement management practices (farming practices) that reduce or mitigate sediment and non point source pollution sources. Monitor success by completing inventory of existing and further commitments for water quality management practices and compile into an annual watershed report to the Regional Board. (August 2003, annually thereafter)

Status: This is the second Annual Report. 12 growers responded to our survey on implementation of management practices. The growers who completed the survey reported that they are cultivating 7,176 acres. Their primary crops are cattle, vineyards, and orchards, though two growers reported nursery and row crops. The growers reported

implementing or planning to implement the following practices. Note that most growers did not report on the number of acres protected and/or were confused by the question so we will not be asking it on future surveys.

1. Vegetative controls
 - a. Annual grassing – 1 growers, NA acres
 - b. Cover Crops – 3 growers, 88 acres
 - c. Critical area planting – 1 growers, 40 acres
 - d. Field border strips – 1 grower, 40 acres
 - e. Filter strips – 0 growers, NA acres
 - f. Grassed/vegetated waterways – 0 growers, NA acres
 - g. Hedgerows – 1 grower, 40 acres
 - h. Mulching – 0 growers, NA acres
 - i. Seeding Furrow bottoms – 0 growers, NA acres
 - j. Windbreaks – 0 growers, NA acres
 2. Field management:
 - a. Crop rotation – 0 growers, NA acres
 - b. Move roads/rows – 2 growers, 700 acres
 - c. Repair of potential erosion sites – 2 growers, 81 acres
 - d. Row arrangement – 1 growers, 370 acres
 - e. Slope management – 2 growers, 700 acres
 - f. Tailwater Recovery / Reuse – 0 growers, NA acres
 - g. Underground outlets – 0 growers, NA acres
 - h. Water conservation -- 2 growers, 11 acres
 - i. Water/sediment control – 2 growers, 700 acres
 - j. Unspecified sediment management - 2 growers, 701 acres
 3. Animal Management
 - a. Animal Feed out of waterway – 2 grower, 40 acres
 - b. Animal Access to water - 2 growers, 700 acres
 - c. Grazing Management – 3 growers, 740 acres
 4. Pest Management
 - d. Integrated pest management – 1 growers, 81 acres
 - e. Beneficial insects – 2 growers, 7 acres
 5. Monitoring
 - a. Monitoring – 3 growers, NA acres
 - b. Pre-sidedress soil testing – 0 growers, NA acres
3. Improve the quality of the water pumped from wells.

Status: The San Benito Water District is working on a plan to improve the County's groundwater. The Group will follow progress and participate as appropriate as well as

implementing any water quality measures that are identified as they complete their Water Quality plans.

4. Continue to hold demonstration/educational events and pilot project meetings as needed.

Status: Members of the Working Group have participated in short courses, monitoring workshops, farm tours, harvest festivals and other training/educational events.

5. Develop water quality projects (demonstration & research) on farms with technical assistance from RCD, NRCS, and UCCE.

Status: None to date.

6. Funding/Assistance to work on bank stabilization, reestablishing channels, riparian plantings, and creek side education.

Status: Newly adopted goal, no work done yet.

Grower Profile: Norm “Willie” Simms, Donati Estate Vineyards

Norm ‘Willie’ Simms works for Donati Estate Vineyards and has done so for the past 6 years. He joined the vineyard when they first purchased the land. His route to becoming a vineyard manager is interesting. He was Vice President of Facilities for Zycon Corporation. At Zycon, he oversaw all the permits and dealt with the San Francisco Regional Water Quality Control Board and all the environmental regulatory agencies. Zycon was bought out and the man who was his boss at the time offered him the opportunity to be the ranch Manager for his son, Matt’s, vineyards. The only experience that he had was engineering and his only relevant background was the managing the company’s environmental compliance, so everyday he is learning. The Donati Estate Vineyards was established 6 years ago. They have plans to one day have an events center and wine tasting room, in addition to the vineyards. Currently, they own a total of 1100 acres and have between 290 and 320 acres planted in grapes.

Willie has always complied with rules so, when he got the letter from Farm Bureau telling him about the Ag Waiver requirements and signing up for the short course meeting, he knew that he had to attend. At first he was very angry about the new regulations. He felt that companies always get blamed for everything and, because of his high tech background, he has known a lot of start up companies that fail due to all the regulations with which they need to comply. But Willie has learned two things while working for different companies; they are that 1) you can’t go against the regulatory agencies when you are planning to expand (e.g.; build something like an event center) and that 2) all companies should and need to comply with regulations.

Willie said that he learned a lot from taking the Short Course even though he resented having to do more work and more classes at first. But, by the time he was done with the Short Course, he felt that he had learned so much about water issues and what he needed to do at the vineyard. He always was sure that he never thought that he had any run off and, if he did, that the water

running off of his property was the cleanest ever. Then he started to look around and started to notice things. He said that, at one of the first conversations he had with MaryEllen, he told her that they do not have any run off, and she said go and looked at your property. Willie took that advice and, at the first big rainstorm, he rode around the perimeter of the vineyard. What he found was something different than what he expected that he would see - he did see sediment-laden runoff! Looking closer, he saw that the sediment was coming from the roads, not the fields, so, as soon as it was dry enough he got to work to fix the problem.



Road at Donati Vineyard before re-grading 12/04

Matt Donati, the owner, and workers at the vineyard help Willie and support him 100%. They know that they cannot make all the changes in one year but they are all trying and always figuring out new ways to do something. The vineyard only has runoff from storm events because the grapes are all irrigated on a drip system. The biggest improvement that they have done, the one that has shown the most results, is re-grading the road so that the water is not going in to the culvert and down to creek, instead it is staying in the vineyard. They have also rearranged the rows that are on the hills, so that when the water comes down, it hits another section and stays there, it never leaves the property. They also have left many hillsides grassy. They don't clean them up so that the plants can filter and retain the rainwater on site. On the grassed hills, they have dug culverts to collect the rainwater and protect their small riparian area.



Road at Donati Vineyard after re-grading 12/04

Since the Short Course, Willie has driven all the around and taken many pictures to document what he has done and what still needs to be done. He also has tested the water once and has looked at the data by Terry Hall from NRCS. He still plans to keep up with the ever-changing water issues and he has attended the watershed working group meeting. He knows that he has done a good thing by going to this class and will keep on updating his farm plan as well so that he can keep making sure that his runoff is the cleanest!

Existing and Ongoing Water Quality Data Collection

The following programs are collecting data on the watershed. This data will be analyzed as baseline data over the winter and then, in conjunction with the data collected through this program, will be used to compare trends and identify potential issues.

- **Six County Cooperative Monitoring:** The vast majority of the growers in this watershed have indicated on their Notice of Intent that they plan to join the Preservation Inc. Cooperative Monitoring Program. They are awaiting details as to how to sign up.

- **Ag Commissioner/County Planning:** general description of groundwater quality and quantity can be found in the County's General Plan
- **NRCS:** monthly water quality monitoring at two locations along Tres Pinos Creek – at the road dip 17.5 miles up Ji south of Paicines and at Brown Valley Road. Parameters measured include: Nitrate-N, Orthophosphate as PO₄, Ammonia-N, Water Temperature, pH, Electrical Conductivity and Turbidity (NTU). The result of the local NRCS monitoring is attached in an excel document.
- **RWQCB Central Coast Ambient Monitoring Program (CCAMP):** In 1998 and 2005, the CCAMP program had 1 monitoring station on Tres Pinos creek. That station is located south of Hollister. No results are available yet for the 2004-05 monitoring program.
http://www.ccamp.org/ccamp/CCAMP_Pajaro_Report.pdf
- **303d List:** The Tres Pinos Creek is not listed as a polluted waterway on the EPA's 303d list.
- **San Benito Water District Groundwater/Surface Water Testing:** groundwater test wells located throughout San Benito County.
- **UC Davis Researchers:** no known stations
- **USGS:** The USGS collected data at 1 site on Tres Pinos Creek on 8/15/1977. That data is available at http://nwis.waterdata.usgs.gov/ca/nwis/qwdata/?site_no=11157500: The full data set is at:
http://nwis.waterdata.usgs.gov/ca/nwis/qwdata?huc_cd=18060002&format=station_list&sort_key=site_no&group_key=NONE&sitefile_output_format=html_table&column_name=agency_cd&column_name=site_no&column_name=station_nm&column_name=lat_va&column_name=long_va&begin_date=&end_date=&inventory_output=0&rdb_inventory_output=file&date_format=YYYY-MM-DD&rdb_compression=file&qw_sample_wide=0&list_of_search_criteria=huc_cd