

RRWA Environmental Column – February 2010

Keep an Eye on Your Watershed – Report Soil Erosion at Construction Sites

Many of us grew up dreading being called a “tattletale” while others of us relished taunting a sibling or schoolmate with the phrase “I’m telling!” When it comes to the protection of our watershed, it’s okay to be a “tattletale.” The Russian River and some of its tributaries (streams that feed into it) are impaired by pollutants, including sedimentation. In the simplest of terms, too much dirt is getting into the river and it can hurt fish.

Although sediment may not seem like a “contaminant” because it is a natural part of streambeds, too much sediment can become a problem. The problem is that too many suspended solids in waterways harm fish. The suspended soil particles clog fish gills, reduce the amount of light that gets through the surface, smother fish eggs, fill nesting sites and provide material to which pollutants can adhere. Increased sedimentation can also fill in creek beds and cause flooding problems for downstream properties and adjacent roads.

In the Russian River watershed, one of the primary sources of sedimentation in our streams is from construction sites with poor erosion control practices. There are many ways construction site managers can keep construction site soils on-site rather than flowing off-site during rain events. All construction sites are required by law to make efforts to keep their soils on-site. Clues that erosion control measures are not properly implemented are muddy water flowing off the construction site during a rain event or soil and dirt piled up around storm drains near the site on a dry day. In the North Coast region, storm drain systems most often connect directly to local streams with no filtration or treatment. This means anything that can be washed away by rain has the potential to pollute our waterways.

Our local construction site inspectors cannot go to every construction site every day. If you see a construction site on public or private land with signs of poor erosion control practices, be a “tattletale” and call it in. An inspector receiving your complaint will go to the reported construction site and provide recommendations to the site manager for improving their erosion control practices. Citizen reporting can be a highly effective tool for finding and stopping polluting discharges.

To report a problem construction site in the Russian River watershed, you can call the public works department of the city where the site is located. In Sonoma County you can also call the County Permit Resources Management Department at (707) 565-2098 or visit their website at <http://www.sonoma-county.org/PRMD/sw/index.htm> and click on Report a Spill or Illegal Discharge. Another contact is the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board at (707) 576-2220 to report a problem site anywhere in the North Coast region including the Russian River watershed.

This article was authored by Cristina Goulart of Winzler & Kelly for the Town of Windsor on behalf of Russian River Watershed Association. RRWA (www.rrwatershed.org) is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together

to coordinate regional programs for clean water, fisheries restoration, and watershed enhancement.