

Russian River Coho Water Resources Partnership

P.O. Box 11526
Santa Rosa, CA 95406
707-569-1448 ext. 101
www.cohopartnership.org

PRESS RELEASE—Coho Return to Russian River

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Contact: Linda Tandle, Project Coordinator; email: linda.tandle@cohopartnership.org

Santa Rosa, California. Earlier this week, California Sea Grant and the Russian River Coho Salmon Captive Broodstock Program announced that an estimated 190 adult coho salmon returned to the Russian River this year, as compared with a previous annual average of less than four. The news that more endangered coho salmon returned to spawn in tributaries of the Russian River than have been seen in a decade is being welcomed by many, including the Russian River Coho Water Resources Partnership.

“We are delighted by this evidence of increased returns,” said Mary Ann King, chair of the Russian River Coho Water Resources Partnership and Stewardship Coordinator for Trout Unlimited. “The Partnership is working hand in hand with the Broodstock Program and other agencies and organizations,” continued King, “to improve habitat and survival of coho. The increase is encouraging, but we obviously have much more to do before sustainable runs of coho return to the Russian River watershed.”

Changes in land use, ranging from agriculture to urban to residential use, have placed many stresses on salmonid habitat in the Russian River watershed, and coho survival has declined dramatically for decades. To assist with coho recovery efforts, the Russian River Coho Water Resources Partnership formed in 2009 to undertake a science-based, collaborative approach to improve streamflow and water supply reliability in five key Russian River tributaries.

“Through the collection of streamflow and habitat data specific to each watershed we are learning not only where to focus our efforts but also what types of water management projects are most likely to improve stream flow and coho salmon survival in each location,” said Dr. Matthew Deitch, Partnership hydrologist and Senior Environmental Scientist with the Center for Ecosystem Management and Restoration.

“The Partnership is working with local agricultural and rural residential landowners in these key watersheds to develop projects that provide a reliable water source while keeping more water in the stream during critical dry periods,” added Kara Heckert, Executive Director of Sotoyome Resource Conservation District. “The Sotoyome and



Gold Ridge Resource Conservation Districts and the Occidental Arts and Ecology Center are working closely with landowners to make these important projects happen. Without the participation of local landowners our program will not be successful.”

The Partnership’s goal is to work with water users to identify and implement water management solutions that provide water for both humans and fish. For example, water reliability can be enhanced through rainwater storage projects, such as roofwater catchment and off-stream agricultural ponds, which capture more abundant winter rains for use during the drier months. These storage projects allow landowners to reduce water diversion from streams during the summer and fall when young salmon are most vulnerable to low flow. Frost protection alternatives, like fans or micro-sprinklers, for vineyards can also reduce the impact of water diversions on streams during frost events.

The Partnership, funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation with additional support from the Sonoma County Water Agency, is a diverse group of water and natural resource experts and includes the Center for Ecosystem Management and Restoration, Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District, Occidental Arts and Ecology Center’s WATER Institute, Sotoyome Resource Conservation District, Trout Unlimited, and UC Cooperative Extension and California Sea Grant Program. For more information, visit <http://www.cohopartnership.org>.