

State of California

Memorandum

To : Ken Aasen
Regional Manager

Date: October 10, 1995

From : Department of Fish and Game -- Bill Cox

Subject : Vision Fire, Marin County

I met this morning with the Department of the Interior damage assessment team and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to discuss the impacts of the Vision Fire at Point Reyes on aquatic resources. The most severely hit area was the Fish Hatchery Creek drainage above Inverness Park in the Lagunitas Creek/Tomales Bay watershed. This is where the houses were burned. The fire was extremely hot over most of the upper 1/2 to 2/3 of the watershed, all of the understory vegetation was burned off, virtually all the trees are dead, and the soil was burned. The Forest Service hydrologist predicted heavy run-off during winter rains as the water would be prevented from percolating into the soil due to the fire caused changes in soil structure. He also predicted a heavy sediment and ash run-off. Fish Hatchery Creek is small perennial stream which flows into Lagunitas Creek a short distance downstream of Whitehouse pool. It apparently supports, or at one time supported, a small (very small) run of steelhead. This stream was completely destroyed during the floods and landslides of January 1982. The alder riparian has come back quite nicely, but if we get heavy rains this winter we will probably see a loss similar to 1982.

The upper portion of Haggarty Gulch, which flows into Lagunitas Creek at Whitehouse pool, also burned hot, but only a small fraction of the watershed. Haggarty Gulch and Fish Hatchery Creek were the only streams in the Lagunitas Creek/Tomales Bay watershed which were affected by the fire. There was no burn in the Olema Creek watershed.

Several creeks on the ocean side of Point Reyes burned. Some lost up to 80% of their riparian cover, but most lost about 30%. Burned creeks included Glenbrook Creek, Muddy Hollow Creek, and Santa Maria Creek. These creeks may all have very small steelhead runs. There will probably be severe short term habitat loss from the loss of riparian and the input of fine sediment. Coast Creek, the best stream on the ocean side of Point Reyes, was not burned.

The Park Service intends to allow nature to take its course in most areas. Tractor cut fire lines will be put to bed, but there will be no cutting of trees except along roads, trails, or near other hazard areas, there will be no seeding (or very little), they may use blown straw mulch, but only if it is certified weed free, and they will use shaved aspen excelsior mat on some steep erosion hazard sites.

The NARCS will take the lead in funding and planning restoration on private lands, but they say they can only fund erosion control structures, not mulching or the cutting of burned trees. The Forest Service hydrologist recommends falling the trees on the contour and backfilling with soil

to create erosion checks. Because of the liability issues and threats to people and property on the heavily developed, and extremely steep slopes, of the Fish Hatchery Creek watershed, he may recommend to CDF that the area be seeded. He is confident that if he recommends seeding, CDF will do it.

The draft restoration plan is due from the Dept. of the Interior team by the weekend, I will probably get to see it.

Park Service and Forest Service biologists raised questions about steelhead, salmon, and tidewater gobi. Salmon is not an issue, the gobi is probably not there and if it is the impact would probably be minor, steelhead will be affected by the fire, but their habitat will heal with riparian restoration and erosion control or the flushing out of the sediment over the next few years.

Spotted owl have either been burned out or they haven't. If their trees burned, they'll just have to find a new home. The same is true of the egret and heron nest sites.

There are two groups of sensitive plants in the area. One group is associated with wetlands and they, along with marsh birds such as the black rails, probably were not affected. The other group was manzanita and ceonothus in the chaparral. This was in the moderate to hot part of the fire.