Watersheds of the Lower Russian River

Austin Creek (70 sq. mi.)
Dry Creek (172 sq. mi.)
Mill Creek (23 sq. mi.)
Healdsburg
Mayacamas (46 sq. mi.)
Franz Creek (24 sq. mi.)
Napa County
Brooks Creek (8 sq. mi.)
Windsor Creek (26 sq. mi.)
Windsor
Mark West Creek (55 sq. mi.)
Mayacamas Mountains
Fife Creek (8 sq. mi.)
Hulbert Creek (8 sq. mi.)
Porter Creek (7 sq. mi.)
Cazadero
Rio Nido
Hobson Creek (2 sq. mi.)
Guerneville
Pocket Canyon (7 sq. mi.)
Sheephouse Rock (4 sq. mi.)
Jenner
Duncan Mills
Orrs Creek (1 sq. mi.)
Monte Rio
Bohemian Grove (1 sq. mi.)
Smith Creek (2 sq. mi.)
Freezeout Creek (3 sq. mi.)
Forestville
Atascadero/Green Valley Watershed (38 sq. mi.)
Santa Rosa Creek (57 sq. mi.)
Santa Rosa
Sonoma Creek Watershed (166 sq. mi.)
Dutch Bill Watershed (12 sq. mi.)
Graton Road
Graton
Camp Meeker
Occidental
Willow Creek (9 sq. mi.)
Occidental Road
Matanzas Creek (21 sq. mi.)
Sebastopol
Salmon Creek Watershed (35 sq. mi.)
Freestone
Laguna de Santa Rosa Watershed (254 sq. mi.)
Blucher Creek (8 sq. mi.)
Rohnert Park
Sonoma Mtn El. 463 Feet
Bodega
Bodega Bay
Bodega Head
Valley Ford
Estero de Americano Watershed (39 sq. mi.)
Cotati
Petaluma River Watershed (148 sq. mi.)
Marin County

Mendocino County
Russian River Basin
Lower Russian River Watersheds
Sonoma County

N W E S

0 2.5 5 Miles

SONOMA ECOLOGY CENTER

Explore your watershed.
Map and write about your home place.
Make this adventure your own journey.....

October 1
I stood on top of Sonoma Mountain this morning, preparing myself for my adventure. Looking off into the distance I could see a storm making its way across the valley. It was exciting to think about all the rain caught up in those clouds and how soon each little drop of water would find a place to land and begin a journey much like mine, a journey towards the ocean. Climbing down from the divide I thought about all the different paths that rain would take and I wondered about my own.

October 28
I've begun to appreciate the landscape in a new way. The hills and rocks create the edges of a great bowl within which the water moves through communities of plants and animals. As I cross each divide leaving one watershed for the next it's like climbing into a new bowl full of discoveries. Where are the creeks and streams here? I can see the riparian corridors and tell the path of streams from a distance by the rich green trail of trees and shrubs that follow its course. Sometimes when I'm following a winding stream it disappears into a pipe or a hole in the ground. Who uses them? Does anyone sing or play by Matanzas Creek? (Confluence of the South Fork of Matanzas Creek)

November 19
Now some people will look at a stream and not see anything but moving water. Not me. After following the streams for weeks now I can honestly say that the twists and turns, riffles and pools, and bobbles and gurgles of each stream are as diverse as the landscape itself. In some places it will move quickly over the rocks churning and mixing in much needed oxygen. In others it might hardly move at all, making little sound in its deep pools. Sometimes there will be a great tangle of dead branches and trees that reach out into the water holding it back. Other times there are great boulders that merely give the water something to go around. My favorite places are those that seem to sing as the stream echoes off the hillside. I could sit here by the confluence of Salt Creek and Santa Rosa Creek for days.

November 21
I realized again today that while for us "dry landers" who swim in and depend on an atmosphere of air, the animals and plants living in the stream need healthy water. In the same way that I need clean oxygen from our air, the salmon needs it from the water. Pollutants in the atmosphere can get in my lungs and on my skin and make me sick just like pollutants in the water can affect the dragonfly nymph. Ever see a dust storm? It can be pretty hard to breathe. Now imagine a soil storm in the water! It happens all the time, just go look. Thinking these thoughts I wonder how the fish are doing in Santa Rosa Creek (at the confluence of Matanzas Creek).

December 21
I saw my first Salmon today! Actually there were three of them and they were so big I was napping by the edge of Mark West Creek when I was awoken by the sound of splashing. The female who had just laid her eggs in a gravel mound made of smaller rocks moved off while two males competed with one another for the right to fertilize those same eggs. The red markings on the males flashed as they swam through the shallow water. They came all the way upstream from the ocean and they still had energy for spawning! I watched for quite a while and wondered how many of the eggs would eventually become fish, making their way back to this spot. (confluence of Humbug Creek)

January 23
I found a rotting salmon carcass on the stream bank today. As I climbed over the branches of a low alder tree I almost stepped right on it. If it were not for the smell I probably would have. There were dozens of raccoon tracks in the sandy soil around it and a few tracks that looked like a large bird had visited as well. What did they think about stumbling across a dead fish? Upon closer inspection I discovered that there were hundreds of little maggots eating away at the salmon's body. Each one was breaking the salmon down into smaller and smaller pieces. Soon the salmon would be part of the soil, the alder tree, and the birds. As I continued on my journey downstream I ducked under Hwy 101 towards the mouth of Mark West Creek I wondered how many pieces of salmon were in me.

February 17
As I sat hunched underneath the protective cover of an Oak Tree, watching the heavy rains spill into the Laguna de Santa Rosa, I was amazed by the water's ability to carve and sculpt the landscape. In some places where the creek was moving fast, it moved large rocks and logs while it dug away at the soil on the sides of the stream. In other places, where it was slower, it would leave behind that same soil and rock making a new part to the story that is the stream. Looking behind me away from the stream I could see smaller streams on the hillside carving their own path.

March 21
Today I discovered a large pile of garbage down near the stream. Yuck! It had apparently come from someone who had been traveling the Hwy 12 near the Laguna and didn't know how harmful their waste was to all the life here. From used oil and soap bottles that release chemicals into the water to plastic bags that get tangled on the plant and wildlife, most of it was recyclable. I always carry an extra garbage bag or two for just such an occasion so I began cleaning up. When I was done I smiled knowing that in just a few minutes I had made a positive difference.

April 22
I can't help but stop and stare into the water of Green Valley Creek looking at all of the amazing macro invertebrates that live there. Because they tend to be food for the rest of the animals here and life in the stream can be fairly challenging, they have some incredible adaptations. I've seen rock homes on an insect's back, predatory diving beetles, camouflage that matches the rocks perfectly and insects that can even walk on water! There are many insects like the dragonfly that start their life out in the stream where food is plentiful. When it is time they crawl out of their skin and climb up on to a rock where they spread out their wings and fly away. It's all in there, you just have to turn over a rock and look. (38°26.667' N 122°55.105' W)

June 21
It was so hot today! I was grateful for the trees and bushes that live along the riparian zone of Dutch Bill Creek for they provided much needed shade on a day like this. Soaking my feet in a cool slow moving pool, I watched as the little salmonids darted away from my toes whenever I wiggled them. The water striders danced in quick circles on top of the water and even the birds seemed to enjoy the shade here as they quietly foraged in the leaf litter for an insect snack. I wondered with the trees gone if this place would feel so alive on such a hot day in June.
38°26.319' N 122°58.511'W Elevation 158 ft

August 3
I had quite an adventure today while exploring Penny Island in the estuary near the mouth the Russian River. It is one of the best places to see a variety of wildlife because there is so much food available there. I was watching the great blue herons and ospreys feed on fish and frogs living in the puddles in the mud flat area when I fell off of the log I was perched on. I landed right into the stickiest mud I had ever seen! I was up to my knees in all of the soil and nutrients that had washed downstream over the last several months. The mud that was currently in my pants could have been soil that I sat on last November. I was stuck in the history of the watershed! Pulling myself out I had new appreciation for the power of the water to move the land. I also thought I could learn a trick or two from the herons who seemed to tip toe on top of the mud.

September 21
I finally made it to the ocean today. The mouth of the river spilled out into the salt water as the gulls celebrated with rowdy songs. Some of the sea lions basking in the morning sun slipped into the water, diving for fishy snacks. As I watched the Russian River become the Pacific Ocean I thought of its hundreds of smaller streams and tributaries that reach out across the landscape like many fingers. Cupping my hands together I bent down and scooped up some cold water. It trickled through the cracks in my fingers and down my wrist. Off in the distance, out over the ocean I could see clouds forming as the sun gathered up the ocean. Soon it would rain somewhere and the process would begin all over again.