

Blue Meadow Farm Project

Navarro River

The Nature Conservancy



Resource Conservation District
Mendocino County



Mill Creek is a priority coho salmon stream situated on the edge of the Deep End of the Navarro River Watershed, the largest contiguous coastal watershed in Mendocino County. It is considered a stronghold for Central California Coast coho salmon recovery – but habitat restoration does not come without challenges.

Today, low summer stream flows are a major limiting factor of juvenile salmonid survival in this region. During the dry season of summer, stream flows recede, coinciding with increased water demand from farms and residents, many of whom rely on direct diversions from the creek or diversions from groundwater. Increasing demands coupled with recent extreme and on-going drought in California have left little water instream needed for listed salmon and reduced the reliability of water for the watershed community.

Blue Meadow Farm is a small, one-acre farm, growing prolific produce and cut flowers for sale at their farmstand located just outside Philo, California along Mill Creek. In an area lacking many grocery stores, fresh,

local produce is a precious community asset. However, Blue Meadow relies on tenuous summer streamflow for irrigation, making water storage a priority project and a win-win for fish and the farm – water stored during the wet season for summer irrigation leaves more water in the creek for fish during the low flow season and improves on-farm water resilience.

The Navarro Streamflow Enhancement Partnership – a team of nonprofit and local government organizations including Mendocino County Resource Conservation District (MCRCD), The Nature Conservancy, and Trout Unlimited – worked together to see the project through to completion. MCRCD spearheaded the project, securing grant funds, coordinating the tank system design, and managing implementation. Completed in 2021 and funded by a combination of public grants, project partners installed a 63,000-gallon tank filled with winter stream flow and a 39,000-gallon rainwater catchment tank filled by runoff from a barn roof. Importantly, the Partnership helped Blue Meadow get a new water right to replace their riparian right, which



Figure 1. 39K-gallon rainwater catchment tank on the left with a 63K-gallon tank on the right, to capture and store water in the wet season.

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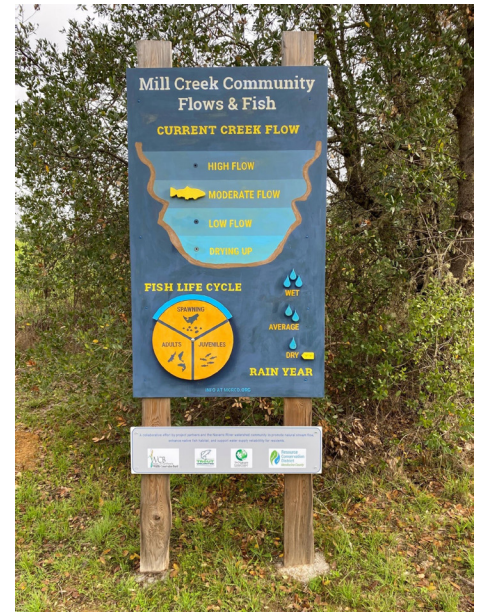
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did not allow for long-term water storage. In exchange for the project, Blue Meadow agreed to forebear direct diversions from Mill Creek during the height of the dry season, July 1st – November 1st.

Thanks to the combined impact of the two tanks, Blue Meadow Farm was able to continue operations when extreme dry conditions in Mill Creek would have prevented diversions and crops would have withered. Simultaneously, reduced summer-time diversions because of this project will help improve flow in Mill Creek and aid the recovery of coho salmon runs. The project showcases one of the guiding tenants of the Partnership's work: a rising tide of water resilience lifts all boats – farms, fish, and families.

The success of this project serves as a demonstration for the Navarro River Watershed community and has garnered interest in both off-stream storage and rainwater catchment from many other landowners in the surrounding road networks.



Above right: Figure 2. Signs help keep the community up to date on streamflow conditions and the life cycles of salmonids.

Below: Figure 3. The combined storage of these two tanks gives the farmers the security they need to forebear pumping from Mill Creek, a priority stream for coho recovery, from July 1 – Nov. 1.



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