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The Rodeo Creek Watershed Vision Plan Statement:

“The Rodeo Creek Watershed planning group envisions a safe, clean, and healthy Rodeo Creek, with a well-connected watershed trail network, and an engaged and active creek community.”
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1. The Restoration Design Group. Data provided by Association of Bay Area Governments, Bay Area Ridge Trail Council, Contra Costa County and San Francisco Estuary Institute.
3. The Restoration Design Group. Data provided by USGS, Google Earth.
4. Unknown, Photograph provided by Contra Costa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District.
7. Notes by community members, basemap created by the Restoration Design Group.
An Overview. The Union Pacific Railroad follows the shoreline. Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railroad travels east-west. The lower watershed is primarily developed land, with the Viewpointe neighborhood being the neighborhood located highest in the watershed. The upper watershed is predominantly open space and agricultural lands.
Introduction

This report documents the work and outcome of the Rodeo Creek Watershed Planning Group. The planning process was open to the public and the group was comprised of local community members and interested parties. It met between February and September 2008 to articulate interests, concerns, and ultimately a watershed vision for the Rodeo Creek Watershed in Contra Costa County, California.

Watershed Vision Plan

A Watershed Vision Plan is a watershed-based planning document that is meant to provide a coherent vision of future projects in the watershed. The plan is community based, respectful of private property rights, involves only voluntary actions and is developed through consensus. The Plan can be used as a fundraising and planning tool and has the added benefit of being a collaborative experience that brings community members together to develop goals and actions to enhance the watershed.

Public Process

The Rodeo Creek Watershed Vision Plan process consisted of a series of six meetings, two field trips and three watershed outreach events. All events were open to the public. An invitation to the February 2008 kickoff meeting was mailed to all 3300 property owners in the watershed and posters were widely distributed. Presentations were made to local community groups to introduce them to the concepts of the Watershed Planning program. The visioning process was designed to be open and collaborative and lead to a community-based, consensus-seeking vision of the watershed. The meetings, field trips and events provided an opportunity for community members to learn about their watershed, express their concerns and interests, and formulate goal statements and action items in support of their vision.

The six evening meetings were held at Lefty Gomez Community Center in Rodeo, California, and generally included one hour of presentations followed by a one hour working session. Field trips were held on Saturday mornings and members visited various locations in the watershed with presentations by representatives from organizations responsible for managing the areas.

Attendance at meetings and field trips varied between approximately 20 and 35 participants. See sidebar for speakers and topics from the meetings.

Community Outreach

Community Outreach for the Rodeo Creek Watershed Vision Planning program was led by the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District. The Watershed Coordinator organized meetings, created publicity articles and flyers, maintained e-mail lists to communicate with participants and served as the point of contact during this program.

The central location for watershed information was a web page created and maintained on the Resource Conservation District web site (http://www.ccrccd.org) posting announcements of the Rodeo Creek Watershed Vision Planning Meetings and events, meeting notes, a photo library and links to relevant web sites and documents. The web page also included jurisdiction maps which were requested by the planning group.

The coordinator organized watershed outreach events including an Earth Day Creek Cleanup and an educational watershed booth with the watershed model at the Rodeo Chamber of Commerce Chili Cook-off in September. She also recruited local community members to participate in the County’s Global Positioning System (GPS) Volunteer Creek Monitoring Program in October 2008 to collect data to monitor and assess Rodeo Creek.
**Meeting and Field Trip Topics**

**Meeting 1 – February 21, 2008**

**Speaker Topics**
- Definition of a Watershed Vision Plan (Drew Goetting, Restoration Design Group - RDG)
- Introduction to the watershed (Erik Stromberg, RDG)

**Working Session Topics**
- Ground rules
- Concerns and interests
- Future speaker topics

**Meeting 2 – March 20, 2008**

**Speaker Topics**
- Historic changes to Rodeo Creek Watershed (Laurel Collins, Watershed Sciences)

**Working Session Topics**
- Participants wrote their interests and concerns relating to the creek on large maps of the watershed

**Meeting 3 – April 17, 2008**

**Speaker Topics**
- Contra Costa County Public Works Department responsibilities for maintenance along the creek and throughout the town of Rodeo (Warren Lai and Victoria Steerrett, Contra Costa County Public Works Department)
- Contra Costa Flood Control and Water Conservation District maintenance of Rodeo Creek (Paul Detjens, Contra Costa Flood Control and Water Conservation District)

**Working Session Topics**
- Participants wrote their concerns relating to the creek on large maps of the watershed

**Field Trip 1 – May 3, 2008**

Site visits in the lower watershed including the flood control channel, the marina, the mouth of the creek, and a drop structure with information presented by Carl Roner from the Contra Costa County Flood Control District and Vincent Manuel from the Contra Costa County Redevelopment Agency.

**Meeting 4 – May 15, 2008**

**Speaker Topics**
- Muir Heritage Land Trust’s role in the watershed (Beth Pardieck, Muir Heritage Land Trust)
- City of Hercules plans in the watershed (Nelson Oliva, City of Hercules)

**Field Trip 2 – June 7, 2008**

Site visits in the upper watershed including the carbon plant and Fernandez Ranch with presentations by Beth Pardieck, Muir Heritage Land Trust; Paul Detjens, Contra Costa County Flood Control District and Bert Mulchaey biologist, East Bay Municipal Utility District.

**Meeting 5 – June 19, 2008**

**Speaker Topics**
- East Bay Regional Park District trail and park plans (Jamie Perkins, East Bay Regional Park District)

**Working Session Topics**
- Participants drafted goal statements

**Meeting 6 – September 25, 2008**

**Speaker Topics**
- A proposal to redevelop the Rodeo Marina (Marc Grisham, Rodeo Marina, LLC)

**Working Session Topics**
- Review of the Rodeo Creek Watershed Vision Plan.
The Rodeo Creek Watershed

The Watershed Visioning Process relies on a shared understanding of the physical, historical, and social conditions in the watershed. The planning group members both received and contributed information to the planning process.

Physical Qualities of Rodeo Creek Watershed

The underlying geology in the Rodeo Creek Watershed is comprised primarily of sandstone, siltstone, and shale (Graymer, 1994). The bedrock in the watershed tends to be highly erodible (Collins, 2008). Many of these rocks are sedimentary formations created 20 million years ago and rich with fossils of sea animals that lived at the time. Younger formations include soft rocks interspersed with the harder sandstones. Many of these formations have folded and tilted, leading to landslides in the steeper, upper watershed, particularly on the Rodeo shale (Alt and Hyndman, 1993).

Soils in the watershed are primarily loams and clay loams. Loams are soils composed of roughly even amounts of sand, silt, and clay. As the name implies, clay loams have a higher proportion of clay. Clay loams are well-drained or moderately well drained soils that develop from the sedimentary rock in the area. These soils generally support oaks, grasses, and forbs. These are not prime farmland soils and are mostly used for grazing and rangeland uses (Soil Conservation Service, 1977).

The Rodeo Creek Watershed averages 21 inches of rain a year (CCCCDD, 2003). Historical data from nearby Crockett (two miles north of the watershed) indicates that 95% of the precipitation falls between October and April. This pattern of mild, wet winters and warm, dry summers is characteristic of northwestern Contra Costa County’s “Mediterranean” climate.

History of Rodeo Creek Watershed

The Ohlone occupied the region, if not the watershed as far back as 5,000-7,000 years ago. At the time, the vegetation in the watershed was likely a combination of native bunch grasses and woodlands. If it was managed at all, it was managed with fire which kept the woodland under story clear and created conditions preferable to fire tolerant or fire dependent plant species. The mouth of the watershed, in present day Rodeo, was a broad tidal marsh stretching along a mile of bay front and approximately a quarter mile upstream of the current shoreline (Collins, 2008).

Rodeo Creek Watershed lies within the historic Spanish land grant called El Rancho de Pinole, owned by Don Ignacio Martinez, the former comandante of the pueblo of San Francisco. The town name Rodeo was borrowed from the place names Rodeo Valley, appearing on a map as early as 1860, and Rodeo Creek, a name that dates from at least 1865 (Dowling, 2007).

Perhaps as early as the 1830’s, cattle began grazing in the Rodeo Creek watershed. The cattle grazing practices in the watershed would have immediately changed the watershed by compacting soils in areas where cattle concentrated, crushing the stream bed and banks, reducing the thatch cover on the grasslands, and substantially decreasing the amount of riparian vegetation along the creek. These changes increased the amount of runoff...
from the watershed and destabilized the creek channel. This intensified bank erosion along the creek channel (Collins, 2008).

By 1874, the Union Pacific Railroad (then known as the Southern Pacific Railroad) traversed the shoreline at the mouth of Rodeo Creek. Prior to construction of the railroad the creek entered a marsh that was located where much of the community of Rodeo is located now. The marsh extended as far inland as the present day location of Investment Street and the creek meandered along the western edge of the valley. See the maps on the following page for a comparison between the historic and present day creek alignment and marsh extents. Maps at the time the railroad was constructed show that the creek was either modified in conjunction with the railroad activities or had been previously straightened and altered by local farmers into an alignment close to what exists today (Collins, 2008).

By the late 1800's, the Union Stockyard was constructed in the lower watershed. Along with the stockyard came a reservoir on the creek, additional rail lines, and a long reach of creek culverted beneath redwood planking. The dam was located where present day Interstate-80 crosses Rodeo Creek. The Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad (then known as the Santa Fe Railroad) extended up through the watershed and reached Martinez through a tunnel in the upper watershed that is still active (Collins, 2008). The construction of this railroad and the associated road significantly constrained the creek by reducing its flood prone width. When high flows came, rather than overtopping its banks and flooding a floodplain, the creek was now contained in a narrow canyon. The added erosive power caused the creek to incise or erode its bed, creating an even deeper, narrower canyon.

The population in the watershed remained under or around 1000 people through the 1920's. By 1940, that number had grown to over 2,000. The modern era of urbanization began during the Second World War when people migrated to Rodeo in search of work in the wartime industries in Vallejo, Richmond, and other centers of wartime industry (Collins, 2008).
(Above) Shoreline and Creek Location and Alignment, Circa 1850's.

(Below) Present Day Creek and Shoreline Location and Alignment.
A major storm and resulting flood in December 1955 renewed calls for action to protect downtown Rodeo from flood damage. The Contra Costa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District (District) secured the interest of the US Army Corps of Engineers in addressing the flood problems in downtown Rodeo after additional floods in 1957 and 1958 galvanized Congressional and local support for a flood protection project.

By the 1960’s, Interstate-80 had been built through the watershed (Collins, 2008), and Caltrans concrete-lined the creek within the freeway corridor. In 1966 the Corps completed the widening and channelization of Rodeo Creek from the mouth to Interstate-80, a distance of 1.3 miles. The first half mile was a rectangular concrete channel that fit in the tight corridor between existing houses and businesses. The remainder of the project was a trapezoidal earthen channel. While the Corps’ project improved the flood carrying capacity, it did not significantly straighten or shift the alignment of the channel. The majority of the channel realignment occurred prior to the 1900’s, around the time the Union Pacific Railroad was constructed.

In the mid-1970’s, the development of the Viewpointe Subdivision upstream of Interstate-80 channelized 0.7 miles of Rodeo Creek between Interstate-80 and the BNSF Railroad. The development also constructed three drop structures in this portion of the creek to slow down the erosive flows in the creek.

Growth in the watershed continued through the rest of the century. The 2000 census set the population of the watershed at 8,672 (CCCCDD, 2003).
Social and Political Features of Rodeo Creek Watershed

Land Use

Currently, eighty-eight percent of the watershed is in unincorporated Contra Costa County including the community of Rodeo. The remaining twelve percent is in the City of Hercules. An additional 10-15% of the watershed is within the City of Hercules’ sphere of influence (CCCCDD, 2003). A sphere of influence is an area that is subject to the influence of city planning (zoning, general planning) even though it is not within the city boundaries.

Fifty nine percent of the watershed is zoned for agriculture. Eighteen percent is zoned for parks and recreation or open space. Most of these three land use categories (agriculture, parks and recreation, and open space) are in the upper watershed upstream of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad (CCCCDD, 2003). The remaining 23% of the watershed is zoned for urban land uses such as housing, commercial uses, and industry.

The Muir Heritage Land Trust (MHLT) owns three properties in the watershed. MHLT’s mission is to hold and manage open space to improve quality of life for current and future generations. The largest property is the 702-acre Fernandez Ranch, most of which is in the Rodeo Creek watershed. The property includes several thousand feet of Rodeo Creek and several thousand more of tributaries to the main stem. MHLT also owns two properties on Franklin Ridge on the eastern edge of the watershed: the 158-acre Dutra Ranch and the 80-acre Gustin Ranch. Approximately one quarter of these properties are in the watershed. MHLT also holds conservation easements on 30 acres in the middle watershed to protect the federally listed Contra Costa goldfields plant species, California red-legged frog, western pond turtle, and riparian habitat along Rodeo Creek (B. Pardieck, personal communication, September 9, 2008).

Immediately to the west of Fernandez Ranch is the 483-acre Franklin Canyon parcel. Again, most of Franklin Canyon parcel is in the watershed. The Muir Heritage Land Trust currently has a purchase agreement to buy 423 acres of the Franklin Canyon parcel. The parcel consists mostly of grassland and oak woodland. If completed, the acquisition could close a critical gap in the Bay Area Ridge Trail, and, along with the existing Fernandez Ranch, would create over 1,100 acres of contiguous open space (Cuff, 2008).

Trails

Four existing or planned trail networks traverse the Rodeo Creek watershed: the San Francisco Bay Trail, the Bay Area Ridge Trail, the Rodeo Creek Trail, and the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail.

The San Francisco Bay Trail is a 500 mile long hiking and biking trail that will eventually encircle the San Francisco and San Pablo Bays. When completed, the Bay Trail will travel along the Rodeo waterfront. Currently, the nearest completed portions are in Hercules and Crockett.

The Bay Area Ridge Trail will be a 550 mile hiking, biking, and equestrian trail that will loop the San Francisco and San Pablo Bays...
along the ridge tops. The trail will traverse the watershed from the north through Carquinez Strait Regional Shoreline, across Highway 4, and up to the southern ridge of the watershed through Fernandez Ranch. Currently, only the portion of trail in Carquinez Strait Regional Shoreline is complete.

The Rodeo Creek Trail extends along the Rodeo Creek flood control channel from approximately ¼ mile upstream of the mouth (near Investment Street) to near Mariners Point Court downstream of where the BNSF railroad crosses the creek. The trail and three pedestrian bridges that cross the creek are maintained by the Contra Costa County Public Works Department and under the advisement of the County Service Area R-10 Citizen Advisory Committee, which advises the County Board of Supervisors and administrative department regarding parks and recreation facilities and services for the Rodeo community. The land for the trail is owned by the Contra Costa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District and, in some places, by local home owners associations. The Public Works Department operates the trail under a license agreement with Contra Costa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District. For the entire length of the trail and to within six feet of the water’s edge, a Public Works contractor provides weed and litter abatement, empties trash containers, and inspects the condition of trail features such as the asphalt, gates, and fences on a weekly basis. The trail extends nearly the entire length of the urbanized section of the watershed and is heavily used. The Rodeo Creek Trail, if extended, could be a critical link between the San Francisco Bay Trail and the Bay Area Ridge Trail.

The San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail Project strives to create a network of launch and landing sites, or “trail heads,” to allow people in human-powered boats and beachable sail craft to enjoy the historic, scenic and environmental richness of San Francisco Bay through continuous, multiple-day and single-day trips on the Bay. The trail will promote safe and responsible use of the Bay, while protecting and increasing appreciation of its environmental resources through education and coordinated, strategic access to the Bay.
An opportunity exists for a Bay Water Trail launch and landing site in Rodeo if a water access channel is restored within the Marina. This would be a key addition to the regional trail network and could provide new community recreation and commercial opportunities.

Flood Control

The Contra Costa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District was founded as a special district of the state in 1951 to provide flood control in Contra Costa County. The District owns and operates large portions of creeks in many watersheds throughout the County including the Rodeo Creek Watershed. Rodeo Creek is served by two taxing entities: Flood Control Zones 8 and 8A. The map on the following page shows Zones 8 and 8A and the channelized sections of Rodeo Creek that the District maintains.

Property tax revenue from these zones paid for the local share of the 1960s Corps of Engineers project, and continues to provide funds for routine channel maintenance such as vegetation control. These tax rates were frozen by Proposition 13 in 1978, resulting in rates much less than what is needed to provide special maintenance such as channel desilting, bank failure and landslide repair. The District is seeking additional revenue sources and funding partners to allow it to more thoroughly maintain Rodeo Creek.

The portion of Rodeo Creek downstream of Interstate-80 was constructed by the Corps of Engineers and the District has an operations and maintenance agreement with the Corps that dictates what type and how often maintenance is required. Additionally, any modifications to the channel require approval by the District and the Corps.

The portion of the creek between Interstate-80 and the BNSF railroad crossing was constructed by the Viewpointe subdivision and was accepted by the District for ownership and maintenance. Any modifications to the channel require approval by the District.

Biological Features of the Rodeo Creek Watershed

The Rodeo Creek Watershed has some unique biological features. It is home to the only population in Contra Costa County of the Contra Costa goldfields, a federally listed endangered plant species. It is also home to the Alameda whipsnake. The Alameda whipsnake is listed federally as a threatened
species. Though it has “critical habitat” (areas essential for the survival and recovery of species) all over Alameda and Contra Costa counties, it has been confirmed to be present in the Rodeo Creek watershed by two separate trappings (B. Pardieck, personal communication, September 9, 2008).

The overwhelming majority of non-urban land cover in the watershed is annual grassland. In the Rodeo Creek watershed, the grasslands are mostly comprised of introduced annual grasses and other introduced species such as yellow star thistle and Italian thistle. In flatter areas, these grasslands are scattered with seasonal wetlands. In this part of California, annual grasslands have the potential to support California tiger salamander, Alameda whipsnake, western burrowing owl, northern harrier, loggerhead shrike, and other special status species (Vollmar Consulting, 2006).

Northern facing hillslopes in the upper watershed support a mix of coast live oak/bay laurel woodland and valley oak woodland. Five species of oak trees are known to exist within the watershed. Such diversity of oaks is unusual for this area and is thought to be attributed to the influence of both bay and inland climates within the watershed (Vollmar Consulting, 2006).

These woodland habitats have the potential to support Alameda whipsnake, golden eagle, white-tailed kite, pallid bat, San Francisco dusky-footed woodrat, American badger, and other special status species (Vollmar Consulting, 2006).

The riparian areas alongside the creek upstream of the BNSF railroad consist mostly of a mix of coast live oaks, California bay, willows, and California buckeyes. Where creek banks are failing, coyote brush and poison oak dominate. Riparian areas in the upper Rodeo Creek watershed have the potential to support California red-legged frog, western pond turtle, Cooper’s hawk, tricolored blackbird, yellow warbler, and other special status species (Vollmar Consulting, 2006).

Fish surveys in Rodeo Creek observed hitch, Sacramento pikeminnow, California roach, Sacramento sucker, mosquito fish, and the three-spined stickleback at various sites in the lower watershed (Leidy, 1984). Except for the mosquito fish, these are fairly typical native fish found in East Bay streams. An assessment by the Center for Ecosystems Management and Restoration (Leidy, 2005) did not find any evidence that Rodeo Creek supported salmonids in the past or supports them currently.
Channel Conditions in the Rodeo Creek Watershed

From the ridgelines of the upper watershed to the mouth of the creek at San Pablo Bay, Rodeo Creek changes significantly due to both natural dynamics and human alterations. Different sections (known as reaches) of the creek will present different opportunities and constraints based on their character and the surrounding land uses. What follows is a brief tour of Rodeo Creek from the headwaters to the mouth. Each reach is represented by a photopoint that corresponds to number on the map and an image to the right.

Photopoint 1: Top of the Watershed Close to Natural Condition Channel
At the top of the watershed, upstream of where Christie Road crosses Rodeo Creek, the channel is in reasonably good condition. It has well-vegetated banks and small floods can access the floodplain. Over the past two centuries it has likely undergone significant change due to grazing and other activities, but compared to other reaches, it is close to its natural condition. The creek is surrounded mostly by lands grazed by cattle. The creek here is ephemeral which means it dries up naturally in the summer.

Photopoint 2: Adjacent to Christie Road Highly Incised Earthen Channel
Where Rodeo Creek flows alongside the Burlington Northern & Santa Fe railroad, the railroad constrains the creek. The creek has responded by cutting down into its bed and creating a deep canyon. This is known as creek incision. The incision is evidenced by two large headcuts in this reach, with a total elevation change of over 15-feet. These headcuts are moving upstream and exacerbating massive bank failure. In this part of the watershed, the creek is surrounded by railroad and wooded hill slopes. This section of creek is ephemeral.

Photopoint 3: Fernandez Ranch Actively Incising Earthen Channel
The Rodeo Creek channel, upstream of the Franklin Canyon Golf Course on Fernandez Ranch, is actively incising and initiating massive bank failures. The incision has occurred at various periods over the past century with the most recent event having occurred during the winter of 2005/2006. Grazing and the railroad and associated road immediately upstream have all contributed to the incision occurring in this reach. The lowering of the Rodeo Creek bed elevation has initiated channel incision on all of the tributaries within this reach. The deep incision prevents floodwaters from accessing the floodplain. In this part of the watershed, the creek is surrounded by grazed lands and wooded hill slopes.

Photopoint 4: Franklin Canyon Golf Course Earthen Bank & Dense Riparian Corridor
Rodeo Creek within the Franklin Canyon Golf Course and downstream to the BNSF railroad crossing may represent the most healthy reach of the creek. Although the channel appears to have become significantly incised from its pre-European condition, the channel has achieved a state of equilibrium with associated floodplain and a dense riparian corridor. This may be disrupted by the massive amount of sediment that is coming from the channel incision and bank failures upstream.
Photopoint 1. Rodeo Creek above the Christie Road Culvert. The channel above the culvert has not incised and is more indicative of the stable conditions found historically throughout the watershed.

Photopoint 2. Rodeo Creek Adjacent to Christie Road. The creek is actively incising as headcuts (small waterfalls) move upstream.

Photopoint 3. Rodeo Creek within Fernandez Ranch. The banks are failing as the creek adjusts to a new stable configuration approximately 30-feet lower than its historic elevation.

Photopoint 4. Riparian Vegetation within the Franklin Canyon Golf Course. This vegetation helps stabilize the creek and banks and reduces sediment contribution into the creek.
Photopoint 5: Below BNSF Railroad Crossing
Earthen Bank Channels
This reach begins at the BNSF railroad crossing and continues downstream to the concrete channel. The Contra Costa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District is the owner of the flood control channel and retains maintenance access roads along both banks of the channel. From here to the bay, the creek is surrounded by housing and other urban land uses. This reach of the creek lacks shade trees and is actively managed to prevent flooding. This reach contains three concrete grade control structures. These grade control structures were constructed to provide channel stability by reducing the slope of the channel and dissipating energy during periods of high flow. This reach contains the upper most segment of the Rodeo Creek Trail. The Rodeo Creek Trail provides public access and recreation along Rodeo Creek.

Photopoint 7: Rodeo Earthen Bank Flood Control Channel
Between the end of the concrete lined channel until approximately one quarter mile upstream from the mouth, the creek is a trapezoidal flood control channel with earthen banks. Similar to the earthen channel upstream, the creek here lacks shade trees and is actively managed to prevent flooding. This reach of creek was constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers and maintained by the Contra Costa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District.

Photopoint 8: Mouth of Creek Rectangular Concrete Channel
Rodeo Creek is contained in a rectangular concrete channel in the lowest reach. The upstream end of the concrete channel corresponds with the most inland point of tidal influence. The right-of-way is limited due to adjacent development. The Contra Costa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District is the owner of the flood control channel and retains maintenance access along only one side of the channel.

A large amount of Rodeo Creek’s sediment load is deposited at the mouth of the creek. These sediment deposits impair the channel’s ability to discharge peak flows and raises water surface elevations upstream in the lower watershed during flooding. The District has to periodically dredge the channel to remove the sediment and maintain flood protection.
Photopoint 5. Lower Rodeo Creek within the US Army Corps of Engineers Flood Control Channel. The Rodeo Creek Trail is on the left. One of two drop structures is pictured here.

Photopoint 6. The Channel is Lined with Concrete Between I-80 and the Northbound Off Ramp. This is a short segment between two culverts. The creek is an earthen trapezoidal channel up and downstream of this location.

Photopoint 7. Lower Rodeo Creek in the community of Rodeo. This image shows the typical earthen trapezoidal channel condition of Rodeo Creek in the Lower Watershed.

Photopoint 8. The Lowest Reach of Rodeo Creek is Contained in a Concrete Box Channel. This reach is tidally influenced.
Topics of Interest

This section summarizes interests, concerns, and opportunities for improvement that the planning group identified during its public meetings. The topics articulated by the group set the foundation for the goals and actions of the Rodeo Creek Vision Plan.

Watershed Information/Coordination
The planning group recognized the need for additional coordination and sharing of information to facilitate sound watershed management. The planning group sought to better understand all agency roles and responsibilities in the watershed, and gain a comprehensive view of all planning efforts in the watershed. The group advocated for continuing the informative Rodeo Creek watershed web site and encouraged greater participation in local planning and governance bodies such as the Rodeo Municipal Advisory Council.

Connections and Waterfront
Gaining an understanding of the watershed as a single, holistic, inter-related unit is dependent in part on physical connections throughout the watershed. Railroads bisect the upper and lower watersheds and create a barrier between downtown Rodeo and the waterfront. The creek and trail network provide an opportunity to overcome these physical obstacles and link the watershed from the hills to the bay. An extended trail network would provide bike and pedestrian access throughout the watershed and health benefits to the residents in the watershed. Planning group members repeatedly stressed their desire to extend the Rodeo Creek trail downstream to the planned San Francisco Bay Trail and the marina on the waterfront. Similarly, the group reinforced the idea of extending it upstream to the Bay Area Ridge Trail. This would create local connections within the watershed and regional connections to the rest of the East Bay.

“This is one of the few areas people can walk down to the creek”

Recorded Notes on an Aerial Photograph.
Meeting participants recorded their interests and concerns on large maps along the entire creek length.

“Keep the rural feel... A more natural creek w/ more wildlife enhances rural feel”
owners of the Rodeo Marina are exploring plans to restore the Marina and boat access to the waterfront with many amenities for the community. A key goal of the owners is to have this be a focal point for both the Bay Trail and the Bay Water Trail projects. The owners are conferring with the RMAC and the County on this project.

Habitat/Creek
The planning group expressed concern with the health of the creek and its ability to support native plants and wildlife. Creeks provide wildlife travel corridors that can host a wide variety of vertebrate and invertebrate species. The group identified the lack of shade trees in the lower watershed as not only an aesthetic impairment but also a barrier to healthy creek function. The group expressed a desire to provide habitat and improve passage for aquatic species but also recognized the importance of sometimes separating public access and wildlife areas. Planning group members identified an interest in using native plants in and along the channel to provide habitat and keyed in on the potential to use landscaping to provide some ecological function alongside those portions of the channel that are concrete lined. Native plantings should not impair flood protection.

Public Access/Safety
Planning group members recognized the importance of providing safe access to the creek. During planning meetings, they expressed concern over a perceived lack of law enforcement along the trail and possible liability of homeowners groups resulting from public use of the creek. They stated a desire for additional instruction for dog owners to ensure their proper use of the trail and to help create a safe and enjoyable experience for all trail users.

The planning group expressed a desire to create a safe and pleasant experience along the creek and increase visibility along the creek corridor. The group explored the idea of a neighborhood watch along the creek trail. Many planning group members expressed an interest in creating safe opportunities for children to explore the creek.

Maintenance in the Lower Reaches of Rodeo Creek
Having a clean and well cared for creek and trail is essential for creating a compelling outdoor experience and critical for attracting more users and potential advocates to the creek. Planning group members identified the maintenance of the creek and adjacent trail in the lower watershed as a high priority. Trash and graffiti alongside the trail and garbage in the creek deter trail users and decrease the aesthetics and health of the creek. Planning members were concerned about agency accountability for the long term maintenance of the creek and trail. The creek is maintained by the Contra Costa County Flood Control District but the trail is maintained by the Contra Costa County Public Works Department. The Public Works Department hires a contractor to provide maintenance, landscaping, and trash removal along the Rodeo Creek Trail. The group identified an interest in holding the contractor accountable for keeping the trail and creek clean.

Planning group members also noted bank erosion between I-80 and Hawthorne Avenue that may be a hazard to trail users.

“Lots of crawdads in the 70’s”

“Homeless encampment under the bridge in 1995”
Goals and Actions

Community participants generated the following list of goals and actions in support of the interests they identified in the first two meetings. The goals represent the result of consensus discussions among the participants. The supporting actions represent a host of possible ways to achieve each goal. It should be noted that many of the actions are not necessarily specific to a particular agency or individual. They have been written primarily to express a concept for achieving the stated goal. Some actions appear more than once as they support more than one goal. In many cases, the actions will require additional funding than what is currently available. The agencies responsible for management in the watershed have limited funding available to them and an increase in services will need to be matched with an increase in funding.

We provide these goals and actions with the hope that they will be realized but also with the understanding that they can only be effectively achieved through the long term voluntary commitment by local partnerships.

Watershed Information / Coordination

Goal: Develop a web site for the watershed
Action: Place creek related announcements on a kiosk at the proposed town plaza.
Action: Create a Rodeo Creek Watershed Trails Master Plan to design connections and routes through the watershed.
Action: Coordinate efforts with other trail plans including the San Francisco Bay Trail, the Bay Area Ridge Trail and the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail.

Goal: Coordinate with County and other government agencies
Action: Brief County Board of Supervisors on results of Rodeo Creek Watershed Vision Plan.
Action: Request assistance from National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation

Goal: Improve connections between the creek and the waterfront
Action: Coordinate with the waterfront planning effort to ensure a seamless connection.
Action: Encourage a vibrant pedestrian and safe bicycle experience between the waterfront and the town plaza along Pacific Avenue.
Action: Incorporate these Actions into Rodeo Planned Unit Development Design Guidelines.

Goal: Delineate and communicate well defined agencies roles
Action: Web site should contain jurisdiction along creek and responsible agency phone numbers and emails.
Action: Incorporate these Actions into Rodeo Planned Unit Development Design Guidelines.
Action: Restore the marina and boat access to the waterfront as a focal point for both the Bay Trail and the Bay Water Trail projects.

Action: Provide information on the watershed including event schedules, links to relevant web sites and documents.

Action: Provide responsible agency and adjacent homeowner association’s phone numbers and emails on the web site.

Action: Provide this information on signs along the creek.

Goal: Encourage community involvement
Action: Place creek related announcements on a kiosk at the proposed town plaza.
Action: Encourage attendance to RMAC meetings by advertising the meetings and results of the meeting along the creek.

Connections and Waterfront

Goal: Develop a well connected trail network
Action: Coordinate efforts with other trail plans including the San Francisco Bay Trail, the Bay Area Ridge Trail and the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail.
Action: Request assistance from National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation

Goal: Improve connections between the creek and the waterfront
Action: Coordinate with the waterfront planning effort to ensure a seamless connection.
Action: Encourage a vibrant pedestrian and safe bicycle experience between the waterfront and the town plaza along Pacific Avenue.
Action: Incorporate these Actions into Rodeo Planned Unit Development Design Guidelines.
Action: Ensure Rodeo redevelopment enhances creek and trail experience
Habitat / Creek

Goal: Revegetate the creek corridor
Action: Plant trees along the creek side trail to improve the park-like experience, shade, and habitat.
Action: Use native plants to reduce maintenance and water needs while providing the greatest amount of habitat value possible to encourage wildlife.

Goal: Improve Aquatic Habitat
Action: Set-up volunteer monitoring of water quality and benthic macro-invertebrates within the creek.
Action: Work with public and private land owners to implement erosion control in the upper watershed.
Action: Discourage development in the upper watershed that would change the flow and quality of water entering the creek.
Action: Increase riparian vegetation to shade the creek and provide woody debris where possible, or after additional Right-of-Way is acquired.
Action: Work with the County to encourage distributed storm water improvements throughout the entire watershed that improves the quality of water entering the creek.

Goal: Acquire land for floodplain
Action: Highlight potential land for acquisition in a Master Plan, based on value offered to the creek as floodplain and for creek side amenities.
Action: Communicate to the Redevelopment Agency that land acquisition is a high priority to improve the function of the creek and the quality of life for the residents of Rodeo.

Goal: Eliminate excessive siltation at creek mouth
Action: Incorporate natural channel design into a Master Plan for Rodeo Creek to address sediment transport within Rodeo Creek.
Action: Work with public and private land owners to implement erosion control in the upper watershed.
Action: If necessary, seek funding and coordinate with Flood Control District to determine process for examining fish passage over drop structures.
Action: If necessary, seek funding and conduct a hydraulic and hydrology study for the watershed to determine the feasibility of drop structure removal or alteration.
Action: Examine beautification options for the drop structures.

Goal: Improve fish passage throughout the watershed
Action: Determine the need for fish passage based on presence or absence of species that would benefit.
Action: If necessary, coordinate with Flood Control District to determine process for examining fish passage over drop structures.
Action: If necessary, seek funding and conduct a hydraulic and hydrology study for the watershed to determine the feasibility of drop structure removal or alteration.
Action: Examine beautification options for the drop structures.

Goal: Provide protection from flooding in urbanized areas
Action: Maintain channel vegetation to ensure adequate flows can pass.
Action: Remove excess sediment when it threatens storm-water conveyance.
Action: Address chronic sedimentation problems near San Pablo Avenue Bridge.

Goal: Provide access to both sides of the creek for clean-ups and recreation
Action: Establish maintenance point access areas in a Rodeo Creek Master Plan for the creek below the BNSF railroad crossing.
Action: Coordinate access points when developing the Rodeo Creek Watershed Trails Plan.

Goal: Improve public safety along the creek trail
Action: Ensure restoration maintains open sight lines through the creek.
Action: Provide police phone numbers along the creek.
Action: Ensure redevelopment of Rodeo brings “eyes on the creek” by encouraging buildings, parks and trails to face the creek and engage the creek.
Action: Foster relationships with local law enforcement and creek side property owners.
Action: Set up a community watch for the creek corridor.
Action: Provide bench seating for “eyes on the creek.”

Goal: Provide more sites for children to access creek
Action: Provide access steps and ramps to access the creek.

Public Access / Safety
Vision

The topics of interest, opportunities for improvement, goals, and actions articulated by the planning group all lead to a specific vision for the watershed. It is worthwhile to state that vision clearly. The Rodeo Creek Watershed planning group envisions a safe, clean, and healthy Rodeo Creek, with a well-connected watershed trail network, and an engaged and active creek community.

Safe, Clean, and Healthy Creek

The Rodeo Creek Watershed planning group envisions a creek that is restored with native plants to provide habitat for animals and shade for creek and trail users. It envisions a creek and adjacent trail that is free of garbage, graffiti, and other pollutants, routinely maintained and kept safe from crime and hazards to create a pleasant and compelling experience for creek and trail users. The planning group envisions that these improvements will lead to greater use and greater community appreciation for the natural amenities that the creek provides.

The planning group also envisions a downtown Rodeo kept safe from flooding. Any changes should not decrease the amount of flood protection lower Rodeo Creek currently provides.

Well-connected Watershed Trail Network

The Rodeo Creek Watershed planning group envisions a trail network that connects the headwaters of the watershed with the Rodeo waterfront, integrating the Bay Area Ridge Trail, the Rodeo Creek Trail, the San Francisco Bay Trail, and the San Francisco Bay (Below Right) Trail.

Maintenance (Goals and Actions Continued)

Goal: Maintain a trash free creek corridor
Action: Encourage schools and youth groups to attend creek cleanups.
Action: Provide litter bags for dog owners.
Action: Discourage dumping in the upper watershed by encouraging fencing, surveillance, and signage.
Action: Provide more trash receptacles along the creek and work with trash collection agency to ensure frequent collection.

Goal: Reduce Graffiti
Action: Hand out graffiti removal kits to community volunteers (like done in City of Richmond).
Action: Ensure redevelopment of Rodeo brings “eyes on the creek” by encouraging buildings, parks and trails to face the creek and engage the creek.
Action: Ensure future development provides fewer convenient surfaces for tagging.

Goal: Ensure that the County agency, or community group, maintain landscaping adjacent to and within Rodeo Creek
Action: Seek funding for a long-term Watershed Coordinator to be a point of contact and advocate for the creek.
Action: Ensure that future improvements include low maintenance native plants and sturdy high quality materials to reduce the need for long term maintenance.
Action: Maintain a web site for the watershed and post the web address along the creek (or stencil on the pathway). Web site should contain jurisdiction along the creek and responsible agency phone numbers and emails.

Goal: Ensure that the County agency, or community group, maintain landscaping adjacent to and within Rodeo Creek
Action: Seek funding for a long-term Watershed Coordinator to be a point of contact and advocate for the creek.
Action: Ensure that future improvements include low maintenance native plants and sturdy high quality materials to reduce the need for long term maintenance.
Action: Maintain a web site for the watershed and post the web address along the creek (or stencil on the pathway). Web site should contain jurisdiction along the creek and responsible agency phone numbers and emails.
Area Water Trail and connecting into all the neighborhoods. The planning group envisions a trail experience that allows a trail user to access all parts of the watershed and connect to regional trails free from roads and motorized vehicles. The planning group envisions that these improvements will lead to greater use, better health and improved quality of life for local citizens, and greater appreciation for the recreational opportunities that the watershed provides.

Engaged and Active Creek Community

The Rodeo Creek Watershed planning group envisions a creek community that is informed, engaged, and involved in creek, watershed, flood control, and community issues. It envisions the creek community being involved in creek clean ups, creek monitoring, and restoration activities. It envisions a creek community that is supported by a watershed coordinator who helps to create these and other opportunities and advances the watershed vision. It envisions the creek community engaging with the Rodeo Municipal Advisory Committee and other planning bodies and government agencies. The planning group envisions the creek community growing through these and other activities, creating a diverse group of watershed stewards working together to improve the watershed.

“The Rodeo Creek Watershed planning group envisions a safe, clean, and healthy Rodeo Creek, with a well-connected watershed trail network, and an engaged and active creek community.”
Opportunities and Next Steps

The Rodeo Creek Watershed Vision Plan provides the foundation for future actions and additional planning and design work intended to improve the Rodeo Creek Watershed. It is, however, merely the first step in planning for watershed improvements. This section identifies opportunities to capitalize on the momentum generated by the planning process and to begin to implement the vision of the Rodeo Creek Watershed planning group.

Lower Watershed Master Plan

Given the interest that the planning group exhibited on lower watershed issues, the opportunity exists to create a Lower Watershed Master Plan. A Master Plan addresses specific watershed actions in much greater substantive and geographic detail than a Vision Plan. A Lower Watershed Master Plan could generate conceptual designs for the various reaches of the watershed, address land use, restoration actions, program development, and/or any host of issues in order to achieve any of the goals stated in this document. As the Contra Costa County Redevelopment Agency is doing a considerable amount of planning in the lower watershed, it may be a good agency to initiate and host a Lower Watershed Master Plan.

Connected Watershed Trail Network

Planning members identified developing a well-connected trail network as one of the priorities of the vision. A Watershed Trails Plan could investigate the various opportunities and constraints involved in connecting the San Francisco Bay Trail, the Bay Area Ridge Trail, the Rodeo Creek Trail, and the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail. A Watershed Trails Plan could investigate ways of establishing feeder trails that link individual neighborhoods with the Rodeo Creek Trail or any of the regional trails in the watershed. The National Park Service Rails, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program
offers support to community groups who are attempting to initiate a trails planning process.

Fernandez Ranch Public Access and Restoration

Muir Heritage Land Trust’s recent acquisition and planned restoration of Fernandez Ranch presents an opportunity to improve public access, trail connectivity, and habitat in the Rodeo Creek watershed. The current phase of public access and restoration activities includes the creation of a parking and staging area, several miles of multi-use (hiking, biking, and equestrian) trails, a bridge across Rodeo Creek, and the restoration of Rodeo Creek and its tributaries as they flow through the property. The full restoration of the property may include additional creek restoration, native plantings, and other supplemental restoration activities (e.g., creek cleanups and site cleanups).

Coordination and Integration with Rodeo Redevelopment

The County Redevelopment agency is heading up the redevelopment of downtown Rodeo and the waterfront. Current projects include the rehabilitation of Parker Avenue, environmental assessment of the waterfront, and a façade improvement program. The planning and redevelopment process provides opportunities to integrate the downtown area, particularly the town plaza, with the creek, its trail, the waterfront, and the Rodeo Marina. Signage, street-scaping, and other urban design features can direct people from downtown areas to the creek and waterfront and create an enjoyable recreational and educational experience.

Rodeo Waterfront Restoration

The Bay Conservation and Development Commission, as part of the Water Trail Project, listed the Rodeo Waterfront as a planned access point to the Water Trail. The owner of the Rodeo Marina has developed plans to renovate and enhance the marina for public access and enjoyment. The opportunity exists not only to restore and improve the Rodeo Marina, but coordinate it with redevelopment plans so that it is connected and physically integrated with the downtown plaza area and the creek trail. This could create an enjoyable experience for creek, trail, and waterfront users and help connect Rodeo, its inhabitants, and its visitors to San Pablo Bay.

Storm Water Master Plan

Another opportunity is to develop a Storm Water Master Plan that focuses specifically on storm water management in the watershed. Given the increasing complexity and rigidity of state and federal storm water regulations, as well as technical advances and new strategies for improving runoff, it may be wise to focus a planning process on how water moves through the watershed – from the roof top to the storm drain to the bay. This technically complex undertaking could have enormous benefits for the health of the watershed and bay, flood risk reduction, and for the quality of life of watershed residents.

Continued Support for a Watershed Coordinator

A key component in maintaining the existing momentum generated by the Rodeo Creek Watershed Vision Plan and advancing to the next stages of watershed improvement is funding for an ongoing Watershed Coordinator. A Watershed Coordinator is the person responsible for organizing watershed planning, education, grant writing and implementation for the protection and restoration of local watershed resources. This is done by coordinating with government agencies, interacting with local community members, remaining informed and educated about actions in the watershed, and ensuring all activity in the watershed is consistent with the stated vision. It would serve the watershed well to fund a watershed coordinator who could perform all of these functions on behalf of the planning group and the watershed itself well into the future.
Conclusion

The Rodeo Creek Watershed Vision planning process has illuminated the need for a coherent vision for the future of the watershed that all parties can voluntarily work towards. This Vision Plan documents the vision of the planning group and of the broader Rodeo Creek Watershed community. Individuals, government agencies, non-profit groups and private interests can refer to the Vision Plan to ensure that their projects are consistent with the larger vision and to seek guidance on next steps and further actions.

As efforts to improve and enhance the watershed proceed through more detailed planning, design, and implementation, actions and items articulated in this vision can be identified as complete or modified. It is expected that the vision for the watershed will transform as physical conditions in the watershed change or as the Rodeo Creek Watershed community is presented with new challenges and opportunities. This document and the planning process it describes will serve as a beacon into the future for efforts to improve and enhance the Rodeo Creek Watershed.
References

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San Francisco Estuary Institute Bay Area, 1998. EcoAtlas Version 1.50b4


