



My name is Kate Wilson and I am here tonight representing Russian Riverkeeper, a local non-profit organization with a mission to inspire the community to protect the Russian River forever. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the State Wildlife Action Plan.

As you know riparian areas, where the aquatic and terrestrial worlds intersect, create one of the most biodiverse areas in our state. On the North Coast many key species such as Coho and Chinook Salmon, Steelhead Trout, Western Pond turtles and Red Legged Frogs depend on a healthy riparian ecosystem for important life stages.

The Russian River and many other North Coast streams have lost a majority of low elevation riparian floodplain habitat, reducing the carrying capacity for listed species and species of concern. In addition, due to dams and historic gravel mining, the Russian River mainstem and key tributaries are incised. This reduces the value of active channel habitat and increases the importance of protecting remaining riparian areas and seeking opportunities to bring back former riparian areas through cooperative programs.

It should be noted that despite Federal, State and local laws and zoning policies, there are few restrictions on development or degradation of lower elevation riparian areas as well as riparian areas within the active channel. Every year the Russian River loses more of it's riparian areas and this summer we have documented roughly 7 acres of low elevation riparian areas in the floodway zoning designation that have been stripped of vegetation under the auspices of pest control for agriculture, event spaces for private homes and wineries and other uses.

Besides the well documented benefit to wildlife and listed fish species, healthy riparian buffers provide a host of benefits to humans such as reducing pollutants in stormwater, reducing property damage from flooding and helping preserve higher groundwater levels in alluvial valleys. Every climate change scenario tells us we can expect more extreme weather such as more prolonged droughts and higher flood peaks. Preserving healthy riparian areas and vegetation helps naturally stabilize banks with tree roots and captures flood debris that could damage vineyards and other property, and is our lowest cost strategy to deal with more violent floods in the future.

In conclusion we encourage the State Action Plan to prioritize actions that can protect remaining riparian areas and find opportunities to increase riparian area buffers where they are inadequate to support our listed fish species and the thousands of plants and animals species that depend on healthy functional riparian areas for their existence. Protecting riparian areas will also provide benefits to property owners by increasing property protection and to the people of California by reducing water quality problems and conserving our native plants and wildlife.

Thank you.