

### 1.1 Project Introduction

The Maintaining Corte Madera Creek: A Citizens' Guide to Creek-Side Property Protection report is a collaborative effort between the Town of Portola Valley and the San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority (JPA). The Citizens' Guide provides a tool for the Town and its residents to use in guiding bank stabilization and revegetation efforts along Corte Madera Creek within the Town of Portola Valley. The Guide was created to facilitate communications between the Town and private property owners who wish to address erosion and property loss. The report is also intended to:

1. Provide guidelines to the Town and its residents for bank stabilization approaches that protect property while improving creek function and habitat values.
2. Develop a broader view of the Corte Madera Creek Watershed as a natural resource and community amenity in an effort to build community stewardship.
3. Introduce feasible and sustainable approaches that promote improved watershed function and that streamline permitting acquisition for property owners and project proponents.
4. Provide an introduction to the Corte Madera Creek Watershed that describes the creek, its different habitats and the interesting species that live in the creek environment.

This document builds on the growing local and regional experience with creek restoration efforts to assist property owners with the project planning process including analysis, design, permitting and implementation phases. The recommendations presented in the Citizens' Guide are based on a series of geomorphic assessments and vegetation and habitat surveys undertaken by a multi-disciplinary team within the project study area. The Citizens' Guide emphasizes a holistic approach to bank protection that considers the entire Corte Madera Creek system as opposed to single isolated problems.

### 1.2 History

In June 1999, the Town of Portola Valley Town Council formed an ad-hoc "Creekside Corridor Committee" to provide feedback and reactions to the Town's policies as they related to creeks, creek management and preservation, and private property protection. The Committee was charged with providing recommendations for the Town Council consideration on these issues, as well as being involved in the preparation of a community educational component. The Committee produced a "Creekside Corridor Regulations: Analysis and Recommendations" Report dated June 2001. That report included general recommendations for the Town to protect riparian resources using regulatory controls.

The Town Planning Commission began review of the committee report in the fall of 2001 and conducted one public workshop, a creek field trip, and commission-level discussions to consider a

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riparian protection ordinance for the town. On each of those occasions, creek-side property owners and other interested parties provided the Commission with valuable comments on the best methods to address the health and stability of the Town's creeks while protecting the legitimate interest of the property owners. The Planning Commission has not taken final action on their recommendations for regulations and policies, and has decided to hold their work in abeyance to allow the JPA/Town "Project" to be completed.

Funding for the 'Maintaining Corte Madera Creek: A Citizens' Guide to Creek-Side Property Protection' report has been provided by a grant from the California Department of Water Resources, administered by the San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority.

In Spring of 2002, the JPA organized and hosted a grants workshop to inform interested parties in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties of the availability of grant funding to conduct local stream protection and restoration projects. The Town of Portola Valley, JPA and the San Francisquito Watershed Council began discussions on project ideas to assist the Town and property owners along Corte Madera Creek.

The JPA agreed that this would be a valuable project, and that since Corte Madera Creek represents a dynamic and integral portion of the San Francisquito watershed, a project of this type would serve the mission of the JPA to protect and maintain the watershed and its environs.

The JPA conducted a search of funding sources, authored a grant application to the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) Urban Stream Restoration Program, and submitted the grant request in partnership with the Town. The Watershed Council (through Acterra) agreed to sign on as the required non-profit co-sponsor of the grant application.

DWR considered the project a high priority, and awarded the JPA and Town \$73,000 to conduct this study and generate this Citizens' Guide. DWR identified priorities to assess the riparian conditions, habitat values, and characterize erosion problems on Corte Madera Creek and provide conceptual design recommendations for the typical problem conditions observed. The primary objective of the Citizens' Guide is to provide a user-friendly tool for landowners that describes planning approaches for effective, ecologically sensitive bank stabilization projects. The JPA has administered the grant contract and funding of this project, and has jointly managed the creation of the Citizens' Guide with the Town.

Corte Madera Creek has been impacted by significant storm events and flood flows in the recent years. These impacts include bank and bed erosion leading to responses – some well-designed and some detrimental – for stabilization. The study area covers an approximately 6-mile section of the creek including the most heavily developed reach through town. The study area was divided into four separate reaches based on geomorphic conditions and significant landmarks. In many of the cases observed along Corte Madera Creek, bank stabilization approaches attempt to armor the visible

problem and fail to address the underlying cause of the erosion. This project does not prescribe specific recommendations for specific sites within the study area and does not address emergency stabilization responses occurring during flood events.

This project included several key sequential tasks: assessments and surveys (study area definition), watershed characterization and description, conceptual stabilization designs and community presentation and outreach.

### 1.3 Goals

The primary goal of the Report is to describe preferred stabilization approaches to address bank erosion that improve overall creek function and expand opportunities for revegetation and associated habitat enhancement. In turn, the Report will facilitate future project evaluation and planning efforts between property owners and the Town of Portola Valley by expanding the understanding of creek and watershed function and resource values. The conceptual approaches will guide responses at existing and future erosion locations as well as for replacement of failed existing bank protection areas.

The goals for the Report were primarily defined by the growing concern about erosion and habitat conditions along Corte Madera Creek in the Town of Portola Valley. The Town and its residents have identified the need to clearly understand the creek and its watershed as a basis for establishing broad recommendations and approaches for banks stabilization and revegetation efforts.

### 1.4 Typical Issues/ Challenges for Creek-Side Property Owners

The natural character and function of riparian corridors like Corte Madera Creek make life along the creek both attractive and challenging. The creek enriches our experience of the physical environment with sounds of running water, cool air and shady vegetation. However, during big storms, the creek can become a force that presents real challenges for homeowners and property protection. These conflicting characteristics create a challenging environment for property owners and the Town regarding their activities and land use along and in the creek corridor.

Most adjacent property owners value the creek as an aesthetic and dynamic element and at the same time have a need to protect property and investment. Property values along creeks are typically higher than similar properties in other areas. Because of the complexity of creek processes, and the diversity of landowners, a wide variety of creek treatments have been applied over time. The perception of risk presented by the creek dictates actions taken by property owners. For example, some property owners have elected to turn their backs to the creek or armor the creek in order to maximize usable property. Unfortunately, these approaches often lead to more significant and costly problems.

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Many existing bank protection and armoring projects along Corte Madera Creek have been installed as emergency responses to erosion associated with the significant storm and flooding events that the region has experienced in recent years. Although there was a perceived threat more thoughtful, responsive and cost effective remedies should have been used. It is important for the Town and its residents to actively coordinate, evaluate and develop bank stabilization protection projects collaboratively in emergency scenarios in order to limit the number of non-engineered and ineffective responses.

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