



2008 Annual Awards Program

Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form

Deadline for Nominations: March 14, 2008

Complete this form and attach to your descriptive narrative.

SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program

Program Excellence Award Category (select only one)

- Community Health and Safety
- Community Partnership
- Community Sustainability
- Strategic Leadership and Governance

Name of program being nominated: CREEK PROGRAM

Jurisdiction where program originated: CITY OF SANTA ROSA

Jurisdiction population: 150,000

Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented by or before January 31, 2007 to be eligible. The start date should not include the initial planning phase.)

Month: MAY Year: 2002

Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in Richmond, Virginia, September 2008. (Each individual listed MUST be an ICMA member to be recognized.):

Name: JEFF KOLIN

Title: CITY MANAGER Jurisdiction: CITY OF SANTA ROSA

Name: GREG SCOLES

Title: DEPUTY CITY MANAGER Jurisdiction: CITY OF SANTA ROSA

Name: _____

Title: _____ Jurisdiction: _____

SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact

Name of person who should be contacted with questions regarding the nomination:

SHERI EMERSON

Title of nominator: SEN. ENVTL. SPECIALIST Jurisdiction of nominator: SANTA ROSA

Street address: 69 STONY CIRCLE

City: SANTA ROSA State/Province: CA

Zip/Postal code: 95401 Country: USA

Telephone: 707-543-4225 Fax: 707-543-3801 E-mail: sjemerson@

srcity.org

Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

Partnerships to Help Local Creeks

Nearly everyone in Santa Rosa lives, works, or plays within walking distance of a creek. Creeks provide many benefits to the urban environment including flood control, open space, recreational opportunities, and off street alternative transportation along the creekside service roads. Local creeks are also home to river otters and turtles, egrets, kingfishers, steelhead trout, willows, big-leaf maples, alders, and many other native species. Partnering with community organizations, agencies, and volunteer citizens, the City of Santa Rosa (City) has implemented a Creek Program to address immediate problems and also created a comprehensive plan that prioritizes longer-term projects along local creeks.

Challenges and Opportunities

More than thirty named creeks flow through Santa Rosa, traveling for a total of nearly ninety miles through the largest urban area in Sonoma County. Over the past century there have been many changes to this complex network of waterways, with some creeks routed underground. After several destructive flood events in the 1950s, many local creeks were channelized to reduce the risk of flooding. Meanders were straightened and creekside vegetation was removed, resulting in warmer water temperatures, lack of habitat, and a decline in the federally-protected steelhead trout and other native fish and wildlife species.

As new neighborhoods were built, development backed on to the creeks and hid them from public view. Fences prevented public access to creek channels and service roads. Creeks were treated as a convenient dumping ground for trash, contamination, debris, yard waste, and other pollutants. 'Out of sight,' and therefore 'out of mind', illicit activities such as graffiti, drug sales, prostitution, encampments, and fires occurred along the creeks. Creekside trails were not welcoming to pedestrians, recreational enthusiasts, or bicycle commuters.

Many problems were left unresolved due to the fact that various jurisdictions share the responsibility for the care of local creeks, creekside trails, and associated maintenance and law enforcement. Citizens who had a complaint or needed to report a problem were unsure which department or agency to contact, or if they would even receive a response.

Yet there were opportunities to improve the situation along local creeks. Remnant areas of native habitat still existed, and many of the channelized creek reaches were already owned and maintained by the public agencies interested in making improvements. There also was an untapped wealth of citizen support and talent in the community. Citizens were looking for ways to become involved and make a difference.

Creek Program Implementation and Costs

The centerpiece of the Creek Program was established in May of 2002, when the City entered into a partnership with the Sonoma County Water Agency (Agency) to create the Creek Stewardship Program, implementing immediate measures to improve conditions along local creeks. That same year, the City also made a commitment in its General Plan to develop a Citywide Creek Master Plan that identified and prioritized opportunities along creeks for natural habitat restoration, protection of health and safety, open space preservation, multi-use transportation routes, and recreation. Both components of the Creek Program would be funded in large part with water quality-related creek restoration funds, from the City's storm water utility fee assessment. With the full support of the City Council and City Manager, these two actions would alter the course of local waterways, this time in a more positive direction.

A joint funding agreement between the Agency and City established the sharing of costs for the Creek Stewardship Program. The Agency pays for half of the salary, benefits, and overhead costs to support the Program Coordinator, an Environmental Specialist position within

the Santa Rosa Public Works Department. The Coordinator organizes and leads volunteer creek clean ups and educational outings, and is responsible for developing the program, providing follow through on reports of creek problems, and cultivating community partnerships. The City reimburses the Agency for the use of supervised adult crews from the County of Sonoma jail that perform creek work beyond the abilities of volunteer Creek Stewards. The cost of program supplies, such as gloves, tools, and trash bags, is shared. Additional projects, such as development of interpretive signage and creation of a creek curriculum for local schools, are pursued as grants and other funding sources are secured. Total spending for the program during the 2006-07 fiscal year was about \$225,000.

Meanwhile, work on a Citywide Creek Master Plan (Plan) began in earnest with a technical assistance award from the National Park Service's Rivers and Trails Program in 2002. The Plan relied heavily on input gathered during public involvement workshops and guidance from a technical advisory committee of eighteen partnering agencies and organizations, with members as diverse as the Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition, National Marine Fisheries Service, and the Sierra Club. A team of City staff, project partners, and consultants completed baseline studies, consolidated creek-related policies, and developed recommendations for habitat restoration and creek trail system improvements. Funding was provided by a Caltrans Community-Based Transportation Planning Grant and local water quality-related creek restoration funds. The Plan was unprecedented in its scope and level of detail, reliance on partnerships and emphasis on community involvement, and use of Geographical Information System technology. The Plan received the 2007 award for Outstanding Planning Document, Jurisdiction Over 50,000 Population, from the Association of Environmental Professionals. Total cost of preparing the document was about \$500,000 over four years.

Program Results

Much more can be accomplished through cooperative partnerships than by a single entity working alone. Over 150 Creek Stewards, from diverse economic and cultural backgrounds, have committed to caring for local creeks. Each year, nearly two thousand citizens participate in educational outings and volunteer through community organizations to clean up creeks. Approximately 45 tons of trash and debris (equivalent to 20 garbage trucks) are removed from creeks annually by volunteers and paid workers. Citizens serve as additional eyes and ears along the creeks to more quickly spot and report signs of water pollution and other problems before a situation becomes larger and more costly to address. Groups willing to undertake a creek project can easily do so with assistance from staff to facilitate permission, coordinate additional resources, and provide tools and services. The Creek Stewardship Program partners with over sixty community groups (businesses, churches, clubs, and others) and twenty youth groups each year. Besides creek clean ups, activities include bird walks, historical tours, run/walk fundraisers, neighborhood hikes, and native tree plantings.

The Creek Program has improved the City's delivery of environmental and public safety services to the community. Working closely with other departments, agencies, and community partners has unified efforts and resulted in more timely response to specific issues and reported problems. Local creeks are cleaner, with less trash and fewer homeless encampments. Trails are safer, with improved access and connections to regional trail systems. The Citywide Creek Master Plan identified and prioritized opportunities to improve creek habitat and the creekside trail system. This planning directs limited resources to the projects that provide the greatest benefit to native fish and wildlife and the overall community, and helps make high priority projects more competitive for outside grant funds.

Lessons Learned

The Creek Program is successful in large part due to the support of the community and the City Council. Staff are clearly directed to develop and maintain the partnerships that make both short term implementation and long term planning possible. Another reason for the program's success is the City's dedication of staff to assist the public with concerns about creeks. The Program Coordinator position provides a single and reliable point of contact to answer questions and ensure follow up with the appropriate department or agency.

An Investment in the Future

Santa Rosa's Creek Program is a model that other communities in the region and beyond can easily adapt for their own uses. For example, the neighboring City of Rohnert Park has dedicated staff time to assist volunteers in caring for local creeks, and is currently in the process of creating a similar creeks master plan.

The Creek Program, working closely with multiple partners, is creating a healthier, more natural environment for people and for wildlife. There is a renewed sense of ownership and caring for local creeks. Citizens are engaged, assured that their involvement is acknowledged and that their concerns and ideas will result in action by their local government. City staff in turn are reenergized, and even more committed to making Santa Rosa a better place to live by being responsive, competent stewards of the public infrastructure and environment for the benefit of citizens and visitors. For most people adventure and play in creeks is a treasured part of childhood. In Santa Rosa's fast paced urban environment, citizens value creeks as linear parks that provide opportunities for wildlife viewing, recreation or alternate transportation routes, and a touch of nature -- all elements of a desirable place to live and work.