

Working
collaboratively to
protect and restore
the waters and lands
of Tomales Bay
watershed



2002

Bulletin

WINTER

Calling a Council for Tomales Bay's Watershed

This newsletter has two purposes: to inform you about the mission of Tomales Bay Watershed Council (TBWC), welcoming your involvement at any level; and to open some doors for your concerns, understanding, and appreciation for Tomales Bay and its entire watershed.

Tomales Bay is the geographic heart of the portion of western Marin County that includes the watersheds of Lagunitas, Olema, and Walker Creeks. There are hundreds of tributaries associated with the three largest creeks. The surrounding landscape can be viewed as a vast circulatory system, connecting all the plant, animal, and human inhabitants. Waters flow into the bay through wild lands, dairy ranches, forests, parks, and human communities—219 square miles in all. The upper boundary of the Tomales Bay watershed is made up of ridgelines both familiar and remote, a rim of sorts, measuring 142 miles.

Within this natural boundary, every human inhabitant and visitor has a relationship with the Tomales Bay watershed, and all of our activities affect it. Much of the western and southern portions of the watershed are under public ownership, while most of the eastern and



Photo by Marty Knapp — www.martyknapp.com

northern areas are privately owned agricultural lands. Fully 60% of our open space is privately owned; its future depends upon our continued support for evolving sustainable agriculture.

Although the Bay and watershed have retained much of their beauty, water quality, and wildlife abundance relatively intact into the early 21st century, there are present challenges to this ecosystem. All too many estuaries like Tomales Bay—valuable to people and wildlife alike—have been degraded or destroyed. Tomales Bay is protected by local, state, and federal laws and regulations. For the past three decades, the conservation movement in Marin County has gained increasing local and political support, as illustrated by the adoption of the Countywide Plan in the 1970s. However, there remain serious water quality, habitat, and management issues to be resolved in this watershed.

Development pressures and population expansion continue to threaten the rural and agricultural landscape of West Marin. Water quality and habitat concerns have been increasingly recognized within the Bay and watershed. One indication of water quality problems in the Bay has been the increase in closures on harvesting

“Land stewardship plays an important role in protecting the health of Tomales Bay and the viability of agriculture. In return, as a rancher my quality of life and the quality of my operation depend upon clean water, good forage, and productive soils created by a healthy watershed.”

Bob Giacomini, Local Dairy Rancher

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oysters, caused by high bacteria concentrations in heavy run-off from rainstorms. In 1986, the Regional Water Quality Control Board identified Tomales Bay as an “impaired waterbody.” In response, concerned citizens, agencies, and organizations came together in a collaborative effort to improve the health of the Bay. This effort recognized the need to include people representing all points of view throughout the watershed.

TBWC held its first meeting in January of 2000 and is working collectively on a plan for the restoration and protection of the watershed and Tomales Bay. But a plan is only as strong as the commitment of people carrying it out—namely, all residents of (and the many visitors to) West Marin. We invite your interest and support in this stewardship effort. The price for our privilege is responsible action. ●

— *Michael Mery*, for the Council



Watershed Inhabitant:
The dairy cow grazes on open space comprising much of the Tomales Bay landscape.

Tomales Bay Watershed

- ▶ The land area draining into Tomales Bay is nearly 20 times the size of the Bay itself: the watershed area is 219 square miles. The bay, on the San Andreas Fault, is 12 miles long and only about 1 mile wide. Creeks flow into Tomales Bay from Mount Tamalpais and Bolinas Ridge to the south, Inverness Ridge to the west, and Walker Creek watershed to the east.
- ▶ Nine villages lie within these natural boundaries. An estimated 11,000 people live here and 2.5 million people visit annually. Human populations have been increasing. Our activities affect the Bay and its watershed.
- ▶ Public lands within the watershed include parts of Point Reyes National Seashore and Golden Gate National Recreation Area, all of Tomales Bay State Park and Samuel P. Taylor State Park, the Inverness Public Utility District, and part of Marin Municipal Water District.
- ▶ The Bay’s waters are part of the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary.
- ▶ 80% of the watershed is used for agriculture, primarily for grazing dairy and beef cattle.
- ▶ The watershed supplies water, provides recreational opportunities, and supports dairy and beef ranching, farming and alternative agriculture, commercial fishing, and mariculture.

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Tomales Bay Watershed Council (TBWC)

- ▶ TBWC was formed in December 1999 by Tomales Bay Advisory Committee and charged with addressing environmental problems affecting the Bay on a watershed scale.
- ▶ TBWC has adopted these goals: improve the water quality of Tomales Bay and surrounding watershed; protect and restore the entire watershed in a way that sustains human and natural resources; and produce a draft watershed plan for review by the public in 2002.
- ▶ Council membership is broad-based and representative of all stakeholders – residential and community groups,

agricultural interests, environmental groups, mariculture, recreational interests, and public agencies. Community members also actively participate.

- ▶ There are currently 7 Council committees: Executive, Funding, Public Outreach, Science, Water Quality, Strategies, and Habitat. TBWC makes decisions using a consensus-based process including all stakeholders.
- ▶ Funding has come from Marin Community Foundation, the County of Marin, the California Coastal Conservancy, and private foundation grants administered by

the Marin Resource Conservation District. TBWC hired a coordinator in 2001 and contracted with a consultant to guide completion of a draft plan. Future funding remains a critical issue.

- ▶ In the future, TBWC will work with relevant agencies to ensure that the plan’s recommendations are implemented. ●

Tomales Bay Watershed Council
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▶ Council Members:

Michael Mery, *Chair*
 Don Neubacher, *Point Reyes National Seashore*
 Kate McClain, *Blue Water Kayak Company*
 Robert Giacomini, *Tomales Bay Agricultural Group*
 Mike McClaskey, *Point Reyes Village Association*
 Catherine Caufield, *Environmental Action Committee of West Marin*
 John Finger, *Hog Island Oyster Company*
 Liza Crosse, *Aide to Marin County Supervisor Kinsey*

Stan Gillmar, *Inverness Association*
 Sally Gale, *Marin Resource Conservation District*
 Ann Grymes, *East Shore Planning Group*
 Alex Hinds, *Marin Community Development Agency*
 Dale Hopkins, *Regional Water Quality Control Board*
 Jared Huffman, *Marin Municipal Water District*
 Lynnette Kahn, *West Marin Chamber of Commerce*
 John Kelly, *Audubon Canyon Ranch – Cypress Grove*

Gregg Langlois, *California Department of Health Services*
 Paul Olin, *U.C. Cooperative Extension Sea Grant*
 Carlos Porrata, *Tomales Bay State Park*
 Ed Ueber, *Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary*
 Bill Vogler, *Lawson’s Landing*
 Reuven Walder, *SPAWN/San Geronimo Valley*
 Tom Yarish, *Tomales Bay Association*

A Plan for Tomales Bay Watershed

▶ Tomales Bay watershed is home to rich wildlife communities, including nearly 470 species of birds. Coho salmon, steelhead trout, and red-legged frogs are important examples of threatened and endangered species that rely on habitats here. Of wild coho salmon remaining along the central California coast from Humboldt to Santa Cruz Counties, nearly 20% of the population spawns in Lagunitas and Olema Creek watersheds.

▶ In 1992, the Regional Water Quality Control Board expanded the list of sources of “water quality impairment” for Tomales Bay to include: nutrients (from manure, septic systems, etc.), pathogens, metals (mercury), and sedimentation.

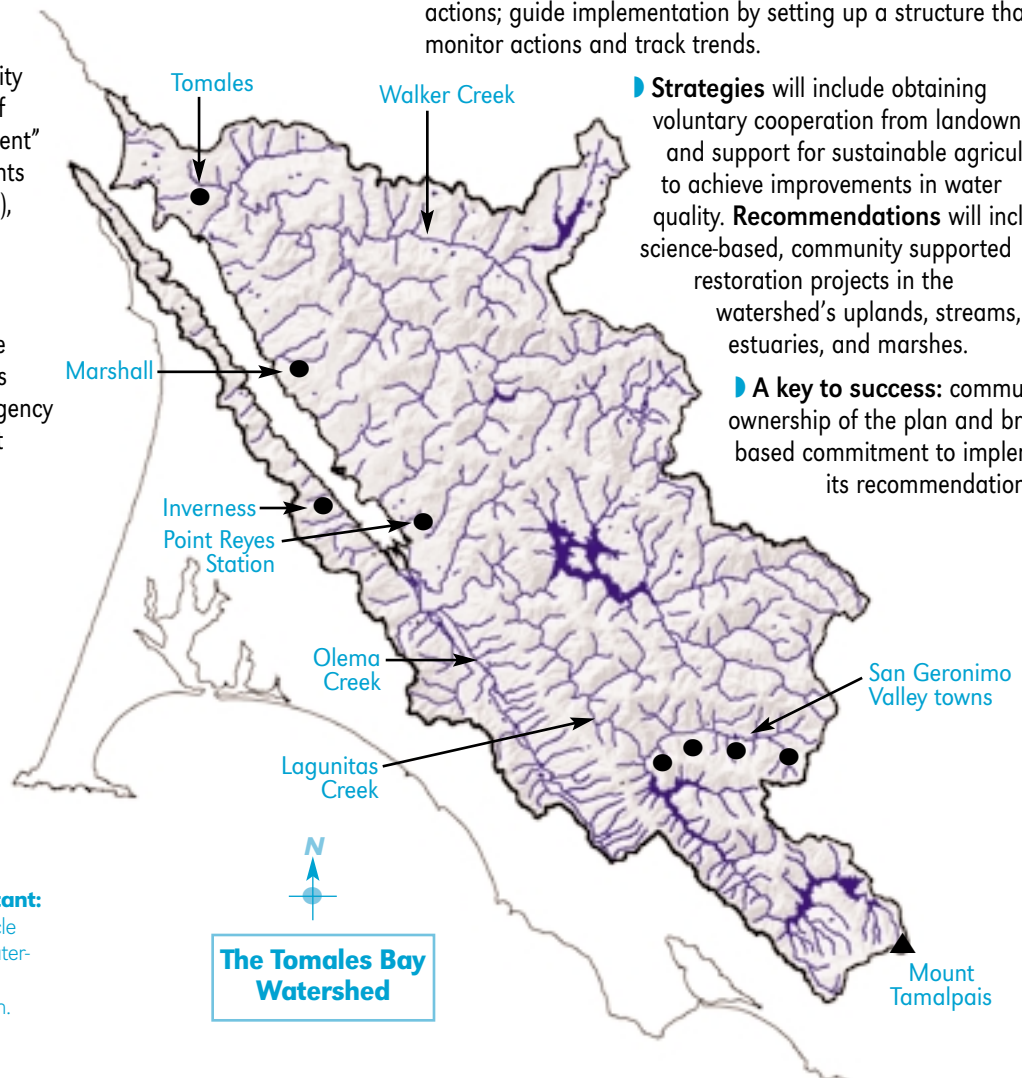
▶ Local action in response to these problems has generated statewide interest. In 2001, Tomales Bay was selected by the State Resources Agency as a pilot watershed management model for California. ●

▶ **Due date:** preliminary plan is scheduled for public review in the fall of 2002.

▶ **Purpose:** describe a vision for Tomales Bay; identify actions to achieve this vision that are realistic, attainable, measurable, and supportive of a sustainable local economy that includes agriculture; encourage stakeholders and agencies to implement actions; guide implementation by setting up a structure that will monitor actions and track trends.

▶ **Strategies** will include obtaining voluntary cooperation from landowners and support for sustainable agriculture to achieve improvements in water quality. **Recommendations** will include science-based, community supported restoration projects in the watershed’s uplands, streams, estuaries, and marshes.

▶ **A key to success:** community ownership of the plan and broad-based commitment to implement its recommendations. ●



Watershed Inhabitant:
Coho salmon’s life cycle touches the entire watershed, from stream tributary to Bay mouth.

“Tomales Bay and the agricultural landscape that functions as its watershed are defining elements of Marin County’s extraordinary environmental quality and basic character, and both are threatened. To save them will require the cooperation and concerted effort of everyone who cares about habitat conservation, family farming, and open space preservation.”

Bob Berner,
Marin Agricultural Land Trust



Watershed Inhabitant:
Streamside willow thickets are the mark of healthy riparian habitat.

“The Tomales Bay watershed’s abundance and beauty fed the bodies, spirits, and souls of the native people for thousands of years. The protection and appreciation of these irreplaceable natural resources is a responsibility that we all need to share for the benefit of generations to come.”

Carlos Porrata,
State Park Ranger

“A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.” — Aldo Leopold

What’s in a Watershed?



Watershed Inhabitant:

The great blue heron is one of some 470 bird species near Tomales Bay.

A watershed encompasses the entire land area that drains into a particular river, lake, or bay. Consider a drop of water falling on the land where you are right now: toward which body of water would it flow? Consider your highest surrounding elevations — mountains and ridgelines: water flows downhill from there and joins other waters in a basin. The word *watershed* is used interchangeably with the terms *catchment area* and *drainage basin*. Most watersheds have *sub-watersheds* within them. Tomales Bay’s watershed includes those of Walker, Lagunitas, and Olema Creeks until they enter the Bay, creating an estuary. The health of streams, rivers, lakes, and bays is intertwined with processes at work on a watershed’s land area. People inhabiting and visiting any place on the planet have a role to play — practicing watershed stewardship.

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“People are the most important part of the equation. Working together and listening carefully to one another, we can do much to protect and improve the health of Tomales Bay and its surrounding watershed.”

Richard Plant, Inverness Resident

How You Can Get Involved

- ▶ Assist TBWC as a committee member.
- ▶ Assist with local fundraising.
- ▶ Volunteer in administrative, public outreach, research, or restoration activities.
- ▶ Be informed. Attend monthly meetings of TBWC — every 3rd Tuesday, 4 to 6 PM, Point Reyes National Seashore headquarters.
- ▶ Provide input to the draft Watershed Plan. Watch for announcements of public meetings and events in the *Point Reyes Light* and *Marin I.J.*, and on Horizon Cable and KWMR 90.5 FM.
- ▶ To receive any future updates, provide TBWC with the following information:

Name: _____

Mailing address: _____

City/state/zip: _____

E-mail address: _____

Daytime phone: _____

Tomales Bay Watershed and You

Plants, insects, humans, other mammals, fungi, microbes, birds — all are members of natural communities and contribute to the processes at work in a watershed system. What’s the nature of your relationship to the marshes, feeder streams, and lands draining into Tomales Bay? How many boxes in this list of human activities can you fill with a check mark?

- Hike the trails
- Sail or kayak
- Raise dairy cattle, beef, or sheep
- Volunteer to work on a restoration project
- Take solace from the views of land and water
- Lead field trips for children
- Garden
- Ride horseback
- Grow or eat oysters
- Drink and bathe in water from a local public utility or your own well
- Work for a locally based business or organization
- Gather mushrooms or berries
- Live in a home with a septic system
- Birdwatch
- Catch or eat fish or clams
- Bike in open space
- Drive Sir Francis Drake or Coast Highway One
- Produce food or fiber
- Can think of at least 6 other ways that people interact with the watershed

- ▶ Make a tax-deductible contribution to help cover TBWC operating costs. The Council’s fiscal agent is Marin County Resource Conservation District. Checks are payable to Marin County RCD/TBWC. ●



P. O. Box 447
Point Reyes Station, CA 94956

“Every day I feel lucky to live and work here. It is only natural to want to protect Tomales Bay, its hills, streams, forests, and wildlife—and also the vitality of its communities, its small villages, and its farmlands.”

**Ellen Straus,
Local Dairy Rancher**

