



RUSSIAN RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

300 Seminary Ave, Ukiah, CA 95482 • (707) 833-2553 • www.rrwatershed.org

RRWA Environmental Column –January 2011

What is a Watershed?

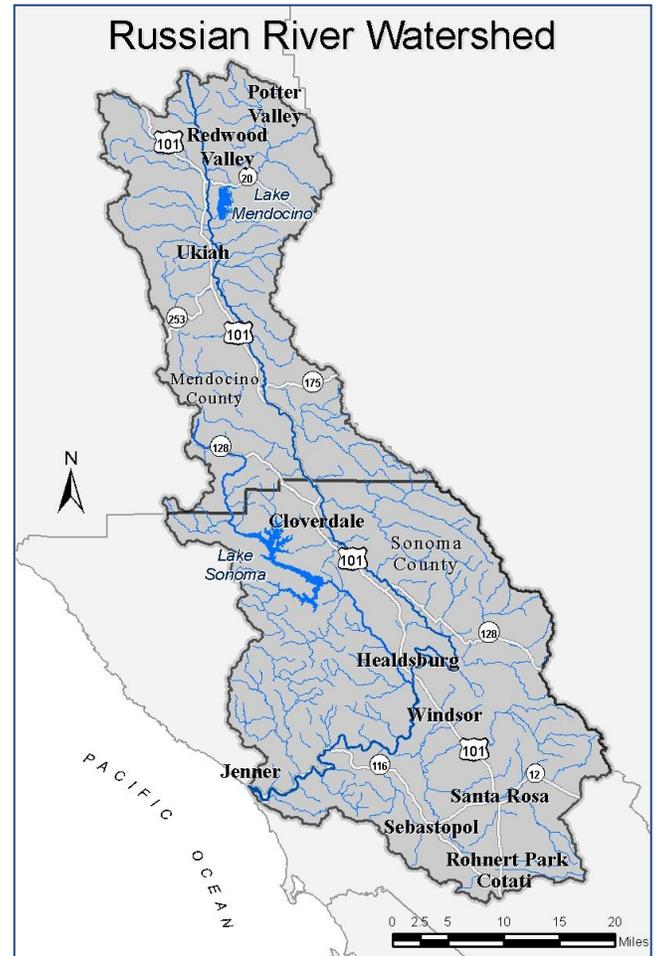
As you drive around Sonoma and Mendocino County you may see signs with names of watersheds. These signs are located near the dividing line or high point between watersheds, and are part of local initiatives to enhance the watershed through public awareness.

But what is a watershed? It is defined as an area of land that drains to a common body of water such as a stream, river, lake or ocean. In our case, that body of water is the Russian River. The watershed of the Russian River watershed consists of approximately 1,500 square miles of land within Sonoma and Mendocino counties. The “top” of the watershed is near Willits while the “bottom” or outlet of the watershed is at the Pacific Ocean near Jenner. Within the watershed are the Russian River’s many tributary creeks, each with their own surrounding sub-watershed areas. Tributaries within the Russian River watershed include Forsythe Creek, Orr Creek, Dry Creek, Big Sulphur Creek, Austin Creek, Mark West Creek, Santa Rosa Creek and the Laguna de Santa Rosa. Many of the tributary creeks in the Russian River watershed also have signs to increase community awareness.

Understanding the environmental, educational, recreational, economic and social benefits of a watershed is the first step in helping to protect and preserve the Russian River and its tributaries. In addition to being the home to approximately 400,000 people, the Russian River watershed provides habitat for numerous plant and animal species including the iconic California Redwoods and three threatened salmonid species (Chinook salmon, Coho salmon and Steelhead trout). A healthy Russian River watershed also acts an economic engine the area in its ability to host activities ranging from tourism and recreation to agriculture and timber harvesting.

Things we do every day can affect the health of our watershed. The list below outlines ten actions all of us can take to make a positive contribution to the overall health of our watershed.

1. Water your lawn/garden only when needed, and apply irrigation at an application rate that soaks in and does not run off.
2. Apply garden fertilizers only as needed, and use organic rather than synthetic fertilizers.
3. Plant native vegetation. Most native vegetation requires less water, fertilizer and pesticides; and also attracts beneficial insects.
4. Capture rooftop runoff using rain barrels. The captured water can then be used to irrigate your garden during drier months. Screen to keep mosquitoes out.
5. Dispose of pet waste properly. Pet waste is typically high in nutrients and bacteria and should only be deposited into the toilet or trash.
6. Wash your car at a car wash. Detergents are harmful to aquatic life. Carwash facilities are connected to treated sewer systems and most recycle the wash water.
7. Keep your car properly maintained and leak free.
8. Dispose of paints, oils, grease, fluorescent bulbs, batteries and chemicals properly.
9. Keep your septic system properly maintained.





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10. Replace your driveway with pervious pavers or pervious concrete.
11. Join a watershed organization.

To find out more about caring for watersheds, visit the California Watershed Portal sponsored by the State Department of Conservation at www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/watershedportal or for programs in our watershed, visit the Russian River Watershed Association web site at www.rrwatershed.org.

This article was authored by Virginia Porter, Executive Director of the Russian River Watershed Association. RRWA (www.rrwatershed.org) is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water, fisheries restoration, and watershed enhancement.