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# TROUT

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## CALIFORNIA DREAMWEAVERS

*Restoring the Garcia's  
Salmon and Steelhead*

South Fork  
Boise Rainbows

Rhode Island's  
Blackstone River

Long Island  
Brookies





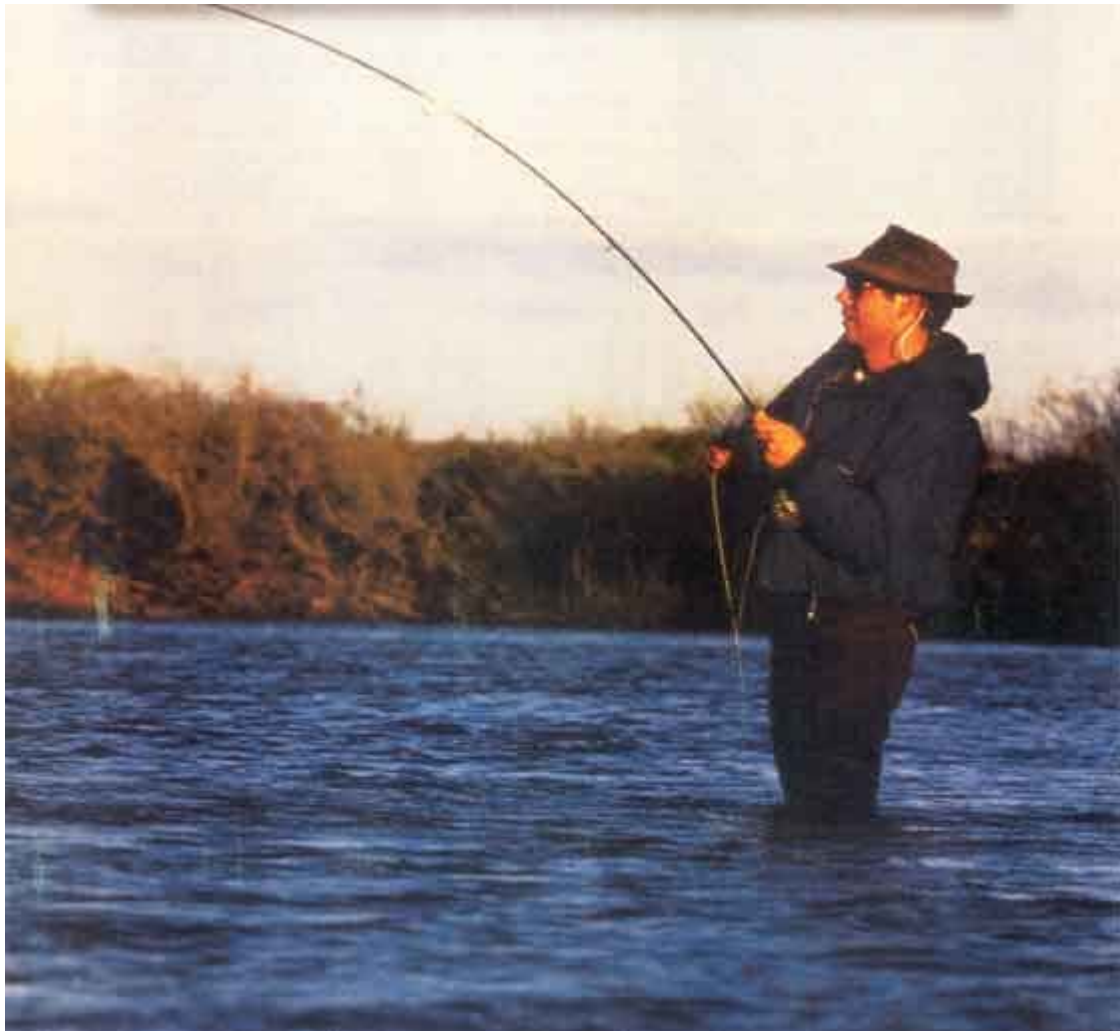
*California*  
**DREAMWEAVERS**

**Coho Salmon  
and Steelhead on  
the Garcia**

*By Gregg Patterson*

**I**T IS A PLACE OF BALANCED UNBALANCE AND NATURAL CHAOS, CALIFORNIA'S NORTH Coast. An ecologically violent and beautiful place where the salt sea smashes against the edge of the earth, straining to scale 100-foot cliffs in its desire to swallow the land. It is where the earth groans from within, shifting and grinding against itself, splitting open as if wanting to swallow itself from the inside out. Where the land runs away from the sea and the water from the land. One up the mountains, one down, like strangers,

PHOTO: PHOTOFEST



**T***he North Coast is an ecologically violent, beautiful place where the sea smashes against the edge of the earth.*

**The Point Arena Lighthouse, south of Fort Bragg, North Coast watersheds once supported abundant runs of ocean-going salmon, steelhead and cutthroat trout.**

passing each other once in time but never crossing paths again; all cloaked beneath tall dark forests of redwoods, Douglas firs and tan oaks.

Threading together sea to land, shoreline to mountains, salt to fresh water, and open coast to dense forest are fish—salmon and trout—that with the precision and consistency of the weaver's loom, run silver threads back and forth that precariously seem to hold this diverse ecotone together. The fish run with determined urgency and a seeming belief that if they don't keep going back and forth, weaving their invisible threads, the earth will split wide open and drop off into the sea.

Those runs of Pacific salmon, steelhead and coastal cutthroat trout are no longer what they used to be. The fish are threatened or endangered in watersheds all along the North Coast, and the simple black type listing now extinct individual stream runs neatly fills line after line on a page of

paper that reads like a daily newspaper's obituary section. The causes of death—overfishing, water diversion, dams, sedimentation, loss of habitat—repeat themselves again and again. To reverse the trend in one watershed, Trout Unlimited has formed a unique partnership with a major timber company to restore runs of coho salmon on the Garcia River.

The Garcia runs through steep mountainous country in Mendocino County on its way to the Pacific Ocean. This is timber country where logging has been a way of life for generations of people and still is. But the logging industry that's been good for the people and the local economies of this rural area, has been bad for salmon and the people who once depended on them for their living.

Fifty-year-old Craig Bell, a local, lives in Gualala. Like the land where he lives, Bell's working life has been a clash of divergent careers. He's

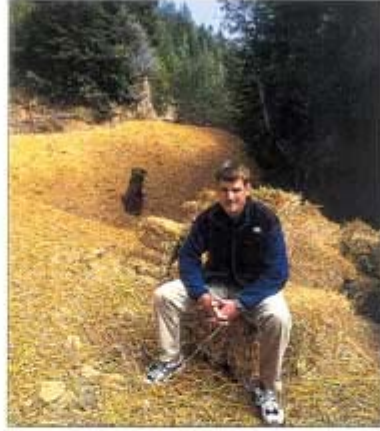
PHOTOGRAPHS BY S. VALENTINE, APRIL 2001



worked both as commercial fisherman and logger. Now, he's a professional stream restorer hired to coordinate TU's restoration efforts on the South Fork of the Garcia River. "I helped fish out the salmon along the coast and then I became a logger," he said. "I even cut down the trees and helped build the roads that ruined the Garcia River. Now I'm trying to fix it all. How's that for irony?"

The effort, known as The North Coast Coho Project, is attempting to reduce sediment pollution in the South Fork of the Garcia River by 72 percent and do instream work to restore spawning and juvenile habitat for coho and steelhead trout. The land surrounding the stream is privately owned by Mendocino Redwood Company (MRC), which purchased it two years ago following decades of ownership by Louisiana Pacific, the multi-national timber giant that had a suspect environmental record in the area. According to Bell, much of the sediment that has smothered the Garcia was a direct result of the poor forestry practices he participated in when Louisiana Pacific owned the 235,000 acres of coastal rainforest.

Now, with a new landowner and a cooperative partnership developed, there's hope that things



On TU's behalf, Steve Trafton approached the Mendocino Redwood Company with a stream restoration proposal for the Garcia watershed.

Fallen trees are used to provide fish cover on the Garcia. This log was notched to create a pool.



Scientist  
Danny Hagans  
oversees road  
repairs in the  
Garcia basin.  
Unstable  
roads have  
dumped  
sediment  
into streams,  
destroying  
fish spawning  
habitat.



The Garcia  
project is  
a rare  
example of  
conservation-  
ists, agencies  
and loggers  
cooperating.

will get better for salmon and steelhead in the Garcia River. The MRC owns 88 percent of the sub-watershed containing the South Fork of the Garcia River. Bell had spearheaded the development of a restoration plan for the Garcia River as far back as 1990, but his efforts had only marginal success.

"I had very limited permission to do things," Bell explained. "They let me put in log structures to form pools, but the real problem was sediment coming off the roads up the slope. They knew it, but they didn't want to talk about it." Bell says the best he got was limited permission to do instream work, but Louisiana Pacific always admonished him by saying "You stay in the stream but no wandering around up on the slopes."

When Mendocino Redwood bought the land, Bell was coordinating the local Garcia River Watershed Advisory Group. A friend suggested he call Steve Trafion, TU's California Policy Coordinator. The two talked about successes TU was having on restoring salmon populations on other North Coast streams. Bell told him about a rough plan he'd developed to protect the South Fork of the Garcia from sedimentation. He

## Grants for the Garcia

**C**RAIG BELL UNDERSTANDS THAT RIVER RESTORATION ISN'T CHEAP: IF THE HEAVY EQUIPMENT associated with logging messed up the river, it's going to take heavy equipment to fix it. That costs money, and it's something he wasn't used to getting from Louisiana Pacific in the 10 years he tried to restore the Garcia River on company lands.

"In ten years of work, I got \$200 worth of seedlings out of Louisiana Pacific," he recalled with a chuckle. "That's all changed now."

TU's Steve Trafion explained that projects like the South Fork Garcia and elsewhere in Mendocino County couldn't happen without a diverse group of partners who contributed not only technical expertise but also generous funding.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation provided \$90,000, allowing the North Coast Coho project to get underway. The Mendocino Redwood Company matched this and other funds with thousands of dollars worth of heavy equipment and equipment operator time, without which up-slope restoration is impossible. The Mendocino County Resource Conservation District added \$35,000, buying additional equipment time and the materials for two massive crossings. Finally, the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) contributed \$128,000, and has subsequently earmarked more funding for TU projects in other Mendocino County watersheds. Thus, the North Coast Coho Project is a cooperative endeavor in the broadest of terms.

"California Fish and Game's ability to help fund these and other costly projects is the legacy of a 1997 state senate bill authored by Mike Thompson," Trafion said. Thompson is now a U.S. congressional representative. His legislation created the "Salmon and Steelhead Restoration Account," which receives up to \$8 million in state funding annually and was recently updated to take in federal funding, too. Trafion says that the CDFG decides what projects get funded based on the evaluation and recommendations of field staff and a panel of volunteer experts.

"The rewards of this aggressively far-sighted measure will be reaped for years to come," said Trafion. "California's example is one that other states would do well to copy." ■

suggested with Louisiana Pacific now gone, maybe it would be worth a shot to contact Mendocino Redwood and see if they were interested. Bell recalls the meeting much like a child would describe his or her Christmas wish list to Santa Claus.

"We said we'd like to bring in outside road experts who are the best in the state at assessing erosion problems, and we'd like to treat it thoroughly, and they said 'Yes,'" Bell recalled. "We were shocked."

"Then we went further and asked, 'Would you consider training your licensed timber operators and road crews in some of these techniques, so it becomes the standard way you operate throughout your property?' And they said 'Yes, and we'll pay for it.'

"There is nothing we've asked for that we haven't gotten," Bell continued. "We've got total access to anywhere we want to go on their property; all of their records—fisheries records, all of their own assessments of erosion problems. We have carte blanche access to anything we want."

Mendocino Redwood CEO Sandy Dean says the most exciting thing about the restoration effort is it has the potential to be the template for

similar projects on its property. "The hope will be that five years from now when we talk about this, we'll have done this many more times and we're going to have populations of fish in much greater numbers than we have today," Dean said. "And that's exciting because aquatic habitat is a great barometer of the health of the forest."

You can imagine Bell's response to such talk after a decade of dealing with Louisiana Pacific. But Dean's beliefs mirror the philosophy of the Donald Fisher family of San Francisco, founders of The Gap clothing stores and the folks who set up Mendocino Redwood. John Fisher says his family's land stewardship ethic comes from having lived in the San Francisco Bay area since the mid-1800s.

"This is our home, and we want to make things better," he said. "My brother [Robert] is on the board of NRDC [Natural Resources Defense Council], and we have a commitment to the environment."

John Fisher says that even though the family is not from Mendocino County, they've brought that environmental commitment with them in managing the company lands. "We have the advantage of coming into the area without a history there," he

**Craig Bell coordinates TU's restoration efforts on the Garcia. The fallen redwood tree will be placed instream to provide nutrients and habitat for fish and insects.**



The Garcia River is still famous for its wild steelhead (right and below).



RICHARD T. GRAY

explained. "We don't have a way of looking at things having to be done a certain way there, just because that's the way they've always been done. That frees us to try and do things differently."

One of those different things is to significantly help the stream by taking care of problems high above it—specifically roads. Danny Hagans of Pacific Watershed Associates is doing that part of the project. He calls it storm-proofing or armoring the road system.

"There's an extensive road system throughout the area, and it's been poorly maintained," he said. He says the goal is to make roads as "hydrologically invisible as we can" so their sediment effects will be as minimal as possible. Hagans says that doesn't mean a "no roads" policy but it does mean well built and well maintained roads.

The pre-restoration road system totaled almost 25 miles in a 2,500-acre area. Another part of the roadwork involves closing and replanting roads no longer necessary. Most of these are lower section haul roads that run parallel to the South Fork and down to where it joins with the Garcia's mainstem.

TU's Trafton hopes this project is the beginning of many more, not only with Mendocino



B. WILKINSON/ATWOOD

Mike Jani (left), Mendocino Redwood's chief forester, and Stephen Cannata, fishery biologist with the California Department of Fish and Game, on the Garcia.



B. WILKINSON/ATWOOD





**Maybe the salmon and steelhead have now evolved into our consciences enough that they can reconnect our souls with land and sea.**

Redwood but also with other North Coast timber companies. "I hope it's going to be the example that sets the tone for the future," he said. "Relations between conservation organizations and the timber companies have been fairly frosty, to say the least, for many years and still are. There are plenty of conservation workers out there who would jump at the chance to do the kind of work we're doing here."

Trafton, like MRC's Dean, hopes the Garcia project sets the standard for what gets done in the future. John Fisher already seems to have decided that's the way things will happen on Mendocino Redwood Company lands.

"The wonderful thing about our relationship with Trout Unlimited," said Fisher, "is we've got numerous streams on our land, and we'd be happy to work with them to restore each one."

Maybe the salmon and steelhead have now

evolved into our consciences enough that they can weave their silver threads, not only securing the land to the sea, but perhaps, also, reconnecting our souls with those same elements, keeping our spirits from splitting away and leaving us unable to return from where we came. ■

*Gregg Patterson spent summers as a boy developing his love for trout and wading the rivers of the Catskills near the family farm in Lew Beach, N.Y. He's a contributing editor to Sports Afield, and his environmental commentaries air regularly on "ESPN Outdoors." His "Carrying A Torch for Trout: Bonneville Cutthroats and the 2002 Olympics" appeared in the Spring '00 TROUT.*

*[TU.ORG](http://TU.ORG) Read our exclusive e-story on fishing for Garcia steelhead at [www.tu.org/active/tumagf/Issues.html](http://www.tu.org/active/tumagf/Issues.html). For more information about the Garcia, including maps and photos, see [www.tutv.org/2000\\_shows/garcia\\_river.html](http://www.tutv.org/2000_shows/garcia_river.html).*

The Garcia basin once harbored enormous runs of chinook and coho salmon (pictured). The chinook are extinct, but conservationists hope that controlling sediment and restoring habitat will help rebuild coho runs.

