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On Saturday, Sept. 13-2014, Turtle Island Restoration Network's Salmon Protection And Watershed Network (SPAWN) program received the prestigious Charles McGlashan Environmental Award from the Marin Democratic Party. The award was announced at a banquet that was attended by about 150 Democrats including State Senator Alex Padilla, State Senator President Pro Tem Kevin De Leon, and Marin's assembly member Marc Levine. Dr. Doug Karpa, Ms. Erica Heimberg and Mr. Todd Steiner accepted the award on behalf of SPAWN and Todd Steiner delivered the following remarks:

We are honored to accept the Charles McGlashan Environmental Award on behalf of the thousands of SPAWN supporters, volunteers, and our small staff that works tirelessly to protect and restore the environment of Marin and its most emblematic and critically endangered species, the coho salmon.

SPAWN is the local initiative of Turtle Island Restoration Network, a small but incredibly effective international environmental organization, headquartered in Marin County. Turtle Island mobilizes people around the world to protect the oceans, our inland watersheds that connect the land to the sea, and marine wildlife that inspires and nourish so many of us.

Turtle Island sees the plight of the species we fight to protect more than just single-species issues in need of immediate attention, but as a vehicle for shifting the paradigm of how the human species views its relationship with the natural world.

Central coast coho salmon, a spiritual and nutritional staple of the native peoples of coastal California, are now on the verge of extinction; and the Lagunitas Watershed in west Marin is the key to their survival throughout their range. Yet, even here the population of adult females has dropped from thousands to hundreds, and recently even below 100, in our worst year ever—occurring just a few years ago.

This precipitous decline from thriving to Endangered has happened on my watch and on the watch of almost everyone in this room... their population dropping by 90 to 95% over the past 60 years... right here in Marin County—a County that prides itself on its environmental stewardship.

This decline continues despite huge investments over the past decade, including millions of dollars and excellent collaborative efforts by many environmental groups and government agencies to restore habitat on our National, State, County and water district Park lands in order to repair poor land use decisions of the past.

Why do coho continue to spiral toward extinction, despite all this good work?

Because even as we repair the mistakes of the past on public lands, our local land use policies—or lack thereof—allow these same mistakes to be repeated, over and over again, on creekside parcels located on private lands.

Without protection on private lands coho will not survive us, because coho are genetically programmed to return to these upper watersheds where they themselves were born, and where the right conditions exist to allow their tiny progeny to survive their first 18 months of life before they migrate back to sea to mature into adulthood.

SPAWN has brought California's leading aquatic scientists together -- people like Dr Peter Moyle of UC Davis and Dr. John McCosker of the California Academy of Sciences-- to provide land use recommendations to the County based on the best available science. SPAWN has brought leading legal thinkers like Professor Deborah Sivas of Stanford Law School to provide common-sense recommendations for legally defensible policies to ensure the survival of this precious public-trust-resource.

SPAWN has also proposed voluntary, non-regulatory initiatives too, such as C-SALT, the Community Salmon Land Trust, which will combine land acquisition with the creation of permanent affordable housing in the Coho's most critical habitat. C-SALT also provides opportunities to sequester carbon and reduce our climate-change footprint.

But all of our recommendations and proposals have fallen on the deaf ears of County Supervisors— our proposals, like the Coho themselves, are the casualties of political expediency.

Coho still survive in Marin today because of the courage of past political leaders to protect some parts of their critical habitat. This involved making difficult political decisions that definitely angered some of their constituents, but years later we honor and celebrate these courageous political leaders.... people like Charles McGlashan, and many of you here tonight.

We need that same courage and leadership today if we are going to save Marin's coho salmon.

The people in this room have the necessary influence to ensure that common-sense, science-based, stream regulations are enacted before we lose an important part of what makes Marin so special.

If we don't act now, we will most assuredly lose the chance to show our future grandchildren the amazing spectacle of bright-red coho salmon jumping at the Inkwells on their miraculous migration to their ancestral spawning and nursery grounds, where they once thrived.

I hope you will join SPAWN in creating the political will to do what is right for the coho—and what is right for the future of Marin.

Thank you,

Todd Steiner
Executive Director
Turtle Island Restoration Network & SPAWN