

The Edie Robinson Community Service Award Nomination for Mel Wright

Mel Wright epitomizes a San Geronimo Valley conservation hero. For over a decade, Mel served as SPAWN's (Salmon Protection And Watershed Network) Volunteer Native Plant Nursery Manager, where he single-handedly grew tens of thousands of native plants to protect and restore streamside (riparian) forests in the backyards of many San Geronimo Valley homeowners, on the San Geronimo Golf Course, Flanders Ranch, on Marin County Open Space, on MMWD wildlands including at the Leo T. Cronin fish viewing area and in Samuel P. Taylor State Park. He built much of the nursery including the potting shed, many nursery benches, and shade houses. These efforts have made the Valley a better place to live for residents, visitors, and have provided a helping hand in the recovery of critically endangered coho salmon, steelhead trout, and scores of species of songbirds that depend on this important and disappearing habitat. With SPAWN hiring a full-time nursery manager less than a year ago, Mel seamlessly settled into a new role becoming our new manager's mentor, while still continuing to serve as our Native Plant Nursery Super-volunteer by collecting seeds, propagating plants, and spending several hours each week at the nursery caring for plants and instructing volunteers and interns.

Mel also educates, motivates and empowers scores of students and adults of all ages in the importance of biodiversity and the joy of making a difference in our community. He quickly becomes the away-from-home Dad to our residential post-graduate interns, teaching them about the Valley, native plants and providing important life lessons for young people early in their career. Our interns may be temporary, but their relationship with Mel often continues for years after the completion of their internships.

Mel's day doesn't start and end inside a greenhouse. Mel leads the hikes to collect native seeds and cuttings that he propagates at the nursery, a naturalist's delight that continues to bring scores of children and adults of all ages into the woods to learn about nature and the cycle of life. Nor does his work end when the plants are ready to be out-

planted back to nature. Mel also leads restoration days, where SPAWN staff and other volunteers wade into what seems to be impenetrable thickets on thorny non-native Himalayan blackberries to remove them before preparing the soil to plant more than 40 species of riparian plants he has lovingly grown in the nursery. Did I mention watering and weeding to ensure the plants survive and thrive? We can always count on Mel.

Sometimes native plants need to be rescued before the bulldozer rolls. Once again, we count on Mel, who will lead volunteers in rescuing native plants from construction sites and keeping them safe for future replanting and site restoration activities. Mel has led this activity on many of the Valley trail projects by Marin County Open Space, mitigating for the County's need to use large earth-moving machinery that causes lots of disconcerting "immediate" damage in the process of "improving" trails for the long term. His restoration work on Open Space trails has spanned every neighborhood in the Valley from Woodacre to Lagunitas and all those in between. Mel has given his efforts to improve the lives of all those who live, work, and play in the Valley.

When others are resting after a hard day in the field, you can often find Mel at community meetings and public hearings speaking up for protection of Valley natural resources in order to protect native fish and habitats and fighting against ill-advised projects that harm the environment.

Making a difference is what super-volunteer Mel Wright does. Mel shares his years of wisdom and experience with our habitat and nursery's volunteers, including local schoolchildren, as he nurtures the plants with utmost care and attention.

Mel's commitment to the native plants and wildlife of Marin County doesn't end there! In addition to leading and managing the SPAWN native plant nursery, Mel is a trained SPAWN naturalist who has led educational "Creekwalks" open to the public. Mel participates in nearly all of SPAWN's local volunteer-based habitat restoration projects. Mel has helped to monitor spawning and out-migrating salmon in San Geronimo Creek. Finally, Mel has assisted with SPAWN's fish rescue program, rescuing salmon trapped by falling water levels caused by dams, culverts, and other barriers to fish passage.

On behalf of all Salmon Protection and Watershed Network staff, interns, and members, I am honored to recommend Mel Wright for the Edie Robinson Valley Service Award, for all the wonderful impacts he has made on the people, plants, and animals who live in the San Geronimo Valley.