

February 27, 2005

Efforts to improve sanctuary paying off

BY TOM RAGAN
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SALINAS — Progress has been made.

The water in Monterey Bay National Sanctuary is cleaner. The soil in thousands of acres of farmland is staying put. And the marine life is better off for it. All this according to the Land-Sea Partnerships report recently released by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Scientists, environmentalists, farmers and ranchers met Friday to celebrate the improvements in reducing pollution in the Monterey Bay National Sanctuary, the largest in the country with more than 270 continuous miles of coastline.

Since 1999, there has been a heightened awareness of protecting the sanctuary and making sure it lives up to its name, said Rachel Saunders, spokeswoman for the sanctuary.

Much of that effort has addressed farming practices.

"Runoff is a big problem, but we're starting to fix it," she said.

Since farmers, ranchers and marine scientists first got together five years ago, more than 700 growers have taken courses on how to reduce runoff, and 157,000 acres of farmland along the Central Coast now have stable soil, she said. That accounts for roughly 450,000 tons of soil that otherwise could have found its way into the sanctuary by hitching a ride through countless tributaries in more than a dozen watersheds.

U.S. Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel, was among more than 50 on hand Friday to assure that federal funding would continue.

In the past four years, Farr has helped secure \$600,000 annually to carry out the environmental program, which is administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, a federal agency that helped with the technical side of farm conservation practices.

Some of the recent achievements could not have been made had the UC Cooperative Extension in Salinas and Watsonville not gotten into the swing of things, too. They used some of the federal funds for research, which included cost-savings to farmers and the benefits of an irrigation water additive, polyacrylamide, which can help keep the soil intact.

And the work continues, Saunders said.

"We encourage farmers to get in touch with their local farm bureaus and implement these sorts of measures," she said.

Contact Tom Ragan at tragan@santacruzsentinel.com.

 Print Article

You can find this story online at:
<http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/archive/2005/February/27/local/stories/05local.htm>
