

The Southern Laguna Restoration Project

John Guardino, Director of Restoration & Conservation Science Programs

We've been busy here at the Foundation getting ready to kick off implementation of one of the single largest restoration projects in the history of the organization. This exciting effort, known as the Southern Laguna Restoration Project, will restore important riparian habitat along nearly 12,000 linear feet of the Laguna Main Channel between Stony Point Rd. and Llano Rd. That amounts to over two miles of channel frontage, 30 acres of habitat and more than 6,000 native plants! The project also includes the installation of a pedestrian trail and interpretive displays that will allow visitors to explore large stretches of the Laguna never before accessible to the public. We're extremely grateful to have support from our partners at the Sonoma County Water Agency, the City of Santa Rosa, and the California Natural Resources Agency River Parkways Program for this landmark project.

Located just west of Rohnert Park, the 2.2-mile project reach has been significantly altered from its historical condition by land use changes and urbanization of surrounding areas. Degraded conditions include loss of riparian vegetation, channel straightening, invasion by exotic species and impaired water quality. Although the current extent of riparian cover is limited to a narrow and intermittent band of trees and shrubs, the California Natural Diversity Database cites the presence of the extremely rare and state endangered yellow-billed cuckoo as recently as the 1970s proving that the area once possessed excellent riparian habitat. Even today increasingly uncommon western pond turtles are still present in summer pools not covered by *Ludwigia*, and steelhead pass through the channel in fall and spring on their way to and from spawning grounds.

The planned riparian restoration of 30 acres is intended to enhance ecological functioning by improving wildlife habitat, water quality and the Laguna's capacity to soften flood impacts on our communities. The project's fundamental habitat goals are to increase the self-sustaining ability of the Laguna's ecosystems to resist invasion by weedy species and to broaden the diversity, complexity and habitat value within the project area by mimicking reference conditions within the Laguna. Currently the riparian corridor is highly fragmented or altogether absent. Using a plant palette derived from reference sites in the Laguna, the project will maximize structural diversity and benefit a



Nursery bursting at the seams with native plants for the Southern Laguna Restoration Project!

broad range of species.

By providing increased nesting and foraging opportunities we expect increased populations for many of our common resident birds including: meadowlark, California towhee, bushtit, mourning dove, Nuttall's woodpecker, and western bluebirds. Seasonal migrants such as Wilson's warbler, black-throated gray warbler, yellow warbler, orange-crowned warbler, Bullock's oriole, pacific-slope flycatcher and warbling vireo will also benefit. Expanded forest area will benefit larger mammals such as river otter and bobcat able to utilize enhanced cover for movement, hunting and foraging. Shading from the riparian canopy will prevent the stream flow from heating; reduce aquatic invasive plant growth and decomposition; and increase oxygen levels in the water to the benefit of fish and invertebrate populations.

The community will also have the opportunity to get directly involved and work with the Foundation as part of our annual Tree-A-Thon on Saturday, April 13th, 2013. Look for announcements and check our website for more details on this event in the coming months. We look forward to having you join us and working together to create a brighter future for our community and the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

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When talking about a natural resource like the Laguna, timeframes can be an important part of the conversation. What was the Laguna like 5,000 years ago? What about 179 years ago, when the first Mexican land grant was used to establish a sawmill? How about 120 years ago when a single market hunter took 6,200 ducks out of the Laguna? All of these things happened before the historic lakes of the Laguna were drained, channelization of the Laguna and its tributaries was undertaken, before riparian forests were decimated to clear land for agriculture, etc.

My own history with the Laguna is fairly brief in these contexts; I first started kayaking the Laguna in 1991 and joined the Board of the Foundation in mid-2004 where I served until mid-2009 when the Board asked me to assume the open position of Executive Director. I have recently had the pleasure of digging further back into the history of the Laguna Foundation when I met Catherine Sharp. Catherine brought me a box of archival materials collected by her father, wildlife biologist Robert Sharp. In 1986 Robert was asked to serve as chairman of a Sebastopol advisory committee which studied problems associated with the Laguna. When the committee's work was completed in 1990, Sharp was asked to be on the board of the newly formed Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation. Bob's love of the Laguna was legendary and he was on the Board for many years, including several as President. In 1997 he was named President Emeritus of the Laguna Foundation. Robert passed away in 1999; sadly before I had the chance to meet him. He was also a founding father of the West Sonoma County Rural Alliance, and Catherine currently serves on its board.

I have only begun to delve into the archival material given to the Foundation by Catherine but it is very interesting and humbling to be carrying on the work of the many founders of the Laguna Foundation. In addition to bringing these great archival materials, Catherine also brought a gift in memory of her father. The generous donation that Catherine made will help insure that the work he started, with many other dedicated Laguna "lovers" so many years ago, continues in our mission to preserve, protect and educate the public about the Laguna ecosystem. We thank Catherine and all the founders and supporters of our mission, then and now!



YOUR Special Event at Heron Hall

Imagine your next business or organizational meeting, staff retreat, workshop, or special event in the beautiful new Great Blue Heron Hall at the Laguna Environmental Center. Full of light, warmth, and Laguna-inspired art, and surrounded by sweeping pastoral views of the Laguna on up to Mt. St. Helena, your guests will feel right at home here on historic Stone farm.

This venue offers a unique and wonderful blend of the rural aesthetic and connection with nature, (self-guided nature trail, wildlife observation platforms, naturalized pond), with all the creature comforts of this state-of-the-art "green" building complete with a fully equipped caterer-friendly kitchen and audio-visual equipment.

Call today to start planning your special event.

Phone: 527-9277 x110
Email: HeronHall@LagunaFoundation.org
Web: www.lagunafoundation.org/learning_facility_rental.html

End of Year Challenge Grant

Hugh Helm, Board President

I am pleased to announce that the Board of Directors and some recent past Board members of the Laguna Foundation are pledging to donate \$10,000 as a challenge grant to help the Foundation reach its very important fundraising needs. For every dollar raised between now and the end of the calendar year, the Board is offering a one-to-two match. This means that we hope to raise a total of \$30,000 for the Foundation during the remainder of 2012!

The money raised will help us continue to provide our vitally important Education Programs:

- Learning Laguna- Our much sought after and highly regarded elementary school environmental education program includes a classroom unit and a field trip to the Laguna for over 1,100 children each year.
- Nature Education Series- We have begun offering Nature Education classes at Great Blue Heron Hall on such topics as bird watching, basket making in Native American styles, stargazing, nature photography, indigenous permaculture, and much more.
- Laguna Walks and Talks- The best way to learn about the Laguna ecosystem is to get out there and see it! Led by trained docents, these walks explore the beauty and wildlife of the Laguna on the ground.

These programs are critical to our mission of educating and building public support for the Laguna ecosystem and our overall mission to preserve, protect and restore it. But, these programs don't yet generate



Photo: Peggy Flynn

Students examine a crayfish during a Learning Laguna field trip.

sufficient funding to pay for themselves. That is why the Board is offering this challenge grant—because we know how excellent and important our Education programs are.

Will you help us with a generous donation to this year-end match? If you use the enclosed remit envelope and make your donation now, we'll make sure we won't ask you again as part of this drive.

"Your volunteers are wonderful - so professional, engaging and informative. The Learning Laguna field trip was an all round great experience for the students. The kids learned a lot and so did !! Thank you. You are all doing a great job!"
Monte Vista School, parent who chaperoned on a field trip

Is 2013 Your Year to Become a Docent?

September and October, March, April and May—the Learning Laguna months when nearly every weekday docents visit classrooms all over the watershed with our interactive "indoor field trip" that teaches and excites children about the Laguna. Docents also spend those months outside with students, along the Laguna experiencing nature, watching grasshoppers, looking in holes, examining aquatic insects, weaving with wetland plants, and taking-in whatever nature presents each special day. Learning Laguna is successful because of all the caring, enthusiastic adults who step forward to enrich their own lives with volunteering. The 1,100+ students, 43 teachers and the Laguna benefit from the priceless community service docents provide. We are making plans for docent training 2013 and we invite you to join the fun, learn and grow.

2012 graduates told us: "The docent training has brought me back to seeing the beauty of living in Sonoma County and renewed my love of nature." "I feel hopeful that we can make this world a better place by focusing on the Laguna and sharing its beauty with children."

"Docent Training was inspirational and fun from start to finish!"

Some of the docents are retired; some fit it into their work schedules. Some are parents with flexible time during the school day and others docent to stay connected to youth. Some volunteer around the county and others focus their energy on Learning Laguna. We all share a love of nature and each person brings unique gifts to the program and the docent community. Become part of the success of the Learning Laguna program! Come make a difference for Sonoma County school children and contribute to a healthy future for the Laguna.

The docent training course runs on Mondays for 10 weeks between March-May. For details, visit our website www.lagunafoundation.org or contact Christine Fontaine: 527-9277 x102 or christine@lagunafoundation.org

*Do you want to know who you are?
Don't ask. Act! Action will delineate and define you.*
Thomas Jefferson

Laguna Keepers Event Calendar

Laguna Keepers are the Foundation's habitat restoration volunteers. Each month, in partnership with the City of Santa Rosa, we meet to give the Laguna a little hands-on love! All work dates are from 9am to noon. Wear sturdy shoes and be prepared to get dirty. Snacks provided, but bring gloves, water, and friends! Only heavy rain cancels.

Saturday, November 3- Cotati Creek Critters

We're always delighted to share and celebrate our love of the Laguna and partnership with the Critters. Please visit www.cotaticreekcritters.info or call (707) 792-4422 for more info and directions to this special workday.

Saturday, December 8- Gravenstein Creek Restoration

Help us kick off this brand new restoration project by planting riparian vegetation along Gravenstein Creek. Meet at the Brown Farm entrance at 2200 Llano Rd, Santa Rosa, and drive in to the parking area.

Saturday, January 12- Laguna Environmental Center

Join us for exciting day of installing native plants around the pond and checking in on all of the fabulous native plantings we've been working on. Meet at Laguna Environmental Center, 900 Sanford Rd, Santa Rosa.

Saturday, February 9- Laguna Uplands

It's our annual Valentine's day trip to the Laguna Uplands Preserve. Check out spectacular views of the Laguna and help us with our continued restoration of this beautiful and rare habitat area. Meet at the end of Palm Drive in Sebastopol just south of Palm Drive Hospital.

Questions? Contact John Guardino: 527-9277x108 or john@lagunafoundation.org. The full Laguna Keepers event calendar is available online.

To receive reminder emails about upcoming workdays, please send your email address to: Nancy@lagunafoundation.org



Pennyroyal Mint Control: 100 Vernal Pools Later!

Meghan Parish, Conservation Science Program Manager

Pennyroyal mint (*Mentha pulegium*) may have a wonderful odor, however it is an exotic invasive perennial weed that thrives in wet habitats like vernal pools. Vernal pools are seasonal wetlands that are home to unique and special assemblages of species – many of them rare and endangered. While Pennyroyal is considered uncommon in California, it is locally abundant and the Laguna Foundation's "Adopt a Vernal Pool" devoted citizen scientists have documented Pennyroyal in approximately half of vernal pools surveyed on the Santa Rosa Plain.

Unlike most of California's wildlands, the unusual hydrology of vernal pools has made them relatively resistant to invasion by non-native species and they remain a vestige of California's endemic wildflowers such as Sebastopol meadowfoam. An estimated 80-90% of the vernal pools in California have been destroyed, making preservation of remaining habitat one of the highest priorities for the conservation of biodiversity in the western United States. Currently, the California Invasive Plant Council rates Pennyroyal as a moderate threat to wildlands, but notes that ecological impacts are not well documented in scientific literature. We suspect that Pennyroyal poses a significant threat to already imperiled vernal pool wildflowers and recognize the need for scientific research to inform management decisions.

Last year, we shared results of our pilot study that showed hand-pulling and herbicide application were equally effective at controlling Pennyroyal. This past summer, in partnership with the California Department of Fish and Game and invaluable help from a team of very hard-working interns, we expanded upon our research efforts to control Pennyroyal in 100 vernal pools! It remains to be seen how much will regrow, but this spring and summer we will monitor the effectiveness of our control efforts and implement a second year of treatment. Stay tuned for our results and hopefully pictures of vibrant wildflower displays in the coming years!



Close-up of Pennyroyal mint in full bloom.

Photo: Hattie Brown

Public Education Events

Anita Smith, Public Education Coordinator

Public Education events continue to blossom and grow here at the Laguna Environmental Center. We had a busy late summer/early fall with natural history walks, presentations, workshops, tabling events, and Open Houses. Heading into late fall and winter, we not only look forward to rain, but all kinds of interesting educational offerings – from presentations on Dazzling Dragonflies, Kayaking the Laguna, Sudden Oak Death, Habitat Gardening, and The Art of Tracking, to movie nights and our monthly Open Houses. Stay tuned to our website and Facebook for up-to-date offerings, as well as for the winners of our first annual Focus on the Laguna Photo Contest!

Laguna Environmental Center Open House
Second Saturday of the month, 10:00am-3:00pm
November 10, December 8, January 12, February 9
Location: 900 Sanford Road, Santa Rosa
FREE (donations appreciated)

Learn about the natural and cultural history of the Laguna de Santa Rosa and historic Stone Farm by taking a guide-led tour. Stop by for a visit and take in the beautiful views. Bird watch from the observation deck. Bring a picnic! Enjoy our gift shop and beautiful art exhibit in Heron Hall (Don Jackson's Laguna wildlife photography exhibit will be on display through the end of December, followed by a group exhibit by Art Workshop of Western Sonoma County). No RSVP necessary for the Open Houses. Come join us!

Dazzling Dragonflies of Sonoma County
Presentation by Kathy Biggs
Friday, November 9, 7:00-8:30pm
Location: 900 Sanford Road, Santa Rosa
\$10 suggested donation

Join us for this wonderful evening with local birder and nationally prominent expert on dragonflies and backyard wetlands biology, Kathy Biggs. Kathy is the author of *Common Dragonflies of California: A Beginner's Pocket Guide*, as well as other field guides and a dragonfly coloring book for children. Through beautiful photographs and stories, species known to occur in the Laguna will be presented, along with an introduction to their life cycles, biology, and amazing behaviors.

Mid-Week Movie Night!
Biophilic Design: The Architecture of Life
Wednesday, November 14, Doors open 6:30pm, movie 7pm
Location: 900 Sanford Road, Santa Rosa
\$10 suggested donation

By Stephen R. Kellert and Bill Finnegan, this fascinating and inspiring hour-long documentary (released in 2012) is about "biophilic design," an innovative way of designing the places where we live, work, and learn to connect better with the natural world. Drinks, popcorn, and yummy snacks will be available to purchase.



Answer: Skunk

Guess what Laguna critter leaves this track?

The Art of Tracking: Learning to See Patterns on a Landscape
Presentation by Meghan Walla-Murphy
Saturday, December 8, 3:00-4:30pm
\$10 suggested donation

While tracking in the South African Kalahari Desert, Meghan learned the phrase "Kyk Mooi" which loosely translates "to look beautifully," or to see something as it is rather than what we want it to be. In her presentation, Meghan will share the discipline and mechanics of tracking while she delves into the Art of Seeing. Most people are astonished by what can be elucidated about animal behavior with these techniques. Meghan will also address tracking as a non-invasive way to research and conserve wildlife that leaves both observer and observed at peace.

Kayaking the Laguna
Presentation by David Bannister, Executive Director
Saturday, January 12, 3:00-4:30pm
Location: 900 Sanford Road, Santa Rosa
\$10 suggested donation

And much, MUCH MORE!

For more information about Public Education events, please contact Anita Smith, Public Education Coordinator, (707) 527-9277 x110 or anita@lagunafoundation.org

Ninth Annual Garden Art Gala- The Best Ever!

Photo: Tibidabo Photography



The Foundation's 9th annual garden party fundraiser took place at the beautiful Vine Hill House on September 9th and according to many people who have attended the event for years it "was our best ever!" The wonderful committee of Barnee Alexander, Yvonne Giambone-Martin, Joany Goodwin, Ramona Haller, Sandy Mays, Mary Marigold, Franny Minervini-Zick, Jan O'Connell, Mary Reed, Barbara Shepherd, and Ellen Swenson worked the entire year to plan and improve the event.

Guests enjoyed tasting local heirloom tomato varieties, cheeses donated by fabulous local artisan cheese companies, Pizza Politana's fresh pizzas, and more. And, of course fabulous local wines donated by area wineries. The silent auction featured outdoor "garden" art, some "wearable art" and a great selection of special wines.

We were particularly proud of the live auction this year as it featured some fantastic new items: a wildlife watching trip to the Cordell Bank on the Miss Anita out of Bodega Bay accompanied by SRJC Marine Biology Professor Bob Rubin; a Wine Country Stargazing Party right here at the Laguna Environmental Center; and a kayak trip on the Petaluma River followed by lunch at Papa's Taverna. And, guest auctioneer Bill Carle did a fantastic job of making the auction fun and entertaining!

The Foundation is profoundly grateful to the many, many people that made this Gala one of our best: generous sponsors, the many artists who donated their work for auction, donors of the exciting live auction items, exquisite wines enjoyed onsite and auctioned, and the many volunteers who made the Gala possible.

See the list (right) and patronize and thank these folks any chance you get for being Foundation supporters! Thanks also to all of the event attendees who bought tickets and purchased auction items; the success of the event depends on all of these supporters!

Finally, be sure to **mark your calendars for Sunday September 8th, 2013** for the 10th Anniversary of this great event. The committee is already talking about ways to make it better!

Thank You Event Sponsors!

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Thank you to our generous supporters since our last *Meanderings*...

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Donations In Memory of Kate McCormick

Randy Brant, Linda Jones, Dianna and Tommy Unis, Shelley Savren and Elijah Imlay, Twenty-Eighth Church Of Christ, Scientist Los Angeles.



The **Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation**, founded in 1989, works to preserve, restore, and inspire greater understanding and appreciation of the Laguna de Santa Rosa wetland complex, which is the largest tributary of the Russian River and one of Sonoma County's richest wildlife areas. The Foundation conducts educational programs, implements preservation and restoration projects, conducts scientific research, works with landowners and public agencies to protect and improve Laguna resources, and advocates for appropriately managed opportunities for the public to enjoy the Laguna.

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We regularly post announcements and photos to our Facebook page:
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Wild Laguna

Christine Fontaine, Director of Education Programs

The North American River Otter (*Lontra canadensis*) is often a topic of conversation when the Laguna is mentioned: people are excited to share stories of sightings, while others are surprised and interested to learn that river otters are indeed part of the Laguna ecosystem. Glimpses right from the seasonal bridge at the Sebastopol Preserve are not uncommon and fortunate winter kayakers have even seen several at a time, playing (well, likely practicing survival skills!) in the open water of the Laguna floodplain. (Photo on right was taken by a Laguna kayaker.)

With their water resistant fur, sleek shape, powerful tail and mostly webbed feet, river otters are excellent swimmers that can stay underwater for upward of 4 minutes seeking a meal. Since they are mostly crepuscular (active during dawn and dusk), sensitive whiskers and a keen sense of touch come in handy when hunting in low-light environments and in murky waters. Like other aquatic mammals, otter nostrils and ears have a special design that close when in the water. Their specialized teeth include sharp canines capable of inflicting lethal bites to prey, carnassials that tear or cut like scissors and large molars capable of crushing hard objects such as shells and bones. Prey that is in larger supply and easier to catch is likely to become dinner.

In the Laguna that mostly means crayfish and slow swimming fish such as carp. Claws that help them hold on to prey also help river otters traverse land. They are known to travel a couple miles each day and have the capacity to move more than 25 miles a day, often overland and even between watersheds.

Otters are very sensitive to environmental pollution. Yet another reason to do what we can to improve the quality, abundance and diversity of Laguna habitat! Because they are at the top of the aquatic food chain, their health and abundance provide clues about ecosystems; although, little research has been done on the river otters of Northern California. The River Otter Ecology Project is working to change that with non-invasive camera trapping and scat collection for genetic and prey analysis, seeking answers to basic questions like populations, range, seasonal prey preferences and health. One component to their research is the Otter Spotter Citizen Science Project. If you spot an otter, consider posting your sighting (with photos if possible) on their website: www.riverottterecology.org. Also, check-out their site for interesting information and regional otter stories. Let's put the Laguna otters on the map!



Photo: Al Martin