



# Meanderings

Celebrating and Restoring Sonoma County's Richest Wildlife Area

Summer 2007

## Middle Reach Restoration Project Putting Down Roots

*Catherine Cumberland, Restoration Program Assistant*

The former vegetable fields and cow pastures of the Middle Reach site have changed dramatically since springtime: approximately 2,000 native trees and shrubs have appeared on the scene! It's been exciting to witness this shift in the plant community: where once there were only non-native curly dock, chicory and ryegrass there are now willows, oaks, wild roses and snowberry. These young restoration plantings will eventually mature into an extensive riparian forest, reaching up to 200 feet from the Laguna's main waterway and providing food, shelter and nesting sites for wildlife.

Many of these trees and shrubs were planted by Foundation volunteers, as well as volunteers from the Sonoma County Volunteer Center's "Hands Across the County" events. Congratulations, volunteers, and thank you! We couldn't have done it without your help, and your participation makes this a true community endeavor.

The Laguna Middle Reach Restoration Project is the largest habitat restoration initiative in the Laguna's history, restoring native vegetation and controlling invasive species along 1.6 linear miles of the Laguna's channel between Highway 12 and Occidental Road. Funded by the State Coastal Conservancy, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Community Foundation Sonoma County and California Wildlife Conservation Board, the current effort is the first of several planned phases which will increase habitat for wildlife, improve water quality and increase the visual beauty of this reach of the Laguna.

As you can imagine, maintaining a planting of this size is a project in itself. With 10-12,000 gallons of reclaimed water flowing through the irrigation system weekly, problems are bound to develop. For example, as summer continues and water becomes ever more scarce, thirsty rodents occasionally chew holes in the drip tubing. Several workdays each month are dedicated to "walking the lines:" following each of the 44 strands of tubing to repair leaks and replace clogged emitters. Along with checking irrigation comes the – sometimes daunting – task of weed control. Plantings must be kept competition-free to ensure the best chance of survival. Weed-suppression cloth or cardboard plus a thick mulch layer surrounds every plant, but weeds have their ways. We also continue to battle perennial pepperweed at the site. It's tough, but our crew refuses to surrender!



Photo by Catherine Cumberland

JM Baeli and Elizabeth Sabo out at the project site.

Which brings us to another exciting duo to make an appearance on the scene: J.M. Baeli and Elizabeth Sabo, our plucky summer assistants. These Sonoma State students (environmental studies and biology, respectively), each bring unique talents to the job. J.M. works as a restoration tech on irrigation systems, site maintenance, monitoring, and planning. He's also our official "tick magnet," attracting as many as 15 ticks per day! Beth, a self-proclaimed "plant nerd," works part-time at the Middle Reach site and part-time as a data tech on the Foundation's Ludwigia Control Project. She quickly endeared herself to us through such thoughtful gestures as appearing for a 7:30am start time on a Monday morning bearing a plate of freshly made beignets. A valuable assistant indeed.

Even at this early stage, work on the Middle Reach Project has already been rewarding, interesting, and fun. We're able to watch the comings and goings of Laguna birds and wildlife (goodbye, blackbirds; hello, pelicans); witness the gradual turn of the seasons; and enjoy the deep satisfaction of enhancing the Laguna for future generations. We invite you to join us this fall and winter as work continues on the next phase of the project: oak woodland regeneration and expansion of the Meadowlark Field riparian corridor. A new LagunaKeeper calendar with our upcoming workdays is on Page 5. Stay tuned....

### **Reliable Pickup Truck Needed- Tax Deductible Donation!**

This extensive wildlife habitat restoration project is in urgent need of a 4x4 truck. If you would like to donate your truck and deduct the full Blue Book value from your taxes, please contact Mark, 527-9277x103 or email: [mark@lagunafoundation.org](mailto:mark@lagunafoundation.org).

## Executive Director's Report

*Dan Schurman*



After all the months of preparation, planning, permitting, and fundraising, it's exhilarating to see work in progress at the Laguna Learning Center site. The new access road is well on its way, the house has been lifted, and our hope to move into the rehabilitated farmhouse by the end of winter really looks attainable.

There is still much more work to do and more money to be raised to fully realize the vision of the facility with an interpretive center, a research field station, a native plant nursery, etc., but having the first phase completed and being on site will make it that much easier for the Foundation to complete this large and inspiring project. We couldn't have done it without the assistance of so many supporters and partners, and particularly of the City of Santa Rosa. Their agreement to allow us to build the Center on their Stone Farm property and their in-kind support of labor and expertise from many of their Utility Department staff have literally made this project possible and without them, it wouldn't be happening.

The theme of partnerships echoes throughout the Foundation's work, and it's been our ability to forge these relationships and our partners' willingness to cooperate with us that has enabled us to make the kind of progress we've witnessed in the last 5 years. The Laguna is such a complex place, both ecologically and politically, that it is essential that we build working relationships with a broad range of individual and institutional partners if we hope to realize our watershed vision of a restored and thriving Laguna ecosystem.

Attaining that vision requires that we chart an organizational course that balances opposing views and entities, brings together disparate elements and stakeholders, and seeks to solve problems and create opportunities for positive developments, rather than fighting or litigation. Some may feel that this approach is not vociferous enough in the Laguna's defense, but we feel our strategy is a practical one. It is the only way to bring people and interests together to achieve a vision for the Laguna that will enhance wildlife habitat, increase water quality, expand recreational opportunities for our growing urban populations, improve flood control, and support a thriving agricultural economy. We believe that if all of us work together these are attainable goals, and not at all contradictory or mutually exclusive. So far, the many partners and stakeholders we've worked with seem to agree.

Our collaborative strategy will be our guide as we strengthen and build our research, education and restoration programs at the Laguna Learning Center, a facility that will be built on partnerships and amplify our ability to rally even more of our community in support of the Laguna. We look forward to the possibilities our richest wildlife area holds for our entire community, and thank you for your support in helping us to come so far toward our ambitious vision for the Laguna.

## The Laguna Learning Center is on the Move- Literally!

*Wayne Mitchell, Director of Campaigns and Individual Giving*

The 150-year-old farmhouse on the Laguna Learning Center site has been raised and moved to allow construction of its new foundation as the Center's first phase of construction becomes a reality. Once back in place, the farmhouse will be rehabilitated to serve as offices for the Laguna Foundation and road and site work will be completed. By next summer, work is planned to begin on the next phase of the project: construction of a "green" interpretive center with an interactive exhibit hall and classroom that will bring to life the Laguna's natural, agricultural and Native American history.

The Laguna Learning Center is located at the Civil War-era Stone Farm, which overlooks the Laguna de Santa Rosa wetland complex. The Center will be a world-class educational facility celebrating the Laguna's unique natural and historical riches, and pointing the way forward to the Laguna's future as a restored and thriving wildlife area, side by side with sustainable agriculture and public recreation.

Photo by Wayne Mitchell



The farmhouse is shown here raised onto steel I-beams as a worker prepares it for its 45-foot journey.

## Southern Laguna Trails

Joe Honton, Watershed Data Manager

A recent reconnaissance tour of the creeks and flood control channels in Rohnert Park and Cotati has been a catalyst for establishing a network of public trails in the area. What's under consideration are twelve miles of right-of-way owned and operated by the Sonoma County Water Agency. What makes this possibility so exciting is that they would tie together many of the primary goals of the Restoration and Management Plan (RMP). And what makes this the right time to pursue these goals, is the encouragement and support for the idea by so many partnering agencies.

On July 7th I led a hike along a sampling of these channels under the sponsorship of the Cotati Creek Critters. In attendance were city council members from Rohnert Park and Cotati; city and county planners; biking, hiking, and transportation advocates; and citizens of the Southern Laguna. The attendees represented a good cross-section of interests and put the spotlight on a variety of ways to take advantage of the opportunity.

The basic encouragement for the idea comes directly from the Sonoma County Water Agency. As the agency responsible for flood control in the area, they are tasked with maintaining the channels for proper convey-

ance of water during and after storms. With their dual role of supplying clean drinking water to the county, they are keenly aware of the interconnectedness of water supply, water quality, flood control, sedimentation and healthy habitats.

Taken holistically, the opportunities for maintaining and improving all of these elements simultaneously just makes good sense. And adding public trails into the mix also makes sense: with greater public awareness of the resource comes greater public responsibility

for monitoring and care. This is exactly the formula that has made Santa Rosa's Prince Memorial Greenway such as success.

Our recently completed restoration and management plan for the watershed, **Enhancing and Caring for the Laguna** ([www.lagunadesantarosa.org/programs\\_rp\\_mp\\_ecl.shtml](http://www.lagunadesantarosa.org/programs_rp_mp_ecl.shtml)) provides ample support for these ideas. In particular, Chapter 10 and the accompanying maps provide a long list of recommendations on this topic.



Photo by Jenny Blaker

Joe Honton leads an exploratory walk on Laguna trails west of Hwy 101 as part of the Cotati Creek Critters "Inside Outside" nature education series.

## How To Better Understand What Influences Laguna Water Quality

Christina Sloop, PhD, Research Director

As one of our first challenges, the Laguna Foundation Scientific Research Program had to tackle the ins and outs of Laguna water quality. 'Ins and outs' refer to the many small and large scale components that play into the status quo of the mainly degraded state of Laguna water quality.

The lower Laguna watershed is listed in the 2007 Clean Water Act 303(d) evaluation for six impairments: high temperatures, low dissolved oxygen, and high levels of sediment, nitrogen, phosphorous, and mercury. The many components that play into this status quo make for a highly complex interplay of point- and non-point sources of pollutants and their potentially interconnected causes; degraded streamside habitats, upper watershed erosion, flood plain dynamics and so on. This translates into a highly complex and intricate system that needs to be pulled apart into the interplay of its components to be understood.

Hence our challenge: in the last 10 months the Laguna Foundation and two collaborating consulting firms have embarked on a project to prepare a series of conceptual models describing the dynamics of our watershed that affect water quality. The results of this effort will be used by the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board to initiate Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) studies to determine specific water quality thresholds for the Laguna.

Our results will also be incorporated into future basin-scale restoration planning efforts by outlining needed simulation models, some of which are currently conducted by our collaborators from NASA-Ames, and by defining monitoring needs for the watershed to provide an improved level of predictability of the natural system fluctuations in the face of increasing urbanization and climatic change. The final Laguna Water Quality Conceptual Model project report will be published in October 2007.

## Welcome Christine!

### *Director of Education Programs*

Christine Fontaine enthusiastically joins the Laguna Foundation as Director of Education Programs. She earned a BA from Sonoma State and an elementary teaching credential from Dominican University. In addition to a background in business, she has been a docent at Bouverie Preserve since 1996 and for the last 8 years she has worked for Point Reyes National Seashore Association, for the first year as Education Programs Coordinator, then as Field Seminars Director.



She enjoys spending her time with family and friends, hiking and birding, and creating ceramics. Chris is a California native who has lived in Sonoma County for 20 years. She feels fortunate to be working collaboratively for the benefit of the landscape she reveres.

## Wild Weeds... and the people who track them

### *Amber Manfree, Project Technician*

The Laguna Foundation's quest to map the extent of invasive plants continues in 2007, with a team of volunteers and staff working to complete the dataset started in 2006. This year the focus is on the Laguna main channel, major tributaries, and ponds. To map plant locations, volunteers use GPS enabled PDAs (handheld computers) that run software especially designed for mapping weeds in the field.

The GeoWeed software application, recently released by our friends at the Sonoma Ecology Center, works as an extension of standard field mapping software. Every time a plant's location is recorded, automated forms appear that simplify and standardize the data collection process.

If you would like more information about volunteering for this project, please contact Amber Manfree at [amber@lagunafoundation.org](mailto:amber@lagunafoundation.org) or (707) 758-0107.

## Join Us for the 4th Annual Art & Garden Gala!

### *Mark Green, Associate Executive Director*

Come celebrate the Laguna de Santa Rosa with a taste of the good life at the Foundation's fourth annual Art and Garden Gala on Sunday, September 9, from 3-6 PM. As always, the Gala is generously hosted by the Vine Hill House, at 3601 Vine Hill Road, north of Sebastopol.

The Gala is a luxurious summer afternoon of tasty pleasures and fascinating entertainment in an elegant outdoor setting overlooking the Laguna. Inspiring keynote remarks this year will be by Sonoma County's own Caryl Hart of the California Parks and Recreation Commission.

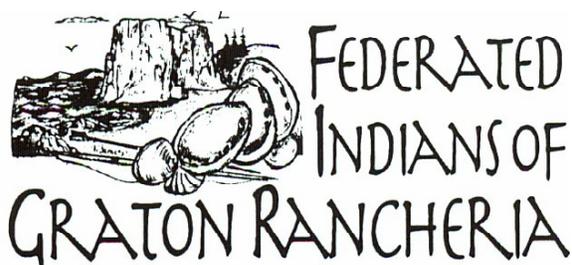
With catering by Mark Malicki of Café St. Rose, premium local wines, magical strolling entertainment and a magnificent silent auction of rare wine selections and original works by local artists, the Art and Garden Gala is unlike any other event.

New this year will be a live auction of three "adventure packages", with celebrity auctioneer David Katz. Enjoy a sumptuous wine and hors d'oeuvres reception, then hop in a small plane for a flying adventure over the Laguna, the coast and the mouth of the Russian River! Invite ten guests to enjoy a delicious celebrity chef dinner served in your home! Invite your friends to kayak the Laguna, then enjoy wine on the patio at Balletto Vineyards with lunch by K&L Bistro!

All proceeds benefit the Foundation's work to preserve, restore, and create opportunities for learning and enjoyment in the Laguna. Doing good has never felt this decadent. Tickets are \$75. The Gala sells out every year, so reserve your tickets now! Contact Mark at 527-9277 x103, or [mark@lagunafoundation.org](mailto:mark@lagunafoundation.org). You can also purchase tickets online: [www.lagunadesantarosa.org/news\\_gala\\_ordertix.shtml](http://www.lagunadesantarosa.org/news_gala_ordertix.shtml).

### Thank You Event Sponsors:

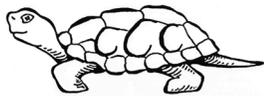
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## Opportunities to Get Involved with the Laguna de Santa Rosa Watershed



### Cotati Creek Critter Events

#### Inside/Outside Nature Education Series:

**Saturday, September 8, 2 p.m.: The Incredible World of Insects with Frederique Lavoipierre.** Prepare to change your view of bugs and creepy crawlies! Did you know that 95% of all animal species on earth are insects, that less than 1% of insects are pests, and that without pollinating insects, there would be no apples, silk, oranges, berries, cotton or chocolate, among other things? Meet by the statue of the accordion player in Cotati's La Plaza Park.

**Monday, October 1, 2007: Native Grasses - the Misunderstood, Undervalued, Understory, with Jeanne Wirka.** Cotati Creek Critters will begin a new project this Fall, to plant native grasses underneath existing trees and shrubs. Come and learn about the history and value of California native grasses, from Jeanne Wirka, resident biologist at the Bouverie Preserve of Audubon Canyon Ranch in Glen Ellen. Free. Refreshments provided. 7 p.m., Cotati Community Center.

**Monday, November 5, 2007: Habitat Gardening with Native Plants, with Phil Van Soelen.** Fall is the ideal time to plant native plants, so come and learn how to make your garden a welcome refuge for birds, butterflies and other wildlife. Phil Van Soelen, co-owner of the California Nursery, will share a wealth of knowledge and experience about gardening for wildlife habitat. Free. Refreshments provided. 7 p.m., Cotati Community Center.

#### Cotati Creek Critters Community Planting Days

We will continue to plant native trees and shrubs along the Laguna de Santa Rosa and will also begin a new project to plant an understory of native grasses and sedges. Other tasks include weeding and mulching to maintain existing plants, plant propagation, and other tasks in our nursery.

**Saturday, October 13, 9am - noon**

**Sunday, October 28, 10am - 1pm**

**Saturday, November 10, 9am - noon**

**Sunday, November 25, 10am - 1pm**

Meet at "Ladybug Lot," Cotati City well lot #2 on Lakewood Avenue. Please check [www.CotatiCreekCritters.info](http://www.CotatiCreekCritters.info) for Planting Day guidelines or contact Jenny Blaker, Outreach Coordinator, at 792 4422 or email: [jenny@creeks.cotati.info](mailto:jenny@creeks.cotati.info).

*The Cotati Creek Critters is a fiscally sponsored project of the Laguna Foundation.*

### TAKE A WALK IN THE LAGUNA!

All walks take place at the Sebastopol Wetlands Preserve with parking behind the Youth Annex at 425 Morris Street.

A great way to learn more about the Laguna, tours are 1.5 hrs. Members free, \$5 donation others.

**Saturday, August 18 at 9:15am**

**Wednesday, August 22 at 7:00pm**

**Wednesday, September 19 at 6:00pm**

**Saturday, October 13 at 9:15am**

For more details or to RSVP, please contact Maggie at 527-9277 x107 or e-mail: [maggie@lagunafoundation.org](mailto:maggie@lagunafoundation.org)

### LagunaKeepers Events

The LagunaKeepers are at it again! In case you haven't heard of us, the LagunaKeepers are the Foundation's restoration volunteers. Each month, in partnership with the City of Santa Rosa, we meet to give the Laguna a little hands-on love! This can mean fence removal, willow sprigging, weed control, or planting, depending on the site and the time of year.

Keepers meet at locations throughout the Laguna, but workdays are always on a **Saturday from 9am to noon**. Tools, gloves, and snacks are provided, along with plenty of fresh air and camaraderie. Rain does not cancel, unless it's a downpour.

Details are available on our website or in the **2006-2007 LagunaKeeper Events Calendar** (watch your mailbox) but meanwhile, here's a handy "clip & save" preview of our upcoming work dates:

**September 29 – Cooper Road**

**October 20 – Alpha Farm**

**November 17 – Kelly Farm (oaks)**

**December 8 – Cotati**

**January 19 – Kelly Farm (willows)**

**February 23 – Joint Wetlands**

**March 15 – Windmill Creek**

**April 19 – Meadowlark Field (oaks)**

**May 10 – Meadowlark (riparian)**

For information, or to receive a calendar or monthly email or postcard reminders of LagunaKeepers work dates, please contact Catherine at 527-9277 x108 or email: [catherine@lagunafoundation.org](mailto:catherine@lagunafoundation.org)



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 Sonoma County's richest wildlife area. 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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Patrick Band, Project Technician  
Catherine Cumberland, Program Assistant  
Christine Fontaine, Director of Education Programs  
Maggie Hart, Administrative Director  
Joe Honton, Watershed Data Manager  
Julian Meisler, Restoration Program Director  
Wayne Mitchell, Director of Campaigns  
and Individual Giving  
Beth Sabo, Project Technician  
Christina Sloop, PhD, Research Director

## Does Long-Term Tarping Control Pepperweed?

*Christina Sloop, PhD, Research Director*

In order to find effective alternatives to spraying the noxious invasive plant perennial pepperweed with herbicide in the Laguna, we are conducting a five-year tarping study at Meadowlark Field in Sebastopol. We have mowed and tarped six patches infested with pepperweed (15,000 square feet total) and marked another six patches that were treated with herbicide for comparison. We will assess the survival of pepperweed plants each year for five years to understand whether this type of treatment successfully controls isolated patches of this noxious invasive.

Tarping may be an effective solution for pepperweed in that it deprives the plant of sunlight needed for plant metabolism, but nutrient storage in the root system can prolong survival of the plant for a period of time and re-sprouting is likely if tarps are removed prematurely. While we utilize herbicides in our invasive weed control programs we continue to look for alternatives and our pepperweed tarping trial reflects this interest.



Photo by Julian Meisler

**Laguna Foundation staff preparing an infested site with tarping.**

When you are out at Meadowlark field on your hike or run and you see areas with ugly plastic, smile, for the unsightly tarping is for a good cause indeed!

This project is funded by the City of Sebastopol.