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PETALUMA WETLANDS ALLIANCE

(A COMMITTEE OF MADRONE AUDUBON)

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Providing Education in and Stewardship of Petaluma's Public Wetlands

Autumn 2007

Weed Removal and Habitat Restoration Update

by Gerald Moore

We have about a dozen highly invasive, nonnative weeds that tend to take over areas where they establish and choke out all the other plant species. This leads to serious habitat degradation and loss of native animal species. Our goal is to eliminate these invasive species and replace them with natives. During the past year we have done extensive spraying of Italian thistle, which is in an exponential growth phase along our levee trails. We also cut and painted all the cardoon plants, which we hope will eliminate them. Hand-pulling was used to remove yellow and purple star thistle, bristly ox-tongue, and a new invasive called stinkwort. These weeds filled several hundred 3x4-foot bags. We planted almost 2,000 native plants, mostly grasses plus some shrubs and trees.

In September we consulted with Dr. Peter Baye, a leading Bay Area restoration ecologist, about our problems at Shollenberger and got some excellent advice. Peter suggested we focus on establishing along our levees patches of three native species that spread clonally and will in several years choke out the annual invasives. The clonal species include creeping wild rye, salt grass, and alkali heath. Shrubs and trees can be planted later in areas cut out from the clonal mats. We will still need to do some weed removal to get the clonal species established since they will need access to sunlight. We are also studying the potential of using salty water from the pond or river as a weed-killing agent, which may reduce our need for Roundup.

Starting in January, we plan to have weeding and planting parties on Wednesday and Saturday mornings approximately twice a month, weather permitting. For exact details, check our Web site or call 763-3577 or 769-8961. We encourage participation by both individuals and organized groups. The more the community participates, the better this precious community resource will become.

Local Organizations Volunteer At Shollenberger Park and Alman Marsh

by Mary Edith Moore

In August, twenty U.S. Coast Guard students from Two Rock came to Alman Marsh with their teacher, Sabrina Hearst, to repair the trail and remove nonnative, invasive weeds. PWA docent Peter Colasanti, a contractor, guided half a dozen students on the trail repair. Nearby, Sabrina and fourteen students worked with two PWA docents to remove bristly ox-tongue and prickly lettuce. On a damp October morning, eleven Petaluma Whole Foods Market employees arrived at Shollenberger Park to pull and cut nonnative, invasive weeds along the east trail. The employees and three PWA docents pulled on gloves, picked up bags, and removed bristly ox-tongue and Italian thistle. Within four hours, the combined effort of these two volunteer groups and a few PWA docents repaired the trail, filled seventy-one 4x4-foot bags with the weeds, and trucked the bags to the dumpster.

The Dream of an Interpretive/Nature Center at Ellis Creek

by Gerald Moore

An interpretive/nature center at the new wastewater treatment plant at Gray's Ranch, now called the Ellis Creek site, has long been a dream of many people in our community. In 2003 there was a plan to build such a center in cooperation with Audubon California. That plan fell through because of the financial limitations facing Audubon. However, they still have an interest in partnering in centers where the facility is owned by city or other nonprofit groups. With this in mind, PWA has located a site at Ellis Creek where such a building could be built. We have worked with architect Mary Dooley to create a possible floor plan and have met with Audubon California, which expresses an interest in partnering with us at some level on the project. The concept is for PWA to find the grant money to build the structure that would be owned by the city and staffed by some blend of Audubon professionals and community volunteers, including PWA docents. We are now trying to assemble a ten-year business (or strategic) plan for such a site. The entire package will be presented to the city council for their suggestions and approval. On October 18, Dave Catlin, the staffer of National Audubon who oversees the creation of new interpretive centers, toured Shollenberger Park with Audubon California representative Brooke Langston. Both were very impressed with our wetlands. We are all crossing our fingers and hoping this dream becomes a reality. A center would greatly expand the educational and tourism potentials of our public wetlands.

Casa Grande Native Plant Nursery

by John Shribbs

Phase I of the Casa Grande Native Plant Nursery, completed in summer 2006, contained about 3,000 square feet for media bins, storage, work benches, wash area, hot house, and shade house. Three solar panels powered lights, cooling fan, backup pump, and irrigation timer. The large work area could support up to thirty students at one time, but the actual growing space was only 600 square feet. The 2,000 plants carried over from the previous year were going to be in the way of the 3,000 plants we wanted to grow this year.

Last spring, the school district approved my Phase II expansion plan, with funds from the Petaluma Education Foundation and Sonoma County Water Agency. The district provided free labor to construct the drainage and irrigation system. The total footprint doubled in size. Both money and time ran out and the construction of the drip system will be delayed until next spring. After the drip system is completed,

the plant grow-space will at least triple, and containers can be held for up to two years so larger trees can be grown.

Danny Bever, a teacher from Sonoma Mountain High School, and I did most of the new construction. Adult volunteer Terri Dugar has come out weekly since last spring to assist in growing operations and supervising students. PWA volunteers also helped with construction, pot washing, and plant growth. We built a 150-gallon water trailer and watered last winter's field planting at Shollenberger weekly. A school parent donated a second used trailer, which a student is refurbishing so we can haul plants and compost. Other donations include a 100-gallon drum composter and a 10x20-foot shade structure for the wash area. Students built a fourth workbench from scrap materials. This fall we have an abundance of toyon and Oregon ash seedlings. We planted the majority of new cells with oak, wild rose, coffeeberry, and native grasses and seeded many flats with a variety of locally collected seed. Soon we will run out of space again.

A representative from the Milo Baker chapter of the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) visited our open house in October and we set up a tentative agreement to offer grow-space for CNPS to produce plants for their October fund-raiser. An Argus Courier photographer took digital pictures at the open house, so we should see a newspaper article sometime soon. We are now seeking funds from a variety of sources to complete the drip system and maintain continuous operations. Of course, we also accept donations.

We will have regular planting parties on weekends and nursery operations after school on Thursdays or Fridays, depending on the school schedule. We advertise field plantings through PWA email. To volunteer at the nursery, contact me at jshribbs@comcast.net. Come on out and help restore our watershed.

Duck Hunters and the Ellis Creek Property

by Bob Dyer

The first days of the duck hunting season in late October found a number of hunters shooting on the city-owned Gray property adjacent to Shollenberger, on which the city is constructing the Ellis Creek Water Recycling Facility. Now that the 260 acres are owned by the city, shooting there is against the law. Over the past few years, a popular entry spot for the hunters has been the parking lot of a business called Phonic Ear (now up for sale), at the southwestern corner of the business park. One day I drove over there and tried to educate the hunters. They pointed out the property was not posted, and one does not argue too long with big guys carrying shotguns. There had been a sign at that entry point several years ago, but it "mysteriously" disappeared. It was not long this year before the hunters had constructed new duck blinds within clear view of the people who enjoy walking the Shollenberger trail. Park-goers were saddened *and angered* by the hunters' activities.

I contacted Margaret Orr of the city and soon thereafter city workers destroyed the blinds. In late November, new signs were erected. They read:

**TRESPASSING
LOITERING
FORBIDDEN BY LAW
CALIFORNIA CODES
PENAL CODE, SECTION, 52-555.5**

Hopefully, we have seen the last of the hunters. *However*, if they return and you see them there, please contact PWA.

Life-Blood (Financial) Issues

by Gerald Moore

Our many wonderful educational and stewardship activities cannot happen without funds. We are a 100-percent volunteer organization, but supplies, equipment, training, and so on, cost money. We rely on a mixture of donations and small grants for these funds.

If you have donated money to PWA in the past, you automatically became a member of our parent organization Madrone Audubon. Madrone is one of our best allies in wetlands education and serves as our fiscal sponsor in what is evolving into a great long-term partnership. If you receive a Madrone membership renewal notice, or if you receive an end-of-year donation notice from Madrone, the money you send to Madrone will be credited to PWA if you so indicate on the comment line of your check. Please make out the actual check to Madrone Audubon. If you have not donated to PWA in the past, please consider doing so this year. Checks made out to Madrone Audubon can be mailed to PWA at our post office box in Petaluma. You will also be made a member of Madrone Audubon.

We appreciate all donations, great or small, and especially want to acknowledge generous contributions from Econscious, RNM Properties, Bank of the West, and Clover Stornetta Dairy, all of Petaluma.

PWA Welcomes New Docents

by Sharon Mansfield

The docent family of Petaluma Wetlands Alliance has grown. Fifteen new and talented docents completed the PWA six-week course of instruction this fall. These docents have also shadowed seasoned docents in classroom and Shollenberger Park activities during October and November. They are ready to lead activities in our spring program. Some may even jump into our Winter Migration Tours, which begin in January. Welcome, Kristine Brook, Camille Jordan, Maureen O'Reilly, Sandy O'Hare, Karen Johnson, Peter Colasanti, Karin Jones, Marian Parker, Kay Quinn, Boyce Quinn, Christine Sheeter, Zee Marie Mondo, Jackie Hewitt, Sally Rowland, and Pat Carson.

Seasoned docents have worked closely with docents in training. We now have an active base of more than thirty docents who are dedicated to supporting our local wetlands and providing tours to children and adults. Tour dates for classrooms have been added to the spring schedule because of the enthusiasm and readiness of our larger group. This will allow more children to learn about and enjoy nature in the wetlands. Congratulations and thanks to all PWA docents.