



PETALUMA WETLANDS ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

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Providing Education in and Stewardship of Petaluma's Public Wetlands.

Autumn 2006

It's Dredging Time Again at Shollenberger

by Bob Dyer

Shollenberger has been a *dredge spoils site* since the 1970s. Only the two-mile trail is truly considered the "park" by the city. Once again, Shollenberger is fulfilling its thirty-year role helping to maintain navigability of the Petaluma River, as dredging started dumping spoils into the park in early November.

This year's dredging will be of the downtown Turning Basin, followed by the stretch of river between the D Street bridge and McNear channel. If time and money permit, the Petaluma Marina will also be dredged. The work should be finished before the first of December. In the process, it's expected some 35,000 cubic yards of silt will be piped into Shollenberger. The \$1.6 million cost for the project will be almost entirely paid for by the state, supplemented by money from FEMA.

Soon after the work started, muddy water could be seen entering the park near the southwest corner of Shollenberger. Some people expressed concern that this would have a negative impact on the wildlife. Actually, if this dredging is true to similar projects during the past few years, there should be little to fear because within the muddy river water brought into the park there will be abundant nutrients—invertebrates and even small fish for the birds to feed upon.

New Wildlife Protection Fence at Shollenberger

by Gerald Moore

On 12 November Boy Scout Troop 74 built a post-and-rail fence at Shollenberger Park to cordon off a sensitive bird habitat area located behind the four picnic tables near the first kiosk that serve as the PWA outdoor education area. The project was conceived by PWA and was taken on by scout Paul Shaw for the public service portion of his Eagle Scout requirements. With a little advice and encouragement from docents Andy LaCasse and John Richards, Paul organized the entire project and brought a crew of fifteen people to carry out the job. His father and the troop scoutmaster are contractors, so they had plenty of equipment. The fence looks great and was in place within several hours. PWA paid for the fencing and cement mix. This is a good example of how we can work with community groups for the betterment of our public wetlands.

Weed Management/Habitat Restoration Update

by Gerald Moore

Last January PWA wrote a weed management/habitat restoration plan to remove the six or seven most invasive weeds from Shollenberger Park and Alman Marsh and replace them with native species. This will make the site more attractive to native animal species. The city approved that plan, in part, last March, allowing our docents to mechanically remove thistles and hardinggrass seed heads from the site. We removed from the park almost 300 bags of four thistle species, plus seed heads on most of the hardinggrass. In October 2006, the city gave final approval to our entire plan so that we could invite the public to join our efforts when the new restoration season starts in January 2007. John Shribbs, a coauthor of the plan, renewed his California herbicide applicator's license, in case we need it, and also planted about 2,000 native plants (from seeds) in the Casa Grande Native Plant Nursery for use at the park. Starting in January 2007, we will attack the invasive weeds in earnest and invite the public to join us. We will also be planting native species to replace the removed weeds. Please call Gerald at 763-3577 if you want to help. Weed pulling/whacking and planting is actually a lot of fun and a very social experience. We plan to hold a public meeting on the project in January and will invite everyone.

Petaluma Wetlands Alliance Graduates Seven New Docents

by Gerald Moore

On 13 October seven applicants finished the six-week course for new wetlands docents. I think they will be an outstanding addition to our educational program. These new people will increase our docent staff to twenty-three.

Second Grade Nature Walks

by Sharon Mansfield

After munching the morning away on its favorite veggie, the Woolly Bear Caterpillar gathered all its little feet and black-orange bristly hairs to wiggle-zoom its way across the big black path before it. Just as it had galumphed halfway across the dry path, it felt its body rising in the air, encapsulated in some funny contraption. All around were many eyes, some brown, some blue, some shaded for a better view, but all looking at Woolly Bear.

Second grade children have scooped Woolly Bear up for close viewing, using the hand-held Snapy, an instrument that docents use to protect small creatures while children get a close up view, and then releasing the critter to go about its way. This is the plan for our second grade Nature Walks . . . a time for children, guided by docents, to “walk, listen, talk, and ponder” while getting excited about nature all around them.

By bringing young children along the nature walk, we hope to give them an opportunity to explore the plant and animal life of Shollenberger Park. The walk is intended to be child directed—docents are guided by the interests and inquisitiveness of the children. We watch the behavior of animals, including birds that are near by, and also insects and any other moving-crawling critter. We examine seeds and plants and discuss their place in the park. We hope to naturally excite these seven- to eight-year-olds about nature in the park.

Teachers who have been at the park for nature walks are excited about this new program. Len Nelson has prepared and given a slide presentation to each class, prior to its visit to the park. His slide show is designed expressly for the nature walks. At the park, docents have an opportunity to spend sixty minutes with a small

group of children without a specific lesson plan and can use the “present moment” to engage the students, directed by student curiosity and interest.

We want children to know that Shollenberger Park is a place where people can enjoy seeing animals and plants in healthy habitats. If we all look and listen carefully, we can learn about and understand our own important part in nature.

Year-end Donations

by Gerald Moore

If you are a member of “PWA and Madrone Audubon,” you will receive a letter from Madrone requesting a year-end donation to support all the great activities of Madrone Audubon, which includes PWA’s work in the wetlands. If you are not a Madrone member, please consider sending a contribution to PWA to help support our many educational and stewardship activities. We now have twenty-three docents and would like to double that number to meet the increasing requests for our services. We have hands-on activities for third graders in the classroom and at the wetlands and are adding second and fourth grade programs as staffing permits. PWA offers free walks on Saturdays for birders, other adults, and families. PWA also generates tremendous amounts of wetlands educational materials for the entire community. We do scientific studies of our egret and heron breeding colony, monthly bird surveys, plant surveys, and more. Our stewardship program includes cleanups, repairs, educational presentations, and the habitat restoration project that will enhance the use of the area by native wildlife. No one in PWA gets paid for their efforts.

All these activities take funding and human energy. Please consider contributing to our great public wetlands with a little of your time and/or a tax-deductible donation. We will appreciate it, as will the 300-plus species of native wetlands plants and animals that call the park “home.” Please make your checks payable to MADRONE AUDUBON and write “Petaluma Wetlands” on the memo line. Thank you.

Have You Heard?

by Mary Edith Moore

There is a gem affecting deductions taken for charitable donations in The Pension Protection Act of 2006, which the president signed into law on 17 August 2006.

For the remainder of 2006 and all of 2007, taxpayers over 70 1/2 years of age may make contributions directly from their IRA of up to \$100,000 per year to their favorite qualified charities. These contributions will count toward required distributions from the IRA and will be excluded from gross income. Example: if a required distribution is \$50,000 and a \$5,000 contribution is paid directly from the IRA to a qualified charity, then the remaining taxable distribution would be \$45,000. The net effect is the same as a deduction for the contribution for those who use the standard deduction and do not otherwise itemize (and many over 70 1/2 no longer pay high mortgage interest on a home and do not itemize deductions).

The rule applies to everyone, that is, charitable contributions paid directly from IRA accounts are part of the required annual distribution, and only the remaining net required distribution is included in gross income. However, this is generally a tax benefit only to those people who do not otherwise itemize. Without the rule, they would include the full required distribution in gross income and would get no tax benefit for the charitable contribution. Those who itemize would, if the rule were not in effect, be able to deduct their contribution. With the new rule, the offset is automatic and those contributions may not be deducted as a contribution on Schedule B. Contact your tax and financial advisors to determine if this provision would be of benefit to you.

The Petaluma Wetlands Alliance, a nonprofit committee of MADRONE AUDUBON, is a qualified charity.

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