

PETALUMA WETLANDS PARK ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

17 APRIL 2002

THE PWPA IS A GRASS-ROOTS GROUP OF LOCAL CITIZENS COMMITTED TO THE CREATION OF A NEW WETLANDS PARK WITH FUNCTIONAL POLISHING WETLANDS AS A PART OF THE NEW PETALUMA WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT. WE ARE A “NOT FOR PROFIT” GROUP ADVOCATING PUBLIC AWARENESS, EDUCATION, AND THE PARTNERING OF GRANTING AGENCIES WITH THE CITY TO SUCCESSFULLY FUND THE POLISHING WETLANDS/PARK PORTION OF THE PROJECT.

**Chairperson: David Yearsley Secretary: Elizabeth Howland
Treasurer: Sylvan Eidelman**

Newsletter: Mary Edith & Gerald Moore

**Contact PWPA AT: 521 Walnut St. Petaluma, CA 94952; 763-2310, or
dmy@Sonic.net**

WELCOME TO ISSUE NO.1

The Petaluma Wetlands Park Alliance (PWPA) will use this newsletter to inform the public on issues relevant to the new wastewater treatment plant with the attached polishing wetlands and wildlife refuge/park. We invite members of the Alliance to contribute articles by e-mail to the editors at geraldmoore@compuserve.com. We intend for this to be a monthly publication that will be mailed to our members and friends either by USPS

or e-mail. This first issue contains more general or historical information but will undoubtedly get more specific as time goes on. Because we are operating on very limited funds, this newsletter will be kept concise and compact.
Gerald & Mary Edith Moore

PWPA SEEKING MORE MEMBERS

We started as a small group of less than 10 people, and this original group refers to itself as the “Steering Committee.” We would like to expand our membership to include people who support our cause and would like to contribute time, money, or both to helping us make this dream a reality. We need people to help with public events and educational projects. We need people to help us cover the costs of both the events and producing the information we hand out. If you would like to become a general member of PWPA please send us your name, address, e-mail, phone no., and a contribution of at least \$20 to the above address. Your contribution will assure that you receive a newsletter and notices of all activities.

Gerald Moore

UPDATE - CITY PERSPECTIVE

The City of Petaluma is moving forward with the design of our new wastewater facility. You may be asking yourselves what do the building of a new wastewater facility and wetlands restoration have in common? The fact is in the United States alone there are more than 600 wastewater facilities that have been designed with natural systems. A natural system incorporates low-tech ways of purifying the wastewater with wetland plants which help remove the toxins and heavy metals from the water, substances which are poisonous to our waterways and our health. In the winter months the City of Petaluma discharges its end product into the Petaluma river. This is one reason why some on the Petaluma City Council support a more natural

system when choosing a plant design.

In order for the City to move forward with a more natural system we must purchase the property south of Shollenberger Park, known as Gray's Ranch. In January of 2002 the Petaluma City Council approved RESOLUTION NO.2002-012. This resolution called for final design of the water treatment plant to include polishing wetlands and the park on Gray's ranch. A proviso was attached to the resolution that the monies for all or part of the Gray ranch purchase, and the money for the polishing wetlands and park must come from grants and be separate from the obligated bond money needed to pay for the remainder of the treatment plant. The City of Petaluma along with the PWPA group agreed to work together in seeking funds from state and local agencies to offset the purchase of the property needed. The City would then build 45 acres of polishing wetlands (including public access trails). Included in the proposal is the doubling of the trail loop around Shollenberger and many other amenities for the public benefit. The plan includes habitat restoration for the hundreds of birds and other mammals that depend on the Petaluma River and its wetlands to sustain their existence. This project will create a part of the "Trail of Tides" from the Petaluma marina to the Petaluma marsh.

On Friday March 29, 2002 Council member Janice Cader-Thompson along with the PWPA Group setup a tour of the Gray Ranch with the potential funding agencies. Representing these organizations were National Audubon's San Francisco Bay Restoration Program Policy Director, San Francisco Joint Bay Ventures Coordinator and the Executive Director of The Bay Institute. A representative from Ducks Unlimited has been on the site on a previous tour. We were excited to learn that this project is the "Talk of the Bay". It fits the criteria for securing funds from the Prop 40 Park bond dollars and the Clean Water Act bond. The purchase of the 272 acres parcel is the key to making this project a reality

The PWPA is promoting this project and working with the City of Petaluma to secure the necessary funding to purchase the land. Please join the

Petaluma Wetlands Park Alliance and help insure the realization of Petaluma's wetlands park/filtration marsh. Let's work together to insure that this section of "Trail of Tides" becomes part of our future in Petaluma.
Janice Cader-Thompson, Councilperson

PWPA PETITION DRIVE TO CONTINUE

The Alliance has decided to continue the petition drive we started last December. At that time we collected over 1000 signatures in support of the polishing wetlands/wetlands park plan. All events sponsored by PWPA will offer these petitions. In addition, another petition campaign will be started soon at Whole Foods by Mary Edith Moore. If you can devote a few hours within the coming weeks to help with this petition drive please call Mary Edith (763-3577). Please try to assure that current signers have not previously signed the petition when circulated last December.

Gerald Moore

CITY LEADERS TAKE TO THE WATER

At 8:30 AM on April 4th on a calm gray morning, an event took place that bode well for the future of the city's new water treatment facility and wetlands park. Mayor Clark Thompson, Councilman Matt Maguire, Bay Institute Director Grant Davis and I cast off from the dock at the Petaluma Marina in the green Riverkeeper's skiff, catching a ride on the outgoing tide. Our destination was Gray's field on the lower part of the ranch. The purpose of the trip was to view the site of the new filtration marsh/wetlands park from the water. As Chairman of the Petaluma Wetlands Park Alliance (PWPA), I also hoped to give our city officials another perspective of the site and discuss the advantages of the wetland improvements and public amenities.

It was wonderful that Grant Davis could join our crew on short notice. Besides being a fine conservationist, Grant's knowledge of funding sources and the process for obtaining funds proved very instructional to our group. Also he is well respected by the city staff, and his support of the project was instrumental in its approval by a majority of the council.

Motoring down the river, we noticed the western bank was busy with the signs of human habitation and industry. Haystack Landing exhibited a collection of fishing boats, waterfront dwellings, and broken docks. Western Dock Enterprises and Dutra Materials showed how industries use the river. By contrast, the eastern bank was a virtual nature preserve. Alman marsh, just below the Marina, resulted when several inlets broke through the levee to reclaim the wetlands behind it. As we passed Adobe Creek, the land on our left became Shollenberger Park. We saw several people walking the park's trail and enjoying the morning air. After passing the park, the height of the embankment dropped noticeably. Thanks to two large openings, or breaches, caused by the last El Nino storms, we were able to see through the levee. We gazed at the draining mud flats in Gray's lower field and the many birds feeding near the serpentine channels. This field was one of the things we had come to see, and I looked for a place to park the boat and disembark. Fortunately, there was enough water in the river to push the nose of the boat into the bank, so the crew could step out onto solid ground. After Matt secured the boat's bowline, we all stepped ashore over the bow and onto a natural footpath that lead toward an old radio building, a hundred yards or so inland. The path, a remnant of a maintenance road that served the levee, improved as we progressed inland along Ellis Creek. Clark commented how easy it would be to make this a permanent trail. I agreed, adding that once the bridges were in place over the levee's breaches, this trail would connect the park to the Marina and become an extension of the River Walk from downtown. We hope this segment of the trail will be named "Trail of Tides".

Talking as we walked, it was easy to be enthused about the beauty of this site and what a wonderful asset for the community and visiting nature lovers. With mud flats on the left and verdant marsh grasses on the right, I pointed

out how few opportunities there are to actually walk through a marsh. Stopping before the abandoned cinder-block, graffiti-painted, radio building, we again reviewed the possibilities of the site. The solid structure would make an excellent building for educational displays, and the large, flat roof could be reinforced for an observation deck. From the roof's vantage, you could see miles of marshland to the north and south, terminated by Sonoma Mountain and San Pablo Bay.

Grant outlined a funding scenario which suggested including all of the public access amenities in the acquisition and development package, thereby making it more attractive to public funding agencies such as the Open Space District and the Coastal Conservancy. This idea was well received by Clark and Matt who were quick to see that this beautiful portion of the new water treatment facility could result in no or little cost to the city and its ratepayers.

As we were all on short tethers with respect to time, it was soon necessary to turn around and head toward the boat. Unfortunately, the tide had receded, and the propeller was stuck in the mud. Were we stranded? Not really. Being an experienced waterman (and the only person with boots), I stepped aboard the grounded skiff and strained to upright the motor. With a little rocking and heaving, the propeller was freed from the mud. On the captain's invitation, the rest of the crew gingerly stepped into the boat. Floating in just a few inches of water, we paddled away from the shore. Once in deeper water, I started the reliable Honda outboard motor for a quick trip back to the Marina.

At the dock, where our trip had begun a scant hour-and-a-half earlier, we made our farewells. The Mayor and Matt thanked Grant and me for the excellent guided tour and expert advice. With literature from the PWPA, both men pledged to help carry the project forward and asked to be kept abreast the PWPA's activities. It is hopeful we will be able to take this trip again in the future when the wetlands park becomes a reality. Then we will be able to proudly share it with our families and friends.

David Yearsley, Petaluma Riverkeeper

SHOLLENBERGER PARK

Rain is life's blood to the central pond at Shollenberger Park. Because so little rain fell the preceding winter, the park was almost dry last summer. Except for the dredging operation done once every four years, rain is the only water source (by law) for the pond. Now, the pond is full, and the birds are plentiful.

I estimate daily visitors at Shollenberger to be about 250, making this park the most popular in Petaluma. People walk, jog, or view the wildlife. Docents Ron Storey and myself have recorded 140 different bird species. A list is available on request ('phone or e-mail).

Duck species seen this season include American Wigeon, Bufflehead, Blue-winged Teal, Canvasback, Cinnamon Teal, Eurasian Wigeon, Greater Scaup, Green-winged Teal, Lesser Scaup, Northern Shoveler, Pintail, Redhead, and Ruddy Duck. Photos of many of these ducks are posted on the FLORA AND FAUNA display board, 1/5th of a mile to the right from the park entrance.

In the side channels on either side of the park's entrance, there have been recent sightings of the Virginia and Sora Rails and the American Bittern. Because of habitat loss, the American Bittern is a species in decline. Shollenberger is one of the few places in Sonoma County where this bird is seen. In the May edition of the *Petaluma Post* (a free publication available at the Community Center, local markets, and restaurants), there will be an article on the American Bittern.

Station markers erected on Earth Day will make the "Shollenberger Park Self-guided Tour" user-friendly. The guides should be available in the park.

Bob Dyer, Docent (763-2934) nrdyer@attbi.com

UPCOMING PWPA ACTIVITIES

- **PWPA and the Madrone Audubon Society will conduct Earth Day activities in Shollenberger Park on Sat. 20 April from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM. Informational tables will be set up. There will be bird walks and work projects including the installation of self guided interpreting markers, removal of cardoon plants, and trash pickup throughout the park.**
- **PWPA will have a float in the Butter & Eggs Parade on Sat. 27 April. If you would like to walk with us call 763-2310.**
- **PWPA will participate in the first annual Arts & Garden Festival in downtown Petaluma on June 9th. No details are available yet.**
- **We are looking for a venue for a large community showing of our new wetlands slide show entitled “Polishing Wetlands and Water Purification”. When date, time, and place are set we will announce it in the newspapers.**
- **Please attend the City Council meetings on May 13 and May 20, 7:00 PM when the draft Environmental Impact Report for the new water treatment plant/wetlands park will be presented and discussed.**

Gerald Moore

WHY USE WETLANDS TO PURIFY WATER?

The food chain in natural wetlands starts with the detritus (dead plant & animal material) on the bottom of the marsh which is broken down (eaten) by bacteria, fungi, micro-organisms, and small invertebrates, which in turn, feed higher animals like insects, fish and frogs. These feed higher animals and/or perhaps us. Minerals are absorbed by the wetland plants.

Wastewater (sewage) is about 99.9% water containing a small amount of organics, suspended solids, and pathogens in it. This amounts to a very dilute solution of our human life-style detritus already “finely chopped” for incorporation with the naturally occurring detritus at the base of the wetland’s food chain. Thus the wetlands ecosystem is doing what it has done for millions of years and simply adding a little bit of our “detritus” to its load. Pathogens are frequently broken down as part of the suspended solids being bio-degraded, or absorbed onto detritus in the marsh. Wetland plants absorb the fertilizer components nitrogen and phosphate from wastewater, which helps keep the outflow water low in these chemicals so as to not pollute rivers, etc. downstream. There are no effective mechanical processes to achieve these reductions in nitrogen or phosphate. Certain wetland plants are also effective at absorbing metals, which can be important if these metals are high in the local waste water.

Since the Clean Water Act of 1972, the State of California is constantly tightening the standards for wastewater treatment. Not only do they regulate organics and suspended solids, but now they talk of regulating metals, nitrogen, and phosphate levels. Wetlands are an inexpensive, natural way for Petaluma to meet these tightening standards now and in the future years.

The additional benefits of providing wildlife habitat and public park access are also important. Ninety five percent of the Bay Area’s wetlands have disappeared. Many rare and endangered species can find homes in our wetlands. Nearly 100 species of migratory birds use wetlands as refueling and resting stops during their migrations. Our wetlands can provide for this, while giving us the pleasure of watching them. An expanded wetlands park would also provide a wonderful living biology lab to enhance the education of our school children. Expanded wetlands will be a major attraction for the bird watching community from all over the United States. This influx of birders will aid the local businesses catering to tourists. Lastly, the concept of blending wildlife sanctuaries with a public wetlands parks allows people to be out in nature, to get some exercise, and to learn to appreciate our natural

world. It's a win-win situation!

Gerald Moore

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