

PETALUMA WETLANDS ALLIANCE



THE PETALUMA WETLANDS PARK ALLIANCE SUPPORTS PETALUMA'S PUBLIC WETLANDS, AND IS A COMMITTEE OF THE MADRONE AUDUBON SOCIETY.

Chairperson: Gerald Moore

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NEWSLETTER # 3

NOVEMBER, 2003

THOUGHTS FROM THE NEW CHAIRMAN

Gerald Moore

After two years of constant efforts from the Petaluma Wetlands Alliance (PWA) the city is purchasing Gray's Ranch. The PWA has become a non-profit committee under Madrone Audubon. Our dedicated, but weary, first chairman, David Yearsley, has given up the Chair to allow himself time to fight new battles in the name of the Petaluma Watershed. **Thank you, David, you were a great leader in a difficult period.** Where do we go from here?

The Alliance is striking out in somewhat new directions. Since land purchase is behind us we will turn our focus towards design of the new property, as well as efforts to support the city in getting funds, managing, interpreting, and maintaining our public wetlands. I use the term "Public Wetlands" to include not only the public portion of Gray's Ranch but also Alman Marsh and Shollenberger Park. These three properties provide over 500 acres of contiguous wetlands stretching along the river from the marina to the wastewater treatment ponds. They have the potential to provide the public with the finest birding, hiking, and wetlands education in the western United States.

We still have a big job to transform the land's potential into a reality. Our first efforts must be to help design the site to produce a first-class nature preserve with trails, blinds, etc. that optimize the habitat for wildlife while also providing quality recycled water and an outstanding wildlife/wetlands viewing experience for the public. At the same time we must be developing strategies to obtain donations and grant money for the

final design and for ongoing needs. We also need to court CA Audubon to get a Regional Center on the site, while we continue to build our own docent program to fill the gap between now and Audubon's future arrival. Other issues we will participate in with the city include management policies, maintenance activities, and public awareness/involvement programs. The future of PWA and our community partners looks not only busy but very exciting. Please join us on this wonderful adventure.

**FLASH! GRAY'S RANCH ESCROW
SET TO CLOSE JANUARY 15, 2004!**

THOUGHTS FROM THE PAST CHAIRMAN

David Yearsley

Dear Members and friends of the PWA; it has been an honor to serve as chairman of the PWA for the past two years and I am proud of what our group has accomplished. The struggle has been much harder than most of us anticipated in the beginning, but we have achieved our important initial goals; approval of the constructed wetlands method of wastewater treatment, and acquisition of the property necessary to do it.

These wonderful victories would not had happened without the voluntary work of our varied constituency, our dedicated steering committee, and the visionary leaders from both the public and private sectors of our community who worked on its behalf. I want to thank you all. There were many highlights and some daunting setbacks along the way. I remember distinctly the thrill of being introduced to **(Continued, Page 2.)**

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THOUGHTS FROM THE OLD CHAIRMAN (Continued)

the environmental art work of Patricia Johanson at a gathering hosted by Janice Cader-Thompson in the fall of 2000; and the realization that the people and the environment of Petaluma could benefit in many ways by the construction of treatment wetlands. It was there that I first met the nucleus of activists who would join forces to form the Petaluma Wetlands Park Alliance. I had been working publicly as the Petaluma Riverkeeper for three years, learning about the watershed and its needs. Now there was a cause to fight for and good people to fight it with. We began by educating the community with a series of brilliant slide shows produced by Gerald Moore. We held public forums and spoke to community groups. We lobbied the city council both publicly and privately. These efforts paid off on Jan. 7, 2002, when the city council in a dramatic vote, agreed to include the constructed wetlands as part of the new wastewater treatment plant.

The condition attached to the council's approval was that the outside funding to purchase the land must be found within a year. It was our good fortune to have Grant Davis of the Bay Institute working on our behalf. With the assistance of County Supervisor Mike Kerns, the Sonoma County Open Space District, and the California Coastal Conservancy, 4.2 million dollars in matching grants had been arranged in just six months. Now the struggle became cutting a deal with the land owners to purchase the property at the appraised value; and what a struggle it was. Protracted and frustrating closed-door negotiations went on for over a year, and from what we heard on the outside things were not going well. The owners, which included principals of the Petaluma Poultry Processors (PPP) wanted to situate their new plant on the same site we wanted for the wetlands park. While these negotiations continued, we suffered what appeared to be a major blow in the city elections. Two of our key advocates on the City Council, Janice Cader-Thompson and Matt McGuire were defeated in a close race, and replaced by candidates about whom we knew little. Things were looking bleak, but we never gave up hope. Fortunately, our new Mayor, David Glass, was an ally in working for the wetlands. It was with his encouragement that the city was able to hire Michael Bierman as new City Manager, and it was Mr. Bierman who was instrumental in finally crafting a deal to acquire Gray's Ranch. The property owners (including David Martinelli, their chief negotiator) made some major concessions, including giving up the dream of a new plant on the site. The city changed its construction plans to move the wastewater plant onto the parcel,

thereby saving millions of dollars. The deal had appeal, and was approved by a unanimous vote of the new council on September 8, 2003. We had a wetlands park at last!

There are so many people who helped to achieve this ultimate victory that I cannot begin to name them all, but I want to express sincere gratitude to everyone who assisted us get where we are today. Of special note is the early support and coverage by the press, especially Chip McAuley at the Argus Courier. Without that positive reporting to the community our project may never have gotten off the ground. I must mention a few individuals who helped to inspire, support, and guide me as chairman of the PWPA. First, is my environmental hero and mentor, David Keller, who as a city councilman helped to save our water treatment plant from privatization and with others, brought the constructed wetlands concept to Petaluma. He has my ongoing deepest gratitude. Grant Davis, whose political savvy and knowledge of the environmental world's inner workings, proved invaluable in guiding our public efforts and helping to achieve our goals. To him I give special thanks. It was Janice who introduced many of us to the genius of Patricia Johanson and the possibilities of an artistically-crafted wetlands park as part of the new water treatment facilities. It was with tireless effort that she championed this cause in both the public and private sectors, through good times and bad. She has my sincere admiration and appreciation. And finally there are the core members of our steering committee, Sylvan Eidelman, Gerald Moore, Bob Dyer, Ron Storey, Stan Gold, and Elizabeth Howland; who all worked hard, giving generously of their time and individual talents to make PWPA a multi-faceted, highly functional entity – and made my job as chairman a pleasure. Thank you all. I want to give special thanks to my wife, Elizabeth, who not only acted as secretary to PWPA, but consistently provided unflinching and invaluable counsel. Whatever I have been able to achieve in environmental work and community service is in a large part due to her.

PWPA (PWA) is entering a new phase. As a non-profit committee of Madrone Audubon it hopefully no longer needs to be a political gadfly. Now it can concentrate on implementing the vision it has held of promoting and protecting wetlands parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and educational facilities in the Petaluma marshes. I'm happy to be able to place the responsibilities of chair in the capable hands of Gerald Moore. It will be a pleasure to assist him and the rest of PWA in my ongoing capacity as the Petaluma Riverkeeper.

The Petaluma watershed still faces many challenges. As the Riverkeeper I plan to use my time and energies to protect and enhance all of its waters and wetlands. It is my hope that the PWA will continue to be a key part of this community; working with **(Concluded, page 3.)**

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THOUGHTS FROM THE OLD CHAIRMAN (Concluded)

environmental organizations, the city government, business leaders, schools, and any other group or individual whose goals are to better the environment and enrich our lives.

FECUND LANDSCAPES: ART AND PROCESS IN PUBLIC PARKS

Patricia Johanson

[Patricia Johanson is an environmental artist who is working with the city regarding wetlands projects on Gray's Ranch. This is an extract from her article published in **Landscape & ART. U.K.** London, England, Summer, 2003.]

The primary purpose of wetlands in the treatment process is to remove algae, nutrients and heavy metals from the wastewater, but filtration marshes also produce a higher quality effluent – water that meets the standards of tertiary treatment for unrestricted use – while accomplishing these goals in a low-tech, energy-efficient way. Our ponds have also been designed to provide maximum usage by wildlife. Habitat islands in each cell offer protected nesting and refuge for birds, while also directing the flow of water in the basins. And, as the sequence of ponds moves through varying ecologies, from upland habitats toward the river, the character of the trail, public accoutrements and islands changes. Thus the pond closest to the highway [Lakeville] is heavily vegetated to reduce noise and visual intrusion and features islands of trees and shrubs to provide perching and roosting habitat for predators such as herons, hawks, and owls. Grassy islands in the middle pond are ideal for nesting ducks. And barren islands of crushed oyster shell in the pond closest to the river, overlooking an open expanse of mudflats, will be used by shorebirds such as stilts, avocets, and terns.

The aesthetics of wastewater treatment is further defined by terraced banks, which allow a greater variety of plants to grow, and by broad 'green' bands of vegetation, alternating with 'blue' bands of deeper open water (habitat for predatory fish). Within the green zones, suspended solids are being consumed by microscopic aquatic animals and insects that live on plants – creatures that play a major role in moving energy through the food chain. Aquatic plants pump oxygen into their submerged stems, roots and tubers, thus supplying the microbial decomposers. By actively incorporating nitrogen, phosphorus and metals, plants also help purify wastewater, while offering food, shelter and nesting materials to myriad species in the littoral

[shallow] zone. Aesthetic structures along the twelve-foot wide berms include the trails themselves, beaches for wading birds, and benches, blinds, and overlooks for humans – all modeled on local flora, fauna and landforms.

BIRDING IN THE UNITED STATES *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service -Extract*

A new federal economic report found that 46 million birdwatchers across America spent \$32 billion in 2001 pursuing one of the Nation's most popular outdoor activities, according to a report from the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The report, *Birding in the United States: A Demographic and Economic Analysis*, is the first of its kind analyzing data from the *2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*.

"Nearly one in five Americans is a birdwatcher," said Service Director, Steve Williams. "This report recognizes what we always thought to be true. Birdwatching is very popular and contributes greatly to the economy, so it is important that we continue to work with our partners to restore and protect habitat to ensure healthy bird populations."

Montana, Vermont and Wisconsin led the Nation in birding participation rates as a percent of total state population. California, New York, and Pennsylvania had the most birders.

Birders spent \$32 billion on gear such as binoculars, travel, food and big ticket items such as canoes, cabins and off-road vehicles. This spending generated \$85 billion in overall economic output and \$13 billion in federal and state incomes taxes, and supported more than 863,000 jobs.

To be considered a birdwatcher, an individual must take a trip a mile or more from home for the primary purpose of observing birds or must closely observe or try to identify birds around the home. Those who notice birds while mowing the lawn or picnicking at the beach were not counted as birders. Trips to zoos and observing captive birds also did not count as birdwatching. Watching birds around the home is the most common form of birdwatching. Taking trips away from home counted for 40% (18 million) of birders. The full report is available on-line at

<http://federalaid.fws.gov>

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

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MADRONE AUDUBON WELCOMES PWA

Sylvan Eidelman, V.P. Madrone Audubon

Madrone Audubon is happy to announce that PWA is now officially a committee of Madrone. Madrone and its board have been active supporters of the Wetlands Sanctuary and have worked along with other allies to see the sanctuary and treatment marshes become a reality. There is so much more work to be done, and PWA is the perfect vehicle to work with the city of Petaluma to continue planning this amazing resource.

Why should PWA be part of Madrone? Its goals are consistent with those of Madrone and also, National Audubon. For five years both the local Bay Area Chapters and National Audubon have been promoting the restoration of 100,000 acres of wetlands around SF Bay. National Audubon has established the San Francisco Bay Restoration Program. The wetlands along the Petaluma River are considered very important. The Petaluma Marsh is the largest intact tidal marsh on the West Coast, and is used by many migrating waterfowl. Restoring the tidal marsh located in Parcel B of the sanctuary will be a great example and demonstration of how effective wetland restoration can be. It is hoped that after a positive experience in the sanctuary, the many visitors will support other bay restoration projects. National Audubon is searching for a site in Northern California to establish an education center. PWA has hosted a group from National, and would like very much to see Petaluma selected as the first site in Northern California. PWA can better achieve this as part of Madrone.

Finally, as a committee of Madrone Audubon, PWA officially becomes a non-profit organization, and can now accept tax-deductible donations. We have a great many things in mind for the Wetlands Sanctuary. We want to promote restoration of natural resources, outdoor education, and a beautiful and convenient natural experience for the visitor. Now we can accept help to make these a reality.

As a non-profit, PWA welcomes Donations towards projects in support of our public wetlands. Checks should be made out to **MADRONE AUDUBON, with "Petaluma Wetlands Alliance" entered on the Comment or "For" line. Send them to Gerald Moore, 1628 East Madison St. Petaluma, Ca 94954. Please include name, address, telephone # and email. Those who donate are added to our mailing list. Thank you.**

PETALUMA WETLANDS PARK ALLIANCE **NOW PETALUMA WETLANDS ALLIANCE**

Gerald Moore

Notice our new name. The word "Park" has been removed for several reasons. First, the 270-acre Gray's ranch land (which may soon have a new name) will *not* be run by the Park & Recreation Dept., but by a section of the City Engineering Department. Twenty-five acres of the site will be used for basic wastewater treatment and not be open to the public except for organized tours. Another part of the site will be used to further purify, or polish, treated wastewater for recycling (this portion, as well as the tidal wetlands near the river will contain trails and be open to the public). Secondly, a survey of dozens of similar sites around the country reveals that although most have trails and welcome the public from dusk until dawn, none are called "parks" but are known by terms like "wetlands" or "marsh" which more appropriately defines their design and purpose. Elimination of "park" is also better suited to our Madrone Audubon non-profit umbrella merger. Lastly, the operators and designers of several similar wetlands projects have strongly discouraged us from using the word "park" because of the wrong connotation and expectations it sends to the public concerning the land's purpose. Our vision, like that of most other wastewater wetlands, is modeled after the Arcata Marsh & Wildlife Sanctuary, where the primary activities are wastewater polishing, wildlife habitat, walking, wildlife viewing, nature study, and youth educational programs.

PWA will include in its scope of support not only the Gray's Ranch area, but also Alman Marsh, and Shollenberger Park with the diversity of activities they offer. We recognize that each of the three wetland sites, although adjoining, have somewhat different purposes, and may have slightly different usage policies.

DOCENT LED-TOURS

The second Saturday of the month, there is a free guided tour of Shollenberger Park. Learn about its flora & fauna, and history. Tours start at 9:00 A.M. at the parking lot and generally last until 11:00 A.M. or 11:30 A.M. The docents bring viewing scopes.

- December 13th*
- January 10th*
- February 14th*
- March 13th*