



PETALUMA WETLANDS ALLIANCE

(A COMMITTEE OF MADRONE AUDUBON)
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Providing Education in and Stewardship of Petaluma's Public Wetlands

Winter 2008

Spring Program at Shollenberger

by Sharon Mansfield

Ponds have filled, temperatures are warming, life at Shollenberger is shaking off winter's coat. PWA begins the Spring Season Wetland's Program on **March 3**, continuing weekly until the end of May. Classes of third grade students and a few second grade classes are scheduled for a busy season. An additional day of seventh grade students has been added. Our newly trained 2007 docents are eager to take their role alongside seasoned docents to bring hands-on activities to students in the classroom and at Shollenberger Park. Thanks to a larger active docent base, we will bring more children to nature this season than ever before. Docents are rewarded with the daily discoveries of life at Shollenberger and the joyful excitement of children who look through nature's eyes on their visit to the park.

Dutra Draft EIR for a New Asphalt Plant

by Gerald Moore

The Dutra Corporation wants to build an asphalt generation plant on the west side of the Petaluma River directly across from Shollenberger Park. Since Shollenberger Park and the Ellis Creek Wildlife Sanctuary would be downwind and downstream from this plant, we are concerned about the negative effects it might have on wildlife and human use of our public wetlands. Several of us have studied the draft EIR (environmental impact report), particularly the sections about wildlife disturbance, noise, visual impacts, chemical hazards, nighttime operations, and pollution. We evaluated the mitigation measures offered for these significant effects and suggested, at a public meeting on February 7, additional mitigations such as sound walls and elimination of the asphalt recycling portion of the project, which in turn would eliminate nighttime operations and reduce other impacts. Written comments were submitted by PWA and the general public. The public comment period closes on **March 4**. A final EIR is due next autumn. Our goal is to make this plant as close to invisible as is technically possible to minimize negative impacts in our wetlands.

Feral Cat Issue Reemerges

by **Bob Dyer**

A hearing was held on February 8 before the Petaluma Animal Services Committee because of demands to rescind Petaluma City Ordinance 9.14110, including the section that bans the feeding of feral cats in or within one-half mile of the Petaluma Wetlands (Alman Marsh, Shollenberger, and the Ellis Creek property). Feral cat supporters outnumbered wetland advocates, but strong testimony in support of the ordinance was provided by **Margaret Orr** of the city, **Gerald Moore**, **Veronica Bowers** (president, Madrone Audubon), **Wayne Till**, **Boyce Quinn**, and **Bob Dyer**. The Argus Courier published my letter in support of the ordinance on February 14. In its "Pulse of Petaluma" feature in the same edition, 63 percent of the public polled agreed with "banning feral cat colonies from Shollenberger Park and other parks because of their threat to bird life." The public is concerned, however, about the city's current policy of euthanizing feral cats. The will of those polled appears to be that feral cats should be sterilized and released but maintained in registered colonies away from sensitive wildlife areas and city parks. This is consistent with the current ordinance. Feral cat advocates persist, promoting an online petition to take down the Petaluma ordinance, "signed," ironically, by people from all over the world but by few local citizens. The French are incensed at us!! We still expect further hoopla on this issue after the committee makes its recommendations. The matter may yet be heard before the city council, in which case an alert will be posted on this Web site.

PWA Strategic Planning Process

by **Gerald Moore**

PWA has begun a strategic planning process as a preliminary step in seeking city council approval and grant funding to construct an interpretive center at the Ellis Creek Water Recycling Facility and Wildlife Sanctuary. Such an interpretive center would serve as the hub for wetlands education and ecotourism for the entire 500 acres of public wetlands in Petaluma after Ellis Creek opens to the public in 2009. Strategic planning includes updating our mission statement, creating visions of where the program will be in five years, and analyzing our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to our programs. All of this information is then prioritized, analyzed, and put into a final document to be used as a planning and progress-measuring document by our board. The process includes several half-day facilitated meetings by interested and involved members of PWA. A committee of the board will polish the information and blend it into the final document. A financial analysis will also be done by either board members or a consultant.

Eagle Scout Project at Shollenberger

by **John Shribbs**

On February 16, **Doug Lindsey**, a senior student at Casa Grande High School, led fifteen members of his scout pack and parent volunteers in a major effort to plant native species on the peninsula behind the fence. They were able to plant more than 200 individual plants including coyote bush, wild rose, buckeye, scarlet monkey flower, golden poppies, mugwort, and elderberry. The recent rains came at a perfect time to settle the plants. Square plots, immediately behind and coinciding with the fence posts, contain a specific native species as a demonstration area for education. Three bigleaf maples were planted south of the benches to eventually provide shade, with the hope that one will do well enough to get to a good shade size. Doug trained at the Casa Grande Native Plant Nursery and practiced planting and instructing at Shollenberger prior to the workday under the tutorage of **John Shribbs**, teacher at Casa Grande High School. Doug organized the workers, planned the layout, and provided lunch. It was a job well done. Thank you, Doug.

Tour of the Ellis Creek Project

by Gerald Moore

The next public tour of the Ellis Creek Water Recycling Facility and Wildlife Sanctuary will be on **Saturday, April 5, at 9:00 a.m.** These free tours are given by the engineers at the construction site and allow the public to observe the progress of construction. The site will open to the public in 2009.

Dedicated Jogger Helps Repair Alman Marsh Trail

by Bob Dyer

Johann Vetter, who operates JV SALES here in Petaluma, loves to jog the Alman Marsh and Shollenberger Park trails. Late last year he approached PWA to see if he could get permission to fix a 40- to 50-foot muddy area just south of the boardwalk in Alman Marsh. He also picks up litter and asked for a new trashcan for the northwestern part of the trail near a bench used by those fishing. We asked the city and they agreed. Johann, with another jogger, hauled in several truckloads of gravel they paid for and the repair was done in December. The city also installed a new trashcan where he requested it. This shows that people who love the park are often willing to pitch in and help support it.

Habitat Restoration with Student Assistance

by Gerald Moore

Last autumn three English classes from Casa Grande High School decided to come to Shollenberger Park for one 75-minute class period per month and help us with habitat restoration. These classes use the environment as a central theme in their English studies, thanks to the creative energies of their teachers, **Vanessa Hauswald** and **Dinah Lee**. Since January they have helped us dig, pull, and mow weeds, then plant native grasses and shrubs. The amount of work these students can accomplish in 75 minutes is impressive and stimulates the rest of us to strive more toward our restoration goals.

Miwok Indian Enrichment Field Trip

by Mary Edith Moore

In late January, eleven PWA docents carpooled to the visitor center at Point Reyes National Seashore where they were met by **Loretta Farley**, park ranger for cultural interpretation. Behind the scenes at the visitor center, Loretta showed and demonstrated the hands-on materials they use to teach students about the Miwoks. Then she led the docents on an excellent one-hour tour through the reconstructed Miwok village at Kule Loklo, including a visit inside the roundhouse. After the tour, Loretta commented on the vegetation along the trail as she walked the docents to the cultural museum where **Kirsten Kvam**, collections curator, was waiting. Kirsten displayed artifacts found at Point Reyes that were from the Coast Miwok tribes. Later, the docents met for lunch at Café Reyes in Point Reyes Station.

In late March, the docents will go to the Jepson Prairie Preserve to learn about vernal pools and the animals and plants that inhabit them.