



CURRENTS

HABITAT RESTORATION

Restoration in the Rodeo Creek Watershed

Every Native Plant Leads to a Healthier Creek... Every Healthy Creek Leads to a Cleaner Bay

As you look down the Lower Rodeo Creek you will notice ducks, egrets, hawks, and if you are lucky enough to spot him, our newly discovered river otter. Completely surrounded by paved roads, cars, shopping centers and homes, all of this lovely fauna still calls Rodeo Creek their home. The RCD and the Partners for the Rodeo Creek Watershed (PRCW) have been working hard this



Photo by Donald Barrilla

River Otter in Lower Rodeo Creek.

year to insure that our local wildlife have a habitat complete with native plants and cleaner water. Through native plant restoration projects along the Rodeo Creek Trail, the RCD is helping to change the health of the Rodeo Creek Watershed (RCW) one project at a time!



Volunteers hard at work on restoration project.

In a partnership with Contra Costa County Redevelopment Agency, Contra Costa County Special Districts, and Carquinez Regional Environmental Education Center, the RCD has begun a series of restoration projects removing weeds and non native, invasive vegetation such as arundo, and planting a wide variety of native plants along the creek trail. Our first site, located at the intersection of the creek trail and 4th Street in Rodeo, is nearly complete. The project includes a viewing bench, new trash receptacle, a doggy bag distribution box, and an educational interpretive sign. This is the first in a multi-phase project that will eventually create a beautiful trail lined with native plants, trees and herbs. These plantings will enhance both wildlife habitat and human enjoyment of the lower RCW. These are goals listed by the community in the Rodeo Creek Watershed Vision Plan



Dog walker admiring the restoration project 2 months after plantings.

The future of our Bay relies on the health of its watersheds. The RCD and the Partners for the Rodeo Creek Watershed are here to bring groups together to ensure that the health and wellbeing of their watershed and its flora and fauna are at the forefront in the community's mind.

The Mission of the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District is to facilitate conservation and stewardship of the natural resources of our county.

Message from the President of the Board



Igor Skaredoff,
CCRC President of the Board

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the founding of the CCRC. Over the years, the District has grown from a group formed to respond to soil erosion problems on 176,000 acres to a District now serving the entire county and addressing management of all natural resources. Our mission is to facilitate conservation and stewardship of the natural resources of our county. It is an honor and a privilege to play a role in continuing this vital service to our citizens and to the natural world we all inhabit.

In other sections of this report, you can learn about our work to improve fish passage, clean up creeks, remove invasive plants, and restore habitat. You can also read about our outreach and educational work.

Our dedicated staff continues to find ways to advance our work in the face of diminishing and fluctuating funding. Not only do they continue to deliver on our mission, but they have also found ways to cut our office and administrative expenses. Staff salaries have been frozen for three years, but their dedication and enthusiasm has not faltered. Our uncompensated, volunteer Board has also stepped up by donating travel and meeting costs. These cost-cutting measures have helped us all to build a sense of teamwork and mutual support, which further enhances our positive workplace environment.

This year, while we continue to fulfill our mission in Contra Costa County, we are also expanding our horizons by strengthening our links with other RCDs. Our RCD is in the Bay-Delta Region, and is a member of the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD). In my new role as chair of the Bay-Delta Region and board member of the CARCD, I have been gratified to learn that we all share common goals to work cooperatively to build on our strengths and to collectively achieve goals that would be difficult for individual RCDs to accomplish alone.

In these trying economic times, it is more important than ever that we all work together, help each other and cooperate to enhance what we do. Challenges can bring out the best in us, and can make us all stronger, more resilient and more effective.

In this, the seventieth year of its existence, the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District is accomplishing much and looking forward to another seventy years of service to our community and to the larger natural community of which we are all members.

CCRC and NRCS Staff



(L to R Standing):

Mary Grim, Teresa Hunter, Nannette Reck

(L to R Seated):

Carol Arnold, Heidi Petty

LOCAL AND REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Contra Costa RCD Provides Leadership for Bay Delta Region's RCDs

Resource Conservation Districts work with the “grassroots” in their communities, but they also share information and collaborate on a regional and state level. In April, the Contra Costa RCD hosted the spring meeting of RCDs in the SF Bay Delta Region. The meeting was led by Igor Skaredoff, President of the Contra Costa RCD and also elected Chair of the Bay Delta Regions RCDs. More than 20 RCD and USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service managers and RCD Board members attended from Napa, Alameda, Solano, Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties. These regional meetings allow us to discuss current and future challenges and opportunities. One such opportunity is to find innovative ways to work jointly on regional issues and projects that may be difficult for districts to tackle on their own. The NRCS Assistant State Conservationist explained new statewide conservation priorities; Department of Conservation staff and Board President of the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts from Sacramento led discussions on maintaining effective conservation efforts during economic down-turns. Local guest speaker David Katzev, with EBMUD, described the success of the Pavon Creeks restoration project which used constructed wetlands and ponds to provide habitat for red legged frogs and other wildlife and to trap sediment in this highly erosive area. He highlighted the surprises they've experienced over just one rainy season. After lunch the group enjoyed a walking tour of the recently constructed Pinole Creek restoration project.

Partnering on Conservation and Restoration Planning

The CCRCDD continues to partner with many organizations including other special districts, non-profits, and government agencies. This has been an effective way to achieve conservation and restoration planning throughout our county and the region. Below are some of our partnership activities:

- Active member of the **Alameda/Contra Costa Weed Management Area**.
- Participated in the **Bay Area Watershed Network** events.
- Partnered with the **Brentwood Agricultural Land Trust** and the **Richmond Community Foundation** to support the Farm-2-Table program in Richmond (read more on p. 5).
- Supported the **California Rangeland Conservation Coalition**.
- Partnered with **CalTrans** on the design of the Pinole Creek Fish Passage Improvements Project.
- Were active members of the **Contra Costa County Special Districts Association**.
- Were active members of the **Contra Costa Watershed Forum** and served on its Executive Committee.
- Partnered with the **East Bay Municipal Utility District** on the Pinole Creek Fish Passage Improvements Project.
- Supported the **Muir Heritage Land Trust** as part of our Rodeo and Alhambra Creek Watershed Programs.
- Served as a member of the **San Francisco Estuary Partnership Implementation Committee**.



Strolling to San Pablo Bay on the new trail along the Pinole Creek restoration project.

NRCS Partnership

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service has partnered with Resource Conservation Districts since their inception in the 1930's. NRCS technical support, along with NRCS funding programs, has created an effective collaboration with RCD's to conserve and enhance rangeland, cropland and wildlife habitat.

NRCS Staff Changes

In March Alyson Aquino, NRCS District Conservationist in Contra Costa County for the past 4 years, transferred to Alameda County. We are very grateful to Alyson for her hard work and dedication to our agricultural community which greatly increased NRCS funding to our county and enrolled more ranchers and farmers in NRCS conservation programs. This fall we will welcome a new District Conservationist. Last August, NRCS biologist Nannette Reck joined our Concord Service Center. She provides consultation for conservation projects not only in Contra Costa County, but for the cluster

From Contra Costa County Mapping Information Center <http://ccmap.us>



RCD Farm Tours take urban residents from the Richmond area to visit farms near Oakley and Brentwood.

of NRCS offices around the SF Bay Delta region. We will soon also be welcoming archeologist Daniel Grijalva who will provide consultation on cultural resources for projects throughout Central California.

Program News

This past year NRCS has continued to work with local farmers, ranchers, and landowners to plan and implement conservation practices through our voluntary programs. With a focus on water use and water quality, the farmlands in the east portion of our county have continued to install hundreds of acres of micro-irrigation in order to conserve water and reduce runoff. Ranchers are improving vegetation management on rangelands though the establishment of watering facilities for livestock that helps distribute grazing. We also continue to work on establishing habitat for native pollinators and beneficial insects. With our new staff, we hope these and other conservation efforts continue to expand throughout the county.

Conserving wetlands and wildlife habitat is another NRCS priority. A new Contra Costa property is being added to the NRCS Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). It constitutes almost the entirety of one small Delta island. The easement should provide benefits in perpetuity for local wildlife and seasonal waterfowl using the Pacific Flyway. This land is an addition to a previous WRP easement of 450 acres obtained 13 years ago. A field review of that property prompted additional technical assistance this year to enhance habitat values on that land.



From Contra Costa County Mapping Information Center <http://ccmap.us>

In the patchwork of farm fields in East Contra Costa there are many opportunities to conserve water by switching to drip irrigation systems. This eliminates agricultural runoff which could harm the Delta.

Connecting People with Produce

Supporting agricultural production in Contra Costa County has been a long standing goal of the Resource Conservation District (RCD). This past year, we began a partnership with two other local organizations to support Contra Costa growers and strengthen their connections with local consumers.

The RCD is working with the Brentwood Agricultural Land Trust (BALT) and the Richmond Community Foundation (RCF) to provide free farm tours so “city folks” in West County can visit the farms where their food is grown in East County, and meet the family farmers who provide fresh fruits and vegetables for our tables.

Some of these farmers participate in the Farm-2-Table community supported agriculture program (CSA) that delivers

boxes of farm fresh produce every two weeks to subscribing Richmond residents. The RCD will organize tours to take these CSA subscribers, and potential subscribers out to meet the farmers who work year round to grow their fresh healthy produce.

Although the RCD has organized farm tours for several years, this new partnership is part of a focused program funded by the California Department of Food and Agriculture to support small family farms and provide urban residents better access to fresh local food. This grant partnership allows the RCD to reach a new audience and to cooperate with these other organizations to sustain the viability of family farms in Contra Costa County, and increase the appreciation of fresh healthy food.

HABITAT RESTORATION

Partnering on Restoration Projects in the Pinole Creek Watershed

Last fall the East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) completed a **restoration project in the Pavon Creeks** sub-basin in the upper Pinole Creek Watershed. This restoration was an outgrowth of the 2005 RCD funded Pinole Creek Watershed Sediment Source Assessment. In that study, this highly erosive area had been identified by the San Francisco Estuary Institute as contributing a large supply of fine-grained sediment to the Pinole Creek mainstem (an estimated 30 to 80 percent of the sediment in Pinole Creek). Responding to this scientific data, EBMUD used mitigation funding to hire consultants who designed and constructed a series of ponds, seasonal wetlands and red legged frog ponds which interconnect with the Pavon creek channels to provide wildlife habitat and capture excess sediment through erosion control techniques. During this past winter and spring, the project was successful in providing habitat for wildlife with native vegetation, wetlands and ponds. It also greatly reduced the amount of sediment that flowed into Pinole Creek which will improve conditions for steelhead.

The RCD continues to work on the design and funding for a **Pinole Creek steelhead passage at the I-80 culverts** with construction planned for the summer of 2012. Partners in this effort include CalTrans, EBMUD, the Contra Costa Flood Control and Water District, the City of Pinole, consultants and the Friends of Pinole Creek Watershed. This project will



EBMUD fisheries biologist leads community tour of Pavon Creeks restoration in the beautiful Upper Pinole Creek Watershed.

contribute to the recovery of the Interior San Francisco Bay Diversity Strata of steelhead, and Pinole Creek will be recognized as important to this recovery effort in the Central California Coast Steelhead Recovery Plan which is currently under development.

The RCD also participated in the City of Pinole’s groundbreaking and ribbon cutting ceremonies to celebrate the first stream restoration project in the Pinole Creek flood control channel. This demonstration project has generated momentum for restoring the mouth of the creek at San Pablo Bay and the remainder of the Flood Control channel.

Range Camp - A Week of Discovery for Tomorrow's Land Managers

Contra Costa County is graced with a bounty of open space. Grassland dotted with Oak trees makes a pleasant vista as we drive local highways, but few of us realize there is a science to keeping this grassland ecosystem in a healthy productive state. Topics like understanding fire ecology, preventing land erosion, managing invasive weeds, preserving oak woodlands are all aspects of Range Management Science. The Resource Conservation District helps ensure that Contra Costa youth have opportunities to learn about range management and explore career opportunities in this field.

Each year, the Contra Costa RCD provides a scholarship for a high school student from Contra Costa County to attend the annual Range and Natural Resources Camp at Elkus Ranch near Half Moon Bay. The camp is organized by the California Society for Range Management. Students spend a week sleeping in tent cabins and learning from experts about principles of rangeland ecology, livestock and wildlife management, forestry, as well as hydrology, soil science, and management of stream habitats. Classroom learning is balanced with field activities such as wildlife tracking methods, outdoor navigation using GPS/GIS maps & compass, and plant identification. Each year we get rave reviews from students who attended camp. Here are some of their comments:

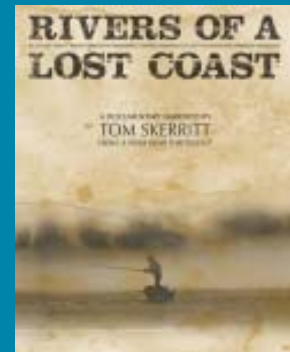


Range Camp students learn to identify native and invasive plants under the guidance of seasoned experts.

- *"I really didn't know that rangeland management is a professional field before I arrived at Range Camp. I learned so much about many aspects of range management, from the geology of the earth to the plants and animals that flourish on it."* – Emma Lyddan
- *"Each day at Range Camp was filled with brilliant people and beautiful scenery. Along with each lesson there was an activity. I had great adventures with new friends from all over California."* – Nicole Ng
- *"This unique camp taught me many things that I have never been exposed to before, and gave me a deeper respect for California's rangeland and natural resources"* – Lauren Kong
- *"Before Range Camp I was nearly clueless about plant life... The plant walk allowed me to learn more about plants and their importance to our earth."* – Nicole Ng
- *"My week at Range Camp was so much more than I could have ever asked to experience... I absorbed every class lesson and every hike because what we learned was so diverse from what I am traditionally taught."* – Hannah Yokum

Rivers of a Lost Coast Shown in Pinole

The RCD sponsored a viewing of Rivers of a Lost Coast at the Pinole City Council Chambers in January. More than 70 people attended to see this documentary film that recounts the historical steelhead and salmon runs of the northern California Rivers, the events which caused their decline and the restoration efforts being made today. The RCD is currently the lead agency working with EBMUD, the Flood Control District and CalTrans on a fish passage at the I-80 culverts on Pinole Creek to enhance the potential to restore a sustainable population of native steelhead trout in this watershed. Look for steelhead to return to our Contra Costa streams in the next few years.



Local Partnerships Promote Clean Water in Alhambra Creek Watershed and the Bay Delta

For the past few years, the local news media has told us about environmental problems in the San Francisco Bay-Delta. As private citizens, when we hear this troubling news we hope for improvement, but often we don't see any way to personally help the situation. However, there are actually many things that private citizens can do. The Contra Costa Resource Conservation District (RCD) has been working for many years to help people realize how our individual and community actions can make a difference for both our local watersheds and also the San Francisco Bay-Delta.



Over 4 tons of debris was winched from Arroyo Del Hambre Creek, Martinez.



The RCD coordinates among a network of local groups and supports the Alhambra Watershed Council at the heart of the network.

In the Alhambra Creek Watershed (the Martinez area), the RCD has nurtured a network of local organizations over the years, and has helped them coordinate their work to maximize the benefits for the watershed, the community and the Bay. In the past 12 months, the RCD has paid particular attention to efforts that monitor or improve water quality in Alhambra Creek. RCD coordination was particularly beneficial in the two projects described below.

An Extreme Cleanup!

Extreme sports, and daredevil acts are all the rage these days, but in Alhambra Watershed, residents turned their energies to conquering the extremely steep terrain, and the extremely large accumulation of trash that had been illegally dumped into the creek along Alhambra Valley Road. It took the combined efforts of the RCD, of volunteers from several local groups, and County workers with heavy equipment to haul over four tons of debris, tires and discarded appliances up the steep banks of Arroyo Del Hambre Creek. No longer would the creek

flow through a toxic accumulation of old TVs, animal waste, and disintegrating plastic. No longer would these pollutants be carried downstream into Alhambra Creek and the Bay. With great teamwork, local partnerships and the determination of people committed to making a difference, we succeeded in improving water quality and wildlife habitat in this creek.

Monitoring Water Quality

When water is constantly flowing downstream its easy for periodic dumping of liquid waste (like emptying chlorinated water from hot-tubs or pools) to go undetected. The RCD organized an educational water testing program for high school students in the New Leaf Collaborative program. This school is conveniently located on the banks of Alhambra Creek. With help from experts on the county staff, the students were trained in the whys and hows of water quality monitoring. They will be checking the creek water weekly or bi-weekly and forwarding their test results to the Martinez Clean Water Officer. This will help develop an overall picture of what's in Alhambra Creek water, and what problems should be the target of the increasingly scarce funding.

Since county governments around the San Francisco Bay-Delta now participate in one regional agreement to protect water quality in the Bay, there is more uniformity in the goals for protecting this important water resource. Just as each tributary creek feeds into a bigger creek or water body, each of our individual efforts contributes to the larger community-wide, county-wide and region-wide effort to protect our treasured Bay-Delta. Whether an individual makes a personal effort to keep trash and toxics out of the creeks, or joins with a community group on a cleanup event, the RCD supports everyone's efforts to protect our natural resources.



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Resource Conservation District**

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