

Protecting and Restoring Sonoma County's Ecological Treasure

Summer 2010

Laguna Learning Center Update

David Bannister, Executive Director

GOOD NEWS! Thanks to improved bond sales, our partner, the California Coastal Conservancy has given us the good news that our previously awarded (but not funded) \$700,000 grant for the Laguna Learning Center is now available! As you probably know, we moved into our administrative offices in the restored civil war era farmhouse on the property in the fall of 2009. That completed Phase I of the project here on the City of Santa Rosa's Stone Farm. With the release of the grant, look for these additional parts of the project to start happening!

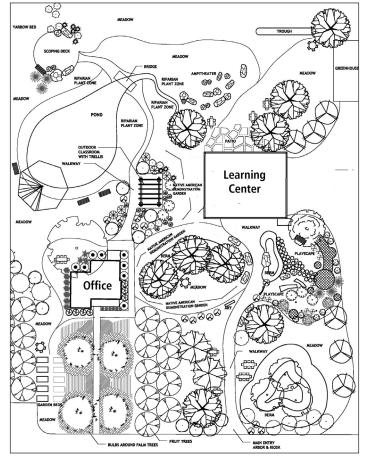
Phase II- Outdoor Learning Center

Landscaping plans for the Outdoor Learning Center are complete (right) and work should begin soon. Thanks to Allen Land Designs and Board Member Jeff Allen for providing these plans and assistance at a much reduced cost!

Phase III- Learning Center Building

We'll be constructing a "barn style" building which will house the Learning Laguna Program. We will use it for Learning Laguna class field trips, for docent education classes, adult environmental education, meetings, events, and more. The building will have views to the Laguna, Irwin Creek, Mt. St. Helena and the Geysers.

All of this could not be done for the budget we have without generous community support: volunteers, contractors working for a fraction of their normal rate, materials supplied at substantial discounts, and the like. If you would like to help, please contact Board Member and Project Manager, Ken Churchill, by email: ken@churchill-cellars.com.



Stone Farm site plan. Produced by: Sierra Hart, Director of Design, Allen Land Design

Components of the Outdoor Learning Center Include:

- Heritage farm garden and orchard- In keeping with the fact that this site has been in agriculture for most of the last 150 years, we'll be growing some food!
- Farm pond with emerging wetland indicator plant species- We'll • be on the watch for wildlife using the pond as well; like the great egrets and great blue herons seen "dipping" captured gophers in the pond before sending them "down the hatch" this winter.
- Installation of native trees and shrubs, plus a greenhouse to supplement our Native Plant Nursery.
- Native plant traditional uses garden.

- Bird observatory platform with spotting scopes- We're up to over 40 species on our "house list" and always looking for more.
- Playscape area for kids. ٠
- Picnic tables, benches, etc.
- Pathways between areas.
- Interpretive signage throughout. •

Outdoor Learning Center Volunteer Workdays

Second Saturday of every month, beginning July 10, 9am -noon

Executive Director Report - David Bannister

It is an exciting time at the Laguna Foundation as spring turns to summer. Attending our annual Delta Pond rookery walk on May 1st, over 150 excited nature enthusiasts made their way out to see the adult great egret, great blue heron and cormorant birds caring for their recently hatched young. Many on the walks also were fortunate to get great looks at a bittern preening and quite visible in the marsh below the pond.

As you may know, the Laguna Trail is being constructed by the Open Space District this year. This trail will go from Meadowlark Field on Hwy. 12 thru to Occidental Road. The trail will enable people to enjoy and learn about the Laguna, and we hope that knowledge translates to public support for Laguna restoration. In fact, the Trail will go through an area where we have done considerable restoration plantings, and where we have plans to do more. So hikers will be able to see first hand the improvements to the Laguna ecosystem that the Foundation has been actively pursuing.

Another aspect of restoring the Laguna ecosystem is removing or controlling invasive exotics from the system. Several years ago we undertook a Ludwigia control project in two reaches of the Laguna. This project was driven by public health concerns about West Nile virus that is spread by mosquitoes. That project had a short term goal of clearing the plant from the Laguna channel in certain stretches where it was particularly impenetrable. That objective was achieved but the success was short lived. Several years later, the plant is just as thick and impenetrable as it was before the project. As the

Questioning Keeps Learning Alive!

Christine Fontaine, Director of Education Programs

Laguna docents have been extra busy this school year and the summer schedule looks like it will be just as full! We've traveled from the Laguna to Ukiah to the Central Valley and to Tomales Bay for continuing education opportunities; tabled at Earth Day events; led the Delta Pond Rookery walks and other public education outings; visited 38 elementary school classrooms and led 38 Learning Laguna field trips this school year... that's almost 1000 children who received four hours of direct engagement with the Laguna, its function, and its flora & fauna.

Not only do docents know about the biology of the Laguna, they practice teaching techniques that help students come to know the Laguna for themselves. Instead of simply relaying information and telling students what to think, we challenge students *to* think. When a bird flies overhead, we point it out and, instead of saying "Look at the great blue heron!" we engage students by asking questions like: *What do you notice about that bird? How is it flying? Where do you think it is going? How long are its legs? In what ways would long legs be helpful? With a bill like that, what do you think that bird eats? How might it catch its food?* We may tell the students the name after an investigation, after they have already been thinking like an ornithologist!



Male egret with display feathers at Delta Pond Rookery. Photo: Drew Jackson

organization that stands up for the Laguna ecosystem, the Laguna Foundation is now interested (as we always were) in a long term management plan for this invasive plant. I have been reaching out to decision makers—both elected officials at the local, state and federal levels as well as Agency managers—to get support for finding and implementing a long term, ecosystem health focused solution. While the problem is daunting, it is exciting to "get to work."

When I read in a student thank you letter: "I answered a lot of questions and I learned not to throw trash on the ground and I learned to not make noise so the birds won't fly away. This was the best day of my life." then I know our methods, the skill of the docents and all our hard work makes a difference—that we foster connections between children and their home environment and we are helping create citizens who make choices that regard the environment.

This summer we will be creating a Laguna learning experience for SuperKids camp and hosting these 50+ campers at the Sebastopol Preserve. Docents will also be leading private tours of the Sebastopol Preserve, and teaching at two new events: the rescheduled 'Family Wetland Exploration' and the 'Santa Rosa Plain Bike & Hike' as part of our new and exciting partnership with LandPaths and the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District. In August we'll be leading another adventure for the iWalk Sebastopol program. Keep an eye on our website for opportunities to experience the wonders of the Laguna for yourself... for a chance to meet the docents and let them help you train your eyes and ears toward meaningful observations about the Laguna and its wetlands!

Restoration Department Update

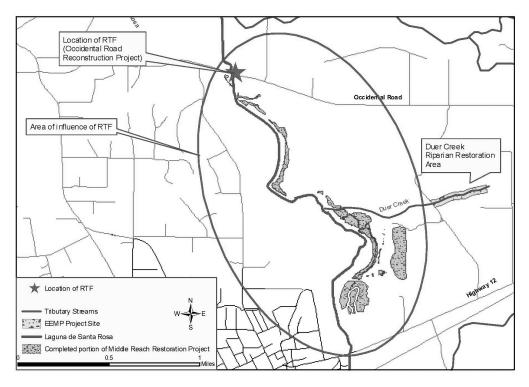
Catherine Cumberland, Restoration Program Manager

Last month, the Foundation was awarded a CalTrans "Environmental Enhancement" grant for work on Duer creek at Kelly Farm. This seasonal tributary is only about a mile long from its headwaters to its confluence with the Laguna, but for such a small creek it has seen plenty of impacts. Over the past couple hundred years it's been denuded of bankside vegetation, straightened, culverted, and partially dammed. Its furthest downstream reach, which previously forked into two channels, has been blocked into one. It is impinged upon on all sides by agricultural impacts, including vineyards, annual discing, and application of composted biosolids; and though it was recontoured and trees were planted in the 1990s by the City of Santa Rosa, it still lacks a continuous tree canopy.

Around the same time as Duer creek was recontoured, the Laguna was taking a hit at the Occidental bridge crossing. There, the Laguna divided into

a "braided" reach of three channels. In 1990, CalTrans replaced the three wooden bridges crossing the Laguna with a single concrete bridge six feet higher than the originals. In addition to consolidating three bridges into one, the center channel was enlarged and the three channels consolidated into one. The one remaining channel directs all water under the bridge, but the other two channels were blocked by the embankment, which spans the 3000-ft. wide floodplain effectively blocking 90% of the natural flow. The backwater effect caused by the embankment was predicted to raise 10-year flood levels between Highway 12 and Occidental Road by 3-4 inches. When combined with bridge projects further downstream, flood levels were predicted to rise 6-7 inches. This was considered acceptable at the time because there were few buildings in the impact area. However, no consideration was given to the effect of higher and more frequent flooding on biotic resources.

The largest and most long-lived riparian trees in this section of the Laguna are valley oaks, a species with high habitat value but only moderate flood tolerance. Tree removal impacts at the bridge site included 83 mature trees, but at least 30 acres of the Laguna floodplain upstream of the site are no longer conducive to supporting valley oak as the dominant riparian canopy species. Tree density in Northwest riparian zones averages 200-350 trees/acre (according to BLM surveys), yet the total riparian mitigation required by CalTrans was only 415 trees.



Location of Duer Creek EEMP Site

Prepared by Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation November 2009 Map ID 687-A

Twenty years after the 1990 impact, it was clear that several factors were unanticipated and required additional mitigation. First, it was stated that the channels were typically dry in summer. On the contrary, the channel underneath the Occidental bridge has not dried up for many years, even drought years. Second, reduced channel capacity means the flood backwater affects a larger area of the floodplain than anticipated (consistent with the revision of the FEMA 100 year flood contour line, which was changed from 74' to 76' to reflect the Laguna's decreasing storage capacity). There has also been significant sedimentation upstream and downstream of the bridge, further reducing storage capacity and increasing backwater effect. Third, the number of trees impacted is far greater than the number removed, due to the weakening of upstream canopy trees from flood stress and the limited recruitment of new trees, particularly valley oaks.

The purpose of the Environmental Enhancement & Mitigation (EEM) grant is to help offset these kinds of longer-term, unforeseen impacts. CalTrans has allocated funding for projects which are directly or indirectly related to the environmental impact of modifying transportation facilities. As the nearest upstream tributary to the bridge site, Duer creek offered an opportunity to create 8 acres of habitat and increase functionality in a degraded setting with a close relationship to the impacted area. Work along Duer creek ties into and expands the restoration plantings undertaken by the Foundation and City of Santa Rosa for a total of nearly 70 acres restored.



Gala Undergoes Exciting Changes

Susan Churchill, Gala Committee Chair

The Gala committee has been hard at work planning another fabulous event to support the Foundation's programs. Our annual fundraising Gala will be held Sunday September 12th from 3-6 pm. Many of you reading this have probably come to this event in the past and if you have, you know what a lovely location Vine Hill House is.

We emailed a "Save the Date" last month and those of you on our email list already know that the Art & Garden Gala has become the Garden Art Gala this year. That subtle change turns out to mean a lot! This year we are going 3-D. We have over 35 enthused artists using their unique talent to create a memorable piece of art for your backyard or garden area. Here are a few we have heard about so far: bird feeders, baths and nesting boxes, outdoor furniture, fountains, sculpture of various medium, ladies garden art hats, and more.

We also couldn't help but notice that every wine lot offered last year sold. Okay, if the people want wine, we can do that! But not just any wine. As at previous Gala events the committee members are soliciting Laguna area wineries and we plan to have some really wonderful lots to pique your interest. We are once again planning to offer "big bottles" for those special occasions. Do you know the number of regular wine bottles in a magnum, double magnum, jeroboam, imperial and melchior? Neither do we, but we will on September 12th!

Not content with changing the type of art and the wine available at auction, our dedicated Gala committee also decided to create a slightly different gastronomic experience. The finishing touches are still being made, but come prepared to sample delicious, local artisan foods such as heirloom tomatoes being grown by our own Denise Cadman specifically for this event paired with exotic sea salts, oysters fresh from Drake's Bay shucked on site, gourmet cheeses from Redwood Hill Farm, and desserts prepared by our own local baker extraordinaire, Glenn Minervini-Zick of ZIX.

This event is going to be the party of the year! If you haven't been in the past, make sure to check it out this year. The location is outdoors at 3601 Vine Hill Road, Sebastopol, at the spectacular Vine Hill House complete with fabulous views overlooking the Laguna, the Santa Rosa Plain, and across to the Mayacamas Mountains. One thing that we didn't change since we didn't get to hear enough of them last year is the music. The Mighty Chiplings are coming back to perform some amazing bluegrass. This teenage group will knock your socks off!

Can't wait? Neither can we. But in order to make sure you have a ticket, you should fill out the form below and mail it back with your check. We are expecting a sell out, so don't delay!! Also, please consider being a Sponsor of the Gala. Sponsorship levels come with mention in the program, event signage and tickets! Again, see the form below or go to our website to become a Sponsor.

Garden Art Gala 2010

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Bobcat Sponsor (\$1,000, includes 6 tickets)

Heron Sponsor (*\$500, includes 4 tickets*)

Egret Sponsor (\$250, includes 2 tickets)

_ Individual Tickets (\$75 each)

I'm sorry I cannot attend, but enclosed is my contribution of \$_____ to help your event be a success. (If sponsoring) please list in the program and promotional materials as:

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Enclosed is my check <i>or</i> I prefer to charge my Visa or Master Name on Card Credit Card # Expiration/ Signature	

Remit to Laguna Foundation 900 Sanford Road, Santa Rosa, CA 95401

Endangered Plant and Pollinator Ecology Study

Hattie Brown, Research Project Supervisor

This spring is the second year of an important 3 year Conservation Science Program research project focused on pollinators and their role in ensuring the sustained reproduction of three endangered annual plants found only in vernal pools on the Santa Rosa Plain and nowhere else on Earth! Initiated by Dr. Christina Sloop, this pollination and reproductive ecology study represents a direct partnership between the Laguna Foundation Conservation Science Program staff and Sonoma State University professor Dr. Nathan Rank, graduate student Kandis Gilmore, and a dedicated bunch of student interns and volunteers.

The study aims to answer questions about the importance of plant-insect interactions and soil seed bank dynamics in ensuring the long-term persistence of these endangered plants: Sonoma sunshine, Sebastopol meadowfoam, and Burke's goldfields. They are annual flowering plants that germinate from seeds stored in the

soil (for as long as 10-20+ years!), grow and flower in the spring, and attract specialist solitary bees (about half to three quarters the size of honey bees) to pollinate the flowers and so help produce seed for the coming years.

With this study, we are trying to understand which pollinators visit which endangered plant species, to what degree the plants need pollinators to produce viable seed, the pollinator community and relative abundance at different sites on the Santa Rosa Plain, and the seed set – or number of viable seeds produced by these endangered flowers.

We are also devising and testing methods to investigate the belowground soil seed bank of these endangered plants. Seeds from Sonoma sunshine, Sebastopol meadowfoam, and Burke's goldfields may remain viable up to 20+ years in the soil. The correct environmental cues to germinate can fluctuate across years, and this long-lived seed bank is the strategy to survive in the highly variable conditions of their extremely wet or extremely dry vernal pool habitat. Therefore, visiting a vernal pool site in a very dry year with very few plants growing may not necessarily indicate that the population is dying out. There may be a vast number of seeds "waiting" to germinate and grow in a future "good" year. To complete this study we've perfected techniques both for germinating endangered plant seed as well as finding and identifying seeds from soil samples - a needle in the haystack process yielding interesting results!

By the end of this study we will be able to use pollinator presence, seed set, and soil seed bank reserves to compare artificially constructed vernal pool environments and naturally occurring vernal pools throughout the Santa Rosa Plain.



Sebastopol meadowfoam with pollinator. Photo: Hattie Brown

Citizen Scientist volunteers are busy collecting data on endangered plant species on the Santa Rosa Plain. In partnership with the California Native Plant Society Milo Baker Chapter, our Adopt a Vernal Pool program collects critical long-term data population and community data on endangered vernal pool plants: Sonoma sunshine (*Blennosperma bakeri*), Sebastopol meadowfoam (*Limnanthes vinculans*), and Burke's goldfields (*Lasthenia burkei*).

Thank you Citizen Scientists for all of your hard work!

Matthew Anderson, Chris Bailey, Joe Balestreri, Betsy Black, Jim Bray, Barbara Briggs-Letson, Denise Cadman, Pat Chan, Caroline Christian, Wayne Clark, Ian Creelman, Heather Davis, Frank Dono, Sheri Emerson, Sarah Gordon, John Herrick, Lynn Houser, William Hoyer, William Hoyer III, Elmarie Hutchinson, George Jackson, Wendy Jones, Morgan Kennedy, John Krafft, Kelley Lamke, Michele Lee, Betsy Livingstone, Teri Macias, Julian Meisler, Trisha Meisler, Walter Muelken, Jana Muhar, Dan Noreen, Leah Ocean, Amber Parsons, Jennifer Potts, Ray Rapp, Mary Rooney, Phyllis Schmitt, Joan Schwan, Bryan Sesser, Patricia Sesser, Matt Smith, Jen Stanfield, Kathy Teare, Roana Tirado, Bob Weis, and Darren Wiemeyer.

Foundation Launches Membership Campaign

At last! You can now support the Laguna Foundation's efforts to protect, restore and educate the public about the wonders of the Laguna by becoming a Member! It's easy, it's quick and it's cheap! Simply complete and send back the membership form below and mail it back to us. Or, you can do it quickly and easily with a credit card online. Either way you join, you'll receive:

- Invitations to Hikes and Events On a monthly basis, we will send you our E-News which provides information on our free hikes, volunteer opportunities and special Member events
- A subscription to our *Meanderings* newsletter, which will keep you up-to-date on the Foundation's restoration, conservation science and education programs
- A Laguna Foundation "Member" static sticker for your car
- Invitations to special "Members Only" events (more on these to come as we are busy brainstorming ideas).

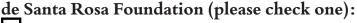
In addition,

- Sponsor Members will also receive 1 ticket to our annual Garden Art Gala.
- Benefactor Members will receive 2 tickets to the Garden Art Gala.

These tickets are a \$75 value each and it is a fantastic event at Vine Hill House overlooking the Laguna. See the article about the new and improved event!

So, if you haven't already become a Member, please consider doing so now so we can continue to do the important work we do on the Santa Rosa Plain.

Yes! I want to become a Member of the Laguna



- Regular Membership \$25
- Family Membership \$50
- Contributing Membership \$100
- Sustaining Membership \$250
- Sponsor Membership \$500 (includes 1 Gala Ticket)
- Benefactor Membership \$1,000 (includes 2 Gala Tickets)

Enclosed is my membership check *or* I prefer to charge my Visa or MasterCard:

Name on Card

Credit Card #

Expiration ____/ ___ Signature _____



Citizen Scientists collecting data on endangered plant species. Photo: Hattie Brown

New Business Sponsorship Program

If you own or manage a business, this program is for you! Wouldn't your organization like to partner with the Laguna Foundation and the important work we do? Our Business Sponsors will get lots of recognition and thanks from our thousands of supporters.

Contact Executive Director David Bannister to arrange a meeting to discuss the Program (707) 527-9277 x.103 or go to our website for more information and to sign up online: www.lagunafoundation.org/donate_ sponsorships.htm

Member Name(s): _	
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Thank You Member!

Remit to **Laguna Foundation** 900 Sanford Road, Santa Rosa, CA 95401

Thank you to our generous supporters since our last Meanderings...

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Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation, founded in 1989, works to preserve, restore, and inspire greater understanding and appreciation of the Laguna de Santa Rosa wetland complex, which is the largest tributary of the Russian River and one of Sonoma County's richest wildlife area. The Foundation conducts educational programs, implements preservation and restoration projects, conducts scientific research, works with landowners and public agencies to protect and improve Laguna resources, and advocates for appropriately managed opportunities for the public to enjoy the Laguna.

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Upcoming Laguna Outings

Santa Rosa Plain Bike & Hike Saturday, June 19, 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Pump up the tires, grab your helmet... and walking shoes! We'll take an easy ride along the Joe Rodota Trail, detouring to walk (and ride) at District-protected properties along the way. This adventure will highlight future trails, wildlife, agriculture, a historic oak forest, and more. Fun for the whole family!

Family Wetland Exploration Sunday, June 27, (new date) 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM Arrive between 10 AM & Noon, stay two hours

Thousands of school children have explored Kelly Wetland through our Learning Laguna program. Here is your chance to experience the magic of the place with your family. Laguna docents will be on hand at several learning stations around the wetland. Upon arrival each child will receive a learning "passport," scavenger hunt, and a trail map. Follow the map for fun and dynamic hands-on learning. Complete the passport for a special reward at the end! Bring a picnic lunch so you can linger and enjoy this special day.

Offered in Partnership with LandPaths and the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

Details and registration information: www.lagunafoundation.org



Killdeer chick *Charadrius vociferus*

Illustration: Molly Eckler