

## Laguna Learning Center: Coming to Life!

*Dan Schurman, Executive Director*

The Civil War-era farmhouse at Stone Farm is rising from the dead – literally! The Laguna Foundation's dream of creating a restoration, teaching, and research headquarters for Laguna conservation is taking shape at the site on Occidental Road northeast of the bridge. The compact two-story frame house with its signature palm trees has long been an iconic landmark to West County residents trekking across Occidental Road.

If you drove by during the past several weeks you might have thought your eyes were deceiving you, but yes, the house wasn't behind its palms anymore. The old house was jacked up and moved off its crumbling foundation to make way for a new one. While waiting for the new foundation, the old lead-based paint on the building's exterior was removed and an interim primer coat was applied.

The house is now back on its new foundation and will be completely renovated during the next several months. In its new life it will serve as the Foundation offices and be known as the Smith-Marler House in recognition of the extensive generosity of Dan Smith and Joan Marler in helping to resuscitate the Laguna Foundation in the early part of this decade and launch the campaign to build the Laguna Learning Center.

Earlier this summer, much of the important and expensive site work was performed: a new driveway off Sanford Road, site grading, old well and septic abandonment, water lines including fire hydrants, recycled water lines for irrigation and "purple" uses in the old farmhouse/new office, electric utility and phone service brought in from the road, etc. All these improvements will benefit future phases of the project as the interpretive center is built and other uses are added.

The project is being managed by Eric Neilson of Jim Murphy & Associates (JMA), one of Sonoma County's most accomplished general contracting firms. JMA is discounting their regular fees for the Learning Center project and many other subcontractors and suppliers are donating or discounting their products and labor. A huge thanks to Guy Smith, Foundation Board member, long-time Laguna landowner and heavy equipment operator, for his generosity in working extensively on the site while he could have been earning much more with his equipment on another project.



A volunteer workday for interior demolition of the second floor.  
Photo: Wayne Mitchell

While the roof was being removed and replaced in October, Laguna Keepers, Learning Laguna docents, and other Foundation volunteers turned out for two house interior demolition parties. Upstairs the ancient lath-and-plaster walls were crumbled down to the studs and downstairs the old redwood bead board paneling was carefully removed for re-use as wainscoting in the new office. Many thanks to the tireless folks who showed up and stayed till the job was done.

Renovation and conversion of the old farmhouse to offices for the Foundation is only the first step in what will one day be an inspiring hub of conservation, restoration, research, education and recreation activities in support and celebration of a thriving Laguna ecosystem. It will continue to be a landmark for Occidental Road travelers but it will become much more to the entire community: a destination for everyone who wants to learn about, study, restore, teach, observe, celebrate, hike in, paddle on, or simply experience the Laguna. It will be a community treasure and its presence and the activities it will spawn will ensure that the Laguna too will remain a treasure for generations to come.

# Executive Director's Report

Dan Schurman

In the last issue of *Meanderings*, I wrote about the valuable partnerships the Foundation has been able to forge and how instrumental they have been in our growth and accomplishments of recent years. The power of partnerships was on full display at the recent inaugural meeting of the Laguna Stakeholder Council. I say inaugural but the Council is really a continuation of the advisor stakeholders who participated in the creation of *Enhancing and Caring for the Laguna*, the comprehensive restoration and management plan (RMP) for the Laguna watershed that the Foundation published late last year.

Building on relationships developed in the planning process, the new Stakeholder Council will become an ongoing forum for information sharing, investigating issues on the land, formulating strategies, and forging further collaborations in support of the restoration and enhancement goals of the RMP. The Council will also serve as a forum for emerging issues and initiatives and their incorporation into the RMP strategies.

The 55 attendees of the October meeting represented the councils and staffs of the cities of the watershed, the county, state and federal resource and regulatory agencies, resource conservation districts, landowners, creek groups, environmental and advocacy groups, and concerned and interested citizens. They heard several presentations on ongoing planning, implementation, and research projects happening in the watershed: the Santa Rosa Creeks Master Plan, the emerging similar effort in Rohnert Park-Cotati, the Foundation's Ludwigia Control and Middle Reach restoration projects, the Foundation's water quality modeling project that will serve as a precursor to and accelerator

of the Laguna TMDL study, the preservation of Cunningham and Pitkin Marshes, results of the Laguna enhancement opinion survey, the Foundation's own 5-year work plan, and the Laguna sediment transport modeling project. The USGS is doing the modeling project as part of the US Army Corps of Engineers' long-term Laguna study that will hopefully one day result in a large Corps project to enhance the flood control and habitat features of the Laguna.

The Council will meet as a large body 3 or 4 times a year and smaller committees will work as needed on specific issues of interest to the Council (e.g. education and community outreach, research and "citizen science," restoration project planning, conservation acquisitions, land management, etc.). In addition, the Council will organize field trips for its members to experience and investigate first-hand the wonders of the Laguna and the challenges we face in enhancing and caring for it.

Given the jurisdictional complexity of the Laguna, such an inter-agency approach is required for effective conservation. The Foundation views its role as the convener and facilitator of this collaboration and as an implementer of the initiatives that advance the goals of the RMP. The community spirit and support for Laguna conservation is strong and focusing it in this way is a primary strategy for the Foundation. The power of partnerships is what will "save" the Laguna.

For more information on the Laguna Stakeholder Council, please contact Joe Honton at x.105 or [joe@lagunafoundation.org](mailto:joe@lagunafoundation.org).

## Help Us Achieve the Learning Center Dream



We are thrilled by the progress of the Laguna Learning Center but we need your help and participation to complete the project.

Construction remains on schedule, but we're still in need of assistance in the form of contributions and pledges of cash, stock or other assets, donations of labor (frame and finish carpenters, drywallers, plumbers, electricians, wood floor refinishers,

landscapers) and materials (lumber, drywall, cable and electrical conduit, pipes and plumbing fixtures, counter tops, office furniture, gravel, mulch, plants, irrigation supplies, propane tank).

Please contact Dan Schurman x.104 or [dan@lagunafoundation.org](mailto:dan@lagunafoundation.org) if you or someone you know can provide help with labor or materials. For information on the project and the campaign for the Center, contact Wayne Mitchell x.111 or [wayne@lagunafoundation.org](mailto:wayne@lagunafoundation.org).

Executive Director sighted in his "natural habitat." Photo: Wayne Mitchell



# Next steps in *Ludwigia* Control and Ecosystem Restoration

Julian Meisler, Restoration Program Director

For the last three summers, the Laguna Foundation has been leading an effort to control the nonnative and highly invasive aquatic weed *Ludwigia sp.* Working in two densely infested areas of the Laguna, we used a combination of herbicide application and mechanical removal to open over 5 miles of previously clogged channels. Open channels have benefits for wildlife and flood capacity and those of us lucky enough to kayak the Laguna. As a result of this work, the Marin/Sonoma Mosquito & Vector Control District has also reported increased ability to control mosquitoes within the cleared channels, a major objective of the project in the context of risks from West Nile Virus.

Our work has shown us that while *Ludwigia* control is attainable in varying degrees, it is also highly dependent on local conditions. For these reasons, we now have to ask how long these areas will remain open, and how can we achieve lasting control?

We have observed that shallow stagnant areas experience regrowth almost immediately, while in contrast, deeper channels retain control for longer periods. However, it has become clear that recolonization of *Ludwigia* in open channels will be imminent unless systemic watershed problems are treated – addressing the ‘root’ of the problem so to speak! Therefore the next steps include developing programs that address such issues as excessive nutrient and sediment inputs, existing conditions of nutrient laden sediments throughout the channels and wetlands, the presence of perennial water in seasonal systems, the lack of riparian vegetation and more.



Mechanical removal of *Ludwigia*

Photo: Julian Meisler

Fortunately the Laguna Foundation has many partners working toward solutions to these problems. The Regional Water Board’s development of regulatory standards for the enforcement of total maximum daily load (TMDL) values for the six recognized Laguna impairments (dissolved oxygen, temperature, nutrients, phosphorus, nitrogen, sediment, and mercury) will be essential over the coming years. Site specific restoration plans are beginning and ongoing and *Ludwigia* research by the USDA holds promise for future alternatives.

While the *Ludwigia* Control Project is complete in its current form, we and others are moving forward with a deeper understanding to tackle the underlying problems of which *Ludwigia* is but a symptom.

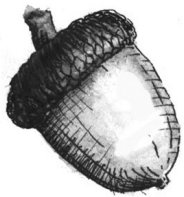
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## LagunaKeeper 2007–2008 Season Gets Underway

Catherine Cumberland, Restoration Program Assistant

The first LagunaKeeper event of the fall was a great start to the season. Sincere thanks to all who turned out to help! Volunteers removed 300 plastic tree shelters as well as 185 weed-suppression mats from an earlier restoration project along Duer creek.

The work inspired a lively discussion on recycling. Once again Keepers held us to a high standard of minimal waste and maximum reuse of resources in our restoration projects. Our next workday is at Kelly Farm (5344 Occidental Rd.), November 17th from 9:00-noon for those who’d like to join the work and conversation.



For the first time in years there’s a good acorn crop. Late-summer warmth has ripened them up and loosened their caps, and we’ve been bagging them as fast as they fall. We’re collecting acorns from 15 different Laguna locations – about 50 individual trees – to ensure good genetic diversity. Over 6,000 acorns will be planted this fall (with help from volunteers, of course!), at Kelly Farm and on Sebastopol’s Meadowlark Field. Check our events calendar on Page 5 for more details.

Also this winter, we’ll plant basket sedge along the channel. Basket sedge is important culturally as well as ecologically. The plant’s long rhizomes, which help retain soil and stabilize weak points in the Laguna’s banks, are highly valued for use in indigenous basketry. If you’d like to join us, contact Catherine x.108 or [catherine@lagunafoundation.org](mailto:catherine@lagunafoundation.org).

The Middle Reach Restoration Project is ready for winter. Both weeds and seedlings were wildly successful in their first season together. Seedlings maintained a slight lead, despite rodent damage (stripped tree roots; nibbled water lines). As the water table fell in the floodplain clay this fall, we saw how burrowing critters utilize the large cracks that open in the soil – which served as cool, protected pathways between plant roots.

The Middle Reach Restoration Project will get a boost from a grant awarded by the California Wildlife Conservation Board in August of this year, which provides the last \$200,000 of the Project’s Phase I budget. We are grateful to all our funding partners for this project, including the State Coastal Conservancy, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Community Foundation Sonoma County.

# 'Adopt a Vernal Pool' Research Program - The Santa Rosa Plain

## Vernal Pool Ecosystem Needs Our Attention

Christina Sloop, Research Director

Vernal pools are rare temporary wetlands caused by depressions in non-permeable soils. They are found right in the heart of the vast Laguna floodplain, throughout Santa Rosa Plain (SRP). They support highly adapted, largely endemic communities of plant and animal species which have evolved to live in the cycle of seasonally wet and dry conditions. Within the last 50 years, the SRP has lost 85% of its vernal pools through major land use transformations. This change has significantly reduced the number of populations of endemic, now endangered, vernal pool plant species, found nowhere else on Earth: Sonoma sunshine, Burke's goldfields, Sebastopol meadowfoam, and many-flowered navarretia.



Sonoma sunshine

Photo: [www.renyswildflowers.com](http://www.renyswildflowers.com)

Today, remaining vernal pools face a variety of stresses due to different microhabitat and management conditions, such as competition with exotic plants. Surprisingly, assessments of the current state of the surviving vernal pool plant populations are scarce. Their population numbers are declining, and my recent genetic survey for two of these endangered plants underscores the urgency to preserve every

surviving population. To secure their long-term recovery we urgently need additional baseline and long-term data, collected in a standardized fashion, so we can broadly assess the current and continued state of 'health' of the SRP vernal pool ecosystem.

The Laguna Foundation research department is now seeking the necessary funding to start a skilled volunteer-based, long-term vernal pool assessment program to respond to this urgent need. Each specially trained botanist volunteer will 'adopt'

one or more sites for yearly surveys using our standardized methods. Our Laguna Ecosystem Database will then serve as the repository of all monitoring data each year, and our short and long-term findings will serve to inform adaptive management decisions aimed at plant recovery.

If you are a trained botanist or skilled botany enthusiast and are interested in joining this program, please contact Christina Sloop at x.101 or [christina@lagunafoundation.org](mailto:christina@lagunafoundation.org).

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## Interesting Survey Results

Joe Honton, Watershed Outreach and Data Manager

A recent opinion survey about the Laguna was conducted which yielded some interesting results. An invitation to participate in the survey was sent by email to landowners, agencies representatives, advocacy groups, elected representatives, and Laguna Foundation volunteers. Responses to the survey's questions were recorded and tabulated online using an Internet response form. In all, 306 people gave their opinion about restoration priorities, land management practices, research needs, educational opportunities for stakeholders, and perceptions about future threats.

...Controlling the spread of invasive plants and increasing the width of riparian forests together received 52% of respondents' votes as restoration opportunities that provide the greatest benefit.

...Reconnecting fragmented habitat corridors, removing non-native species, and reducing excess nutrients in waterways, together received 64% of respondents' votes as problems that should be worked on first.

...Perennial wetlands, riparian forests, vernal pools, and seasonal floodplains, together received 65% of respondents' votes as habitat types most in need of preservation.

...Water quality and water quantity; and wildlife distribution and movement; together received 55% of respondents' votes as topics that are most in need of new research.

...Urban expansion, groundwater depletion, and loss of habitat together received 66% of respondents' votes as potential threats to the watershed in the coming decade.

...Finally, two questions related to the possibility of establishing an expert-led field seminar series, revealed that respondents want more information and more involvement in all topics related to the Laguna. Respondents clearly emphasized their desire to observe the Laguna first hand, to learn from the experts, and to help make good decisions based on good information.

*The results of the survey can be found online at:*  
[www.lagunadesantarosa.org/pdfs/opinion\\_survey\\_2007.pdf](http://www.lagunadesantarosa.org/pdfs/opinion_survey_2007.pdf)

# OPPORTUNITIES TO GET INVOLVED WITH THE LAGUNA DE SANTA ROSA WATERSHED

## LagunaKeeper Events

LagunaKeepers are the Foundation's habitat restoration volunteers. Each month, in partnership with the City of Santa Rosa, we meet to give the Laguna a little hands-on love! This can mean fence removal, willow sprigging, weed control, or planting, depending on the site and the time of year.

Keepers meet at locations throughout the Laguna, but workdays are always on a **Saturday** from **9am to noon**. Tools, gloves, and snacks are provided, along with plenty of fresh air and camaraderie.

We have workdays scheduled throughout the winter. Planting in the rainy season gives seedlings a chance to establish before temperatures get too high and soil dries out. Winter is also a great time to see waterfowl and other wet-weather inhabitants of the Laguna.

**Only heavy rain cancels** LagunaKeeper events.

### November 17

#### Oak Woodland Restoration

Be part of converting a nearly treeless 10-acre hillside into oak woodland. Enter at 5344 Occidental Rd. across from Hanna winery; follow signs to the worksite.

### December 8

#### Cotati Creek Critters Collaboration

We'll help the CCC give some TLC to the Laguna headwaters area. Meet at Ladybug Lot on Lakewood Ave. in Cotati. Directions at [www.cotaticreekcritters.info](http://www.cotaticreekcritters.info).

### January 19

#### Willow Sprigging

Willows can help stabilize bare spots or minor erosion on the banks of the Laguna. Help us cut and install sprigs. Meet at Kelly Farm (5344 Occidental Rd.) & we'll caravan to the job site.

### February 23

#### Joint Wetlands Workday

Planting at the Joint Wetlands area. We'll also begin work on the new native plant garden. Meet at 4300 Llano Rd. & follow the signs to the "Admin" building.

### March 15

#### Windmill Creek

Previous work on Windmill Creek began establishing a tree canopy. Now to the next reach! Meet at the Brown Farm gate: 2200 Llano Rd. just north of Grab 'n Grow.

*For more information, to receive a calendar, or for monthly reminders of LagunaKeeper work dates, please call Catherine Cumberland x.108 or email [catherine@lagunafoundation.org](mailto:catherine@lagunafoundation.org)*

## Cotati Creek Critter Events



### INSIDE/OUTSIDE NATURE EDUCATION SERIES

**Monday, November 5, 2007, 7pm**

**Habitat Gardening with Native Plants**

*with Phil Van Soelen, California Flora Nursery*

**Monday, December 3, 2007, 7pm**

**The Plight of the Pond Turtle**

*with Dr. Nick Geist, Sonoma State University*

**Sunday, January 6, 2008, 9am**

**Birds of Cotati - a Winter Bird Walk**

*with John DellOsso, Point Reyes National Seashore*

**Monday, February 4, 2008, 7pm**

**Geology of the North Bay**

*with Dr. Rolfe Erickson*

**Monday, March 3, 2008, 7pm**

**Water, Power, and Politics**

*with Dr. Andy Roth, Sonoma State University*

### Community Planting Days - Join Us!

We will continue to plant native trees and shrubs along the Laguna de Santa Rosa and plant an understory of native grasses and sedges. Other tasks include weeding and mulching to maintain existing plants, plant propagation, and other tasks in our nursery.

For all planting days meet at "Ladybug Lot," Cotati City well lot #2 on Lakewood Ave.

**Saturdays, 9am - noon:**

**November 10**

**December 8**

**January 12**

**February 9**

**March 8**

**Sundays, 10am - 1pm:**

**November 25**

**December 30**

**January 27**

**February 24**

**March 30**

*For more information about the Inside/Outside Series or Cotati Creek Critter Planting Days, please visit [www.CotatiCreekCritters.info](http://www.CotatiCreekCritters.info) or contact Jenny Blaker at 792-4422 or [jenny@creeks.cotati.info](mailto:jenny@creeks.cotati.info).*

*The Cotati Creek Critters is a fiscally sponsored project of the Laguna Foundation.*

# Fourth Annual Art & Garden Gala a Smash Success!

Mark Green, Associate Executive Director

A sparkling summer day at the beautiful Vine Hill House and a capacity crowd of Foundation supporters celebrated the fourth annual Laguna Art and Garden Gala on September 9. Our most successful Gala yet was a rich afternoon of art, fine food, delicious wines and fascinating entertainment. Inspiring keynote remarks by Caryl Hart of the California Parks and Recreation Commission set the Foundation's work in context, as exactly the kind of work that is critical to maintain wildlife populations in the context of global warming.

The Foundation is grateful to the Gala's generous sponsors, to the many artists who donated their work for auction, donors of the exciting live auction "adventure packages", to caterer Mark Malicki of Café St. Rose, auctioneer David Katz and the donors of the exquisite wines enjoyed onsite and auctioned, and the volunteers who made the Gala possible. The event exceeded our expectations in every way! Thanks to all who helped the Art and Garden Gala to be such a wonderful day, providing much-needed support for the Foundation's work to protect, restore, and build public appreciation for our most important local wildlife area.

## Our wonderful EVENT COMMITTEE:

Nina Arrabit, Gail Bettinelli, Susan Churchill, Barbara Harris, Sandy Mays, Pat O'Connell, and Anne Stephens.

## The Foundation extends our deepest gratitude to:

Dan, Jan, Shannon and Mike of Vine Hill House, Mark Malicki and his crew at St. Rose Catering, Veronica Bowers of LaDolce V, and Glenn Minervini-Zick of Zix Artisan Sweets and Savories.

## Our generous contributing artists and auction donors

3-D Eddy, Barnee Alexander, Holly Anderson, Warren Arnold, Jocelyn Audette, Susan R. Ball, Jennifer Balletto, Balletto Vineyards, Abby Bard, Genevieve Barnhart, Phyllis Beals, Joel Bennett, D. A. Bishop, Tony Black, Paula Brent, Arlene Buch-Houghton, Cafe St. Rose, Martha Channer, Hugh and Connie Codding, Marsha Connell, Donna DelaBriandais, Tamsen Donner, Ryan Douglas, Louisa Fraser, Mary Fuller, Yvonne Giambrone-Martin, Green Greenwald, Glen Halverson, Adriane Hatkoff, Michael Hayden, Joe Honton, Don Jackson, Linda Kammer, Tari Kerse, K&L Bistro, Diane Laessig, Joyce Libeu, Kristina Lucas, Sandra Maresca, Larry Martin, Robert McChesney, James Millikan, Steve Milton, Craig Mitchell, Rick Mohar, Sheila O'Brien, Pat O'Connell, Julie Patterson, Hanya Popova Parker, Rivers Edge Kayak and Canoe, Robert Rice, Annie Roberts, Deborah Salomon, Micah Schwaberow, Guy Smith, Allis Teegarden, Henry Trione, Bill Wheeler, Kathleen Woolfe, Kathleen Youngquist, Allen Land Design, Dehlinger Winery, Dutton Goldfields Vineyards, Radio-Coteau, Hanna Winery, Hart's Desire Vineyards, Kosta-Browne Winery, and Scherrer Winery.

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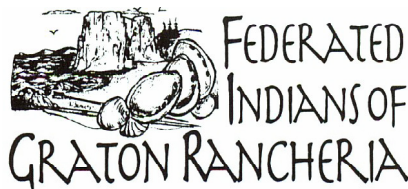
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Caryl Hart speaks to a captivated crowd Photo: Molly Matheson

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**...and, of course, all  
our donors, volunteers, and you.**



The **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 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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## Join the Fun: Become a *Learning Laguna* Docent

*Christine Fontaine, Director of Education Programs*

Learning Laguna, our dynamic environmental education program for 2-5th graders, wrapped-up programs for the year on October 26th. Thanks to the 1170+ hours our trained, volunteer docents contributed to Learning Laguna, we were able to work with 40 different classes, first by visiting those approximately 1000 students in their classroom, then by leading the children on engaging educational field trips out at the Laguna. From rain to LCD projector challenges to perfect days where every piece neatly fell into place, the docents give, flex and persevere to make sure every child has an exceptional learning experience.

In addition to the work of being a docent, sharing knowledge, appreciation and passion for the Laguna is truly fun with countless personal rewards. Knowing your efforts contribute to the overall health of the Laguna by helping influence the next generation of naturalists and stewards is quite gratifying. Staying in touch with the younger generations and experiencing awe with a group creates feelings of connectedness. Learning and following your own curiosities, then talking about it all with a group of people who share your enthusiasm creates community. Plus, when you go out, you never quite know what you will see... a flock of white pelicans landing on the Kelly Wetlands pond, red shouldered hawks fledging, a marsh wren nest in the tules, river otter scat... what could be more exciting?

Docents also have opportunities for a great variety of experiences through our Docent Circle activities. We harvest tule, spend special mornings birding around the Laguna, help clear trails, visit special places within (and some that are outside) the watershed, attend special continuing education classes, and make many new friends.

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We hope you will consider joining us for the adventure of being a docent! The training begins on March 10th and will run for ten-weeks with class on Monday afternoons. We will teach you about the natural and cultural history of the Laguna and there will be many opportunities for hikes, exploration and learning in context. If you would like to be contacted with the dates of the upcoming informational meetings, or if you would like an application, please contact Christine Fontaine x.102 or [christine@lagunafoundation.org](mailto:christine@lagunafoundation.org). We look forward to seeing you in the field!

