

## Creek Week 2004 - Another Success Story

### Creek Week Volunteers Do Something About It!

The typical Creek Week volunteer thinks it's fun to get wet and dirty while doing a good deed. Our loyal repeat volunteers look forward to the annual opportunity to perform community service outdoors, near home, yet in a semi-wild setting. Maybe you'll see some ducks — watch out for the mallard nest floating in the quiet water. Perhaps a skittish rabbit or even a deer will hop across the open field next to the creek you're working in. Some of the clean-up sites are graced with beautiful wildflower blooms. We hope each volunteer this year had a memorable adventure.



At the celebration after the morning clean up, many people swap stories about their experiences that morning. Unfortunately, reports of some discoveries cause concern. Volunteers might come across homeless encampments, trees that have been killed by escaped illegal campfires, drug paraphernalia, and water that looks and smells polluted. Each of us who cares wants to do something. We hope that you share your stories with others so that more people will be aware of the problems that affect creek health and perhaps change their behavior or get involved. We salute Creek Week volunteers for taking positive action on the clean-up day.

### Report From the Creek

If you ask Alta Tura, President of the Sacramento Urban Creeks Council, to describe Creek Week, you may learn much more about it than you want to know. The planning that starts in October of the previous year, the meetings, the fund raising, the question of how many T-shirts to order—it sounds like a lot of work. She sometimes gives me, her husband, a last minute job to do.

Like this year. A site leader couldn't make it on time but would be there later in the morning. So I went out to the meeting place. A young family arrived and we studied all the information in the leader's box together. They had never done a creek clean up before, so they had to trust me that more than fifty other sites were being cleaned up that very day, and that the little tickets I gave them were good for a T-shirt and lunch at the celebration site at noon. We talked about poison oak and red sesbania and set out with our plastic garbage bags. We had fun—just the four of us. Our section of Arcade Creek downstream from American River College was pretty clean, but we discovered some hidden trash and filled our bags. Then we ran into the real leader and lots of kids who walked and splashed their way through the creek to get more garbage. We found things to make a tiny sculpture of trash. They took lots of great pictures.

Finally we drove to the celebration site and parked in the last remaining shade, then we walked along Arcade Creek into the festivities. Many people were there, some muddy and wet, and we realized that lots of creek clean up had happened during this big event. That sense of community accomplishment and participation is the essence of Creek Week. Stepping through the looking glass from individual and small group accomplishment to community-wide involvement is a thrill every time.



2003 - 2004

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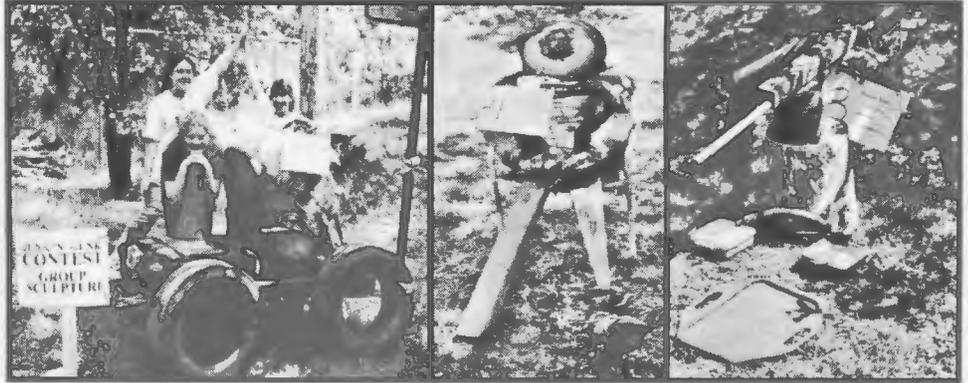
The purpose of the Urban Creeks Council of California is to encourage the preservation, protection, restoration, and maintenance of natural streams in urban environments. The goals are to educate the general public on the aesthetic, recreation, and ecological values of natural streams.

As a chapter of the statewide organization, Sacramento UCC assumes the same purpose and goals. The chapter holds regular meetings, develops educational materials, participates in neighborhood fairs and public events. It works with schools, neighborhoods, and youth groups to encourage creek clean ups and streambank restoration. It cooperates with city and county efforts to reduce pollution from stormwater runoff. It cooperates with other organizations to monitor developments along stream corridors. Membership is open to anyone who wishes to share in these activities.

Chapter meetings are generally held the second Monday of each month at the Arcade Creek Recreation and Park District. Please call (916) 482-8377 for specific meeting dates and times.

## Creative Creek Art

The Junk and Gunk contest may be the shortest annual art exhibit in Sacramento. Creek cleaners select inspiring pieces of trash and bring them to the Celebration, working in teams to create art for all to enjoy until 2:00 p.m., when the sculptures are dismantled and tossed into the dumpster. The artists enthusiastically compete for Junk and Gunk Prizes. This year's judges were Marie Smith, President of American River College; George Franco, Channel 13 reporter; and Peter Tucker, Sacramento Urban Creeks Council Web Master. We thank the judges for doing so much to make the contest great fun.



**1st Place: "How's My Driving?"**  
by Emily, Annelise and Amy

**2nd Place: "Chuck"**  
by Katie & Dominic  
Kennedy, Tetra Tech

**3rd Place: "Trash Dog"**  
by Scout Pack 531

## New Communities - New Creeks

**Mather** - The neighborhood of Independence at Mather formed a committee headed by Susan Crocker. They were concerned about the garbage in Morrison Creek where it ran by their homes and in nearby Mather Regional Park. Forty enthusiastic neighbors helped to clean the creek. Because they feel so good about the effort, they are planning another clean-up in September.

**Folsom** - For the second year, Kelly Cameron organized Folsom folk for the creek clean-up. She worked with the City of Folsom, neighbors, schools, and scout groups to make sure all eighty volunteers had a satisfying service experience.

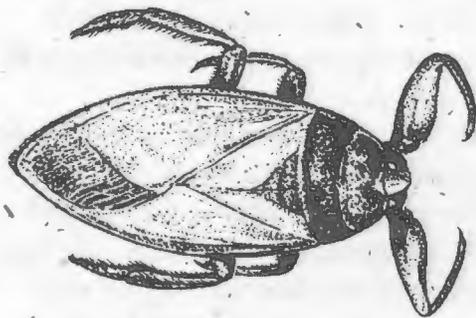
**Rancho Cordova** - This was the first year a Creek Week clean-up site was located in Rancho Cordova. Mitch Dion and Johnnie Lane of California American Water undertook the task of finding a needy Rancho Cordova waterway. They then recruited volunteers to do the clean-up. It was difficult to find urban creeks in Rancho Cordova - most drainages are concrete bottomed and kept clear of vegetation.

# Creek Plants & Critters

## The Giant Water Bug *by Bonnie Ross*

This is the first in a series of articles about aquatic insects. By way of introduction, an extinct relative of the modern-day mayfly was first detected in 250 million year old rocks. Today, 30,000 aquatic insect species representing 12 insect orders have been named. There are even aquatic members of the butterfly and moth order.

Picking a favorite to discuss is impossible, so we'll start with one of the more weird aquatic bugs. The giant water bug belongs to the Order Hemiptera, or "True Bugs." Looking at this insect can leave no doubt that it is a predator. The largest can grow up to 40 mm or 1 1/2" long. Our common giant water bug is about 20 mm or 3/4" long. Their large eyes and grasping forelegs are excellent at finding and catching other aquatic creatures. Once caught, the giant water bug injects its prey with a chemical that digests protein, which is then sucked up like a protein shake.



The male water bug allows his mate to lay her eggs on his back, then carries them around even after they become heavy enough to drown him.

Giant water bugs are helpful to creeks and ponds because they feed on non-native, warm water fish fry and bullfrog tadpoles, although they will eat anything they can catch.

The most unusual behavior of these bugs is that the male cares for the young. He will allow only females that he has mated with to lay their eggs on his back, ensuring that he is caring for his own progeny. As the eggs incubate, the male will bring them to the surface or do "push ups" to aerate them. As the nymphs develop inside the eggs they get heavy enough to drown their parent. He must get his own oxygen supply as well as provide air to his offspring, so a smart daddy bug will hang around submerged vegetation that he can use to climb to the surface. Isn't that remarkable?

## Sandbar Willow *by Frank Wallace*

Sandbar willow, *Salix exigua*, also called narrowleaf willow, is one of six varieties of willow that are common in riparian creek and river corridors throughout the Sacramento region. This variety of willow is a small or medium-sized perennial shrub. Its leaves are narrow and long, usually silver green in color. It produces the fuzzy "pussy willows" in early spring, followed by beautiful yellowish catkins, which are the flowers of the plant. Growing in moist soil, it will spread out in cobblestones, in sand, and even in clay. Its root systems spread out underground and produce new plants that can form thick groves which help protect the creek banks from erosion. It has been used by native Americans for many purposes, including basketry, fish weirs, rope, roofing, and as a treatment for coughs and sore throats. Deer and beaver feed on new shoots; some shrubs in popular feeding sites may only be two feet tall but 5-6 years old.



**Mark your calendar:**

**2005 Creek Clean-up Date is Saturday, April 9**

## Center High School Receives 2004 Creek Steward Award

During the past seven years, Center High School science students have investigated Dry Creek as part of their science classes, pulled non-native Red Sesbania weeds from the stream channel, and planted over 500 trees on district campuses.

As part of the Integrated Science I & II, and Earth Science classes, students have walked to the creek during the school day, made general observations on stream habitat, recorded nitrate, pH, temperature, velocity and depth measurements, collected and sorted benthic macroinvertebrates, and performed bioassays on Daphnia using creek water. In the future, these efforts could contribute valuable data to a coordinated network of students monitoring the Dry Creek Watershed.

The Community Service Club, in conjunction with the Sacramento Tree Foundation, has organized several tree planting and tree mulching/maintenance days throughout the district. In addition to planting over 500 new trees on district campuses, students have begun to monitor and maintain them. A project begun at one school site will create a computerized map and database of the trees using GPS and GIS technology to help keep track of how the trees are doing.

For the last four years, Center High School students have worked with the Sacramento Weed Warriors to help take out Red Sesbania from Dry Creek at Gibson Ranch. Approximately 150 students logging over 500 work hours have begun to make a dent in the thick growth of this plant in one stretch of Dry Creek.

The Sacramento Urban Creeks Council applauds the students for working to make Dry Creek healthier and for learning more about creek and river animals by using the creek as an outdoor classroom. In addition to the direct benefits of the activities, these experiences and the knowledge gained from them will contribute to the development of responsible practices by students, their families and friends.

## Sponsors Contribute Money and So Much More

Although Creek Week is planned by volunteers and volunteers provide the labor, money is an absolute requirement. The monetary contributions of Creek Week sponsors make it possible for all volunteers to receive a free T-shirt and lunch. Additional costs, such as newspaper ads, brochures and postage all add up to the need for many generous Creek Week sponsors. Please notice Creek Week sponsors listed on the outside of this newsletter, and thank them kindly for their support.

Creek Week sponsors also help by making in-kind donations of materials and services. Several sponsors assign employees to serve as Creek Week planning committee members, others encourage their employees to help with the clean up. We are very thankful for the strong commitment our sponsors have made to Creek Week.

## Celebrate!

On a sunny and mild April Saturday morning, creek cleaners, guided by their trusty site leaders, were busy collecting trash and removing invasive plants. At the same time, others were busy getting ready for festivities at the Discovery Museum Science Center. Exhibitors set up, the Maharlika Lions Club fired up the barbecue and got ready to serve about 1,500 hot dog lunches, the American Criminal Justice Association planned the parking logistics for about 500 vehicles, and the Cat McCarthy Gang set up the music. Master of Ceremonies Dave Bender, meteorologist from Channel 13, and his assistant Herb Niederberger, Division Chief of Sacramento County Water Resources, reviewed the program. Signs, safety cones, banners, flags, prizes, and T-shirts were put in place. Registration tables were set to welcome volunteers to the Celebration.

Volunteers finished their work at the creeks. Some stopped at home to clean up. Those who didn't were sure to wash their hands well when they got to the Celebration. The party was on! We hope that everyone learned something from the exhibits and the museum, and that everyone enjoyed the food and festivities. Let's do it again next year!

## West Nile Virus and Urban Creeks

by Dave Tamayo, Trustee, Sacramento-Yolo Mosquito  
and Vector Control District

West Nile Virus (WNV) has been in the news a lot recently, especially since it appeared in Southern California last year. It is almost certain to arrive in Sacramento this year. Since WNV is spread to humans by mosquitoes which breed in water, it helps to know how this relates to local urban creeks.

According to David Brown, the General Manager of the Sacramento-Yolo Mosquito and Vector Control District, our local urban creeks are not usually a significant source of mosquitoes because they need still water in which to breed. Most creek habitat is not suitable for them because it is flowing. However, creeks can become a problem under certain conditions. As creeks dry out in the summertime, isolated pools stagnate and become excellent mosquito habitat. Mosquitoes breed in pools that form behind debris dams or other obstructions. Finally, mosquitoes favor water with lots of organic matter, which occurs when lawn clippings and other yard waste is deposited in the storm drain system or directly into creeks.

District staff proactively control many of the potential mosquito hot spots in our community with methods such as mosquito fish, draining problem sites, applying insect growth regulators, and applying a bacterium that is specific to mosquito larvae. If you notice a section of creek that contains a lot of mosquito larvae, you can help by contacting the District. Whether or not you live near a creek, if you have a problem with mosquitoes in your yard or neighborhood, you can call the District for help in identifying and controlling the source.

It is important for the public to help eliminate mosquito breeding sites. Mosquitoes lay eggs in any standing water, and development from egg to adult can take as little as three days. Ponds, puddles, and bird baths are obvious breeding sites. But rain gutters, tree holes, wheelbarrows, flower pots, dog dishes, unmaintained spas and pools, and even plastic sheeting can harbor mosquitoes.

Effective mosquito control in the United States has been very successful at almost completely eliminating diseases like malaria that used to be common. By working together to proactively control mosquitoes while they are in their larval stage, the District and the public can greatly reduce the threat of WNV and the need to spray pesticides to kill adult mosquitos.

Call the District at (916) 685-1022 or visit their website:  
[www.sac-yolomvcd.com](http://www.sac-yolomvcd.com)

## Promoting Stewardship, Preserving Biodiversity

by Frank Wallace, Project Director,  
Sacramento Weed Warriors

The American River Parkway and riparian areas along creeks throughout Sacramento are being invaded. The invaders are non-native plants, such as red sesbania, Spanish broom, arundo (giant reed), yellow star thistle, Chinese tallow tree, pampas grass, and others. So what's wrong with these plants that have come from distant parts of the world? Why not let "nature" take its course?

Unfortunately, these non-native plants have been brought to Sacramento by actions of man, not by "mother nature". In their native environments, insects, animals, diseases, soils, and weather all combine to limit their growth. In our environment, because of their adaptability, these non-native plants are able to out-compete young willows, sycamores, cottonwoods, oaks and native shrubs and grasses for water, soil nutrients, and sunlight.

So what are we doing about this invasion? Since May 2001, the Sacramento Weed Warriors (SWW) project, under the leadership of the Sacramento Valley Chapter of the California Native Plant Society, with support from the Sacramento Urban Creeks Council and the American River Parkway Foundation, has been implementing a community-based invasive weed eradication initiative. Environmental organizations, government agencies, schools, community groups, and businesses are supporting this initiative and have been encouraging their members to participate.

We need more volunteers. This war on invasive weeds will be successful only if we are able to expand our community-wide campaign. Throughout the year, SWW conducts an invasive plant removal work group on the first Saturday of the month. SWW provides all the necessary tools, gloves, and even extra water. Visit the CNPS website for more details at [www.sacvalleycnps.org](http://www.sacvalleycnps.org) or call Frank Wallace (contact information below).

Equally important, SWW needs interested individuals who can assist with outreach activities. We will be organizing a team of outreach coordinators who can communicate with interested organizations about the negative impacts caused by invasive non-native plants and the SWW project. If you would like to get involved, please contact Frank Wallace, SWW Project Director, at 427-5694 or by email [[frankw2@pacbell.net](mailto:frankw2@pacbell.net)].

**Next Community Work Group Event –  
August 7 (9:00 pm– 12:00 noon)  
William Pond Recreation Area**



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creek critter  
carries the  
eggs and  
takes care  
of all the  
babies?  
See page 3  
to find out!

Alta Tura  
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