



Sacramento Urban Creeks Council

Creek Watch

Creeks connecting communities

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www.sacto-tcc.org

Spring 2005

Get Ready for Creek Week 2005...

by Alta Tura

...with this story from a Creek Week 2004 participant

I wanted to know more about the fish that live in Sacramento's creeks. A Monday morning Creek Week activity titled *The Fish of Morrison and Laguna Creeks* seemed to be a good place to start. I was pretty sure I'd see some real live fish since we would be visiting Meadowlark Lake at the Sacramento Regional County Sanitation District Bufferlands. I hadn't expected to encounter dead fish, though. Steve Scott, Senior Natural Resource Specialist with the Bufferlands, seemed comfortable with the slimy smelly job of plucking each specimen out of its jar of alcohol. Steve told us how to identify each type of fish and if it was native or introduced. He also talked about what the fish eat, if they are good eating themselves, how they fit into the ecosystem and some very interesting adaptations. After some time had been spent getting to know the sample fish, they were returned to their jars.

Natural Resource Specialist, Chris Conard, teamed up with Steve to wade into Meadowlark Lake with a long seine net. Each held a pole at his end of the net as they walked back to the shore dragging the net. Sure enough, there were a few glistening wriggling fish plus pollywogs and crayfish for us to observe. Those who had been paying attention earlier called out the species name as each critter was gently removed from the net. We had a short time to admire the vibrant colors and live action that were missing in the alcohol specimens. Then the fish were gently returned to the lake. Once more the net was deployed and more fish seen.

What did I learn that morning? This is what I learned about just one species. Sacramento Black Fish are native minnows that were an important year-round food source for Native Americans. They are sold today in Asian fish markets. Their teeth are in the throat (pharyngeal teeth), not the mouth, for eating plankton. They can survive in water with low levels of oxygen. Although these fish used to be plentiful, their numbers are now low because of introduced fish and other changes to their environment.

To learn more you can attend the April 6 Bufferlands field trip. See **this year's Creek Week brochure** for details on the *Local Fish & Fauna* and many other activities offered during Creek Week.



What's going
on here?
Turn the page
to find out!

Photos by
Frank Wallace





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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, recreational, 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 Tuesday of each month at the Arcade Creek Recreation and Park District.

Please call (916) 482-8377 for specific meeting dates and times.

Join the Fight Against Alien Invaders

by Frank Wallace

Since 2001, each Creek Week Cleanup Day has included work sites to remove red sesbania, an invasive plant that grows naturally in southern South America. This plant is spreading rapidly along many creeks in north Sacramento and along the American River, threatening the existence of native plants used by wildlife for food and shelter. This plant grows right next to the creek and is spreading into sand bars in the water, increasing the risk of flooding. The California Department of Food and Agriculture considers it a serious threat to biodiversity, designating it a red alert plant

On Cleanup Day, Sacramento Weed Warriors, a volunteer stewardship project of the California Native Plant Society, provides site leaders and all the tools and gloves needed for removing sesbania. Each site leader provides an introductory orientation regarding removal techniques and safe use of tools. Target sites will be listed on the Urban Creeks Council web site, so if your family, youth group or student team wants to participate, you can look for a site closest to your home or school. If you want to volunteer, please contact Frank Wallace, SWW director, at 427-5694. Students as young as 10 have participated previously.

Sesbania removal projects are usually a lot of fun for youth groups. These projects develop teamwork and friendships since there are several tasks of varying difficulty: First, the upper portions of the plant are cut off using pruning saws and loppers; then weed wrenches and shovels are used to remove the roots; and finally the vegetation is cut up and carried to a location away from possible flooding, where it will decompose naturally. Volunteers usually rotate among jobs learning how to use the different tools. A group of 10-15 participants can make a big contribution to this invasive plant control effort.



Since new sesbania plants will sprout throughout the year, Sacramento Weed Warriors will be supporting removal work groups and monitoring teams throughout the spring and summer. If you have a school community service project, a youth group, a business team, or a community organization that would like to volunteer, please call Frank Wallace.

Photos: Pg.1, left; Natomas Charter School students working along Dry Creek at Gibson Ranch

Pg. 1, right; Dry Creek Elementary 5th-graders using weed wrenches to remove red sesbania

Above; Grant High School student hauling cut vegetation to pile

All photos by Frank Wallace

**Help us clean a creek on Saturday, April 9.
Look in the Creek Week brochure or go to
www.sacto-ucc.org for more information.**

Mira Loma High School Arcade Creek Project

by the Outreach Team for the Mira Loma Arcade Creek Project

The Arcade Creek project is much more than just your average high school venture. Rather, it is a fusion of ideas, a network of cooperating people dedicated to environmental awareness and preservation. It is a group of students determined to prove to themselves and those around them that their collaborative efforts can and will make a difference. It carries the undeniable power of capturing student interest at such a magnitude that they constantly strive to do their best work - not to impress their instructors, but because they feel devoted to their task at hand. This is the Arcade Creek Project.

Students in the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program at Mira Loma High School run this ambitious project each year. As part of a supplementary requirement in the IB program's curriculum, the project already has the advantage of avid, intellectually advanced students as participants. These students are enrolled in an IB Biology, IB Physics, or IB Environmental Systems course and thus already have a solid foundation in science.

Through work in one of eight different studies, students are given a chance to do everything from mapping the creek and bank area to studying the creek ecosystem and animal life. The Chemistry study, for example, tests water samples from the creek to determine its ability to sustain life. Through the use of more than ten different chemical tests, including those for ammonia and alkalinity, the study is able to "provide the hard, conclusive data that determines the health of the creek," stated senior manager Jon Spaulding. Another study, Long-Mapping, maps the creek to help familiarize students with their project sites and also to help detect patterns of erosion. A third study, Botany, concentrates on acquiring samples of plants whose diversity show the health of the creek. Through the creation of an herbarium, students are able to identify non-native plants and assess their degree of invasiveness. Monitoring the health of the creek and recording changes is one of the primary objectives of the Arcade Creek Project, and accurate records and careful tracking of the creek over time becomes especially important in allowing students to detect any shifts from the norm and ultimately achieve their goals.

However, this project is also about reaching out to the public and educating people on the importance of environmental conservation and preservation. Senior Katie Jensen, manager of the Restoration study (which works on restoring Arcade Creek to its original state), argues that her study has a crucial and direct positive influence on the creek. Arcade Creek continues to become a topic of increasing importance. Prominent issues have included the emergence of red sesbania in the creek, erosion of the creek bed, and political debates over selling a part of the creek to a philanthropic group that planned on building a parking lot in its place.

The project may be an IB requirement, but it also gives IB students and the science program a chance to go out and do actual field work, employing the skills they learn in school in the real world. "I have learned applications that I couldn't have learned inside of a classroom," senior manager Shahrzad Zarafshar tells us. The project is both an effective teaching tool and a source of inspiration.

In her article "The Young Can't Wait," Severn Cullis-Suzuki told young people, "real environmental change depends on us. We can't wait for our leaders... We must become the change we want to see." We, the students of the Arcade Creek project, are working hard toward making that message come to life by protecting our own little corner of the environment. While working to save a single creek may seem a fruitless task, it is a step forward in the ever-increasing battle to save the global environment. It is a chance to pass on our knowledge to other members of the community, and hopefully inspire them to do the same. Together, we will make a lasting impression for years to come.

While working to save a single creek may seem a fruitless task, it is a step forward in the ever-increasing battle to save the global environment. It is a chance to pass on our knowledge to other members of the community, and hopefully inspire them to do the same.

Note from UCC President Alta Tura: Mira Loma High School's Arcade Creek Project will be the recipient of this year's Creek Steward Award which will be presented by the Sacramento Urban Creeks Council at the April 1st Splash Off for Creek Week. As in past years, Mira Loma students will help clean Arcade Creek on the April 9th clean up day.



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The Urban Creeks Council of Sacramento is dedicated to protecting and sharing the abundant natural treasures that make up the extensive creek systems of our region. As a member, you will receive many benefits, including our newsletter *Creek Watch*. To become a member or renew your membership, please fill out and mail the form below to: Sacramento Urban Creeks Council, 4855 Hamilton Street, Sacramento, CA, 95841

YES! I want to help Sacramento's creeks. Enclosed is my tax deductible gift of:

- \$10/Students
- \$25/Regular membership
- \$40/Family Membership
- \$100
- \$250
- Other _____
- I would like to be a member of the Sacramento Urban Creeks Council.
- I'm already a member; please accept my donation and renewal.

Make check payable to: Sacramento Urban Creeks Council.

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Questions? Call: (916) 482-8377 Email: ucc@arcadecreekrecreation.com