



Sacramento Urban Creeks Council

Creek Watch

Creeks connecting communities

Volume XV, Number 4

www.sacto-ucc.org

Summer 2007

Volunteers Clear 18 Tons of Trash From County Creeks

by Alta Tura, UCCS President

April 28th dawned clear, and an estimated 1,400 volunteers turned out to clean a creek on Clean-Up Day.



Moderate flows in our region's watershed this spring made the creeks more accessible than last year. Because there were no extreme high water events in the rainy season, less debris than usual was washed up on the banks. Even so, about 18 tons of garbage were removed from creeks in Sacramento, Citrus

Heights, Folsom, Rancho Cordova and unincorporated Sacramento County. Specially trained volunteers also removed invasive red sesbania plants from 1,000 feet along both sides of Steelhead Creek near Dry Creek. Thousands of seedlings were uprooted and an estimated 3 million seeds were disposed.

In addition to the usual tires, shopping carts, and general garbage, there were items fished out of creeks that mystified the finders: a bed frame, water heater, bowling ball, fire extinguisher, fax machine, waffle iron, motorcycle frame, cage trap, washing machine and public telephones. Our volunteers suspect that garbage gets in the creeks in a variety of ways. The big items are illegally dumped; some are stolen property. Homeless encampments account for much of the garbage. Many smaller items have been tossed out of car windows or

blown out of trucks and find their way to the creek by way of gutters and storm drains. Every item has its own untold story.

Many wildlife sightings were reported by creek cleanup volunteers. Introduced or nuisance species such as opossum, turkeys, peacocks, pheasants, and mosquitoes were spotted. Creek cleaners saw robins, raccoons, grey squirrels, garter snakes, jack rabbits, western fence lizards, and mallards - all native residents. Volunteers were careful to avoid poison oak, a native plant found in abundance along many of Sacramento's creeks. Poison oak is one of many native plants that provide food and cover for urban wildlife. Since ninety percent of urban wildlife depends on creeks, it is not surprising that eggs and young were reported by volunteers.

The afternoon Celebration at the Discovery Museum Science Center gave volunteers the opportunity to celebrate their accomplishments. Great live music, fun activities, barbeque, free museum admission and earth-friendly exhibits were enjoyed by all. Many were impressed and inspired by the imaginative Junk & Gunk sculptures on display.

Thank you to all who helped with the cleanup. You helped us in our mission to preserve and protect an important urban natural resource - creeks!





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Creek Watch Editor - Betty Cooper

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 fourth Monday of each month at the Arcade Creek Recreation and Park District office.

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

Cleaning Steelhead Creek

by Libby Harmor

Valley View Acres is a rural neighborhood in North Natomas bordered on two sides by Steelhead Creek and the Ueda Parkway. The east levee of the creek is a front or back fence for many residents. The parkway and creek are used year round for bike riding, horseback riding, dog walking, hiking, jogging, bird watching, fishing and general nature enjoyment. There are others who use the area for car dumping, trash dumping, unwanted pet dumping, drinking and other less desirable activities. The neighbors police the creek on a regular basis and keep an eye out for dumpers.

On April 28th, residents of Valley View Acres were joined by a bus load of Center High School students and other Creek Week volunteers to clean Steelhead Creek. The students working with the Weed Warriors concentrated on the eradication of red sesbania, a pretty but incredibly invasive plant/weed. The other folks spent time pulling trash out of the creek to make it safer for wildlife, horseback riding, fishing, and other recreational use.

Four sites along the creek were manned by volunteers from the neighborhood. Trash was placed in bags and hauled to the top of the levee where city, county or special district employees loaded it into trucks to be hauled to the landfill. The red sesbania trimmings were pulled to the levee top and put in a dumpster. Some of the larger items, like a camper shell, tires and shopping carts were dragged up the levee and left for the dump trucks. Although regretful that muddy banks prevented the hauling out of an engine, volunteers headed for the Celebration at noon, satisfied with the morning effort.



Libby has been a Creek Week volunteer for many years. We thank her for her hard work and leadership on the Steelhead Creek cleanup.

Many Thanks to the Sponsors of Creek Week 2007!

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Many Thanks to All Our Volunteers!



Do you have some good photos of Creek Week activities? We'd like to put them in our newsletter!

Send prints to Betty Cooper at P.O. Box 579, Carmichael, CA 95608 or email digital photos to cooperbe@saccounty.net

Mosquito Fish, Friend or Foe?

by Bill Templin

Mosquito fish (*Gambusia* sp.) are small fish (1.5 - 2.5 inches) that tolerate a wide range of temperatures and are used as a predator of mosquito larvae in many diverse aquatic habitats throughout the world. With all of the attention being given locally to aerial spraying to control mosquitoes and reduce West Nile Virus problems, mosquito fish just keep on quietly eating the mosquito larvae as many people want them to do. Unfortunately, mosquito fish also eat other living things, which can be a problem in some environments. In fact, some people think that mosquito fish can be a "major pest and in many cases more suitable alternatives exist for mosquito larvae control" (www.gambusia.net). So what should we use for mosquito control if we can't use mosquito fish? Pretty much any fish will eat mosquito larvae. Try finding a mosquito larva in any body of water inhabited by fish. The best thing to use is a native fish found in your local area that is somewhat hardy and will reproduce in the environment that requires mosquito control. Guppies (*Poecilia* sp.) are also used locally instead of mosquito fish, mainly in koi and gold fish ponds, but they lack the tolerance for temperature extremes. For more information, visit www.fightthebite.net/download/brochures/Biological_Control.pdf



During a recent tour of the Sacramento-Yolo Mosquito & Vector Control District offices and hatchery facilities, I learned that mosquito fish and guppies are used as biological controls to help reduce the amount of pesticides needed. Mosquito fish are planted in most permanent or semi-permanent water sources but are no longer planted in vernal pools because of their detrimental impacts on fairy shrimp. I also learned that planting is now done only by technicians who are trained in the field. In the past, mosquito fish were handed out on request, which provided less control on their use. I also found that District Manager David Brown (dabrown@FIGHTtheBITE.net) and his staff are very helpful and eager to work with individuals and groups who may have concerns about any of the District's operations. Consider taking a tour yourself. They will be holding an Open House next spring.

Is Your Garden Creek Friendly?

by Betty Cooper

It's a great feeling to see all that trash piled up after a Creek Week Cleanup. But what can we do to help creeks every day, around our own homes? The choices we make in our gardens and home landscaping can contribute to the long-term health of our creeks, even if we don't happen to live very close to one. That's because rain and sprinkler water runs drains from our yards into storm drains, carrying many things along with it. The storm drains funnel all that water into creeks and rivers without any processing or filtering, and the runoff contains chemicals and invasive plant seeds that come from our yards. If you are reading this newsletter, you probably already know that you shouldn't pour anything down the storm drains. You may also know about some of the alternatives to pesticides and herbicides that are safer for the environment. You can get great information about those alternatives at www.ipm.ucdavis.edu and also at www.sacstormwater.org/StormwaterPollutionSolutions/PestControlProgram/PestControlProgram. Another solution to creek pollution is to replace large lawn areas and fussy hybrid plants with native plants.

Native plant landscaping is great for the health of creeks because:

- Native plants are more drought tolerant so less watering is necessary; less watering means less runoff.
- They have fewer pest problems so pesticides aren't necessary.
- They don't spread invasive seeds that wind up sprouting along the creeks and crowding out natives.
- They are well-adapted to the area and thrive with little or no additional fertilizing.

You can find an excellent list of plant choices at www.comflowerfarms.com/pdf/Wildlands_Catalog.pdf and also at www.californiagardens.com/Lists/native.htm. Visit some local native gardens like the one at the old City Cemetery in Sacramento (tour and plant information at www.sacvalleynpns.org/Projects/demogarden) and the Effie Yeaw Nature Center. Visit the gardens during different seasons, and watch for native plant sales. The California Native Plant Society is holding a sale on Saturday, September 22nd, 9 a.m - 3 p.m. at the Shepard Garden and Arts Center in McKinley Park, Sacramento. Come see some beautiful plants and meet folks who love native plant gardens.



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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