



## Girl Scouts Get Involved in Local Creek Protection

*by Carmel Brown*



The Laguna Creek Watershed Council is fortunate to be working with two Girl Scout troops in Elk Grove: Troop 1563 and 1955, Girl Scouts Heart of Central California. Both troops have adopted reaches of the local creeks as part of their community service, and one troop has a very interesting tale to tell!

Troop 1955 has adopted a 1 mile reach of Elk Grove Creek, which travels through the older section of town. The girls and their parents regularly walk the creek, collect

*(continued on page 5)*

## Otters Return to Carmichael Creek

*by Susan Skinner*

My cataloging of some of the shyest inhabitants of Carmichael Creek in January 2007 was fascinating news to local nature lovers.

"It's great to see them using our creek," said Sandra Dunn, president of the Carmichael Creek Association. "The otters' return may mean our water is becoming healthier. We have encouraged residents to treat the waterway responsibly; not just for our benefit, also for the sake of the creatures depending on the habitat. I've lived on the creek for 24 years. At one point, there were lots of otters. I haven't seen one for years now."

Respected local naturalist Jack Hiehle thought it more likely adult males are just ranging for more food and territory. "They are more successful at finding food than most of the mammals around," he explained. They'll stay in one place as long as there's sufficient food, then they'll move on..."

The otters I photographed in January belong to the northern river species. Though carnivorous mammals of



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## Creek Watch

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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 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.

## Curl Up With a Good Book

Looking for a special gift idea for the nature lover in your life? Consider the revised and expanded edition of the popular natural history field guide, The Outdoor World of the Sacramento Region. The 236-page soft-cover volume contains more than 600 local flora and fauna species. Originally authored by the revered teacher and environmental activist Effie Yeaw, Outdoor World is published by the American River Natural History Association (ARNHA). It is available at book stores and is on sale at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center in Ancil Hoffman Park in Carmichael.

*"It's the most comprehensive natural history review of the Sacramento area that I know. No serious naturalist, professional or amateur, should be without it."*

—Bill Grenfell, Granite Bay, photo-naturalist and certified wildlife biologist

*"This expanded new edition of this time-tested guide throws open more doors to the Sacramento area's outdoor world. It is one of a kind"*

—Eva Butler, past president, Sacramento Valley Chapter, California Native Plant Society

The Nature Discovery Shop offers wonderful books for all ages, puppets, toys, jewelry, cookbooks, nature T-shirts, and more. Profits support environmental education programs in the Sacramento Area. Questions? Call (916) 489-4918.

Also on sale at the Nature Center's Discovery Shop:

Carmichael, Americana on the Move, by Susan Maxwell Skinner

Now that you've seen some of Susan's beautiful photography in this issue of Creek Watch, check out her award-winning book full of amazing shots of local wildlife, architecture and people. It's also available through her website, [www.susanmaxwellskinner.com](http://www.susanmaxwellskinner.com), and at Beverly's Crafts on Fair Oaks Boulevard at Marconi Avenue.

**Mark your calendar!**  
**Saturday, April 26th**  
**Creek Week 2008**

# Groups Plan Creek Improvements Within Watersheds

by Alta Tura, President, Sacramento Urban Creeks Council

Everyone lives in a watershed. A watershed, also known as a drainage basin or catchment, is an area of land that drains to a waterway. Most people reading this live in the Sacramento River Watershed and probably know it. Fewer people know which creek watershed they live in, partly because creeks that lay down like ribbons through our communities often go unnoticed.

Sacramento County is a patchwork of creek and river watersheds. Watershed groups have been formed in many Sacramento area communities to improve conditions and to maintain healthy conditions in area creeks. The improvements can result in things like cleaner water, healthier plants and animals, flood protection, trails for walking and biking, and better public access to the natural world. Creeks in the developed areas of Sacramento County have suffered decades of damage from normal human activities such as living, working and driving in watersheds. The damage is often unintentional. People in watershed groups are trying to undo damage where we can, avoid the mistakes of the past and find creative new solutions through planning.

Three watershed groups are currently working to help Sacramento County creeks. You don't have to be an expert to join. Each group is dealing with a different set of problems and opportunities, and they are each at a different stage in their planning. The watersheds vary in size; Alder Creek is 11 square miles, Laguna Creek is 48 square miles and Arcade Creek is 38 square miles. Each watershed group generally begins by assessing existing conditions of the creek's water, bed, and bank and vegetation/habitat, along with conducting surveys to determine the community's values and opinions. Typical problems found are excessive erosion, living conditions hostile to all but the hardiest water animals, minimal natural vegetation, and an invasion of exotic plants.

The Alder Creek Watershed group will create a management plan to help protect the creek and its resources as the area south of Highway 50 is developed. The project is administered by the City of Folsom and is funded by a CalFed watershed grant managed by the State Department of Water Resources. There are some existing problems, but because most of the land in the creek's watershed is yet to be developed, there are many opportunities. For more information contact the project manager Carmel Brown, CKB Environmental Consulting

at 452-3557 or Sarah Amaya, City of Folsom Grant Manager at 351-3545.

The Laguna Creek Watershed Council is nearing completion of a management plan that will guide future development of the upper watershed (unincorporated Sacramento County and City of Rancho Cordova) and propose solutions to problems in the developed parts of the lower watershed (Cities of Elk Grove and Sacramento). Development along the upper part of Laguna creek is just beginning. While the lower part of Laguna Creek is mostly built-out, the group has been blessed with some healthy and stable Laguna Creek stretches in Elk Grove thanks to past decisions to leave a wide floodplain corridor next to the creek. Elk Grove Creek, part of the lower watershed, was not so lucky and has suffered from homes and businesses crowding in too close. For more information contact Greg Suba, Watershed Coordinator 772-3230 or visit [www.lagunacreek.org](http://www.lagunacreek.org)

The Arcade Creek Watershed group has completed a management plan for this built-out, highly populated watershed which includes Arcade and Cripple Creeks. Many potential projects have been identified that could improve conditions in this urban creek system that has been severely impacted by large number of residents who live in, near or adjacent to the Watershed. The first project, which includes a wetland detention basin to improve water quality, is now in progress. Other parts of the project include removal of invasive plants and planting of native plants. For more information visit [www.arcadecreek.org](http://www.arcadecreek.org)

We will be running articles about these watershed groups and other creek planning efforts in this and future issues of Creek Watch. If you live in any of these watersheds, please consider joining the group. There is much planning and work to be done! If you don't live in one of these three, remember there are lots of creeks in Sacramento County. Your creek and watershed are still waiting for a group to form, assess their condition and discover their potential.



## Otter Bliss in Carmichael Creek *(continued from page one)*

the weasel family, they are social, frolicsome and find time for enjoyment during their busy days. In my many hours of scrambling along banks with a camera, I saw otters sliding down sedge clumps to splash and somersault in creek pools. When not eating or playing, they loped off,



found patches of sunshine and rolled around like children. This instinctive activity helps them mark territory. Perhaps it also stimulates circulation after swimming in the frozen creek.

In early morning hours of Sacramento's January cold snap, I watched a big submerged male — nearly five feet long — noisily cracking ice as he foraged among rocks and grasses. The sleek otter pelt (motive for man's over-trapping and species decimation) resembled patent leather. In fact, a thick fur undercoat is impervious to freezing water. Pointed tails and undulating muscular action give the otter a serpent-like motion. In water or on land, they are incredibly quick. California law now protects them from hunting or trapping and they are repopulating wilderness areas in this state.

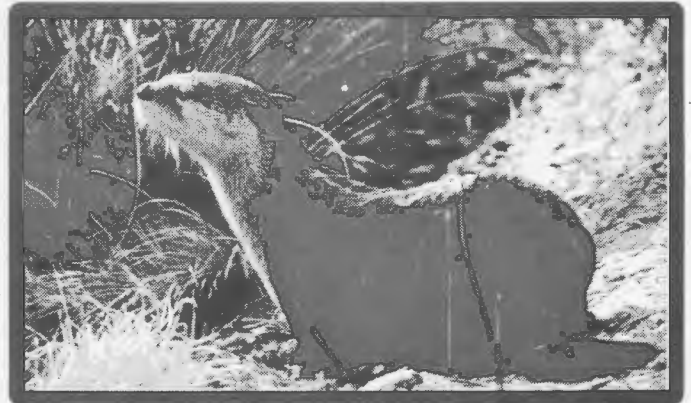
When unthreatened, they prefer to eat and rest on land. After a shake and a grooming bout, their outer fur quickly fluffs up. Blissful rolling invariably follows. Though some references call otters nocturnal, my Carmichael friends seemed busy much of the day. Between fishing trips, the predators enjoyed aquatic sport. For hours, they cruised and somersaulted like dolphins. A Carmichael woman last year reported an adult "surfing" on rapids caused when Carmichael Creek flooded. "He cruised on his back down the river, swam upstream and slid down, over and over," observed the resident. "We watched him having tremendous fun..."

Super-alert to human presence, the swimmers submerge at the drop of a lens cap. Muscular little nostrils seal like valves as they vanish — with barely a ripple — for

minutes. Unlike the taciturn beaver, otters can be chatty. They hum and chuckle among themselves. When alarmed, necks stretch above water and indignant faces grunt like bewhiskered, old men. All those cartoon characterizations of otters — puppy mouths, pink toenails and playful habits — make you forget they have evolved as ruthless killing machines.

I forgot. Until I saw one fellow snare his supper. He hauled a medium-size fish to a sedge clump and, unhinging his jaw to an astonishing width, wolfed it headfirst. Much loud crunching of bones accompanied the meal. His mate did not share; dinnertime means every mammal for himself. I later saw a large turtle surface, clamped in the same viselike teeth and claws. On land I found little heaps of clam shells, remnants of lighter repasts. I often saw otter scat, full of scales and bones. The noisy disposal of boney fish heads attests to the force of that endearingly clownish jaw line. Even the whiskers are honed to locate underwater prey. If otters are repopulating residential areas, they should be treated with respect. Though shy of humans, otters are defensive parents. Last summer, a Sacramento hospital treated a woman rafter for bites. She had drifted too close to a riverbank den where, attacking like piranha, a nursing mum savaged the intruder's legs.

Observers at the Effie Yeaw Nature Centre report otters periodically streak inland from the American River to raid a small pond in the preserve. "They devour all the crayfish, then they take off again," says staffer Betty Cooper. "If otters are living in Carmichael Creek, there must be plentiful food in it for them."



*All pictures by Susan Maxwell Skinner, author,  
Carmichael, Americana on the Move  
[www.susanmaxwellskinner.com](http://www.susanmaxwellskinner.com)*

## Girl Scouts Get Involved

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trash, take photos and send in reports of the types of invasive aquatic weeds they observe growing in the creek. Girl Scout Troop 1563 got involved in the Laguna Creek Stream Stewards Program in an unusual way. They participated, as they have for the past 3 years, in the April 2007 Creek Week. While picking up trash from a section of Laguna Creek, they uncovered a shopping cart bearing the name of a nearby drug retail store. They decided to return it to its rightful owner, but the store manager said he didn't want it, and to "return it to the creek where they found it". The girls were shocked and dismayed and decided to turn this unfortunate incident into a learning experience for everyone.

The troop has written a letter to the corporate headquarters for the store in question. They have asked the store to take certain actions to show their commitment to the community and environmental protection. For example, they've asked the store to get involved in the local Creek Week cleanup next year. The troop has adopted this stretch of Laguna Creek to ensure that the area is clean and the interpretive signs along the trail remain free of graffiti. They want to work with the City of Elk Grove to determine if cart retention systems could be required for new stores in the future, and they hope to make a presentation to the City Council.



Jo Smith cut the ribbon dedicating the trail in the Arcade Creek Nature Area. Other celebrants included the Arcade Creek Recreation and Park District Board of Directors.

## Arcade Creek Park and Jo Smith Nature Trail Dedication

*by Jane Steele*

The Arcade Creek Recreation and Park District has completed construction of the Arcade Creek Nature Area and Jo Smith Nature Trail. Construction consisted of the installation of a bridge crossing Verde Cruz Creek. Pedestrians can now safely walk on the trail from Arcade Creek Park to American River College.

An interpretive exhibit project was part of the improvements. Park and trail users can learn about the wildlife and plants that inhabit this riparian area as well as learn about the Arcade Creek Watershed, regional wetlands, and how you can be a steward of the land.

A dedication was held on Saturday, November 24, 2007 honoring Jo Smith and Frank Cruzen, co-founders of the Sacramento Urban Creeks Council. More than 80 friends, family and neighbors came to honor Jo and Frank. The park district named the trail in honor of Jo Smith, a long-time environmentalist in Sacramento. Jo also served on the Board of Directors of the park district for many years. A beautiful bench was donated by the Sacramento Urban Creeks Council to the park district. The bench will be placed along the Nature Trail in honor of Frank Cruzen.

Creeks Council President Alta Tura spoke at the dedication of the bench in memory of Frank Cruzen as Marie Cruzen, Christie Hill and Anna Hill enjoy the seating. (right) Verde Cruz Creek bridge will make a safe and scenic crossing. (below)





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 PERMIT NO. 619  
 SACRAMENTO, CA

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SACRAMENTO

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
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Make check payable to: Sacramento Urban Creeks Council.

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