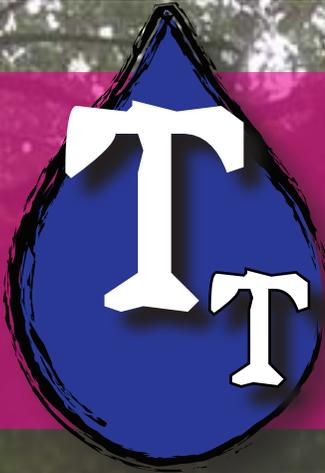


Southern Region

March 2011



TRIBUTARY TRIBUNE



**Stories and Art Created by
The AmeriCorps Watershed Stewards Project**



The mission of the AmeriCorps Watershed Stewards Project (WSP) is to conserve, restore, and enhance anadromous watersheds for future generations by linking education with high-quality scientific practices.

A special project of the California Conservation Corps, WSP is administered by CaliforniaVolunteers and sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

TRIBUTARY TRIBUNE 2011

The Tributary Tribune showcases the adventures, insights, and art of members of the AmeriCorps Watershed Stewards Project. For seventeen years the WSP has been serving communities throughout California's coast. This issue features stories and art by members from our Southern Region, placed in communities ranging from Fort Bragg to San Luis Obispo...

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Fantastic Voyage Under the Creek

by Wendy Laumer

On Thursday January 20th, I had an amazing opportunity to help with a snorkel survey for the Chorro Creek watershed.

Chorro Creek is the main tributary for the Chorro Creek sub watershed and dumps sixty percent of the freshwater into the Morro Bay estuary. Morro Bay estuary is now a national reserve (circa.1995) and is monitored by The Morro Bay National Estuary Program.

There are five tributaries to Chorro Creek which include Dairy Creek, Pennington Creek, San Luisito Creek, San Bernardo Creek, and Walters Creek. The portion of the snorkel survey that I had the amazing opportunity to experience took place on Dairy Creek; the other tributaries were surveyed earlier in the day.

The survey area of Dairy Creek is accessible at Camp San Luis (CA National Guard) via Chorro Creek. My two partners in snorkel crime were Susan Kennedy and Jake Long, both Special Corps Members for the Fishery Department at The Los Padres CCC Center. After making it through a Compressed Natural Gas fill up for the CNG van we were cruising (if you haven't done this, it is a really interesting experience....the pump is pressurized making an awful sound when turned on and off and before fueling you must watch a safety video in order to even start the pump).

The impetus for the survey was generated from an electro-fishing (E-fishing) grant which was approved by the Department of Fish and Game to remove an invasive species (the illustrious Pike Minnow). I was fortunate to have accompanied my two WSP team members Megan and Aristotle on an E-fishing expedition back in October with DFG on Chorro Creek. The snorkel survey was to complete the invasive species removal with a "fish eye" view for any remaining Pike Minnow that may have meandered up the tribs. The first part of the said snorkel survey mission included climbing into an amazingly fashionable poop green dry suit. Being a surfer for 20+ years, this was a far cry from the sleek super stretch wetsuit that I often refer to as my super suit. I will now refer to this suit as "the oompa loompa suit". Oompa loompa suits are not complete



Wendy Laumer sports the "Oompa Loompa" suit before surveying Chorro Creek, near San Luis Obispo

without a dazzling pair of stream boots and strikingly large neoprene gloves. To make the ensemble really pop, a head squeezing hood along with snorkel and mask finish out the statement. Once I had "shrink wrapped" myself into the oompa loompa suit (this done by squatting down to remove any excess air and having a partner zip you in for a delightful, suction-like sensation), we were ready to traverse the incised bank to our journey under the stream.

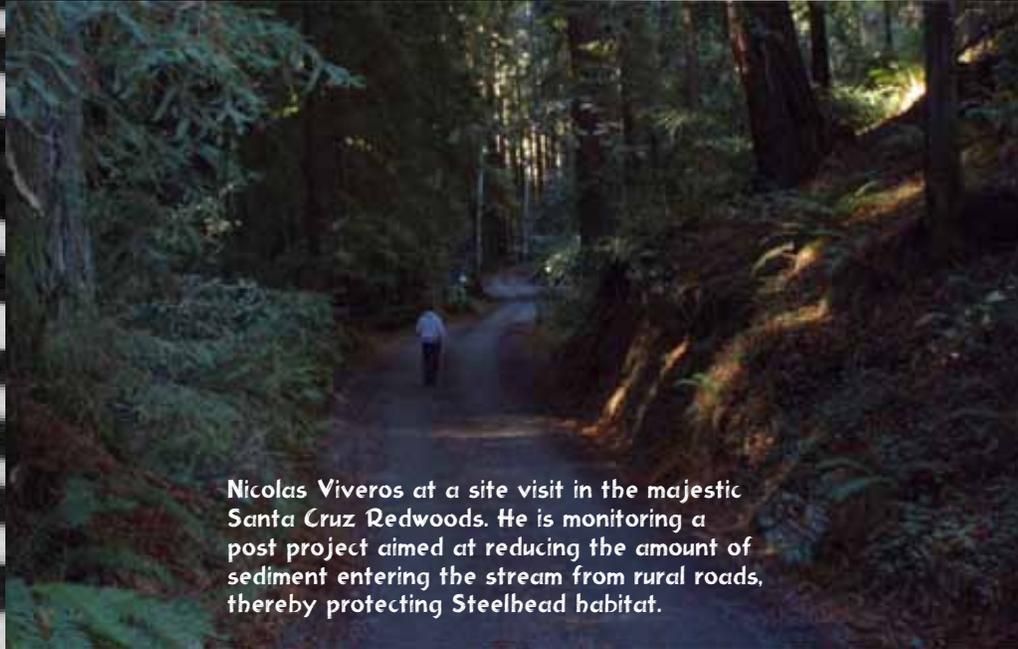
After a good wade through Chorro Creek, we found the confluence we were looking for. We lumbered up Dairy Creek looking like inebriated sailors until our promised bubble curtain was in full view. It was time to submerge. Crawling onto all fours, I then allowed my oompa loompa suit to do its magic. I spread my arms out very slowly and

floated on top of the surface like a fallen leaf. Right in front of me, just below the bubble curtain, nestled slightly under a root wad, were two, eight inch rainbow trout enjoying the freshly oxygenated water of the small cascade. The newly discovered biosphere of the stream was a sight unlike any I've seen. I have snorkeled in Hawaii, Indonesia, Australia, and England, but this new "life aquatic" was surprisingly beautiful and serene. The colors abound were muted naturals including mossy and sage greens, beiges, and browns. The fish were silvery bright with fading parr marks. The water was clear, like being in a fresh water aquarium resplendent with bubbles.

I floated transfixed on the trout watching, captivated by their every move. I wanted everyone to see and even stuck my hand out to alert Jake who was standing on the bank, my thoughts shouting "look"! Of course Jake could not see what I was viewing, but he already knew this world...

Back on land, I climbed out of my oompa loompa suit and had a new admiration of its color. In the water I blended in so that the unsuspecting fish were no longer scared of my humanness. The air seemed a bit crisper, the light of the sun brighter. My day was transformed by the underwater world. I cannot wait to put my oompa loompa suit on again and venture back to the creek. Next time, though, I will remember to shower with Tecnu...

POISON OAK!!!



Nicolas Viveros at a site visit in the majestic Santa Cruz Redwoods. He is monitoring a post project aimed at reducing the amount of sediment entering the stream from rural roads, thereby protecting Steelhead habitat.

Haikus

By Ben Schleifer

Salmon upon redd
Glossy gaze meets surveyors'
Each marks own meaning

Floy tag in the spine
Punch a star in operculum
We count strong fish

By Desiree Dela-Vega

Cold salmon buddy
Allow me to join in play
Your Stream calls to me

Stream Boots are a Girl's Best Friend

by Alyssa Hernandez

One December morning, my mentor, Marti, and I were prepping for our site's Green Job Corps program. Green Job Corps is our environmental education program, and this month we were teaching at a boys detention center in the nearby area. This week was our benthic macroinvertebrates lesson, and it was our big field day in the stream. The morning prep for that day was especially chaotic, but we eventually got all the supplies into the car and began our thirty minute drive to the center. It wasn't until we had reached the site that I realized I had forgotten the most important tool for my lesson: my stream boots. For those of you who have never collected benthic macroinvertebrates, it requires you to hop in a stream and stand downstream with a special net and kick around the opening of the net to push insects into it. **BOOTS ARE NECESSARY.**

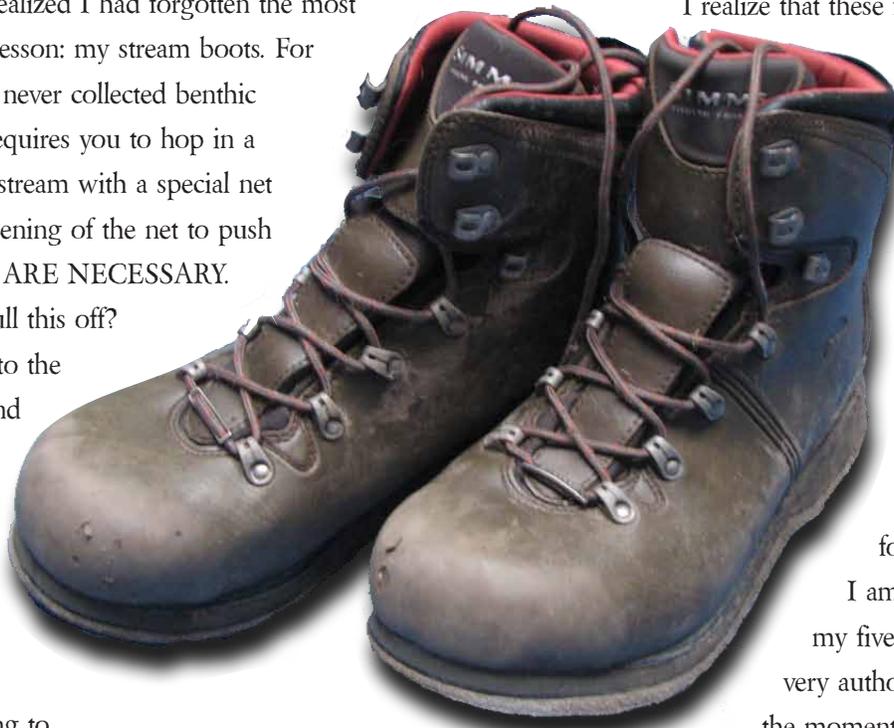
How was I going to pull this off?

We made our way to the stream with the boys and at this point I had a plan in mind. I couldn't decide if my plan was exceedingly brilliant, or kind of dumb. It was probably the later, but I was going to go with it. Here was my logic. I was wearing Converse at the time, but was lucky enough to have a pair of hiking boots and a shirt in the back of my car. I decided I was going to take off my socks and wear only my Converse into the stream. The Converse would provide me with basic protection that I would need. The dry socks and hiking boots would be what I would wear once I was out of the water so my feet wouldn't freeze off. Also, I had that shirt, which was going to be my makeshift towel for my feet when I took them out of my cold wet Converse. Sheer brilliance right? I thought so.

Of course as my plan was put into action, there were

definitely some flaws in my reasoning. Number one...

Converse are made of cheap canvas material which provides no insulation whatsoever, so I might as well have gone in barefoot. Number two...it was December and we were in a mountain stream. The water was about 37 degrees F and that is not too far above freezing. I managed to get through my basic lesson without my feet falling off, but they did turn a lovely shade of cherry purple. It would also take the entire rest of the day for me to regain full feeling in my toes.



I realize that these factors alone probably make this plan seem

like a failure, but there are positives.

These boys are at a detention center.

That and the fact that they are teenage

boys make it really hard to gain their

honest respect and

trust. It's especially hard for me, seeing as how

I am still very young, and my five foot three stature isn't

very authoritative. However,

the moment I walked into that

stream, you could hear their shocked

reactions and see the looks of disbelief on their faces. I simply explained that sometimes science is painful, and you do what

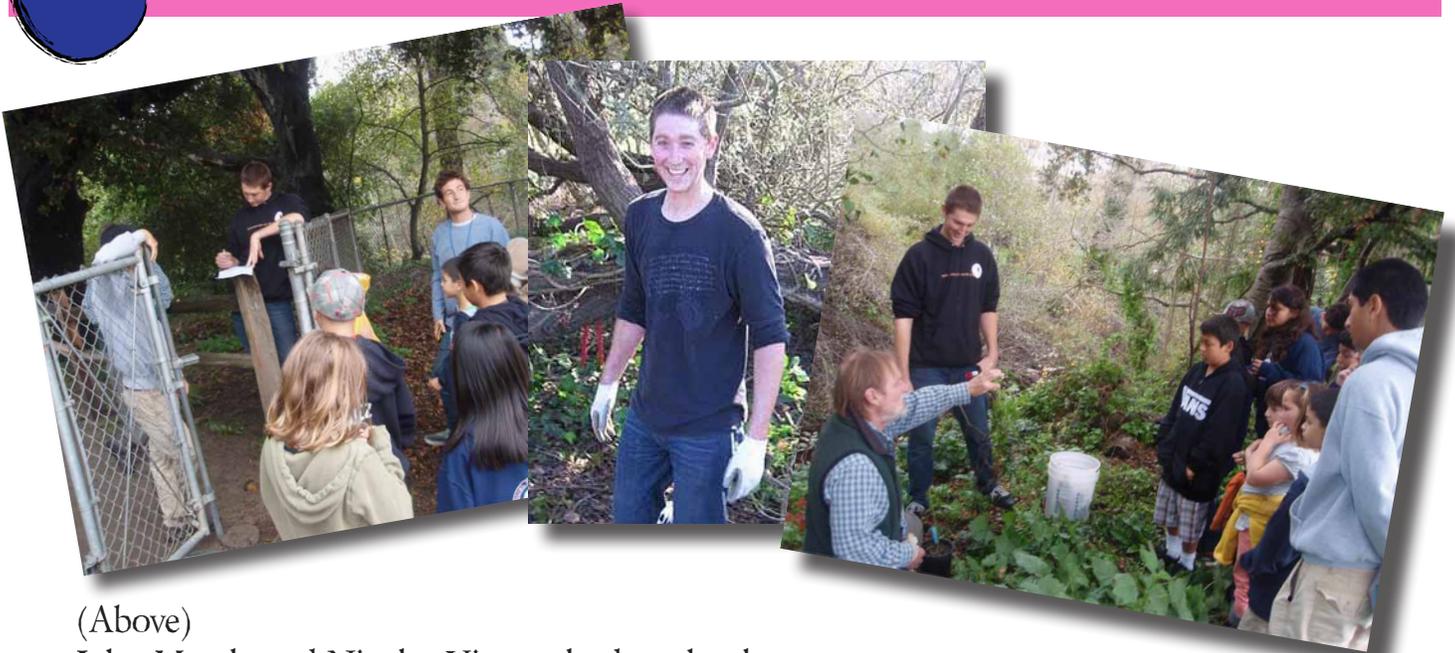
you need to do in order to get your data. After that, they remained completely engaged and were probably one of the

most curious and respectful groups I have ever taught.

Also, bugs are my passion. I really wanted to do this aquatic insects lesson. I had already showed them several pictures, but to have them see some of these insects up close was all I really wanted. In the end, it was completely worth it, even if my feet almost fell off in the process.

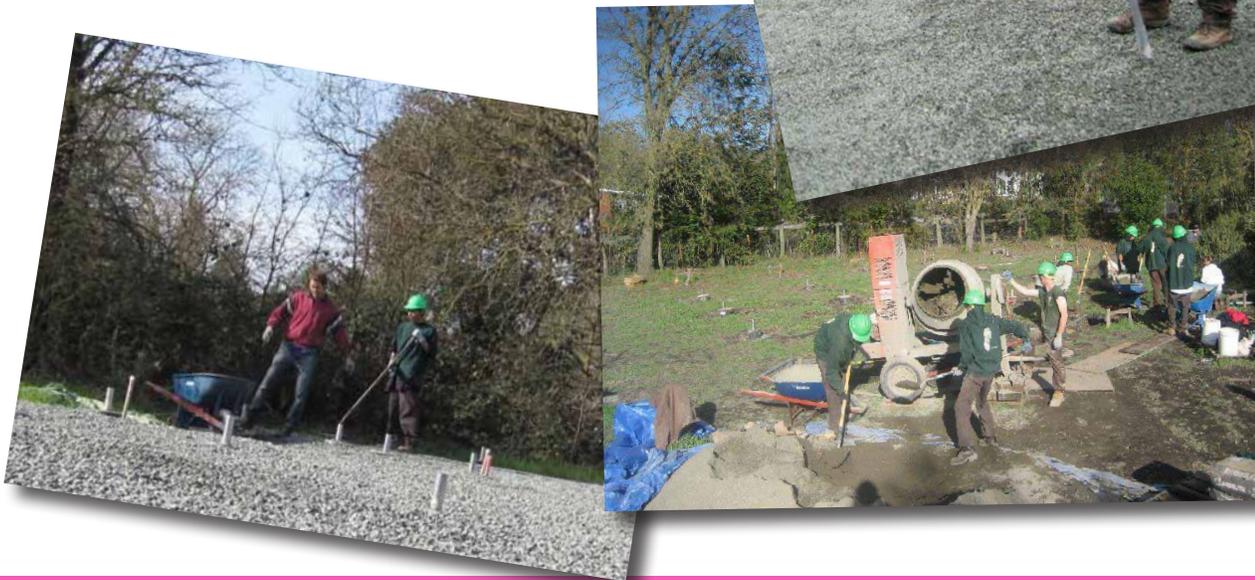
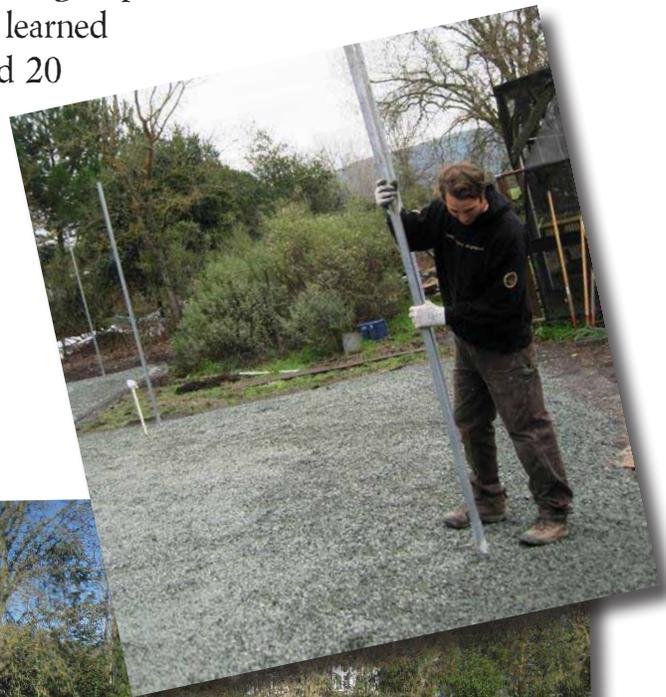


ONE WATERSHED, ONE COMMUNITY



(Above)
John Morely and Nicolas Viveros lead a school group on the Soquel Creek Planting Day. Students learned about riparian corridors, salmon, and planted 20 native species.

(Below)
Danny McKnight and Summer Swallow, WSP members placed with the Sonoma Ecology Center, lay the groundwork for a new native plant shade structure at the Sonoma Garden Park.



The AmeriCorps Moment

By Aristotle Ou

- The AmeriCorps Pledge-

**I will get things done for America -
to make our people safer,
smarter, and healthier.**

**I will bring Americans together
to strengthen our communities.**

**Faced with apathy,
I will take action.**

**Faced with conflict,
I will seek common ground.**

**Faced with adversity,
I will persevere.**

**I will carry this commitment
with me this year and beyond.**

**I am an AmeriCorps member,
and I will get things done.**

Megan, Wendy, and I were habitat typing one fine November day in Pennington Creek, home to the distinguished red-legged frogs and steelhead trout. Around four in the afternoon, we decided to wrap up the day and return to civilization. Unfortunately, the deeply entrenched Pennington Creek, filled with poison oak and lined with barbed wire, provided no easy outlets nearby for an exit.

Megan, Wendy, and I travelled further upstream for about another hundred feet until we found what seemed to be an accessible route on the embankment. Megan attached the measuring tape to the side of her backpack and hung the loppers over her shoulders as she climbed across the embankment using the willows and coyote bush as stakes. When she climbed over 20 feet and reached the leveled surface, I elongated the stadia rod and passed it to her. Wendy, in her larger than life waders, clung to the clipboard filled with Pennington Creek habitat data we had worked so hard to collect as she climbed up using the shrubs and stadia rod Megan provided.

As Wendy approached the last couple of feet of the embankment, her left foot suddenly slipped on the silty surface. Without hesitation, Megan reached out with her right hand to grab Wendy while still holding on to the stadia rod with her left arm. Megan pulled Wendy up, and due to Megan's quick reflex, Wendy was saved. Meanwhile, I scouted the area with my monoscope and densiometer to watch for any predators such as mountain lions or turkey vultures. Finally, I climbed up and met with Megan and Wendy, who had despairing looks on their faces.

In front of us laid a mini-forest engrossed in cape ivy. Megan, in frenzy, lifted the loppers off her shoulders and wildly hacked away the cape ivy. Wendy and I followed slowly behind, removing the shredded invasive species as Megan's thunderous snips were tearing away the popular landscaping plants. After a few minutes of shearing, a ray of light shone through a small aperture. I rushed forward past Megan and widened the hole by tearing away the cape ivy with my bare hands.

The sunlight blasted the expanded opening and lit up the dense mini-forest. My eyes filled with hope and tears as Megan, Wendy, and I walked back to our site vehicle. I experienced my Americorps moment that day, and I know many more will come my way.

Faced with apathy, Megan took action against the cape ivy. Faced with conflict, Wendy found common ground with the leveled surface. Faced with adversity, I persevered until I saw the light. Megan, Wendy, and I are Americorps members, and we get things done.

♪ "It doesn't pay much, but it sure is fun. I'm an AmeriCorps member, and I get things done." ♪



RECONCILING THE PAST, Redeeming a Species

One Fish, Two Fish...

by Katrina Nystrom



One fish, two fish, red fish, blue fish or five Coho, three Steelhead, and one stinky carcass. That is what I am up to in Fort Bragg—counting fish. I would have never dreamt that that my job would include playing in creeks, hiking, exploring, and ultimately working to save endangered species.

The other day my neighbor asked whether I was a fish biologist who did something with scales or a ‘fish counter.’ I found it quite enjoyable that he referred to my position the same way that my co-workers and I joke about. I told him that indeed I am counting fish, instead of the professional title of spawner surveyor or life cycle monitor. A former commercial fisherman himself, he was remarkably engaged in how the fish were doing. I told him that in Pudding Creek, they had counted 120 Coho by the beginning of December (now the numbers are over 200). My neighbor even knew that was impressive compared to last years total of 10 and that Coho usually start heading up the creeks in this area around the end of December. The storms came early this year. It is nice to be in a community that cares about the fish count.

Fort Bragg, located on the Northern California Coast, is an old fishing and logging town, but there are no more fish to catch or trees to cut. The history of logging in the area has altered the landscape. There are often old roads that run along the creeks that were built without an understanding of the local water systems, which leads to extra sediment in the creeks when the winter storms blow out the roads. Walking along the streams there are amazing trees that are 20ft in diameter, but only 20ft high. I haven’t yet seen a true old growth tree, but it seems like in most creeks the forest stands are starting to recover and provide more shade to keep the water cool.

This has been an amazing record-breaking year. At the Van Arsdale Dam, the record of Chinook salmon climbing up the fish ladder almost doubled. In the 1986/1987 season there were 1,754 Chinook; this year there were 2,315 which included 814 males, 746 jacks, and 755 female. A member from our crew measured the longest female at the dam, at 101 centimeters. The crew member was only 30 centimeters taller than the fish was long.

I have been told by many of the old-timers in this once logging town that, historically, the numbers seen this year are not even comparable to the days of yore. These weather laden locals tell me that the original settlers to Northern California could not cross their horses when they came to the streams because the flows were packed bank to bank with fish. This is not the case now. That is why I am here.

I hope to make the situation better—and it appears to be getting better. The data we collect helps with rehabilitation projects and setting state standards.

Will salmon recover in Northern California? As the great Dr. Seuss once said, “Don’t ask us, go ask your mother.”

Discovering the Natural

By Diana Baetscher

“Choose one word to describe your experience.”

“I learned a lot about restoration.”

“One word?”

“Oh, oops...”

“Salmon.”

“Fun.”

“Interesting.”

“Natural.”

Natural? Did a field trip of eighth graders from San Francisco think of this as natural?

Lagunitas Creek starts on Mt. Tamalpais and flows, momentarily unimpeded, to Kent Lake, where a small portion of its water is spit out beneath mammoth Peter’s Dam (A regulated minimum flow – to ensure salmon habitat is adequately managed). The stream bubbles beneath clunky log structures tied together with half-inch steel wire hoisted into the water by helicopter. It tumbles over multi-ton boulders with large metal grommets protruding from the cascade, where they too were hooked to a helicopter line.

Lagunitas Creek slips underneath Shafter Bridge – under a road traveled by surfers and hikers enroute to Point Reyes. It meanders through Samuel P. Taylor State Park – named for the baron of the paper mill that once churned waste into this stretch of river – the local saloon still boasting the moniker Papermill Creek. Astride campsites of birdwatchers and boisterous twenty-somethings, the stream creeps past the RVs of adventurous retirees. It meanders beside Sir Francis Drake Blvd. on its way into the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Safe within the confines of a national park, Lagunitas Creek winds across grange land upon which cattle stoically chew their cud. It makes another few turns before washing into the estuary; mixing with the salty tide of Tomales Bay.



Its natural path to the Pacific. Natural. But in comparison to what? To the cement and concrete jungle of the city? Or the ridges and draws of this area before a Spanish general built haciendas on the hillsides and staked claim to the watershed? Natural. Natural in providing habitat for native fauna: for generously permitting the last and most resilient members of this coho population to return?

“How we define natural has implications for everything we do – it’s our baseline, our goal, our holy grail.”

How we define natural has implications for everything we do – it’s our baseline, our goal, our holy grail. Yet once we begin to appreciate the natural, we build roads to access it and trails to explore it. Our natural watershed becomes a recreation destination, and the natural inhabitants become tourist attractions. Our coho play the starring role in a natural drama on the verge of tragedy.

And now, saving the Lagunitas coho requires intervention. They need the tourists and adventurers, the birdwatchers, campers, ranchers, and residents to appreciate what could be natural about this place – and preserve what remains natural. This watershed is a place teetering on the edge: where people blur the line between reveling in the naturalness of this place and eliminating it.



WISDOM IN THE WATERSHED

WSP San Luis Obispo's CCC Educational Experience

by Megan Dolson

In late November, it was decided that we, the WSP members in San Luis Obispo, would lead an environmentally related educational event for the Los Padres CCC corps members. We were told that we would have one crew December 16th and 17th for six hours each day, and then another crew December 20th and 21st for the same amount of time. That meant twenty four hours of teaching CCC corps members about the environment. My reaction went something like this...

“WHAT!?”

You have to understand, I had no teaching experience whatsoever, let alone teaching crews of people in their late teens and early twenties. I was so convinced that because of my inexperience in publicly presenting subject material, they would be unresponsive to the subject material and just plain bored! I was certain it would be a disaster, I even emailed our site supervisor to tell her I thought it was a bad idea. Well, that didn't get me very far and I realized I just had to suck it up and do it!

We decided to split each day into three sections, the first part of the day led by Wendy, the second by me, and the third part by Aristotle. We chose different topics to cover each day and spent a lot of time developing



WSP member, Megan Dolson, in the field near San Luis Obispo.

relevant slideshows and activities. We used a lot of the Real Science curriculum and borrowed some ideas from curriculum developed by one of our placement sites, Central Coast Salmon Enhancement. In the end we taught corps members about the Salmonid lifecycle, watersheds, water cycle & water quality, land use management, water conservation, native plants, WSP overview and careers in the environment. These lessons included games and activities such as Life Cycle Ro-sham-bo, Fish Prints, Water Cycle Dice, and Crumpled Paper Watershed Model.

We took both crews on a hike to view the Chorro Valley Watershed and on a tour of the San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden to learn more about native plants and how indigenous people made use of them in the area.

Over all, the educational events were a HUGE success and corps members really did get into it. It was so cool to see them make the connection with the fact that so much of the work they do is for the benefit of Salmonids in the watershed (and what a watershed actually is!). And I must say, we ended up being pretty good teachers, too.

Finding Beauty in the Watershed: Observations in a Land of Few Fish

By Emi Bauman

Being a Watershed Stewards Project member in the Lagunitas Watershed might be one of the most effective ways to realize the dire situation of the Central Coast Coho Salmon. While trying to save this very endangered and evolutionarily sensitive unit of Coho, I've come to accept that seven is going to be the final tally of how many adult spawning salmon I've seen this season. Of course, seven is better than nothing, especially amidst this season's final count of 145 adults spotted in the watershed. However, my lack of inspiring fish moments has drawn my attention toward the watershed as a whole and how every creature in it is as unique and important as the last. Something about Lagunitas has drawn out the birder in me, noticing for the first time what a diverse array of birds exist in West Marin. So, here are the three most interesting and surprisingly inconspicuous birds I've come across in the last four months.



The first notable character is the Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*), which to me looks like nothing short of a cartoon character. This bird is made infamous by watershed stewards and salmon enthusiasts alike, but with numbers this low, most salmon predators start to look like villains. The kingfisher's long, heavy bill is designed to prey on almost anything living in the water, particularly fish. The bird spends its days perched at vantage points in the trees before diving head first into the water picking up fish, amphibians, and crustaceans. Despite its cartoonish features, it can be tricky to spot a kingfisher. The telltale sign that you've spotted one is if you hear a loud rattling cry and see a flash of blue over the creek.

of their long, thin bill with serrated edges, that allows them to better hold on to their slippery prey. Mergansers tend to hang out in small groups on the creek and nest in tree cavities. I was initially drawn to the Merganser because of its wild punk-rock hairdo, which is particularly noticeable in females, who have a reddish-brown head with tufts of feathers sticking out in the back. Like the kingfisher, this bird relies heavily on a protected forest area and a healthy population of fish.

The next noteworthy watershed resident is the Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*), a diving duck that also feeds on fish in the creek. These large ducks are sometimes called "sawbills" because



My last but, not least, favorite sighting is the Evening Grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*), an infrequent winter visitor to the Lagunitas Watershed. I spotted a group of these finch-like birds on top of a dawn redwood at our offices. This lovely bright yellow bird can be seen here only in the winter in irruption years. An irruption year occurs when a bird species visits locations outside its normal range due to inadequate food supplies in its usual range. The range of Evening Grosbeaks has expanded due to increased availability of bird feeders in the winter months. The presence of these birds, like the salmon, is an important indicator of the health of the watershed and the changes that have occurred. The grosbeak's presence is dictated by human influence, and both the kingfisher and merganser rely on a depleting supply of fish as a vital food source. If our fish populations continue to decrease, I worry that this diversity of birds will not exist in the Lagunitas Watershed for future birders to appreciate.

"There is nothing in which the birds differ more from man than the way in which they can build and yet leave a landscape as it was before." -Robert Lynd

Salty Connections

Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary Visitor Center, San Francisco

by Rietta Hohman



Every day is a new and exciting adventure for our team here in the San Francisco Bay Area. One day we might host a science program for families, and the next day we will meet and greet the public at our Visitor Center on beautiful Crissy Field. Other days you can find us out in Point Reyes doing field work with the park service. This highly diverse mixture of activities keeps us on our toes and ready for action.

Our main focus at the Farallones Marine Sanctuary Association (FMSA) is the Oceans After-School program, in which we deliver eight programs to eight San Francisco schools for a total of 64 programs. Last week we finished the first three schools. Next week we are on to the next five. In these after-school visits we teach our students about life along the California coastline—one of the most vibrant, unique and productive coastlines in the world. The entire United States has only 13 marine sanctuaries - four are located in California waters and three are a stones throw (figuratively speaking) from the Golden Gate Bridge. The local National Marine Sanctuaries – Monterey Bay, Cordell Bank and the Gulf of the Farallones – provide a habitat for countless organisms.

The reason for this abundant protection is because the ocean floor off of California has a continental shelf that facilitates the beneficial movement of cold, nutrient rich waters from the ocean floor up to the surface. These nutrients feed phytoplankton, which in turn act as the bottom of the ocean food web, providing nearly all marine creatures with life. Our terrestrial watersheds are inherently connected to these prolific waters, and our salmon are a crucial link between these environments. They were once able to thrive in these oceans and in the streams and rivers connected to them, but now they suffer detrimental influences in both. To bring our salmon back, it is essential that we understand greater ocean processes and organisms. In doing so, we can help protect the salmon as well as our watersheds. In our programs, we teach children not only about the amazing journey of the salmon, the water cycle and watersheds, but also about plankton, sharks, marine mammals, seabirds, crabs, squid and a whole host of other topics.

Perhaps the most important lesson we teach is how to take care of our Earth's water, whether fresh or salt. The children we teach are growing up in a highly urban environment – seven million people in nine counties at last count. Yet each time I teach I can see them understand that they have a responsibility to take care of the environment. When asked, “How can you help salmon every day?”, they respond (with minimal prompt) that they should pick up trash, recycle, and conserve water. It is one of the greatest sensations to know that I'm contributing, in my small way, to creating the next generation of watershed and ocean stewards. It is also heartening to know that I work alongside a team of wonderful people, both with the Watershed Stewards Project and FMSA. I admired their dedication to the science and the education needed to protect our beautiful California and its water. I am inspired by the children for how they learn, and I love the difference it all makes.

Join our Watershed Team

By Ben Schleifer

We call to the fish who inhabit the stream!
Whether be in a pool, a ripple or upon your redd
Come, arise and join our watershed team

Olive green backs and rosy silver gleam
With powerful bursts you strive for the water's head
We call to the fish who inhabit the stream!

Anadromous fish surely must dream
Of the Ocean, seals and fries being fed
Come, arise and join our watershed team

To heck with the current and may you never lose steam
Because you can only cease when you are dead
We call to the fish who inhabit the stream

The Coho and Chinook are more than they seem
They represent our strength when all goodness fled
Come, arise and join our watershed team

For the horrors we brought, we all should redeem
And to do nothing is the fate that all should dread
We call the fish who inhabit the stream
Come, arise and join our watershed team



Artwork by
Desiree Dela Vega, a
WSP member placed with
Hopland DFG.



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