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Carmel River NEWS

From the Carmel River Watershed Conservancy (CRWC)

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For more news and watershed updates please check out the Conservancy's website!

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Carmel River Watershed Tours

Available for this fall! If interested contact Lorin Letendre.

A "Flood" of Benefits

By Leah Maccarter

The Carmel River Floodplain Restoration and Environmental Enhancement (FREE) Project will provide the next location for residents and students to observe and learn about unique wildlife, vegetation and enjoy the benefits of major restoration projects. As a summer intern at the Big Sur Land Trust (BSLT) I have been absorbed in learning about all the amazing benefits this project will bring to the community and species most in need of habitat. Since 2007, BSLT and Monterey County have steadily been making progress on the Carmel River FREE Project, which aims to restore 90 acres of native riparian and wetland habitats on the Odello East property and provide much needed flood protection to residents in the north bank flood zone. The Project will remove five sections of the south bank levee and construct a causeway over Highway 1 to allow high river flows to access the recently restored Carmel River Lagoon South Arm.

Over the summer, I have learned how complex a process recreating nature can be. Immediately following causeway construction a huge planting and seeding effort will take place to facilitate the growth of grasses, forbs, and small shrubs. It is hoped that as high river flows wash over the historic floodplain they will carry with them a diverse assemblage of native seeds from upstream that will repopulate the area with luscious and vibrant green riparian vegetation.

Re-establishing the vegetation on the floodplain is one of the most important factors to consider post- construction. The dense root systems of grasses, willows, and small trees will be critical in stabilizing soils on the floodplain and preventing erosion. Additionally, as riparian and wetland habitats success through the years unique species of wildlife will have the opportunity to thrive. Bird watchers will be especially thrilled to observe unique species such as the White-tailed kite, Yellow warbler, Tricolored blackbird, Lawrence's Finch inhabiting the riparian trees.

Reconnected wildlife connection corridors from the Palo Corona Regional Park and Carmel River Lagoon will expand the habitats of many terrestrial mammals and amphibians, like the California red-legged Frog or Monterey dusky footed woodrat. An extended trail network will provide connection corridors for us humans too! Eventually, residents will be able to stroll the south bank trail from mid- Carmel Valley to the mouth of the watershed and connect to Palo Corona and Point Lobos State Parks trail networks. What a "flood" of benefits this project will bring!

Baskin Foundation Grant's Successful Year

The Peggy and Jack Baskin Foundation made a generous grant to the Conservancy to conduct watershed education in the Carmel River Watershed aimed at making students (mostly from low-income areas) better environmental stewards and to spark their interest is pursuing science careers. The grant period ended in May, with the Tularcitos School tour pictured above the final one for the grant year. The Conservancy, guided by our Watershed Education Coordinator Marie Butcher, conducted 15 tours and in-class presentations involving 745 students from schools in Gonzales, Salinas, Marina, Seaside, Carmel Valley, and Cachagua. A major partner was the Recruitment in Science Education Program (RISE) sponsored by CSUMB, whose mission is "to enhance diversity in the sciences and increase college attendance by providing under-represented and low-income high school students with tutoring, study strategies, motivation and real-world-science experiences" especially through field trips. An actual RISE success story (Cynthia Gonzales) is also described in this newsletter.

Students from Tularcitos School at Los Padres Dam

Hopeful Happenings in the Carmel River

The Carmel River Task Force, chaired by CRWC and comprising all the governmental and non-profit agencies involved in the Carmel River Watershed, has identified five top priorities that are making major progress. They are:

1 - Increasing in-stream flows. The Eastwoods' contribution of Odello East land and water rights to the Big Sur Land Trust will add water in the lower Carmel River especially during the dry months, and the promising Rancho Canada conversion from golf courses to a river park place could add as much as 200 acre feet back into the river there.

2 - Removing fish passage barriers in the river and creeks. We are supporting several projects spearheaded by Trout Unlimited to remove barriers to steelhead passage in Cachagua Creek, Potrero Creek, and San Clemente Creek. Potrero Creek is of special interest because it is the first potential spawning creek that steelhead encounter in the lower Carmel River.

3 - Adding large woody debris (LWD) to the river. The Carmel River Steelhead Association secured a grant to install cedar logs and redwood stumps in the Carmel River just upstream of the Lagoon. The LWD structures will be anchored in the river bed and will provide badly needed refuge and food for steelhead in an area of the river where they are predated upon by birds and other wildlife.

4 - Lower Carmel River Floodplain Restoration and Environmental Enhancement (Carmel River FREE) Project. The Task Force strongly supports this project, which has made great strides thanks to the Eastwoods' land donation (see #1 above) and will be further advanced by Big Sur Land Trust grant applications to close the revenue gap of about $11 million.

5 - Gravel augmentation in the river channel. The Monterey Peninsula Water Management District has periodically added gravel

in various parts of the river to provide improved spawning beds for the steelhead. The removal of the San Clemente Dam and restoration of the river at that site (a former high priority of the Task Force) will also allow passage of gravel down the river, which was previously blocked by the dam.

So as you can see, lots of progress is being made to restore the Carmel River watershed back to its former health and beauty for the benefit of its threatened species, to prevent flooding, and to provide increased recreation for residents and visitors!

RISE to the Challenge with Cynthia Gonzalez

RISE students at Marina High School

In recent years, there has been an increased preoccupation for the health of our environment. We hear phrases like 'global warming,' 'pollution,' 'carbon footprint,' 'growing population,' and we find ourselves concerned. However, there is hope. There exist those special individuals devoting their lives to finding solutions to the most complex issues humankind has yet to face. As role models in our communities, both locally and globally, they confront the challenge. They are RISE students, past and present!

Recruitment In Science Education (RISE) is a nonprofit community based program through California State University Monterey Bay (CSUMB), where low-income underrepresented first generation college bound high school students from the Monterey Bay and Salinas areas are recruited for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) training, as well as college readiness. The Conservancy is conducting watershed education with RISE students thanks to a grant from the Peggy and Jack Baskin Foundation.

Cynthia Gonzalez, seen seated in the photo, bottom right, a graduate of the RISE program, an alumna of the University of California Los

Angeles (UCLA) with a degree in Biology, current graduate student at CSUMB in the Applied Watershed and Marine Science Program, and a leader of current RISE students took some time out of her day to describe her experience. Before Gonzalez had even heard of RISE, she had an assignment during her fifth grade year that she reflects upon until this day. She recalled thinking: The first step is to make observations. The sky is blue; the grass is green; why is this lady bug here on the grass? Science is fun! This is peaceful. I like this!

"I didn't know what a watershed was growing up in school because we didn't talk about it," Gonzalez said, but then Gonzalez entered the RISE program in 2005, during her eighth grade year at Harden Middle School in Salinas. She said, "I quickly learned that the community I was living in was my community and that I could contribute to making it a better community." Gonzalez explained, "When living in Salinas you feel a little isolated from the Monterey community when in reality, the communities are interconnected." Gonzalez said, "A big part of seeing how the communities connect is by understanding the watersheds. The Carmel River Watershed and the Salinas River Watershed are connected," as they share the Sierra de Salinas Mountain Range as borders.

A big thank you to Cynthia Gonzalez and everyone at RISE for helping us to remember our interconnectedness and for being role models and leaders in our communities!