



Turning the Page on Another Year

Morro Coast Audubon
Sweet Springs Circle of Friends News
Issue No 2

2011 Highlights

From the Preserve Mgr - Holly Sletteland

I'm afraid I'm one of those diehards that haven't given up on New Year's resolutions. I still like to take a moment to look back and reflect on what was accomplished and to take stock of what remains to be done. I just happen to be getting to it a little later than most. Some like to do it on New Year's eve...others choose New Year's Day. For me, the 21st seems just right and happens to coincide with the first storm of 2012.

All in all, it was a very productive year in which much was accomplished. Even though the expansion project is moving forward at a much slower pace than any of us ever anticipated, we made considerable headway on clearing the way for Sweet Springs East to be opened to the public. We continued to improve habitat throughout the preserve with the help of almost 2000 volunteer hours and your generous donations. We also continued to pursue grant opportunities and were successful in securing some, but were unfortunately shot down on others. Below you will find a summary of some of our key successes in 2011 and a look at some of the challenges ahead.

Sweet Springs Central

- Obtained \$1500 *Associates in Action* grant from Kohl's Department Store to conduct planting party with their staff and kids from Morro Bay High School on Earth Day.
- Obtained \$9000 *Together Green* Grant from National Audubon & Toyota Corporation to increase community participation in conservation projects; the grant funded most of our volunteer restoration efforts in 2011.
- Installed "iron ranger" at the preserve entrance & collected almost \$200 in less than 6 months!

- Installed 2 memorial benches on the north side of the pond, generously donated by Shelley & Watson Gooch and the Bowen family.
- Planted 2 memorial trees, generously donated by the Akle family in honor of Sylvia Rosenberg and by the board of the Winter Bird Festival in honor of Joanna Frawley.
- Replaced 500 feet of rotten trail border along on pond trail; Cal Poly logging team volunteers cut branches used as replacements.
- Weather sealed all bridges, benches, signs and the viewing platform with help from Cal Poly WOW students.
- Recruited 2 volunteer interns from Cal Poly to monitor water quality in the ponds & provide recommendations for improving habitat for Southwestern pond turtles; MBNEP is generously allowing us to use their equipment to do the sampling.
- Removed irrigation lines on the area that was planted in 2008 just west of the kiosk at the preserve entrance. This area has become very well established with an 85% survival rate of native plants. There is also considerable natural germination starting in this area and invasive weeds are well under control.
- Continued to remove invasive bull thistle, radish, oxalis, velvet grass and more from the salt marsh near the boardwalk. Planted goldenrod, seaside daisy and salt rush in cleared areas.
- Cleared eucalyptus debris & invasive weeds, predominantly veldt grass, from the area adjacent to Broderson over the course of the year; Planted with shade tolerant coastal scrub plants, such as coffee berry, toyon, nightshade & wall flower in December.



Earth Day Planting Party



Cal Poly Students Seal Old Bridge



Broderson Weed Crew



Collecting Seed



Reworking the Trail



Sweet Springs East Kickoff



Welcomed owls...farewell to hive



- Cleared invasive weeds on knoll on west side of trail back to the northern boundary fence & planted 500 plants to increase vegetation cover and diversity. Although this area is not highly visible to visitors, it provides excellent wildlife habitat.
- Maintained area restored in 2009 with over 400 plants through MBNEP grant & replanted 30 plants that had died with species that had succeeded.

Sweet Springs East

- Designed & installed a project announcement sign on the property acknowledging funders of the purchase & project partners.
- Worked with the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo to prepare & submit an application for a county Minor Use Permit (MUP) to make improvements (e.g. trails, viewing platform, fencing, etc.) and gradually remove eucalyptus trees. This was a major undertaking involving the coordinated efforts of many people.
- Stepped up community outreach to educate residents on the proposed project through presentations at Los Osos Advisory Council (LOCAC) & LOCAC Land Use Committee, hosting an Open House on the preserve & providing information at local events & farmers markets.
- Solicited letters from individuals & organizations in support of the project; such letters will be critical in influencing future regulatory decisions.
- Worked with 50 Grizzly Academy cadet volunteers to remove a large homeless camp on the property; Filled a 30 yard dumpster with debris from the encampment.
- Hosted a Restoration Kickoff Party on September 24th with speakers Jim Patterson (Board of Supervisors), Marshall Ochylski (CSD), Vicki Milledge (LOCAC) & Fred Collins (Northern Chumash Tribal Council) encouraging over 80 volunteers to begin the restoration by pulling a quarter acre of veldt grass.
- Conducted baseline vegetation monitoring on the preserve with the assistance of a volunteer Cal Poly intern so that we can track improvement over time.
- Enlisted the services of the Monarch Alert Project at Cal Poly under the direction of Dr. Francis Villablanca to conduct a survey of the preserve to assess overwintering populations.

- Received commitment from MBNEP to donate mitigation funding of over 27K from the Morro Bay Tank Farm removal to restoration of Morro shoulderband snail habitat on Sweet Springs East.
- Obtained grant of a 10K from PG&E to help fulfill an essential goal of providing access to people with mobility impairments, especially those using wheelchairs; all trails & amenities will be fully ADA compliant.

The Year Ahead

We're looking forward to another busy year in 2012. We're going to be shifting most of our attention to the east side, but we certainly won't neglect the central preserve or lose any of the gains we have made. We think it has finally reached a point where it can do a better job of holding its own.

We hope to be able to restore at least an acre of Sweet Springs East near the entrance. We will be pursuing additional grant funding to assist with this effort and future restoration projects. Unfortunately, we recently had two proposals turned down that we had high hopes for. We will also be seeking grants and continuing our fundraising efforts for the public access improvements.

We expect our application for permits to be heard by the County Planning Commission sometime this spring. However, we suspect that even if the project is approved, it will be appealed and require additional review by the Board of Supervisors and perhaps the Coastal Commission.

We are so grateful to all of you for being a part of our projects and making them possible. They wouldn't happen without you!



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