

ON THE GROUND

Taking care of the land

The protection of land doesn't end when it is acquired; it enters a new phase called stewardship. This is a brief summary of the stewardship work underway on Land Trust lands this year.



Bryne-Milliron Forest

The Land Trust has owned and cared for the 322-acre Byrne Forest outside Corralitos since 1984. The Milliron family expanded the forest by donating 80 acres in 2008. Our Land Steward, Jeff Helmer, has lovingly cared for the forest since we've owned it. This winter he was joined by 40 volunteers who came out in the rain to pull invasive French broom and eucalyptus saplings. The



eucalyptus saplings were coming up on a 14 acre area we cut two years ago – a grove that had been steadily spreading into the redwood forest.

Last year Jeff completed work on a narrow and strenuous trail to the Milliron addition to our forest. The trail leads to a stunning old redwood that we think could be 1,000 years old and 250 feet tall. We've nicknamed it, "The Great White," because its bark has been bleached (it's actually a pale brown) from its exposed south-facing slope. You can join us on a hike to the Great White in June (see back page for details).



The Sandhills

The Land Trust acquired the 189-acre former Geyer Quarry in 2008. Along with protecting a unique hotspot of biodiversity, we inherited a challenging set of stewardship problems: invasive non-native weeds, soil erosion along make-shift trails, and destructive motorcycle use. When we raised \$5.5 million from the state, foundations, and our donors to acquire this fragile habitat, we promised to protect it from such threats.



This winter almost 100 volunteers came out on four days to remove French broom and acacia, which are major threats to the native habitat that support seven species found nowhere else on earth. At the end of 2009 we used funds from a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant to remove major stands of acacia.

This spring we will begin fencing to address the destructive trespass challenge. In places motorcycle use has destroyed the oak understory in the upper part of the property and trails cut for motorcycles and horses have led to serious erosion problems – which pose water quality problems in Bean Creek, which flows through part of the property. We will be developing a management plan that addresses future access and water quality challenges on the property.



Watsonville Sloughs

When we acquired 441 acres at the heart of the Watsonville Sloughs, we committed ourselves to developing a comprehensive management plan, not just for our land, but also for other parts of the Watsonville Slough system – the largest freshwater wetlands in the County. This winter we began that planning process and we expect to complete it by the end of 2010, along with our Conservation Blueprint.

The plan has three components. First we will develop a plan for the 383 acres of farmland and 58 acres of wetland directly under our care. Second, we will identify restoration priorities for both our land and on the 350 acres of adjacent state and federal lands. Some of these projects will be paid for by the farmland we lease. Finally, the management plan will refine overall conservation priorities for the entire slough watershed, including priorities for future acquisition and restoration. In all of this we will work closely with an array of nonprofits and government agencies. We'll have more on this plan in future issues of Landmarks.

Work is already underway with Pajaro Valley High School students at the Fitz Wetlands Educational Resource Center on restoration of a California red-legged frog pond on our land. Vince Mattulich, the farmer we lease the land to, and the Community Alliance of Family Farmers have begun planting hedgerows and trees to enhance the riparian areas between the farm fields and the sloughs.



Antonelli Pond

Antonelli Pond, on Santa Cruz's west side, is our oldest property, acquired in 1982, and for the past 28 years we have been caring for what is essentially an urban park. Jeff Helmer has gone out two to three times a week for almost all of those years to pick up trash. The picture to the right shows a couple of bags of trash, along with Jeff's dog, Berkeley, in the back of his vintage Studebaker. We regularly remove mattresses and other camping materials – and cut back and clear willows and weeds that provide cover for such activities.

This year students from nearby Natural Bridges High School helped pull invasive English ivy (which provides excellent campsite cover). The students have also been doing water quality monitoring at the pond this year. We look forward to working with them over the next few years and providing them with an opportunity for hands-on learning about natural resources management and stewardship.



Glenwood Open Space Preserve

Caring for this 163 acre preserve is complicated. The property is owned by the City of Scotts Valley and the Land Trust has interim management responsibility until a management plan is completed. At that point the Land Trust will have to decide if the \$1.1 million stewardship endowment provided by the Wildlife Conservation Board is sufficient to adequately care for the property in perpetuity.

The good news is that the first draft of the management plan is nearing completion. The final plan is expected in a year or so. The plan will address the challenge of protecting the habitat for the Ohlone tiger beetle and the Scotts Valley spineflower while providing appropriate public access. The Ohlone tiger beetle is an endangered species and protecting its habitat was the central reason the state Wildlife Conservation Board funded the project.



WANT TO HELP?

This brief overview gives you some idea of how much work is involved in caring for 3,200 acres of land. This winter we had a backlog of work that could utilize the 120 volunteers generated by the Disney program. For now, though, we are looking for a few dedicated and hard-working volunteers to join Lynn and Jeff in taking care of the land. If that sounds like you, give Lynn a call at (831) 429-6116, extension 305.

