

The Lay of the Land

The Newsletter of the Solano Resource Conservation District

Volume 15, Issue 1

Late Spring 2017

Service is Our Focus

By Christopher Rose

Spring is fully here and summer is just around the corner. For the first time in five years in California, we have had a very rainy winter and spring. Reservoirs are full and the snow pack is deep. Coming off a busy wet season of planting, we are focused on service to our District and Solano County. To that end, we're coordinating and implementing volunteer events; maintenance and weed control at restoration sites; and dozens and dozens of field trips and watershed education and conservation lessons in the classroom for students all over Solano County.

The diversity of landscapes, land use, people and conservation and education opportunities make Solano County a truly rewarding place to work. The RCD works across a diversity of landscapes, land use, and people to deliver high quality programs that support a healthy landscape, including watershed education, habitat restoration, weed abatement,

conservation programming and water quality monitoring. The RCD offers many hands-on volunteer opportunities, workshops and an annual Fall Plant Sale with locally sourced species of

native plants for home and ranch use. We take pride in being proactive and at the forefront of new innovations and ways to deliver the best assistance to our partners and cooperators.

This issue of Lay of the Land is focused on Solano RCD's primary goal of providing service to our District and throughout Solano County. No one newsletter could

cover all of what the RCD offers; instead this issue focuses on ongoing restoration efforts on McCune Creek near Winters, Alamo Creek in Vacaville and the north and middle forks of Horse Creek in northern Vacaville. We'll also bring you up to date on our conservation planning and carbon farming efforts, agricultural oil recycling, Project WET, and the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program.



Allison Martin, Solano RCD Education Program Manager with students from Crystal Middle School at the Suisun Marsh

What's Inside

Service is Our Focus	1
Urban Greening in Vacaville	2
Free Oil Recycling Services for Ag Producers	3
Climate Change Mitigation on Your Ranch or Homestead	3
McCune Watershed Habitat Restoration	4
Sediment and Erosion Control Assistance	4
Project WET Teacher Training	5
Staff Directory	6



The Dannel Nature Park meadow in full bloom this spring. Solano RCD installed the meadow for the City of Fairfield last year.

Urban Greening in Vacaville

By Katherine Holmes, Assistant Executive Director

Over the last five years, Solano RCD has partnered with the City of Vacaville to plant 3,500 native trees & shrubs and seed 30 acres of native grasses & wildflowers along creeks in Vacaville. Along the way we've held 50 community volunteer planting events and brought 40 elementary school classes out to our Vacaville restoration sites. These efforts have been funded by two Urban Greening grants from the CA Natural Resources Agency.

Come visit our sites and see the changes we've made!

Irene Larson Demonstration Garden

This new garden features ten species of native trees and shrubs, complete with plant labels and an informational kiosk. Some of these plants, like redbud and buckeye, feature gorgeous spring flowers. Others, like toyon and hollyleaf cherry, are covered with colorful berries in the fall that the birds just love. We hope the demonstration garden will help local residents select beautiful, drought-tolerant natives for their yards. As a bonus, all ten species provide great wildlife habitat - producing fruit, nectar, seeds and berries that wildlife need to survive. The demonstration garden is located right next to the Irene Larson ball fields off of Alamo Drive. You can also visit our website to download a brochure with more details about these ten fantastic native plants.



Solano RCD staff install decomposed granite trails at the new Irene Larson Demonstration Garden

Three Oaks Demonstration Meadow

Are you interested in replacing your lawn with a drought tolerant alternative? This new demonstration meadow features four species of native grasses and one species of native sedge. All five will stay green with only two or three irrigation events each month during our long hot summers. A couple of them, including red fescue and slender sedge, can be mowed for a traditional lawn-like look. Others, like purple needlegrass and Junegrass, provide a more "tufty" look. Gardeners can easily tuck bulbs and wildflowers into native meadows to increase their wildlife-friendly aspect. The demonstration meadow is located off of the Alamo Creek bike trail next to the Three Oaks Community Center's tennis courts. Solano RCD also has a detailed brochure available on our website to help you replace your lawn with a native grass meadow.



Solano RCD sponsored an AmeriCorps team this winter who helped install the Three Oaks Demonstration Meadow

Centennial Park Bike and Pedestrian Trail

Last winter, Solano RCD worked with the City to install a new 4,000 foot long bike and pedestrian trail along two forks of Horse Creek in Centennial Park. Then we worked with community volunteers to restore native plants to 15 acres on either side of the new trail. We've planted 1,800+ trees, shrubs, and flowering forbs to beautify the park, shade the trail, and improve wildlife habitat. This fall we will be installing ten interpretive panels along the new trail so that park visitors can learn about local natural history. Come take a walk in Centennial Park – you can get your morning exercise on the 1.5 mile loop trail and check out our newest restoration site as it grows up and fills in.



Volunteers plant native trees and shrubs among the newly seeded native grasses at Centennial Park in March 2017



Redbud (*Cercis occidentalis*) blooms each spring with beautiful pink flowers. Photo by Robert Sikora

Climate Change Mitigation on Your Ranch or Homestead

In addition to continued work with farmers and landowners to create conservation plans for their property, we are collaborating with USDA-NRCS to assess a landscape's potential to sequester carbon. "Carbon farming" removes CO₂ from the atmosphere and fixes it in organic material, such as plants and soil organic matter. Practices such as cover cropping, minimizing tillage, and planting hedgerows of woody plants all sequester carbon in the soil and in plant biomass over time. Contact our office at 707-678-1655 x111 or email amy.king@solanorcd.org if you are interested in seeing what you can do to capture CO₂ on your property!

Free Oil Recycling Services for Agricultural Producers in Solano County!

by Amy King Watershed Project Manager

Solano RCD is working with the County to assess and promote used oil and oil filter recycling. We are particularly interested in reaching small scale operations that do not already contract with a used oil pick-up service. If you have any kind of ag operation and have some barrels of oil or filters taking up space in your barn, please give us a call! We have two options to offer:

1. Clean, new 12-qt containers for collecting used oil and bringing it to a recycling facility, such as that at the Hay Road landfill or at the Pisani's station in Winters. These are free as long as supplies last, limit 5 per operation.
2. If you have quantities or containers that are difficult to bring to a recycling center, we can offer a free pick-up service at your ranch.

Please call Amy King at 707-678-1655 x111 or email at amy.king@solanorcd.org if you are interested in either option. In addition, we are hoping to improve the ease of recycling used oil in the future by assessing how existing facilities could be improved. If you give us a call, we will conduct a brief survey with you to get your input on how we can get all used oil and filters to a recycling facility!



Hedgerows like this, recently installed by Solano RCD on a Dixon farm, help sequester carbon

McCune Watershed Flood Control and Habitat Restoration Project

By Sarah McKibbin, Restoration Project Manager

Sediment and Erosion Control Assistance

By Andrea Mummert, Conservation Project Manager

The McCune watershed is located between the cities of Vacaville and Winters in an area of dense agriculture and pockets of rural residential areas. McCune Creek was moved and channelized to accommodate agricultural activities decades ago, including the removal of native riparian



McCune Creek Habitat Project

vegetation. Likewise, Dry Arroyo Creek, a major tributary to McCune Creek, was grazed for decades before being incorporated into a rural-residential development, and is thus nearly denuded of native vegetation. The historical alterations to the natural hydrology of McCune Creek exacerbated flooding conditions in an already flood-prone area. Coupled with the lack of deep-rooted vegetation along streambanks, this has led to massive bank sloughing and sediment influx to the larger watershed.

The McCune Watershed Flood Control and Habitat Restoration Project aims to restore riparian and upland habitat and increase stormwater capacity, while reducing flooding and erosion along both creek channels. Along Dry Arroyo Creek, 3,800 feet of riparian corridor will be restored by planting more than 1,200 native trees and shrubs and 5 acres of native grass and forb understory. We are working to repair sloughing banks and stabilize vulnerable stream channel sections by installing jute netting, native rhizomatous grass and sedge plants and willow cuttings. The banks of McCune creek have been laid back to increase channel capacity and improve water flow, and are being vegetated with perennial native grasses to reduce erosion and resulting sedimentation in downstream channels. As a result, over 2 contiguous mile of stream corridor are being enhanced to create wildlife habitat and reduce soil erosion in this agriculturally intensive area of Solano County.

The Dixon/Solano RCD Water Quality Coalition (Coalition) continues to assist its members in meeting the regulatory requirements of the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board). The Regional Board is currently focusing on sediment and erosion control as a means of protecting surface water quality. Agricultural producers are required to implement effective sediment discharge and erosion prevention practices to minimize or eliminate the discharge of sediment above background levels.

Coalition members with parcels identified as higher risk for contributing sediment to off-farm waterbodies are now required to complete Certified Sediment and Erosion Control Plans to document which practices are in place or will be implemented in the future to minimize sediment movement off of their properties.



Cover crops reduce sediment movement

The Coalition is offering trainings to qualify members to self-certify their Sediment and Erosion Control Plans. The training helps the growers assess risk of erosion and sediment loss from their farms, evaluate whether the existing practices are sufficient, or whether additional

practices need to be installed. Seventy-seven Coalition members participated in this year's February 2017 training. Another training will be held in November 2017.

In addition, the RCDs – with funding and technical support from NRCS – are offering on-farm site visits to growers who have requested additional help with inventorying and evaluating the effectiveness of their sediment control practices, or who would like help reviewing the required Sediment and Erosion Control Plan forms. (Growers are still responsible for self-certifying, but RCD staff can provide review of those plans and additional recommendations and Conservation Planning assistance for their properties.)

If you are interested in a site visit to assist with Sediment and Erosion Control practices, please contact our office 707- 678-1655, and speak with Kelly Huff (x 102) or Martha McKeen (x 103).

Project WET Teacher Training

By Wendy Low, Watershed Educator

In February, our Solano RCD educators hosted and facilitated our third Project WET teacher training. The Dunnell Nature and Educational Center in Fairfield proved to be an excellent setting for the workshop, with multiple rooms, kitchen facilities, and a courtyard for outdoor sessions set in a recently restored creekside park.

Funded through the School Water Education Program (SWEP), we are able to train local teachers in this water-themed curriculum across a wide range of subject areas and grade levels. SWEP is a free program that partners with teachers throughout the county to provide school children from kindergarten through high school with lessons about water awareness and conservation. The Cities of Vacaville, Fairfield, Suisun, Vallejo, and Benicia, as well as the Fairfield-Suisun Sewer District and Solano Irrigation District, collaborate through SWEP to fund this kind of education. Solano RCD is in our second year coordinating SWEP.

In addition to our remarkable new site for Project WET training workshops, the trainings include guest speakers such as Alex Rabidoux from the Solano County Water Agency. Alex gave a compelling and eye-opening presentation on the subject of water

distribution throughout the state and the sources of drinking water within Solano County.

In the 2017-2018 school year, we will be dividing our two annual workshops by grade level, focusing on the needs of K-6 teachers in September and grade 7-12 teachers in February. Project WET activities are designed to be adaptable for a

range of grade levels, but grouping teachers by the grades they teach will enable us to feature Project WET activities best suited for specific age groups.

Teachers and other Solano County educators interested in registering for next year's workshops can contact Wendy Low at wendy.low@solanorcd.org. For more information about Project WET and the SWEP program, visit

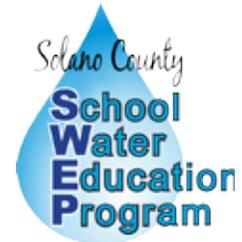
www.solanorcd.org.



Spring 2017 Project WET Training Participants at the Dunnell Nature and Educational Center in Fairfield



Solano RCD Educators Laura Morgan, Wendy Low, Carla Murphy and Jill Bolduc at the Spring Project WET training



Jill Bolduc presents to a room of Solano County teachers at the Spring Project WET training

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Volunteers at our April 2017 planting event, just a few of the 235 community members and 300 students who helped restore native plants to Centennial Park over the past year. Photo by Katherine Holmes

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If you would like to start receiving the *Lay of the Land* as a pdf in your email in-box instead of as a mailed paper copy, please contact Caitlyn Morrisey at Caitlyn.Morrisey@solanorcd.org