



REFUGIO CREEK WATERSHED VISION PLAN

10 JUNE 2009

Public Meeting #5

Meeting Notes / Compiled: 11 JUNE 2009

- MEETING #5:** HERCULES PUBLIC LIBRARY
109 CIVIC DRIVE, HERCULES, CALIFORNIA 94547 7:00 PM
- ATTENDING:** ROBERT REBER / CITY OF HERCULES
DREW GOETTING, RICH WALKLING / RESTORATION DESIGN GROUP (RDG)
JULIANA GONZALEZ, THE WATERSHED PROJECT
REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CITY OF HERCULES
COMMUNITY MEMBERS
- CC/EMAIL:** ROBERT REBER (FOR FILE & DISTRIBUTION THROUGH WEBSITE)
- NOTES:** FIFTH COMMUNITY MEETING
- NEXT MEETING:** SEPTEMBER 9, 2009, 7:00 PM

INFORMATIONAL SESSION

MEETING INTRODUCTION

Drew welcomed the group, reviewed progress to date, and reviewed the agenda for the evening.

WATERSHED GROUPS

Dr. Juliana Gonzalez, of The Watershed Project spoke to the group about how community groups organize to improve their watershed and how her organization can help.

Drawing on local examples of watershed groups in San Pablo, Pinole, and elsewhere in west Contra Costa County, Juliana described successful strategies for keeping a community involved in its watershed. Successful groups have a series of quarterly or monthly activities. These can be restoration, recreation, education, or monitoring projects that provide consistency and cohesiveness to the group. The focus of the group may vary depending on the needs of the watershed or the interests of the individuals involved.

Successful watershed groups often have a very small nucleus of dedicated members (3-7 people). These people may comprise a steering committee for the watershed group. Some of the more successful groups have a paid or volunteer coordinator to take notes, write grants, maintain the listserv, centralize communications, and other tasks. Many paid coordinator positions are part-time (16-20 hours a week).

Paper or electronic newsletters keep the small group of dedicated members in touch with the larger community. A small group of people can reach thousands by means of a newsletter. Electronic newsletters can help a group track what topics interest their audience by seeing who clicks on what links and reads what articles.

The Watershed Project can help watershed groups in many ways. They oversee several grant programs and can direct watershed groups to other sources of private and government funding. The Watershed Project can serve as a fiscal sponsor for small watershed groups. Watershed groups can use TWP's non-profit status to secure donations and support from other sources.

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TWP has two documents available to assist groups in forming: “How to Run a Watershed Awareness Campaign” and “From Start Up to Sustainable.” More information on starting a watershed group is available on The Watershed Project’s website:

<http://www.thewatershedproject.org/communities.html#orgdev>

TWP also trains teachers and educators in watershed issues. Their training programs include Kids in Marshes, Kids in Creeks, and other teacher-focused learning opportunities. TWP provides educational programs directly to youth through its Riparian Lab and service learning projects. More information, including information on their summer training for educators and other educational activities, can be found at:

<http://www.thewatershedproject.org/education.html>.

Juliana fielded questions about funding for watershed groups, the role of watershed coordinators, and the impact of the economy on small watershed groups.

WORKING SESSION

After the break, the group broke into two groups to review the updated draft Goals and Actions (see attached). The group reviewed the actions that were included, added actions, modified others, and updated the list.

The group reconvened and discussed broadly what it had learned or gained over the course of five meetings and a field trip and what some of the priority actions were. Members of the group had learned about the connection between the upper and lower watersheds, gained an awareness of the watershed as a whole, and began to understand how creeks and watersheds function. Members commented on how the shape and form of Hercules was a result of the Refugio Creek Watershed. One member stated, “Refugio Creek is our Main Street.”

Group members prioritized access throughout the watershed, connecting the upper and lower watersheds better (through the I-80/BNSF/San Pablo corridor), dealing with invasive species, and getting youth involved in the watershed.

COMPILATION OF THE DRAFT VISION PLAN

The Refugio Creek Watershed Vision planning group has met for five months, toured the watershed, heard from experts, and generated over sixty watershed management recommendations in the form of goals and actions. Restoration Design Group will now take this information, compile it, and produce a draft watershed vision report for the group to review in September.

If you are on the mailing list, you will receive an email from the City informing you that a draft of the Vision Plan is available for review.

There is still time to contribute. If you have thoughts or ideas about the watershed that come to you over the summer, feel free to send them to Rich Walkling at: rich@rdgmail.com.

Remember to join us on Wednesday, September 9 at 7pm at the Hercules Public Library for our final planning meeting.

Reviewers of these notes are encouraged to send any comments relating to the goals and actions to Rich Walkling at Restoration Design Group (rich@rdgmail.com or 510.644.2798 x5#).

These Meeting Notes represent RDG's understanding of meeting events and community member comments. If information included in these notes is incorrect or requires clarification please notify RDG within 30 days and a revised set of Meeting Notes will be distributed.

WATERSHED VISION PLAN – DRAFT GOALS AND ACTIONS

ACCESS

Draft Goal

Provide connected biking and pedestrian opportunities throughout the watershed to improve health, provide alternative to driving, and create an appreciation for the Refugio Creek Watershed.

Proposed Actions

- Create access point to Bay Area Ridge Trail and Fernandez Ranch at top of Refugio Valley Road
- Create creek access point at parking pull out across from Hanna Ranch Elementary
- Improve cross walk (lighting and stop signs) at Refugio Valley Road and Carson Street by Hanna Ranch Elementary
- Identify and highlight access points to Ohlone Creek trails
- Maintain trail across from lower exit of high school so that it does not fall into the creek
- Provide formal access to creek in Refugio Valley Park
- Beautify and integrate creeks and trails to create a better pedestrian experience when walking between Refugio Valley Park and San Pablo Ave.
- Better connect trails with creek
- Clean up trails
- Plant native, drought-tolerant vegetation along trail (especially trees)
- Create interpretive trails near proposed elementary school in lower watershed
- Create boardwalk access between Bayside and San Pablo
- Build pedestrian bridge from Front Street in Bayside to John Muir Parkway/Alfred Noble Dr.
- Complete creek trails down to bay and Bay Trail
- Create loop trail in middle watershed by connecting trail between Refugio Valley Road with maintenance trail on other side of creek (connect at Teen Center and upstream of Country Run)
- Future dog parks should treat water quality issues associated with dog waste
- Provide trash & recycle cans along trail
- Connect existing trails (and provide legal access) to create a loop trail along the ridges of the upper watershed starting at Falcon Way and Refugio Valley Road
- Construct a boardwalk through the lower watershed ponds
- Consider using boardwalks to access sensitive areas
- Formalize and limit access points into the creek to protect habitat
- Include interpretive signs at formal creek access points
- Improve bike and pedestrian access under I-80 and railroad tracks
- Provide a clear and deliberate hierarchy of trails (e.g., transportation, wandering access spurs)
- Town center should use creek as part of its identity and access

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Draft Goal

Educate the community to improve water quality and habitat and create access opportunities and to appreciate the Refugio Creek Watershed.

Proposed Actions

- Identify teachers to be environmental coordinators
- Have a watershed coordinator
- Provide regular watershed tours for the public
- Create “Blurbs” or summaries of watershed issues
- Create a self-guided tour using number posts at places along the creek. Tour guides could be available on-line or at places like the library
- Create a creek docent program through the schools
- Establish a “Creek Fest” similar to the Pinole Creek event
- Establish an online clearinghouse or archive to retain reports, photos, and art
- Create a Refugio Creek book that would include a list of species with photographs of plants and animals found in the watershed
- Place interpretive signage along the entire length of Refugio Creek
- Create creek-stewardship program at Teen Center along with garden, native plantings, improved creek access, and loop trail
- Make connections between schools and other groups to share ideas and resources
- Hold pollution and debris pickup not just in creeks but in entire watershed on Coastal Cleanup and other days
- Educate the community (outreach to youth and schools, The Watershed Project, Hercules Community Gardeners, Inter-Ac Group, and Kadets) & Earth Team
- Create and maintain a website for watershed information both in Hercules and outside of Hercules (include activities, links to other websites, data, and information clearinghouse)
- Use interpretive signs to explain the history of sites and areas along the creek

CREEKS

Draft Goal

Improve water quality, increase native habitat, and restore the creeks of the Refugio Creek Watershed to as natural a condition as possible.

Proposed Actions

- Evaluate fish passage at Refugio Valley Park drop structure
- Daylight creek downstream of fire station (alongside Refugio Valley Road)
- Investigate the potential to irrigate the community garden with creek water
- Replace non-native vegetation (e.g., ivy, pampas grass, eucalyptus) with native vegetation
- Improve and open Ohlone Creek between San Pablo Ave. and Sycamore Ave. in conjunction with development of the adjacent property, modeled after San Luis Obispo
- Manage the creeks as wildlife corridors
- Ensure the creek is maintained as planned
- Manage the creeks primarily for wildlife and habitat while accommodating public access and flood protection

PONDS

Draft Goal

Improve water quality, increase native habitat, and reduce maintenance costs throughout the ponds in Refugio Creek Watershed.

Proposed Actions

- Improve water quality (pond scum) at Lake Refugio
- Evaluate ways to improve water quality in lower watershed ponds
- Evaluate improving drainage out of Duck Pond by shading outlet channel with native riparian trees and adjusting outlet elevation
- Investigate costs and benefits of Refugio Valley Park lake

WILDLIFE/NATURE

Draft Goal

Provide, protect, and improve habitat for desired wildlife in the Refugio Creek Watershed.

Proposed Actions

- Manage the creeks as wildlife corridors
- Identify sites for mitigation (for threatened and endangered species)
- Create projects that are ready for funding in order to access mitigation funds
- Reduce impacts of feral cats, wild turkeys, and other non-native species

STORM WATER/WATER QUALITY

Draft Goal

Reduce flood risk and improve water quality in Refugio Creek Watershed.

Proposed Actions

- Place “Drains to Bay” signage at all storm drains (add this item to education)
- Evaluate opportunities to capture storm water at every pipe outfall and storm drain inflow
- Use BMPs (best management practices) to keep trash/pollutants out of creek
- Consider alternatives to storm drains (swales, rain gardens)
- Investigate the capacity for on-site water retention
- Organize creek clean-ups
- Conduct water quality testing through educational programs with the schools or volunteers. (add this item to education)