



Watershed Voice

The ESCONDIDO CREEK
Conservancy

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A Publication of The Escondido Creek Conservancy

WINTER Edition 2005

Escondido Creek to Benefit from Restoration Projects

Several habitat restoration projects will transform Escondido Creek for the better over the next few years. Invasive exotic plants that have infested the creek will be removed and the native vegetation allowed to recover.

Monoculture patches of *Arundo donax* (Giant Reed) and messy stands of Eucalyptus will be replaced with the natural beauty of live oak, willow, and sycamore woodlands. The enhanced creek habitat will provide better shelter for the many birds and animals that depend on Escondido Creek for their survival.

Projects Underway

Already underway are two projects on TECC owned lands involving the removal of *Arundo*, Eucalyptus trees, fennel, castor bean and other invasive weeds.

The native oaks, willows and sycamores will be allowed to return or will be planted if natural recruitment is slow. Two additional projects are planned for next year to complete the restoration of the creek areas owned by TECC.

In another effort, the San Diego County Water Authority has begun a large project to remove Eucalyptus trees from the creek in the Elfin Forest area.

In all, nearly 30 acres of Eucalyptus will be removed, eliminating a fire hazard and making room for the native trees that will better support wildlife.

Also underway is a program led by the Carlsbad Water-shed Network to remove *Arundo* and pampas grass from all of Escondido and Reidy Creeks, as well as from watersheds to the north as far as Loma Alta Creek.

Funded by a grant from the Regional Water Quality Control Board, this huge project allows land owners to take advantage of a free service to remove these plants from their properties and control any resprouts for three years.



Downed Eucs await removal in the TECC Quarry property restoration.



The CWN crew goes after *Arundo* at the TECC Quarry site.

Continued on Page 3

Planting Pride in Communities with America-in-Bloom

By Evelyn Alemanni

In towns all across the country each summer, communities prepare for a visit from judges from the America in Bloom Competition. It's not just a beauty contest.

Judges are trained to evaluate communities on eight criteria: Floral Displays, Landscape, Urban Forestry, Environment, Tidiness, Community Involvement, Turf & Groundcover and Heritage.

The goal of the program is to make America a better place to live, one community at a time.

Reaction to the program everywhere is enthusiastic. People often greet judges

“We’ve already won, just by entering. Our town has never looked so good.”

saying, “We’ve already won, just by entering. Our town has never looked so good.”

The program brings together people from all parts of the community, working together on projects that make a visible difference, such as cleaning streets, eliminating eyesores, putting out colorful planters, eradicating weeds, and holding local beautification contests.

New friendships are formed, new traditions develop, and residents report

greater satisfaction and pride in where they live.

The cleanup and planting efforts are often contagious – as one property improves, the neighbors get the idea, and before long, entire blocks are sparkling and beautiful.

Elfin Forest entered in 2003, missing first place in its population category by just 24 points out of 900. The community will enter again in 2005, and efforts are already underway for a winning entry, starting with the sowing of more than 60 pounds of wildflower seeds along Elfin Forest, Harmony Grove, and Questhaven Roads.

The Elfin Forest Garden Festival (www.elfinforestgardens.info) on April 23 will help raise funds to pay for the entry fee and the judge’s visit.

TECC’s efforts in the area of environmental stewardship will certainly help the community achieve higher points for the environmental sector. So many of the things that TECC does related to preserving and protecting the natural open space in the Escondido Creek watershed – education, stream cleanup, road cleanup, revegetation at the creek, purchase of open space, and more – directly support the goals of the America in Bloom program.

Because Elfin Forest is such a unique community, with more creatures than people, fewer than 1,000 residents, no stores, sidewalks, schools, or even streetlights, the America in Bloom judges need to consider the strengths that the

community offers in preserving the rural environment and preventing the spillover of suburban sprawl into its boundaries. Within our borders, at least half the land is preserved as open space through the efforts of TECC, The Christward Ministry, and the Water Authority.

Our valley is home to many endangered plant and animal species, and the preservation efforts create a priceless legacy.

For those who live here, and even people in the surrounding communities, these preserved open spaces represent a living natural history museum where people can see how California looked a mere 50 years ago.

America in Bloom judges will be visiting Elfin Forest during the first part of May. Let’s get ready for their visit by cleaning up, planting, caring for the environment, and preserving our heritage. It takes the involvement of everyone in the community to win this prestigious award. With your help, we can do it. For more information about the America in Bloom program, check www.americainbloom.org.

To participate in the local effort, call Eric Anderson at 760-471-1464.

The **ESCONDIDO** CREEK
Conservancy

Conservancy Teams with the Santa Isabel General Store

The Escondido Creek Conservancy (TECC) has teamed up with the Santa Isabel General Store to raise money for the Conservancy.

Vintage items are donated to TECC and then consigned with the General Store, which is across from Dudley’s Bakery.

The store sells a wide range of vintage items - furniture, jewelry, farm and garden tools, kitchen and household items, western and Old California collectibles, books and many other antiques and collectible objects dating from the

early 1800s through the 1960s.

The Santa Isabel General Store, which is open Wednesday through Sunday, is located in Santa Isabel in the original general store built in 1884.

The Escondido Creek Conservancy will eagerly accept your generously donated items to be placed on consignment.

Please contact Claudia Costanzo at 760-744-9052 to make your donation.

Elfin Forest Residents Prepare for Community Beauty Contest



Trails in Elfin Forest let people enjoy the area's natural beauty.

If you happened to be driving along Elfin Forest or Harmony Grove roads in the week of Nov. 3, 2004, you probably saw people strolling along with handfuls of seeds.

Organizers who were busy preparing the community for the 2005 America in Bloom contest had asked for the community's help. Packages of California poppy seeds were handed out at the Elfin Valley Nursery, across the street from the fire department.

Residents who picked up free seed packets were asked to sow the seeds on Nov. 6 along Elfin Forest and Harmony Grove roads, said Evelyn Alemanni, contest organizer.

"We asked that people spread the seeds because the ground was still moist from all the rain, Alemanni said. "We expect the flowers to start blooming in early April," just in time for the America in Bloom contest."

Two judges will be in the community the first weekend in May, and winners of the annual contest will be announced at a symposium in early fall. Specially trained judges travel the country evaluating communities based on their population and categories such as heritage, environment, floral displays, community involvement, tidiness, turf and groundcover and urban

forestry and landscaping.

According to the contest's website, www.americainbloom.org, organizers began the event in 2001 as a way to bring communities together to beautify their environment.

Elfin Forest, with its population of less than 1,000, entered the contest in 2003 and won second place in the under-5,000 population category. This year, Rancho Santa Fe won first place in that category, while Elfin Forest chose to take the year off to better prepare for 2005, said Eric Anderson, one of the owners of Anderson Seed Co.

"When we first entered, we noticed there were not too many communities entered in our population category," Anderson said. "We decided we would enter once to see how well we did. We were surprised at how many in the community wanted to participate.

Anderson's family-owned business donated nearly 40 pounds of seeds that were distributed and will produce bright orange poppies in the spring.

While Elfin Forest is not vying for any cash prizes, Alemanni said each community that enters receives a plaque and those that win also receive a trophy, but it's more about "bragging rights."

"I think the biggest prize is getting to live in a beautiful community," said Alemanni, who has participated as a judge in past events.

Registration costs is \$600, and the community will raise funds during its annual Garden Festival, which takes place April 23. Residents pay a fee to tour local gardens, and the proceeds will go toward the America in Bloom registration fee and for other community projects.

Alemanni said Elfin Forest is the smallest community to participate in the contest, and in 2003 she spread the seeds herself but thought it would be fun to involve the community this year.

"By involving the community, you build awareness of the contest," she said. "Plus there is such joy in spreading the seeds. It gives you a chance to slow down and get in touch with nature.

The above article was reprinted courtesy of North County Times.

Restoration

Continued from Page 1

Problem Plants

These plants are tenacious invaders, displacing native trees and creating severe fire hazards in the dry months. Arundo also causes flooding problems by clogging creeks with enormous root and cane masses. TECC encourages land owners along the creek to contact Doug Gibson at (760) 436-3944 to sign up for this program.

Taken together these efforts will go a long way toward returning Escondido Creek's stream side forests to their natural state, although Eucalyptus will continue to be a problem in some areas. The initial multiyear restoration efforts will need to be followed up by periodic monitoring to ensure the invasive exotic plants don't stage a comeback. But with a bit of luck and hard work done by these projects, we all will be enjoying a more natural and biodiverse Escondido Creek in the very near future.

Benefit Concert Helps Escondido Creek and its Watershed

The Escondido Creek Conservancy hosted its third benefit concert recently at Lazy J Ranch in Elfin Forest, overlooking the creek's tree-shadowed watershed. Proceeds from the fund-raiser will help the organization's goal to serve and protect Escondido Creek and its 77-square-mile watershed, which extends about 20 miles from Lake Wohlford in Escondido to San Elijo Lagoon in Encinitas.

The conservancy raises funds to buy land along the creek to preserve open space and organizes projects such as removing non-native plants and replacing them with natives.

Plans include removing non-native eucalyptus trees in the watershed and replacing them with oaks to attract native birds, said Leonard Wittwer, conservancy board member.

At least 21 acres of trees have been removed along the creek in an area near Aliso Canyon in Rancho Santa Fe. The

conservancy also has plans to remove trees from an area near Harmony Grove Road. The group installed a rock bench on a trail there to serve as a memorial for Cali McDonald Chen, a 1-year-old girl who drowned in her backyard pool last year.

"Cali's parents said she showed interest in nature, so her family and community raised \$6,000 for the conservancy," said Wittwer. "We are now using that money to build the bench, and whatever is left over we will use for other projects."

These projects include the possibility of acquiring new land and cooperating with various agencies to implement land-protection programs.

Wittwer said the fund-raiser served as both a networking tool and a way to educate people about the importance of the creek.

"We are trying to raise consciousness and recognition," he said. "We want to

help advertise our cause and draw people in to help keep our wetlands clean."

The conservancy took a giant step toward preserving the watershed as open space when it bought 76 acres in February 2001. The land, near the Elfin Forest Reserve, was purchased using private donations.

The most recent purchase was for the Derbas land, named after the previous owner and took place in 2002. The conservancy borrowed \$3.3 million from an anonymous lender to purchase 345 acres, with the intention of paying off the loan by selling land to the county of San Diego, Wittwer said.

The Derbas land makes up one-third of the watershed and another third of the San Dieguito River watershed, just south of Escondido near Del Dios Highway.

The above article was reprinted courtesy of North County Times.

The Escondido Creek Conservancy Officers

June Rady.....	President	Jerry Harmon.....	Director
Brent Alspach.....	Secretary	Jack Olmstead.....	Director
Leonard Wittwer.....	Director	TECC Office.....	760-471-9354
Steve Barker.....	Director	Email.....	tecsters@yahoo.com
Tim Costanzo.....	Treasurer	Website.....	www.escondidocreek.org
Everett DeLano III.....	Director		

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P.O. Box 460791 Escondido California 92046

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