

## Leveraging WHIP for Watershed Improvements

### Palomares School Science Expo and Watershed Festival

*By Morri-Ann Nagata, Asian Pacific Islander Scholar, Soil Conservation Intern - Livermore LPO*

Palomares Elementary School, situated alongside Palomares Creek in Alameda County's Castro Valley, implemented a Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) restoration project on Palomares Creek in 2002 that helped inspire and expand watershed improvements throughout the San Lorenzo Creek Watershed. The project was managed by the Alameda County Conservation Partnership (USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Alameda County Resource Conservation District), with additional funding provided by the Alameda County Public Works Agency.



**A bio-engineered crib wall was installed to stabilize Palomares Creek. This WHIP project launched several other community-based watershed improvement activities.**

The 2002 WHIP creek project restoration goals included streambank erosion control and stabilization, wildlife habitat enhancement, and providing opportunities for students and the community to learn about their creek and watershed through hands-on activities.



**Students examine an aquatic insect called a backswimmer.**

Since 2000, Palomares School has hosted an annual Watershed Festival, mainly funded by the Alameda Countywide Clean Water Program and supported by the Conservation Partnership. The Festival is a family event consisting of lots of informational booths, natural resource activities and student-led creek tours that showcase the WHIP project improvements.

This year the event blossomed into a much larger Science Expo and Watershed Festival for nearby communities. The Expo offered learning opportunities to more than 800 students and 32 teachers and chaperones from schools located within the San Lorenzo Creek watershed, along with parents and neighbors. The event was regarded highly by teachers because it helped meet curriculum standards set forth by California's "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001". More than 20 agencies hosted activity stations.

### *Outreach Tip to Put in Your Back Pocket*

**Farm Bill Conservation Programs are tools that can be used by NRCS and our partners to "link and leverage" resources to help achieve broader resource management goals. Consider using WHIP and EQIP as "strategic inspiration" to showcase conservation benefits to new client groups, including county and city government agencies and schools, to expand and fund mutually supportive projects.**

The Alameda County Conservation Partnership hosted two activity stations at this year's Expo that focused on watershed health and wildlife. A variety of California native riparian wildlife species and other naturalized wildlife living in and around Palomares Creek were demonstrated. Students examined backswimmers, dragonfly larvae, green tree frogs, native stickleback fish and many other creatures living on their school grounds. In other activities, students were able to view first-hand the detrimental effects neighborhood run-off can cause within watersheds. They experienced this through a realistic landscape model which incorporated elements of human activities that could cause pollution such as motor oil, animal wastes, fertilizers, and pesticides.



**Jackie Charbonneau, NRCS Ecologist, showing students the native stickleback fish found in Palomares Creek.**



"The unique aspect of this project was the ability of the Conservation Partnership, Alameda County and the dedicated teachers and staff at Palomares School to work together to turn a simple stream restoration project into a *regional learning center* that includes interpretive creek trails, creek-based science curricula that meets State standards, and now an annual Science Expo and Watershed Festival."

-Terry Huff  
NRCS District Conservationist

"This WHIP restoration project resulted in a great collaboration of partners and demonstrated how children can learn about science through real world applications."

-Jackie Charbonneau  
NRCS Ecologist



"The Palomares School program is an outstanding example of watershed education because investigation of the school's creek is incorporated into the learning curriculum of each grade level. This is orchestrated by Sherry Johnson, a retired teacher from the school who works part-time for the RCD to bring the watershed lessons to life by taking students on year-round exploratory visits to the creek that flows just steps from their classrooms."

-Amy Evans  
ACRCO Resource Conservationist