

Livermore Students Restore Local Stream

Livermore, CA, January 30, 2020— Students from Livermore area schools descended on Copper Moon Ranch in early January to help restore a section of the Arroyo Mocho. They were participating in Point Blue Conservation Science’s program ‘Students and Teachers Restoring a Watershed’ (STRAW), hosted by the Alameda County Resource Conservation District (ACRCD).

STRAW instructors first visited classrooms, teaching students from 4th grade to 12th grade principles of watershed restoration. These classroom sessions prepared the students for hands-on learning at the nearby ranch where they performed the restoration work themselves, planting trees and native shrubs.

STRAW is working in partnership with the local ACRCD, which has been assisting Copper Moon’s landowners, Julie Gallagher and Bob Stear, with grazing management and recovering from high flow events in 2017 that scoured streambanks and washed away shade trees and shrubs along the Arroyo Mocho, jeopardizing their home and barn.

Flooding from severe storms, driven in part by climate change, is anticipated to occur again. The trees and shrubs the students planted are intended to help reduce potential future impacts on the streambank, such as erosion.

“When we bought the property in 2011, we had cattle running



in the Arroyo Mocho and sections of it were treeless with very little vegetation. Any new growth that would begin would either be trampled or eaten by the cattle,” says Julie Gallagher. “Our vision was to have the Arroyo Mocho lush again with native vegetation and species. The first step was controlling cattle access to the arroyo which occurred several years ago with fencing” and a new stockwater system with assistance from ACRCD and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). “The result was a vast improvement of new vegetation and wildlife. Talking with the team at NRCS and ACRCD we shared our vision of what we wanted our riparian area to look like. We were introduced to Point Blue and STRAW. We thought that it was a wonderful partnership for us as ranchers to work with the local school students,” explains Gallagher, who runs Copper Moon Ranch with her husband Bob Stear.

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The current restoration project represents the first STRAW effort in the East Bay. STRAW started over 28 years ago, when 4th grade students watched a movie on endangered species and asked what they could do to help. They began taking action by planting willow trees in streams to improve habitat. Some students even went to Washington, DC to share what they were doing with government representatives. Since its inception, 40,000 students have restored over 30 miles of riparian habitat in the Bay Area.

The restoration is also anticipated to enhance habitat for amphibians and reptiles, including California red-legged frog, Foothill yellow-legged frog, and Western pond turtle.

“This project has multiple benefits, from providing wildlife habitat to improving water quality to storing large quantities of carbon in woody plants. Creek restoration is one of many management strategies that can mitigate climate change in California’s natural and working landscapes by pulling carbon out of the air and storing it in vegetation,” explains Ian Howell, the Carbon Farm Program Manager for the Alameda County Resource Conservation District.

In the end, the students will restore just over one acre along the creek. Their work was made possible by a multi-agency partnership that includes Point Blue, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service,



and the Alameda County RCD, with funding from the US Fish and Wildlife Service’s Partners for Wildlife program, the US Environmental Protection Agency’s San Francisco Bay Water Quality Improvement Fund, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program through the federal Farm Bill, and the California Coastal Conservancy through the state’s Greenhouse Gas

Reduction Fund. Of course, the project could never have occurred without the enthusiastic participation of the owners of Copper Moon Ranch and the intrepid students from Livermore schools.

Gallagher says, “We get the benefit of having our vision of the riparian area filled with native species again while the local students get to learn how to plant, what are the native species for the Livermore area, and also what it is like to be out on a working ranch. The benefit is not just for Copper Moon Ranch, but for the students who will see it in ten years and say ‘Hey, I planted those plants!’ With the

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addition of over 200 plants to the area, the environment will be benefitted in so many ways, from increasing the CO₂ absorption/O₂ output, to preventing erosion and purifying the water, to bringing in native wildlife that had disappeared because their food source and environment had been missing.”

The Alameda County Resource Conservation District (ACRCD) is a special district of the State of California committed to supporting voluntary conservation, education, technical assistance around natural resource management, and wildlife preservation.

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