



Lagoon Tidings

**THE CAMPAIGN FOR
GATEWAY PARK**
CONTRIBUTE NOW. CONSERVE FOREVER.

Community Habitat Restoration at Gateway Park

“What an amazing event. We got to work outside, learn about the local habitat, and help restore the beautiful outdoors. Everyone walked away with a real sense of accomplishment.”

~ Anthony Ongyod, Restoration Volunteer

On April 21 at Gateway Park, we got “down to earth.” Our Community Habitat Restoration event not only improved the environment for native plants and animals, we also raised awareness and funds for The Campaign for Gateway Park.

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Calendar of Events

Bird Counts

Second Monday each month
7:30 am–Noon at Rios Ave trailhead
Contact birds@sanelijo.org

Docent Meetings

Regular monthly docent meetings
Second Tuesday each month
9–11 am at the Nature Center

Docent Training

Become a trained naturalist at
San Elijo Lagoon
Training starts October 2012
Sign up now! (see page 5)

Guided Nature Walks

Second Saturday each month
9 am–11 am at Rios Ave trailhead

Every Saturday
10 am–11 am at the Nature Center

New! Summer Evening Walks

5:30–7 pm
June 20, July 19, Aug 15, Sept 19
(See page 3)

Family Discovery Days

“Native San Elijo”
June 30–Jul 1, 1–4 pm at the
Nature Center

Volunteer Restoration Events

Third Saturday each month, 9–11 am
June 16
September 15
October 20
November 17
December 15

For location and sign-up go to
SanElijo.org/restoration-events



Community volunteers clip flowers of invasive plants to prevent seed dispersal. Photo: Jennifer Nelson

Outreach Survey Highlights

Online survey provides insights into Conservancy programs

Last winter, we sent out a survey linked from SanElijo.org seeking the viewpoints of members, donors, trail users, and citizens. This survey was part of our 25th Anniversary preparations to better understand what inspires membership and trail use. We also sought feedback on use and perception of Conservancy programs. The findings helped Conservancy staff to make recommendations for planning in this milestone year, including these highlights:

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President's Message

By Denise Stilling, *President*

Have you ever wanted to encourage a friend to become a member of SELC but not been quite sure how to explain all the good work we do? Well, I'd like to offer you a little help. Our acronym "SELC," which stands for San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, can also be used as a reminder of what we do as an organization.

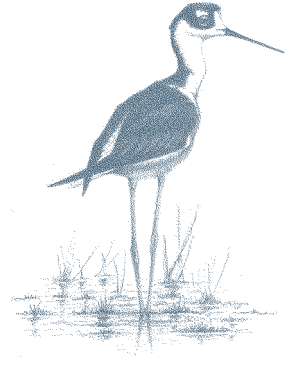
S – Science – we are a science-based organization with decades of biological and hydrological data used to monitor and maintain the health of the reserve.

E – Education – our environmental education program raises the public's awareness of the importance of coastal wetlands.

L – Land – as a land trust we are constantly looking for opportunities to increase the amount of open space around the reserve.

C – Conservation – we have spent the last 25 years protecting and restoring the reserve and we will continue to do so for the next 25 years and beyond!

So whether you are passionate about protecting open space, committed to environmental education, or concerned about the health and integrity of coastal wetlands, rest assured that San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy shares your goals. Thank you for being a member. And maybe now you'll find it easier to persuade a friend or neighbor to join us, as well. ❖



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FEATURED PHOTO



*Cobwebby thistle,
 a California native*
 Photo: Janie DeCelles

Submit your own photos taken in the lagoon! Send as an attachment with a description and your name in the subject line to photos@sanelijo.org

Images for submission: We prefer RGB files with minimum pixel dimensions of 2100 x 1600, minimal image manipulation and no recompression before submission. Please see image submission info at SanElijo.org/lagoon-image-drop-box

Life in the Los Penasquitos and San Elijo Lagoons

By Joan R. Simon



(Originally published in the Torrey Pinecone, newsletter of the Torrey Pines Docent Society)

At the March 10th docent monthly meeting, Doug Gibson, Executive Director and Principal Scientist at San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, arrived without his promised “show and tell” (the waters being too cold for live specimens in early March), but with a lively and colorful PowerPoint presentation that did not disappoint. He spoke about how alike the San Elijo Lagoon and the Torrey Pines Los Penasquitos Lagoon are. They are similar in size (100 sq. mi. for Los Penasquitos’ watershed v. 77 sq. mi. for San Elijo’s watershed), number of invertebrate species (50 v. 45), and number of fish (22 v. 23). They are also similar in the challenges they have faced with an expanding population at their doorsteps.

In fact, for the past 125 years, the welfare of Los Penasquitos Lagoon has been under threat. With the building of the railroad in 1887 and Highway 101 in 1901, which removed the coastal strand, the ocean no longer had easy access to the lagoon. Then in 1940 sewage began to be discharged into the lagoon waters and this problem went unchecked for more than 30 years; later, in the 80s and 90s, sewage spills added insult to injury, with eutrophication spurring excessive algae growth and suffocating native species. From 1960–1990, as the watershed was developed and Interstate 5 built (1965), excessive fresh water run-off from the growing amount of hardscape threatened to overwhelm the lagoon’s salinity and allow invasive fresh water species to out-compete saltwater plants and animals.

Conditions today are much improved, thanks in part to state and federal legislation, including the Clean Water Act, which mandates (if not always enforces) clean water practices, and the efforts of naturalists in both lagoons. But there is still a long way to go and many challenges remain. One of the biggest each year is ensuring access of ocean waters to the lagoon. In the past, when there was

less fresh water run-off and pollution, the lagoon could be closed for considerable periods of time and remain vital. Today, however, the inlet must stay open in order for the lagoon to survive, with a window of “no more than 15–20 days,” Mr. Gibson remarked, adding that “if your system closes in the summer, it will crash in 24 hours,” with fish beginning to die.

Needless to say, this poses a serious financial problem every year when the post-winter sands migrate onto the beach and inevitably close off the inlet to both the Los Penasquitos and San Elijo lagoons. The \$100,000 (per lagoon) dredging by mechanized equipment is done in both lagoons, usually back to back some time between late March and May. San Elijo Lagoon has the benefit of a \$2.3 million endowment to cover the yearly dredging expense. According to a TPA representative, the Los Penasquitos has money for this year, but at present there is no long-term source of funding.

Today, with diligent efforts to keep the lagoons open and the reduction in pollutants, both lagoons abound with life. There are Striped mullet, California halibut and the Staghorn sculpin. In fact, Mr. Gibson noted, a lagoon’s primary function is as a nursery and “85% of the fish we eat use lagoons.” There are California mussels, California butter clams, and the Gould’s bubble snail, which is an indicator species for a healthy, “really good system” (but is only present at Los Penasquitos). The California horn snail, which is a host to many parasites, can be a good indicator of diversity in a system; in fact, “the more you have,” Mr. Gibson said, “the more diverse” your system is (and incidentally this species is responsible for “swimmer’s itch”). There are Fiddler crabs “that burrow along the shoreline,” Egrets (Great and Snowy), and Clapper Rails, which are adjusting to climate change by building their nests in higher ground. And don’t forget the lively and thriving populations of deer that live upstream in the two lagoons. ❖



NEW! Introducing summer evening walks!

What Comes Out As the Sun Goes Down?

Summer evening walks will explore San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve as day becomes dusk. Join Conservancy docents to enjoy the pungent odors of sage-scrub on a warm evening, search for deer emerging from afternoon naps, and night herons fishing for a meal. Walks will be held from 5:30–7 pm on the third Wednesday of each summer month: June 20, July 19, Aug 15 and Sept 19, 2012. Meet at the Santa Carina trailhead east of the I-5.

For directions go to: SanElijo.org/santa_carina.htm. Trails are generally flat but we may encounter short stretches of moderate steepness or loose sand. Wear good hiking shoes and bring a light wrap in case the pesky marine layer finds us.

A Mule deer in the lagoon at dusk

Photo: Janine Free

Got gloves?

As the marine layer enveloped morning check-in, retired professionals, students, Conservancy board members, and neighbors signed in to volunteer. Nearly 50 Community Habitat Restoration participants pulled more than 2,000 pounds of non-native and invasive plants at the edge of Gateway Park where it borders San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve. Controlling invasive plants at Gateway protects neighboring habitat from infestation. This spring's event provided an ideal time to reduce the spread of invasive (or harmful) plant species.

"We got a lot accomplished at this event, even exceeding our goals," said David Varner, Conservancy Science Director. "We couldn't do this work without spirited community volunteerism from people of all ages and backgrounds. On that Saturday morning we all worked together to clean these sites and protect reserve habitats."

Learning as we go

Our Community Habitat Restoration events are more than work parties. The Conservancy's biologists designate time to educate participants and provide context for their efforts. After clipping vast stands of non-natives, including mustard, chrysanthemum, nasturtium, and purple stative, volunteers took a break to tour the West Basin of the reserve, between Scenic Highway 101 and the

train tracks. The biologists discussed sensitive lagoon habitats, including the restoration project at San Elijo Lagoon's dune—one of the few remaining coastal dune ecosystems in Southern California.

Recruiting new friends to The Campaign for Gateway Park

During this event, we met joggers, walkers, and dog owners who expressed their desire to get involved to raise funds for Gateway Park, thrilled to see the land we've valued for so long is at last in capable and sustainable hands. TV Channel 10 and local newspaper coverage captured this event to share the importance of saving our last open spaces.

Last December, when the Conservancy purchased Gateway, Conservancy member and restoration volunteer Jon Lea Fimbres' newest grandchild was born. "This land is for him," she said of her inspiration to donate to the campaign and to volunteer to help restore the property. "This was the first time I could see what it's really like," she said. "When you're walking it and preserving it in its natural state, you realize without the help of all these people, there could be a big hotel here!"

Are you, or someone you know, interested in learning more about saving Gateway Park? Please contact Elaine Dodge, Conservancy Development Director at elaine@sanelijo.org or (760) 436-3944 x 708. ❖

Favorite trails?

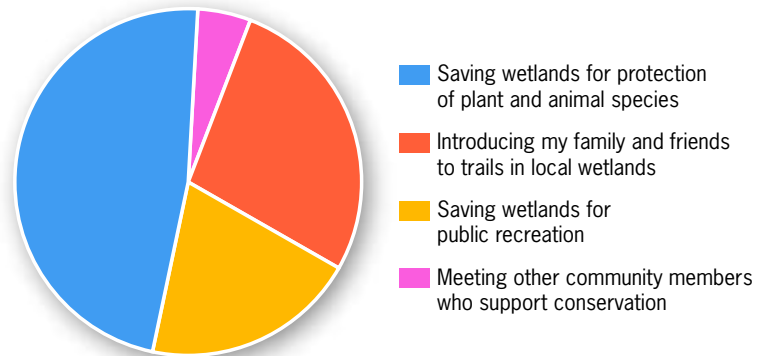
The Nature Center Loop and Rios Avenue trails were voted most popular. We learned that those who use the lagoon often go several times a week. Hiking was the number one activity, followed by birding and jogging. We also received comments on trail ideas and maintenance concerns. New this year: the Conservancy is adding Summer Evening Walks to capture the essence of late day for those who can join us after work.

Environmental and outreach programs received high ratings, with the most important being field trips and curriculum for our K-12 audience. Each week, Conservancy naturalists are in the reserve leading school field trips. As of this survey, new and current sources of funding will be sought to cover busing costs for school field trips, and other ways to support getting our children out into nature.

One hundred percent of survey respondents indicated that saving wetlands for protection of plant and animal species is an inspiration for Conservancy membership. Also, Nature Camps and presentations on wetlands topics received high importance. Community Habitat Restoration events now incorporate a walking tour to observe and learn about the biodiversity of the site being restored.

The Conservancy's land stewardship programs all received high degrees of importance, most notably the protection of habitat for threatened and endangered species. At the time of this survey, Gateway Park had not been purchased; a land acquisition that provides a buffer for wildlife in San Elijo Lagoon. The community support so far generated to secure Gateway Park in perpetuity is indicative of these land stewardship values.

What inspires your membership commitment with San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy?



Many respondents check SanElijo.org, read *Lagoon Tidings* and like us on Facebook (17 friends in the survey). Since the survey, *Lagoon eNews* has been revived and joins our social media outreach strategies for connecting with the community (subscribe online at SanElijo.org if you aren't receiving eNews, under "News" tab).

In its 25 years, the Conservancy has achieved major accomplishments. What staff and board focus on for the future is crucial as the Conservancy addresses new challenges. We thank all who participated in the winter survey, and whose answers and comments inspired enhancements to Conservancy programs this year. We'll continue to seek your thoughts and opinions in future surveys. For more detailed information and Outreach Survey highlights, visit SanElijo.org/outreach-survey. ❖

Education Update

By Tara Fuad, Education Director



“Watershed Quilt”: a special thank you from 5th graders at Central School, Escondido. Photo: Tara Fuad

As environmental educators, we have all questioned our effectiveness at instilling lessons that make lasting impressions on the students. There are so many distractions on a field trip: the students are out of the classroom, lizards abound, mom may be nearby, and then a fish jumps just as you are trying to engage the students in meaningful conversation. It takes patience and skill to keep students on topic, and sometimes we wonder...did they take in anything I said?

One way to gauge our effectiveness is in the thank you letters we receive from the students after a school visit. These letters provide a window into the students' experiences, often putting to rest concerns that our words went in one ear and out the other. One particularly poignant thank you card arrived in the form of a “quilt” with each student illustrating a 6” x 6” patch accompanied by their own inspirational message. This class had participated in the watershed program that addresses how students from Escondido are directly connected to the lagoon, why wetlands are important to protect, and what they can do to make a difference. I'd like to share several quotes from the Watershed Quilt entitled “Our San Elijo Lagoon... We Will Protect It!”

“I appreciate that I live in the Escondido watershed, therefore I am going to keep Escondido clean from trash.”

“If we litter, all the trash will go to the storm drain and will end up in the ocean and harm the creatures living there. Therefore I shall not litter and I will pick up trash.”

“The plants and animals in the lagoon help clean pollution that's in the water. I will make sure I wash the car on the lawn.” ❖

DOCENT TRAINING



As the Education Program expands, so does the need for docents. It's not too early to sign up or start recruiting friends to join the vibrant SELC docent community. Training will take place on Tuesdays 9 am–Noon in October and November (excluding Thanksgiving week) at the Nature Center. Applications are available at SanElijo.org/volunteer-docent.

Docent in the Spotlight—Emmy Garnica

By Tara Fuad, Education Director

A member of the Conservancy for as long as she can remember, Emmy Garnica is well integrated into the Cardiff community where she lives, works, and volunteers. After working for Kaiser Permanente in the Department of Psychiatry and Addiction Medicine for over 30 years, Emmy scaled back her work load to a small private practice for individual and couples therapy located in the same building as the Conservancy offices. Emmy also teaches yoga to seniors at Cardiff Library every Monday and Wednesday at 2 pm.

A graduate of the docent class of 2009, and a birder for over 20 years, Emmy didn't take long before she was leading her own walks. She initially substituted for the weekly Saturday walks at the Nature Center, but soon became a regular walk leader for the 1st and 5th weeks of the month. “I really enjoy the Saturday walks because you never know what to expect or who is going to show up...it keeps it



Emmy Garnica Photo: Tara Fuad

interesting. You have to be prepared to lead a private walk for one person or a mixed-age walk for over 20 participants, as happened last week when a scout group asked to join my walk.”

Emmy traces her interest in nature back to “Neil-O-Bug”, a family friend, gifted teacher and childhood mentor. “Neil and I really hit it off,” recalls Emmy. “My family wasn't really into camping, so Neil became my link to nature, and we remain friends to this day.”

In addition to volunteering as a docent, Emmy is on the Steering Committee of Friends of San Diego Architecture, which was founded by her mother over 25 years ago and is about to become its own 501c(3). Thank you, Emmy, for contributing so

richly to the community in which you live! For those interested in practicing yoga or learning more about local plants and animals, please consider joining Emmy at the library or the Nature Center. ❖

Family Discovery Days

The collaborative effort between the Conservancy and County of San Diego Parks and Recreation has proven to be very popular, with over 500 community members participating in each event. The next Family Discovery Day, “Native San Elijo”, is scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, June 30 and July 1, 1–4 pm. Come and learn about how Native Americans used the plants and animals of the lagoon to meet their everyday needs. A special thanks to all the volunteers who make each Family Discovery Day a success.

Iris Godbout (left) and Beverly Moazed await the next visitors at Spring Family Discovery Days “Egg-ucation”. Photo: Tara Fuad



Kelsey Roman with Fiddler crab poster she created for Family Discovery Days.

Photo: Tara Fuad



Our First Education Intern

Kelsey Roman is a sophomore at MiraCosta College and planning to transfer to UCSD as an Ecology, Behavior, and Evolution major in fall 2013. She is an avid hiker and believes that people often lose sight of the natural world and its restorative qualities in our fast-paced technology-oriented modern era. She hopes to educate people about the importance of preserving the outdoors. We are grateful for Kelsey's creative contributions to our education program.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

President's Council Takes on New Directions for 25th Anniversary Year

By Elaine Dodge, Development Director

San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy's President's Council was founded for the purpose of strengthening financial resources to maintain continuing existence of SELC and the reserve for the benefit of future generations. Over time, this came to mean donating to and raising money for the Conservancy's endowment fund.

Last year, when the President's Council reached its endowment fund goal of \$1 million dollars (see *Lagoon Tidings* Fall 2012) thought was given to setting a special goal for the President's Council in the unique circumstances of the Conservancy's 25th Anniversary. In consultation with the Board and members of the President's Council, it was decided to re-purpose President's Council member donations to the 2012 annual campaign. Annual campaign dollars raised this year sustain programs for 2012 and, more importantly, build capacity to grow existing programs and launch new programs in the coming years.

In 25 years, among other accomplishments, the Conservancy created an education program serving over 2,000 students annually, removed invasive plants from hundreds of acres in the reserve

and throughout the watershed, established a healthy habitat for endangered and threatened birds, and acquired six easements and 19 parcels for conservation.

Looking to the future, the Conservancy is focused on adding K–2nd grade curricula to its education program and bringing additional students, especially from inland and disadvantaged communities, for our hands-on science education. We will be planting 1,000 natives in previously treated areas, establishing a sustainable outreach program by hiring a communications director, incorporating tiered groupings of community volunteers for our habitat restoration efforts and, of course, completing the acquisition of the Gateway property.

“I'm excited to chair the President's Council in this time of growth and advancement for SELC,” said newly elected Council Chair Daniel Powell. Additional funding provided by the President's Council will help build sustainability for the Conservancy's mission.”

For information on how you can become a President's Council member, contact Elaine Dodge at 760-436-3944 x 708 or elaine@saneiljo.org.

Ways of Giving

A Sense of Ecology in Education: The Grauer School *By Dr. Stuart Grauer, Head of School*



Grauer Students Gabi Espinosa and Audrey Grauer Photo: Trevor Olson

In addition to scholarly, physical and emotional development, any great school understands that all students must cultivate a sense of ecology. This sense of ecology is basic to the development of active, positive citizens for the future. It is a powerful intelligence both rooted to early times and tied to our future prosperity and happiness.

The Grauer School is a founding member of SELC. The San Elijo Lagoon is a treasured local resource, and a treasured neighbor. So when we are planning ways to reach out into the community and give back, our spectacular local lagoon is always a priority. Through the years we have hiked and jogged the trails, adopted various sections of the lagoon to restore to natural conditions, created interpretive studies out of the many lagoon ecosystems, and befriended rangers, docents and SELC staff. Personally, my family and I have spent countless happy hours in peaceful meandering through this area of timeless beauty. We love the lagoon, and have been truly inspired watching SELC prosper and succeed through the years.

Picking the lagoon for a substantial, ecological donation was a natural for us. We thought for about a year about the precise placement of our memorial bench. There in the San Elijo Lagoon we can actively refine the sense of ecology of ourselves and our students, while honoring a valued neighbor.



Stuart Grauer and Dave Stillinger install The Grauer School's memorial bench in the lagoon. Photo: Joel Kramer

Spring Membership Renewal

Have you renewed your membership in 2012? The 700 species of mammals, birds, plants, insects, and fish living in the San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve depend upon your annual membership support. Your financial contributions sustain Conservancy programs that continually restore and maintain their habitat. Meanwhile our education and outreach programs cultivate future generations of conservationists who will take over the job of protecting our environment.

Please renew now! Reduce your carbon footprint by donating on-line at SanElijo.org/membership.



Community Supporters



Recently in bloom in the lagoon: Fuchsia-flowered gooseberry
Photo: Jamie DeCelles



San Elijo Lagoon CONSERVANCY

25 years of watershed moments

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Thanks for helping save paper!



We thank Wardell Builders of Solana Beach for their generous donation of the materials and installation for the Gateway sign.

