
**San Francisquito Watershed Council
Steering Committee Minutes**

December 13, 2006

Introductions. Agenda approved. The next meeting is January 10th.

Announcements

- Ryan Navratil (SFWC): The next Watershed Council volunteer workday will be January 6th from 9:30 am to 12:30 pm; the activity is planting native plants along Alpine Road on upper Corte Madera Creek.

Presentation: Spring 2006 vulnerable tree survey (Kevin Murray, San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority)

Pam Sturner introduced Kevin Murray, saying the vulnerable tree survey project is part of a grant from the Department of Conservation that supports part of the salary of both the JPA executive director and the Watershed Council coordinator and is for the coordination of watershed management and planning activities.

Kevin told the Steering Committee that the JPA had been contacted last year by Jason Banich, a high school student who was looking for ideas for an Eagle Scout project. The JPA shared its Department of Conservation work plan with him, and he chose to do the vulnerable tree survey.

Kevin then passed around a handout that contained the survey form used by volunteers to assess vulnerable trees; it is available on the Watershed Council's website at <http://sanfrancisquito.org/projects/forums>. Jason worked with the JPA to develop the form, using the San Francisquito Creek Bank Stabilization and Master Plan as a starting point; it divides the creek into sections from Sand Hill Road to West Bayshore Road and shows all trees along the banks. The handout also contained contact information for everyone that the volunteers might need to contact during the survey.

Jason recruited 50 volunteers to conduct the survey, and at a March 2006 training session, they were trained to look for dead and dying trees and those that could be easily undermined. The volunteers were divided into 10 groups for the actual survey, which took place on March 26. They used the form (p. 3 of the handout) to identify vulnerable trees, their location, specific signs of poor health, and some other information. The survey packet also contained a field guide with names and pictures of common trees, and the JPA asked volunteers to look for and note *Arundo donax* (invasive giant reed) during their observation walk. As part of his project, Jason Banich set up check-in stations where volunteers picked up materials for the survey. He also got Starbuck's to donate coffee and pastries.

Kevin then passed around a handout with a table showing the survey results. Once the results were tabulated, they were given to the city arborists of Palo Alto and Menlo Park for follow-up. Of the vulnerable trees identified, two trees were eventually recommended for some sort of action.

Kevin then told the group that the JPA is interested in making this an ongoing effort and asked for suggestions about how to make this happen, possibly in partnership with the Watershed Council.

Comment: This seems like something we should look into.

Question: Was species information collected?

Response: Yes, but only for vulnerable trees. This is just a small portion of the total creekside canopy. The species is listed by number in column 4 of the results table according to the codes used in the survey form field guide. Also, if volunteers did not recognize a tree species, they used the code number 14.

Kevin then passed around a handout of Jason's Eagle Scout report in the form of a PowerPoint presentation.

Question: How was this vulnerable tree survey different from the annual creek maintenance walk that the JPA organizes?

Response: This survey was done from a different view of the channel: volunteers observed from the banks rather than from the creek bottom as occurs during the maintenance walk. Also, there were more eyes on the creek and there was more of a focus specifically on vulnerable trees.

Question: Can you give us more context about the Bank Stabilization Master Plan, which you said was used to form the basis of the tree survey?

Response: In 1999, the Santa Clara Valley Water District, the San Mateo County Flood Control District, and the cities of Menlo Park, Palo Alto, and East Palo Alto partnered on a project to document the condition of the channel and vegetation of San Francisquito Creek from Sand Hill Road to West Bayshore. The project had many goals, including documentation of the condition of bank vegetation. One recommendation of the plan was to do a more in-depth inventory of bank trees. The goal was to protect the trees that were there and to help identify where to supplement where trees are lacking. The plan consists of three volumes. One contains maps of each of the 18 sections, in which portions of the banks are assigned numbers according to the general type of recommendations for that portion of bank. The document also gives land ownership and stream channel grade information. The third volume is a technical appendix that includes a series of photos. There is a copy of the full document in the Acterra library, and the JPA also has copies. It contains a lot of information, and residents who ask for recommendations for their properties are often overwhelmed by it. It's good to have someone who's familiar with it help residents go through it.

Question: Who were the volunteers who performed the tree survey? Can we get them interested in our volunteer programs?

Response: They were largely friends and family of Jason or other troop members. But many of the volunteers expressed an interest in creeks and trees. We can ask Jason for his volunteer list or ask him if he would be willing to post our events to his list.

Question: Was there any trouble with access during the survey?

Response: There were some areas that couldn't be surveyed due to lack of access to private property or because of water levels in the channel. Before the survey, Jason and the JPA sent letters to all residents telling them that volunteers would be performing the survey for publicly accessible areas. Some residents wrote back and offered to allow volunteers to go into their yards as well. Participants of next year's maintenance walk will make an extra effort to observe areas that were missed during the tree survey. The largest section of creek bank that volunteers could not survey was along the Stanford Golf Course where the creek banks were very wet and heavily vegetated.

Question: Does Stanford evaluate their creekside trees regularly?

Response: I'm not sure.

Comment: You could send the survey form and results to Stanford and ask them to supplement it with their own data.

Question: Was there any evaluation of the volunteer experience – what volunteers liked and didn't like?

Response: Yes. In the last few pages of the PowerPoint presentation packet, Jason included a section about what he learned, what went well and didn't go well, and what the volunteers enjoyed about the survey.

Comment: This a fantastic model to use to see if scout troops in other areas might be interested in doing something similar. For example, there are 20 debris jams on Coyote Creek. Having volunteers collect information and get it to the maintenance crews would be very helpful.

Comment: Paul Heiple is a scout master in Portola Valley. Maybe he could work with his kids on similar projects here.

Question: Does the Water District know about this survey?

Response: They have their own Adopt-A-Creek program, but we should show them this report.

Staff reports

Katie Pilat, Restoration Projects Manager: Katie has spent much of the past month working on outreach materials for the storm water demonstration projects. Outreach for the project will include an interpretive sign at the Menlo Park parking lot, a brochure about the two projects and about storm water management techniques, a fact sheet about each site including material information and costs, two guided tours of each site, and two community presentations about the projects. She also attended three training sessions hosted by CompassPoint: one on supervision, one on project management, and one on budgeting. All three workshops were very informative.

Ryan Navratil, Field Coordinator: Ryan attended a volunteer management training, also offered by CompassPoint. He led a workday in early December at which volunteers, including lots of students, planted 130 plants at the Woodside Elementary School site. This site had been planted in the past, but recently a redwood tree fell down and the site was trampled by the heavy equipment used to clear the fallen tree. The next workday will be January 6th, which will be another planting day at our site along upper Alpine Road.

Also during this month, Ryan and Pam hosted a Streamkeeper meeting at which they got good feedback on the reporting forms that Streamkeepers are asked to fill out. Ryan recently developed electronic forms for the group.

Question: Is there a lot of volunteer turnover in the Streamkeeper program?

Response: Yes; a lot of people have retired and/or left the area in the past two years. This is the 4th year of the program and we do recruiting each year. We are looking at ideas on how to develop a mentorship program between more experienced and newer Streamkeepers. Volunteer recruitment and retention is an issue many groups are grappling with now as people's lives get busier.

Question: At your volunteer management training, did you cover anything about sustaining the volunteer core?

Response: Yes, to some extent.

Comment: It's true that many groups struggle with this problem. We don't have this problem at Jasper Ridge -- there are perks galore for volunteers, including continuing education opportunities, access to the Ridge, and evolution of new duties for volunteers.

Ryan is also in the process of recruiting volunteers and developing the training protocol and curriculum for the revegetation monitoring program. Additionally, he has been working with partners from the *Arundo donax* eradication program on a study of the effects of active revegetation of weed eradication sites. The two partners are U.C. Davis and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The hypothesis of the study is that you must actively plant at a weed eradication site and cannot get good weed eradication results from removal only. In the Watershed Council's *Arundo* eradication program, we use the cut and stump method, in which glyphosate is applied directly to cut stumps and only contacts the plant material, not the soil. Glyphosate degrades quickly. The plants that will be planted are from stock collected in the San Francisquito watershed.

Question: Will tree of heaven be included in the Watershed Council's weed eradication efforts?

Response: Not at this time – the grant we have is specifically for *Arundo* eradication.

Comment: We have found that cutting the stumps and applying Garlon in early to mid June is effective at killing tree of heaven. This is the time of year when the tree hasn't seeded yet but has invested a lot of energy in growth. Tree of heaven reproduces vegetatively and by seed, so slash must be removed from the sites to control regrowth.

Comment: The Town of Portola Valley gets donations of chipped wood that sometimes have hundreds of tree of heaven sprouts.

Ryan commented that at the last San Mateo County Weed Management Area meeting, the group discussed the idea of creating a weed-wiki (wikipedia) to share specific information about successful weed eradication techniques.

Pam Sturner, Project Director and Coordinator: Pam noted that at the January meeting she will talk with the Steering Committee about initiating a strategic planning process for the Watershed Council. We are in a transition as an organization; we are finishing up several long-term projects and some of our large grants are coming to an end. It is time to take a new look at our work and our mission and figure out how to move the organization forward in a way that draws on our

talents. Pam has talked to the Management Advisory Committee (MAC) about this and would like to begin planning in January. She emphasized that the Watershed Council is in a fortunate position: given our loose structure, we are about as free as organizations ever get to look at their future. There are many incredible, committed, and creative people who are part of this group and will help think this through. Pam will present a plan and schedule for the process at the January Steering Committee meeting, and will ask that a little bit of each meeting will be devoted to this process, to come up with new ways to engage and connect with the watershed and the people in it. Pam will be putting together a Strategic Planning committee and welcomes everyone to consider participating in it. This committee will move the process forward and bring recommendations to the Steering Committee for consideration and decision. Pam acknowledged that there is often the fear that strategic plans will just sit on a shelf, but stressed that this plan will directly influence the Watershed Council's future work. It will be a management tool and a touchstone for what we do and what we don't do. We want to be intentional about our work and this plan will help us do that. It will also help us address our organizational structure to meet our priorities.

Question: Is there any way the Watershed Council can help the Army Corps to move faster on its flood management and ecosystem restoration project? Do we have any Army Corps contacts?

Response from Kevin Murray (SFC-JPA): The San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority is the local contact for the Army Corps project. Its Board of Directors has an interest in the role the Watershed Council plays in the project. Outreach is an important part of the project, and maybe there is some outreach-related role that the Watershed Council can play. Some members of the JPA's Board of Directors think the Watershed Council can do all of the outreach for the project, but this is a really big effort and may be too big of an effort to volunteer for.

Comment: There would need to be funding for that.

Comment from Pam Sturner (SFWC): It's an important observation that there are differing expectations about a potential role for the Watershed Council. I think we are committed to assisting in the exchange of information about the project, as we have been doing over the past year through updates by Cynthia D'Agosta to the Steering Committee.

Comment: This topic can be a part of the strategic planning discussion regarding what we do and don't do as an organization. It is very important for us to what we think our role should be. And there's no doubt that that the Army Corps project will have a huge impact on the creek's future.

Comment: We need to be really clear on our role in this project so that it doesn't overwhelm us, especially if there are misunderstandings among the various parties about each other's roles.

Comment from Kevin Murray (SFC-JPA): The pace of the Army Corps project is limited by federal funding. This is looking better, but there are still no guarantees.

In attendance:

Katie Pilat – SFWC

Libby Lucas – Los Altos resident

Marge DeStaebler – PV Conservation Committee

Jerry Hearn – Acterra

Bill Whitmer – SFWC

Philippe S. Cohen – Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve, Stanford University

Julie Skelton – Stanford Management Company
Kevin Murray – SFC-JPA
Pam Sturner – SFWC
Ryan Navratil – SFWC
Judy Dauberman – Youth Community Service

Minutes respectfully submitted by Katie Pilat.