

# ACWF Remediated Creek and Habitat Site Maintenance Event

## January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Nearly 30 creek restoration enthusiasts packed the room at the Peralta Hacienda Historic Center on Tuesday, January 25<sup>th</sup> to hear experts in restoration project maintenance share their stories, and glean a few new ideas for making a most “unglamorous” job more successful.

The program started off with a tour of the historic Hacienda grounds and nearby Peralta Creek, led by **Ben Glickstein**, Volunteer Director at the Peralta Hacienda. The park was established in response to neighborhood interest and remains a small oasis in the midst of a densely urban area. The Alameda Countywide Clean Water Program has just awarded the Friends of Peralta Creek and the Friends of Peralta Hacienda Historical Park a small grant to do removal of invasive species and native plantings along the creek. Ben talked about the difficulties encountered with urban sites, as well as the significant value gained by adding cultural elements to the landscape. Littering is a problem in the creek area, but the more visible grounds near the buildings – complete with placards identifying important plant species - were relatively clean.

Following the walking tour, three speakers from business, government and non-profit groups shared case studies, techniques and solutions for common – and not-so-common – problems with remediated creek-side areas and how to keep them maintained for the long-term.

**Joshua Bradt**, Watershed Resources Specialist with the Public Works Department in Berkeley, started off the program with some key points: namely, when planning for maintenance, sources of funds must be identified up-front or it might be forgotten. This is particularly important with state bond money and other grant funds, which can generally only be used for capital costs. Maintenance often gets left out of the equation, or must be substituted for something else that is fundamental to a project’s long-term success.

He emphasized the need for communicating with the public about what the project will look like in the short-run and in the future. Once plants grow in, a site can look very different from the original installation and may not be as appreciated as the clean look of the newly established plantings. It is important to make sure you understand the public – and they you – to best manage the “human use interface”. Interpretive signs and managing for visibility (e.g., incorporating benches, focused trails, low fences) are key components.

Also, do not assume that the local agency responsible for the site is experienced with restoration project plants and their short and long-term maintenance needs. Landscape maintenance subcontractors often have a “mow and blow” mindset, so this element of the equation needs constant care and supervision, just like the sites themselves. Early communication with public agencies, including public safety and flood control agencies is important.

Josh also suggested that operations and maintenance workshops be scheduled, and recommended a work site “Users Manual” for maintenance workers and volunteers that will help ensure consistency over time. This was done with the El Cerrito Baxter Creek Gateway project, and the manual includes a checklist and log for volunteers. He explained that with a small investment cost, volunteers can achieve a tremendous amount of work.

**Mark Heath**, Principal and Restoration Specialist with Shelterbelt Builders, addressed the fact that site preparation upfront is directly related to maintenance needs in the future. He also recognized the huge need for volunteer support. He suggested that having a “presence” allows remediation work to succeed: sheathing of the new plantings and fencing can do wonders for keeping visitors from inadvertently destroying it. Early weeding or use of weedblock fabric is key, along with mulching, caging, and fencing. Vinyl-coated wire blends well with the landscape, but welded wire is the sturdiest (and most costly upfront) and better guarantees the investment. He also walked through the variations in irrigation – from automated to DriWater gel packs - and discussed the success rates of these methods based on his experience in maintaining restored streambanks.

Mark also suggested that specific guidelines be developed for how restoration areas should look. The National Park Service has done this for all of their restored sites. He suggested planning in 1, 3 and 5 year timelines, and providing a 3<sup>rd</sup> party “biological monitor” that can document progress toward performance standards and ensure that maintenance is accounted for in a feedback loop. He also dove into territory unknown to most, regarding legal terminology for contracting. Apparently, wages for “maintenance” requires an hourly wage that differs from wages for “installation and warranty”, which triggers negotiations with the trade unions on prevailing wage requirements.

**Cindy Angers**, with Friends of the Arroyos, and an ACWF Steering Committee member, addressed some key components of site maintenance that have made significant differences in the success of their site in Livermore: providing lighting to minimize nighttime vandalism, a trash can to provide a place for trash, and a relatively new and inexpensive idea for weed reduction: cardboard sheet mulch! The Friends of the Arroyos gathered cardboard boxes from local stores and, with the help of volunteers, installed this easy to use and biodegradable form of weed control.

A robust forum discussion followed the talks, with a lively and engaged audience of grassroots organizations that included The Watershed Project, Butters Canyon Council, The Watershed Nursery, Friends of Sausal Creek, the Urban Creeks Council, and Friends of Five Creeks, as well as city, county and state agency representatives. One of the recurring themes discussed was the importance of using a committed volunteer base for restoration and maintenance, which the Forum plans to address in an upcoming event in April or May.

For a copy of the *“The Weed Workers’ Handbook – A Guide to Techniques for Removing Bay Area Invasive Plants”* please visit: <http://www.cal-ipc.org/shop/index.php>