

The Lay of the Land

The Newsletter of the Solano Resource Conservation District

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Early Fall 2016

Bring on Fall!

By Christopher Rose

As summer turns to fall, the sense of changing seasons is all around us. Every year I revel in the changing light, the cooler night air, and the fall harvest. Solano RCD staff and Board are gearing up for a fall/winter season of working with landowners, partners, volunteers and paid contractors to implement and manage conservation practices across the County, in small, medium and large-sized projects. We'll hit the ground running with a fall and winter work plan that includes seeding more than 20 acres of native grasses, planting 10,000 sedge, grass and rush transplants, and more than 1,500 native trees and shrubs at four different restoration sites throughout Solano County. We'll be working at sites near Vacaville, Winters,



Solano RCD Conservation Project Manager Andrea Mummert Puccini broadcasting native grass seed at the Dunnell Park demonstration grassland site

Rio Vista, and Collinsville. Work continues on weed control and erosion control planting in Pleasant's Valley and Old Alamo Creek, and our Flood Awareness program will kick into high gear to get Solano County residents and landowners thinking about

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Solano RCD Fall Plant Sale Returns



Solano RCD Board members assist on plant purchase check out at a past plant sale

Solano RCD is very excited to bring back our Fall Plant Sale. The Solano RCD Board believes the event is one of the best ways for Solano RCD to connect with District residents and the County, providing a needed service that supports our mission. So why the hiatus from plant sales?

The RCD has always taken plant health and plant propagation standards seriously and when a new Phytophthora species (water mold that zaps the ability of plants to absorb nutrients) called *Phytophthora tentaculata* began threatening commercial nursery operations, we needed to ensure that all nursery stock that entered or left the RCD was clean. Our basic nursery practices of keeping plants off the ground, avoiding standing water near plant storage areas, never re-using potting soil and washing used pots with a disinfectant solution didn't seem to be enough, given the potential damage of the *Phytophthora* threat. There was no evidence of current or past infection, but we tested our nursery stock and consulted with the California Department of Food and Agriculture to be certain. At the same time, we

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Flood Awareness with site visits to talk about flood preparedness and the Small Grant program for flood control. Our summer watershed education programs ended on September 17th with the 2016 Coastal Clean-up program, which included more than 60 sites in the County. Things started right back up with the Suisun Marsh Education Program for middle-schoolers in Fairfield and Suisun City classrooms as students returned from summer vacation.

We're proud to offer so many programs to educate children, youth and adults in the field and teach people how to protect and restore the natural resources that make Solano County such a wonderful place to live. Our education programs—and everything else we do—are possible because of the great partners we work with to improve and enhance our county. These partnerships are a vital tool in making the District's tax base dollars go further and do more. Our annual budget for the 2016-2017 fiscal year exceeds \$1.6 million dollars. \$160,000 of this amount, about 10% of the budget, comes from Solano RCD's annual tax assessment. The remaining 90% comes from County, State and Federal competitive grants and directed action grants from various local partners. We use these resources to take students out into the field to learn about their watersheds, eradicate noxious weeds on public and private lands, and to plan and implement habitat restoration projects throughout the County. We hold workshops and field days for the community, and run twice-yearly native plant sales to support habitat enhancement projects on private lands.

Plant Sale, continued from Page 1



Join Solano RCD at our Conservation Education Center and go home with drought tolerant California native plants!

revised our protocols for growing, storing and purchasing plant stock. Now, after upgrading our nursery operation, plant purchase policy from commercial nurseries, and propagation protocols, we're ready to host a Plant Sale

The 2016 Fall Plant sale will take place October 15 at our Conservation Education Center. It will offer more than 20 species California native and native cultivars for purchase at a fair price, focusing on drought tolerant California native and regionally appropriate plants for sale for urban and rural home use, and specifically for use in lawn replacement projects. Solano

RCD has supported gardening with drought tolerant California natives and naturalized hybrids for a long time. One of the best ways to achieve big water savings in the landscape is to convert lawn areas- which can use more water than all other home uses combined- into drought tolerant plantings featuring native grass meadows or native shrubs.

The Solano County Water Agency (SCWA) offers a one-time rebate to customers who replace their turf with drought tolerant meadows, mulched drought-tolerant shrubs or permeable hardscape, and RCD staff can help you plan an attractive, easy to maintain alternative to your lawn to earn that rebate. Plants native to Solano County and similar areas evolved to survive in drought conditions, requiring much less

water to flourish than species from wetter climates. A garden planted with a variety of native plants provides habitat and nectar sources throughout the year to support local and migratory beneficial insects, birds and wildlife. In urban areas, native gardens provide wildlife habitat and cover where none would otherwise exist.

SCWA staff will be at the Plant Sale to discuss their turf replacement program with interested homeowners, and Solano RCD and SCWA will team up to offer two training sessions in the demonstration garden during the sale (9:00 – 10:00am and 11:00 – 12:00pm). Join them to learn about landscaping with native and regionally appropriate drought tolerant plants to create meadows with grasses, sedges and rushes as an alternative to turf.



Solano RCD Project Manager Amy King discusses the benefits of landscaping with drought tolerant California native plants at a Solano RCD Plant Sale

Farewell and Hello – New Staff for the RCD

When you visit the Solano RCD office, you'll find some new faces. We had to say goodbye to two great staff members this summer: Judy Powell, our long time Office Manager retired; and Jamie Solomon, our Environmental Education Assistant Manager, moved to Southern California. Although we will miss them greatly, we've been given the opportunity to welcome four new people to the Solano RCD family. We'd like to use this space to introduce you to our new staff members. We are very lucky to attract such high quality people to the RCD. Their dedication, passion and hard work make help to make our excellent team even better.

Caitlyn Morrisey, Office Manager



Caitlyn is our new Office manager and bookkeeper. Her responsibilities include coordinating payroll with Solano County, invoicing, maintaining personnel records, and taking minutes for the Solano RCD Board of Directors' meetings. She brings more than 10 years of experience working in various office settings,

most recently as a paralegal and office manager at a local law firm. Caitlyn earned a BA in History from UC Santa Barbara.

Allison Meador, Assistant Environmental Education Program Manager

Allison came to SRCD with eight years of experience as a resource interpreter and environmental education program manager. Her passion for environmental education started as a fifth grade student when a science camp naturalist inspired her to pursue the joy of sharing nature with



others. Allison's experience includes work with the East Bay Regional Park District and the Monterey Bay Aquarium. She served as education and marketing director for Micke Grove Zoo in San Joaquin County, where she developed and assessed the curriculum for over a dozen new school and public based programs. Allison is an active member of the National Association for Interpretation and one of the few proud Certified Interpretive Managers in the world.

Laura Morgan, Environmental Education Program Coordinator



Laura joined the RCD in summer 2015. She manages our environmental education field trips, coordinating with teachers and delivering classrooms lessons, teaching children of all ages about the watersheds that surround them. Laura has always enjoyed learning about scientific concepts and

earned a B.S. in Animal Biology at U.C. Davis. During that time, Laura was part of the Yang Lab where she conducted research on monarch butterfly coloration and helped with ongoing experiments. During college, Laura was a research assistant, and interned at the Bohart Museum of Entomology where she led tours, visited schools and helped coordinate educational events.

Sarah McKibbin-Restoration Project Manager

Sarah began working for Solano RCD in January 2016 as Restoration Project Manager, and is currently managing three of our newest habitat restoration and enhancement projects. She has over 10 years of experience working with natural resource conservation organizations, including the California Department of Boating and Waterways, Sacramento Area



Flood Control Agency, Sacramento Area Creeks Council, The Nature Conservancy at Cosumnes River Preserve, and the Sacramento Tree Foundation. Her work and volunteer experiences have centered on native plant establishment, habitat restoration, invasive plant management, and vegetation monitoring throughout Sacramento Valley. Sarah earned a B.S. in Ecological Management and Restoration from U.C. Davis.



**Jeff Carlson-
Restoration
Technician**

Jeff Carlson has a lot of practical experience working with his hands. For the past fifteen years, he has spent time in farming and ranch management, construction, and veterinary medicine. Jeff comes to us

after thirteen years in maintenance and bio-processing at Genentech. Jeff is a long-time volunteer for the Putah Creek Council, and he's been one of the RCD's best volunteers for several years. When our workload increased last year, we were lucky to be able to hire him as a full-time Restoration Technician. Jeff brings a variety of skills to the RCD including site management, volunteer workday coordination, contractor skills, tractor operation, welding, and plant identification and native species planting skills. Jeff earned a B.A. in German Studies from U.C Davis.



Environmental Education Coordinator Laura Morgan teaches a field lesson to attentive students in Benicia

And now, our farewells:

**Judy Powell, Office Manager
Emeritus**



Judy was our Office Manager from 2006 until her retirement this June. She will stay on in a part time advisory capacity until our new office manager becomes accustomed to our office management protocol, likely through this calendar year. Judy was an integral part of Solano RCD's healthy growth, administering staff payroll, timely bill payment, preparing for monthly Board meetings and a host of other tasks. We will truly miss her attention to detail, her work ethic, and her kind and lovely disposition.

**Jamie Solomon, Assistant Environmental Education
Program Manager**



Jamie served as our Assistant Education Program Manger for the last two years. She did an amazing job, teaching classes, leading field trips and organizing our Watershed Explorers Program for 3rd graders; Suisun Marsh Watershed and Wetland Program for 6th graders; and the Bio-monitoring Program for high schoolers. We'll miss Jamie because she was great at her job and because she's a great person and very fun to work with. Jamie has moved to Southern California to continue her career there.



A Solano RCD Restoration Technician prepares the Centennial Park site for seed this fall

Volunteers Make it Happen

Fall is planting time, which means Solano RCD staff will be out across Solano County planning, preparing and implementing habitat restoration projects. Fall planting season also means that there will be many opportunities to assist the RCD with restoration and enhancement projects during our conservation volunteer days.

We believe that people learn and understand the value of environmental stewardship best when they have opportunities to actively participate in real projects that transform the landscapes they live in. In volunteering their time and labor, people gain an understanding and connection to our work far beyond anything they can access from a newsletter article, no matter how well written and laid out. Getting outside and getting your hands dirty provides immediate real-life involvement in conservation, and it provides real help in getting the job done. People who participate in our field days—propagating plants, removing weeds, and planting natives and watershed appropriate species—almost uniformly enjoy their experiences. They usually go on to learn more and volunteer more. They become ambassadors for our projects, bringing out more folks



Solano RCD Assistant Executive Director Katherine Holmes discusses the site during a volunteer planting event at Centennial Park in Vacaville.

to find out what it's all about. We maintain an e-mail list of people interested in volunteering at habitat restoration and wildlife conservation projects, and every six weeks or so, we send out an e-mail describing upcoming opportunities and inviting folks to sign up. More than a dozen exciting events are planned for the next sixth months; check out solanorcd.org for upcoming opportunities. If you'd like to add your name to our volunteer list, e-mail Katherine Holmes at: Katherine.Holmes@solanorcd.org. We'd love to have you with us!



Restoration Technician drill seeding native grasses at Centennial Park in Vacaville



Volunteers help plant a hedgerow north of Dixon

The Lay of The Land

Newsletter of the Solano Resource Conservation District
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Solano RCD Fall Plant Sale Returns! Saturday, October 15, 8 - 12

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Solano Resource Conservation District

Fall Plant Sale

October 15, 2016

8:00 am-12:00 pm

at the Conservation Education Center
6390 Lewis Road, Vacaville

Featuring an excellent selection of well-priced
California native & regionally appropriate plants

Get the *Lay of the Land* by e-mail!

If you would like to start receiving the *Lay of the Land* as a pdf in your email in-box instead of as a mailed paper copy, please contact Caitlyn Morrisey at Caitlyn.Morrisey@solanorcd.org