

Laguna Learning Center Phase I Nearing Completion

Mark Green, Acting Executive Director

Construction is hopping at Stone Farm! Thanks to a generous pledge by former Foundation Board President Susan Churchill and her husband Ken, renovation of the historic farmhouse at the Laguna Learning Center is now scheduled for completion by the end of July, at which time the Foundation's staff will move our offices into the building and we'll be able to start conducting activities onsite. This will complete Phase I of the three-phase project, and is a major milestone for the Laguna Foundation.

The Laguna Learning Center is a core component of the Foundation's strategy to build public awareness of the Laguna, and will expand the capacities of each of our program areas, with facilities for education and research and a native plant nursery to support our expanding habitat restoration efforts. Once we're moved in, we'll start to work immediately on Phase II, for which we have secured a State Coastal Conservancy grant of \$700,000. Though currently frozen (see page 6), we're confident this money will be there within the coming year.

Completing Phase I is a major step for the Foundation and we are deeply grateful to the campaign donors, community supporters and contributors of labor, discounted materials, and other services which have enabled our "community barn-raising" to move ahead. Please see below for a complete list of these generous, community-minded supporters plus key donors of services and materials.



Dan Schurman

Almost ready! Laguna Learning Center farmhouse in March

Of course, an event like this will require a party! We'll let you know when we're ready to celebrate the opening of the Laguna Learning Center and hope to see you there when we cut the ribbon. Our deepest thanks to everyone who has helped this long-awaited day to arrive.

Community Service Partners

Architect & Designer : Yuill-Thornton Brady
 Project Manager: Jim Murphy and Associates (JMA)
 Excavation, Trenching & Heavy Equipment: Guy Smith Company
 Heating System: Warm Zone Inc
 Insulation: DJM Coatings Services Inc.
 Electrical: Nine Lights Electric Inc.
 General Contractor: Sean Barr Company
 Floor Installation: Hendricksen Natürlich Flooring
 Painting: Painting & Decorators Association
 Tile Installation: Ken Hower Custom Tile and Marble
 Sheetrock Installation: Mike Jay
 Landscaping Company: Allen Land Design
 Computer Systems Management: ComputerLink PC & Network Management

The following companies have generously donated materials:

Berry's Sawmill Inc.
 Bohan & Canelis Aggregates
 Friedman's Home Improvement
 Mead Clark Lumber Company
 Norcal Building Materials
 Sebastopol Hardware Center
 Van Dyke and Associates

If a need arises, we hope you will consider contacting these small local businesses who are supporting the work of the Laguna Foundation and generously serving our community.

If you can help or would like more information about becoming a Community Service Partner, please contact Mark Green at (707) 527-9277 x103, or email: mark@lagunafoundation.org.

A Message from the President of the Board of Directors: Dan Schurman Departs the Foundation

After more than six years of service, Executive Director Dan Schurman has stepped down from his position with the Laguna Foundation. Dan led the Foundation over a pivotal period which saw the organization expand its programs into habitat restoration, conservation planning, and scientific research while continuing to conduct its well-known environmental education program in local schools, Learning Laguna. On his watch, the Foundation tackled complex challenges such as the threat of invasive Ludwigia in the Laguna, engagement with a diverse range of stakeholders, and pursuit of a permanent home at the Laguna Learning Center.

The Foundation wishes Dan good luck in his future endeavors. Associate Executive Director Mark Green will fill the role of Acting Executive Director while a search is conducted for a permanent replacement; Mark has declined to be considered as a candidate for the position. A committee of the Board has met and identified key skills and experience that we are looking for in our new Executive Director and we are currently accepting applications.

The loss of a chief executive of any organization can be traumatic. However the Laguna Foundation has a stable team of experienced and excellent staff members and I am confident that together with the support of the Board and you, our Stakeholders, the Foundation and its programs will thrive. The important work we are doing in and around the Laguna will survive us all and I hope we can count on your continued support in making it all happen.

Thanks again,



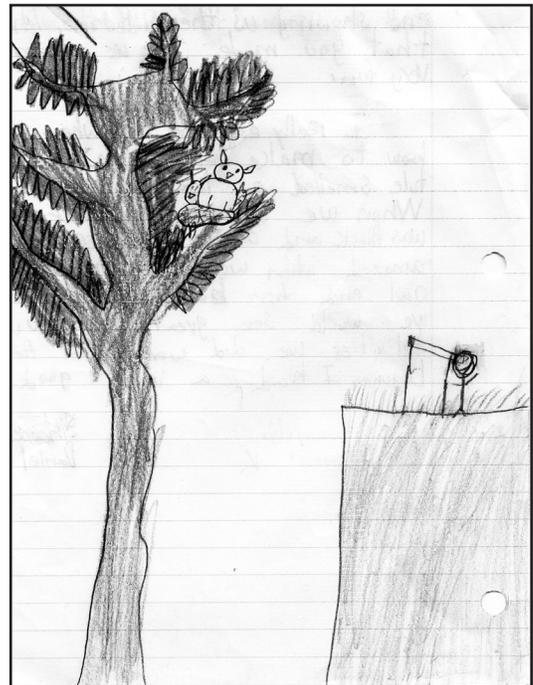
David Bannister
Board President
Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation

Docent Training and Learning Laguna in Full Bloom

Christine Fontaine, Director of Education Programs

There was a great response to our call-out for new docents this year—we have a training class of 19 people who are eagerly learning more about the Laguna and how to share that new knowledge and bubbling enthusiasm with 3-4 grade students. This is a great group of trainees; several are former elementary teachers and nurses, plus we have a doctor, a geologist, a psychologist, a PhD in Curriculum & Instruction, non-profit administrators, developmental disability experts, artists, caterers, master gardeners... all with amazing hearts and the desire to make a difference for children and the Laguna. Their contributions to the Laguna, the Foundation & the people they eventually teach are going to be enormous. We are so pleased they each made the decision to become a docent!

Learning Laguna spring programs began on March 26 and this season we will be working with 19 classes in 8 school districts, reaching about 425 students throughout the watershed. Last spring students were treated to sightings of Great Horned Owl chicks in a nest at Kelly Wetland and lots of Western pond turtle sightings at the Sebastopol Preserve where the cliff swallow nest building activity and the aerial acrobatics they perform while hunting for flying insects is always a thrill to watch. This year we excitedly anticipate the Laguna surprises that will be revealed as students learn about aquatic life, food webs, adaptations, the special qualities of Laguna plants and habitat, all the while gaining a deeper connection to the Laguna and developing a sense of place. As a third grader from Piner Elementary sums it up: "The Laguna is a great place to learn!"



3rd grader's illustration of a Great Horned Owl's nest he enthusiastically observed during a Learning Laguna field trip

Five Seasons of Laguna Bird Monitoring to Inform Trail Impact and Restoration Efficacy

Dr. Christina Sloop, Research Director

Five seasons of monitoring the richness and relative abundance of bird species across 44 point locations and a variety of habitat types in the Laguna, conducted by local bird expert Lisa Hug, has produced an important baseline record illuminating the current status of bird populations in the Laguna. Through this work we have established the initial range of fluctuations in bird diversity over five seasons prior to implementation of a trail system throughout the Laguna. This current baseline dataset will be compared against future survey data collected during and after trail construction to assess the potential impacts on bird life to public access in the area. Our current database and insights are vital components of planning the future management of trails, and in developing habitat restoration and conservation strategies.

As vegetation height diversity is directly correlated with bird diversity in many ecosystems, an increase in structural complexity of riparian areas along the Laguna is desirable. Our Laguna Foundation riparian restoration plantings throughout the Laguna Middle Reach section (between Highway 12 and Occidental Road) are already under way to providing greater habitat complexity for birds and other wildlife in the area. As these riparian plantings mature we expect to see bird diversity increase and species composition change reflecting an increase in vegetation height structure.

To assess the efficacy of our restoration plantings in the Laguna Middle Reach, a dedicated group of volunteer citizen scientists have been conducting bird surveys for the past two years, allowing comparison of bird diversity within our planting zones to established riparian forests to the south. Their important work will help to inform us about how the composition of bird communities change as vegetation matures, and whether our restoration plantings actually adequately serve to increase biodiversity in the Laguna.

Our current bird survey datasets further serve to identify desirable species that are struggling in the Laguna. For example, we found a conspicuous absence of Acorn Woodpeckers and Bewick's Wrens in Laguna habitats that should theoretically support healthy populations of these species. Our data also help to identify the importance of different Laguna habitat types to biodiversity and to highlight potential problem species in the Laguna, such as Brown-headed Cowbirds and European Starlings. These introduced bird species compete with native species for suitable nesting sites and food resources. Therefore, monitoring potential pest species is as important as monitoring beneficial species.

The continuation of these surveys in future years will be of utmost importance to observe the potential impacts of the implementation and use of the trail system, and to continue to watch special concern and pest species. They will also serve as crucial datasets in climate change modeling, to understand how predicted changes in rainfall and temperature will impact Laguna biodiversity into the future. Birds are a relatively easy group of animals to observe, and monitoring the health of Laguna bird populations over the long term will also have positive ramifications for other types of wildlife, such as reptiles, amphibians, insects and mammals.



Acorn Woodpeckers (*Melanerpes formicivorus*)

We would like to thank Lisa Hug, Denise Cadman, Patrick Woodworth, Gay Bishop, Alexandra McDonald, Ellen Blustein, Marcia Johnson, Chris Engle, Dea Freid, and Dough Shaw for their work and dedication to these projects, and the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District for funding support.

For more information about the Laguna bird survey please go to the Laguna Watershed Knowledgebase:
www.lagunafoundation.org/knowledgebase/?q=node/196

Delta Pond Rookery Walks Coming Right Up on Saturday, May 2

Christine Fontaine, Director of Education Programs

There is still time to register so don't be left out of this fun, awe-inspiring experience! Sign-up now and come view the bird nesting colony that establishes itself each spring in the trees between the Laguna and the western side of Delta Pond. At a monitoring survey on March 27, twenty Great Blue Heron, twenty Double Crested Cormorant and ten Great Egret adult bonded-pairs were recorded coming in, establishing territory, building nests, and in the case of the herons, already sitting on eggs in their nests. By May 2 we will be able to peek in on chicks and watch hustling parents while they try to keep up with all the hungry mouths to feed.

Beginning at 7:30 AM there will be 6 docent-led walk times to choose from throughout the morning. We ask for a \$10 per person donation and registration takes place on-line, through our website (www.lagunafoundation.org). This event is a fundraiser for the Learning Laguna bus scholarship fund. Bring friends and family out for a joyful morning and help enable school children throughout the watershed to learn about and experience the wonders of the Laguna for themselves.



www.clipart.com

Great Egrets (*Ardea alba*) with nestlings

Welcome Access Adventure Sonoma

Denise Cadman, Board Secretary

The Laguna Foundation has a fantastic new partner called Access Adventure Sonoma. They provide outdoor recreation, environmental education and open space access in Sonoma County and beyond for anyone living with the challenges of disabilities. Modeled after Access Adventure in Solano County, Access Adventure Sonoma uses horse-drawn carriages powered by draft horses.

Access Adventure Sonoma is an inclusive organization serving those in wheelchairs, as well as seniors, disadvantaged and at-risk youth, people with developmental or cognitive disabilities, and vision or mobility impairments. Money is currently being raised to purchase a custom carriage with a hydraulic lift designed to load and secure wheelchairs. This uniquely designed vehicle will offer a safe and comfortable ride, providing access to anywhere horses can go.

The Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation not only serves as the fiscal sponsor for Access Adventure Sonoma, allowing the receipt of tax deductible donations, but will also be providing volunteers to serve as interpreters on our outings in the Laguna. Access Adventure will also work in partnership with other land-management agencies in the county to take people with disabilities and underserved youth to wild places across the county.

Their first outing will take place on May 2nd in concurrence with Delta Pond Rookery walks guided by Laguna Foundation docents. Access Adventure has booked a horsedrawn tour for a group challenged with multiple sclerosis.



Access Adventure

A custom carriage with a hydraulic lift designed to load and secure wheelchairs

Laguna Adventures

Public Tours of the Laguna

Saturday, April 25

10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Family Event: Celebrating International Migratory Bird Day at Salmon Creek School in Occidental

Join co-sponsors the Laguna Foundation, Madrone Audubon & Salmon Creek School for a fun and interactive day for the whole family. Volunteers from many local environmental organizations will be part of the event, providing lots of hands-on activities including bird-walks plus sharing information about our local bird life, wildlife conservation, wetlands restoration, landscaping with native plants to attract wild birds and much more. The event is open to the public and free. Bring a picnic and enjoy the beautiful Salmon Creek campus (1935 Bohemian Hwy, Occidental).

Saturday, May 2

Multiple walk times available

Delta Pond Rookery with Laguna Docents

\$10 per person

This annual event is not to be missed! The trees between Delta Pond and the Laguna are host to a sizable rookery of great blue herons, double crested cormorants, plus great egrets with their wispy breeding plumage. Come watch the adults endeavoring to keep up with demanding chicks who are trying to out-compete nest-mates and prepare for first flight. The sights and sounds of all this activity are indeed awe-inspiring. This event is a fund-raiser for the Learning Laguna bus scholarship fund.

Sunday, June 28

9:30 - 11:30 a.m.

Sebastopol Wetlands Preserve for Families with Laguna Docents

\$5 per person

Bring the kids! Our Learning Laguna docents will present hands-on activities to keep everyone engaged, having fun and learning about the habitat, plants and animals of the Laguna.

Saturday, July 25

9:00 a.m. - noon

The Laguna to Stone Farm

Join Laguna Docents for a Laguna adventure with Sebastopol Walks! Follow the proposed route of the Laguna trail from the Plaza to the Laguna and north to Stone Farm on Occidental Road. Wear hiking shoes, bring a water, a lunch, and a hat. Return to the Plaza. (5 miles)

For more information or to registrar, please contact Christine Fontaine at (707) 527-9277 x102 or email: christine@lagunafoundation.org

LagunaKeepers

Volunteers Restoring the Laguna

LagunaKeepers are the Foundation's habitat restoration volunteers. Each month, in partnership with the City of Santa Rosa, we meet to give the Laguna a little hands-on love! Volunteer season runs September through May with a break during the summer.

Be sure to wear shoes & clothes you don't mind getting dirty. Only heavy rain cancels. Snacks are on us, but do bring gloves, water & friends!

Saturday, April 25

9:00 a.m. - noon

Native Plant Demonstration Garden

Phase two of the installation of the new garden, and a special Earth Day celebration. Meet at 4300 Llano Road, follow sign to the 'Administration' building.

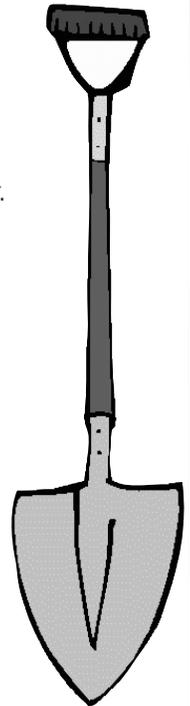
Saturday, May 9

9:00 a.m. - noon

Cotati Creek Critters

Keeper season wouldn't be complete without a visit to the Laguna headwaters area and a chance to socialize with our pals in Cotati. Meet at Ladybug Lot on Lakewood Avenue in Cotati. For directions, see the CCC website: www.cotati-creekcritters.info

For more information, or to receive a monthly reminder of LagunaKeepers workdates, please contact Catherine Cumberland at (707) 527-9277 x108 or email: catherine@lagunafoundation.org



Please note the change in dates for our next State of the Laguna Conference: October 14-16, 2009.

The Conference will include presentations on current research, water quality, restoration efforts, invasive species, the status of public access, California Tiger Salamander and other high-profile issues in the Laguna. A day of field trips will be included. Come for one, some or all the days, as you wish. We look forward to seeing you there.

State Grant Freeze Impacts Foundation Projects

Mark Green, Acting Executive Director

On December 19, 2008—the last day of work before Foundation staff closed the office over the holiday break—we were notified by the State of California to stop work immediately on all projects for which we had received state grant funds. We weren't alone: this order went to every grant recipient in the State, a result of the State's budget woes and its inability to sell revenue bonds in the fearful environment of the nation's staggering economy.

The news was a double-whammy for the Laguna Foundation. Not only were grants received for the Middle Reach Restoration Project now on hold...but the \$700,000 grant which had just been approved by the State Coastal Conservancy for the Laguna Learning Center was, too—before a grant contract was signed. For all we knew, that grant was in danger of disappearing altogether.

Since that day, the Foundation has been working with a statewide coalition of conservation organizations hoping to find a way to bridge this crisis. As we've learned more, the news generally hasn't been good. Invoices for work completed before the work freeze have not been paid. Signals from Sacramento indicate that these grants are the State's lowest priority to start work on again, after billions of dollars' worth of road and infrastructure projects. Conservation organizations all over the state have been laying off staff and in some cases shutting their doors entirely as a result of this crisis. The conservation infrastructure of the State of California—the nonprofit partners the State relies on to implement its goals for land conservation, habitat restoration, endangered species recovery, and addressing climate change—has been dealt a blow from which it will take years to recover.

On the other hand, some of our worst fears have been assuaged. We have been able to keep working on the Middle Reach project because one of our grant funding streams was not frozen. The State has concluded that grants like our Learning Center grant are to be considered as existing State obligations, even though contracts haven't yet been signed (and since, we've signed a contract). Recently, there are hopeful murmurs coming out of Sacramento that invoices for work completed before the freeze will be paid within a couple of months. And when the State finally did go back to the marketplace to try to sell bonds again, they sold nearly 60% more of them than they had planned to offer, lending hope that the State may be able to fund stopped projects again within a year or so.

It seems that the worst-case scenario has been avoided, and the Foundation has weathered this storm better than many. Still, these challenges add to an economic climate which is the most difficult seen by the nonprofit sector in more than a generation.

This year, the support of Foundation members is more critical than ever to enable us to weather this difficult time and carry our efforts forward into the nation's economic recovery. Please consider making a gift to the Laguna Foundation this spring or, when you receive your invitation, becoming a sponsor of this year's Laguna Art and Garden Gala. Working together, we can keep moving toward the day when a healthy, thriving Laguna is a beloved centerpiece of Sonoma County's ecological and cultural landscape.



Citizen Scientists Conduct Vernal Pool Monitoring

Dr. Christina Sloop, Research Director

The 'Adopt a Vernal Pool' program is in full swing monitoring three endangered plants on the Santa Rosa Plain. Over fifty citizen scientist volunteers are busy monitoring populations of Sonoma Sunshine (*Blennosperma bakeri*), Sebastopol Meadowfoam (*Limnanthes vinculans*), and Burke's Goldfields (*Lasthenia burkei*). This program, in its third year, is a long term survey to measure and document annual variation in plant populations and indicate trends toward loss or recovery of these three species.

Thanks to the Community Foundation Sonoma County for funding this important program for a second consecutive year, and to our amazing citizen scientist volunteers.



Citizen scientists at Adopt a Vernal Pool field training day

Christina Sloop

Thank you to our generous supporters since our last Meanderings...

Institutional Program Supporters

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**...and, of course, all our donors,
volunteers, and you.**



The **Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation**, founded in 1989, works to preserve, restore, and inspire greater understanding and appreciation of the Laguna de Santa Rosa wetland complex, which is the largest tributary of the Russian River and Sonoma County's richest wildlife area. The Foundation conducts educational programs, implements preservation and restoration projects, conducts scientific research, works with landowners and public agencies to protect and improve Laguna resources, and advocates for appropriately managed opportunities for the public to enjoy the Laguna.

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Julian Meisler, Restoration Program Director
Christina Sloop, PhD, Research Director

Grand Opening of Native Plant Demonstration Garden

Catherine Cumberland, Restoration Project Supervisor

In 2007, the City of Santa Rosa awarded a grant to the Laguna Foundation to install a native plant garden at the City's Water Treatment Plant. Work began last fall, when the "Laguna Keepers" stewardship volunteers planted trees and shrubs. **On Saturday, April 25th, from 9am to noon, we'll celebrate the grand opening.** Laguna Keepers will be back, planting flowering perennials, and representatives from the City's Water Conservation Department will be on hand to provide information on the water-saving irrigation methods demonstrated at the site. We're planning a real garden party atmosphere, with tasty snacks and beverages, so please come celebrate with us!

The purpose of the garden is educational: Visitors will observe numerous species of attractive, drought-tolerant natives, and learn how these plants support native wildlife. Another key element is promoting "smart" watering methods and modeling landscaping changes that reduce water use. The garden also features lawn alternatives, a solar-powered water fountain, recycled materials in paths and benches, reclaimed water, and mulch from the Treatment Plant's compost facility. Methods and sources will be described in signage and take-home literature.



Catherine Cumberland

LagunaKeepers on a workday last autumn

Visitation to the Water Treatment Plant has been steadily increasing – last year over 1500 visitors toured the facility – and the Demonstration Garden will provide an excellent opportunity to educate the public on the water savings potential and wildlife benefit of native plants.

After the party, we'll offer a short tour of the Garden, as well as a Treatment Plant tour. Both tours start at 12:30. The Treatment Plant is located at 4300 Llano Road, between Todd Road and Highway 116.