**Friends of the Mark West Watershed**

**2015 NEWSLETTER**

March 2015

We are a watershed community dedicated to preserving, protecting, and restoring the Mark West Creek and its watershed as a natural and community resource.

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**FMWW Wildlife Cameras Capture Thousands**

The FMWW Wildlife Camera Program continues to capture great pictures of wildlife in our watershed. Since the start of the program less than a year ago, we have over 2500 events taken from 8 of the 15 cameras we issued.

More than 1700 of these are — no surprise — the ubiquitous California Mule Deer. However we have also verified images of 14 other species including **black bear, river otter, lynx and puma.**

By all accounts, the program is a success despite not having captured a shot of either ringtail, beaver or Sasquatch, but we can always hope. If you have one of the cameras and are having trouble using it, please contact Chris or Graham. We would very much like to get all the cameras feeding images into the system.

We will be showing off our best images and our online data analysis system at the Hike & Hoot on April 11th.

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**Saddle Mountain Management Plan**

On 2/28/2015, Sonoma County Open Space District held a “town hall” style meeting to gather public input as part of its development of a Management Plan for Saddle Mountain.

If the Plan is accepted by Sonoma County Supervisors (perhaps later this summer), there would be four immediate elements:

1) Road Treatments for existing roads, addressing erosion concerns through new culverts, out-sloping of roads, armoring of stream crossings, etc.

2) A New Electric Gate at the entrance at Cleland and Calistoga Roads.

3) Invasives Eradication programs, including continuation of volunteer efforts.

4) Limited Public Access; more about this below.

Future, proposed items included:

5) Docent-Led Tours.

6) Open Space Days, as currently done on other Open Space properties.

7) Environmental Education programs for school-aged children.

The crowd (which filled the Rincon Valley Library’s activity room) was particularly concerned about the potential for increased visitors. Bill Keene, General Manager for Open Space, explained that public access will continue to be rather limited under the Plan. A key limiting factor is no good current access from public roads: the existing Cleland entrance is a locked gate on a dangerous curve on Calistoga Road.

The long-term possibility of the property being absorbed by Sonoma County Parks is a non-starter until a better entrance can be acquired by Open Space. Additional improvements — such as new trails, parking, and bathrooms — are also on hold until the access issue is resolved.

If you have concerns or comments for Open Space while they finalize the Plan, immediately contact Sorrel Allen, 707.565.7347, Sorrel.Allen@sonoma-county.org.
In partnership with LandPaths, the 11th Annual

Hike & Hoot Potluck
Saturday, April 11th, 2015

Please join us for all or part of the festivities:

1:30 PM Begins: meet your neighbors, sign-up for hikes, and visit tables hosted by FMWW Wildlife Camera Program, LandPath’s Owl Camp, Historical Ecologist Arthur Dawson, Lidar Mapping with Robin Hoffman, and CAL Fire. Plus, free Comet Popcorn!

HIKES: • Native Wildflowers & Plants Hike (strenuous) with Sue Smith; 15 max. • Kid’s Nature Walk with Amanda Tuttle • Pond Exploration with Steve Williams • Sustainable Practices Tour of Monan’s Rill with Joan Linney • Special Guest appearances!

3:45-4:45 Meet the raptors of the Bird Rescue Center
4:15 Meet back at the HUB for popcorn and beverages
4:30-5:15 Main Speaker: Celeste Dodge, Pepperwood Ecologist, on Climate Change: Advancing Collaboratives on Local Climate and Connectivity

5:30-6:15 Potluck Supper: Last name: A to I = Bring salads or appetizers; J to S = Bring entrees, sides, or vegetables; T to Z = Bring desserts. Please bring enough to serve 12 and label ingredients. Bring your own cups, plates, utensils.

6:15-6:20 FMWW’s Watershed Volunteer Awards
6:20-6:40 Raffle — bring cash, preferred, or a checkbook — proceeds go to cover H&H costs
6:40-7:00 Potluck clean-up
7:00-9:15 Fire-circle (weather permitting) with storytelling, music jam, and s’mores!
8:15-9:15 Hooter Hike, while fire circle continues (sunset is 7:42 PM)
9:15 PM Close down and clean-up

New (Old) Location: 7899 Saint Helena Road (7899 Puff Lane)

Please join us for all or part of the festivities: Hiking shoes or boots, sunscreen, water bottle and flashlight recommended. Children and musical instruments welcome! Car-pooling strongly encouraged.

Monan’s Rill House Rules: No smoking, no pets, and stay away from the ponds. All guests sign a release form when checking in at HUB.

Directions to Monan’s Rill: 7899 St. Helena Rd, Santa Rosa CA 95404. Approx. four miles up St. Helena Rd. from Calistoga Rd, look for the Hike & Hoot signs. On a sharp right turn, there are several mailboxes on the left, at the base of “Puff Lane,” a one-lane gravel road. Follow the H&H signs up Puff Lane: it’s approximately one mile to HUB building. Drive pass HUB to parking areas as designated by signs or attendants.

RSVP at www.LandPaths.org/events     Questions? info@markwestwatershed.org or call 538-5307
When is a Buzz
More than just a Buzz?

by Penny Sirota

This time of year, if you hang around any flowering plants, you can hear the happy busy sound of bees as they hover from flower to flower. It’s a fascinating dance of co-evolution between insects and flowering plants.

North America is home to 46 species of Bumblebee, one of the most important native pollinators of wild and cultivated plants. Their special behaviors and life history allow them to out-compete honey bees. Tolerant of colder temperatures, bumblebees emerge earlier in the season and earlier in the day. Each species has a different tongue length, which gives them a special fit with specific wild flowers. Some flowers have evolved structures, like long tubes with small openings, effectively sealing away the precious pollen from honeybees. It is only the large, cumbersome bumblebee, and a few other species, that know the trick to release the protein rich pollen.

Buzz Pollination: Bumblebees grab hold of the flower with their strong mouths, disconnect their flight muscles, and vibrate their smaller thoracic muscles to create a loud buzz. Inside the pollen tube, pollen grains dance about until they gain so much energy that they blast free and shower the body of the vibrating bee. The bumble bee will likely leave an odor message to let others know that the pollen has been already released from this blossom, and then will fly off to comb the pollen into neat, moist packets on their legs.

Studies have shown that the most productive buzzes are both long and loud; frequency does not seem to matter. So the big massive bees are most successful at releasing more pollen per flower. Oddly, the loud, pollen-gathering buzz requires no movement by the bee. And that buzz is a different pitch than the buzz made while flying.

There are over 20,000 species of plants that rely on buzz pollination to get their genetic information delivered to other flowers. Some of the flowers in our area that rely on this strategy include our native manzanitas and shooting stars. In our gardens, tomatoes, eggplant, and potatoes are all buzz pollinated.

Bumblebees are quite fun and interesting to observe. They are big and slow. (Caution: while usually docile, female bumblebees can sting — repeatedly — if they are threatened!) You can easily identify species by the pattern of stripes on their body and determine gender by the presence of hair on their back legs.

Their life cycle is short and fascinating. Once temperatures have increased, a solitary queen bee emerges from her over-wintering site in need of food. She seeks out nectar and a good nesting site – usually in an abandoned rodent nest. Then the queen gathers protein rich pollen which stimulates her ovaries for form eggs.

She creates wax pots filled with nectar. She lays her first brood of eggs, which she keeps warm for several days by constantly vibrating her body. It takes about 4 weeks for eggs to hatch into larvae, make cocoons for pupa and emerge as adults. Their life span is another 4 weeks.

The first generation of bees is all females who busily gather pollen and nectar to feed the queen and the next batch of eggs. The generations born later in the season are a mixture of male and female. The males leave the nest and hang around flowers sipping nectar and trying to mate — sound familiar?

There are many indications of population decline for most species native pollinators. Studies indicate that climate change can cause a misfit of timing between when the queens first emerge in spring and when flowers bloom. Other challenges include loss of habitat; loss of genetic diversity; and, in some cases, pests, disease, or exposure to pesticide.

Whatever the cause, there are easy and effective steps we can take to help foster bumblebees and our other native pollinators:

1. Provide Food: Provide an abundance of differing flowers throughout early spring through late fall. Large banks of flowering plants offer better forage. Some plants to consider for your landscape include ceanothus, manzanita, salvias, lavenders, Russian sage, rosemary, and borage. Observe the bees in your garden and see what they prefer.

2. Protect the Nest and Over-Winter Sites: Undisturbed edge habitat with well-drained soil will provide nesting and over-winter sites. Hedgerows, no till zones, and piles of stone will increase bumblebee habitat.

3. Learn more! Bumblebees are fun and easy to observe! You can determine species, sex, life cycle stages, pollinations and nectar-gathering strategies. There are number of excellent websites and citizen science projects to check out. One of my favorite is Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation: xerces.org.
April 11th: Hike & Hoot
April 26th: Road & Creek Clean-Up

Our Last Newsletter?
Maybe. We mail this newsletter and Hike & Hoot Invite to 790 neighbors and local organizations at a cost of over $750/mailing (using “bulk rate” postage and competitive printing). This is, by far, our largest yearly expense. We want to eliminate it — and keep providing you watershed news and H&H information. And we can if you sign up today for our low-volume, non-commercial email list (aka listserv). Just email us at info@markwestwatershed.org and we’ll sign you up. Please help.

Nature-Based Day Camp, Right In Our Backyard
LandPath’s Owl Camp is nature-based day camp open to youngsters 6 to 13 years of age. Camp is located at Rancho Mark West, off St. Helena Rd., 20 minutes from Santa Rosa. Kids explore, enjoy and learn at this 120-acre preserve, with a pristine year-around stream, pond, redwood forest and miles of hand-made trails. Sessions are in July and August.

Owl Camp offers a rich experience for children to explore nature through tracking, canoeing, creek and pond exploration, nature art, fort building, nature journaling, plus music, storytelling, woodworking, craft making, cooking and organic gardening. Our headquarters is in the historic old red barn, next to the community garden. Owl Camp is proud to offer a staff of college-educated, experienced and talented educators. At least three staff are always present, plus a cadre of trained volunteers to keep the kid-to-adult ratio small. LandPaths is committed to keeping camp open to all youth. Scholarships and transportation assistance are available.

“Owl Camp is really fun. I love canoeing and playing in the creek,” announces Zoey Zinnia.

“This is the best raspberry I’ve had in my life!” exclaims Daniel Duck.

“I like playing in the creek and making face paint from the rocks we find,” coos Beatrice Butterfly.

“I love you, I love you, I will always love you,” declares Jack Jay while putting a fish gently back in the stream.

“I always like the pond and creek, and making crafts,” says Pondweed Jack.


New to the watershed?
Sign up for Emergency Phone Alerts. Read more at https://sites.google.com/site/alpineclubsite
If you’re on either the Alpine Club or FMWW’s listserv, you receive email notices of upcoming EPC events and meetings. To join either listserv, just email us at info@markwestwatershed.org

Road & Creek Clean-Up
SUNDAY April 26th
Picking up trash has never been this fun before. Come join your neighbors as we beautify our roads and creeks. Plus, help remove non-native, fire-hazardous Scotch Broom.

April 26th
9AM at Rancho Mark West, 7125 Saint Helena Rd.
Dress in layers: wear long pants (poison oak protection), long-sleeve shirt, sturdy shoes or boots, work gloves, hat, sunglasses, and a small daypack for carrying water, snacks, garbage bags, and found treasure. Lunch and refreshments provided at noon.