Highlights from Friends of Five Creeks’ 2019

Focus on Codornices Creek — progress and loss

In our big 2019 project, Codornices Creek on the Berkeley-Albany border, we saw both big gains and dramatic loss. Below San Pablo Avenue, agencies addressed long-neglected problems of weeds, camping, and trash following our 2018 discovery of a forgotten $450,000. Volunteers flooded to the creek. Groups came from David Carol Associates, HLB Lighting, Lygos, Meyer Sound, Rigetti Computing, Wells Fargo, and Uber, as well as nonprofits Grizzly Peak Fly Fishers and Northern California Science Writers. Add in big groups of UC Berkeley students, high-schoolers, our weekly Weed Warriors, and stools installed by Eagle Scout Matt Sprague (right) — the creek is becoming the urban oasis for people and wildlife that it should be.

In April, however, discharge of firefighting surfactant killed more than 100 fish in Codornices, our area’s only trout stream. We successfully challenged the California Department of Fish and Wildlife’s underestimate of the numbers. Later, board member Sheryl Drinkwater (below right) helped on a survey that found a few small survivors. This gives hope, but not confidence, that the trout will recover. Asking neighbors to report pollution, we have discovered that smaller releases, probably detergent, are fairly common. We hope to work on this in 2020.

Helping nature from hills to Bay

Our volunteers kept up with and even expanded our many other projects. In Tilden Regional Park, we gained against both fire-prone French broom and smothering cape ivy. The El Cerrito Hillside Natural Area is safer from wildfire, thanks to big joint work parties with El Cerrito Trail Trekkers, as well as students from neighboring Prospect Sierra School and our weekly Weed Warriors.

Along the Bay, we stretched work against invasive stinkwort south to Emeryville and Algerian sea lavender farther north into Richmond. On the Berkeley shoreline, with groups including Black Pine Circle Day School and UC Berkeley’s CalRotaract, we continue to help areas near the mouth of Strawberry Creek “go native” and made big strides against harmful weeds in the not-yet-open Brickyard area of McLaughlin Eastshore State Park.
Drawing young people into nature and stewardship

Our volunteer work parties in beautiful places give young people a chance to learn about and enjoy nature as well as work hard and achieve. Besides the many kids who come with their families, groups in 2019 came from Ardmore (high-school students from Brazil); Civic Leadership Institute (a nationwide summer program run by Northwestern University); El Cerrito, Irvington, and St. Mary’s College High Schools; and Scouts from Cubs to Eagle.

Experience for the next generation of environmental professionals

We expanded and developed our program of short-term, part-time “restoration coordination” interns in 2019. The focus is on real-world experience and résumé-building for budding environmental professionals, as they lead groups and learn techniques important in restoration and monitoring. This year, besides wages, we began paying costs of some professional meetings — important for both knowledge and contacts — and reimbursement for transportation, to help candidates with limited resources.

Public education and engagement for all ages

Our free Bay Currents talks on natural history and environmental issues covered bugs, rangeland, mushrooms, restoration, seaweed, solar power, and Bay islands, with audiences of over 100. Our monthly e-news continued to deliver news on environmental events and issues around the Bay along with a “species of the month.”

With tables at events, field trips for kids, and tours ranging from green infrastructure at Lake Merritt to discovering aquatic insect life at the Essig Museum of Entomology, we reached out to draw a wide range of people into local nature. As hands-on projects mature, we hope to do more of this education and outreach in 2020.

Please [donate] to help us keep volunteering in 2020!

Join us in fun, learning, and helping the environment — [fivcreeks.org]