Volume 23, Issue 1

TRIBUTARY TRIBUNE

Stories and Art by Members of the Watershed Stewards Program

Year 23, District D

The City that Saves Creeks!

By: Mark Garcia, placed at Santa Barbara Steelhead Co-Op

Like many cities across California, Santa Barbara imposes a Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) for guests who stay in any lodging for less than thirty-one days. However, for the benefit of local watersheds, residents in the City of Santa Barbara voted to approve a 2% TOT increase (Measure B) in 2001. The 2% increase goes directly to the City of Santa Barbara's Creeks Division for the purpose of creek restoration and water quality improvement projects.

This dedicated funding source has allowed the City of Santa Barbara to work towards its mission to improve creek and ocean water quality and restore natural creek systems, through storm water and urban runoff pollution reduction projects, creek restoration projects, and community education programs. A great benefit of Measure B is that the Creeks Division is able to provide matching funds required when applying for state and federal grants.

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"The community of Santa Barbara understands the importance of living in a healthy and productive watershed."

- Mark Garcia

Barger Canyon Restoration nearing completion. Photo By: Mark Garcia

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A program of the California Conservation Corps, WSP is one of the most productive programs for future employment in natural resources. WSP is administered by California Volunteers and sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Reinventing the Los Angeles River.

By: Nina Trusso, placed at Resource Conservation District of Santa Monica Mountains

After California's first major storm event, with between 0.75-1.25 inches of rain falling over the Los Angeles River basin in late November 2016, a team organized by the Friends of the LA River (FoLAR), conducted a fish survey just upstream of the Sepulveda Dam. The dam was originally designed by the Army Core Engineers (USACOE) in 1941 to hold floodwater during winter storms. The morning of the FoLAR survey, a USACOE team arrived with a dozer and a dump truck to remove sediment and debris that washed into the river's concrete channel after the recent rains.

The USACOE has managed the Los Angeles River for flood control for the last 80 years turning formerly natural banks into concrete channels leading to the explosive population boom along the river's banks. The river now moves through 14 cities and unincorporated areas of LA County. The flood control management efforts began after a series of floods in the 1930s devastated communities along the banks. The USACOE efforts included moving 20,000,000 cubic yards of Earth, pouring more than 2,000,000 cubic yards of concrete, and placing nearly 50,000,000 pounds of reinforced steel (USACE). By the project's completion in 1960, the LA River was, as stated by the LA County Department of Public Works, 51 miles of engineered waterway. Now, climate change, ongoing drought, and a growing demand for water is forcing LA to reexamine the river's management plan. Following the recent LA River Ecosystem Feasibility study, the USACOE is about to embark on another huge management effort of the river. This effort will result in, what the Friends of the LA River calls the largest urban river restoration project in American history. $22 billion will be spent on restoring 11 miles of the river in the downtown LA area. This is an opportunity to reinvent the river as a much needed local source of water for the region and habitat for Steelhead trout. In order for this to be possible, I believe more than flood control and rising property value must be considered. The LA river needs a more holistic management plan. The people of LA need a new kind of river. This river has incredible potential. If the LA River can be restored from concrete channels, then any river can be recovered. If it is restored successfully, there is no such thing as a lost cause.

FoLAR Fish Survey. Photo By: RCD Stream Team

"The people of LA need a new kind of river."

- Nina Trusso

About the Watershed Stewards Program

Since 1994, the Watershed Stewards Program (WSP) has been engaged in comprehensive, community-based, watershed restoration and education throughout coastal California.

WSP was created in 1994 by California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) biologists, educators, and the California Conservation Corps to fill critical gaps in scientific data collection, in-stream restoration, and watershed education. In collaboration with landowners, tribal communities, teachers, community members, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies, WSP works to revitalize watersheds that contain endangered and threatened salmonid species (Chinook salmon, Coho salmon, and Steelhead trout) by using state-of-the-art data collection and watershed restoration techniques. WSP also engages Members in education, outreach, and volunteer recruitment efforts to increase the capacity of partner organizations. WSP currently has Members working from the Oregon border to the Santa Monica Mountains.

Members learning about tool safety from Jody. Photo By: Khaalid Abdullah

The City that Saves Creeks!, continued from page 1.

By combining awarded grants with Measure B funds, the Creeks Division has been able to complete many successful restoration and water quality improvement projects over the past 15 years.

A major restoration project was just completed by the Creeks Division in the Upper Arroyo Burro Watershed. In late 2013, the Creeks Division purchased a 14 acre parcel along Arroyo Burro which was degraded by past land use. Portions of the creek channel had been straightened and armored with concrete and other forms of revetment. According to the Creeks Division's E-newsletter, the restoration project included the following: removal of existing structures and debris in the creek; re-grading of the channel to create a more natural and stable creek bed and banks; construction of a seasonal wetland in the upland area to improve habitat diversity; re-vegetation of the disturbed areas and riparian corridor with native plants. Over 4,500 container plants and 800 willow stakes were installed to re-vegetate the site with local native plants.

The community of Santa Barbara understands the importance of living in a healthy and productive watershed. Through continued support from the community and the hard work of the Creeks Division, additional restoration and water quality improvement projects will be completed. It's an amazing feeling when you work in a community that is implementing conservation and restoration efforts to revitalize watersheds that have been impacted by development and pollution.

Putting Pigeons on the Pill

By: Lauren Malinis, placed at San Luis Obispo Steelhead Initiative

I have always loved animals and as a child I enjoyed spending my time feeding pigeons. As I got older I noticed that certain areas had an abundance of pigeons, with many of them looking sick or injured. Some pigeons even had insects or parasites crawling through their feathers.

In San Luis Obispo (SLO), on Mission Plaza, everything looks peaceful. At this time of year, you can see Santa's house and a carousel adjacent to the Mission. The creek down below appears beautiful and pristine. However, upon closer inspection, you will notice an abundance of feathers in and around the water. If you spend enough time looking you may notice pigeon eggs have sunk to the bottom.

You'll be in for a surprise if you dare to walk along the creek and into the dark culvert. You will hear the birds making their usual cooing sound, one might even be struggling in the water. Upon exiting the tunnel and reaching the land on the other side you will look down at your feet and notice the remains of dead birds in varying states of decomposition. Some bodies are almost wasted away, leaving a frame of feathers at the edges of the wings.

Overall, the pigeon population has become a huge problem in San Luis Obispo. With such a high density, disease and parasites spread rampantly among the birds. Additionally, the feathers, bodies, and the excrement they produce pollute the water in the creek.

How do we fix these problems? Freddy Otte, the San Luis Obispo City Biologist is working on a solution. It involves the use of pigeon contraceptives, which would be mixed into food and placed on an automatic feeder. This form of birth control mainly affects the female bird's ability to lay eggs. The medication would need to be ingested on a regular basis in order to be effective. If the plan is put into action it will be interesting to observe the difference in the San Luis Obispo pigeon population 10 years from now.

Pigeon feathers in San Luis Obispo Creek. Photo By: Lauren Malinis

Year 23 Watershed Stewardship Program Members. Photo By: CCC Fortuna Staff

For the wild: a Sonnet

By: Priscilla Sisommout, placed at WSP Office of San Luis Obispo

Author's Note: I was inspired to write a reflection on national service but specifically about WSP's service to the wilderness. This program is amazing because Members are serving both local communities and being a voice for native wildlife.

First I introduce how our service to the wild stems from a deep childhood love for the great outdoors and given time and knowledge we have discovered our passion to protect it. The poem follows with our concrete actions of teaching and restoring habitats. Finally, I explain our hopes for the future of the wilderness and how together we will work to see it's fruition.

For the wild

We are here to serve the call of the wild.
As kids we awed at this wonderful world,
How others treat this land makes us feel riled.
With age our passion to protect unfurled.

Together we stand to teach and restore.
We impart empathy for the outdoors,
Healthy habitats are what we strive for.
Fighting for the wild are our chosen wars.

In time we hope for a positive change,
A planet that everyone calls "Home"
Where we and the wild are not so estranged
A place we and the wild together roam.

Our goals won't waiver and away be piled,
United we'll serve the call of the wild.

We’re All in This Together: The Central Coast Water Conservancy

By: Britta Dornfeld, placed at Resource Conservation District of San Luis Obispo

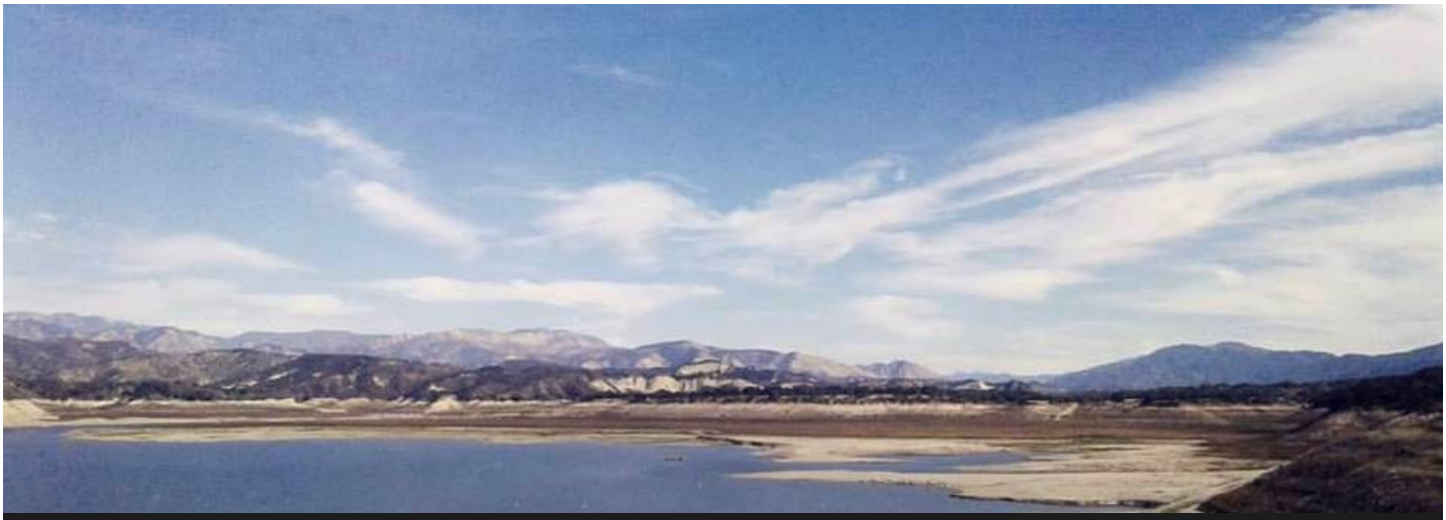
San Luis Obispo, CA hosts placements for the San Luis Obispo Steelhead Initiative (SLOSI), the San Luis Obispo Resource Conservation Districts (SLORCD), and the Region II office with its associated Team Leaders. That means there’s a lot of WSP Members doing important work in San Luis Obispo county! And thanks to a new environmental consortium, the Central Coast Water Conservancy (CCWC), the different Placement Sites and their various Mentors are now all working together to coordinate their conservation efforts.

This conservancy involves approximately a dozen organizations, including the California Conservation Corps, non-profits, and different government organizations such as the City of San Luis Obispo and the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board. Devin Best, the Executive Director of the Upper Salinas-Las Tablas RCD (US-LTRCD), started CCWC in January of 2015. He says, “I facilitated the first CCWC meeting because I realized there was a limited amount of resources available for conservation projects and collaboration would maximize efficiency in using those resources”. All the organizations involved in the conservancy now have a chance to not only find out what other groups in the region are doing, but to offer or solicit help from each other.

Where does WSP fit in with all of this? Jody Weseman, the Region II Program Coordinator, attends meetings and offers input, and the local WSP Members are also a part of the conservancy. About a week after I started with US-LTRCD, I attended a conservancy meeting. While I didn’t know all the projects each organization talked about, it was great to hear about what conservation efforts are occurring throughout the county. As this coordination effort grows, I’m excited to see what else WSP can do to support their efforts, and spread the idea of collaboration throughout the state of California. We’re all working towards the same goal of restoring anadromous fish habitat; we might as well work together to reach that goal!

WSP Members and CCC Member setting irrigation lines. Photo By: Khaalid Abdullah

WSP Members work on riparian planting project. Photo By: SLORCD



Cachuma Reservoir. Photo By: Nicole Schager

Impacting the American Riviera

By: Nicole Schager, placed at Santa Barbara Steelhead Co-Op

Many residents and businesses in Santa Barbara are experiencing the stress of having a statewide water shortage and are having to make cutbacks on their water use. Historically, Lake Cachuma has been a major water source for the people of Santa Barbara, but currently the reservoir is at 7.5% of its total capacity (*Drought Information*, 645^{0}). During a non-drought year, Lake Cachuma provides Santa Barbara with 55% of its water (*Water Sources*, 2016). The reservoir is also an important water source for the endangered Steelhead trout population of Southern California.

As a WSP Member, I feel fortunate to witness these resilient fish while surveying creeks for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). The opportunity to hike stretches of creeks has showed me how these fish do not have the means to migrate to the ocean. The lack of groundwater recharge and the presence of manmade barriers creates fragmented habitat for trout. Faced with multiple water scarcity issues as a community, Santa Barbara is taking action to find solutions to its watershed problems.

Collaborating with the City of Santa Barbara as a WSP Member allows me to have an impact in improving local watersheds for the benefit of the community and wildlife. Currently, the City of Santa Barbara is planning and implementing several watershed restoration projects. The Creek Division of the Santa Barbara Parks and Recreation District has restoration projects with goals of recharging aquifers, creating fish passages, and vegetating riparian zones. One example incudes installing permeable pavers in several public parking areas throughout Santa Barbara.

Story continued on page 8 >>>

The San Joaquin River

By: Evelyn Barajas-Perez, placed at San Joaquin River Partnership

This poem is about the Friant Dam which was built in Fresno in 1942. The dam disconnected the San Joaquin River from the ocean forming a barrier for salmon.

The poem describes the relationship of the river and the salmon as an agreement, something that benefits them both. The salmon had a place to nest and the river received nutrients from the fishes' bodies.

The river didn't have any salmon for roughly 60 years until California's Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) started a Trap and Haul program started in the early 2000's. The "we" in the poem refers to is the scientists, workers, and WSP Members.

Poem continued on page 8 >>>

Impacting the American Riviera, continued from page 7.

The permeable pavers allow surface runoff, which carry pollutants, to percolate into the ground rather than flow straight into storm drains, creeks, and the ocean. At Mission Creek, the Creek Division has removed fish barriers to assist the movement of trout and at Las Positas Creek, the Creek Division has increased wildlife habitat by planting native plants in the upper part of the watershed. The Creek Division is also involved in educating the community about creek and drought conditions through outreach events such as its Annual Creek Week.

With the opportunity to learn about watershed management and monitoring by assisting the Creek Division and CDFW in Santa Barbara on these various projects, I aim to use this knowledge and experience to help educate the Santa Barbara community about how its actions are impacting the local watersheds. With more minds thinking about the water issues, hopefully, we as the Santa Barbara community will make responsible choices so that everyone, including the trout, has enough

WSP Members covering a heavy machinery access road, before a storm. Photo By: SLORCD

Evelyn holding a salmon. Photo By: Pat Ferguson

***The San Joaquin River*, continued from page 7.**

In 1942 it was complete, the wall
The wall that hushed the flooding flows
Forcing the unwilling river to embrace the air of selfishness
No longer will it,
No longer can it, wait for the chinooks arrival home

The river will remain choked held to its last breath
Never again to inhale the breath of the salty sea

Was it worth it?
To diminish an agreement centuries old
The river would feed them having patience for what was to come

Chinook would leave with the promise of re-turning
Many years would be invested in themselves
The promise remained
Their arrival would come
Bringing more life then they took
Knowing of the agreement
Staying where they began
There they would remain
There they would become new life

Sixty years have past
And at last the silent waters were stirred
Soaring through the liquid sky they came
Unknowingly fighting for what already was theirs

Here we are as Members armed and ready
Here we are hoping their place is established once again
Here we are fighting their battle

May the agreement be made again.

Alumni Spotlight!

Former Mattole Restoration Council (MRC) WSP Members reunite on Willits Bypass Mitigation Project

By: Hugh McGee, MRC Native Ecosystem Restoration Program Director

Over the past 10 years I have had the pleasure of working with over 20 WSP Members who have been placed at the Mattole Restoration Council (MRC). I am always impressed with WSP Members work ethic, dedication to restoring Mattole ecosystems, and positive attitudes. They have been essential in completing many of our native ecosystem restoration projects, from pulling weeds, to planting native plants, to educating youth in our watershed about ecology. Our partnership with WSP has been essential to improving habitat conditions in the Mattole Watershed and we could not complete many of our projects without them.

Over the past year I had the opportunity to manage the native plant installation phase of the Willits Bypass Mitigation Project. When I found out we needed to install over 600,000 plants in a window of a couple months, I knew I needed to put together a highly experienced all-star planting crew. I called on old tree planting friends, former colleagues, former interns, and of course, former Mattole WSP Members. WSP Members typically spend a month or two swinging a hoedad on our riparian and grasslands restoration project and are usually some of our top planters by the end of the season, so I knew they would be up for the challenge.

Between September and November of 2016, six former WSP Members were part of a 20 person planting crew that helped install 625,000 native plants on wetland and riparian restoration sites in Little Lake Valley outside of Willits, CA. It was a pleasure to once again work with former Members and all of them proved to be some of the best planters on the crew.

Nick Tedesco, Monica Scholey, Trevor Griffiths, Christina Malatesta, Chris Harris, Veronica Yates, and Hugh McGee

Save the Water, Save the Farms, Save the Fish

By: Alyssa Bucci, placed at the Resource Conservation District of San Luis Obispo

You don't have to spend a long time in San Luis Obispo (SLO) County to realize that agriculture plays a huge part in the area's economy, culture, and aesthetic. Agriculture employs about one out of every ten workers and contributes almost $1.9 billion to the county's economy (SLO County, 2013). The ongoing drought has been an issue for farmers and ranchers, as well as local aquatic habitats and the animals that depend on them. Therefore, watershed conservation efforts are critical. Many agricultural management programs have been developed to address this and other environmental issues, while taking into accounts the needs of the farmers.

On December 15, 2016 the Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District (SLORCD) hosted a Rangeland Management Workshop to discuss techniques that can improve the quality of local watersheds in an efficient and cost effective manner. Local ranchers, academics, and conservation professionals came together to discuss opportunities and see some projects in action.

To the left of the agriculture field lies a woodchip bioreactor. By: SLORCD

The workshop started with a presentation on a rainwater harvesting system that can collect up to 260,000 gallons of water per year off rooftops, which is stored and used to water cattle in the dry summer months. This reduces well usage in the summer, leaving more water in the creek for threatened Steelhead trout.

Next came a presentation on wildlife friendly agricultural ponds; old stock ponds that have been repaired to meet the habitat needs of threatened California species. Hallie Richard from the RCD shared information on Mobile Irrigation Labs, a program that assesses the uniformity of irrigation systems to increase soil health and improve crop yield. She also discussed nutrient management, and the possibility of using woodchip bioreactors as a cost effective method to filter nitrogen out of water. Efforts like these can reduce sediment loading to provide better habitat in streams and estuaries. Carolyn Doehring of the National Estuary Program talked about a riparian fencing project that reduced E. coli concentrations in San Luisito Creek. Local rancher Mike Estrada and his wife Terri, shared a device they developed called the Water Gap Saver that makes fences crossing streams more resilient and prevents debris buildup during storms.

All of these techniques are tools the farmers and ranchers of SLO County can use to conserve the environment in a way that is beneficial for all parties involved. In a county where agriculture is so integral, efforts to simultaneously lessen its impact and support its success are a wonderful resource for building a more sustainable community.

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Together we can Restore Creeks!

By: Khaalid Abdullah, placed at San Luis Obispo Steelhead Initiative

So far in my short time with the San Luis Obispo Steelhead Initiative (SLOSI) I have gained a massive amount of knowledge regarding the ecology of SLO's watersheds, and professional practices of local organizations who work to improve salmonid habitat. I feel very lucky to have been a part of the Los Osos Creek bank stabilization project this winter. While assigned to this project I had the opportunity to display knowledge and skills that I had developed and acquired through training with WSP.

The creek was suffering from bank erosion near an orchard and bridge that crosses through private property. The landowner agreed to the stabilization project which included adding granite boulders and large pieces of woody debris to help defend the eroded banks. This would move the flow of the creek and help to stop the water from eroding the unstable creek bank. Heavy machinery, large water pumps and a large crew of workers were needed for this project. However, before work could be done on the creek populations of Steelhead trout and Red Legged frogs had to be relocated from the section of the creek that would be dewatered, to prevent fatalities.

By the time I began working on this project, the creek was already dewatered, with all pumps running. It was interesting to see firsthand the methods that were used to dewater the section of creek and see a few Red Legged frogs that were captured and removed to a safe location. Once all of the fish and amphibians were removed from the creek WSP Members from both SLOSI, SLORCD and CCC Los Padres' Crew four added willow and dogwood cuttings to the newly formed banks to help accelerate riparian regeneration. Finally, after the work in the creek was done and all the large machines where gone, we put down mulch and straw to help all the soil that was disturbed. I truly feel like I can accomplish anything with the new skills I have learned and I cannot wait to see what is in store for me for the rest of my term with WSP.

Khaalid demonstrating a planting. Photo By: SLORCD

"I cannot wait to see what is in store for me"

- Khaalid Abdullah

Adelaide kayaking during a Redd and Carcass Survey. Photo By: Evelyn Barajas-Perez

Salmon in Fresno?

By: Adelaide Robinson, placed at San Joaquin River Partnership.

When I accepted the position with the Watershed Stewards Program to be placed at the San Joaquin River Partnership, I received many questions from friends and family. One of the most common was, "Are there actually salmon in Fresno?" Although I believed that salmonid presence was essential for my job, I didn't feel confident giving an answer. After spending the past two months working with Chinook Salmon in the San Joaquin, I have found that there is no simple answer to that question.

Before the 1940s, the portion of the San Joaquin River that runs through Fresno County provided spawning habitat for both fall and spring run chinook (Fry 1961). This changed drastically in 1940 when Friant Dam was constructed. The dam caused large sections of the river below to dry up, making it nearly impossible for salmon to reach the spawning habitat below the dam (Yoshiyama 2001). The decline in salmon quickly followed, and by 1949 they had been extirpated from the San Joaquin upstream of the confluence with the Merced River, an area which includes both Fresno and neighboring Madera County (Yoshiyama 2001).

Circumstances continued to look dismal for salmon in Fresno until 2006, when a lawsuit headed by the Natural Resources Defense Council came to a legal settlement. The result was the formation of the San Joaquin River

Restoration Program (SJRRP), a multi-agency partnership with a long-term goal of restoring self-sustaining populations of salmon within the San Joaquin (SJRRP 2016). During the following years SJRRP began a variety of restoration efforts. Friant Dam began to release restoration flows to provide river connectivity (SJRRP 2016).
CA Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Bureau of Reclamation began annually trapping and hauling chinook that had strayed from the river on their migration upstream from the ocean. These salmon, which had strayed into un-suitable farmland habitat near Los Banos, were transported and then released in the reach below Friant Dam. SJRRP also began releasing thousands of hatchery raised juvenile salmon into the restoration area (Hunt 2016).

Story continued on page 13 >>>

Unfortunately, having salmon present is different from having a self-sustaining population. The salmon currently found in Fresno would not be there if not continually supplied through both trap and haul and hatchery releases. For self-sustaining salmon to occur, SJRRP must first remove fish passage barriers that prevent migration, as well as increase spawning success (Castle et al. 2016). Nonetheless, the presence of the current salmon allows for research, such as emergence monitoring and Redd and Carcass surveys, which will help them to pinpoint necessary restoration projects.

Although far from finished, SJRRP has made incredible strides towards their mission of restoring salmon to the San Joaquin. With time, dedication, and cooperation, they just might reach their ambitious goal. I look forward to the day when I will be able to answer the question, "Are there salmon in Fresno?" with, "Yes absolutely!"

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"There's a lot of WSP Members doing important work!" - Britta Dornfeld

Year 23 District D Members. Phot By: WSP Staff
Top Row left to right: Priscilla S., Britta D., Mark G., Nina T., Khaalid A., Adelaide R.,
Bottom Row left to right: Alyssa B., Evelyn B., Nicole S., Lauren M.

Outgoing Program Manager, Jennifer, building garden boxes at a WAP with her husband, Tom Wheeler.

Final Words from a Great Program Manager

I am so grateful for my time with the Watershed Stewards Program. This job was so challenging and rewarding and reminded me that something can be difficult and wonderful at the same time. I am going to miss the amazing community that surrounds this program. It has been wonderful to be part of something with so much history and surrounded by so much love and passion and I am very grateful to have been part of this program for a time.

My favorite part of my job was figuring out how to make things work better – better systems, smarter policies, smoother procedures – which all create a happier staff and help foster a better Member experience. I loved providing a great experience for everyone who comes through our program – I really enjoyed seeing Members grow throughout the year as a result of their time in WSP.

WSP is different from other organizations because of the amazing staff that help create such a high quality program – I have never met such a wonderful group of strong women who care so deeply about youth and our environment. We are also unique because every year we get to revisit our trainings and activities and make them even better than they were before. It is an amazing opportunity to learn from our past actions and get constant opportunities to improve our program.

Members often come into WSP at one of the biggest times of transition in their lives: they have recently graduated college, and are suddenly thrust into the "real world" and trying to figure out how everything they have learned so far will fit together. It is easy to feel like your life path is too meandering and you need to get your career and settle down. My biggest piece of advice to Members is to follow your interests wherever they take you, and don't worry about having too many interests! Chase your passions, and stay open to learning. Thank you for the amazing opportunity to lead this program. I can't wait to see where all of our current Members end up in a few years

Jennifer Catsos

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www.ccc.ca.gov/go/wsp

Our Mission

The Watershed Stewards Program's (WSP) mission is to conserve, restore, and enhance anadromous watersheds for future generations by linking education with high quality scientific practices.

WSP Staff

Program Manager: Stephanie Birmingham
Reg I Program Coordinator: Zia Schatz
Reg II Program Coordinator: Jody Weseman

Credits

Editor: Priscilla Sisommout, District D Team Leader

Become a WSP Member! Learn more about the program and find our application at:
www.ccc.ca.gov/go/wsp