

# THE MOUNTAINS EXPERIENCE

A Publication of Mountains Restoration Trust

Summer 2006

*This issue of The Mountains Experience is dedicated to the riparian stream restoration efforts of MRT throughout the Santa Monica Mountains. Riparian habitats provide essential breeding, nesting, feeding, and refuge for birds, mammals and reptiles. For surrounding communities, streams mitigate flooding, maintain water quality, and provide an oasis in the semi-arid climate.*

*According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California has lost 90 percent of its wetlands and riparian habitats, yet these ecosystems provide habitat to 80 percent of the state's wildlife species. MRT is not only committed to acquiring these areas but to restoring and maintaining them. Funding for these major projects is obtained through member support contributions and government programs. Protecting these precious habitats throughout the Santa Monica Mountains is a continuing effort for generations to come.*



## MRT Begins Stream Restoration Along Dry Canyon Creek at Headwaters Corner



Mountains Restoration Trust has begun a significant stream restoration project at Headwaters Corner at Calabasas, which will restore and improve the natural wetland and riparian habitat (the stream corridor and vegetation) along the banks of Dry Canyon Creek, a year-round headwater of the Los Angeles River. The State Department of Water Resources, Urban Streams Restoration Program, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are funding the project to help preserve and improve this riparian habitat which serves as an important transition zone between aquatic and dry habitats.

"This project is important in so many ways," explains MRT Project Manager Debbie Bruschaber. Dry Canyon Creek is a crucial link between aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems in the region. It also plays an important part in

water quality from upstream watersheds and tributaries within the Santa Monica Mountains to the downstream Los Angeles River that empties into the Pacific Ocean at Long Beach. "Small streams are actually more efficient at removing pollutants than larger ones," says Bruschaber.

A study of Dry Canyon Creek's riparian ecosystem determined that the system's ability to sustain itself had become degraded by many years of man-made alteration. Non-native plants have choked out the stream's native species. Debris, dirt fill, asphalt and concrete have also been dumped into the stream and along the banks disturbing the natural functions.

The stream restoration project will involve the removal of invasive plants such as periwinkle and Virginia creeper. "Although they are pretty to look at, these aggressive non-native invaders suffocate the plants that sustain the function of riparian habitats," says Jo Kitz, native plant specialist. Also being removed from the area is debris, which will require heavy equipment to free the stream of unnatural substances. The stream banks will then be reformed and planted with native species. This will increase the capacity of the stream as well as slow and filter run-off, reduce erosion and improve water quality.

By bringing back the native species and removing the debris, MRT will restore the balance to Dry Canyon Creek at Headwaters Corner. The stream restoration will improve the region's wildlife habitat and make a positive contribution to the Los Angeles River system.

Once the main restoration work is complete, MRT will continue with monitoring the stream banks and beds as they return to their natural balance. The project site at Headwaters Corner will serve as a model and provide many educational opportunities to help communities understand the importance of protecting their natural environment.



*MRT Project Manager Debbie Bruschaber leads a public workshop on the stream restoration project at Headwaters Corner*

## Restoration Project...

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"Individuals can do a lot to help sustain healthy streams," suggests Brushaber. For those that live in the Santa Monica Mountains, keeping invasive plants out of the landscape and planting with native species will maintain the mountain's natural habitat and beauty. Residents everywhere can help by keeping motor oil, garbage and pesticide out of the storm drains. When washing your car, use a professional car wash or wash it on the lawn with biodegradable soap. As many people own pools and spas in Southern California, waiting until the chlorine dissipates before draining will also help waterways. To request more information on stream protection, call (818) 591-1701 or email [mrtrust@mountainstrust.org](mailto:mrtrust@mountainstrust.org).

## Restoring Cold Creeks Creeks

Local residents have been puzzled when weird-looking plastic tubes, chicken-wire cages and metal stakes suddenly pop up in creek-side meadows and along stream banks, especially in Cold Creek Valley Preserve, owned and managed by Mountains Restoration Trust. What you're seeing, is the first stage of stream-restoration work. The tubes and cages are tools restoration experts use to protect tiny bushes and saplings from herbivores until the baby plants are sturdy enough to thrive on their own. They are the same temporary tools used by experts to restore riparian areas within our national parks.

When MRT workers do restoration along our creeks, their goal is to improve the creek's quality of life, the health of our ecosystem and the ambiance of our recreation areas.

## Nature Docents Needed!

MRT's Cold Creek Docents are recruiting volunteers to lead occasional weekend public walks or nature walks with small groups of elementary students at beautiful UCLA Stunt Ranch Reserve in Calabasas. Six half-day training sessions will begin on Monday, October 2. Classes taught by resource professionals will include aspects of Santa Monica Mountains ecology, early Chumash culture, geography, the role of soil, interpretive techniques, and a special workshop in teaching with artifacts. For more information, call Nancy at 818-591-9363.

## MRT News

### Riparian Habitat Enhancement in Malibu Creek



MRT has completed a 5-year Malibu Creek Enhancement project removing 414 patches of *Arundo Donax* or giant reed from 8.5 acres of the 252 acres of riparian habitat that stretches along 4.5 miles of Malibu Creek. Based on a previous study, it is estimated that had the project not proceeded, the existing 8.5 acres would have in five years expanded to 25.59 acres; in twenty years to 690.93 acres leaving no native riparian vegetation. The Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission (Prop 12), National Park Service, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and Los Angeles County from the Habitat Conservation Fund (Prop 117) contributed funding to help eradicate the destructive invader. Additional in-kind services were provided by several agencies and organizations.

*Arundo donax* is one of the fastest growing perennial grasses averaging 4 inches per day with heights reaching nine to 30 feet. This terrestrial plant grows along streams, lakes, drains, and other wet sites. A threat to the dwindling riparian resources of coastal southern California, the reed offers no benefit to riparian habitats yet demands enormous amounts of water and is highly flammable.

A post-project survey conducted this year by Sapphos Environmental, Inc., determined that of the 414 patches, 62% are completely dead and 99.4% displayed greater than 80% mortality. The survey concludes, "these results are outstanding for treatment of species as persistent as giant reed over a large area." However, treatment must continue at Malibu Creek and beyond park borders, or the giant reed will continue to spread and degrade the Santa Monica Mountains.

### Trancas Creek Amphibian Restoration

Invasion of riparian habitats does not stop at the stream banks. The introduction of certain stream critters can be detrimental to local amphibian species. In 2002, studies indicated that red swamp crayfish, a stream predator of amphibians were wiping out populations of California newts and treefrogs, both species of special concern in California.

With Proposition 12 grant funding to MRT

through the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission, Dr. Lee Kats, professor, Pepperdine University, devised a 3-year red swamp crayfish removal study/project to determine the effects of removing these predators on amphibians in a reach of Trancas Creek owned by National Park Service. Amphibian populations (newts and tree frogs) rebounded beyond expectations when the crayfish were no longer in the stream. These results are heartening to MRT, Dr. Kats, his research team, students, homeowners and volunteers who helped set the traps and net crayfish and form the basis for future projects.

Studies this year indicated that the amphibian restoration project has been successful. Amphibian numbers are the highest that we have seen anywhere in the Santa Monica Mountains.

In 2005, this amphibian restoration project was awarded the P.I.E. (Public Involvement Education) Grant by the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission to further educate the community about the current and potential impacts that invasive aquatic species, such as crayfish and mosquitofish, can have on the biodiversity of local streams.

## Awards



MRT Executive Director Steve Harris presented State Assemblymember Fran Pavley a special MRT award for her natural resource conservation efforts during her two terms.

## Congratulations!

to one of MRT's founding boardmembers

**Margot Feuer**

Named "Citizen of the Year" by the  
Las Virgenes Homeowners Federation

## MRT Happenings

### MRT Helps Solstice Canyon Return to Natural Splendor



Since 2002, MRT and the National Park Service (NPS) have joined forces to enhance the riparian area of Solstice Creek and to control a newcomer to the mountains that threatens the ecological integrity of the riparian community of Solstice Canyon. False caper (*Euphorbia terracina*) is an invasive non-native species only recently identified and currently limited to the Santa Monica Bay watershed.

These efforts are not to be missed. Solstice Creek in Solstice Canyon in Malibu offers waterfalls, great oak trees, a lane of California black walnuts, and a stream with white alders towering above it and seasonal wildflowers creating a mosaic of colors. Tropical Terrace Trail leads to the remains of a house designed by famed architect Paul Williams and featured in *Architectural Digest* but burned in the 1982 wildfire.

Under the direction of the NPS, a student program called Eco-Helpers has hosted 4,215 students, teachers and chaperones who have learned about the importance of maintaining a healthy watershed while actively participating in the restoration process by pulling invasive non-native species and planting native species.

They helped remove umbrella sedge from the stream, and vinca, false caper, sweet fennel, mustard, prickly ox-tongue, Italian thistle, milk thistle, and smilo grass from the stream banks and riparian zone. They also replanted sages, sagebrushes, deer grass and other native species. Within two years the results have been astounding:

- 105 total field trips
- 1.61 total acres weeded
- 6,290 total plants installed
- 1.45 total acres planted or replanted

NPS reports that the Eco-Helpers restoration project at Solstice is an amazing success. "We literally went from areas covered in 99.9%

of invasive *Euphorbia terracina* to areas that look virtually identical to the intact native coastal sage scrub on the mountainside. Hundreds of students have learned about the resources and made a lasting contribution to this national park," explained NPS Ecologist Christy Brigham.

Volunteers from the California Native Plant Society and MRT's Outward Bound Adventures restoration crew and staff contributed to restoration efforts by removing English ivy from the trees near Tropical Terrace, umbrella sedge from the stream and other invasive species from upland areas.

You may see before and after stream restoration pictures at: <http://www.nps.gov/samo/educate/ecohelpers/index.htm>.

### Volunteers Plant Native Trees



Wild Walnut Park across from Headwaters Corner has an increase in riparian and wetland trees and shrubs thanks to the caring efforts of volunteers. This past Arbor Day people of all ages lent their hands to help plant mulefat, elderberry, black walnut and oak trees, which were generously provided by the Malibu Forestry Unit of the Los Angeles County Fire Department. The Calabasas High School Earth Club and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, a division of the U.S. Dept of Agriculture, helped to coordinate the planting. The celebration was part of the Earth Day Stream to Sea Family Fun Day, co-sponsored by MRT, the City of Calabasas and the Las Virgenes Municipal Water District with additional support from Whole Foods Market. The native planting at the city-owned park is part of MRT's ongoing Dry Canyon Creek restoration project. If you would like to help keep the young trees healthy, please contact Debbie Brushaber at 818-591-1701 ext. 205.

### Habitat Restoration Days

Individuals and groups are invited to do native plantings; remove invasive species; and restore habitat. Bring drinking water and wear sturdy shoes and work clothes. A hat, gloves and sunscreen are suggested. Receive credit for community service hours. Tools are provided.

- **Time: 9am – noon (or earlier)**
- Please RSVP to reserve tools and confirm time and location.

#### Cold Creek Habitat Restoration

*Cold Creek Preserve*  
RSVP 818-591-1701 ext. 203  
August 20, Sept. 16, Oct. 22, Nov. 18

#### Dry Canyon Creek Native Plant Restoration

*Headwaters Corner*  
RSVP 818-591-1701 x205  
August 12, Sept. 16, Oct. 21, Nov. 18

#### Oak Woodland Restoration

*Malibu Creek State Park*  
August 19, Sept. 23, Oct. 21, Nov. 19  
Jo Kitz – 818-591-1701 x203

#### La Sierra Canyon Habitat Restoration

*La Sierra Preserve*  
October 29, Nov. 4, Dec. 3  
Jo Kitz – 818-591-1701 x203

#### Weed War

#### California Native Plant Society

For more info and to RSVP, call 818-348-5910  
August 13 – Cold Creek Cyn Preserve  
Sept. 10 – TBA, Oct. 8 – TBA  
Nov. 12 – Tapia Park  
(remove ivy and vinca).



**Non-Profit Org.  
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**Mission Statement**

*Working in partnership with the community to preserve, protect, and enhance the natural resources of the Santa Monica Mountains for the benefit of the environment and for present and future generations through: land acquisition and conservation easements; habitat preservation and restoration; and research and education.*

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**MRT Recreational Programs**

*Weather ranges from very hot to very cold—dress in layers, wear sturdy shoes and hat, bring water and snacks.*

**2nd Saturday Walks**

*Cold Creek Canyon Preserve  
9am - noon*

Enjoy a leisurely interpretive 2-mile walk through one of the gems of the Santa Monica Mountains. Meet at lower gate to Preserve. RSVP 818-591-1701  
Sept. 9, Oct. 14, Nov. 11

**Sunset/Moonlight Walks**

The Topanga Skyline Ridge Trail commands views of distant mountains and the sparkling lights of the metropolis. Meet at the top of Stunt Road with supper and a “goodie” to share. 3hrs.  
Sept. 3, 5:00pm; Oct 1, 4:45pm;  
Nov. 5, 3:15pm

**Chaparral Chatter Walks**

8:30am, 4 hours  
Cold Creek Preserve/ Stunt High Trail  
Halli Mason – 818-345-6749  
Oct. 19, Nov. 16

**YOUTH NATURALIST PROGRAMS**

Programs are designed for 8- to 12-year olds and include an activity, craft, outdoor experience, and a guest speaker or animal. Pre-register. Fee. RSVP 818-591-1701 x184

**Reptiles & Amphibians**

Sept. 9, 9:30 am – 12:30 pm  
Learn what makes a reptile a reptile and an amphibian an amphibian!

**The Night Sky**

Oct. 28, 6:30pm-9:30pm  
Stars, planets, nebulae and constellations in the night sky are seen through telescopes! Oh My!

**Birds**

Nov. 18, 9:30 am – 12:30 pm  
Examine bird pellets, bones and feathers through microscopes and bird behavior with binoculars!

**NATURE DISCOVERY CAMP**

August 21 - 24, 9:30am to 1:30pm  
Outdoor wonders include a dinosaur dig with a paleontologist, a model volcano with a geologist, and the night sky with an astronomer.

**Headwaters Corner New Logo**

Headwaters Corner, under MRT stewardship and in partnership with the City of Calabasas, has an official logo created by John Low & Associates. When completed Headwaters Corner at Calabasas will be an exciting, innovative



12-acre interpretive center dedicated to demonstrating how urban communities can live within the natural environment and to teaching the cultural history of the Santa Monica Mountains. Headwaters Corner is already in operation offering public education in a natural setting.



**Look for Our Anniversary issue in November!**