



WALNUT CREEK WATERSHED COUNCIL

Achievement Report

2022



The Walnut Creek Watershed Council is a volunteer-led 501(c)(3) organization that supports a healthy and sustainable Walnut Creek Watershed. The Walnut Creek Watershed Council's mission is to support community efforts, scientific studies, public education, and restoration projects that protect and enhance beneficial uses and resources in the entire watershed. The Council encourages sharing information and promotes collaboration among the stakeholders.

Board of Directors

Bob Simmons, President

Alan Bade

Dick Heron

Ron Hufft

Lesley Hunt

Fareed Nabkel

Associate Directors

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Contra Costa Resource Conservation District

Walnut Creek Watershed Council Achievement Report 2022

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This report was designed and edited by Lisa Damerel.

Cover photo: Killdeer chick at Lower Walnut Creek Restoration Project by Lisa Damerel

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President's Message

Good things are happening in your creeks!

Our last report was in 2019, and we are pleased to be able to provide a report in 2022.

Organizationally, the first significant change is that the Council became a 501(c)(3) corporation. We created a Board consisting of a representative from each of the tributaries to Walnut Creek (Grayson, Las Trampas, San Ramon, Pine, and the Clayton Drain) and me. We also have three advisory board members, who are representatives from the Flood Control and Water Conservation District (FCD), the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District (CCRCD), and the City of Walnut Creek.

The second significant organizational change is that the Council created the Walnut Creek Watershed Restoration Plan Steering Committee. That Committee met throughout the year and identified a lengthy list of stakeholders and a list of organizations that have funded watershed plans in the past. The overall concept is for a broad, umbrella-type plan for the entire watershed, and then more specific plans, with identification of restoration opportunities, in the five tributaries. Our goal for 2023 is to conduct stakeholder outreach and start contacting funding organizations. We will be working with both the FCD and the CCRCD in those efforts.

The efforts of the Friends of San Ramon Creek to remove *Arundo donax* (a.k.a. giant reed) have been tremendous. At sites in both Lafayette and Walnut Creek, the Lafayette Creeks Committee and the Friends of the Creeks have removed invasive species and planted native species. In Pleasant Hill, the Friends of Pleasant Hill Creeks provided input into the design of the new community library next to Grayson Creek, which includes a beautiful new creekside trail and native plantings. In Concord, the Friends of Concord Creeks conducted some creek cleanups. This report provides more information on the work of these watershed groups and others.

Please enjoy and protect your creeks.

Supporters

Municipalities

City of Concord
City of Lafayette
& Lafayette Creeks Committee
City of Martinez
City of Orinda
City of Pleasant Hill
City of San Ramon
City of Walnut Creek
Town of Danville
Town of Moraga

Nonprofit & Community Organizations

Diablo Valley Fly Fishing Club
Friends of Concord Creeks
Friends of the Creeks
Friends of Pleasant Hill Creeks
Friends of San Ramon Creek
Greenbelt Alliance
John Muir Land Trust
Mount Diablo Audubon Society
Mount Diablo Interpretive Association
Save Mount Diablo
Sustainable Contra Costa
Sustainable Walnut Creek
Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation

Government Agencies

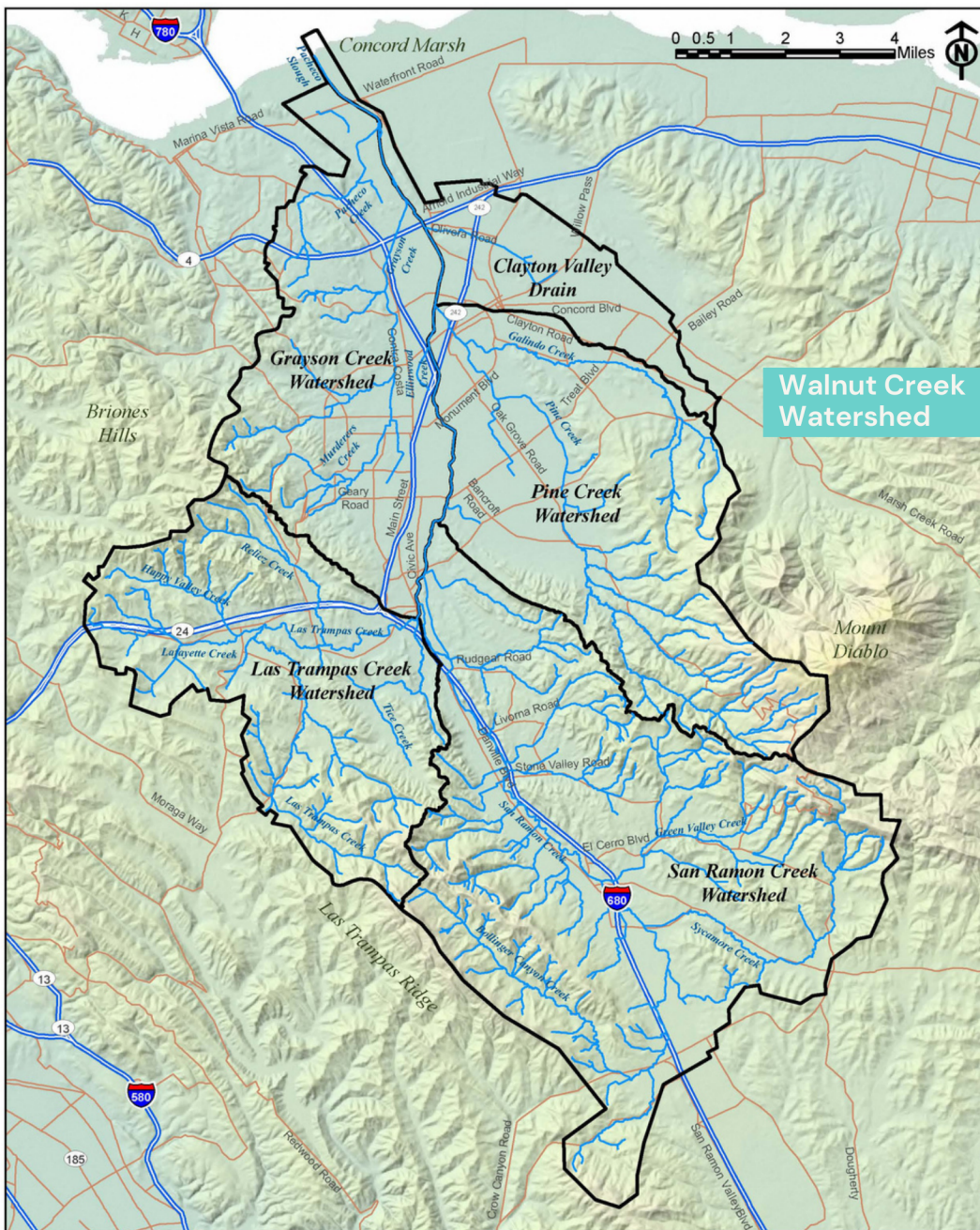
Central Contra Costa Sanitary District
Central Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority
Contra Costa County Flood Control & Water Conservation District
Contra Costa Resource Conservation District
East Bay Municipal Utility District
East Bay Regional Park District



Photos on this page courtesy of FCD

Walnut Creek Watershed Info

The Walnut Creek Watershed is the largest watershed in Contra Costa County totaling 146 square miles, or 96,000 acres, in size. The Watershed has 309 miles of creek channels accounting for almost a quarter of all mapped creek channels in Contra Costa County. The watershed extends from San Ramon to the south, Martinez to the north, Moraga and Orinda to the west, and Concord to the east. From protected natural lands (Mt. Diablo State Park, East Bay Regional Park District lands, and Walnut Creek Open Space) and grazed lands to suburbs and urban creeks, our watershed has a bit of almost everything.





A lot of foundational work was done with the Friends of Concord Creeks (FCC) volunteer group in 2022. The formation of a Nextdoor group helped to organize support from the community and build a strong list of interested parties. After joining the Walnut Creek Watershed Council and agreeing with the Council Board to have representation from the FCC, important connections were made within and external to the Council, including with the City of Concord.

The FCC hosted its first creek cleanup event in May at Newhall Community Park with the help of the CCRCD. A group of 10 FCC volunteers cleaned a section of Galindo Creek stretching more than 1,000 feet. At the suggestion of one of the volunteers from the first event, the FCC hosted another event at Hillcrest Community Park in July. On July 30th, a group of 12 FCC volunteers had a fun morning and removed a lot of trash along a large section of Holbrook Channel, upstream of the Clayton Valley Drain.



Photos on this page by Salma Nabkel

Training the next generation of creek stewards



Having fun at Hillcrest Community Park

The FCC returned to Hillcrest Community Park with the CCRCD in September to join Concord City Councilmember Carlyn Obringer's September of Service day, which coincided with California Coastal Cleanup Day. Carlyn had the support of roughly 100 volunteers that helped with trash pickup, pruning of vegetation, and general maintenance. At the end of September, the FCC joined the Contra Costa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District in a fascinating cleanup of the San Ramon Bypass Channel and Walnut Creek.

In addition to the cleanup events in 2022, the FCC began identifying sites for potential future cleanups and restoration. Looking ahead to 2023, the FCC will build on this year's efforts to grow the group and increase its positive impact on the community and watershed. In January, the FCC will join the annual Giving Natives a Chance event and join in the efforts to create a watershed restoration plan.



Friends of Pleasant Hill Creeks

Community Creek Cleanups: On Pleasant Hill Community Service Day, more than 20 community volunteers cleaned up approximately 1,000 linear feet of historic Walnut Creek near Ellinwood Dr. in Pleasant Hill. The collected trash filled a 20-yard dumpster and included food wrappers, cigarette butts, plastics, Styrofoam, furniture, shopping carts, and construction debris. The Pleasant Hill Civic Action Commission sponsored the cleanup, which was conducted with support from the City of Pleasant Hill maintenance team and Republic Services. Volunteers also participated in 2 trash assessments and cleanups that focused on sections of Grayson Creek near the Center St. bridge in Pacheco and north of Highway 4. These events were sponsored by the Contra Costa County Watershed Program in partnership with The Watershed Project (Center St.) and the CCRCD (Highway 4). **Since 2017, volunteers have removed more than 6,000 pieces of trash from Pleasant Hill's creeks! Thank you volunteers and sponsors!**



Wildlife Monitoring: Volunteers with Friends of Pleasant Hill Creeks and Mt. Diablo Audubon Society continued the monthly Grayson Creek Bird Survey, which over 5 years has documented 109 species of birds in the Grayson Creek riparian corridor (including 104 species of native resident and migratory birds.) A bird brochure and links to online eBird checklists are available at www.pleasanthillcreeks.org. In addition, members continued to watch our local creeks after significant rainfall events for anadromous fish, aiding a local fish biologist in a multi-year effort. Large fall run Chinook salmon have been documented in both Grayson and Walnut Creeks.

Creek Stewardship & Restoration: Friends of Pleasant Hill Creeks volunteers continued to monitor and maintain a native-plant restoration site on Grayson Creek near Chilpancingo Park. During the 2022 drought, members pulled weeds and hand watered the site. At the 39th Salmonid Restoration Conference, we co-presented a talk titled "Community-involved Creek Restoration in the Walnut Creek Watershed." To support long term watershed planning and stewardship, we participated in multiple 2040 Pleasant Hill General Plan meetings and served as a founding member of the Council's Watershed Restoration Planning Steering Committee.



Education and Outreach: We hosted a table at the Grand Opening of the new creekside Pleasant Hill Library and co-authored with library staff a brochure about creek stewardship and wildlife.

Friends of Pleasant Hill Creeks is a nonprofit organization of Pleasant Hill residents who care about our creeks. Our mission is to engage community members in protecting, restoring, and enjoying our creeks and adjoining open space. We are a project of Social & Environmental Entrepreneurs, a 501(c)(3) charity. Please visit us at www.pleasanthillcreeks.org.

Friends of San Ramon Creek



Friends of San Ramon Creek (FSRC) has been working for almost a decade on its Arundo Removal Project in the San Ramon Creek Watershed, a sub-watershed of the Walnut Creek Watershed. Within about 3 years, FSRC expects to have removed all Arundo from the sub-watershed and have all areas where Arundo has been removed under management.

FSRC has identified and mapped approximately 156,000 square feet of Arundo in the sub-watershed. To date, about 93,000 square feet is under management. FSRC continues to inspect and treat all the sites (now 33) that have been treated since 2013. Of the 33 sites FSRC has treated over the past 9 years, we can say that 4 are now free of Arundo.



Photo by Mike Anciaux

An FSRC Arundo removal crew was augmented by volunteers from Chevron on 9/14/22.



A temporary bridge was constructed to provide access to a patch of Arundo on the west side of San Ramon Creek.



Photos by Dick Heron

Replanting

FSRC planted native plants at several Arundo removal sites in November–December 2022.

Water Quality Monitoring

A small crew of FSRC volunteers have been sampling water from 6 locations along San Ramon Creek, Sycamore Creek, and Green Valley Creek once a month. Instruments measure pH, nitrates, turbidity, conductivity, and dissolved oxygen. This data is submitted to The Watershed Project, which in turn submits the data to the statewide database compiled by CEDEN (California Environmental Data Exchange Network).

Library Naturalist Speaker

FSRC engaged Malcolm Sproul, a principal at LSA Associates, to speak to a crowd about creek stewardship, plants, and historic features before so much of the San Ramon Creek watershed was developed.



CITY OF LAFAYETTE CREEKS COMMITTEE

Construction of Rain Garden Project

Early in the year, the Lafayette City Council authorized the necessary additional funds to add to previously obtained grants for the construction of the Lafayette Rain Garden at the corner of Golden Gate Avenue and First Street, a project that had been in the planning stage for several years. Construction commenced in the fall and is essentially complete.

Community Service Day

Lafayette held its annual community service day on June 4th. More than 100 volunteers turned out to work on various projects. About a dozen of those volunteers assisted in planting shrubs and trees and installing an irrigation system at the city's Gazebo site. Another couple dozen volunteers cleared a weed-infested creek bank along Las Trampas Creek at the city's Leigh Creekside Park as initial preparation for a subsequent restoration project that has since been completed.

Private Property Arundo Eradication

The Lafayette Creeks Committee negotiated an agreement with The Restoration Trust whereby that organization sponsors Arundo eradication projects on private property in Lafayette. The first such private property eradication project was conducted in July at a residence bordering Lafayette Creek in the city's downtown area.

Creek Identification Signs

The Lafayette Creeks Committee created a program to construct and install permanent creek identification signage where some city roads cross creeks. With the assistance of committee members, the program has become an Eagle Scout project, and the first sign has been installed where Old Tunnel Road crosses Reliez Creek (see photo at right). It is expected that a number of similar creek identification signs will be installed in the same fashion in 2023.



Photo by Ron Hufft

Leigh Creekside Park Restoration Project

Along the western edge of Leigh Creekside Park, the bank of Las Trampas Creek was in need of restoration. Volunteers performed initial invasive plant clearance on Community Service Day. With some funding from the Walnut Creek Watershed Council, native plants were purchased from The Restoration Trust. The City of Lafayette agreed to fund the remainder of the project's cost. On October 22nd, volunteers returned to the site to do the final clearing and tidying to prepare for planting day. On January 28th, 2023, the restoration planting was completed by about a dozen volunteers who planted approximately 1,200 plants, mostly Santa Barbara sedge (*Carex barbarae*), a couple hundred creeping wild rye (*Leymus triticoides*), and 3 native sycamore trees.



Our primary project this year was planting natives along the banks of Walnut Creek in Civic Park. We have 3 sites between Lincoln Avenue and Arroyo Way. Contractors planted 2 of the sites with a native grass species particularly well adapted to holding soil in place. We are adding appropriate larger plants like trees, shrubs, and perennials, with a focus on pollinator-friendly, creek-adapted species. Selecting these plants is a job in itself, but a pleasant one. Throughout this project, the weather has been a challenging factor—first, it was so dry we had to water the plants, and then it was so wet that we had to worry about plants washing away.

Starting in November, a group of student volunteers came all the way from Irvington High School to remove ivy near the creek in Civic Park. They also planted appropriate native plants. This work was part of their Change project, which their school assigns every year. We are happy to have had their help and contributed to their knowledge of the natural world. We have also had a couple of corporate groups help us out this year.

We participated in Walnut Creek's Community Service Day in October with four projects: ivy removal and minor tree pruning in Civic Park, a creek cleanup on Pine Creek, and the very popular family creek cleanup at Heather Farm Park (especially geared toward introducing children aged 6–10 to the natural world and the need to take care of it).



Irvington High School students pulling ivy in Civic Park.



The family creek cleanup crew posing with their accumulated trash before throwing it in the dumpster.

Photos on this page by Lesley Hunt

In addition to our restoration work, we've also been involved in a political issue for the last two years—a proposed senior continuing care development at Seven Hills Ranch next to Heather Farm Park. This site was identified in the County's 50 Year Flood Control Plan as the best place to create a respite site for returning salmon and steelhead on their way to spawning sites upstream. One of our objectives was to preserve this possibility, and we did achieve that. Unfortunately, the Board of Supervisors voted in December to approve the project. For more information, see the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation page in this report or visit SaveSevenHillsRanch.org.



The Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation continues to work on its half dozen restoration projects, many of which involve water in some way—Bayberry Pond and Rock Oak Creek in Lime Ridge North, and Indian Pond and a tree planting site near Deer Lake in Shell Ridge. We have become increasingly aware that water is a precious resource in the Open Space, and we are considering ways to make water more available to local wildlife.

Mitigation sites have become a critical resource in central county as development projects destroy existing wetlands and developers need to “replace” them. To this end, the Walnut Creek Watershed Council and a consultant conducted a tour of several possible sites to evaluate their suitability as restoration sites. Two of them were on Open Space land. This has encouraged us to look for other sites, and there are several promising ones. We will pursue the possibilities, including funding, in the coming year.

A major focus for the past two years or so has been Seven Hills Ranch. The Foundation and the City of Walnut Creek have always viewed this 30-acre site adjacent to Heather Farm Park as open space to be preserved, if possible, but the land is in the County’s jurisdiction. In 2020, the County received a proposal to build a gated continuing care retirement community on this land. It would block the existing wildlife corridor, cut down or compromise many mature oak trees, and require a lot of blasting and excavating, all of which would completely change the character of the land. An ad hoc group, Save Seven Hills Ranch, has skillfully led the fight against the development. Both the Foundation and the Walnut Creek Watershed Council have served on the Save Seven Hills Ranch steering committee, and the Foundation is the fiscal sponsor for the group. We wrote what we considered to be very strong responses to many of the facets of the development and submitted them in response to the draft EIR. The County Planning Commission voted against the project 5–1, but the Board of Supervisors approved it unanimously two weeks later. We are very disappointed, but this battle is not completely over. You can read more about it at SaveSevenHillsRanch.org.



Photo courtesy of Save Seven Hills Ranch

Seven Hills Ranch on a late winter afternoon. The stable is one of the few buildings on site. Note deer in right foreground. We have also seen nesting red-tailed hawks, wild turkeys, smaller birds, and a variety of wetland and other plants.



2022 Work in the Walnut Creek Watershed

CCRCD staff continued to provide outreach, event, grant, and administrative assistance to the Walnut Creek Watershed Council and creek groups throughout the watershed. We are proud to have helped the new group Friends of Concord Creeks hold its first events. We worked on projects and events with additional partners in the watershed, including CSU East Bay-Concord Campus, Pleasant Hill Instructional Garden, Sustainable Walnut Creek, and several cities.

CCRCD.ORG



Volunteers collecting trash along Galindo Creek in Newhall Community Park during the Friends of Concord Creeks' inaugural creek cleanup on 5/29/22.



Concord City Councilmember Carlyn Obringer, Fareed Nabkel, and Lisa Damerel working at a creek cleanup in Hillcrest Community Park on CA Coastal Cleanup Day, 9/17/22.

Photos on this page by CCRCD staff



CCRCD staff and interns led the Pine Creek cleanup on Walnut Creek Community Service Day, 10/8/22.



CCRCD staff helped plan and facilitate Cal-IPC's one-day Northern CA symposium held at CSU East Bay-Concord Campus on 7/18/22.



The plant and insect photos at left were taken while CCRCD staff helped steward and monitor pollinator habitat projects in Concord and Lafayette.



Contra Costa County Flood Control & Water Conservation District

Lower Walnut Creek Restoration Project

2022 was literally a year of growth for the Lower Walnut Creek Restoration Project. In early 2022, the project's contractor (Four M Contracting, Inc.) completed south reach levee grading work and opened the final wetland restoration areas to the tides. The focus then quickly turned to installing over 31,000 plants, all custom grown for the project. The planting work extended for nearly 2 months with significant hand labor to ensure that each plant was in the right location, healthy and protected with a reused milk carton, and connected to the temporary irrigation system. By April, the cover crop of goldfields and poppies were in full bloom.



Photos on this page courtesy of FCD

2022 was year 2 of the 4-year construction contract, so the year's main focus was ensuring the plants were well taken care of and ready to thrive in the future. Other major tasks in 2022 included planning and permitting work for the upcoming public access phase of the project, which will include a staging area, restroom, outdoor classroom, trails and multiple large pedestrian bridges. That construction work is led by partner John Muir Land Trust, and tentatively set to begin in the fall of 2023, with a grand opening planned for early 2024. More project info (including live webcams) can be found on the project webpage at www.lowerwalnutcreek.org.

Annual Giving Natives a Chance Planting Event

The District hosted its 10th Annual Giving Natives a Chance Planting Event with support from the CCRCD and The Restoration Trust. The event was held in the name of Mike Carlson, the former Chief Engineer of the District, who passed away in 2022. The District and its partners hosted 60 volunteers at the Clayton Valley Drain, planting 6,200 grass plugs, including creeping wild rye and Santa Barbara sedge. In the 10 years since the first Giving Natives a Chance event, native grass coverage and restoration at the Clayton Valley Drain has more than doubled, covering 68% of the creek bank—up from 30% in 2013. The eventual goal will be to establish the native grass habitat along the Clayton Valley Drain, eliminating non-native grass species. The native grass species are low maintenance, save water, support local ecology, and mitigate fires.

Creek and Channel Safety Awareness Program

Contra Costa County has designated the month of October as Creek and Channel Safety Awareness Month. During the month of October, the District coordinates with local schools to educate students about the dangers of entering the creeks and channels. The District coordinates with Walnut Creek Intermediate—a local middle school bisected by Walnut Creek—to host the Creek and Channel Safety Event. The 2022 Creek and Channel Safety Event was the District's first in-person outreach event since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The event included a poster competition amongst students, an awards ceremony for students participating in the poster competition, and engagement with members of Con Fire. Five student-selected posters were printed onto canvas and displayed along the Walnut Creek to remind students to STAY OUT STAY ALIVE!



Photos on this page courtesy of FCD

Streamside Management Program for Landowners (SMPL)

The SMPL program provides free advice on creek care, restoration, and maintenance for homeowners within the vicinity of natural creeks. SMPL entered into a new 3-year agreement with the District in October 2022 to ensure continued support for homeowners through 2025. SMPL has provided support to dozens of homeowners for common creek problems, including erosion, entrenchment, fire management concerns, and fallen trees. This year alone, SMPL has performed 22 site visits to properties throughout Contra Costa County. The SMPL program has also sponsored 3 workshops and trainings related to the Lower Alhambra Creek Watershed Management Plan, Garrity Creek, and Rheem Creek.

Looking Forward: 2023 Contra Costa County Creek and Watershed Symposium

Working closely with the CCRCD, the District is organizing, planning, and sponsoring the 2023 Contra Costa County Creek and Watershed Symposium. We look forward to hosting you at this event, which will take place in the Walnut Creek Watershed on October 26, 2023. You can find more information about the event here: www.ccwatershedforum.org/symposium-2023.

Thanks for reading!
You can find more information about
the Walnut Creek Watershed Council
at www.wcwatershed.org.

See you in the creeks in 2023!

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the volunteers, supporters, and
partners of the Walnut Creek Watershed Council!
The projects highlighted in this report could not
have happened without you.

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