

2013 Report

Walnut Creek Watershed Council:

A Year of Partnerships in Action



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Walnut Creek Watershed Council

Government Agency Supporters:

Central Contra Costa Sanitary District
Central Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority
City of Lafayette
City of Martinez
City of Orinda
City of Pleasant Hill
City of San Ramon
City of Walnut Creek
Contra Costa County
CCC Flood Control and Water Conservation District
Contra Costa Resource Conservation District
East Bay Municipal Utility District
East Bay Regional Park District
Town of Moraga

Non-profit Agency Supporters:

Diablo Valley Fly Fishermen
Friends of the Creeks
Greenbelt Alliance
Mount Diablo Audubon
Muir Heritage Land Trust
Save Mount Diablo
Sustainable Contra Costa
Sustainable Walnut Creek
Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation

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Walnut Creek Watershed

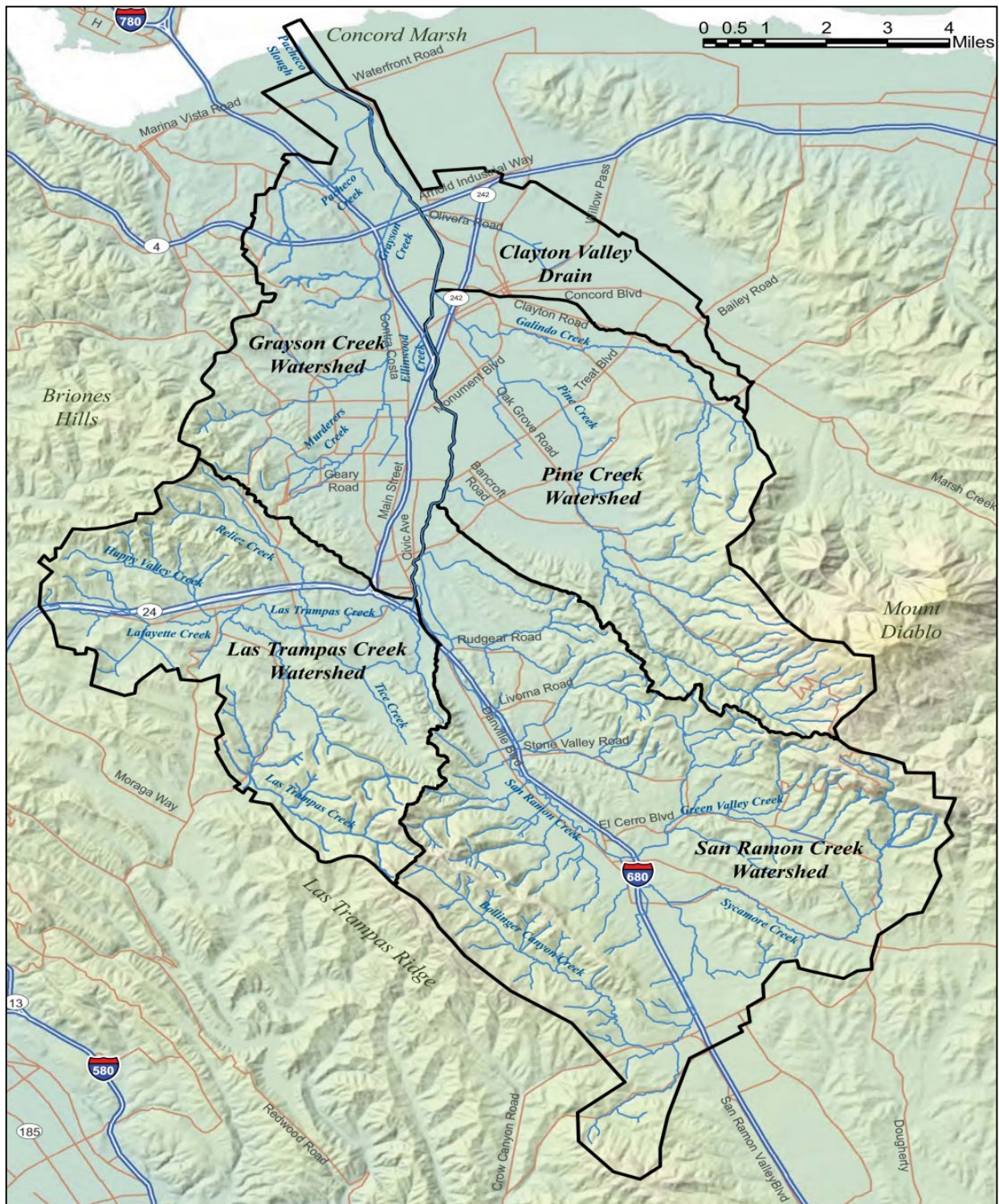


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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to bring attention to the Walnut Creek Watershed and show how much the communities that live in the watershed can accomplish by working together to improve its condition.

Walnut Creek is the largest watershed in Contra Costa County, comprising five subwatersheds, totaling 146 square miles, and accounting for more than 35 percent of the County's population.

The Walnut Creek Watershed Council is a voluntary, non-regulatory stakeholder group that supports a healthy and sustainable watershed. In 2013 the Walnut Creek Watershed Council completed an inventory of the watershed, hosted eight presentations by organizations involved in watershed stewardship, and provided a forum for information sharing and collaboration between community groups involved in caring for the watershed.

This report includes a brief overview of the Walnut Creek Watershed Council's accomplishments in 2013 and individual reports from many of our supporting organizations. These individual reports highlight the contributions those organizations have made, but also illustrate the size and complexity of our watershed. We know other organizations have made contributions as well, and hope that we can provide a more complete report in subsequent years.

The Walnut Creek Watershed Council's goals in 2014 include developing a long-term vision plan and advancing educational outreach and on the ground restoration projects in the Walnut Creek Watershed.

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Walnut Creek Watershed

The Walnut Creek Watershed is the largest watershed in Contra Costa County totaling 146 square miles or 96,000 acres, in size. Its 340,000 inhabitants account for over 35% of the County's population. The Watershed consists of five subwatersheds extending from San Ramon on the south and Martinez on the north to Moraga and Orinda on 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 cities and urban creeks, our watershed has a bit of almost everything. See inside back cover for a map of Cities and Communities in the watershed.

One thing the Walnut Creek Watershed has a lot of is streams; 309 miles of creek channels in fact - accounting for almost a quarter of all mapped creek channels in Contra Costa County. Over 70% of the channels (by length) in the watershed are natural, meaning they have no obvious reinforcements. Nearly 16% of the creeks are in concrete channels. Another 12% are constructed earth channels. Less than 1% of the channels are rippedraped. All of this watershed information is from the *Walnut Creek Watershed Inventory* (Feb 2013).

Mission of the Walnut Creek Watershed Council

Our mission is to support community efforts, scientific studies, public education, and restoration projects which protect and enhance beneficial uses and resources in the entire watershed. The Council encourages sharing of information and promotes collaboration among the stakeholders.

History of the Walnut Creek Watershed Council

In 2011, several individuals representing different organizations began meeting to discuss how to create a community-based group with an interest in improving our watershed. After several months, they decided to create a Council and started the organization process. The result is the Walnut Creek Watershed Council (Council), which is a voluntary, non-regulatory stakeholder group that supports a healthy and sustainable watershed. As of the end of 2013, Contra Costa County and seven of the nine cities and towns in the watershed, together with several non-profit organizations and other governmental organizations, have expressed their support. The complete list can be seen in the beginning of this report.

Goals of the Walnut Creek Watershed Council

Our goals for 2014 and beyond are ambitious. At the top of the list is working towards a vision for the future of the watershed and identifying specific steps that need to be taken to get there. Additionally, we seek to increase watershed awareness through educational events and on-the-ground projects with community groups.

2013 Activities and Accomplishments

In addition to what our supporting organizations did, the Council itself had several accomplishments. With funding from the Contra Costa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District and the Contra Costa County Fish and Wildlife Committee, we completed the *Walnut Creek Watershed Inventory* (Feb 2013), an overview assessment of the condition of the watershed and the first published view of the entire watershed. The intent of the inventory is to provide the Watershed Council and other interested parties with an overview of the status of the watershed and its management opportunities and constraints. The *Inventory* is an important first step in developing a vision for the watershed and is an invaluable resource for the Council and the entire watershed community. You can view this report at: <http://www.ccrwd.org/> under the Walnut Creek Watershed tab.

The Council also worked with the Digital Safari Academy, a three year college and career preparation program at Mt. Diablo High School where students work with clients in the community to design multimedia arts and computer science projects. Students from this program helped design a logo for the Council, which you can see on the front cover of this report. A tour of the Redwood Creek restoration project at Muir Beach in Marin County gave us some good ideas for our own watershed as well.

Additionally, the Council invited several organizations to speak at our meetings throughout the year so that we might better understand what the needs are in our watershed and how we can work together to address them. 2013 presentations included:

How Did We Get Here? – Part 1 and 2, a History of the Walnut Creek Watershed
Paul Detjens, CCC Flood Control & Water Conservation District

“Re-imagining our Creeks: the Future of Our Creeks in our Communities”
UC Berkeley Landscape Architect students

“Homelessness and Water Pollution: Thinking outside the Channel” a Master’s Thesis
Saneta DeVuono-Powell, UC Berkeley graduate student in partnership with the CCC Flood Control and Water Conservation District

The San Francisco Estuary Partnership’s Watershed Program
Caitlin Sweeney, San Francisco Estuary Partnership

Native Creek Fish: Habitat Requirements in Walnut Creek Watershed
Pete Alexander, East Bay Regional Park District Fisheries Manager

Central Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority - Trash Issues
Paul Morsen, Executive Director, Central Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority

Treatment of Wastewater and Possibilities for its Re-use
Curt Swanson, Director of Operations, Central Contra Costa Sanitary District

2014 Goals. In the coming year, we will work towards obtaining funding for preparing a Vision Plan for the Walnut Creek Watershed. On a more modest level, we hope to coordinate a single watershed day of work focusing on creek clean-ups, Arundo removal and native planting with community groups. Furthermore, we hope to provide at least one educational event regarding our watershed.

City of Lafayette Creeks Committee

2013 Report



Lafayette Creek Day 2013



Creek Workshop 2013

Staffed informational booth at Lafayette's Earth Day celebration.

Held very successful Creek Cleanup and Education Day and removed 3000 gallons of invasive plant removal from Leigh Creekside Park.

Submitted successful grant proposal to CCC Fish and Wildlife Committee for two interpretive signs along pervious path on Mt. Diablo Blvd. Sign panels in production and installation is planned for early 2014.

Provided letter of support for successful grant to Clean Water Program for Walnut Creek Watershed coordinator.

Worked with Restoration Design Group to create report on creek enhancement alternatives on Shield Block that will support the start of Downtown Preservation, Restoration and Development Plan.

Consulted with city staff regarding fire and debris disposal at Las Trampas Creek in Community Park.

Held a creeks workshop on best practices for creek restoration and planning for City Council, commissioners, staff and public.

City of Walnut Creek's Clean Water Program

2013 Report



The primary goal of the Clean Water Program is to minimize and eliminate pollutants from entering the City's storm drainage system, which eventually discharge untreated to local creeks and the Bay. The Program is tasked with implementing State and Federal clean water standards to improve local water quality and protect our water resources from contamination and pollution.

April 2013:

Program staff conducted the 4th Trash Hot Spot Assessment and Cleanups at three reaches within Walnut Creek. The most commonly found trash materials were plastic bags, plastic materials, cigarette butts and food/beverage containers.

The trend (over the past four years) had showed a decreasing amount of trash found at all three locations.

April-May 2013:

The Program sponsored five Outdoor Watershed Classes at Creek Walk in Civic Park. Approximately 95 students from two elementary schools participated in this program. Since the inception of this program three years ago, over 400 fourth and fifth graders had completed this watershed education program.

Contra Costa Resource Conservation District

2013 Report



Community Service Day, Walnut Creek



Watershed model at Lafayette Creek Day

Jennifer Stern, pictured above with Walter Moeller of Friends of the Creeks, is the Watershed Coordinator for Walnut Creek and Resource Conservationist at the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District (CCRCD). Jennifer assists creek groups with various activities in the watershed. In the last year, the CCRCD has:

Increased Watershed Awareness through educational events such as “Re-imagining Our Creeks” (a watershed-wide event featuring UC Berkeley student designs) and “*Discovering a Sense of Place*” (a workshop series on local watersheds).

Expanded Pollution Prevention Education through interacting with the public at educational outreach events such as Lafayette Creek Day and Danville’s Earth Day celebration.

Helped build **Higher Capacity Creek Stewardship Groups** by providing publicity for events to recruit new volunteers, synergizing creek group efforts, and helping a new creek group in San Ramon Creek watershed establish itself.

Facilitated Creek Clean-ups and Restoration by providing planning assistance and insurance coverage for events, day-of oversight and follow-up with volunteers. These events have successfully cleared trash and invasive plants from creeks across the watershed.

Contra Costa County Flood Control & Water Conservation District 2013 Report



This year the Contra Costa County Flood Control District focused on building partnerships within the community. The District's mission is to provide flood protection facilities while protecting environmental resources; civic engagement and partnerships with environmental groups will be crucial to fulfill this mission in the future.

The District received a grant from the California Department of Water Resources Flood Emergency Response Projects for the installation of **nine new stream gauges** and linking to two city funded stream gauges. The grant will also fund the development of a stream gauge webpage. This will include 6 stream gauges located in the Walnut Creek Watershed.

The District continued its **goat grazing study**. This study, which will end after its third and final year in spring of 2014, compares the efficacy of grazing goats to spraying herbicides for controlling vegetation in flood control channels. Ultimately, the District hopes to minimize its use of pesticides.

Collaborated with students from UC Berkeley to address the **issue of homeless encampments in the Walnut Creek Channel**, problems associated with them, why they exist, and recommendations for dealing with them.

On December 7, 2013 the Flood Control District held its first volunteer event, ***Giving the Natives a Chance***. The experiment proposed by Restoration Trust was to plant 100 feet of both banks of the channel with plugs of field sedge (*Carex praegracilis*), Santa Barbara sedge (*Carex barbarae*), and creeping wild rye (*Leymus triticoides*). They successfully motivated a crew of 90 volunteers representing Contra Costa County Public Works as well as other county divisions, creek groups, schools, non-profits and community members to plant 15,000 native plant plugs in the Clayton Valley Drain, a tributary of Walnut Creek.

The Flood Control District hopes to build off the success of this event to develop future volunteer creek restoration events.

Diablo Valley Fly Fishermen, Walnut Creek Public Services Department, and a Local School 2013 Collaboration Report



Project: Enhancement of Heather Farm Pond with Floating Islands

Heather Farm Pond is a shallow, concrete-lined, irregularly-shaped body of water in Heather Farm Park in Walnut Creek. A concrete walk-way encircles the Pond, which is used by park visitors, walkers, and the occasional fisherperson. The Pond supports a meager population of bluegills, bass, and catfish; during the winter months, the Pond also receives stocking of rainbow trout, which are managed on a put-and-take basis. A local Rotary organization also stages a youth fishing event at the Pond, during which time additional fish stocking occurs.

The Pond has neither an inlet nor outlet, and since it is shallow, summer water temperatures limit the year-round fishery to warm-water species. In addition, population of ducks, geese and other waterfowl, attracted to the Pond and its surroundings, add significant organic matter to the Pond, enriching it and causing algae blooms during summer months.

Diablo Valley Fly Fishermen (DVFF), with 365 members, has met monthly in the clubhouse overlooking the pond for many years, and also uses the pond for free community casting lessons during the warm months. The club brought this question to the Walnut Creek Watershed Council meeting: what might we work on together to improve the fishery in the Pond? This question was brainstormed with Walnut Creek Public Services Department staff, and the idea of "floating islands" was the result.

Artificial floating islands have been used around the world to improve water quality in small bodies of water such as the Pond. The process involves nutrient uptake by roots of the semi-aquatic plants on the islands. In less than a year, a manufacturer in CA was identified, and two such islands were purchased, planted and installed, with the cooperative help of the manufacturer, Walnut Creek Public Services staff, DVFF volunteers, and a group of students from a nearby middle school.

Ted Shapas (DVFF), Mike Vickers and Heather Ballenger (Walnut Creek Public Services Department), December 2013

Friends of San Ramon Creek 2013 Report



The Friends of San Ramon Creek support programs and projects which promote a healthy San Ramon Creek and the 54-square mile San Ramon Creek watershed.

This year the newly organized Friends of San Ramon Creek produced a small brochure and sponsored several activities. Mary Grim and Jennifer Stern from the RCD helped support these activities.

Earth Day at the Danville Library in cooperation with the Town of Danville

- Table with creek and watershed information.
- Interpretive walk along San Ramon Creek, provided by two East Bay Regional Park District naturalists with access permission from CCC Flood Control
- Trash pick-up by 30 participants

Public program co-sponsored by the Clean Water Program staff of Danville, San Ramon, Contra Costa County and Resource Conservation District. About 25 people came.

- Introduction to the Friends of SR Creek - Speakers on the Clean Water Program, Flood Control history and functions, Arundo removal, school relationships

Two Arundo removal projects on October 5 and November 2, 2013

Participants included creek bank owners, Danville/Sycamore Valley Rotary, students from SRV and De LaSalle high schools, RCD staff, individuals contacted through email address list, and Friends of the Creeks. About 45 people at both events.

Several informal walks along San Ramon Creek to identify invasive species, especially Arundo with the excellent support of Lesley Hunt (Friends of the Creeks)

Identification of six creek stewards who are actively cleaning and nurturing the creek bed and creek in their back yards

Beverly Lane 11/2013

Friends of the Creeks 2013 Report



Re-imagining Our Creeks
presentation Civic



Cutting and removing Arundo at Kaiser



Clearing ivy from trees in
Park

April 1: Hosted first watershed-wide meeting for the Walnut Creek Watershed Council “Re-imagining Our Creeks” featuring designs by UC Berkeley graduate students in landscape architecture. About 70 people attended – to everyone’s delight, it was standing room only.

April 17: Two volunteers testified at the Walnut Creek Design Review Commission meeting about preserving and enhancing the creeks as Broadway Plaza is remodeled.

May 11: 24th Annual Downtown Creek Cleanup. More than 140 volunteers from Walnut Creek and beyond removed trash and invasive vegetation from 2.5 miles of creek channels.

August 25: Eight volunteers from DVC removed ivy from trees in the Las Trampas creek channel and cut Arundo.

September 16: Nine volunteers from Dow Chemical and Four FOC members removed Arundo on Las Trampas Creek during the Week of Caring.

September 28: Thirteen volunteers cut ivy from trees in the Walnut Creek channel in Civic Park for our annual Community Service Day project.

November 2: Fourteen DVC volunteers removed the rest of the ivy from trees in the Walnut Creek channel in Civic Park and picked up trash.

December: Returned to City Council and the Design Review Commission to give more testimony on the importance of following the Creeks Master Plan at Broadway Plaza. While we were unable to daylight any of San Ramon Creek, we do expect compliance with the Creeks Master Plan and that will improve the situation for wildlife.

All year: Helped Friends of San Ramon Creek get up and running.

Save Mount Diablo 2013 Report



Hosted 3 major recreational events (cycling & running) that had a total of 3,000 attendees in parks within the Open Space.

Promoted and released a free audible guide for Lime Ridge Open Space to enhance the public's experience at this incredible park.

Led 5 public hikes in the watershed, with a total of 75 attendees.

Controlled noxious weeds - Artichoke thistle and *Dittrichia graveolens* on our Mangini Ranch property near the headwaters of Galindo Creek.

Monitored eleven agency agendas each month for projects that could have impacts to cultural, natural and scenic resources in the Watershed.

Cities and Communities in the Walnut Creek Watershed

