Earth Team Students Map Out Pinole Creek’s Fish Passage Project

After a one-year hiatus, Pinole Valley High School’s Earth Team students are once again contributing their energy and talent to service projects that benefit the Pinole Creek Watershed and our local community.

Earth Team, a non-profit organization, partners with several community groups including the Friends of Pinole Creek Watershed. Earth Team’s Sustainable Youth Internship program takes an immersive approach to environmental education, offering year-long internships to high school students at many Bay Area public schools. The internships promote team-work and project-based learning, preparing students for college and environmental careers. Student teams research and address pressing issues on their campuses and in their communities. Throughout the East Bay, Earth Team student interns have engaged their peers to protect watersheds from litter and runoff pollution, restore creek native habitats, prevent marine debris, and fight air pollution.

This October, more than a dozen Earth Team student interns from Pinole Valley High School joined Friends of Pinole Creek Watershed Coordinator Lisa Anich at the Pinole Creek Fish Passage Project to investigate current conditions in the channel downstream of Highway 80. Students mapped and measured features of the channel that can affect passage of steelhead trout as well as flood management, including the width and depth of streamflow and the configuration of the large boulders which are an engineered component of Pinole Creek’s Fish Passage Project. Students mapped 450 square feet of the channel. Their observations will be incorporated into a map of baseline conditions, a valuable reference tool for future years.

Itzel Gomez, Earth Team Campus Coordinator for Pinole Valley High School, commented on the work day: “Students expressed how much they liked working in the field, and it helped to solidify their understanding of the contributions they can make in their community with Earth Team.”

FOPCW is grateful for Earth Team’s assistance, and proud to work with these students who will be tomorrow’s environmental stewards and community leaders.

— Lisa Anich

Friends of Pinole Creek Watershed Fall Meeting: Thursday, November 15, from 7-9 pm at the Pinole Library. All are welcome and refreshments will be served.
FOPCW Fall Meeting Featured Speaker: Hershell West

If you’ve driven on Pinole Valley Road under the I-80 freeway and seen the mural that connects Old Town to Pinole Valley, you have spotted the work of Hershell West.

Hershell West is a painter, muralist, arts educator, and arts advocate who lives in Old Town Pinole with his wife, pianist and teacher Marilyn. He was born and raised in the rural south, overcoming the odds to become a respected professional artist.

After moving to Pinole in 2013, Hershell and Marilyn made it part of their routine to walk the creek. Over the years, he developed a fondness for photographing the creek and the surrounding landscape, documenting seasonal changes and bird activity in and around the creek and San Pablo Bay. He says, “I like theme-oriented pictures: Pinole Creek at high and low tide, the creek before and after rain, the movement of shadows, trees in winter and spring, and of course, birds.”

Hershell will be sharing a slideshow of some of his work at the Friends of Pinole Creek Watershed Fall Meeting, Thursday, November 15, from 7-9 pm at the Pinole Library. You can also see a few selections of his work on display at the library.

— Ann Moriarity

SF Bay Trail Updates

On September 12, 2018, a large crowd gathered to celebrate the opening of a beautiful new segment of the SF Bay Trail connecting Pinole’s Bayfront Park to what was once an isolated section at Pinole Shores. The new bridge is being enjoyed by walkers, bikers and birders, all taking advantage of the spectacular views of San Pablo Bay. The East Bay Regional Park district will soon put out to bid another section of the trail from Hercules to Rodeo. For more information visit BayTrail.org or EBParks.org.

— Maura Sullivan

California Native Plant Highlight: Santa Cruz Island Buckwheat (Eriogonum arborescens)

You’ve probably seen native California buckwheat (Eriogonum fasciculatum). It is a common shrub found in many parts of California, but it is not our only native buckwheat. There are over a hundred different buckwheats native to California! The lovely Santa Cruz Island Buckwheat (Eriogonum arborescens) happens to thrive in Contra Costa County.

Santa Cruz Island buckwheat is an evergreen woody perennial shrub with light gray-green leaves that are very similar in shape to rosemary leaves. Tiny pink and white flowers that dry to a copper brown form clusters at the tips of branches. Insects and birds love the flowers and visit them often.

This buckwheat flourishes in full sun with very little water and is tolerant of sandy and clay soils. It is cold hardy to 10°F and is deer resistant. The shrub usually grows to between 3 and 4 feet high and between 4 and 5 feet wide, but it can grow to be larger. If you’re looking to attract pollinators to your garden with a low-maintenance shrub, Santa Cruz Island buckwheat could be a great fit. It may just grow to be your new favorite California native plant!

— Lisa Damerel

The Friends of Pinole Creek Watershed thanks these volunteers and contributors: Editor: Carol Arnold, co-founder of FOPCW; designed and produced by Melissa Lawton Design. Many thanks to contributors: Ann Moriarty, Maura Sullivan, Lisa Anich, Carol Thompson and Lisa Damerel. To learn more about FOPCW or to volunteer, please visit friendsofpinolecreek.org.