My name is Devin and I am one of the 13 interns with the Earth Team Sustainable Youth Internship Program this year at Pinole Valley High School. Earth Team is a local nonprofit that prepares youth like me to engage and participate in our local environment.

This year as a new intern, I have learned more about environmental topics affecting us in the Bay Area, such as creek restoration, indigenous ecology, and environmental racism. I’ve also had the chance to take part in community-bonding exercises, to meet my fellow interns, and to learn more about the environment, all at the same time!

During the Fall semester, we conducted litter cleanups around our local neighborhoods and near the Pinole Public Library. One of the most exciting things we did was cultivate California native plants under the Redwood trees at the Pinole Native Plant Garden outside of the library.

Planting was very exciting because it was one of the first times I have done environmental fieldwork. My team and I researched plants that would thrive in a redwood ecosystem. I chose to plant Rubus parviflorus, also called “Thimbleberry,” an edible North American Native plant that is similar to a raspberry.

Thanks to the help of fellow interns and gardening advice I received from members of Friends of Pinole Creek Watershed, I learned how to plant and how to “put my weight” into shoveling. It was pretty cool to learn these skills and they will come in handy when I plant a garden at home and in college!

I can’t wait to continue working on the Pinole Native Plant Garden and care for the native plants we cultivated back in the Fall. This semester my fellow interns and I are excited to finally get a chance to build a path in the garden! I look forward to continuing my environmental stewardship in college next year and helping mentor youth like myself to understand issues surrounding environmental science and justice.

— Devin Dinh, Pinole Earth Team Intern from Pinole Valley High School
FOPCW News and Events

FOPCW Participates in Thriving Earth Exchange

We are thrilled to announce that Friends of Pinole Creek Watershed was selected to participate in a new cohort of the American Geophysical Union’s (AGU) Thriving Earth Exchange program! Over the next 18 months, FOPCW will work in collaboration with an AGU Community Science Fellow, a community scientist, the City of Pinole, the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District, Earth Team, and the public to complete a community science project right here in Pinole, called “Engaging community to protect the Pinole Creek Watershed: Assessment of trash impacts to promote a thriving ecosystem.”

The project team envisions the Pinole Creek Watershed as a thriving ecosystem that benefits all social and ecological communities. We hope to establish a trash assessment and water quality monitoring program for Pinole Creek to determine the impacts of trash on creek health with the targeted goal of reducing those impacts on the watershed. Doing so is a community-driven response that aims to improve the environmental health of the creek and, in doing so, the quality of life for Pinole residents.

This project has identified three overarching goals:

- Identify and understand sources, paths, and impacts of litter entering Pinole Creek;
- Engage people of all ages in trash monitoring and litter cleanup, thereby fostering a sense of environmental stewardship that endures well beyond project participation; and
- Inform policy development for the creation of a city-wide creek protection ordinance.

Outputs from this project will include:

- A report for students, residential, and commercial communities summarizing social and ecological impacts of litter in Pinole Creek;
- A map of the watershed identifying locations where illegal dumping and litter are common, and a characterization of the trash and water quality at each site;
- A community-engaged water quality monitoring plan for testing creek health;
- A report for local government presenting science-based recommendations for trash-reduction programs and the creation of a city-wide creek protection ordinance.

Stay tuned for more information about how you can get involved in the months ahead. To learn more about this project please visit our project page on the https://thriveingearthexchange.org/project/pinole-california/. — Lisa Anich

Coastal Cleanup 2020 — Cleaning the Shore from Our Front Doors

For 35 years, Californians have mobilized to keep trash out of creeks, bays, and the ocean on Coastal Cleanup Day. 2020’s social distancing restrictions called for a new approach: Instead of a single day of gatherings and celebratory barbeques, Californians staged do-it-yourself cleanups throughout the month of September.

The Watershed Project, a non-profit that coordinates cleanups throughout Contra Costa County, reported that almost 400 volunteers cleaned 27 miles of Contra Costa’s streets, parks, shorelines, and creeks, preventing a wide range of harmful pollutants from entering the San Pablo and San Francisco Bays. Plastic items comprised 91% of trash collected in the county. Statewide, 12,000 Californians reported removing 70,000 pounds of trash in September 2020!

Here in Pinole Creek Watershed, the Pinole Creek Watershed Interactive Map on our website, www.friendsofpinolecreek.org proved a useful tool for directing volunteers to priority cleanup spots on creekside trails. Volunteers did an excellent job cleaning the trail between Henry and San Pablo Avenues and the Bay Trail to Railroad Avenue. Alhambra Valley Road in the upper watershed was also a priority for cleanups.

Volunteers who sort and report types of trash help us understand trends. In 2020, volunteers tallied protective equipment (PPE) trash – gloves and masks – for the first time. Internationally, 27,000 PPE items were collected. Pinole Watershed cleanups logged a higher percentage of PPE than the county and state totals. The origins of the trash may help explain why: Pinole volunteers documented several sites where household garbage, including PPE, had been dumped.

The Friends of Pinole Creek Watershed are so grateful to everyone who organized their own cleanup in 2020, and we look forward to hosting group cleanups again in September 2021! — Lisa Anich

FOPCW Celebrates 20 Years of Stewardship of the Pinole Creek

FOPCW is proud to announce that 2021 is our 20th Anniversary. Many thanks to all those who have been supportive of our group and our many achievements. We are planning ways to announce our anniversary to the community and a celebration in the fall, or when it is safe to gather together for a celebration.