

CHEER up your Creek!

Coastal Habitat Education and Environmental Restoration
(CHEER)

Newsletter of the
Pajaro River Watershed

9-28-2013



President's Message

It's been a long hard road, and a seemingly impossible mountain to climb, attempting to restore our Steelhead Trout Fisheries in the Pajaro River Watershed. Coastal Habitat Education and Environmental Restoration (CHEER) received its non-profit tax exempt status in 2004. For two years board members planned, developed, and met with stake holders in creating a vision that would achieve our goals and objectives.

The year was 2006, Jonathan Ambrose, a biologist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) drew a line in the sand at Silva's Crossing on the Uvas Creek at Christmas Hill Park, Gilroy. Jon proclaimed "this is the battle ground". We must work to restore and reclaim our watershed from this point in all directions.

CHEER volunteers received their marching orders and went to work implementing Jon's Fisheries Restoration Plan. Additional strategies were developed in habitat restoration, habitat reclamation, intervention, prevention, education, and suppression. The comprehensive plan is called a "seamless system of watershed care" that has made a dramatic positive difference to our watershed. The greatest testimonial is the rebound of protected resources (protected species) such as the Steelhead Trout, Western Pond Turtle, Red-legged Frog, and the nesting American Bald Eagles on Uvas Creek.

Thanks to our volunteers, supporters, and partners.

One fish at a time,

President, Herman Garcia



Our Mission

Coastal Habitat and Environmental Restoration, also known as CHEER, is an organization with a fresh take on environmental programming. Its mission is to rescue coastal ecosystems but do so in a way that safeguards resource-based local economics. CHEER recognizes that varied interests are represented in local economics. It believes that assessing and reconciling these interests so that each group profits by cooperation in restoration efforts, is the key to more effective environmental programming.

Our Objectives

- 1) Clean up watersheds that once teemed with wild Steelhead Trout where Steelhead are now severely endangered or threatened due to environmental impacts
- 2) Restore Steelhead populations to renewed watersheds
- 3) Involve the community in each step of the process to improve chances of attaining and preserving project results
- 4) Find ways for people to profit by corporation and collaboration with CHEER's objectives
- 5) Provide for CHEER's financial sustainability

CHEER Board

President: Herman Garcia

Founding Board Member: Bob Brem

Founding Board Member: Eleanor Villarreal

Founding Board Member: Irma Butrez

Founding Board Member: Pete Valdez



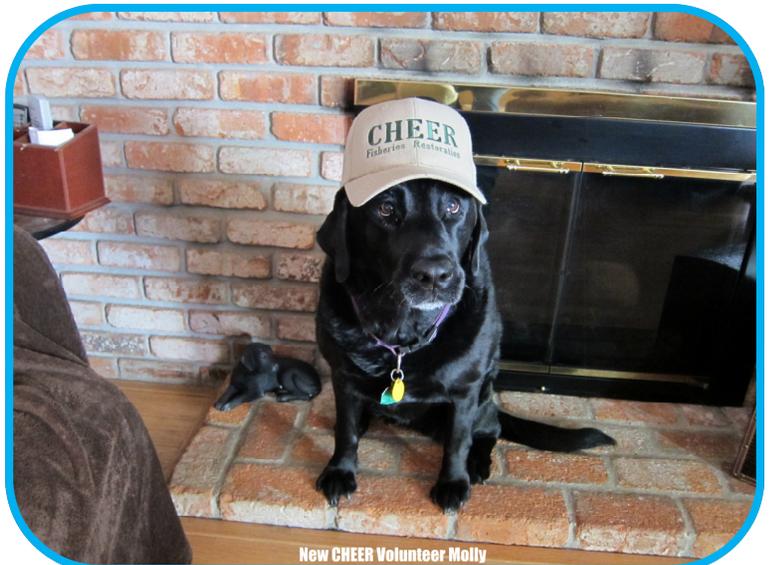
Coastal Habitat Education and Environmental Restoration

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Water Resource Management

“The Journey”

March 2008

Twenty trapped adult Steelhead Trout on a quarter mile stretch of Bodfish Creek. Michelle Leicester, biologist with the California department of Fish and Wildlife approved a special permit for a one day rescue of the fish. Jonathan Ambrose of the National Marine Fisheries Service in collaboration and partnership with Jeff Micko of Santa Clara Valley Water District, Jerry Smith PhD, San Jose State University developed a pulse flow release of water from Uvas Dam.

The Goal: rescue Steelhead Trout from Bodfish Creek. Transport and release at the confluence of Bodfish Creek at Uvas Creek. Pulse flows would provide enough water to allow fish to return to the Pajaro River and eventually to Monterey Bay.

The plan was executed without a hitch, but there was an unintended surprise, for the first time Uvas Creek had a spring run of spawning Steelhead Trout. The pulse flow at the end of March became an annual event meant to move out juvenile and remaining winter run adult fish, and now including our new spring run of adult spawners.

The final plan also created ten miles of Steelhead rearing habitat downstream to Silva’s Crossing at Christmas Hill Park, Gilroy. 2013 drought conditions required a new target of wet channel to Santa Teresa Boulevard Bridge at Eagle Ridge. The slight modification did not affect the out-going or in-coming migration of fish.

The success of the pulse flow release plan has inspired three more water resource management projects in the Pajaro River Watershed. To include a winter run-off water storage project on the Little Authur Creek (Redwood Retreat Rd), water diversion project on Dave’s Creek for spawning Steelhead, and duplicating Uvas Creek’s model at Pacheco Dam. Flow release plan is being developed for Pacheco Creek.

Thanks to these working partners:

CHEER

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Santa Clara Valley Water District

National Marine Fisheries Service

California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Trout Unlimited

Center for Ecosystem Management and Restoration

Jerry Smith PhD., San Jose State University

Jeff Micko, SCVWD



2008 Bodfish Creek Rescue



Silva’s Crossing

CHEER 2012

Children's Nature Fair

Pre-school and Kindergarten Gardens Native Plant Restoration

Program Partners

- Coastal Habitat Education and Environmental Restoration (CHEER)
- Santa Clara Valley Water District
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Gilroy Unified School District
- FIRST 5 Santa Clara County
- Mexican-American Community Services Agency (MACSA)
- City of Gilroy

Special thanks to
Dick and Michelle Beltran of Beltran Contracting, Gilroy
Michael Bonfante of Bonfante Nurseries, Gilroy

Program Overview

This program seeks to combine the mission of CHEER with the mission of FIRST 5 and our education partners to ensure that pre-school and kindergarten children are exposed to high quality learning environments to stimulate optimal brain development, while at the same time creating the next generation of environmental stewards. In addition, they are developing a sense of civic responsibility by connecting them with their environmental surroundings.

As part of the environmental science curriculum 3,4,and 5 year old students were guided to plant seeds from native plants. CHEER volunteers along with pre-school and kindergarten teachers assisted in the effort. The planting process included sharing of the essential elements of the plant life cycle. Each student planted their own California Poppy seed in an organic pot, seed will mature in 4-6 weeks. During this time students had the opportunity to learn about seeds, germination, and stages of plant growth and development.



By the numbers
900 GUSD Kindergarten Students
340 GUSD State-Preschool Students
97 MACSA 3,4,5 yr. Old Students
650 Siblings (plants provided for these children)

Goals and Objectives Achieved

- Development of next generation of environmental stewards.
- Implemented an inter-generational approach to community stewardship.
- Watershed education and awareness for children, parents, and community.
- Reduced negative impact of garbage, toxins and pollutants by 90% in upper Pajaro River watershed
- First phase of native plant and habitat restoration to DeBell Preserve, complete

Parent workshops on education and awareness resulted in a 90% reduction in illegal dumping of garbage, toxins and pollutants from 2011 to 2012 in the upper Pajaro River watershed.



Year in Crisis 2008

Coastal watersheds throughout California and the Pacific Northwest experienced severe population declines in its Steelhead Trout and Salmon of 80%, 90%, and some areas a total loss of Salmonids in respective areas, resulting in species moved from threatened to endangered under the Federal Endangered Species Act. Closures of commercial and recreational Salmon seasons directly impacted local economies.

Out of the gloom and doom of a season lost with questions of what happened to our fish. Just the opposite was witnessed by CHEER scouts and monitors, reporting the best run of spawning Steelhead trout in the upper Pajaro River watershed for over twenty years.

By the Numbers

| | | | |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| First year 2006 | Trained and equipped by NOAA | # rescued 120 Steelhead | fall and winter activity: removed garbage, toxins, and pollutants. |
| 2007 | NOAA and CA fish & game support | 1,492 Steelhead | Habitat reclamation continued |
| 2008 | “ | 23, 512 Steelhead rescued | |

CHEER volunteers received the “2009 Salmonid Restorationist of the Year”, an award given annually by the Salmonid Restoration Federation.

With agency partners and community support, CHEER volunteers reversed the 2008 negative trend of Salmonid losses.

Every year presents different circumstances that impact steelhead populations, volunteers do their very best to address these issues immediately to improve passage and spawning.

To date: 50,000+ steelhead rescued and restored.

Congratulations!



Steelhead Rescue in Graveyard

Steelhead rescue had just begun May 2007. The three man crew was working disconnected pools upstream of the Bloomfield Bridge in the lower Uvas Creek. A thick morning fog lay on the bottom of the creek channel; Herman Garcia and Bob Brem were packing up equipment to move up the creek as Raul Rivas disappeared into the fog scouting ahead. As Herman and Bob started upstream Raul reappeared from out of the fog with a startled, concerned look on his face. Bob shouted out "Raul, did you find fish?" Raul responded "you gotta see this" bodies rolled up in blankets! As the team closed in to investigate with Bob, a retired police officer, in the lead, what was discovered was extraordinary. What looked like arms and legs hanging out of rolled up blankets, actually were branches poking out of rolled up carpet. In the thick fog from a distance it could be a disconcerting creepy sight.

The "carpet graveyard" was previously put in by a prior property owner to hold the bank from completely being washed away. The "graveyard" is approximately fifteen feet high from the channel bottom to the top of the bank, thirty feet long down the channel, how deep into the bank will not be known until work begins to restore the bank. For years the "Graveyard" held in place. The "Graveyard" started degrading in 2011, the following year CHEER and the Santa Clara Valley Water District partnered in the restoration project,

Complete first phase: CHEER volunteers remove rolls of carpet that blew out with the high water and scattered downstream approximately ¼ mile.

Complete second phase: "Graveyard" secured in place by SCVWD staff and engineers.

Third phase: Completion spring 2014 by SCVWD at an estimated cost of \$200,000.00

All at no cost to the current property owner, thanks to Santa Clara Valley Water District!

**Carpet Graveyard secured by
Santa Clara Valley Water District 2012**

Complete bank restoration due Spring 2014





2012 CHILDREN'S NATURE FAIR EDUCATION & AWARENESS

