



Slo STEWARDS

A PUBLICATION of *EcoSlo* and the CITY of SAN LUIS OBISPO

S L O C I T Y ' S N A T U R A L R E S O U R C E S

Printed with soy ink on 100% post consumer, non-bleached recycled paper by Poor Richard's Press.

S L O S T E W A R D S S P O R T S A D V E N T U R E



BY JODEE BENNETT
PHOTOS BY KELLY HAYES

Get Out and Hike!

As a Natural San Luis docent, I spend a lot of time hitting our local trails. Since not knowing what to expect may keep people from hiking, I'd like to share two suggestions that can be worked into busy schedules and enjoyed by seasoned and beginning hikers alike.

If you are new to the sport, there's a great little hike in the South Hills with a bit of an incline and a great 360 view from the top. The trailhead is on Stoneridge Dr. off Broad St. To the right of the pocket park there's a gated paved road with a pedestrian gate on the right. Follow this road up and to the right, as it becomes dirt. Continue to the top of the ridge and turn left at the fork. As you reach the top, pause to admire the view. While it may take a seasoned hiker less than ten minutes to reach this little peak, it's also a great way for beginners to ease into more strenuous hiking. The trail is usually accessible when others are muddy during rainy weather. Watch for bright yellow, low growing Johnny-jump-ups

among the rocks in late winter and spring. Orange California poppies are present almost all year. Return on the same trail.

Islay Hill (off Tank Farm and Orcutt Road) is another quick, though potentially more strenuous, hike. Once again you follow the same trail up and down. This trailhead, located at the end of Sweetbay Lane, will provide a good 20-30 minute cardio workout as well as nice views from the top. The first half takes you through rolling grassland rich with wildflowers in the spring. Look for the long grass-like leaves of the Lily family. The ones with wavy edges are soap plant; the others could be chocolate lilies! Watch for these in early springtime. Just before the transition between grassland and chaparral, on the right, is a grove of Oak and Sycamore that provide shade and solitude beneath their canopies. Beyond this grove, be sure to notice the small native Hollyleaf Cherry trees among the rocks on the left. The rest of the

climb is through brush and, while relatively steep, is well established and obvious. Warning, this section can be slippery even when the ground is dry, and is not recommended immediately after rainfall. A round trip up Islay Hill and back can be completed in under an hour.

These two trails are among the City's best-kept secrets. In the future we'll explore loop trails. Meanwhile, get out there and hike!



It Was a Very Good Year...

A Look at What the City of San Luis Obispo's Natural Resources Protection Program Accomplished in 2006

2006 turned out to be a very exciting and productive year for the City of San Luis Obispo's Natural Resources Protection Program. Working with the development community, and utilizing the last remaining funds of the City's open space acquisition program, staff added over 600 acres to the City's Greenbelt with the promise of more, and undertook a variety of natural resource and recreational enhancement programs. City Biologist Freddy Otte went from being a part-time, temporary employee to full-time and permanent. Finally, working with our colleagues at the Public Works Department, Natural Resources staff cleared the way for the first phase of the Bob Jones City-to-the-Sea Bikeway.

On the land conservation front, the City saw the results of years of work on several projects:

Bowden Ranch donation. The 180 acre Bowden Ranch is a spectacular open space with pristine native bunchgrass habitat, numerous rare plant species, and a popular trail with great views. In February 2006 the transfer of this property from the developers of the 23-unit Bowden Ranch subdivision was completed. A realigned trail and bridge across the site's small perennial stream has been installed, and a substantial tree planting program to mitigate the project's necessary tree removals has been completed.



Gearhart donation. A 13 acre property along Calle Joaquin was donated to the City as part of a development approval for several new auto dealerships at that location, long envisioned in the City's General Plan. The City is now working with Cal Poly and others to maintain the property for agricultural uses and possibly establish a turf research facility there.

Brughelli Ranch conservation easement purchase. In what is considered one of the City's most strategic acquisitions in the entire greenbelt, the City purchased (at a reduced, or "bargain" price) a conservation easement on the 390 acre Brughelli Ranch on Buckley Road. The easement restricts the property to agricultural zoning in perpetuity, and any development many years into the future must meet acceptable standards and provide evidence that resources such as water are available to support it. The bargain sale price for the easement was \$750,000 or approximately \$1,900 per acre.

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STORY AND PHOTO BY
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The City of San Luis Obispo and the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County want to say "Thank you!" to the over 200 people who donated cash to assist in the purchase of the Union Pacific Railroad Company property and/or the Brughelli Ranch conservation easement. A SPECIAL THANKS to those below who donated \$500 or more to the effort:

- Richard Alberts
- Denise and John Allen
- Mike Baxter Insurance
- Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District
- The Davies Family Trust
- Don and Ellen Dollar
- Mike and Bonnie Eisner
- Leland and Valerie Endres
- Bert and Candy Forbes
- Gaia Graphics & Associates
- Kristen Hazard
- James and Esther Landreth
- Frank Little and Bette Kulp
- Roger and Claretta Longden
- Allen and Susan Minker
- Kelly Moriarty
- Dean and Patty Anne Morgridge
- Morro Bay National Estuary Program
- The Morro Group
- Pedro Nava
- Peter and Suzanne Nelson
- Paul Robinson
- Swift Action Fund 2006 of the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation
- Ken Schwartz
- Sierra Club, Santa Lucia Chapter
- Jim Skow

www.slocity.org/naturalresources

More Steelhead in Coon Creek

STORY AND PHOTO BY
FREDDY OTTE

Monitoring for steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) has begun again in Coon Creek. To mitigate the potential impacts from the Water Re-use Plan, the City of San Luis Obispo undertook the removal of a non-functional culvert under Pecho Valley Road, at the end of Montana de Oro State Park and the alternate access to PG&E's Diablo Canyon. Then, a series of rock weirs, 24 in all, were installed to make the grade passable for anadromous fish to again access the pristine upper watershed. A free-span bridge was installed so there would be no future impacts from the road.

Once the project was complete, NOAA Fisheries had the City implement a monitoring program for documenting steelhead recolonization of Coon Creek. The first year's surveys were completed last September and consisted of three elements. First, in the winter, we monitored the adult steelhead

population and number of redds, which are steelhead spawning beds built in the gravel. Second, in the spring, we snorkeled the estuary looking for smolts, steelhead that are ready to migrate out into the ocean. Finally, we snorkeled in the summer to count the number of fish within the project area and inspected the weirs to ensure they remain structurally sound. This monitoring protocol must be carried out for three years.

Results from last year, year #1, were sparse. One small adult steelhead was observed in the project area. Once its



The project area looking downstream from the bridge.

redd was observed, staff snorkeled the pool to observe a 16-inch steelhead holding under a rock in the pool. The smolt surveys produced 8 juvenile fish positively identified as smolts. Lots of steelhead were encountered in the project area itself. With all the newly created habitat, it is not surprising that many more fish were found. A total of 84 fish were re-located from the project area initially. Over 390 fish were counted this past summer ranging in size from 1.5-inches to almost 9-inches. This is very encouraging for the re-colonization of Coon Creek due to the incidence of resident fish reverting back to their anadromous life history at times.

The rain didn't come until late in 2006, so that may have influenced the number of fish in the watershed. Hopefully for the 2007 and 2008 season, there will be enough water to attract more fish back into Coon Creek.

It Was a Very Good Year... continued from front page

Union Pacific Railroad property donation. The Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County and the City collaborated on this acquisition by the Land Conservancy late in 2006, and the Land Conservancy has offered, and the City Council has accepted, this donation. This is also expected to be finalized in early 2007. The Land Conservancy's action has preserved 315 acres of mountain lands on the West Cuesta ridge, in an area noted for its rare plants, Sargent cypress groves, springs and other water sources, and several popular mountain bike trails.

Margarita Area easement donation. In 2006, the City Council accepted a conservation easement donation offer on 71 acres of the South Hills made by King Ventures, Inc. This easement is expected to be finalized within the next two to three months. It more than doubles the size of the South Hills Natural Reserve (to 131 acres) and ensures public access and natural resource conservation on the site in

perpetuity. At some point in the future the owner plans to donate the fee title to the property to the City, and the easement will be transferred to a third party to ensure that the easement restrictions remain in place under City as well as private ownership.

City Natural Resources staff completed the Conservation Plan for the South Hills Natural Reserve. The plan calls for certain improvements to the existing trail system, cleanup of a roadway erosion problem, and protection for rare plants in the new easement area. There will also be some entry signage installed that will reflect upon the natural and cultural history of the site, especially the old racetrack that used to be nearby (called Exposition Park) and the local "Cheapskate Hill," where people would go to watch the races without paying.

Staff also oversaw a number of mitigation projects connected to City roadway or utility line improvements. The latter involve creek crossings which

can impact southern steelhead habitat or other riparian habitat.

Another major project getting a push forward is the Bob Jones City-to-the-Sea Bikeway. This long-awaited connection from San Luis Obispo to the Pacific Ocean at Avila will have a one mile section constructed in 2007.

An environmental enhancement component funded by a grant from the Department of Fish and Game involves tree and shrub plantings along the trail right of way, wood-rail fencing to discourage entry into the creek area, and informational signage about features of the trail area. The trail runs alongside the San Luis Obispo Creek and the City sewer plant for about one-half mile, so signage describing the water quality protection features of the plant seems appropriate.

Hopefully by mid to late 2007 citizens will be walking and riding this section of trail, and Natural Resources staff look forward to another very good year in 2007.

SLO City Parks & Recreation Ranger-Led Hikes

Ranger-led events are free, on SUNDAYS starting at 1pm. Wear sturdy shoes and bring water to drink. For more info please call the SLO City Parks and Recreation Department at 781-7302.

Cerro San Luis	South Hills	Bishop Peak	Irish Hills
March 11	April 15	May 20	June 10
Lemon Grove loop, early wildflowers will be in bloom. Meet at the Cerro San Luis Natural Reserve trailhead: Turn right onto Fernandez Road just before the southbound 101 Marsh Street on-ramp.	Enjoy the wildflowers in bloom. South Hills Open Space. Take South Street east and turn right onto Exposition Drive. The street will turn into Woodbridge, and the trailhead is on the right.	Wildflowers in bloom. Bishop Peak Natural Reserve at Patricia Drive trailhead. To reach the trailhead and meeting place, take Foothill Blvd. to Patricia Dr. Trailhead is on the left, just past Patricia Court.	PREFUMO CYN Meet at the Prefumo Canyon trailhead. From Highway 101, take Los Osos Valley Road north, turn left onto Prefumo Canyon Road and stay on it for one mile. The trailhead is on the left after the bridge crossing.

Natural San Luis Docent Hikes

All Natural San Luis Docent-led events are free and held on SATURDAYS starting at 9am. For more information please call 544-1777 or 781-7211.

Islay Hill	Guidetti Ranch	Bowden Ranch	Irish Hills
March 17	April 14	May 12	June 23
Early wildflowers will be in bloom! To reach the trailhead, take Tank Farm Road to Spanish Oaks Drive. Turn right and continue to Sweet Bay Lane. Turn left onto Sweet Bay Lane, trailhead is at the end of Sweetbay Lane.	Enjoy wildflowers! Limited spots. RSVP: ECOSLO, 544-1777. The hike is 5 to 6 hours. A hill and some gentle inclines. Bring lunch, snacks, & plenty of water. Meet at Food 4 Less parking lot (3985 S Higuera in SLO) at 9am and caravan to the ranch.	Meet at the trailhead at the end of Lizzie Street, off Johnson. The trail ascends up behind San Luis High, connecting to the Reservoir Canyon Open Space. Rather steep but not too long. Less than a mile to the top for stunning views and wildflowers.	PREFUMO CYN Meet at the Prefumo Canyon trailhead. From Highway 101, take Los Osos Valley Road north, turn left onto Prefumo Canyon Road and stay on it for one mile. The trailhead is on the left after the bridge crossing.

SLO Stewards Trail Work

SLO Stewards maintain trails, creeks and open space. Work parties go out on SATURDAYS from 9am to 1pm. Wear long pants and sturdy shoes. Water and snacks will be provided.



Cerro San Luis	Bowden Ranch	Bishop Peak	Cerro San Luis	Irish Hills	Islay Hill	Reservoir Canyon
March 10	March 24	April 14	April 28	May 12	May 26	June 9
Meet at the Cerro San Luis Natural Reserve trailhead: Turn right onto Fernandez Road just before the southbound 101 Marsh Street on-ramp.	Please meet at the Lizzie Court trailhead. To reach the trailhead, turn east off of Johnson Avenue onto Lizzie Street and continue up a short way to end of street at trailhead.	To reach the trailhead and meeting place, take Foothill Blvd. to Patricia Dr. Take Patricia Dr. to Highland Dr. Turn left on Highland Dr. and continue until it dead-ends at trailhead.	Meet at the Cerro San Luis Natural Reserve trailhead. To access the trailhead, turn right onto Fernandez Road just before the southbound 101 Marsh Street on-ramp.	PREFUMO CYN Meet at the Prefumo Canyon trailhead. From Highway 101, take Los Osos Valley Road north, turn left onto Prefumo Canyon Road and stay on it for one mile. The trailhead is on the left after the bridge crossing.	To reach the trailhead, take Tank Farm Road to Spanish Oaks Drive. Turn right on Spanish Oaks Drive and continue to Sweet Bay Lane. Turn left onto Sweet Bay Lane, trailhead is at the end of Sweetbay Lane.	Meet at the Reservoir Canyon trailhead. Take Highway 101 north out of San Luis Obispo, past the City limits one mile and turn right onto Reservoir Canyon Road (2nd road past City limits). Road will end at trailhead.

PHOTOS BY TERRE DUNIVANT