

**MINUTES**  
**Wildcat-San Pablo Creeks Watershed Council**  
**September 17, 2020**  
**10am – 12pm**

**Attendance:** Sherry Stanwell, Tim Jensen, Melinda Harris, Peter Mangarella, Anne Bremer, Ann Riley, Jesse Alberto, Joe Neugebauer, Michelle Cordis, Sarah Puckett, Rich Walkling, Adele Ho, Patrick Phelan, Amanda Booth, Nathan Bickart, Juliana Gonzalez, John Steere

**1. Introductions** –Tim Jensen began the meeting at 10:05 am.

**2. CUSP**—Ann Riley reported that CUSP will partner with Contra Costa County as the lead on a Rheem Creek restoration project at Wanlass Park, and also work with the City of San Pablo and the Army Corps of Engineers. They want to make this a training opportunity in which they instruct how to draft planting plans for review and permitting and involve people in the planting plan design. They see this as an opportunity for any apprentices looking to expand their training in Urban Tilth or The Watershed Project, as well as other East Bay non-governmental organizations. Please contact Riley at rileywaterways@gmail.com if your group would like to partner on the project.

The Salmon Restoration Federation conference has been canceled due to the pandemic. Regarding legislature, AB 1788 passed the legislature; it is a moratorium on second generation anticoagulant baits because of the secondary poisonings that occur when wildlife eat the baits that have ingested the baits. It is on the governor's desk, and they expect him to sign. Raptors Are The Solution (RATS, <https://www.raptorsarethesolution.org/>) sponsored this bill in coalition with other wildlife groups. RATS also does educational events.

**3. Urban Tilth**— Nathan Bickart reported that they have been working on Wildcat Creek in North Richmond and Cerrito Creek on the Albany/El Cerrito border, as well as Albany Hill. Their work in the park district is on pause due to the current fire danger. They are grateful to be able to work outside and have the normal suite of planting planned this fall, especially along Wildcat Creek. Thankfully, the goats did not eat their native plantings this year, instead staying upstream of Fred Jackson Way.

Adele Ho reported that their North Richmond Farm project is moving along. The rain gardens along Fred Jackson Way (part of the North Richmond Watershed Connections project) have been somewhat delayed due to the pandemic, but they are moving forward with the County on an agreement to use grant funds. They are also finalizing their plans in response to County review comments for the work in the roadway, and expect to go out to bid during the winter and be ready to start construction in spring.

**4. SPAWNERS**— Helen Fitanides reported that they have resumed small outdoor work parties with core volunteers at their restoration sites in Richmond and El Sobrante. They had a small birding by ear walk planned but had to cancel due to the smoke. They will have a zoom talk in November about the wood duck boxes around San Pablo Reservoir, with more information to come.

**5. The Watershed Project**—Juliana Gonzalez reported that they have had a busy summer. They are now in the midst of Coastal Cleanup Month, including an event with residents in North Richmond to clean their neighborhoods, using an app to track the trash collected. They are partnering with the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District and local volunteer groups for this cleanup. On Sunday they hosted a showing of *The Story of Plastic*, a 2019 documentary about the plastic crisis.

For the Rheem Creek project, they are looking for local resident artists in the Richmond/San Pablo/Rheem Creek watershed to create illustrations for a children's storybook.

They are partnering with the City of San Pablo for the grand opening of the Wildcat Creek restoration project behind the library; this will be a virtual ribbon cutting in November or December.

Their water quality monitoring program has continued with core staff and volunteers, led by Helen Fitanides.

Their school programs have moved entirely to distanced learning for K-12, prioritizing schools in the Wildcat/San Pablo/Rheem Creek watersheds. Contact Anne Bremer ([anne@thewatershedproject.org](mailto:anne@thewatershedproject.org)) if you know of a school interested in working with them.

**6. North Richmond Water Needs Assessment**—Anne Bremer reported that they are currently in the project development stage. This project is funded by Prop 1 for water related improvements in disadvantaged communities.

Last year they completed the needs assessment phase, and heard from the community that their priorities were clean drinking water; urban greening, green infrastructure and parks; sea level rise and flooding solutions; sewer improvements and protections; and water conservation and use of recycled water.

This year they took this list of priorities to stakeholders to identify what projects are already in the pipeline which might be a good match. Due to the pandemic, they have been sharing those projects back to the community for their feedback via mailers, their website and social media rather than in-person gatherings. They asked residents to fill out a survey and received 51 responses.

The results: the community supports solutions to flooding and stormwater issues, more green spaces, and safe drinking water. They approved all the potential projects, and prioritized them into Tier 1 (North Richmond pump station upgrade; tap water testing, education and outreach), Tier 2 (flood risk reduction in Rheem Creek and Wildcat Creek trail improvements), and Tier 3 (environmental education, green benefit district, and green street corridor).

The main takeaways are that the community places highest value in their immediate health, safety and quality of life, and then their access to green space and restoring wildlife habitat. Finally, they support all-age community education about environmental issues.

An important step in establishing trust with residents will be to follow through with implementation for some of these plans.

Their next steps will be to report back to stakeholders and identify potential funding sources and seek implementation funding.

Link to full slide deck report:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lyACRp0EnhVY4A6nPdU9jLaggJmCuCoE/view?usp=sharing>

Link to web page with additional project details: <https://thewatershedproject.org/nr-water/>

Adele brought up the planned watershed training center at the North Richmond Farm and the potential of working together and coordinating grant funding opportunities.

Juliana pointed out that The Watershed Project will not be the primary applicant for these projects, but rather the agencies and community groups most closely involved with the projects. The Council could have a role in pulling together the research that has been done over the years in these watersheds, as well as putting together lists of the potential projects, funding sources and lead agencies.

Riley brought up that the Council used to have a trail subcommittee that worked on the overpass over the North Richmond Parkway, for which the West County Transportation Agency is a potential partner. Perhaps we could bring back that subcommittee to work on this issue again.

Patrick Phelan said that the City of Richmond is working on a Gap Closure Project on the Bay Trail near Goodrick Ave, but the project will not provide bike/ped access across the Parkway. The Bay Trail is rough in places and needs attention to make people feel more comfortable biking and walking it. At a recent West Contra Costa Transportation Advisory Committee (WCCTAC) meeting, they talked about their desire to do a multimodal study for the Richmond Parkway; they should know about this community feedback before proceeding.

Amanda Booth said that she has learned that there is not a lot of interest in cycling that area of the parkway, that it is too dangerous. Also, they were notified this week that state parks will be coming out with an Outdoor Education grant in next 6 months or so; funding will be for multi-year projects in disadvantaged communities. Grant amounts will range from 20-300K and they are looking for projects that develop workforce skills and outdoor education. Both cities and nonprofits will be eligible to apply. One note is

that outreach to the public is mandatory, as is incorporating their feedback; previous outreach may not qualify.

Tim volunteered to be a contact to help develop the North Richmond Pump Station project as that will be a County project.

**7. Community Based Ecological Solutions in Rheem Watershed**— Rich Walkling reported via Helen that the 65% plans and hydraulic study for the project will be complete by September 30. American Rivers has nearly completed its Restoration Opportunities Analysis for the Rheem Creek Watershed and The Watershed Project is spearheading an effort to do public outreach in the neighborhood by mail.

Anne reported that they are using the storybook as their mail outreach effort, educating residents about why the creek is flooding and what can be done about it. For this project they are currently looking for Ohlone people indigenous to the Rheem Creek Watershed, as well as local artists.

Sarah Puckett said that American Rivers has identified 17 restoration project opportunities for Rheem Creek, from the headwaters to the mouth. At the next Council meeting, she hopes to present on these projects. The American Rivers team would love assistance from the Council on incorporating these projects into the map that the Council created several years ago, and will also be asking for general support for funding applications.

**8. SFEP**— Josh Bradt was not present.

**9. North Richmond Horizontal Levee Working Group**— Joe Neugebauer reported that West County Wastewater District has received a grant for planning a horizontal levee on the North Richmond shoreline. They are currently working on an MOU with landowners and non-landowners and expect to be finished in June 2021. They will deliver the potential cost for all parties for two options: a siloed project protecting the treatment plant (and just working within the wastewater district), and a project that would encompass the entire shoreline, including Chevron and Republic Services. The MOU asks landowners to provide technical expertise where applicable, as well as granting access to their property for non-intrusive studies, and also asks Parchester Village and North Richmond community leaders to share their needs and wants as well as provide technical expertise.

**10. West County Wastewater**— Sherry Stanley, on the Board of Directors, spoke to the state of the North Richmond Pump Station (which they operate for the County) and how only one pump is working. She has already taken this issue to John Gioia, who said the County is working on improvements to it. Regarding the horizontal levee project, she said that we will have to be cautious approaching Chevron and Republic Services but thinks that it will be easier with Gioia's support. Regarding the MOU, she urges any

groups interested in getting involved with the levee project on any level to get involved and contact Josh Bradt.

**11. City of San Pablo**— Amanda Booth reported that the El Portal project is complete.

The Wildcat Creek Trail project is moving quickly despite some delays in deliveries, and they expect to be substantially complete by mid-November and have a virtual ribbon cutting in December or January.

The designs are done for the Rumrill Complete Streets project, and they are waiting for the final Caltrans funding. They expect to have an RFP in Dec/Jan, which would be final in spring 2021, and construction would go through 2022.

The City is doing their annual creek cleanups, removing any major trash and debris blockages that may cause flooding from the channel. They will in the next week or so, begin desilting Wildcat Creek near their storm drain line in the vicinity of Rumrill Bridge.

They will be applying for Prop 68 funds in December for the Park project adjacent to Rheem Creek; the city has changed the parcel (swapped south for north) but the legal subdivision can't occur until spring 2021.

They are also doing a community beautification project going after illegal dumpers with cameras, catching two. A video documenting the catch in the Richmond Standard got 15,000 views, and they are publicizing on their Facebook page. They are also doing education and outreach to the community on trash reduction.

They have also partnered with the Flood Control District and BNSF Railway for cleanups near homeless encampment sites on San Pablo and Wildcat Creek, removing trash but not encampments. BNSF will be cleaning their section soon.

**12. City of Richmond**— Patrick Phelan reported that they have been working with TWP on a small cleanup event scheduled for Saturday September 26th on Baxter Creek near San Pablo Ave (the site of the Greenway Gap Closure). Construction for the Via Verde culvert project should occur between spring to November of 2021. They are still negotiating with the Water Board on the mitigation project on Rheem Creek near Contra Costa College.

**13. County Watershed Program**— John Steere reported that they are in the process of initiating the North Richmond Watershed Connections project, and they are close to having agreements prepared. They hope to be officially underway later this fall, although some coordination is underway already. They hope for the first mile/last mile project to be underway by next summer.

**14. Flood Control**— Tim Jensen reported that their vegetation management with goats was successful, and no native plantings were disturbed. They are partnering with the City of San Pablo and the railroad on encampment cleanup as mentioned by Amanda. The developer Panattoni, has been working on their property east of Richmond Parkway and south of Pittsburg Avenue doing site preparation work including deep soil compaction and placing fill against the levee on Wildcat Creek to ensure no impacts to flood protection. The Flood Control District is making sure they leave a 40-foot strip of land undeveloped for the landing for the future East Bay Regional Park District trail overcrossing of Richmond Parkway.

**15. Wildcat Creek Fish Passage Subcommittee**— Peter Mangarella reported that they are still coordinating with the Department of Water Resources' Urban Streams Restoration Program, trying to obtain the full amount of a grant for the Wildcat Creek fish ladder project (500K out of 700K was awarded late last year). They are hoping to speak to DWR soon, to better address their concerns about the plans. Thanks to Riley for providing additional information on the proposed design work. They have also initiated a contact with Caltrans regarding the I-80 culvert on Wildcat Creek to learn more and provide information for prioritizing a project to make it more fish friendly.

**16. Financial Subcommittee**— Sarah asked that folks who've applied for recent grants let her know so the sheet can be updated.

Link to project and grant list:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1lmGyQss1gC5iZcsMmYSnoDvisD-ubKIXTlz7PcnJrTU/edit?usp=sharing>

**Next call-in meeting of the Financial Subcommittee: Thursday October 15 at 10am.**

**17. New Items / Other Roundtable Reports**—

Sarah asked about the county's beaver management plan. Tim said that they have had several meetings about what to do about a beaver dam built in a Flood Control channel in Oakley. They have tried the depredation tactic, but another beaver family moved into the site. They are also doing a hydraulic study to look at what happens to the flood capacity of the channel due to this beaver dam in storms. Of secondary concern is what to do about beavers if they show up in another location, which is being incorporated into the County negotiations for its Regional Board programmatic maintenance permit. They have developed a flow chart decision process for following up on beaver issues.

Adele mentioned that the East Bay Regional Park District has started a Trail User Working Group. She is also interested in putting together a session on public agency maintenance of restored creek projects for the APWA conference next year; reach out to her at [adelehope@aol.com](mailto:adelehope@aol.com) if you know any good success stories.

**18. NEXT MEETING: Thursday November 19 from 10am-noon.**