

MEETING SUMMARY
Wildcat-San Pablo Creeks Watershed Council
December 16, 2021
10am – 12pm

Attendance: Tim Jensen, Anne Bremer, Cathy Bleier, Josh Bradt, Maggie Chen, Karineh Samkian, Roger Wachtler, Patrick Phelan, Audrey Matusich, Peter Mangarella, Jonathan Owens, Joe Neugebauer, Sarah Puckett, Rich Walkling, Andrew Chambers, Eunice Quintanilla, Juliana Gonzalez

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

2. CUSP report – Josh Bradt reported that the Streamside Management Program for Landowners (SMPL) is continuing to provide support to property owners adjacent to creeks in Contra Costa County. Interested homeowners should contact custreams@gmail.com. The program will need to hire an entry-level staff person in the New Year. The position is an ideal fit for Green Collar Corps or Watershed Apprentices alumni, with lots of training and mentorship. They are looking for someone comfortable with public speaking.

3. Urban Tilth report – Adele Ho reported through Anne Bremer that Urban Tilth is now the proud owner of the property at the northeastern corner of Fred Jackson Way and Brookside Drive, which has the North Richmond Farm on it and is bounded on the north by San Pablo Creek. They are planning to construct the Fred Jackson Way rain gardens and underground utility services to the farm site this coming spring. A Capital Campaign is underway to raise funds for the Watershed Workshop, Native Plant Nursery, Farm Greenhouse and other farm operations buildings. Unfortunately, they were not successful with their application to the State Parks Program... it was highly competitive (they received 468 applications totaling \$2.42 billion, but had only \$500 million in funding available).

Distribution center development is running rampant in North Richmond, and the community is concerned about the impacts of the increased traffic and associated pollution, as well as the idea of the area becoming a land of warehouses. On Tuesday, County Supervisor Gioia introduced, and the Board of Supervisors approved, an ordinance to place a temporary moratorium on fulfillment centers, parcel sorting and parcel hubs. This pause would allow time to start re-evaluating development goals for the area. The moratorium would apply to at least 2 projects in the early stages of applications, one of which Urban Tilth is extremely concerned about, as it is right next door to the Farm and the proposed building would shade out the farm crops for a good portion of the day. Note: the Ordinance would not apply to 3 projects that have already received their land use approvals: 500 Pittsburg, Scannell on Parr Blvd, and CenterPoint on Brookside Dr.

Nathan Bickart reported through Anne Bremer that they just graduated their 2021 cohort of 'Basins of Relations' Watershed Restoration Apprentices! The program had to be modified slightly for COVID-safety but everything went smoothly and they're so proud of their graduates. Thanks to all those who helped support the growth of these young environmental stewards as they built their knowledge and put it to use on West County Creeks!

Their Watershed Restoration Field Crew continues to perform restorative work in partnership with governmental partners along Codornices, Cerrito, and Wildcat Creeks. They're hopeful that all this rain will nourish (but not overwhelm!) their hand-grown native plantings, installed in October/November. They're also hoping to expand their work on San Pablo Creek as the North Richmond Farm grows along its south bank. They're prepping for a big MLK Day event at the North Richmond Farm- please join them if you're able!

Sarah Puckett: Did Urban Tilth purchase the farm property from Contra Costa County?

Tim Jensen: Yes—it's exciting that they now have control over their future.

4. SPAWNERS report – Lauren Iverson was not present, but Juliana Gonzalez reported that SPAWNERS is conducting maintenance of two restoration sites (Castro Creek and San Pablo Creek by the library). They are planning to do more small, in-person restoration events. Lauren is also interested in doing more videos (she has experience producing videos for other nonprofits). They are continuing to offer quarterly talks and will have an event in the spring. Check their website for more information: <https://www.spawners.org/>

5. The Watershed Project report – Juliana Gonzalez reported that The Watershed Project (TWP) will turn 25 in 2022! They will have a big celebration event in the spring, with monthly newsletter articles celebrating The Watershed Project's history, accomplishments, and future. If anyone has photos or memories of historical moments with The Watershed Project, please reach out to Juliana. Juliana also reported that the amount of trash in Wildcat Creek at Verde Elementary School following the recent storms is overwhelmingly high. TWP will need to coordinate with the Flood Control District to address it, and it will likely take months to clear.

Anne Bremer provided an update on several community priority projects from the North Richmond Water Needs Assessment (more information about the needs assessment is available online at <https://thewatershedproject.org/nr-water/>):

- Tap Water Quality Testing: The Watershed Project, with support from San Francisco Estuary Partnership, is offering free tap water quality testing through SimpleLab for Richmond residents, prioritizing North Richmond residents. They are currently conducting outreach, and testing is anticipated to begin in January and continue through May 2022.

- Horizontal Levee: The Watershed Project's community engagement efforts include presentations to various community groups and community member recruitment for 3 working groups (paid positions). The working groups will begin meeting in February 2022 and work on three project components: community survey development and delivery, design for community benefits, and workforce development. There is also a tribal engagement component, and TWP will meet with tribal partners in early 2022 to jointly identify roles and priorities.
- Wildcat Creek Fish Ladder: TWP's community engagement efforts include K-5 educational programming, creation of a children's book, partnership with tribal representatives for interviews and storytelling, a community-facing web page, and a presentation to the school community.
- Rheem Creek: TWP's community engagement role includes vegetation planting workdays, community input on interpretive signage, a neighborhood working group to develop a community-based funding plan to support ongoing creek maintenance, educational programming, volunteer and student involvement with maintenance and monitoring, online updates, presentations at meetings, and a grand opening event upon project completion. More about the project is available at <https://thewatershedproject.org/rheemcreek>
- North Richmond Pump Station: Along with the tap water testing, this project was identified as a top priority for the North Richmond community. Current plans for the pump station upgrade don't include sea level rise resilience. The draft Proposal Solicitation Package (PSP) for Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) grants has been released, and this project would be a great fit for an application if the timing allows. TWP has resources for consultants and grant-writing to prepare an application. Is there anyone at Contra Costa County or the City of Richmond they could connect with on how to move this project forward?

Tim Jensen reported that the project has been moved to the Buildings Department at the County and was unsure of the correct contact person, but offered to help guide it to the right person if TWP follows up in an email. Patrick Phelan offered to serve as a proxy for Joanne Le on the City of Richmond side. Josh Bradt reiterated that the pump station would be a great fit for IRWM funding.

Sarah Puckett: Can any project apply for IRWM funding, or do projects need to be filtered through an organization/agency already working on the IRWM program?

Josh Bradt: There will be a scoring committee for the Bay Area IRWM region, and projects are bundled together for recommendation.

Juliana Gonzalez: Could the horizontal levee project move forward with IRWM funding with 30% designs anticipated by September 2022?

Josh Bradt: Not sure, it depends on the IRWM grant application timeline.

Juliana Gonzalez reported that TWP has a contract with Contra Costa County for finishing the Watershed Connections project, and they'll be ready to start their Adopt-a-

Tree program, in which they'll be planting 50 trees in the next two years. They will be celebrating MLK Day on the Richmond Greenway with the City of Richmond with a stewardship workday. Their environmental education team has been re-adapting curriculum for in-person learning and is starting to schedule in-person field trips with teacher partners.

Cathy Bleier: Golden Gate Audubon has a school program for elementary students, and they're looking to restart the program in Richmond schools, if that's of interest.

Sarah Puckett: Are there any updates on the topic of unhoused people living in creeks?

Josh Bradt: A needs assessment was conducted with unhoused people as part of the Disadvantaged Community and Tribal Involvement Program (DACTIP). There was a suggestion to pilot a program in which encampment residents would be trained in becoming creek stewards, along with providing wraparound services. There was some uncertainty about whether a recent grant application will be awarded, but the pilot program is one of the actions listed in the update of the Estuary Blueprint.

6. Community Based Ecological Solutions in Rheem Watershed (City of Richmond) –

Rich Walkling reported that LSA is wrapping up the bioassessment for permit applications, and reported that a lot of the invasive vegetation previously cleared for a topographic survey has grown back. Neighbors are likely eager for the project implementation to begin.

Patrick Phelan reported that the City of Richmond is almost ready to move forward with their \$1.6 million implementation grant from the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA), and requested that the project team look over the latest budget details. He reported that the flooding in the neighborhood is still terrible, and the project is much-needed. Construction is planned for summer 2023.

7. Brook Road Fish Passage, Restoration, and Bridge Project (East Bay Regional Park District) – Rich Walkling reported that the project includes removing at-grade concrete stream crossing and replacing it with a restored channel reach and bridge. The project will also realign a portion of Wildcat Canyon Trail (to move it up out of the riparian area) and make improvements to the parking lot.

Scott Stoller reported through Anne Bremer that the Park District is developing 30% design early in 2022, with goal of 2023 construction.

8. Sediment Management in Jewel Lake (East Bay Regional Park District) – Scott Stoller reported through Anne Bremer that the study will be complete in spring 2022 and the Board will decide which option to move forward with to the design stage.

Jonathan Owens reported that there has been one online public meeting already, and there will be another in January or February. He will share the invitation with the group when it is available.

Peter Mangarella reported that Trout Unlimited has provided a letter and presentation to the board on their analysis of the two options. They are encouraged that the Park District is working on fish passage in the upper watershed as Trout Unlimited is working on it in the lower watershed.

Andrew Chambers: Is the project in Alameda or Contra Costa County?

Rich Walking: Contra Costa County.

Sarah Puckett: Is there a deadline for public comment on the Jewel Lake project?

Peter Mangarella suggested trying to comment as soon as possible, ideally before the end of the year. The board decision will happen in the spring.

Tim Jensen suggested checking the East Bay Regional Park District website for instructions and deadlines:

<https://www.ebparks.org/about/planning/jewellakestudy.htm>

9. San Francisco Estuary Partnership (SFEP) report – Josh Bradt reported that they are working on their periodic update of the Estuary Blueprint, their comprehensive conservation management plan. The Blueprint is now open for public comment, and all are encouraged to offer feedback. Information about how to provide comments is available on their website, and public input session is scheduled for January 11 from 1-3pm: <https://www.sfestuary.org/estuary-blueprint-public-comment/>

10. West County Wastewater update – Joe Neugebauer reported that West County Wastewater (WCW) is celebrating their 100th anniversary (founding date December 13, 1921), and will be posting a video about the district on their website and social media pages soon. They are working on the ESCO project, led by the firm Engie, a series of comprehensive energy and sustainability upgrades including a centrifuge and sludge drying system for biosolids that can be land-applied, which will be more efficient than the sludge lagoons, and free up the space the lagoons currently occupy.

Mithun is working with The Watershed Project, Environmental Science Associates, and West County Wastewater to come up with 30% designs for a horizontal levee for the area in front of WCW, and hope that it will eventually be expanded to a five-mile stretch along the shoreline. Given that there will be more property available in place of the sludge lagoons, it's possible the levee could be expanded further onto WCW property.

Tim Jensen: Is the district able to utilize the federal infrastructure bill?

Joe Neugebauer: Yes, they are aware. Mark Northcross from NHA Advisors is keeping track of all grant opportunities.

Tim Jensen: Is the district working toward net zero energy?

Joe Neugebauer: Yes, the goal is to go carbon neutral or carbon negative. The district's five-year climate action plan is available on their website.

Juliana Gonzalez requested time during the next meeting of the Council to present about the horizontal levee project, and Tim Jensen granted the request. Karineh Samkian asked if the project partners would be interested in presenting to the San Pablo City Council as well, and offered to check with the City Manager and schedule the presentation for the New Year.

Joe Neugebauer reported that the next meeting of the Horizontal Levee Stakeholder Group will meet on January 20 at 9am. To receive updates about these meetings, reach out to Joe at jneugebauer@wcwd.org.

11. City of San Pablo report – Karineh Samkian reported that the Rumrill Complete Streets project will begin ripping up pavement in January, in phases to minimize traffic disruption. The Wildcat Creek Restoration project sustained some storm damage in the October rains, and will need to be assessed again when water levels are lower. Salesian High School has adopted that stretch of creek, and they've been doing trash cleanup and weeding. Trout Unlimited may offer lessons about the future fish ladder project with the students, and Peter Mangarella suggested coordinating with The Watershed Project as well.

For the replacement of the bridge at San Pablo Ave and 23rd Street over San Pablo Creek, the City just got a construction manager and will send out a request for proposals in the next year. They plan to replace the bridge, make the intersection safer and more bicycle/pedestrian friendly, and implement some creek improvements.

Starting January 1st, the City will be enforcing illegal dumping with fines, with a particular focus on the hotspots of creeks and multifamily housing complexes. In this pilot program, the property owner will be held responsible for any dumping on their property (even if they/their tenants didn't do the dumping) and will need to clean it up within 10 days or pay for the City to clean it.

12. City of Richmond report – Patrick Phelan reported that CalTrans Sustainable Communities grants are available in the North Richmond area. The County applied for one on Parr Blvd, and the West Contra Costa Transportation Advisory Committee (WCCTAC) applied for one on Richmond Parkway, which would hopefully address truck traffic issues. The City met with the City of San Pablo and Contra Costa County to discuss railroad crossing safety issues, as well as bicycle/pedestrian and Wildcat Creek trail improvements. The Yellow Brick Road and Richmond Wellness Trail projects are both under construction, and both include bioswales and stormwater management. To receive updates on projects in the City Manager's Weekly Updates, sign up at <https://ci.richmond.ca.us/965/Weekly-Announcements>

New culvert in action during heavy rains on December 13:

<https://www.ci.richmond.ca.us/ImageRepository/Document?documentId=59581>

The City, The Watershed Project, Groundwork Richmond, and Golden Gate Audubon conducted a successful cleanup of Meeker Slough on November 27 and hope to continue that kind of work with neighbors. Trash and illegal dumping are a real problem in Richmond; the new Interim City Manager is passionate about the issue and Public Works Director sent an “all-hands-on-deck” email to come up with ideas for solutions.

Is anyone familiar with the Clean California grant program (February deadline)?

<https://cleancalifornia.dot.ca.gov/local-grants>

Karineh Samkian shared that she plans to meet with Amanda Booth in January to discuss ideas, and offered to meet with Patrick, too. Tim Jensen added that CalTrans could be another possible source of information (they gave a recent presentation).

Patrick Phelan reported that the City will be hiring for several positions. Patrick will share the job postings when they become available.

Andrew Chambers reported that the CalTIP hotline is another resource for reporting illegal dumping, if it's a Fish & Game code violation:

<https://wildlife.ca.gov/Enforcement/CalTIP> He encouraged reporting as much as possible, because the more reports they have, they can use it as justification for more resources (staff) in the area.

Cathy Bleier: During the cleanup of Meeker Slough, a lot of the neighbors were upset about the larger items in the slough. What can be done about these larger items?

Patrick Phelan: Meeker Slough is either the City of Richmond's or UC Berkeley's responsibility.

13. County Watershed Program report – John Steere reported through Tim Jensen that the Watershed Program's primary project is the North Richmond Watershed Connections project. The County is making several improvements along Fred Jackson Way: widening the road, putting down new pavement, installing sidewalks, bioswales, and plantings. The concrete work is almost done, and planting is scheduled for January 2022.

Urban Tilth is entering into contract with the County to construct improvements on their new parcel, include a sidewalk, bioswales, and trees. The goal is for construction to happen in summer 2022. The Watershed Project's contract with the County should be completed in January, which will allow them to begin their Adopt-a-Tree program. Juliana Gonzalez reported that they hope to start planting trees in October 2022.

14. Flood Control report – Tim Jensen reported that the rains on October 24th set a lot of records for high rainfall, over a 100- or 500-year flood event in places, but luckily the watersheds were so dry that they soaked up the water and all flows stayed within creek banks and detention basins. The rain last week was slow enough not to experience flooding or overtopping of facilities, but a lot of debris and trash was mobilized by the high flows, so crews are cleaning it up.

Every so often, the Watershed Council organizes a creek cleanup workday through Urban Tilth, The Watershed Project, or Ann Riley to clean up debris on the south side of Wildcat Creek, where mature trees cause debris jams. Tim suggested another such workday in the summer or fall, and offered that Flood Control maintenance crews can help with a dump truck and chainsaws.

15. Wildcat Creek Fish Passage Subcommittee report (Trout Unlimited) – Peter Mangarella reported that the project has received funding from two different sources: A California Department of Water Resources grant for which the County Flood Control District is the lead (Gus Amirzehni is the project manager), and a grant from the California Fish Passage Forum, for which The Watershed Project is the lead (Juliana Gonzalez is the project manager). The County Board of Supervisors has approved the contract, and the consultant team is on board and starting to do work.

Juliana Gonzalez reported that The Watershed Project, FlowWest, Trout Unlimited, and the County have finalized the scope of work for the Fish Passage Forum contract. The Forum has not yet sent the final grant agreement, but they approved the final budget and scope of work. It will be a two-year contract; the first year is approved first, and the second year is contingent on their budget. They will be able to start hiring consultants after the final contract is approved.

Karineh Samkian reported that a fairly large (~2.5 feet) deceased Chinook salmon was found in Wildcat Creek adjacent to City Hall, well upstream of the fish ladder, and shared a photo.

16. Financial Subcommittee meeting report – Antony Falzone was not present, but Sarah Puckett reported that the subcommittee met about a month ago, updated the funding sources spreadsheet, and discussed upcoming grants. A copy of the spreadsheet is available online at <https://www.wcspcouncil.org/subcommittees/financial-subcommittee/>

Next call-in meeting of the Financial Subcommittee: 1/13 or 1/27

18. New Items / Other Roundtable Reports—

Restoration Design Group is hiring a Landscape Designer/Landscape Architect. Please see their website for more information: <http://www.restorationdesigngroup.com/>

19. NEXT MEETING: Thursday, February 10 from 10am-noon