

Creek Revitalization: Back to Bacich

by Nick Salcedo

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Bacich Elementary School in Kentfield is the latest school in the Corte Madera Creek watershed to start a creek protection and revitalization program managed by Friends of Corte Madera Creek. The new work will build upon work done earlier by the late John Walters near Creekside Marsh, at the lower end of Laurel Grove Creek, by extending the planting and restoration efforts up the creek to the intersection of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard and McAllister Avenue.

The creek lies between the school athletic field and the eastern arm of McAllister Avenue; the bank on the road side is currently dominated by young elm trees, while the opposite bank has mixed vegetation. This work complements several other successful school creek restoration projects undertaken by Friends, such as those at College of Marin, Redwood and Sir Francis Drake high schools, and White Hill Middle School.



Laurel Grove Creek runs along the edge of Bacich Elementary School athletic field, in Kentfield.

In 2004, Friends approached Bacich about doing a creek enhancement project when the school was replacing a building adjacent to the creek. After walking the creek, school officials recognized the opportunity to improve the creek's riparian character by protecting the existing native oaks and alders, giving them an opportunity to mature, controlling the spread of nonnatives, and planting additional native trees, shrubs and other riparian vegetation.

Friends' plan took into account the school's and neighbors' concerns about bird habitat, bank erosion and aesthetics.

Friends received a grant from the Bella Vista Foundation to purchase plants, tools, equipment and supplies needed to begin the project. Since the planting season (mid winter) of 2004-2005, well over 100 new plants have been installed along the creek to supplement the existing vegetation. Most of these are willows, buckeyes, coast live and valley oaks, toyons and big leaf maples. Some of the willow stakes planted last year have already reached a height of six feet. Over the next several years we hope to see more native vegetation than non-native, leading to improved riparian habitat, increased bank stability and better all around ecological function of the creek.

This particular creek project is important for two reasons. First, it protects and enhances a section of creek in the lower reaches of the watershed where fresh water from Laurel Grove Creek meets and mixes with the tidal waters of San Francisco Bay. This is one of the last remaining natural mixing zones in the Corte Madera Creek watershed with a natural bottom and creek bank: most of these areas have been modified with concrete or other materials. These mixing zones provide unique habitat for algae and invertebrates and serve as feeding havens for fish, birds and other animals. Mallards, egrets and green herons can often be seen using this section of creek. Second, because it's located at a school, this creek provides an easily accessible

outdoor environmental education opportunity. Here children can learn first hand about creeks, riparian habitats and the many ways humans, fish and wildlife interact and exist with creeks.

In the Corte Madera Creek Watershed, 22 of the 27 schools in the watershed (more than 80%) are within one-quarter mile of a creek or wetland. Many, like Bacich, have a creek or wetland on their own property. This makes them ideal sites for creek protection, enhancement and/or restoration and outdoor environmental education laboratories. If you or your school are interested in, or would like information about, undertaking a creek project feel free to contact Friends.

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