

Our Task as Humans...

by Stephen Fuller-Rowell

This watershed in which we live is truly magnificent: from the cathedral redwood groves on the serpentine western hills, across the teeming marshes of the lowlands, all the way to the pine ridge of sandstone that separates our valleys from the Laguna de Santa Rosa. This morning, I sat, watched and listened as sharp-shin hawks marked out their territory with their screams. I walked beside crystal-clear streams dancing from the cool forest shade out into the meadows.

This land is home for many communities. Steelhead spawn in the upland creeks. California freshwater shrimp hide out beneath the vegetation overhanging the banks. Though I've never seen them, there are coho salmon in Green Valley Creek. And our dog once got her nose full of quills during a chance encounter with a porcupine.

And there are people too. We Europeans have been drawn to this land of the Pomo and the Miwok: the Irish and Italian farmers of the 19th century whose family memory lives on in the names of our school districts, back roads, and local bars; the back-to-the-land hippies of the 20th century who brought organic farming to the area; and now the retirees of the 21st century who bring their life experience and time to do good work here.

Yet we humans have had an enormous impact on this land. Many plants, animals, birds and insects that were here two hundred years ago are no more. The beaver dams have gone. Thankfully, large-scale clearing of the land has ended. Foresters no longer use the creek beds as skid-trails. But our impact continues, often times despite our best intentions. Many are the well-meaning farmers who hauled the limbs of fallen trees from their creeks, thinking that an unobstructed creek was a good creek, before it was known that such large woody debris helps create and maintain the deep pools that provide refuge for fish on hot summer days. When others removed the shading trees and bushes from the creek banks, no one knew how

narrow was the water temperature range in which fish could thrive. As we water our lawns, run our evening bath and flush our toilets, few of us are aware of how the groundwater is being sucked down by all of our wells.

Fortunately, a consciousness of these things is re-emerging. We are beginning to relearn the awesome complexity of a living watershed. We are finding the will to halt the deterioration and begin the many needed tasks of restoration. But before we turn to restoration and protection, we must first stop the negative impact we have.

We are blessed by the presence of many in our communities who have this understanding and the ability to teach. We must listen to such people as they teach us how to live more lightly on this land. We cannot return this watershed to the pristine state it was in two hundred years ago. However, we can, with consciousness, reverence, understanding and guidance, live upon this land in such a way that we may share the space with all the other creatures for whom this is home: creatures that have far less ability than we humans to adapt and relocate in response to environmental change.

This change cannot be mandated by regulation alone; the change for the good will occur only when we understand where we live and how to live here. We see the change happening now, as our children learn the names of their creeks and know how these creeks connect upstream with the winter rains and downstream with the Russian River and, eventually, the ocean.

So this is our task as humans in this watershed: to watch, to listen, to learn, and to be here for many generations to come, humbly and joyfully living in reverent community with all other plants and creatures in our Atascadero/Green Valley Watershed. May we all help see this come to pass.

Stephen Fuller-Rowell is a board member of the Atascadero / Green Valley Watershed Council. For more information about the council, call Jean Redus at 823-2006.

Tour the Green Music Center

Tuesday Tours of the Green Music Center on the Sonoma State University campus are now being offered for those who would like to see the construction site of the 105,435-square-foot facility.

Tours lasting 30 minutes are currently being offered on Tuesdays at 3:30 p.m. at the site of the project located at the intersection of Rohnert Park Expressway and Petaluma Hill Road on the Rohnert Park campus. No reservations are needed. Those who are interested should arrive at the parking lot across from the Green Music Center by 3:30 p.m. where a tour guide will be waiting.

Those planning to take the tour must wear close-toed shoes and dress for the weather. Tours will take place under any weather conditions.

Construction of the Donald & Maureen Green Music Center began in 2006 and is continuing to progress on schedule. Preparations are now being made to begin the concert hall stone façade work and exterior wood siding.

For more information, contact Susan Kashack at susan.kashack@sonoma.edu or phone (707) 664-2122.

The Green Music Center Web site can be found at <http://greenmusiccenter.sonoma.edu>.

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