

SLO STEWARDS

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SLO City's Natural Resources

A PUBLICATION OF *EcoSlo* AND THE CITY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO

FUNDRAISING FOR THE FUTURE



PHOTO BY MEG AND KEITH EVANS

by
Neil Havlik, Ph.D.
Natural Resources Manager
City of San Luis Obispo

FELLOW NATURE LOVERS have a time-sensitive opportunity to add 310 acres of open space to the Irish Hills Natural Reserve. Phyllis Madonna, owner of the Froom Ranch, and the City Council agreed to an "option" for the City to purchase the ranch for \$700,000 (approximately \$2,260 per acre). The deadline to raise the necessary funds and complete the transaction is June 30, 2010. There is a limited time to raise the necessary funding.

The Froom Ranch lies west of town, in the hills behind Home Depot and Costco, off Los Osos Valley Road. It is adjacent to the 700-acre Irish Hills Natural Reserve, which has been a city-owned open space since 2001. The property includes rich wildlife habitat, dense chaparral, oak woodlands, open grasslands, and one-half

mile of the perennial Froom Creek inhabited by steelhead trout. The property is underlain by serpentine soils and contains a number of rare wildflowers and other plant species. These habitats extend into Irish Hills Reserve, where there are some six miles of very popular multi-use trails.

When the project is completed, the Irish Hills Natural Reserve will be increased to over 1,000 acres. The current trail system would be doubled, providing new areas to explore and enjoy. Several new trail loops can be created by utilizing the old Froom Ranch roads that are already found on the land. These trails would link to the existing Irish Hills Natural Reserve, and make it possible for the future continuation of the

city-owned Johnson Ranch Open Space, which lies about one mile south.

In agreeing to the option, the City Council anticipated use of local Measure Y funds, State grant support, and a local fundraising effort in order to raise money for this beautiful land. But given the State's difficult finances at this time, State grant support is uncertain. This makes the local fundraising effort imperative to the success of the project.

We need to raise \$150,000 locally to protect this wonderful open space. That money would be matched with \$300,000 of Measure Y funds, and \$250,000 from the State. The Nature Conservancy

continued inside on page 2



PHOTO BY NEIL HAVLIK

WE NEED YOUR HELP NOW TO PROTECT THIS VALUABLE PROPERTY.

SPRING INTO SERVICE

by Freddy Otte
CITY BIOLOGIST

Volunteers get a sneak-peek as the new Johnson Ranch prepares to open.

NEW OPEN SPACE WILL BE made public this year! Thanks to ongoing support from local organizations and individuals, the conservation plan for the Johnson Ranch Open Space has been completed. Soon everyone will be able to enjoy the 2-mile trail loop through the vast and scenic landscape just south of the city limits, at the intersection of Ontario Rd. and South Higuera.

The Johnson Ranch is a 242-acre open space acquired by the City in 2001. It was not open to the public because there were no dedicated trails. The Leadership San Luis Obispo class 17 has adopted the Johnson Ranch as the location for their legacy project. They see this project as a significant addition to the City's open space trail system. Several other groups, including the California Conservation Corps, Central Coast Concerned Mountain Bikers, service clubs and many individual volunteers have also dedicated much time and effort towards making this land public.

Our neighbors installed riparian fencing that excludes cattle from the creek system, as well as water troughs to protect the creek from the few farm animals that remain on the land. This has proved effective, and the vegetation along Dry Creek is coming back very quickly. Three pastures were established so the cattle could be managed with rotational grazing to further lessen the impact of the cattle on any one area (especially the creek system). City staff is also in discussions with our neighbors about realigning the access road to further lessen the impacts on the land, as the road currently bisects the creek and pond area. The decommissioning of this road would increase the capacity of the creek and reduce damaging sedimentation.

A dedicated parking area, official entryway, and kiosk with information about the property, resources, and map are still needed before the land can be opened to the public.

Several trail workdays are planned for people interested in contributing to this project. The dates are available in this newsletter. We would like to have the property open by spring or early summer. Keep an eye out for the notice and be prepared to experience this special property.

Go outside and *play!*

This summer check out the **Jr. Ranger Activity Camp**
Learn more about the world you live in!



Schedules available online at www.slocity.org/parksandrecreation under the activity guide link.

MANY VOLUNTEERS HAVE DEDICATED MUCH TIME AND EFFORT TOWARDS MAKING THIS LAND PUBLIC.



One of the many scenic views from Johnson Ranch's new trail system - photo courtesy of Freddy Otte

FUTURE *continued from front*

has pledged to the City to match the funds of locally raised contributions. We have until before mid-2010 to raise these funds, so it is necessary to act quickly, as such opportunities rarely arise.

I urge you to support this great opportunity in any way possible. Contributions can be made to the City of San Luis Obispo, or to the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County. Contributions should be identified as being for the Froom Ranch project. With everyone's support we can permanently conserve this beautiful area, so future generations can enjoy the natural beauty that surrounds San Luis Obispo.

Natural San Luis Docent HIKES

Events are free and take place **SATURDAYS** at 9AM. Please bring water and wear sturdy shoes.

- 3/14 GUIDETTI RANCH**
The meeting place is at the Food 4 Less parking lot at 3985 S. Higuera, San Luis Obispo. We will carpool/caravan to the ranch which is located off of Buckley Rd. *Wild Flower Alert*
- 4/11 IRISH HILLS from Perfumo Canyon**
Take Los Osos Valley Rd. north and turn left on Perfumo Canyon Rd. Follow for 1 mile. Trailhead is on the left after bridge crossing. *Wild Flower Alert*
- 5/09 JOHNSON RANCH**
Meet at turnout located at the intersection of South Higuera St. and Ontario Rd. NOTE: This Open Space is not yet open to the public. Access is granted for scheduled events only!
- 6/13 STENNER SPRINGS**
Highway 1 towards Morro Bay. Less than a mile out of town turn right on Stenner Creek Rd. Follow road for 2 ½ miles to the end, or park under the train trestle and carpool to the trail head.

For info call ECOSLO at 544-1777, or SLO City Natural Resources Dept at 781-7211.



TAKE ONLY PHOTOGRAPHS.
LEAVE ONLY FOOTPRINTS.

PHOTO BY TERRE DUNIVANT
GAIA GRAPHICS & ASSOCIATES

SLO City Parks & Rec Ranger-Led HIKES

Events are free and take place **SUNDAYS** at 1PM. Please bring water and wear sturdy shoes.

- 3/15 SOUTH HILLS**
Meet at the South Hills trailhead off Woodbridge St. Take South Street east and turn right onto Exposition Dr. Road will turn into Woodbridge Street. Trailhead is on the right.
- 4/12 BISHOP PEAK from Patricia**
To reach the trailhead, take Foothill Blvd. west and make a right turn at Patricia Dr. Continue north on Patricia Dr. and the trailhead will be on the left, just past Patricia Court.
- 5/17 IRISH HILLS from Perfumo Canyon**
Take Los Osos Valley Rd. north and turn left on Perfumo Canyon Rd. Follow for 1 mile. Trailhead is on the left after bridge crossing.
- 6/14 RESERVOIR CANYON**
Meet at the Reservoir Canyon trailhead. To reach trailhead, take Highway 101 north. Go past city limits and turn right onto Reservoir Canyon Rd. This road ends at trailhead.

For info call: SLO City Parks and Rec at 781-7302. Visit: www.slocity.org/parksandrecreation

SLO Stewards TRAIL WORK

Workdays are **Saturdays** from 9AM-12PM. Please wear long pants and sturdy shoes. Water and snacks provided.

- 3/07 JOHNSON RANCH**
Meet at turnout located at the intersection of South Higuera St. and Ontario Rd. NOTE: This Open Space is not yet open to the public. Access is granted for scheduled events only!
- 3/21 RESERVOIR CANYON**
Meet at the Reservoir Canyon trailhead. To reach trailhead, take Highway 101 north. Go past city limits and turn right onto Reservoir Canyon Rd. This road ends at trailhead.
- 4/04 JOHNSON RANCH**
Meet at turnout located at the intersection of South Higuera St. and Ontario Rd. NOTE: This Open Space is not yet open to the public. Access is granted for scheduled events only!
- 4/18 BISHOP PEAK from Highland**
Take Foothill Blvd. west. Turn right on Patricia Dr. Continue north on Patricia Dr. and make a left onto Highland Dr. Highland Dr. will end at the Bishop Peak trailhead.

- 5/09 JOHNSON RANCH**
Meet at turnout located at the intersection of South Higuera St. and Ontario Rd. NOTE: This Open Space is not yet open to the public. Access is granted for scheduled events only!

- 5/23 IRISH HILLS from Perfumo Canyon**
Take Los Osos Valley Rd. north and turn left on Perfumo Canyon Rd. Follow for 1 mile. Trailhead is on the left after bridge crossing.

- 6/13 JOHNSON RANCH**
Meet at turnout located at the intersection of South Higuera St. and Ontario Rd. NOTE: This Open Space is not yet open to the public. Access is granted for scheduled events only!

- 6/27 JOHNSON RANCH**
Meet at turnout located at the intersection of South Higuera St. and Ontario Rd. NOTE: This Open Space is not yet open to the public. Access is granted for scheduled events only!

For info call: City Ranger Desk at 781-7302. Visit: www.slocity.org/parksandrecreation.



PHOTO BY
CITY OF SLO RANGER SERVICE



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FIGHT FIRE WITH FLOWERS

by
Craig Wilson
Program Manager
Growing Grounds Farm

Stump fire with some floral friends.

THIS YEAR'S FIRE SEASON is now over in San Luis Obispo County. Fortunately we escaped relatively unharmed and experienced only a few small wildfires. However, another related season is upon us... planting season! What we plant around our homes and other structures, as well as how we care for our landscaping, can greatly influence (both favorably or adversely) the potential for damage or loss from wildfires. Wise selection, installation, and care of a fire-resistant landscape can give firefighters extra time for structure protection, and potentially completely deflect a wildfire.

No plant is truly fireproof, but for fire protection and fire threat mitigation purposes, plants fall into two basic categories: pyrophytic (plants that

ignite readily and burn intensely), and fire resistant. Pyrophytic plants are often characterized by needle- or blade-like leaves, and strong-smelling, sticky or resinous saps and oils. Fire resistant plants include many broadleaf deciduous trees, plants with succulent leaves, and shrubs with minimal dead material remaining on the stems.

“There are hundreds of beautiful native and non-native fire resistant plants.”

Many plants have inherent fire-resistant characteristics; however, these benefits can be marginalized by improper care and maintenance. Most plants, including our natives, do better with some summer water. For example, a fire-

resistant plant that is native to the Arizona-Sonora Desert region, with late summer monsoons, could become a tinder box in our Mediterranean climate where we generally experience five to six months without rain. It is important to prune dead and dying vegetation off shrubs and trees. Planting low-growing species closer to the house, in addition to spacing plants properly, maximizes plants' natural fire-resistant characteristics.

There are hundreds of beautiful native and non-native, fire-resistant and drought-tolerant plants available for landscaping. Lists of appropriate plants and much more information can be found at www.firesafecouncil.org, www.bewaterwise.com, and www.ucanr.org.

