



Butte County Resource Conservation District Newsletter, Spring 2014



RCD educates Chico High students about the drought

The Butte County RCD has made environmental education a top priority due to the current drought conditions. In March, staff from the RCD educated over 160 Chico High School students on the current conditions, misconceptions, and conservation strategies associated with the drought.



Kelly Peterson, RCD District Manager, and Sam Rossi, Conservation Associate, explain the effects of drought to Chico High students. Source: Enterprise-Record

Chico High School health teacher, Vallarie Jensen, was eager to schedule the RCD to visit her classroom and felt it necessary that her 9-12th grade students completely understand the statewide issue. Staff from the RCD covered many of the social, economic, and ecological implications surrounding the drought in the form of a slide presentation. The RCD also explained that it can be easy to save our precious water. Water saving tips that were covered included everything from turning off the water while one brushes their teeth to putting their dirty dishes in the dishwasher instead of cleaning them by hand which can take four times as much water. The take-home message for the students was to think how everyone from farmers and ranchers to salmon and other wildlife will be affected by the drought.

- Upcoming Events -

Adopt-A-Highway Volunteer Day

June 17th, 2014 @ 8 am

Meet at the intersection of Highway 99 and Highway 162 in the dirt parking lot west of Highway 99.

Volunteers are needed from **8 a.m. – 11 a.m.** to help cleanup litter and make a positive statement to visitors and residents regarding litter along Butte County roadways.

River & Trail Cleanup Day

July 26th, 2014 @ 8 am

Volunteers are needed to help remove litter from the Feather River in Oroville, Ca.

Great Sierra River Cleanup Day

September 20th, 2014

Join the Butte County RCD and Feather River Recreation & Park District in Oroville to take part in the state wide cleanup of our rivers! Contact Sam Rossi, Conservation Associate, for more information.

After the presentation, students joined the RCD by playing water Jeopardy based on their new knowledge and motivation to receive a candy reward. By the end of the day, each student left their health class with an improved understanding of the current drought conditions and a piece of candy. The story was covered by the Enterprise-Record and made it on the front page!

BEEP & the RCD reach out to the Forest Ranch community

Farmers, ranchers, and city residents were not the only ones thrilled to see the late rains in February. Volunteers that helped the Broom Education & Eradication Program (BEEP) were saving considerable energy pulling the invasive weed known as broom when the soil was wet.



BEEP volunteers rest on their Weed Wrenches™ following the Neighborhood Demo Day.

One might think removing the deep-rooted species is the worst of BEEP's worries; however, there's a more pressing matter acting as a road block. BEEP has outdone itself when it comes to showing up each and every season to eradicate broom and educate residents in Forest Ranch about the plant's harmful impacts to the ecosystem and their fire safety. Unfortunately, there is one underlying problem that keeps BEEP from attaining its mission of a broom-free watershed; motivating homeowners who participated in the program to take ownership in the issue and maintain the broom on their property.

Since 2006, BEEP volunteers have successfully removed thousands of broom plants from 70 properties in Forest Ranch. With the most recent season ending in March, 2014, an additional 20,000 plants were added to that list. A success story none the less; however, the plant's resiliency intertwined with a lack of homeowner maintenance has created a scenario where broom is removed by BEEP and then allowed to return the following season. BEEP knows broom eradication can be a daunting task for the average homeowner considering the plant's ability to reestablish itself by producing thousands of tiny seeds that can remain viable for over 25 years. Fortunately, they have a prescription to follow to effectively control the species.

Current research points to the importance of revisiting the broom infestation each year by using a combination of control methods such as herbicide treatment, mechanical pulling, and revegetation with favorable native plants. By the third year, infestations tend to disappear.

Removal and maintenance of the plant is needed now more than ever considering the current drought conditions. The plant requires more water than the native plants it out-competes and undoubtedly creates a favorable environment for extreme wildfire.

The community action group has fought some tough battles, but returns every season to remove the invasive weed from their foothill community. With an undocumented average age of 50, it takes a special kind of person to look past their age and volunteer with BEEP. The work volunteers perform is not exactly the easiest of tasks, nor is it something that is always sought after a hard day, week, or month of work on their own property. However, this

PRE DEMO DAY PHOTO



POST DEMO DAY PHOTO



never seems to discourage BEEP volunteers from going out each and every Saturday in February and March.

One thing the group lacks is a fading sense of motivation and that is what they hope to share with the landowners they visit on those Saturdays. The task of motivating landowners to take ownership of removing the broom on their property has long been secondary to the pull season. BEEP and the RCD held a Neighborhood Demo Day for residents located along Forest Ranch Way to demonstrate removal methods. Over 5,000 plants were pulled with the help of 20 volunteers. BEEP and the RCD hopes to hold similar demo days in other neighborhoods to show homeowners how fun and easy it can be to maintain broom on their property.

Partnership benefits wildlife and local 4-H youth

Seldom does an opportunity to benefit wildlife populations and local youth at the same time present itself. Fortunately, for Butte County, a partnership between two organizations is taking advantage of such an opportunity. The partnership is between the RCD and the UC Cooperative Extension Butte County 4-H Youth Development Program. The two decided they could help serve wildlife needs while simultaneously involving 4-H youth in the effort.



Left to Right: Bill Connelly, Butte County Board of Supervisors; Mary Thompson RCD Board President; Megan Oliver, 4-H Officer.

Wildlife nesting boxes are the product of this partnership and are constructed, sold, and used as habitat right here in Butte County. They are on-the-ground projects that have not only served as crucial habitat for many avian species, they have also provided local 4-H members with the opportunity to learn valuable skills while becoming educated on wildlife needs.

As of now the Palermo 4-H Club is the main 4-H club participating and has a total of 43 students that learn how to construct these boxes. Adrian Rosales, age 12, participates in the program and stated in a letter, "As a proud member of Palermo 4-H, I have had the great opportunity to help the environment and our community by being an active carpenter in building nesting boxes."

The Butte County 4-H Youth Development Program is composed of local youth (K-19) that can choose to learn about a variety of trades depending on their interest. For example, 4-H members interested in wood working help construct these nesting boxes for use by owls, wood ducks, bats, and songbirds. The 4-H members are included early on in the building process to ensure complete involvement. They begin by learning how to read design specifications and measuring the lumber to be cut. They finish with an understanding of how to safely operate machinery and how to assemble a product. "In the process of building I have learned how to use a tape measure, square, saw, drill, and hammer correctly," said Rosales.

Their involvement doesn't stop there. Each box sold raises funds that go directly back into their 4-H club to support the many activities the 4-H Youth Development Program prides itself in providing their members. So when a 4-H member builds a nesting box they are actually raising money to learn anything from how to care for cattle, sheep, goats, and horses, to fine tuning their skills in another trade such as sewing. The funds are also directed to help the members get the most out of their program. "This has benefited the community by providing scholarships for 4-H Summer Camp, and high school graduates," said Rosales. "It also has allowed us [the 4-H members] to help with some of the maintenance on the grange where we meet." Rosales concluded by saying,

"One of the most important things we have learned is how to work as a team to accomplish our goals and help nature."



Rachael Bryson, Soil Conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service, works with a multitude of land managers in Butte County to promote conservation practices. “The farmers and ranchers we work with are eager to install nesting boxes for barn owls, specifically, to encourage these cavity nesters to take up residence on their farms and ranches because they help to naturally control the rodent populations,” said Bryson.

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife has confirmed that this natural method is much less harmful than applying rodenticide which is still widely used and has actually been found to harm scavenging birds such as owls. Moreover, using owls as a natural rodenticide can be extremely efficient. It has been found that one pair of barn owls can consume up to 2,000 rodents a year! Owls have also been known to nest in the same site repeatedly.

Unfortunately in the western United States, barn owls are thought to be limited by the availability of suitable nesting sites. “There are very few cavities suitable for nesting on a typical farm so there is a great opportunity to increase the habitat value for these beneficial species by installing these nesting boxes,” said Bryson.



Sample Owl Nesting Box
Source: <http://cbrp.org/SDBluebirds/owl.htm>

When asked how these nesting boxes provide specific habitat, Bryson explained, “Each of these boxes has been designed to provide a suitable cavity for nesting as well as to provide protection from predators like raccoons.” The RCD also provides specific installation instructions to help make sure that the boxes are installed in a manner that encourages the desired species to inhabit the space.

Kelly Peterson, District Manager of the RCD, could not be more pleased with the partnership. “The wildlife nesting boxes are located right here in the [RCD’s] office where any county resident interested in providing wildlife habitat on their property can purchase boxes directly,” said Peterson.

“I think folks feel good about buying these especially knowing that their money is going to help local 4-H youth learn anything from how to weld to how they can better serve their community,” Peterson said. “A small portion of the funds also help us [the RCD] continue this partnership and provide conservation projects throughout the county!”

This not-for-profit is determined to identify more partnerships like this that promote community involvement in conservation issues and provide local youth with valuable experiences. Interested in helping your local 4-H Youth Development Program and RCD by purchasing a wildlife nesting box, please contact the RCD at bc-rcd@carcd.org. Orders can also be made online through our website at <http://buttecountyrpd.org/>.

- OTHER WAYS TO HELP -

We are currently seeking donations from local businesses to help provide food and water for volunteers on future work days. Donations include:

- Any \$ amount
- In-kind donations

Please see the section titled “How to Donate“ for more information on donations and how your support helps us!

AmeriCorps Conservation Associate reaches out to citizens for involvement in water issues

For Butte County residents, February’s rain was an all too familiar occasion that did not come often enough this winter. This spring the RCD was proactive by pushing to mobilize and educate citizens about the importance to protect the little water we do have.

May 31st, 2014 was the RCD’s third River & Trail Cleanup Day that involved volunteers from all over Butte County to help remove litter from the Feather River in Oroville, Ca. Since the program’s inception, over 70 volunteers have removed 73 large bags of

litter and one shopping cart from Butte County waterways! Follow the link below for Channel 7's coverage of our Cesar Chavez Cleanup Day (<http://www.krcrtv.com/news/local/oroville-park-cleanup-honors-cesar-chavez/25240444>).

Aside from coordinating river cleanups, the RCD's Conservation Associate, Sam Rossi, has been visiting community groups in the area to promote such conservation topics as invasive weed eradication, watershed pollution, and wildfire risk. The hope is to educate people on the impact each of the topics pose to their water quality and supply.



Sadie Jones, volunteer, helps remove litter from Riverbend Park in Oroville, CA.

Rossi attended a homeowner's association meeting in Forest Ranch to shed light on their invasive weed problem and how it threatens their water supply. As Rossi put it during the meeting, "The invasive weed known as broom, presents you all with a more serious issue other than wildfire hazard." "Broom requires more water than the competitor plants that grow next to it which eventually threatens your water supply."

He and the RCD have concentrated their efforts to help the Broom Education and Eradication Program (BEEP) by recruiting volunteers to address the watershed issue. When asked why he views broom infestations as a watershed problem, Rossi replied by saying, "Broom's resilient characteristics allow it to produce ample supplies of tiny seeds with hard outer shells that make it readily transportable from Forest Ranch down the creek to Bidwell Park in Chico." Moreover, broom seeds can remain viable for years, even decades which stresses the importance of removal of the species now. "I believe our actions now are necessary to protect what water is currently in our lakes, rivers, and aquifers so that farmers, ranchers, and residents alike may have a quality supply of water for generations to come."

While at the RCD he has been working to involve the Chico community in such issues. Whether it has been presenting opportunities at the California Conservation Corps local headquarters, or informing students in CSU Chico's Water Resources Policy and Planning class about the negative aspects of invasive weeds, water has been a central topic that has seemed to motivate people to volunteer.

If your group, classroom, or after school program is looking for new ways to engage students in environmental education, the Butte County RCD can help! Rossi, is eager to build new relationships with organizations involved in education through the use of the Butte County RCD's EnviroScape® Watershed Model.

About Butte County RCD

Since 2002, the Butte County RCD has worked with and acted as a liaison between willing private landowners, organizations, and agencies (especially the USDA NRCS) to offer a variety of programs that meet land management goals while also working towards natural resource and agriculture conservation objectives. These efforts are not only beneficial to the unique plant communities, pristine waterways, and diverse wildlife populations Butte County has to offer; they are also regarded as cost-effective management practices by local landowners.



Kelly Peterson, District Manager

The Butte County RCD has partnered with local, county, regional, state, and federal organizations to successfully complete projects related to forestry, fire prevention, erosion control, grazing, wildlife restoration, agriculture, land conservation, invasive

species control, and environmental education in an effort to educate the public, manage lands, and conserve natural resources. Kelly Peterson joined the Butte County RCD team in 2011 as the District Manager and has worked diligently to secure the Butte County RCD's important role in the county.

Director Highlight

The Butte County RCD is governed by a five member Board of Directors; one from each supervisory district. The Board is made up of local land owners, ranchers, and farmers. Directors are appointed by the Butte County Board of Supervisors on their strengths as active partners in the conservation community.



Wes is our second Board Member to be featured in our "Director Highlight" section and serves as a Director. Wes has very deep roots in the land and a lifelong commitment to conservation issues in California. He grew up on a family owned wheat and row crop farm in Butte County near the Dayton/Four-Corners area. He is a graduate of California State University Chico in Civil Engineering. From 1986-1991 he was the Glenn County Director of Public Works. From 1991-2006 he owned and managed a private engineering and surveying firm in Chico, which he sold to Lumos and Associates, where he worked as the Engineering/Survey Manager until 2012. Since then he has served as the Principal of W Gilbert Engineering providing civil engineering and land surveying services to Butte County.

Directors:

Mary Ann Thompson appointed by Bill Connelly
District 1

Wes Gilbert appointed by Larry Wahl
District 2

Colleen Hatfield appointed by Maureen Kirk
District 3

Terrell Storm appointed by Steve Lambert
District 4

Dave Lee appointed by Doug Teeter
District 5

Associate Directors:

Rod Carter
Rob Mackenzie
Bill Kellogg

Contact

If you would like to join our mailing list please contact Kelly Peterson at bc-rcd@carcd.org. If you have any other questions concerning your community and the Butte County RCD, please feel free to contact us!

Can We Survey You About Our Newsletter?

We here at the Butte County RCD are interested in receiving your feedback concerning our newsletter. The survey is one short question that would substantially help the future of the AmeriCorps partnership and secure conservation projects here in Butte County! Please follow the link below to take our survey!

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/JGSLM8X>

Next Regular Board Meeting

The next special Board Meeting is scheduled for June 24th, 2014. The meeting is from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. and is held in the Butte County Farm Bureau Conference Room at 2580 Feather River Blvd in Oroville. Public comment is encouraged!

- How to Donate -

Go to the Butte County RCD's website (<http://buttecountyrcd.org/>) and click on the green box found on the left margin just below the heading, "Resources".

In appreciation of your contribution your name and/or name of your business will appear on the BCRCD's website and promotional materials as a valued partner, as well as a hyperlink to your personal and/or business website(s) depending on your level of sponsorship. All donations will receive a follow up letter describing how the donation was specifically used.

Remember, the Butte County RCD is a not-for-profit organization that exists based on contributions large and small. That being said, any amount really does help the Butte County RCD improve Butte County natural resources for all. Donations also help the critical projects drafted by the AmeriCorps member by supporting the continued funding of the Butte County RCD's partnership with the SNAP program.

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