

The Lower Eel River: Restoration, Recreation, and Education

Recently, Friends of the Van Duzen River received two grants collaborating with the Eel River Recovery Project (ERRP), Loleta Eric's Guide Service, and the Kiwanis Club of Fortuna. The first grant from the Rose Foundation entitled the Lower Eel River Salmon Parkway concentrates on three elements: Restoration, Recreation, and Education. The Rose grant is a collaborative endeavor to engage cities, agencies, environmental groups, Native Americans, private business, and community members in dialogue, meetings, proposals and actions to protect the critical habitat of the Eel River, home to the endangered salmon. The vision of Pat Higgins, ERRP Director, the grant will develop the Salmon Parkway trail from Fortuna to Loleta, and educate local students in grades K-16 to become the next generation of stewards protecting the Eel River.

As the staging area, the lower Eel serves a significant role in the magical and mystical migration of the sacred salmon. Local guide and naturalist Eric Stockwell has been a significant contributor to the study of the Eel River for his entire lifetime. Eric has been taking key individuals from the agencies and the community on guided tours of the Lower Eel. Critical habitat changes have taken place in the past year including the filling of the Boxcar Hole and the separation of the Drake hole for the first time in recent history. Using the Rose Foundation grant, Eric has been presenting his findings to a significant group of city officials, agencies, environmental organizations, and private industry in the hopes of finding solutions to restoration of the Lower Eel before a dangerous fish kill takes place. The good news is that the first run of chinook have made it to the healthy 12th Street hole as we await the thousands of salmon set to return.

We are at a key point in history. Save the Redwoods League is celebrating its 100th anniversary. The Wild and Scenic River Act which includes the Eel and the Van Duzen Rivers is celebrating its 50th anniversary. Rails to Trails is now a viable alternative to improve our recreation and quality of life in Humboldt County. Led by Merritt Perry, the city of Fortuna has been very supportive in efforts to expand the current trails. Recent California legislation has dissolved much of the railroad lines and together we are seeking ways to expand recreational possibilities in the Fortuna to Fernbridge area.

Working with Autumn Chapman, the new Superintendent/Principal of Loleta Elementary, we are about to break new ground in our commitment to environmental education on the North Coast. Combining Mrs. Chapman's scientific background including working at the Scripps Institute as a young woman with Friends of the Van Duzen's classroom and field work experience, we are developing a Watershed Science classroom to serve as a model for Humboldt County and beyond.

Environmental education has been a key element in California schools this decade. The concept of STEM, science-technology-engineering-mathematics, has become an important part of the scope and sequence of education. Using the concept developed by Barbara Domanchuk, a key member of the Friends of the Van Duzen River, we are adding Ecology with the Arts so that STEM becomes STEAM.

The Kiwanis Club of Fortuna is very active in issues affecting the local community. Loleta Elementary school volunteer librarian, Janice Simmons provided an opportunity to write a successful grant. Receiving \$1000, we developed two programs, Artists in the Schools and Poet in the Schools.

Following a field trip to Crab Park, Virginia Wood, Morris Graves, Art on the Road will be developing collaborative estuary drawings in two parts with one group drawing below the water and one above.

Then in November, using good quality brushes from the grant, local artist Abbie Perrott will be working with the Art Club students to develop ocean and river water color paintings.

Dan Levinson, California Poet in the Schools recently conducted a one-week poetry workshop in grade 5/6 and 7/8. His recent book Songs of Six Rivers is available in current book stores. Enclosed is one of the student's poems.

It's an exciting time for the Loleta Elementary School and the lower Eel community!

Sal Steinberg, Community Coordinator Friends of the Van Duzen River, Watershed Educator

Old Growth Forest

In a forest,
lost in time,
I find a nest,
lost to the ages upon the ground.

I go there to walk,
think and dream.

I see the forest,
and its trees,
all unseen,
from everyone,
except me,
silently I leave.

—Adia Sand, 6th Grade