



Spring 2019

SPAWNERS

San Pablo Watershed Neighbors Education and Restoration Society

Wilkie Creek: The History of a Park, Continued

Donald Bastin



In our last issue, we traced the beginnings of our Wilkie Creek park site, leaving off in early 2009, with little more than some sketchy plans and three small oak trees, that had been planted ten years before by Martha Berthelsen and students from Valley View Elementary School. This photo was taken about a year and a half later. By this time we had become amateur landscape designers, and here we see some young volunteers laying out a walking path from the road to a circular area that would become an “outdoor classroom.” The idea was that

students from De Anza and other local schools would meet here with their teachers and learn something about the natural world in their midst. The three oak trees are visible (one tree is just poking into the picture at the left). Even after more than ten years, they have yet to become more than good sized shrubs.

Here we see the same site about a year later, in August of 2011. The “classroom” is taking shape with the addition of five benches, and logs which define the space, and the pathway. New plantings, all native, are now visible in front of the dogwood trees along the pathway at the right, and will be supplemented by more growth as the years progress. The oaks are growing, but the little fellow in the center seems to be having a hard time keeping up.



Like any park or garden, our site requires regular maintenance and upkeep. Every year, in late winter or early spring, we have to pull and weed-whack the weeds (mostly non-native grasses) that grow so vigorously. Naturally we don't want to use any herbicide, and we don't want to add to the noise and air pollution by using a gas whacker. So we purchased a couple of electric whackers, and a lot of batteries. They do a surprisingly good job. We also have had a problem with the benches. They were cemented in place, but, apparently, not well enough to discourage some playful park users from pulling them out of the ground. Several hundred pounds of added concrete seem to have served as a deterrent, but we have also had to deal with bench damage and the inevitable graffiti. All parks have to deal with this kind of problem, it seems.

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By 2013 the park was beginning to shape up nicely. The new plantings along the pathway were beginning to fill in. At the center left is a toyon planted about a year before. And, finally, the spindly middle oak is beginning to take off. Though not visible, we had also begun to plant some native trees (buckeye, elderberry, toyon and madrone) along the hillside sloping up to the chain link fence that borders De Anza High. To discourage hungry deer, we installed wire cages around each tree (a bit of a cage can just be seen at the lower left of this photo).



Late July, 2012: Installation of interpretive sign at the Wilkie Creek site. Women, from left: Martha Bertelsen, Clementina Diaz, Judy Ward, Gudron Kleist. Men, from left: Dick Bush, and the late Holger Bertelsen.

In our next issue we will wrap up this mini-history of Wilkie Creek park, showing its appearance at present, and featuring the feedback of some of our favorite visitors, students from local schools.

Calendar of Events

3rd Saturday Volunteer Work Parties

May 18, 9:30 am – 12:00 noon

*Wilkie Creek site, 4805 Santa Rita Rd.
Richmond, CA, 94803*

Join us at our Wilkie Creek restoration site where we have been building a native plant ecosystem since 2010. No experience necessary. People with all levels of experience are welcome. Wear sturdy shoes, comfortable work clothes, and bring a water bottle. SPAWNERS will provide tools, gloves, and snacks.

Nature Walk With Bob Flasher

June 4, 5:30 pm – 7:30 pm

Bear Creek Staging Area, Briones Regional Park

Join naturalist Bob Flasher for a nature walk where we'll learn about benthic macro-invertebrates, bottom-dwelling creek bugs that indicate water quality. We'll follow Bear Creek Trail across the creek and through beautiful oak and bay woodlands; one section is moderately steep downhill so please bring hiking poles if you need them.

Directions: Meet at the Bear Creek Staging Area in Briones Regional Park. From San Pablo Dam Road, take Bear Creek Road east for 4 miles. Turn right on Briones Valley Road, ¼ mile past Happy Valley Road (signs for Bear Creek Staging Area). Park in the first parking area on the right, and meet at the nearby tables. Sorry, no dogs allowed.

Helpful numbers:

Broken hydrant or street flooding: 1-866-40-EBMUD
Debris dumped in the creek: 1-800-No-Dumping