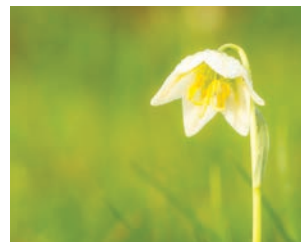


# OSA Outlook



SPRING 2017



## Is the Drought Behind Us?

At the start of 2016, 100 percent of California was in varying states of drought. According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, that number has dropped to about 24 percent, with the Bay Area and further north enjoying most of the reprieve. The question remains whether the drought can be declared over.

"This year may be a wet one, but we should continue our long-term march toward greater water conservation," said John Varela, chair of the Santa Clara Valley Water District Board, "We will certainly have more dry years in the future—maybe even next year." He added that people should VOW, as in Value Our Water, to make permanent changes that save water such as replacing high water using landscapes with California friendly ones.

The Coyote Valley, a 7,500 acre natural and agricultural landscape between south San Jose and Morgan Hill contains the Laguna Seca, the largest freshwater marsh remaining in the South Bay. But this area was anything but dry ("Seca") during the 2016-2017 storms. As pictured above, this winter it filled for the first time in years, attracting birds and wildlife and reminding us of nature at our doorstep and what the area looked like over 100 years ago.



*Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve - South Meadow Restoration Project*

### In the Preserves – Spring

Winter's drenching storms provided a testing ground for the meadow restoration project at Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve and the results are in. The restoration has successfully slowed the flow of rainwater and greatly reduced erosion, and the water now filters through the soil, percolating down to the aquifer underlying the valley. By refilling the aquifer, we help ensure Santa Clara Valley farms and residents have access to clean water even in times of drought.

The meadow project restored 8.5 acres of the Coyote Creek watershed, removing the agricultural drainage ditches and reshaping the creek. The white lines in the photo above are erosion control wattles that will biodegrade once the plants and their roots are established. The small pond on the right captures water runoff from the hillside, providing drinking water for wildlife. The grassy green meadow is in a fragile state – so please enjoy the view and stay off the grass!

who  
am I  
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My house, which is made of sticks, could be as big as a human, but I'm only a little longer than a foot. You might spot these houses in Sierra Vista Open Space Preserve. I usually live there by myself, although some mice might room with me. I've lined the inside with leaves, including those from the California bay laurel tree, which contain compounds thought to ward off ticks and mites.





## A Lichen Whisperer

Volunteer docent Cait Hutnik has a soft spot for the little guys—pond turtles, dragonflies and even lichen, an unsung hero of the forest. Cait began by taking photos of preserves and shortly after she began leading themed hikes in Sierra Vista and Rancho Cañada del Oro.

“The Open Space Authority gives volunteers the opportunity to explore their passions,” she said. She discovered lichen during dry winters when the mushrooms weren’t as abundant. Spotting the thriving lichen, she decided to dig deeper.

“I find lichen very beautiful in how it expresses itself,” she said. “I realize how important to nature they are. They act as carbon sinks. With their ability to clean the air they are very valuable.”

She calls lichen the “flipside to wildflowers.” While wildflowers are ephemeral, lichen will live in the same spot for a very long time, and can be photographed over the course of a year. Cait was recently recognized by the Lichen Society for promoting awareness and appreciation for lichen.

## Nature Photographer Extraordinaire

Retired electrical engineer Ron Horii uses his photography skills to open people’s eyes to the wonders of our big backyard. He has been walking the preserves and taking photos since the Authority’s inception in 1993.

“I’ve always enjoyed taking pictures of nature,” he said. “When I’d go hiking for exercise, I’d stop and take pictures of the scenery—flowers, water, trees.” As an Open Space docent, he teaches photography and how to view the many facets of the natural world through a camera lens.



Ron’s exquisite landscape photos have gained public attention and enticed more people to explore the natural world. “With more people out on the trails, the demand for conservation and open space will continue to grow,” he said.



Photo by Ron Horii

## Gardening Tips for Edible Native Plants

From low-lying ground cover to flowers that pop with flavor and trees heavy with fruit, Santa Clara Valley produces many edible plants that were once staples of the indigenous diet. While it’s not advisable to go foraging in woods or meadows, you can seed edible plant species in your backyard. The California Native Garden Foundation in San Jose shared these tips:

### Ground Cover

Miner’s lettuce and watercress are low-lying plants that pop up quickly. Miner’s lettuce has a mild flavor, almost like iceberg, while watercress has a more distinct peppery taste – both make delicious salads.



### Flowers and Grass

Clarkia, tarweed, Indian ricegrass, and red maids, known for a crimson flower that holds oil-rich seeds, are native to the Valley. Seeds can be toasted or smashed and blended with honey and mesquite flour to create tasty, healthy homemade energy bars.

### Vines, Trees, Cacti

Wild California grape leaves and ripe fruit are edible and the vines can create secluded spaces and whimsy in your



yard. An elderberry tree may take time to grow but both the purple fruit and white flower can be eaten. The syrup of elderberry is a folk remedy for flu symptoms. The large red fruit of the prickly pear and the pokey paddles make for “superfoods.” The juice from the fruit is used in jelly and cocktails or vinaigrette.



El Toro Peak

## Open Space Protection Expands Opportunities for Outdoor Recreation, Agriculture and Wildlife Habitat in South County

### Scaling the Mountain

A long-held vision for land conservation and easily accessible recreation came closer to fruition with the Open Space Authority’s purchase of a 6.63-acre property at the base of the iconic El Toro Peak in Morgan Hill. The City of Morgan Hill contributed to the purchase by providing half of the funds. Since 2009, the Authority and the City of Morgan Hill have worked closely to prepare for opportunities that move us forward in implementing the Santa Clara Valley Greenprint and the City’s plan for a public trail that will connect more people with nature and showcase the sweeping views of the mountain. Additional possibilities include a trail winding up the hill through beautiful oaks and grassland, ultimately reaching El Toro Peak.

### Pajaro River Agricultural Preserve

With grant funding from the Pajaro River Watershed Flood Prevention Authority, the Authority purchased 100.6 acres of productive farmland near the Upper Pajaro River. The property lies within the Soap Lake Floodplain, one of ten critical conservation focus areas identified in the Santa Clara Valley Greenprint. Its permanent protection as open space will allow improvement for downstream flood protection.

The Authority foresees restoring portions of the property along the Pajaro River to enhance habitat for nesting birds, improve water quality, and improve the habitat linkage along Llagas Creek and the Upper Pajaro between the Santa Cruz Mountains and Diablo Range. The Authority intends to keep the land in active farm production by leasing to a farmer.



Pajaro River Agricultural Preserve almost entirely under water during 1955 flood.



nearly 105,000 acres of public lands into a contiguous network from north of the Santa Clara County line to Pinnacles National Park in San Benito County.

In early 2016, Santa Clara County Parks purchased the Coyote Highlands-Coyote Canyon property for \$25.16 million, with a contribution of \$500,000 in Measure Q funds from the Open Space Authority. The Authority also secured a \$2 million grant from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation to help fund the purchase. As part of the contribution, the Authority secured a conservation easement over the property to further ensure its protection.





## Human and Natural Communities Heal from Loma Fire and Winter Storms

Plant and animal communities experienced devastating impacts from the Loma Fire — and their story is still being written. Chaparral scrub, hardwood forests, grasslands and oak communities all burned during the fall fire — but nature has a way of healing itself, even if it takes some time.

Galli Basson, the Authority's Resource Management Specialist, said that certain plant communities, like chaparral scrub, are normally fire receptive but regrowth may not follow typical patterns because of the years-long drought. "We're expecting some rare species to pop up," she said. "It will be interesting to see what plants come back, and whether they are native or invasive."

Animals experienced major changes to their habitat as a result of the fire and rainstorms. For example, foothill yellow-legged frogs that live downstream in Llagas Creek may be impacted by debris that has washed into waterways. A survey taken last summer before the fire shows a robust population of the species, which is a state species of special concern, said Basson. The frogs need slow-flowing water and deeper, clear pools with rocky bottoms to deposit their eggs from spring to summer.

"We'll have to see what happens with Llagas Creek when they are ready to breed," she said.

The local human community breathed a collective sigh of relief on October 11, when the Loma Fire was contained after burning for nearly two weeks. Proactive land clearing by residents and the Authority helped save people's homes from the fire. Twelve homes were destroyed and a total of 4,475 acres burned but, thankfully, no lives were lost.

Mark Wiley, a Casa Loma resident for six years and a volunteer firefighter, said that the fire was definitely not a surprise for most residents — especially after so many dry years — but the "water that came was, for some people, more devastating."

"It was really a double whammy between the fire and the unprecedented amount of rain," he said. "The fire was intense and there is a long road ahead for getting fixed up. One of the silver linings is the way the community has come together."

During the fire, the Authority opened staging areas to accommodate residents, said Megan Robinson, Supervising Open Space Technician. "We were in a position to provide the residents with a place to stay close to their homes, offer a listening ear and help out wherever we could."

The Open Space Authority's land management team has been busy monitoring and reporting on roads and hillsides at risk of mudslides and clearing and repairing trails damaged by fire and rainstorms.

"Our main concern has been visitor safety and maintaining the infrastructure of our trail system," said Andy Burnside, Open Space Technician. "We've had a steady flow of visitors since the storms ended and our trails and preserves are just about back to normal."







## Celebrate the Earth

In 1969, three million gallons of oil spilled off the coast of Santa Barbara, and a monumental movement was born. Devastating photos of birds and animals covered in oil raised awareness nationwide and incited passion for protecting the natural environment. That year, Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson and a network of grassroots groups created the nation's first Earth Day. It was dubbed a "teach-in" day on environmental matters.

On April 22, 1970, more than 20 million people joined in coast-to-coast demonstrations in hopes of protecting the Earth. Policy work and environmental regulation such as the Endangered Species, Clean Air and Clean Water Acts soon followed.

Nearly a half century later, Earth Day spurs action all over the world. People gather for beach and river cleanups, tree plantings and guided hikes. School children pick up trash and seminars and demonstrations educate people about threats to wildlife, water and air quality and climate change.

Locally, environmentally conscious communities do their part year-round by exceeding water conservation targets, protecting native species and working toward a sustainable future. Our open spaces, waterways, native plants and local wildlife depend on all of us to take action and no activity is too small. Celebrate the Earth by making a difference in your community, April 22, 2017.

who  
am I  
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**ANSWER:** I'm a dusky-footed woodrat, named for my sooty gray feet. My tail is lightly covered with fur and I have long whiskers and rounded ears. I'm found from Oregon through California primarily in oak woodlands. It's important not to disturb my stick home, but if you peered inside (please don't - how rude!), you'd spot chambers for storing food and leaves connected by tunnels, as well as an area I use as a latrine.

### April 15, San Jose

The Coyote Creek Cleanup is an all-ages event. Volunteers will pull trash from the banks of the creek. Visit [keepcoyotecreekbeautiful.com](http://keepcoyotecreekbeautiful.com)

### April 22, San Jose

The Great American Litter Pick-Up is celebrated with neighborhood and park cleanups across the city. Each of the 10 council districts chooses areas to work on as a community. Check with your council representative for more details.

### April 22, Campbell

The Great Diaper Cloth Change draws attention to the billions of disposable diapers tossed in landfills each year and also attempts to break a world record for most cloth diapers changed at one time. Visit [downtowncampbell.com](http://downtowncampbell.com)

### April 22, Gilroy

A 5K Fun Run encourages outdoor activity and the recycle, reuse, reduce, repurpose mantra. Participants can walk, run, or hop to the finish line to receive medals made from recyclables. Go to [cityofgilroy.org](http://cityofgilroy.org) for more info.



### April 29, Watsonville

Summit for the Planet is a walk-a-thon, learning expo and eco-carnival aimed at engaging all ages. Learn about what's new in sustainability. Visit [summitfortheplanet.org](http://summitfortheplanet.org)



## POLICY

### Wildlife Corridor Protection Gaining Momentum

A growing interest in wildlife protection at the state level was evident at a legislative briefing held in January which drew 60 attendees from both houses. Current and proposed legislation that offers protection for wildlife corridors include the following:

- Current \$3.5B parks bonds include language specific to funding of wildlife corridors
- AB 1630 (Asym Richard Bloom) would set requirements for Caltrans and CA Department of Fish and Wildlife to collaborate on accommodating wildlife in Caltrans infrastructure projects
- AB 498 (Levine) passed in 2015 encourages protection of wildlife corridors and establishes grounds for denying regulatory permits if wildlife corridors are not protected

Protection of wildlife corridors and connected habitats aim to help native



species such as gray fox, mountain lions and bobcats, and others, continue to find places to safely live, breed and forage. Creating linkages also helps preserve genetic diversity among migrating animals. Coyote Valley and the Upper Pajaro River Valley are local examples of critical wildlife corridors.

## Outdoor Learning – Free and Easy!

The Open Space Authority offers a wide variety of classroom, library and outdoor education programs. The benefits of outdoor, hands-on learning are countless. What better way to learn about nature than with a trail underfoot and a fresh breeze across your face? Educational aides, along with our volunteer docents, play an amazing role at the Open Space Authority, allowing us to offer free learning activities to the community. Meet our new educational aide on board this spring: Michelle Domocol.

Michelle hails from the East Coast and has fallen head over heels for California's diverse landscapes, native species and microclimates. That love runs deep and she devotes her time to collecting all the information she can about our Valley and sharing with others.

She hopes that by joining the Authority's seasonal team, she can "impart knowledge" to the community and use her California Naturalist Certification to its fullest. Her degree in Environmental Resource Management might also come in handy.

Having been interested in interpretive education for some time, Domocol has worked as an environmental consultant, a landscape designer and with other local agencies such as Veggielution.

"I treasure any opportunity I have to help protect the Santa Clara Valley and the Bay Area—anything that preserves our environment," she said.



**"I treasure any opportunity I have to help protect the Santa Clara Valley and the Bay Area—anything that preserves our environment."**




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## Starry Nights

Saturday, May 20, 2017  
9:15 to 10:45 p.m.

Rancho Cañada del Oro  
Open Space Preserve

4289 Casa Loma Road,  
Morgan Hill

Join astronomers from the San Jose Astronomical Association for a peaceful and cool evening out under the stars. Feel all your stress melt away as you look at the Milky Way from our parking lot. We have lots telescopes so no gear of your own is needed. Please dress warm and bring water to drink and a flashlight if you like. This is a family friendly event, but probably best for children 5 years and older. Please, no touching the telescopes or eyepieces. No smoking, pets, or photography are allowed at this event. Rain or clouds cancel.