

# The Community VOICE

Rohnert Park, Cotati, & Penngrove

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Exploring the byways, bikeways and habitat of the Southern Laguna Watershed

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Once you become interested in your local creek (where does it come from, where does it go to, what wildlife lives here and why?), whole new worlds open up, whether your interest is in plants, birds, water quality, in the lie of the land, or encouraging children to explore the natural world.

This semester, Cotati Creek Critters has taken on seven interns from Sonoma State University, all of whom are taking classes in Environmental Conservation and Restoration.

One is especially interested in helping to inspire children to learn about nature, another will help develop a Spanish-language outreach program, another is interested in learning and teaching others about plant identification and uses. Another is taking classes in GPS and GIS (Global Positioning Systems and Geographic Information Systems) and will set up a system to help us monitor plants, to improve our records and data on plant survival rates. Creeks can take one in many different directions, as well as creating the realization that everything is connected.

These interconnections create many opportunities for collaboration. Some of the connections are obvious, like those around water and plants. Cotati Creek Critters has teamed up in various ways and at different times with the California Native Plant Society, the Native Plant Propagation class at SSU and the National Wildlife Federation's Backyard Habitat gardening program. Each winter the Critters, along with hundreds of other volunteers throughout the Russian River watershed, participate in the Russian River First Flush water quality monitoring event.

Other connections are less obvious. Like bicycling - what has bicycling to do with creeks?

It's surprising how few people realize that there's a network of off-road bicycle routes waiting to be discovered alongside some of our local creeks. For the past few summers, CCC has held a Creek Bike Ride to introduce people to some of the off-road bicycling opportunities in Cotati and Rohnert Park. For example along Copeland Creek, there is a tour with stops along the way to talk about hydrology and geology.

On April 6 we're teaming up with the Sonoma County Bicycling Coalition to host a ride called "Exploring the Byways, Bikeways and Habitat of the Southern Laguna Watershed." This will be part of SCBC's "Spandex-free bike rides" series. Kate Symonds, who works on a habitat restoration program with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, will be with us to help interpret what we see.

Bicycle riding is a great way to enjoy the countryside and this ride is mostly on fairly flat, level ground, so it will be relatively gentle and easy-going, with plenty of stops along the way to enjoy and learn about the landscapes we pass by.

Bicycling is good, healthy exercise. It's an excellent mode of transport. With my bicycle bags I can carry four bagfuls of groceries at one go. With a trailer I could do more.

Once you've got your bicycle the maintenance costs are minimal. Cycling offers an exceptional degree of freedom and independence - and no more worries about where to park! It's fun, and it puts you more closely in touch with the life around you than sitting inside a metal box on wheels.

If you're not already an avid cyclist, and would like to explore some of our local countryside in the company of others, this could be the experience that could convert you.

With every trip by bicycle that replaces one by car, we're also saving on fuel, pollution, carbon dioxide emissions and our individual contributions to the changing climate.

Depending partly on the level of interest in this bike ride, CCC may expand our collaboration with Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition to include rides to other field trips later in the summer, including to the Sonoma County Wildlife Rescue Center in June, and to Shollenberger Park in July when we'll be observing western pond turtles with Dr. Nick Geist from SSU. Watch this space for details.

To join the April 6 "Exploring the Byways, Bikeways and Habitat of the Southern Laguna Watershed" bike ride, register with [jenny@creeks.cotati.info](mailto:jenny@creeks.cotati.info) or 792-4422.

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