

Print Page

Exploration and Reconnaissance of future trails

By Joe Honton

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If you've ever wanted to explore the creeks and byways of your local neighborhood, now's a good time to do it. Visionary planners from the Cotati Creek Critters and the Laguna Foundation will walk along three nearby creeks in July as they explore the possibilities for a future network of public access trails. Community participants are invited to join the group as they walk along the creeks.

The Cotati Creek Critters has a long-standing program that connects community volunteers with their project to enhance the stretch of the Laguna de Santa Rosa that passes through Cotati. Jenny Blaker, one of the founders of the Critters, will co-lead this summer's hike.

The Laguna Foundation has recently published "Enhancing and Caring for the Laguna," a plan for the restoration and management of the watershed that encompasses Rohnert Park, Cotati, and the surrounding Sonoma County countryside. Joe Honton, project manager at the Laguna Foundation who helped developed the plan, will join Blaker in leading the hike.

The Rohnert Park City Council has convened a Creeks Master Plan subcommittee to develop a regional plan for its many miles of urban creeks. One of the projects that fits within this master plan is the Copeland Creek multi-use trail that will be constructed soon using funding from Measure M.

The opportunity to develop biking and hiking trails along the creeks in the area has recently become more of a possibility. Several creeks west of Highway 101 join the Laguna de Santa Rosa as their combined waters begin their long journey to the Pacific Ocean via the Russian River. These creeks include Gossage, Washoe, Copeland, Hunter, Five, Hinebaugh and Bellevue-Wilfred.

Most of these creeks are maintained by the Sonoma County Water Agency, which has built access roads along the levees that protect nearby properties from flooding. These access roads are ready-made for becoming hiking trails. The agency has recently suggested a willingness to open these formerly closed areas for this purpose.

Community participants interested in joining this reconnaissance effort can meet the leaders at 9 a.m. by the accordion player in La Plaza Park, to carpool to the starting point west of Hwy 101. Email jenny@creeks.cotati.info or call 792-4422 if you plan to come. The walk will be about three miles long and will take about two and one-half hours. Wear sturdy footwear, a hat, and sunscreen.

The Laguna Foundation works to improve the ecological health of the Laguna de Santa Rosa, Sonoma County's richest wildlife area, and to inspire appreciation and enjoyment of this unique natural treasure. Visit them at <http://www.lagunadesantarosa.org>.

Joe Honton is the Watershed Outreach and Data Manager for the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation. He is also co-author of the Foundation's Ecological Restoration and Management Plan.

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