

Restoring a crucial creek



By [MARTIN ESPINOZA](#)
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Published: Sunday, January 9, 2011 at 3:00 a.m.
Last Modified: Sunday, January 9, 2011 at 10:21 a.m.

The self-named Cotati Creek Critters were out in force Saturday, helping to restore a crucial Sonoma County waterway.

More Photos:

- [Cotati Creek Critters](#)

For the record, the volunteer critters walked upright and the waterway was the Laguna de Santa Rosa, not the nearby Cotati Creek.

Volunteers pulled non-native ivy and planted an underbrush of California Fescue on the upper banks of the channel, located at Liman Way, just north of Myrtle Avenue. The spot is considered

the southernmost border of the Laguna, as well as the highest elevation of the watershed, said Wade Belew, stewardship coordinator for Cotati Creek Critters.

“Everything that you do from this point out has an impact as you go downstream,” Belew said.

The year-round work done by the group includes removing garbage from the creek and planting trees and shrubs or ground-level plants. Much of the tree planting in and near the channel was done between 2005 and 2008. The hope is that in another five years, a canopy of branches, shrubs and leaves will grow and cover the channel, cooling the water and creating a more ideal habitat for wildlife.

Belew said the non-native Ivy has a “waxy texture” that attracts snails, which are a favorite food for rats. Belew said it's common to see large piles of snail shells along the channel where roof rats and sewer rats have been feasting.

California Fescue is a perennial plant that, when it takes hold of the soil, will last decades and grow deep roots that augment the ground's water absorption properties and reduce soil erosion.

If there were more fescue in the watershed, “we would have less flooding and more water going into the water table,” said Belew, who is also president of the California Native Grasslands Association.

The restoration program effort drew the interest of a number of volunteers, including Azael Gonzalez, a 29-year-old Cotati resident, who said he heard about the restoration effort on the radio.

“I had nothing else to do, so I figure I'd come out and help,” said Azael, an unemployed landscaper and “jack of all trades.”

Cotati Creek Critters holds its Creek Stewardship Days on the second Saturday of every month, with the next scheduled for Feb. 12.

Tasks may include caring for existing plants by weeding, mulching, and watering, planting trees and shrubs or understory plants, removing invasive plants and plant care and propagation in the nursery. Other tasks include refurbishing used tools.

For more information, contact jenny@creeks.cotati.info or 707-792-4422.