

Restoring Native Species in the Stevens Creek Corridor



Over the last 30 years, projects big and small have been bringing back native species in the Stevens Creek Corridor. While the Santa Clara Valley Water District, California Department of Water Resources, California Department of Fish and Wildlife and other agencies provided funding and expertise to the big restoration projects, none of this would have happened without community support, and the many volunteers and nonprofit organizations that helped with restoration efforts.

It all started long ago when Cupertino residents Nancy Hertert and Lonnie Toensfeldt had a vision of setting aside some of Cupertino's agricultural land as a nature and rural preserve, first protecting McClellan Ranch in 1976. Later residents supported a bond measure to acquire the privately-owned Blackberry Farm Golf Course and Picnic Area and preserve it as public open space.

Conserving these lands was an important first step, but because these acres and the creek that flows through them had been grazed, plowed, and planted with a variety of crops, more was needed to help the species still present, and to reintroduce some that had been forced out.

When Cupertino City Council designated McClellan Ranch as a Nature and Rural Preserve, the meadows were no longer managed for agricultural purposes, but this did not mean the native plant life immediately returned. Local organizations including Friends of Stevens Creek Trail, Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society, and the Stevens and Permanente Creeks Watershed Council, along with scout and youth group volunteers worked to control invasive weeds, and plant native trees and shrubs.

Stevens Creek supports four species of native fish: three-spine stickleback, California roach, Sacramento sucker, and Central Coast steelhead trout (on the threatened species list since 2006). Many problems contributed to low survival rates of the fish. Fortunately, with grant money from the state and support from the Santa Clara Valley Water District, Cupertino was able to undertake major restoration efforts.



Anise Swallowtail Butterfly

After extensive studies and modeling, hydrologists guided the construction of a channel that winds its way through an area that was formerly a large asphalt parking lot. Now fish have the improved habitat that includes pools, riffles, and several backwater channels that provide refuge when heavy rains create powerful currents in the main channel. The trees that were planted along the creek now stabilize the banks and shade the water, keeping it a suitable temperature for steelhead, a cold-water fish.

Fish haven't been the only native species to benefit from restoration efforts in the Stevens Creek Corridor. Spring through fall, the blooming natives attract a number of native bees, butterflies, and other insects. The native narrow-leaf milkweed planted over the last decade is now supporting monarch caterpillars, and the Yampah planted by and cared for Grassroots Ecology's volunteers support anise swallowtail caterpillars. It is only since the restoration efforts that these butterfly species have been found breeding here. Some of the tiny native bees that forage for nectar and pollen among the flowers nest within the hollow stems of the native grasses.

You needn't be a bug or bird to enjoy the increasing diversity of plants and animals in the corridor. Students explore the restored meadow, creek, and riparian areas on field trips, and those of all ages can be delighted when they pause and appreciate the growing diversity of life in the Stevens Creek Corridor.