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## Laguna Creek Watershed Council 2017 Work Plan

### **Introduction**

Every two years, the Board of Directors re-examines the Council's priorities and opportunities and how that might alter the current activities of the Council in a way that is consistent with its mission and vision. The mission of the LCWC is to protect and restore the many benefits Laguna Creek and neighboring waterways provide, including flood attenuation, fish and wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and open space. We seek to accomplish this mission by working cooperatively with all stakeholders in the watershed. The work plan is modified as circumstances within the watershed evolve. Over the past few years, greater awareness of the relationship between stormwater management and ecosystem health has emerged.

The most severe drought in California's recorded history has stimulated renewed interest in water conservation and stormwater re-use. Urban and rural development has resumed requiring the consideration of more sustainable practices. Taken together, these circumstances present new opportunities for the LCWC to advance our mission.

### **The Work Plan**

The projects listed in this plan have been divided into three (3) major categories: *Policies and Plans*, *Rehabilitation and Restoration* and *Stewardship*. Following is a list and brief description of the priority projects.

#### **A. POLICIES AND PLANS**

##### **A1. Oversight of the Use of Best Management Practices for Development Projects**

The housing market has continued to show growth and development plan submittals have increased. As a result, we anticipate the review of projects will continue to increase.

#### ***Project Description -***

This project reflects the consolidation of a number of individual projects within the LCWMAP that share a common characteristic – oversight of development projects. The projects in our management plan that are grouped together under this umbrella include Carmencita Ranch Oversight (#13), Ogden Reach Oversight (#14), Elk Grove Rural Block Reach (#17), Poplar Hollow Reach (#20), Lower Bypass Area Reach (#27), and Sun Creek Development (#2). This umbrella project reflects the desire of the watershed council to provide input and review to development projects to ensure that newer stormwater management practices such as those identified in the SDMP (Storm Drain Master Plan) such as low impact development, are considered when new developments are being planned. To date, the focus of our efforts has been in Elk Grove. As projects in the upper reaches of the watershed move forward, the LCWC will work with the City of Rancho Cordova and Sacramento County in a similar fashion.

#### ***Project Significance -***

This project provides the opportunity for the LCWC to advance a progressive approach to new development; one that places the protection of natural resources at the beginning of the planning process, not at the end; that protects the integrity of the streams and surrounding corridor; and that integrates low impact development measures into the project to the maximum extent practicable. In the past, a number of developers have made presentations to the watershed council seeking input and the



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watershed council's stamp of approval. Discussions with developers are especially useful because they usually occur early in the development process when suggestions can be implemented without great difficulty. Efforts should be coordinated with the Sacramento Regional Stormwater Quality Partnership when possible.

## **A2. Beaver Management Plan (LCWMAP Project 38)**

In the past, the LCWC has been contacted by residents reporting sightings of beaver carcasses around Camden Lake. Many enjoy watching beaver activity in Camden and elsewhere and were angered by the discovery of the carcasses. Beavers live in most of the tributaries of the Laguna Creek Watershed and play a distinctive role in the aquatic ecosystem. On the other hand, they have no natural predators in most places within the watershed and can rapidly multiply, posing a variety of challenges. The City of Elk Grove has a Beaver Management Policy, but it lacks details and clearly defined criteria for removal/culling of beaver.

### ***Project Description -***

As opportunities present, we will work with the City of Elk Grove, the Sacramento-Yolo Mosquito and Vector Control District, the state Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, members of relevant homeowner's associations, and other stakeholders to better understand the issue, inform residents of the nature of the challenges, and contribute to the evolution of the Elk Grove Beaver Management Policy so that the criteria for removal are clearly defined and the methods of management are carefully considered and evaluated.

### ***Project Significance -***

Beaver are one of the small, wild mammals with which residents of the watershed interact and in most cases, view fondly. Yet, their activities can interfere with floodway maintenance and they can be highly destructive of trees and restoration efforts. Finding a balanced approach to their management is challenging. Yet, as animals that are highly aquatic, the LCWC has a responsibility to work with local stakeholders to identify a reasonable approach for their management. Part of this approach involves reaching out to residents so they are aware of the challenges and management practices. Currently, this educational component is missing. LCWC might be able to help fill this gap.

## **B. REHABILITATION AND RESTORATION**

### **B1. Judy Waegell Memorial Grove**

#### ***Project Description -***

The Waegell family has contributed in many ways over the years to the LCWC. Judy's untimely death in the fall of 2012 resulted in the desire to establish a memorial grove in her honor. The Council will investigate opportunities for working with others, such as the Sacramento Valley Conservancy, to identify sites that could be used to establish a grove of native trees and shrubs in Judy's honor.

#### ***Project Significance -***

Projects that include revegetation and provide habitat restoration or improvement are always of significance to the council.

### **B2. Opportunities for Restoration/Protection in the Upper Laguna Creek Watershed (south of Jackson Highway; northeast of Bond Road) (LC WMAP #4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 34)**



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***Project Description -***

The upper Laguna Creek area of the watershed retains a rural character and includes some land owned by the Sacramento Valley Conservancy. The LC WMAP contains a number of projects involving restoration of various portions of this area of the watershed (noted above). Action 4 addresses stream restoration near Vulcan Triangle Rock mines. Action 5 addresses restoration opportunities along the Waegell Ranch. Action 6 describes conditions along the Shehadeh reach. Actions 7 and 8 address the need for planning and characterization of the Conservation Reach, the area upstream of Excelsior and south of Jackson Highway. The limitation of these actions is that they are primarily conceptual. There is a need to review each action carefully and develop a strategy to integrate the various actions. This would permit the LCWC to take advantage of grants and other opportunities to restore and protect an important area of the watershed. This area would make a logical choice for the Waegell Memorial Grove.

The SLEWS (Student and Landowner Education and Watershed Stewardship) Program of the Center for Land Based Learning (CLBL) offers the opportunity to develop a plan for restoration of these reaches of the creek, in partnership with local landowners, such as the Sacramento Valley Conservancy, the Waegell family, and a local high school. Working with SLEWS would involve developing a concept proposal, contacting local partners, and submitting an application to the CLBL. The CLBL is also offering a training opportunity for implementing a SLEWS like program that might be of interest to the Council. Further discussions and consideration should be given to this opportunity. It would afford a mechanism for implementing a number of the Council's identified projects and go a long way toward restoring degraded reaches of the creek.

**B3. Tree Planting Program (Project 32/33 in the LC WMAP)**

***Project Description -***

This watershed-wide activity includes tree planting in both rural and urban areas. The benefits of tree planting are numerous, and the Sacramento Tree Foundation offers several programs that can be implemented in the Laguna Creek watershed. They also offer technical support and planting supplies. This project has the potential for many partners including various municipalities, park districts, neighborhood organizations, and schools, as well as adult and youth organizations.

The Sheldon Community Association and the Greater Sheldon Rd Estates Homeowners Association, partnering with SMUD and the Sacramento Tree Foundation, are working to restore the Valley Oak population in the rural area of Elk Grove through the "Folks for Oaks" program. Starting in 2007, private homeowners have planted over 1000 trees on their property. Tree survival monitoring methods will include a written survey sent to past participants, and phone surveys. There is an opportunity for a possible service-learning project to monitor the growth of the trees and plot their locations.

Elk Grove has completed a tree preservation ordinance to update the previously used Sacramento County Ordinance and fulfills its obligation to the City's general plan to conserve large native and non-native trees for biological and aesthetic reasons. The LCWC will work with these homeowner organizations and seek additional opportunities for restoring the tree canopy throughout Elk Grove.

***Project Significance -***

This program offers an opportunity for broad participation of the public and has high visibility within the community. Further, this project would support other efforts of the watershed council to utilize "interceptor trees" as part of an integrative approach to managing stormwater and to address climate change adaptation needs. The LCWC would like to develop a comprehensive plan to implement this program throughout the watershed.



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## **B4. Laguna & Whitehouse Creeks Restoration Project**

### ***Project Description -***

This project is addressed in this Work Plan under the Elk Grove Storm Drain Master Plan. This project is contingent upon the City acquiring the land surrounding the confluence of the two creeks. As such, the LCWC is not in a position to independently move the project forward. However, the WC will stay in touch with the Public Works engineers to keep apprised of negotiations and will participate in the technical advisory committee, when formed, to help develop a restoration plan (2011, per pers. comm. with City staff).

The idea for this project arose when the watershed council learned about the planned construction of a bypass channel east of Highway 99 at the confluence of Laguna and Whitehouse creeks. The goal of the second phase of this project was to shrink the 100-year floodplain by building a second channel parallel to Laguna Creek through the middle of a small wetland. Although the bypass plan was abandoned when the US Army Corp permit expired, attention was drawn to the need to improve flood control in this location along with an opportunity to preserve and enhance the existing wetlands. The area adjacent to this site is a 100+ acre undeveloped site owned by a few different entities that is linked to the Camden area. This project presents the opportunity to plan this area around the natural features, specifically the wetland and two creeks.

### ***Project Significance -***

This site provides an excellent opportunity to construct a multi-functional flood control project that would include a wide stream corridor, including trails connecting various other sections of the Laguna Creek trail system, restoration of Whitehouse Creek, which has been straightened and disconnected from the floodplain, and preservation of a wetland. This effort would involve the participation of numerous stakeholders and would not be simple to achieve. However, it would protect one of the few large undeveloped open spaces remaining along the creek within the Elk Grove city limits.

## **C. STEWARDSHIP**

### **C1. Educational Programs, Events and Activities**

#### ***Project Description -***

The goal of the events is to build stewardship for watershed protection and involve more community members in the work of the Council. LCWC may choose to organize its own stand-alone service event or participate in existing projects/activities such as Creek Week. The event(s) may include a single or multiple service opportunities such as trash clean-up, creek restoration, or river-friendly landscaping education. The Council might also work with the new Valley Foothills Watersheds Collaborative on restoration and clean-up projects.

Many community members are attracted to the work of the watershed council through educational events and activities. The LCWC will work in coming years to expand the number of events to engage broader sections of the watershed community. Some of the current programs, events and activities are:

#### ***i. Coastal Cleanup***

As part of the annual Coastal Cleanup, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy partners with organizations to host local river and stream cleanups. The LCWC has partnered with the Sierra Nevada Conservancy to host an annual stream clean up in late September. These events engage local high school students and families. They are an excellent way to



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promote watershed stewardship.

**ii. *Creek Week Cleanup***

The third week of April is historically 'Creek Week' in Sacramento County coordinated by the Sacramento Area Creeks Council. The weeklong event includes a clean-up day. LCWC annually participates in Creek Week Cleanup activities at various locations along Laguna Creek and within the watershed. This event utilizes local high school students and families as volunteers and is an excellent way to promote watershed stewardship.

**iii. *Cruise the Creek***

In the fall of 2012, the LCWC sponsored the first "Cruise the Creek" interpretive bike ride along the middle stretch of the Laguna Creek trail. Interpretive and educational stops were made along the way to discuss various watershed and creek issues with volunteer docents.

Since then LCWC has hosted both a spring and fall 'Cruise the Creek' event each year. The events have included both walking and biking versions. Although turnout is typically modest, LCWC is committed to improving and growing the event and improving outreach to local groups (ie. Scouting groups, clubs, etc.) to guarantee a larger audience and level of participation. This event is geared for families or groups with school age children.

LCWC has since applied for and received city of Elk Grove Community Event Grants to offset the cost and pay for materials.

**iv. *Adopt-a-Creek***

The City of Roseville hired an experienced member of the Dry Creek Conservancy to develop an Adopt-a-Creek program for the watersheds within Roseville. Interactive maps are posted on the web where individuals or organizations can identify sections of local creeks available for adoption. Adoption includes not only periodic clean ups but also exploring grant opportunities and implementing restoration activities. Roseville's experience serves as a good model for Laguna Creek. A new effort on the part of local watershed councils, known as the Valley Foothill Watersheds Collaborative, is working with municipalities to foster Adopt-a-Creek programs. Working with the VFWC, we will foster similar efforts with both Elk Grove and Rancho Cordova.

**v. *Greener Gardens***

The purpose of this event is to educate community members about river friendly landscaping and introduce them to vendors who can assist them with implementing environmentally-friendly alternatives to turf. This annual event started in the spring of 2012 and has been held in April each year. The event consists of a local garden tour featuring residential landscapes that demonstrate river-friendly landscaping practices and principles. The event also includes an all-day festival featuring workshops, informational booths, and green landscape-oriented vendors. The LCWC is committed to participating in this annual event by staffing a booth and providing display and educational materials that educate the public about the watershed, the work of the Council, and how greener gardening can protect the aquatic ecosystem.

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The event now resides under the umbrella of the non-profit EcoLandscape California (ELC) and will not be held in April of 2017. ELC is considering a larger regional event offered every other year in the future.

**vi. *Bird Box Installations***

In conjunction with the 'Cruise the Creek' event, the LCWC has started incorporating bird box installations along Laguna Creek. Nesting boxes to support nesting activities of both wood ducks and other passerine species have been installed. The educational activity includes both the assembly and installation of the boxes by both event attendees and LCWC board members. Boxes are typically installed in the fall followed by clean-up and maintenance of the boxes the following spring.

The city of Elk Grove has provided funding for materials with recent allocations from the annual Community Event Grant process.

**vii. *River-Friendly Landscaping Workshops***

In the spring of 2016, LCWC hosted a river-friendly landscaping (RFL) workshop for residents, taught by instructors from EcoLandscape California. The workshop titled, "Getting the Best Yard with the Least Water" was attended by approximately 30 people and included topics on RFL principles, right plant/right place, calculating irrigation water use and more. A second workshop titled "Designing Eco-Friendly Landscapes and Water-Wise Irrigation Systems" will be held on March 25, 2017. LCWC will continue to look for opportunities to provide watershed based education to the residents of Elk Grove and the watershed.

The city of Elk Grove provided funding for both workshops with allocations from the Community Event Grant. In addition, the Elk Grove Water District provided matching sponsorship.

**viii. *Interpretive Signage***

The LCWC has been engaged in the creation of interpretive signage along the creeks' trails since its inception. The founding grant project included the development and installation of 4 large interpretive signs. Following in this path, the City of Elk Grove has required developers with project along the creeks to install interpretive signs adjacent to their project. Members of the LCWC have donated their time and expertise to work with the developer and the graphic designer to prepare many more signs in various locations along Elk Grove and Laguna Creeks. These signs have addressed a variety of issues including low impact development, aquatic life along the creek, eutrophication, vernal pools, etc. These signs provide an excellent opportunity to foster watershed stewardship.

***Project Significance –***

These projects build awareness of the environment and the need for protection of the watershed in many ways. It is part of our effort to establish the LCWC as a vibrant non-profit of relevance to the community in a period when grant monies are scarce. Using the resources that are available each year, these events have the potential to grow. As people become familiar with LCWC through participation in these events, some will be drawn to participate in other LCWC activities. These events are significant and worthwhile; both for the benefit of promoting watershed stewardship and education, as well as building recognition for the LCWC.



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## **C2. River Friendly Demonstration Projects (Project #11, 16, 40 & 41)**

### ***Project Description -***

In the last several years, two significant projects were completed that promote river friendly landscaping (RFL) practices within the watershed. The City of Elk Grove completed the construction of the Rain Garden Plaza, a 1 acre park in which a wide variety of LID practices are highlighted. Second, the CARCD with funding from the city of Elk Grove sponsored the Elk Grove Greener Gardens Tour & DIY Expo, which promotes RFL and LID practices. Part of the event includes a driving tour featuring front yard landscapes in Elk Grove with rain gardens, turf conversion and other RFL practices. Both of these projects have raised the public's awareness of watershed-friendly landscaping practices.

The LCWC had a booth at the Elk Grove Greener Gardens event and will continue to participate in the future, as well as identify opportunities to utilize the Rain Garden Plaza for educational events. Both of these activities are consistent with Projects 40 and 41 in the LC WMAP.

Other projects in the LC WMAP that promote RFL include daylighting of a storm drain pipe and outfall in the Vineyard neighborhood as discussed below. As opportunities for funding these projects arise, either through state greening funds or through the City of Elk Grove, we will pursue them.

This project unifies 4 different projects identified in the WMAP, the Vineyard Storm Drain Daylighting (#11), Jordan Ranch Swales project (# 16), and the River Friendly Demonstration Gardens (#40) and Water Use Efficiency Projects (#41). Details of each project can be reviewed in the LC WMAP. All of these projects provide the opportunity to apply specific LID or restoration practices that will improve or protect the conditions within Laguna Creek and its tributaries.

### ***Project Significance -***

Much of the degradation seen today in Laguna Creek and its tributaries is associated with the damaging effects of stormwater runoff from areas with extensive impervious cover. Not only does stormwater carry pollutants into the creeks, but the increased volume and velocity of water acts like a pressure washer on the creeks causing extensive erosion and degrading aquatic habitat. Low impact development and related management practices reduce water quality and habitat degradation associated with traditional conveyance systems by reducing the volume of stormwater that reaches the creeks. They are the most up-to-date approaches to managing stormwater and flood risk while at the same time reducing damage to local waterways. The watershed council seeks to popularize the best available scientific and engineering information for managing stormwater. This cluster of projects would put these concepts into practice for all to see.

### **Conclusion**

The Council has a dedicated Board that is committed to advancing the organization's mission. However, a key limitation is the lack of sufficient funding to hire a watershed coordinator. The 2017 Work Plan lays out steps to begin to remedy this situation. Through consultation and partnership with other agencies and non-profit organizations, it is our intention to develop a sensible and sustainable strategy to establish a stronger financial footing for the council. The organization of the new Valley Foothills Watersheds Collaborative (VFWC) holds the potential to help the council move towards this goal.

Many of these projects that would be better served if the Council had a stronger financial footing, however the LCWC remains committed to supporting these projects by use of in-house expertise and leveraging resources of partners to achieve the mission.