



Suggestion for Nomination: Ojai Valley Green Coalition – Watershed Committee

Ojai Creek Riparian Habitat Restoration Project, Ojai California

Category: Planning or Research Project

The Ojai Valley Green Coalition (OVGC), Watershed Committee developed a plan, secured collaborative partners and grant funding as well as youth and adult volunteers in order to restore the riparian ecosystem of the Ojai Creek or East Barranca riparian corridor adjacent to Libbey Park in Ojai. The project is expected to greatly enhance the health and vitality of the creek. Removal of non-native plants is allowing for a significant increase in the native plant population, improving hydrologic capacity of the stream as well as providing light to tree seedlings sprouting along the canopy understory. All non-native plants have been removed. As a result, native oak seedlings are sprouting and the stream banks have been planted with native mulefat and willow cuttings. Already there is more available surface water in the north end of the stream channel, which is believed to be directly attributable to the removal of the palm trees since they use more water than native trees. The native trees have far greater carbon sequestration ability than the palm trees as they contain much greater photosynthesizing biomass. Additionally, albedo is increased with natural openings in the tree canopy, and with greater reflectivity of solar radiation overall temperature in the riparian area will likely decrease. Decreased temperature, greater solar reflectivity and less available CO₂ has important implications for slowing climate change.

The OVGC Watershed Committee developed the project and collaborated with the City of Ojai, the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy, Ojai Trees, the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project which allocates money from the Earth Island Institute, and the C.R.E.W. which is an Ojai based non-profit organization that provides job training, jobs and character and leadership skills while maintaining wildlands.

A true grass roots effort, members of the OVGC Watershed Committee along with, 124 unduplicated volunteers came out for at least one weekend day of creek work and 30 of those returned at least once more. These included student volunteers from Oak Grove School, Thacher School and Cal State Channel Islands

A significant amount of research went into the site history as well as conducting up-to-date habitat assessment investigations. In the early twentieth century large rainbow trout or steelhead were regularly caught in the annually flowing creek. Population growth, increasing groundwater extraction, longer periods of drought and the introduction non-native plant species have made a significant impact on the local watershed pushing the southern steelhead trout as well as several other riparian dependent species to near extinction.

The restoration effort has been well documented. Conservation Biologist Brian Holly has identified and plotted each tree and plant using a handheld GPS. Habitat conditions were also characterized to develop baseline conditions that enable the restoration team to track progress.

In preparation for the project, an Eagle Scout Candidate with Ojai Boy Scout Troop 504 (under the biologist's direction) organized a creek clean-up day and stream morphology survey.

A group of students has planted acorns along the banks, volunteers have helped broadcast a native riparian seed mix throughout the site. Over 250 mulefat and willow cuttings have been planted and follow up efforts continue to keep invasive species from re-growing. Most recently, as part of the local Arbor Day celebration, nine sycamore trees were planted.

Not only is the restoration effort an important project that has broader implications for balancing the global carbon budget and slowing climate change, but it is improving water quality and habitat for foraging birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles that inhabit and rely on the riparian zone.

Contact:

Ojai Valley Green Coalition

Deborah Pendrey, Executive Director

coordinator@ojaivalleygreencoalition.com

Phone: 805-669-8445

Mailing Address

323 E. Matilija St. Ste. 110-114

Ojai, CA. 93023