NATIVE HABITAT PROJECT PROGRESSES IN VALLEJO

Multiple local agencies and groups are starting the second year of a native habitat enhancement project at Lake Dalwigk in Vallejo. The Solano Resource Conservation District (RCD), in partnership with Vallejo Flood and Wastewater District, the Greater Vallejo Recreation District and the Vallejo Watershed Alliance, will begin work rehabilitating vegetation in and around the lake this summer.

According to wastewater district spokeswoman, Jennifer Kaiser, work will begin on trimming the palm trees around the lake, and removing debris and small growths around their base and trunks. Some palms will be removed as well as some dead and diseased sycamores. This coming winter, more than 200 native trees and shrubs will be planted around the lake.

Last winter, native plants and shrubs were planted on the two islands in the middle of the lake. According to the Solano RCD project manager, Sarah McKibbin, another major task this year involves battling an invasion of stinkwort (Dittrichia graveolens); an exotic weed designated by the California Invasive Plant Council as a Red Alert species that is spreading in the newly planted areas as well as through much of the project site.

Historically a tidal marsh on San Pablo Bay, the project site is a 44-acre detention basin that is now separated from tidally influenced areas by development. The basin was modified in the 1970's to provide flood protection for the City of Vallejo. The basin was dredged and re-shaped in 2012 to increase storm water capacity and create islands for wildlife. Storm water collected in Lake Dalwigk is pumped out to the Napa River by a pump station at the corner of Stewart Street and Solano Avenue. Residents of the neighborhood take advantage of the playground and picnic area on the southeast corner of the basin and the trail that surrounds the lake.

Future phases include installing more native plants this winter and next, some grown at Solano RCD's nursery in Dixon. There is very little canopy diversity or native habitat available in the upland areas of Lake Dalwigk. However, a small number of native trees and shrubs are thriving, such as coast live oak and coyote brush, indicating that additional plantings of these species will result in successful site revegetation.

Another phase of the project involves constructing visitor amenities to increase visitor awareness and protect the restored area. Solano RCD will install at least 10 interpretive signs along the trail that include descriptions of the native plantings and upland habitats created, resident and migratory birds and other wildlife, wetland function, climate change mitigation, and best management practices for storm water. In addition, Solano RCD will install a permanent drinking water fountain in the northern section of the project site and two dog-waste stations to protect water quality and help maintain an inviting environment for visitors.
Habitat restoration workers approach one of the islands at Lake Dalwigk, which is located along Curtola Parkway in Vallejo.

When completed, the project will restore the basin to a functioning wetland and wildlife area. The native plants will enhance resting habitat for migrating birds and will create more habitat diversity and complexity to support increased use of the site by other wildlife. This vegetation will also enhance the hydrologic function of the basin by improving storm water infiltration, reducing erosion, and filtering runoff to improve lake and storm water quality. The Greater Vallejo Recreation District and the Vallejo Flood and Wastewater District will be responsible for maintaining the project improvements.

Native plants will be installed by volunteers. Those interested in volunteering can sign up to receive emails about future activities at www.VallejoWatershedAlliance.org, or by contacting Sarah McKibbin at the Solano RCD, sarah.mckibbin@solanorcd.org. You can also learn more about this project by attending a meeting of the Vallejo Watershed Alliance on Saturday, August 17 at the Dan Foley Cultural Center/Vista Room, 1499 North Camino Alto in Vallejo. Sarah will give a presentation on the project’s progress and upcoming volunteer opportunities from 9:00 to 10:00 AM. After that, the Alliance will calendar activities for the next twelve months. Members of the public are invited to come for the presentation or stay for the entire meeting. There will be free refreshments and parking.