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Soon more native plants, like the toyon at left planted by Mark Woerner, will grace the North Davis Ditch as part of an Urban Greening Project. Photo: Libby Earthman

Wild and Welcoming: The North Davis Ditch

By Libby Earthman

Some call him the rogue restorationist, others call him the guerilla gardener, but everyone who meets him agrees on one thing: Mark Woerner is unfailingly generous. Mark lives in North Davis along a human-built waterway which is known by more monikers than himself: the Covell Channel, Channel A, and (more affectionately) The Ditch. Mark retired from his position as Research Program Specialist with CalTrans in 2001 and started looking at ways to enhance The Ditch for the benefit of wildlife and to improve the scenery for his daily runs.

Mark first came to Davis from southern California in 1969 to pursue an undergraduate degree in Plant Sciences and a graduate degree in Agricultural Economics. He and his wife, Wendy Pratt, have lived in North Davis since 2001. "I had not lived near the edge of the city

until I moved to my current home, where I'm no more than a couple of minutes walk from the open space and agricultural fields that adjoin the city. With two dogs that required multiple daily outings, the road along The Ditch became my preferred walking route," reported Mark.

It wasn't long before Mark realized that The Ditch had potential to be more than a drain for runoff.

"I participated in the 2007 Natomas Four-Bridges Run. That route winds on the American River Trail from Folsom down to the Nimbus Fish Hatchery and back, through dense riverside vegetation and sparse oak woodland. The habitat along the American River made the event very interesting and enjoyable. I've always been impressed by the form and grandeur of mature Valley Oak trees. It seemed

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Putah Creek Council is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection and enhancement of Putah Creek through advocacy, education, and community-based stewardship

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Any time I hear Alexi Murdock's song "Orange Sky" I pause and reflect. The lyrics are as beautiful as they are haunting. The chorus repeats, "My salvation lies in your love" over and over again. It's quietly affecting.

The chorus is also the background music to the short film "Picture the Leviathan" featuring James Prosek's paintings of different species of fish, and it made the film all that much more touching. To say that Prosek's paintings are beautiful falls short of reality. Prosek uses art to touch people with the beauty and magic of fish, in hopes that bringing them into focus will inspire people to work toward their conservation.

I find his effort particularly compelling because it's the same work we try to accomplish with Putah Creek Council, though we use different tools. Since the Putah Creek Accord was signed in the year 2000 establishing legally mandated flows for Putah Creek, we have worked to connect people to this local resource.

In 2013 we celebrated 25 years of Putah Creek Council. Many of the founding members were scarcely that old when they founded the Council, but they believed in Putah Creek's right to exist...

We know that the strongest protections for the creek come from an engaged population which understands the value of having nature nearby and invests themselves in its protection.

The deep satisfaction of looking back at a well-planted tree you worked into the fertile soil along Putah Creek's banks is hard to find in everyday life. When you plant habitat for wildlife, it's a selfless act which touches the emotional part of all of us. It feels good to give, especially to Putah Creek—your creek.

In 2013 we celebrated 25 years of Putah Creek Council. Many of the founding members were scarcely that old when they founded the Council, but they believed in Putah Creek's right to exist—the right of the fishes, wildlife, birds, and trees—to flourish. From our modest beginnings of cleaning up dumped trash to bird-a-thons, we have continued to gain steam and community support.

Volunteerism has grown 700% in the past five years, and our in-class education programs for 2014—all four of them—will reach at least three times the number of students we have in the past.

You are a big part of this incredible growth. Success is about so much more than numbers, it's about the heart that people have poured into Putah Creek over the past quarter century. Thank you for your support, and for working with us to get here. If experiences change people, and people change the world, we are changing the creek one experience at a time. 



Investing Where Your Heart and Home Are

by Ann Crane, Donor and Stewardship Team Member

When I think of where to invest my money and time, I look for local organizations that engage the community and keep the resources close to home. With an emphasis on local environmental education and habitat enhancement, Putah Creek Council more than fits the bill.

With only three staff members it is obvious that nobody is getting rich off the money from the Putah Creek Council donors. It is amazing how much work gets done with such little overhead. I particularly like the way they engage an army of citizens to get so much work done. I always enjoy the work days because I meet so many interesting people and get a sense of accomplishment when we are done.

It is amazing how much work gets done with such little overhead. I particularly like the way Putah creek Council engages an army of citizens to get so much work done.

The more I learn about the Putah Creek Council the more I am impressed with how much they do with so little. When I travel around the area I am proud to see the many education and restoration projects my time and money has gone to support. 🐾



Alder planting Feb 6, 2010 downstream of Pedrick Road on Putah Creek (left). Same alder tree October 10, 2013 (right). Trees were planted to block ATVs from driving in spawning gravels. Photos: Libby Earthman (left); Rich Mavovich (right).



Join our next Creek Community Celebration and Potluck:
April 17, 2013, 6-8 PM at Berryessa Brewery

We will send out more information about this community potluck in the months to come

‘Neighbors were overwhelmingly supportive of my efforts. Some made cash donations to support purchases of supplies and plants, and several helped with the digging and planting.’

that it would be nice to have a similar landscape closer to home.”

He sought and secured permission from the City of Davis, and started planting in fall, 2007. “Late that winter, oak seedlings began appearing in most of the sites I’d planted,” Mark enthused.

Energized by his success, he sought help from experts. The City of Davis provided guidelines for native plant selection, Putah Creek Council and Rich Marovich, the Putah Creek Streamkeeper, helped with native plant propagation. “Soon, trays of native plants were sprouting in my backyard, and tending California wild rose, deergrass, purple needlegrass, toyon and others seedlings became part of my daily routine.

“Neighbors were overwhelmingly supportive of my efforts. Some made cash donations to support purchases of supplies and plants, and several helped with the digging and planting. Had it not been for the enthusiasm of the people who enjoy being on the channel, my wife, kids, and in-laws Cay and Dave Pratt, I probably would have tapered off my efforts,” Mark said.

After three years he realized that he alone could not accomplish a one-and-a-quarter mile habitat enhancement.

Urban Greening: Voter-Approved Funds to Make Cities Greener

In 2010 Putah Creek Council won a contract from the California Natural Resources Agency enabling the “North Davis Riparian Greenbelt” project. Phase one involves the continuation of Mark’s in-channel work to transition existing vegetation into high-value habitat. Phase two will

create environmental interpretation areas along the greenbelt.

The project team includes: City of Davis, Yolo Resource Conservation District, McCord Environmental, Putah Creek Council, Center for Land Based Learning, Great Valley Design, and UC Davis’ Louie Yang (see page 6). The project team has also been blessed with diverse support from the community via an all-volunteer project advisory committee, Northwest Hydraulic Consultants, and the support of the Davis Open Space and Habitat Commission.

Natural and Recent History of The Ditch

The Ditch begins just west of the western terminus of the Russell Blvd. bike path. Its riparian corridor there is graced with majestic valley oaks.

From there it gently meanders east until reaching the western boundary of Davis and taking an abrupt, straight course north. The waterway is then routed into a geometric channel with multiple 90-degree turns, and is pumped under Highway 113 toward the portion of channel this project addresses.

The original channel was likely a distributary of Putah Creek—disbursing flood flows from the main channel of Putah Creek during high flows and distributing them over Putah and Cache creek’s broad floodplains.

The Ditch was moved into its North Davis location in order to make way for the North Davis neighborhood, manage flooding along Covell Blvd., and to provide a channel to carry runoff, especially from regional farms.

The channel has the potential to be an exceptional asset to wildlife because it has water for most of the year. According to Melanie Truan, Staff Research Associate for UC Davis’ Museum of Fish and Wildlife Biology, “It is an important link in the network of swales, sloughs, creeks, and waterways

“North Davis... continued on page 6

‘It is an important link in... [the] habitat for birds and wildlife living in and passing through the region.’



2013 Putah Creek Cleanup Recap

by Sara Tremayne

Everyone remembers September 21, 2013 for the early-season storm that dumped rain for hours, though the 122 Putah Creek Cleanup volunteers who braved the weather to pick up trash and care for plants likely remember the storm a little more vividly than most. The refreshing rains didn't dampen the spirit of creek clean-up volunteers who, despite the often-heavy downpour, laughed and cut holes in trash bags to use them as impromptu rain jackets.

Putah Creek Council hosted four different clean-up sites around along Putah Creek. Besides picking up trash from the creek, volunteers worked on removing tree protection from newly planted trees in the Winters Park floodplain, to keep the tree protectors from washing away when the floods return.

This year Putah Creek Council's sites saw:

- 122 volunteers
- 4891 pieces of trash collected
- 1 mile of rope fencing tightened
- 400 feet of new rope fencing installed
- 150 wire cages removed
- 1 happy creek

This year eleven international Humphrey Fellows from UC Davis participated in the cleanup. We were

touched when one of them wrote to us after the event thanking us for the inspiration.

"I would like to appreciate you and Putah Creek Council members for your concern about the environment. You motivated me to start similar activities in Ethiopia when I get back to home where the environmental degradation is a common problem. I really enjoyed with the weather, it was my first rain shower in the USA," wrote Mr. Sintayehu Mekonnen.

Because water invariably runs downhill, the lowest point in the landscape is Putah Creek, and anything that is left on the street, (plastic wrappers, bottles, oil, dog waste, etc.) ends up in the creek when it rains. Even as volunteers removed trash from the creek, storm drains from the city delivered hundreds of bottles and wrappers which were picked up by the rain water on the streets, a real reminder that trash anywhere in a city can become pollution in the creeks, which is eventually sent down into the ocean.

Thank you to everyone who participated in this year's event, and to everyone who responsibly attends to their refuse every day. 🌱



Putah Creek Cleanup volunteers, some clad in rain jackets made from trash bags, celebrate a successful morning. Photo: Don Sanders



Mark Woerner, right, and his son David pose with a sign announcing the project along the Ditch. Photo: Libby Earthman

‘I think working in the dirt, planting and watching something grow, especially a native plant, is a very fundamental way to connect with nature. It leaves me both tired and satisfied at the end of the day.’

that course through Yolo County. All of these form an integrated whole that provide essential habitat for birds and wildlife living in and passing through the region. What is good for one is good for the whole.”

Community Planning and Planting

The planning process for this project is two-pronged: first for channel vegetation, and second for the elements along the bike path and greenbelt.

We have been delighted by the outpouring of love people have shared regarding The Ditch. In fact, our project team was reluctant to call it The Ditch, feeling it sounded like a derogatory term. We were won over by the constant input from community members about their love of The Ditch and how this project can further the positive relationship they have with it.

As we began planting plans for The Ditch, we received multiple comments about the importance of keeping it a wild place for children to explore, ride bikes, and dig in the dirt. While we had this in mind when we first conceived of the project, hearing this from the community touched a special chord for us all.

The plans for The Ditch and greenbelt improved substantially due to public input.

Monarchs and Milkweed



Newly emerged monarch on milkweed, above; and monarch caterpillar on volunteer-planted milkweed at PCC habitat site, right. Photos: Libby Earthman (above); Martha Rocha (right)



The western population of monarch butterflies breeds as far north as Canada, and over-winters from Mendocino County to San Diego. They rely heavily on an unfortunately named plant, milkweed (more on this below), to lay their eggs and to feed newly emerged caterpillars.

Putah Creek Council loves milkweed, don't get us wrong. We have favorite seed-collection sites throughout Yolo County, dig up and transplant plants fated to be sprayed with herbicide, and often have seeds cold-stratifying in our home fridges. However, we find the second half of the name discouraging: weed. No one likes weeds. Weeds get sprayed with herbicide or pulled out with disdain.

Everyone should love milkweed. It's beautiful, drought-tolerant, and attracts monarchs.

When Louie Yang, Assistant Professor of Ecology at UCD approached us about planting milkweed as part of the project in North Davis (see cover story),

Investing in Habitat

There is only so much space set aside as wildlife habitat in the Central Valley. This project invests in one those few pockets of land which can serve as both wildlife and human habitat. When we asked Mark what motivates him to make this project a reality, he replied, "I strongly believe that maintaining and restoring natural habitat is necessary for our collective psyche, to nurture our spirit and undo some of the loss. I think working in the dirt, planting and watching something grow, especially a native plant, is a very fundamental way to connect with nature. It leaves me both tired and satisfied at the end of the day."

We share the Mark's eagerness to see the vegetation mature and watchable wildlife return. "I hope residents will find ways to become involved with the planting and maintenance of the plants in the channel. I look forward to seeing California Quail in The Ditch, a bird that was common around my childhood home," said Mark.

We look forward to that, too.

Funding for this project has been provided in full or in part by the California Natural Resources Agency via voted-approved Proposition 84 funds. The contents of this article do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the California Natural Resources Agency.



Bonnie Berman and Jill Langston help thin invasive trees growing along The Ditch, October 2013. Photo: Martha Rocha

Help Plant! Volunteer opportunities begin in December, 2013. Register to help at: putahcreekcouncil.org

we jumped at the chance. While milkweed could have been a minor component of our planting plan, Louie's combined effort makes it a secondary focus of the habitat enhancement. Louie received a \$600,000 grant from the National Science Foundation to establish a large population of milkweed, and study how monarchs respond over time.

Louie's research will specifically look at how shifts in the timing of milkweed-monarch interactions affect both species. Such shifts in seasonal timing are likely to be an important consequence of a changing climate.

Western monarchs pass the generational baton up and down the West Coast. Adult butterflies overwinter on the southern west coast, and as the temperatures warm, they start flying north in search of milkweed plants on which to lay eggs. When that egg hatches into a caterpillar and metamorphoses into a butterfly, that individual continues the journey north, each generation of

adults making it a further before laying eggs for the next generation and perishing.

Approximately three successive generations push the next generation north, and as the winter months return, the migration reverses course as monarchs head back south toward overwintering grounds.

Imagine how disruptive it would be for a monarch to make it to the Central Valley, only to realize that there are so few milkweed she cannot find one on which to lay eggs. Or perhaps, the few milkweed that are available are too old to be useful for laying eggs.

Yang's research seeks to understand how populations of interdependent species are impacted by shifting climates so we can better model how climate change may impact a variety of species. We are lucky that he's working in North Davis to establish 800 individual plants, and look forward to having hundreds of monarchs utilizing the site into the future.

Putah Creek Club: The Next Generation of Creek Stewards

by Martha Rocha

Rebecca Fridae, a Winters teacher, never stops advocating for her students.

A long-time supporter of Putah Creek Council, Rebecca had approached us several times over the past four years requesting that we revive an after-school program for middle school students: Putah Creek Club. Putah Creek Club connects local youth to Putah Creek in an effort to promote the next generation of creek stewards. For years we didn't have funding or the collaborative relationships in the community to rekindle the program. That all changed with a call from another Winters resident in fall, 2012.

Alejandro Rojas Garcia, local veterinarian and wildlife photographer, approached Putah Creek Council in November 2012 with his desire to help lead an after-school club for local students. His enthusiasm, matched with Rebecca's dedication and ability to organize students, and funding from the Putah Creek Council community of donors helped bring Putah Creek Club back to life in spring 2013.

We wanted the students to see this opportunity as more than a way to spend springtime afternoons: we wanted them to commit to learning, being open to new activities, and being empowered advocates for Putah Creek. After attending an introductory presentation about the goals of the club and proposed activities, students completed a written application to join the club.

When asked what he hoped to gain from being a part of Putah Creek Club, Victor Morales said, "I hope to gain friendships, knowledge about wildlife, and ways to help the environment."

Club members also described their leadership qualities that would benefit Putah Creek Club. These qualities included being a good problem solver, and being helpful, nice, patient, hardworking, dependable, and cooperative. We agreed: those are all key qualities of not only successful stewards, but successful community members, too.

Students alternated between bi-monthly "Explore" events lead by Alejandro Rojas Garcia and "Restore" Events lead by Putah Creek Council staff. While "Exploring" with Alejandro, PCC Club members learned about native plants and animals, how to

recognize common birds, and how to identify animal tracks. They also tried their hand at restoration activities such as preparing bare root roses, installing drip irrigation, and planting oaks.

The oaks they planted along the Nature Path will soon provide food and shelter for local wildlife, and the students have enjoyed checking up on them throughout the summer and fall. They often reported back to Rebecca about how their trees were growing.

When asked what they enjoyed the most, the students raved about using binoculars to look for birds along the creek and planting oak trees. After participating in Putah Creek Club as 6th graders, students have the option of continuing their involvement by acting as mentors when they are in 7th and 8th grade.

The Putah Creek Club Program aims to instill a sense of pride and ownership of Putah Creek—their creek—and from what the students are saying, the Club achieved it. Putah Creek Club would not be possible without Alejandro's vision and dedication, and Rebecca's willingness to provide transportation, logistics, and serving as a mentor and role model. Funding for this program was provided by the Putah Creek Council community of donors. On behalf of the creek and Putah Creek Club—thank you! 🌿



Sara Tremayne instructs a group of Putah Creek Club members, all wearing Putah Creek Club t-shirts, on proper oak planting techniques. Photo: Martha Rocha



Education Programs to Expand in 2014

By Martha Rocha

In our office we often muse about how we can get people, especially young people, to care about and take action on behalf of Putah Creek. We know that the more emotionally connected people are to a space, the more willing they are to give of themselves to protect it.

In 2014 we will expand our environmental education programs for local students with the aim of touching them in a way that builds a life-long appreciation for the natural world. Our programs address core scientific standards while also bringing to life the topics we teach—in a very tangible way.

Thanks to funding from the Yolo Water Resources Association, this spring Putah Creek Council will bring the 'Salmon in the Classroom' program to local classrooms. Classes who join the program raise salmon from eggs in their classroom, participate in three in-class lessons about native fish and watershed health, and have the opportunity to take a field trip to the Yolo Bypass to learn about the current research UC Davis and CalTrout are conducting on floodplains, farming, and fish from inspiring, wader-wearing scientists. This program is supported through a partnership with CA Department of Fish and Wildlife, Fly Fishers of Davis, CalTrout, and UC Davis. Classes in Winters, Woodland and Davis have already signed up for this exciting opportunity.

Adopt-A-Flat will also return this spring. In this program students raise flats of native plants in the classroom and then plant them along the creek to improve wildlife habitat. All 4th graders at Shirley Rominger in Winters will participate. Through collaboration with Wild Campus, a student-run UC Davis conservation club, several additional



elementary schools in Davis will also participate in the Adopt-A-Flat program.

This fall, Wolfskill High School students will start the Winters Trash Project. Working with teacher Charlotte Kimball, students will collect trash and recyclables off the streets in Winters and keep record of how much trash they are preventing from entering Putah Creek. The collected trash will be encased in large bins and put on display in the Putah Creek Council side yard at 106-C Main Street. Come by and take a look!

Putah Creek Club (see page 8 for more details) starts in January for selected Winters 6th graders. Putah Creek Club aims to connect local youth to Putah Creek in an effort to promote the next generation of creek stewards. This spring we will continue to work with Rebecca Fridae and Alejandro Rojas Garcia to provide an opportunity for students to connect to Putah Creek. ♡

Students wait to be handed classroom-grown native plants (left). Students follow Martha Rocha to Putah Creek for a field trip (above right). Photos: Libby Earthman



I volunteer with Putah Creek Council because...

“Protecting our environment is a big priority in my life and I love to get my kids and their friends involved in the community to foster a lifelong commitment to wildlife and habitat conservation.” –Jennifer Tepley, Winters

“Putah Creek Council does such great work and Putah Creek, my creek, is a national model for successful stream restoration.” – Steve Wathen, Davis

“Community engagement is essential to the success of environmental missions.” –Anon

2013 Summer Interns

By Martha Rocha

This summer we hosted a dynamic cohort of interns who worked hard to learn essential habitat enhancement and job skills. This year’s interns included: Adrian Korcyl, Madeira Alba, and Levi Dietrich from Winters; Tristan Noriter-Tilly and Caitrin Vadnais from Vacaville; Haley Wooning from Davis; and Ben Russell from Dixon.

Interns worked in our native plant nursery in Davis and on habitat restoration sites along Putah Creek in Winters and Davis. “Interning with Putah Creek Council this summer was both educational and enjoyable,” said Caitrin Vadnais, Putah Creek Council summer intern. “By doing hands-on work in the nursery, I learned how to properly transplant and seed different types of native plants. I also took the opportunity to work out in the field setting up and caring for irrigation lines, and weeding plants around Putah Creek.”

Their work challenged their physical stamina and required incredible dedication. Interns worked through the heat wave in early July, lifted heavy bins of plants in the greenhouse, dodged thorny thistles and wild roses on restoration sites, and quickly learned to identify poison oak along the creek. Irrigation field days, especially, had the potential to be a pendulum of extremes as interns walked many dry, dusty miles checking irrigation lines for clogged drip irrigation emitters only to get soaking wet the next minute while replacing broken emitters.

“This experience has taught me more about commitment, hard work, and what actually goes into maintaining our beautiful environment,” continues Vadnais. “This internship was definitely a highlight of my summer.”



Ben, Adrian, Tristan, Madeira, and Caitrin work together to transplant sedges. Photo: Martha Rocha

“This experience has taught me more about commitment, hard work, and what actually goes into maintaining our beautiful environment. This internship was definitely a highlight of my summer.”

We said farewell to our summer interns in early September, with the exception of Levi Deitrich. Levi worked with us through October, pulling the last remnants of drip irrigation from Winters Putah Creek Park. 🌿



Streamkeeper Corner: Setting Priorities

By Rich Marovich, Putah Creek Streamkeeper

When I first met renowned fish expert and UC Davis Professor Peter Moyle, I asked him what actions we should prioritize to improve fish habitat in Putah Creek. He gave me three goals: decrease water temperatures, increase spawning habitat, and create more habitat diversity. Twelve years later we continue to work toward these objectives.

Water temperature matters because cooler water favors native fish. Prior to the Putah Creek Accord, native fish were mostly only upstream of Stevenson Bridge. The flow regime of the Putah Creek Accord helped bring cooler water farther downstream, allowing native fish to extend their reach to Pedrick Road. Further reductions in water temperature may extend native fish to the Interstate 80 bridge, particularly if the large pools upstream can be narrowed to allow more shading to cover the channel.

The first comprehensive water temperature study was commissioned by UC Davis and performed by Jones and Stokes during the Putah Creek flow litigation. This study made clear that while the flow regime of the Accord helps bring cooler water downstream, the primary cause of increasing water temperature is solar radiation. Even if we triple current flows, the extra water delivered downstream would not be much cooler if no other actions are taken. Shade over the water is key and channel width critically determines how much of the channel can be shaded by streamside trees. In many areas the channel needs to be narrowed so streamside vegetation can effectively shade the water and also to increase flow velocity and reduce the water's residence time in pools.

Water temperature is a relatively simple and direct measure of aquatic habitat health. We look forward to measuring the effect of channel narrowing at Winters Putah Creek Park. We are still gathering temperature data, though in the meantime downstream of Winters the Kilkenny family has observed that the water is cooler because their grandchildren spend less time in the water. We call this the 'Kilkenny grandchildren bioassay for water temperature.'

Our work to improve spawning habitat started at the Dry Creek confluence on the western boundary

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of Winters. We realigned the channel in 2005 so that Putah Creek could more effectively capture and transport natural gravels from Dry Creek. The channel realignment at Winters Putah Creek Park continues this work. Gravel mobilizes primarily in high flow events.

We have increased habitat diversity by installing rock weirs and log revetments. Putah Creek lacks large, instream wood due to a legacy of removing vegetation from the channel. Large wood in the channel creates complex patterns of flow, scour, and deposition that create complex microhabitats for aquatic life. Large wood enhances the diversity of aquatic species and provides sunning habitat for Southwestern Pond Turtle.

We will continue to work toward these goals in the coming years. 🐟



Salmon spawning in Putah Creek, December 2004. Photo: Rich Marovich

Board Updates



Katherine Holmes 'retired' from the Board in October after six years of board service. During that time she launched and chaired the Watershed Wonders committee and helped solidify organizational processes.

Her keen attention to detail was always appreciated, and her mentorship during complex budgeting and finance allocations ensured our staff could sleep at night. We wish her well in all her new pursuits.

Kate Mawdsley joined the Board in early 2013 as our Secretary after volunteering with us in our native plant nursery and at plantings and creek cleanup for many years. Kate is retired from the UCD library system. In addition to her service on our



Board, she coordinates the docent tour program at Jepson Prairie Preserve and is a docent for Yolo Basin Foundation. When she's not at Board meetings she's often traveling the globe learning about familiar or exotic plant communities.

Carrie Shaw re-joined the the Putah Creek Council Board in early 2013. Carrie was a director during the early days of the Council, leading the production of newsletters and other community involvement in the early 1990s. Carrie now serves as the Treasurer. Her background in non-profit management and fire ecology has already helped guide projects and the organization. When she's not at Board meetings you can find her organizing various community activities in Davis.



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