***FRIENDS OF THE CALAVERAS UPDATES***

***10.18.21***

***Jim Marsh***

1. ***Weekly monitoring of the UOP Native Grass Restoration site continues.***

Sometime between 09.03 and 09.11 a fire burned nearly all but the bankside vegetation between transect stakes 6 and 7. This area comprised one of the largest patches of the native grass (commonly referred to as Creeping Wild Rye) all of which above ground growth appeared to be consumed. Between 2012 and 2014 approximately 10,000 plugs of this species had been planted on “The 3 Acres” (this is the primary native grass species referenced in the site’s official name). I was interested to see how fire might effect this hardy, rhizomatous perennial. Over the next several weeks I was encouraged to see new sprouts at the base of virtually all the burned rye stubble. With little or no moisture during that interval--other than one storm delivering only a trace of rainfall--the native grass had already gotten a leg up on the invasive annuals that normally won’t germinate until mid-winter in years with typical rainfall. Furthermore if a bulk of the seed from the annuals was consumed in the fire it will be interesting to see if the native wild rye can take advantage of the reduced competition. Another significant native species lost in this burn—a large, contiguous stand of Gumplant—has already demonstrated its resilience on the site following other fires. In my nine years observing four burns consuming parts of the floodplain Gumplant and the native sage, Mugwort, are frequently among the first species to show fresh growth following fires. With deep rooting growth patterns Creeping Wild Rye, Gumplant and Mugwort all appear to be able to take advantage of the benefits occasional burning can provide. All are species that were planted during the restoration plantings in 2012/2013/2014 either via plugs (Creeping Wild Rye) or seed (Gumplant, Mugwort). Gumplant is significant in that it provides nearly year around blooms that have been observed to be heavily relied upon by a variety of native bees and other pollinators. All of this suggests that the fires annual levee maintenance mowings are intended to prevent may in fact be more beneficial to restoration than harmful. Could managed burns (along with the goat herd I learned last spring is being used to graze some county levees) not be a more natural (and possibly less costly) means of restoring some of the native character of the Calaveras channel within the city limits?

1. ***Outreach and Education***

Jessica Bilecki (Director, UOP Sustainability Office) referred several students to me for an interview about the restoration site and the use of Calaveras water for campus irrigation. All were part of a freshman Core class and were assigned to prepare an oral presentation. Their class’s theme was “Nature”. Following our 45 minute chat at the river they invited me to their 15 minute team talk the following week. I long ago lost track of the exact number of these kinds of encounters I’ve had with UOP students and faculty but I count them among the most valuable. I always take the time to emphasize with these young people the significance of the resource they likely walk near every day of their UOP experience. I have taken the same approach with the dozens of faculty members I have met over the years who have represented the sciences, education, the arts and the humanities.

1. ***Coastal Clean-up***

Because I knew I’d be unable to attend Coastal Clean-up on 09.18 I elected to do a clean up sweep on the UOP site. It appeared someone had done some cleaning prior to my arrival on 09.11 but I still hauled out ~25 lbs. of trash. Much of that being discarded clothing and personal belongings scattered at several locations. Since UOP has been enforcing stricter standards regarding camping there is less evidence of active campsites in the usual locations. However there is plenty of evidence of occasional sheltering being done particularly in the large sandbar “willow garden” between transects 4 and 5. This area has become more and more attractive as the willows have propagated and created a natural screen making camps much less visible from the levee road.

1. ***Fall 2021 Photo Survey and Vegetation Monitoring***

Fall 2021 Photo Survey was completed 09.19.21. Vegetation counting was begun on 09.24.21 and finished on 09.26.21

1. ***Next Calaveras Fish Group Meeting will be in November--Date TBD***