

Colusa Almond Project SLEWS Field Day March 19, 2010 Gil Ramos' farm, Arbuckle



Mentors:

Nina Suzuki- Center for Land-Based Learning
Jack Alderson- Natural Resources Conservation Service
Mary Kimball- Center for Land-Based Learning
Mary Fahey- Colusa Country Resource & Conservation Service
Jenny MacDonald- Community Alliance with Family Farmers

Students:

An ecology class of 25 from Colusa High School consisting mostly of seniors.

Additional Staff:

Miles Daprato, Field Day Coordinator-
Audubon California
Gilbert Mohtes-Chan, Photo journalist & Documentation-
Community Alliance with Family Farmers



Overview:

The first SLEWS (Student and Landowner Education and Watershed Stewardship) day of 2010 at a Colusa Almond Project work site was a rousing success. On March 19 staff from CAFF and its project partners hosted a field day for 25 students from the Environmental Science Academy at Colusa High School. The primary objective of this field day was to plant native shrubs and trees along Salt Creek in order to strengthen the bank, and thus prevent further erosion. A secondary task was to help with weeding around existing native plants (planted two years ago at a SLEWS day with another Colusa High School class) to protect them from being overtaken by weeds or accidentally being mowed. In two hours, 25 students who were mostly seniors and five mentors were able to plant over 200 plants, and mark and weed around countless existing plants along the bank of the Salt Creek stream bed along grower Gil Ramos' almond orchard. The rest of the field day was focused on outdoor and environmental education. Topics included native plant identification, planting demonstrations, history of California's Central Valley, and balancing farming and ecosystem functions.



Diana, a senior attending Chico State in the fall, packs native dirt around a ghost pine.

Highlights:

- We got the students' blood flowing after a small snack when they arrived with an energizing and competitive native plant ID game, "Steal the Native Plant." In mentor groups of five, the students had 10 minutes to memorize 11 native plants that they would be planting shortly. Students in each group were numbered 1-5. We placed the plants in the center of the circle and the fun began! Miles called out the name of a native plant and a number. Students from each group with that number rushed to be the first to touch the correct plant. The group successfully learned to identify ghost pine, redbud, wild rose, buckbrush, sticky monkey flower, coyote brush, fuchsia, manzanita, silver bush lupine, elderberry and chamise.
- Miles and Nina demonstrated to the students the best way to plant the trees and shrubs. This included clearing the planting area of weeds and rubble, digging a hole as deep as the container, carefully removing and placing the plant into the hole, packing the hole with the native dirt to completely cover the nursery soil, sinking a tube over the plant and into the ground to stabilize and protect the plant, then sinking a stake into the ground and securing it with a zip tie.
- Burritos for lunch! The students were delighted with a filling and delicious lunch after all of their hard work.
- Following lunch the group spent some time talking about the history of California's Central Valley, and how it has changed through the years. Mary Kimball read a few pages from "Up and Down California," recalling the tremendous Central Valley flood in 1862. Jack Alderson brought a series of enlarged maps of the Colusa/Arbuckle area dating back to the mid-1800s through modern day. He provided insight as to the changes that occurred in a mere 150 years. Nina challenged the students to draw or write in their sketchbooks what they thought the valley would look like in 2050.



Hayden, Zach, Luis & Katie learning to identify Ghost Pine & Silver Bush Lupine for the "Steal the Native Plant" game.



(above) Miles & Nina demonstrate correct planting technique.
(left) Hayden sinks a stake into the ground to stabilize the newly planted shrub.



Section of stream bank after a successful, productive and FUN day!

Quotes:

- "We're planting trees to keep down the erosion. It's hard work. If there weren't people doing it, it would not get done. We need to keep our environment going. You help out future generations. I can come back and bring my kids and say I did that." - Diana Madrigal, senior
- "It feels like you're giving back to the environment and you're helping someone out in the community."
- Hayden Meyers, senior