



The Watch

Newsletter of the Watsonville Wetlands Watch
Fall 2006

Sedges Have Edges

The scientific name for sedges is *Carex* which means 'cutter' in Greek for the saw-edged leaves of some species that can cut the skin if they are handled carelessly. The genus *Carex* contains more than 2000 species that are found world wide and at all elevations from sea level to alpine meadows. It the most diverse genus of plants in California with more than 140 species. Here in Santa Cruz County we have at least 29 species of sedge. Sedges are notoriously difficult to identify which makes determining the exact number of species difficult.

All sedges are perennial plants. The leaves of sedges are generally slightly stiffer and remain green longer in the summer than the leaves of grasses. The stems that support the flowering parts are triangular and the leaves are in ranks of threes. Although it is sometimes thought that sedges only grow in wetlands there are many sedges that grow in drier plant communities as well, such as our Little Hill Dweller Sedge (*Carex tumulicola*). Sedges can be characterized as bunching or spreading depending on the length of the rhizomes (underground stems). The Little Hill Dweller Sedge has short rhizomes and forms densely tufted bunches. The Slough Sedge (*Carex obtusa*) has longer rhizomes that spread to create large patches. By sprouting from rhizomes sedges reproduce themselves by cloning. These clonal colonies can be hundreds of years old.

The sedges that produce long rhizomes are used by Native Americans as a

weaving material for making baskets. Properly prepared roots provide strong and flexible strips that will not break when woven. The finest baskets are made by skilled weavers and may take many months to complete. They are beautiful works of art that are also very useful for gathering, processing and storing food. When harvested with respect and knowledge of the rate of regrowth sedges are a renewable resource.

The spreading rhizomes and fibrous roots of sedges make them ideal for habitat restoration and erosion control projects. In our projects we have found that sedges are very useful when planting in moist areas that have been infested with Poison Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*). The dense growth of the larger sedges provides ideal cover and nesting habitat for small mammals and birds. If you look inside sedge clusters you will often find the leafy tunnels that animals seek shelter in. Sedge seed is an important source of food for birds and mammals. Birds such as Soras (*Porzana carolina*) and Grasshopper Sparrows (*Ammodramus savannarum*) relish sedge seeds. The leaves are valuable as forage, especially in the summer when grasses are dead or dormant.

-John Pritchard



Fitz WERC Native Plant Demonstration Garden

Preparations are being made to create a native plant demonstration garden at the Patrick J. Fitz Wetlands Educational Resource Center, located at Pajaro Valley High School. Volunteers and our restoration specialist, Jonathan Pilch, have designed a landscape plan to showcase native habitat that you would find around the wetlands of Watsonville. This project will be divided into three phases beginning November 2006:

PHASE I

The greenhouse, installed just this past summer, houses propagated plants which are native to the Pajaro Valley and which we will use for planting in the project. Some of the plants we are planning to plant around the shade house are Pajaro Manzanita, California Rose, Yellow Bush Lupine, Mugwort, California Oat Grass and various sedges. The east side of the greenhouse will supply a happy home to California Sagebush, Snowberry and Monterey Evening Primrose. At the back of the greenhouse a soil and compost bin will sit at the edge of a gravel pathway and an outdoor sink has been installed near two 4' x 8' student work tables. Concrete pavers will be

used for pathways and wood chip mulch has been laid down under and around the student work area.

PHASE II

We are excited to have Bob Lyons' class from Rolling Hills Middle School constructing birdhouses for the migratory bird garden! We also welcome future after-school middle school groups to help with the planting of Coffeeberry, Fuchsia Flowered Gooseberry and Sticky Monkey Flower - all of which will encourage our vast array of bird species.

PHASE III

A wetland pond system that will utilize rainwater runoff from the main building will be installed. Native bog and marsh plants such as Bull Rushes, Spike Rushes, Marsh Marigold, Tule, Marsh Pennywort and Smartweed will be used to create a wetland area.

This native plant garden will be a unique and sensitive habitat for students, community and all who visit the Patrick J. Fitz Wetlands Educational

Resource Center and you too can be a part of the vision of creating this special place. Volunteers, helping hands, thoughts or concerns are welcome so please contact Jonathan Pilch

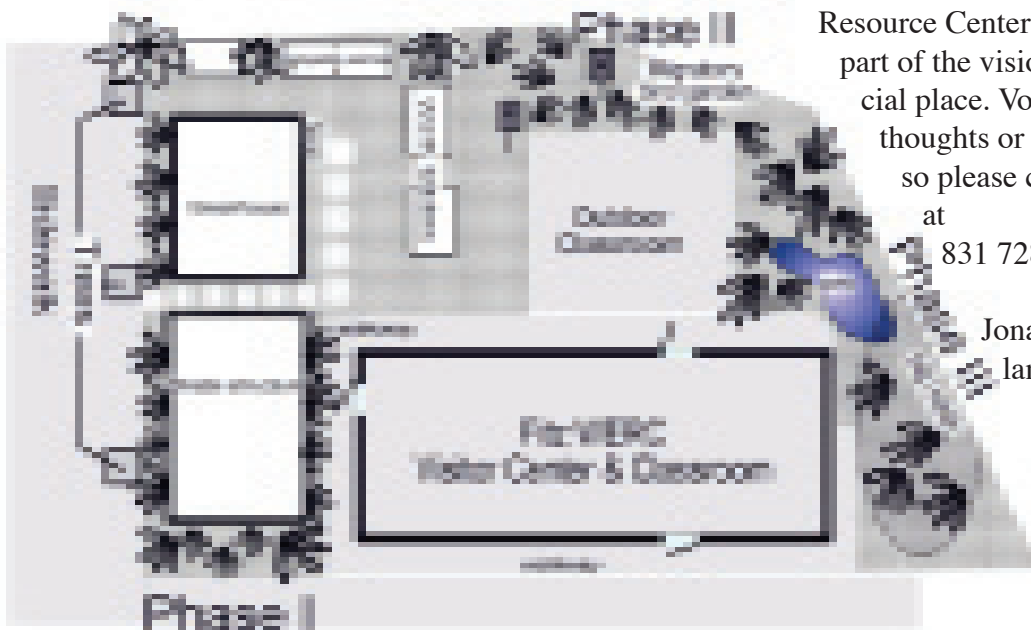
at

831 728-4106

or email

Jonathan@watsonvillewetlandswatch.org

- Lorrie Rubio



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● **Special Thanks**
● to **Wild Rose Art & Framing** who generously donated framing for the donor plaque in
● the Fitz WERC visitor center. Thank you!
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Our Greenhouse Doors Have Opened



After a summer of collecting native seeds throughout the sloughs, there was no better time to finish construction of the Fitz Wetland Education Resource Center's newest addition, the Ruth Hofmeister Memorial Greenhouse. On a warm, late-summer evening, WWW members, docents, volunteers, and staff gathered for a small potluck in honor of two special guests. One was our new greenhouse and its sponsor, Laura Hofmeister, and the other was WWW former board member extraordinaire, Marian Martinez.

All had a chance to say a hello and farewell to honoree Marian Martinez, who had flown south from her new home in Oregon for well-wishing and to catch the 2nd annual Birding Festival. And all had a chance to tour our greenhouse, new and just beginning to fill with seedlings of some of our favorite grasses, rushes, sedges, and wildflowers.

The greenhouse will play an instrumental role in our effort to restore the wetlands and grasslands of the Pajaro Valley. It stands at the top of Pajaro Valley High School, prominent on the landscape to the west of Watsonville. All of the plants inside will be grown from seeds collected locally and only found in the Watsonville slough system. Every plant and seedling is labeled with the original location of the parent plants. By

growing seeds native to our watershed, the next generations of plants will remain as unique and genetically strong as the last. This way we can be sure our efforts to restore the wetlands will stand the test of time.

In the true community spirit of the Fitz WERC, many hands will raise native plants from seed to full grown plant, and all will have the opportunity to participate in the cycles of restoration. Already many school and community groups have begun to schedule their visits to grow the plants we need to restore our wetlands. The greenhouse certainly holds the spirit of Ruth Hofmeister, a teacher and librarian, who sparked the curiosity and creativity of friends and family and inspired them to get their boots muddy, their hands dirty, and to experience the beauty of nature and native plants.

Many thanks are due, and I would like to give a special thanks to a few individuals who gave very generously their time. Some of these people worked tirelessly, raising the frame and structure, not quitting even through a "light" hailstorm. Others contributed with ideas and support. A special thanks to Bob Culbertson, Bob Lyons, Bob Geyer, the Hofmeister and Williams families, Dobie Jenkins, Tony Rubio, Tom Schroeder, Jim Van Houten (who contributed countless hours and ideas), the City of Watsonville, Pajaro Valley Unified School District, the Community Restoration Project, and one of Pajaro Valley High School's P.E. classes (who helped us move the heavy growing-tables inside the greenhouse)!

The work is just beginning, but we're moving fast; the seeds have been sown and already some seedlings are ready for transplanting. I hope you'll find a way to join us either on a Saturday volunteer day, by assisting with a school or community group visit, or by stopping by to watch our native grasses grow. See you then!

-Jonathan Pilch

Calendar

Get those hands dirty!

Second & fourth Saturdays: Meet at the Fitz Wetlands Educational Resource Center at 9am. to join the Restoration Team as we restore several areas in and around Watsonville. We work until 12 noon - and always make time for a walk and tour of our local wetlands flora and fauna. Please wear a hat, work clothes and sturdy shoes. We supply the gloves, tools, and a snack. No experience necessary - just a desire to help these wonderful ecosystems.

In the coming months we'll spend our time weeding and ensuring the survival of our Spring plantings, mulching, collecting seeds, watering our plantings, planting natives, and enjoying Indian summer as long as it lasts.

For more information please email jonathan@watsonvillewetlandswatch.org or call 728-4106.

Join Watsonville Wetlands Watch

and help protect our wetlands! Membership of \$25 a year/\$15 student or senior, supports efforts to preserve and protect slough systems in the Watsonville area. You will also receive The Watch, our quarterly newsletter.

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