

The State of the Creek—An Impressive Show

FOSC's State of the Creek meeting on January 18 brought over a dozen restoration groups out of the woodwork, forests, and neighborhoods to Dimond Library to show slides and talk about their work. It was difficult to go away unimpressed. The presentations covered almost all of the 20 active restoration sites throughout the watershed.

"It was tremendously energizing to see how much work is going on and how FOSC's influence has spread throughout the watershed," said EPA environmental engineer and board member Helen McKinley. "The passion for the work really stood out--so many people who feel so strongly about protecting the watershed and are out there actively working to conserve and restore it."

Presentations covered sites from the source of the creek to its mouth, from redwood forests to concrete jungle, from heavily used city parks to little known canyons and urban back yards. For long-time FOSCers, the most surprising thing may have been how many groups had sprung up on their own. "I saw a new organization," said biologist and past president Mark Rauzon, "a true grass roots adoption of places dear to people, where they are willing to be the ecological artisans, taking the initiative to adopt these sites and start restoring them. They have accomplished a tremendous amount, and their vision is huge. As an organization we want to do as much as we can to support and encourage them."

One of the larger visions is that of Lisa Lemus and Phillip Wong who would like to daylight the creek that runs under a portion of Wood Park where they lead the ongoing restoration effort. John Bowers, who co-leads the restoration at Barry Place in the Fruitvale District with Sheelah Weaver, floated the idea of getting conservation easements from several landowners nearby, which would allow volunteers to restore the longest above-ground reach of the creek west of I-580.

The prize for most unique and artistic restoration site went to Jingtowen where neighbors in this industrial-come-artists' community in the lower watershed adopted a strip along Peterson Street to create a native plant garden and an art wall. The wall consists of several large murals by artists from the neighborhood, and the garden symbolically brings the nearby creek to the surface from its underground channel.

"It was wonderful to bring together all these restorers and planters in one place," said longtime nursery volunteer Nancy Jones, who is responsible for propagating many of FOSC's plants, "and to finally see all the places where my 'babies' end up."

FOSC Restoration Director Megan Hess reviewed the work going on at six of the older sites in the upper watershed. As FOSC has matured, its role and mission at these sites have expanded and become more complex. In addition to staging 75 workdays last year, Megan led two dozen school field trips, teaching kids from elementary to high school about restoration and environmental stewardship. And as its reach on public lands has grown, FOSC finds itself interfacing more and more with government agencies, institutions, and other nonprofits on issues ranging from protecting endangered species to balancing the needs of sensitive habitat with those of mountain bikers, dog walkers, and summer campers.



Thanks to all who shared their efforts with us and who attended. FOSC plans to make the State of the Creek an annual January event. For a map of the watershed with the locations of all the current restoration sites, go to http://www.sausalcreek.org/pdf/FOSC-Restoration-Sites_Map.pdf. To view slide shows from the State of the Creek meeting, go to <http://www.sausalcreek.org/volunteer/di-canyon.html#sites>.

--Richard Kauffman