

eacNews

Environmental Action Committee of West Marin

information, updates, involvement • spring 2001 • EAC, Box 609, Pt Reyes Station 94956

In defense of natives

Alien Impact

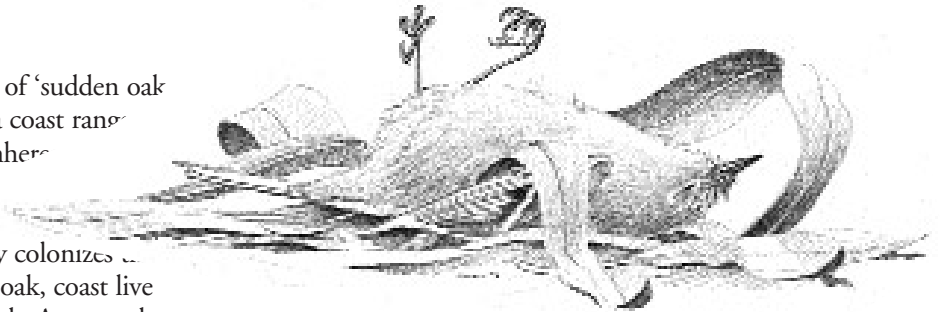
The recent appearance and rapid spread of 'sudden oak death,' or SOD, in the hills of the California coast range provides an unnerving object lesson in the inherent and potentially dire consequences of the introduction of non-native species into the wild. The cause, *Phytophthora*, is a new pathogen that aggressively colonizes the cambial tissue of four of our native oak species—tan oak, coast live oak, interior live oak, and California black oak. Apparently, *Phytophthora* arrived in California as a stowaway on the root stock of ornamental European rhododendrons. A recent study estimated that SODS-infected trees cover 219 square miles of coastal forests between Humboldt and Monterey counties. In the San Francisco Bay area, 13-37% of the oaks have symptoms. These acorn bearing trees are critical to numerous wildlife species. Deer, turkeys, jays, quail, squirrels, and acorn woodpeckers are just a few of the many species that rely heavily on acorns as a food source. Now it is feared that the magnificent native Rhododendron groves of the North coast will succumb to the infestation.

Non-native species seem to be lurking everywhere these days. Green crabs in Tomales Bay, fields of scotch broom on Mt. Tamalpais, croaking bullfrogs in Hagmaier Pond. In fact, non-native species have become such a common part of the landscape that we often overlook the detrimental impacts

Non-native species produce a ripple effect through a community's web of interactions.

to native species. Take Blue Gum Eucalyptus (please).

Blue gums were introduced from Australia because of their rapid growth and the idea that they might provide a ready source of wood for construction and furniture. As it turned out, in the California climate they grow so fast that when dried, the wood cracks and has very little structural integrity. Not only is it useless for its intended purpose, but it is a serious fire risk because its oils are highly combustible. A common misconception is that Eucalypti harbor a diverse array of wildlife. Well, that's partially true. Eucs are long-



Keith Hansen

A rubg-crowned kinglet fallen victim to Eucalyptus. below: two little ones with beaks "tarred" by alien nectar

bloomed with showy flowers that produce vast quantities of nectar, so native species flock to them to forage on the high-energy food source. Unfortunately, unlike the birds that co-evolved with Eucs down-under and developed long bills adapted to extracting Euc nectar, many of the California bird species that frequent Eucs—including kinglets, warblers, and vireos—are short billed. The Euc's tar-like juices stick to their bills and block their nasal passages so that it becomes difficult to breathe. Many die of asphyxiation.



photo credit?

The effects of invasive, non-native plant species are also evident in coastal California dune habitat. The loss of native dune habitat in California is largely the result of development and the intrusion of invasive species. Here at Point Reyes, the main culprits are European beachgrass (*Ammophila arenaria*) and iceplant (*Carpobrotus edulis*). Both of these plants were used extensively in dune stabilization projects on the West Coast, but have spread far beyond the original planting sites.

European beachgrass has efficiently crowded out native plant species and has severely altered dune topology along the beaches at Point Reyes. The steep, continuous foredunes running parallel to our beaches did not exist prior to the establishment of European beachgrass. Historically, foredunes were lower, ascended more gradually, and were dominated by native dune vegetation. European beachgrass created the current foredune system by capturing sand that would otherwise be carried over the dunes by wind and holding the sand in its extensive, deeply vertical root and rhizome system. By preventing the movement of sand from

One stream at a time

Chicken Ranch Beach in Inverness has a special place in the heart of the West Marin community and in the history of the struggle to establish public access to California's beaches and to protect our coastline. It was the subject of the Marks-Whitney case, the forerunner of the California Coastal Act.

In 1993 Gerry and Cathy Coles illegally created two B&B units on their property near Chicken Ranch Beach. This brought the number of bedrooms to five, though they have only a three-bedroom septic system. Last year the Coles, having obtained a County permit for a new five-bedroom septic system, applied to the California Coastal Commission to legalize the B&B units. The Commission staff recommended approval and a hearing was set for January, 2001. The hearing was postponed when EAC and many others complained about the lack of public notice.

With the hearing rescheduled for February, Commission staff again recommended approval. Again, EAC sprang into action. We asked an engineer to review the County-issued septic permit. Thus we were able to alert both the County and the Commission to the fact that the County-issued permit allowed the owners to achieve the required setback between the leachfield and the nearby creek by filling in the creek and moving it back fifty feet! In addition, the required geo-technical study was missing. On receiving this information, the County agreed to review the septic permit and the Commission staff again dropped their recommendation for approval and rescheduled the hearing.

Late last month, EAC discovered that the Commission staff was again recommending approval of the permit, this time based on the County's "assurances" that it would soon issue a new septic permit. However, the County's assurances were based on a misclassification of the creek that flows past the and there was still no geo-technical report.

EAC engaged hydrologists to study the creek and issued an action alert asking our members to help. Many responded, contacting officials in both agencies to raise questions about the creek classification and slope stability and ask the Commission not to base a decision on this important issue on inadequate information and erroneous assumptions.

The upshot of our campaign is that the County is reclassifying the creek and has withdrawn the "assurances" it earlier gave the Commission that a septic permit was imminent. The Commission staff then stated it would recommend denial until a County septic permit is issued, so the Coles asked that the hearing be postponed for 90 days. A final decision must be made at the end of that time.

EAC's efforts to protect Chicken Ranch are part of our continuing struggle to protect West Marin's riparian ecosystems and to ensure the health of the Tomales Bay watershed. And often that comes down to fighting for one place, one small stream, at a time. ■

Easy ways to remember EAC

Last month, a member asked how he could include EAC in his will. A good question. More and more of us are realizing that making wills is not just for the rich. Many people have put some money away in retirement plans; many others have some savings or own property. No matter what your age, it makes sense to think about how you'd like to dispose of your homes, savings, and possessions. We hope you will consider providing for West Marin, as well as your loved ones, by including EAC in your plans.

Any competent lawyer can insert a few sentences into a will to make clear your intention to give EAC a set amount of money, a particular property, or a designated proportion of either. A gift can be non-restricted, restricted, or an endowment. A non-restricted gift can be used for the general operations of the organization. Alternatively, a donor may restrict a gift so that it is only used, say, for the protection of the Tomales Bay watershed or for efforts to preserve the rural character of West Marin. If a gift is given as an endowment, only the income can be used; the principle is protected in perpetuity. EAC has a fund, administered by the Marin Community Foundation, that provides a reserve for special projects and for emergencies. It is a simple matter to specify that a bequest to EAC should be part of this fund rather than our general operating budget.

If you already have a will and would like to include EAC, it is easy to add a codicil, which is an appendage to a will that adds to or modifies something in the will. For example, if you want to change your executor or add or remove the name of someone to receive a bequest, you can use a codicil. Codicils are just as legal and binding as the main document, but are much less expensive than drafting an entire will. They present an easy way for to include EAC in your estate plans. It's not necessary to go through the time and expense of redoing the entire will; all it takes is the creation of a brief legal document that is then stored in a safe place with the will. EAC can supply you with sample language to achieve this.

There is another easy way to include EAC in your estate plans: by designating it as a beneficiary of a retirement plan. Recently, for example, I moved my IRA account from one bank to another. In doing so, I had to designate a primary and secondary beneficiary. I also had the option of dividing the IRA between several beneficiaries. I took the opportunity to make EAC a beneficiary of my IRA. I do my best as Executive Director, but if the stock market rebounds, that designation may be the best thing I ever did for EAC or West Marin!

If you would like more information about how you can include EAC in your estate plans, please contact EAC at 663-9312. When you're planning for the future, please remember West Marin. ■

Alien, from page 1

fore to rear dunes, European beachgrass has greatly reduced the amount of quality dune habitat available for native dune species.

Iceland forms broad, nearly impenetrable mats that deprive native plants of space, water, and nutrients. In addition, iceplant slowly transforms sandy soils through the build-up of organic matter. This deprives native dune species of the sandy soil they require and encourages the encroachment of entirely new vegetative communities. And, like European beachgrass, iceplant prevents the natural movement of sand through the dune system.

The dominant presence of these two species at Point Reyes has had profound consequences on native dune species and communities. Many native dune plants have been displaced, including the federally endangered beach layia (*Layia carnosa*) and Tidestrom's lupine (*Lupinus tidestromii*). The endangered Myrtle's silverspot butterfly (*Speyeria zerene myrtleae*) has been severely affected by reductions in western dog violet, which is the butterfly's primary larval host plant and adult nectar source. The advancing foredunes created by the spread of these invasive aliens has drastically limited the nesting beach habitat needed by the threatened western snowy plover. In addition, European beachgrass and iceplant threaten the native beach

pea foredunes and American dune grass foredunes near Abbott's Lagoon which are among the largest expanses of these rare ecosystems remaining in California.

As we consider the effects of non-native species on our local environment, we must expand our horizons to a larger context. In this country, nearly half the species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act are at risk primarily due to competition with or predation by non-native species. Globally, we are in the midst of a catastrophic mass extinction, with the overall rate of extinction far exceeding that of the routine rate at which species have disappeared. Paul Ehrlich has estimated the global extinction rate at nearly one hundred times the background level just for birds and mammals. This extinction event is likely to rank among the most extreme half-dozen such extinction events in the history of our planet.

Among the factors contributing to global species loss, the effects of introduced species rank second only to habitat destruction. Biological communities are an intricate tapestry of ecological relationships and species' responses to the physical environment. By displacing native species and altering habitats, non-native species can produce a ripple effect through a whole community's web of interactions. More species are lost, biological diversity is reduced, and the community is simplified. By working towards the elimination of non-native

species in the wild, we are investing in the value of our native species and communities, our own spiritual depth, and our planet's biodiversity and ecological health.

Our mission

EAC's primary mission is to protect the native flora and fauna of West Marin. This explains our interest in protecting the Tomales Dunes—a dynamic natural ecosystem that is threatened with 'stabilization' and conversion to a leach field for a large sewage treatment system at Lawson's Landing.

The National Park Service is working to reduce the influence of non-natives on public lands. There are many opportunities for the public to participate—pulling broom or ice plant, whacking thistles, surveying open space. Board members of EAC participate actively in these efforts; we would like to encourage other EAC members to do the same. ■

—Jules Evens and David Press

TO GET INVOLVED: Contact the Point Reyes National Seashore—

Tom Echols, Volunteer Coordinator:
464-5195

Habitat Restoration Hotline: 464-5211

Invasive Species website:
www.invasivespecies.gov

New Board Members

EAC has two new board members. Both come to the board with a great history of community and environmental activism. We welcome them.

Peter Martinelli grew up on a West Marin ranch and developed an early interest in land-use issues. He earned his B.A. in Environmental History at U.C. Berkeley, and has spent the past 15 years farming organic vegetables and fruit, the past five on his family's farm in Bolinas. In 1995, Peter co-founded the "Marin Organic" labeling project.

Marin Organic seeks to link local consumers to farmers who agree to improve soil and water conservation and wildlife habitat on their farms.

For more than thirty-five years, **Sim Van der Ryn** has worked to incorporate ecological principles and practices into architecture and planning. As California State Architect under Governor Jerry Brown, he developed the nation's first government-initiated energy-efficient office building program. He also founded the Farallones Insti-

tute, which helped to create national awareness of ecologically integrated living design, and its successor, the non-profit Ecological Design Institute (EDI), and has written several influential books about sustainable planning and design.

Being on the EAC board is a challenging, but rewarding job: the board's responsibility is to ensure that EAC carries out its mission of protecting West Marin's land, waters, and wildlife. If you know of anyone who might be

Green Building

“Green Building” refers to design and construction of buildings that conform to a number of criteria, including minimizing site disturbance, designing for energy efficiency and water conservation, maximizing use of reclaimed, recycled, and sustainably produced and non-toxic materials, and minimizing construction waste.

The interest in green building is growing. The US Green Building Council, whose members include major players in the design and construction industry, recently established a rating system for commercial buildings. A residential rating system should be available next year. Marin County is also reviewing county codes and development standards with an eye to encouraging Green Building.

EAC wants to promote green building in West Marin. We are in the process of developing an informational program for builders and local residents. EAC has set up an advisory council of local builders, designers, and architects to help guide our Green Building program. We plan to publish a local Green Building Guide, create a “petting zoo” with samples of new materials to aid and inspire builders and architects, work with local suppliers to make sustainable products more available locally, and help local organizations adopt Green Building Practices.

New Members

EAC is a grassroots organization. We cannot protect West Marin without the support of people who care. Our appreciation to the following fine people for joining EAC: Janet Allen, Kentfield; Sonja Anderson, Point Reyes Station; Thomas Asher & Kirstin Radasch, Fairfax; Priscilla & Michael Bull, Kentfield; Emery Clay, San Rafael; Sheila Concannon & Michael Lagios, Tiburon; Jon & Carole D'Alessio, Ross; Ron & Heidi de Stefano, Larkspur; Dennis & Betty Drake, San Rafael; Carol & Columba Duffy, San Rafael; Lele & Rachel Field, Fairfax; Deborah Fitzpatrick, Woodacre; Steve Hadland & Anneke Van Der Veen, Point Reyes Station; Randy Hayes & Lauren Klein, Mill Valley; Judith Hiltner, Ross; Ruth Hom, Fairfax; Wanda Hosford, San Rafael; Wesley Huss & Sonja Morris, Kentfield; Vicki Leeds & Ben Moseley, Point Reyes Station; Linda & Barry Linder, Inverness; Daniel & Virginia Mardesich, San Rafael; Katherine & Erwin Martinez, Tiburon; Allan & Eleanor Martini, Tiburon; Jane Mills, San Rafael; David Minkler, Mill Valley; Anthony Prud'Homme, San Francisco; Ronald Restanio, Corte Madera; Lloyd & Margaret Smith, Kentfield; Thomas Vaughan, Belvedere; Donald Vesey, San Rafael; and Idie & David Weinsoff, Farifax.

Thank you and welcome!

EAC Board

Jules Evens,
President

Anne Baxter,
Secretary

Gordon Bennett,
Treasurer

Paul Bickner

Mark Dowie

Henry Grossi

Peter Martinelli

Mia Monroe

David Press

Sim Van Der Ryn

Celebrate EAC's 30 years of environmental activism

TIME: 6 pm. Friday June 29th. PLACE: The Dance Palace.

Great food and wine and plenty of it. A great speaker, *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist Jon Carroll. And a great time at *the* event of West Marin's socio-gastronomo-environmental calendar!

Call 663-9312 for reservations and information.

eac

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