

Watershed

The Escondido Creek Conservancy

VOICE



SPRING/SUMMER 2021



ESCONDIDO

PARADISE NO LONGER HIDDEN!

INSIDE: Explore Park in the Park • The Lakes of Escondido
Reidy Creek • Creek Community Gardens

Photo by ©KS Nature Photography

Eagles in Escondido!

by Leonard Wittwer | Board President of the Escondido Creek Conservancy | Photo by ©KS Nature Photography

There was a time when bald eagles were seen soaring above Escondido. Although they were never common, lucky locals caught glimpses of these iconic birds. Sadly, in the 1950s, a chemical known as DDT was introduced as an insecticide. The bald eagle and other bird populations plummeted. When DDT was banned, many impacted birds began to thrive, but the bald eagle has been slower to re-emerge—until now.

Over the past few years, the number of bald eagles raising young in Escondido has grown. Recently, our land managers have begun seeing charmingly-awkward teenage bald eagles flying over our preserves. Over the past decades, the region has become a better habitat to support the emerging bald eagle population due to a combination of factors: slowly improving water quality, fish stocking, and habitat protection.

For thirty years, the Conservancy has worked in the Escondido Creek watershed to enhance the extraordinary landscape with the goal of creating an improved environment for the wildlife and people that call it home. This issue of the Watershed Voice is a peek at how we see Escondido, and what it can become. No longer “Hidden,” but one of the most beautiful communities in southern California. One that embraces both nature and a vibrant economy.

It is too early to know if those gangly teenage eagles will stick around to become local residents, but we think they will find Escondido much to their liking. We are optimistic for the future of our re-emerging eagle population, and for the future of Escondido.



Building Towards the Future.

As we celebrate our 30-year anniversary, the Conservancy is moving into a new home that will enable our staff to maximize the work we do including:

- Protecting the watershed.
- Conserving the land.
- Providing for outdoor education.
- Restoring & preserving the creek.

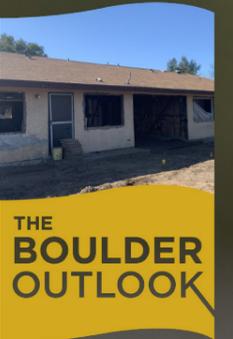
Not to mention, it will allow us to share our passion for nature conservation with all of you.

Our new home at Boulder Outlook on the Meadow Mountain Preserve is a key component of expanding our efforts in the Escondido Creek watershed by creating a unique space to work, and showcase our work.

You can show your support for the work we do in the Escondido Creek watershed and throughout North County San Diego by supporting the Boulder Outlook capital campaign.

Accessible opportunities to support the campaign are available to all, and range from building naming rights to placing a commemorative brick along the future patio. In donating towards our Boulder Outlook campaign you are helping our team continue to do the work we are so passionate about in a space where we can share it with our community.

For more information contact: meghan@escondidocreek.org



“As a wildlife photographer, I travel around the world to some of the most extraordinary places on the planet. Escondido ranks with some of the best for world class birding. With over 200 species of birds and mammals, including the rushing Western and Clark’s Grebes, it is a nature photographer’s dream location.”

•Krisztina Scheeff | KS Nature Photography

KS Nature Photography leads workshops and wildlife photography classes in San Diego. Find details: www.KSNaturePhotography.com

SUPPORT:
escondidocreek.org/boulder-outlook

Park in the Park

by Ann Van Leer | Executive Director

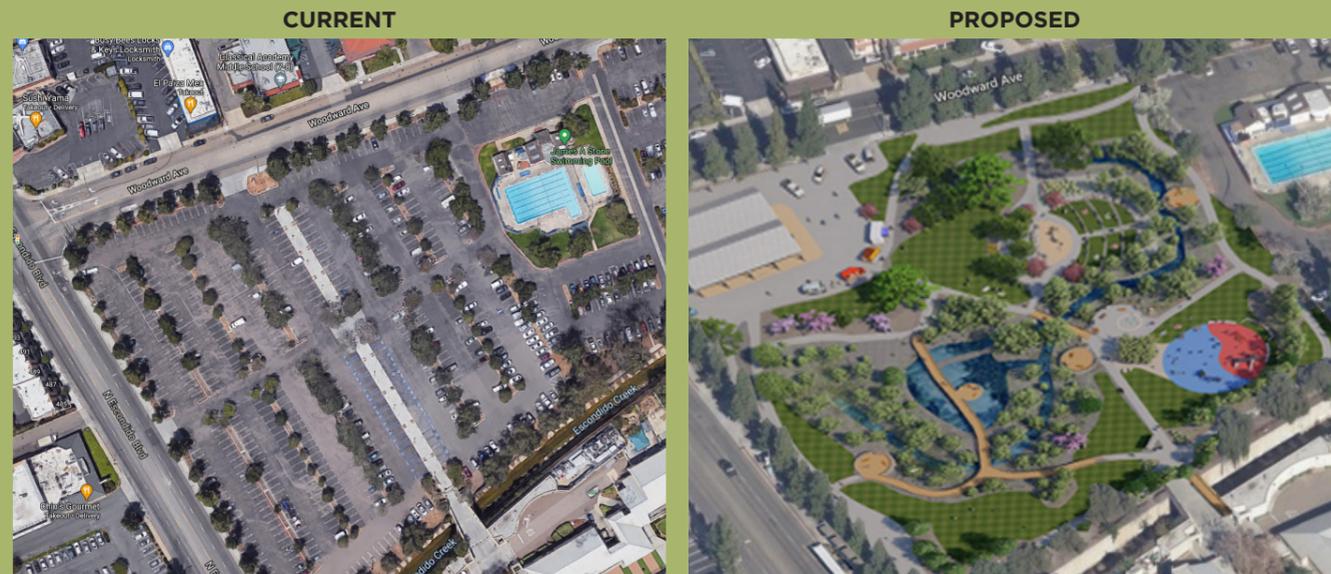
“They paved paradise, and put up a parking lot.”

In 1970, the brilliant songwriter Joni Mitchell wrote the song, “Big Yellow Taxi.” She included the poignant words above as a warning that has gone unheeded.

Sadly, the paving of paradise has occurred everywhere since then, including here in Escondido. Escondido Creek has been encased in a concrete channel, and sometimes forced underground. While floodwater has been controlled, what was lost was paradise for people and wildlife.

We think it is time to recreate paradise in Escondido.

In 2010, the city and students at Cal-Poly Pomona created a vision plan for a people-friendly flood control system along Escondido Creek. More recently, the Conservancy secured a \$355,000 state grant to help advance the concept through engineering. With this grant, the Conservancy has created a 30% design for a pilot project to convert a parking lot in Grape Day Park into a park.



The Park in the Park un-paves a four-to-six-acre parking lot, replacing it with a new people-friendly paradise that captures and naturally treats stormwater in ponds and a flowing stream. The park could include a pavilion, an amphitheater, a sculpture garden, playgrounds, walkways, splash pads, and meadows filled with native trees and wildflowers.

As the Park in the Park project has evolved over the past few years, some of our friends have pointed out that the parking lot we propose to un-pave is serving a purpose. We hear you, and have proposed two parking alternatives for consideration.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

BE BOLD!

Review the proposal,
and **submit your comments**

to The Conservancy at:

ESCONDIDOCREEK.ORG/GRAPEDAYPARK

This may seem an odd time to posit such an ambitious project for Escondido. We suggest this is the perfect time to be so bold, as both the state and federal governments are beginning to push large amounts of money into the economy for infrastructure projects, especially for projects supporting underserved communities. Additionally, project economists estimated annual increases in local revenue from Park in the Park to be \$1.9 to \$7 million.

We dream of a future where Escondido residents promenade through an improved Grape Day Park on warm summer evenings after dinner at a downtown restaurant. Other visitors picnic on the lawn while listening to music in an amphitheater surrounded by art and beauty. In this future, Escondido Creek is revealed to be the heart of the city, and an asset for people and nature. Together, we can un-pave paradise.

Community Gardens Along the Trail

by Richard Murphy | Board Vice President

The Conservancy was thrilled to support the City of Escondido’s successful \$8.5 million grant to make improvements along the Escondido Creek Trail. Last fall, I sent a letter to Deputy City Manager Joanna Axelrod urging the city to consider installing community gardens along the creek trail, as part of the grant implementation.

We proposed a garden addition along the trail where residents—especially those with small or even no yards could grow plants, including vegetables or flowers. In addition to vegetable gardens, the Conservancy would love to see some of those plots become pollinator gardens creating new habitats for monarchs and other threatened butterflies and insects. Even better, they could be integrated into garden plots with vegetables and wildflowers to support both humans and wildlife!

In my letter to the city, I suggested six locations where there appears to be room along the Creek Trail to install these gardens but there may be more locations. Read the letter and the subsequent news articles on our website. Please let the City of Escondido know you support community gardens along the trail!

Read the letter & learn more at:

EscondidoCreek.Org/news/gardens

Reidy Creek: Found!

by Hannah Walchuk | Conservation Director

There are a few precious spots in Escondido where you can catch a glimpse of the wild and powerful Escondido Creek, as it may have been before it was caged in concrete. The Reidy Creek tributary is one of them: natural, alive with trees and bird calls. That is no accident!

For the past two years, the Escondido Creek Conservancy partnered with the City of Escondido and the Urban Corps of San Diego County to remove invasive species from a 1-mile stretch of Reidy Creek, located generally behind the Escondido Police Station.



Urban Corps of San Diego County workers removing invasive plants from Reidy Creek.

Thanks to a grant funded by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the partners have removed more than 150 invasive and fire-prone palm and eucalyptus trees from the site, as well as nearly six acres of the non-native plant and wetland scourge Yellow Flag Iris. These areas will be replanted with native understory species to increase biodiversity onsite.

Lots of different people have expressed appreciation for this work. Many neighbors, including members of the nearby community gardens and residents of Reidy Creek Apartments, have thanked Conservancy staff for putting the project together. Many of them remember a time not too long ago, before the palm trees took over, when Reidy Creek was clean and calm. City staff have even noticed a drop in emergency calls to the area.

We think the birds and bees appreciate the work too. Our annual avian surveys reveal more species on-site than before the project began.

The Lakes of Escondido

As a resident or visitor to Escondido, you are minutes away from thousands of acres of preserved lands, including four beautiful public lakes; three of the lakes are open to public use many days of the year. These same areas are also home to California's iconic wildlife—including deer, bobcats and mountain lions—who enjoy the freedom to move between landscapes that are mostly still wild.

These large, preserved habitats are respite for both people and animals to appreciate and live in nature. The greater Escondido area offers many opportunities for outdoor adventures, for people of all ages. We urge residents and visitors to explore these beautiful areas to see what our region has to offer!

Dixon Lake at Daley Ranch

The City of Escondido's 70-acre reservoir is part of the 3,000+ acre Daley Ranch. The recreational area is open for picnics, camping, rock climbing, and is especially popular for fishing, as it is reportedly home to the largest bass in the region. Anglers can fish from a rental boat or from the shoreline.

Photo of Dixon Lake (right)
©KS Nature Photography
www.daleyranch.com



Young man fishing at Dixon Lake.



Lake Wohlford

Like Dixon Lake to the west, Lake Wohlford is owned and operated by the City of Escondido as a drinking water reservoir.

The lake is also open to the public for fishing from the shore and from rental boats. Trails surround the lake providing beautiful views!

Photo of Lake Wohlford at sunset
©KS Nature Photography
www.escondido.org/lake-wohlford



Conservation Fellow, Mayra Dominguez climbing at Dixon Lake.



Clark's Grebes rushing atop the water in a courtship ritual. ©KS Nature Photography



Olivenhain Reservoir

The 784-acre Recreational Reserve welcomes visitors 364 days a year to enjoy 11 miles of hiking, mountain biking and equestrian trails, as well as picnic and reservoir overlooks.

Photo of Olivenhain Reservoir (above)
©www.olivenhain.com
www.elfinforest.olivenhain.com/faqs



DISTANCE TO LAKES FROM DOWNTOWN ESCONDIDO:	
Dixon Lake	5 miles
Lake Wohlford	8 miles
OMWD Reservoir EFRR	7 miles
Lake Hodges	7 miles

Dixon Lake:				
Lake Wohlford:				
OMWD Reservoir:				
Lake Hodges:				

Lake Hodges

Lake Hodges is a 1,200-acre reservoir with 27 miles of shoreline. When full it can be 115 feet deep! The water of the lake is open for boating three days per week, and is popular with anglers.

The San Dieguito River Park's Coast-to-Crest trail passes by the lake, providing access to the 70-mile long trail, which is now 66% complete.

Photo of Lake Hodges at sunrise (right)
©KS Nature Photography
www.sandiego.gov/reservoirs-lakes/hodges-reservoir



The Escondido Creek Conservancy

Staff

Ann Van Leer | Executive Director
Rita Petrekova | Director of Finance & Operations
Simon Breen | Education Director
Hannah Walchak | Conservation Director
Jennifer Imm | Education Manager
Juan Troncoso | Land Manager
Aida Rodriguez | Outreach Associate
Shirley Innecken | Restoration Specialist
Donna Leon | Land Management Assistant
Meghan Williams | Development Associate
Steffani Jijon | Education Facilitator
Seekey Cacciatore | Education Facilitator
Stacey Vielma | Education Facilitator
Ryan Woldt | Marketing & Communications Associate
Jamison Lauria | Conservation Land Management Assistant

Board of Directors

Leonard Wittwer | President
Richard Murphy | Vice President
Vicky Taylor | Treasurer
Betsy Keithley Ph.D | Secretary
Steve Barker | Director
Ron Forster | Director
Jeff Swenerton | Director
Kevin Barnard | Director
Olga Diaz | Director
Lisa Ruder | Director
Krystle Miller | Director
Christina Simokat | Director



P.O. Box 460791 Escondido, CA 92046



A family of eagles nesting over one of Escondido's beautiful lakes. ©KS Nature Photography

How You Can Support

by Meghan Williams | Development Associate

There are many ways to support the Conservancy through gifts, including direct donations, estate planning, corporate giving, and/or volunteering, just to name a few. Your contribution helps us continue our work of protecting and restoring our rich native habitat, educating the next generation of leaders in conservation science and biology, and providing opportunities for disadvantaged youth to get outdoors.

We have created a handful of funds focused on land acquisition and restoration, education, and equipment to ensure your donations are being put to work in an area that is close to your heart. Our newest campaign is seeking funding for the renovations on the new office, native plant nursery and education facilities being restored on our Mountain Meadow Preserve. All donations received for The Boulder Outlook campaign go directly back into the land fund.

If you have any questions regarding how you can support our work to continue to enhance the lives of people and wildlife in our watershed, please do not hesitate to reach out to:

Meghan Williams at meghan@escondidocreek.org.

We send many thanks to our community and our supporters. We could not do all that we do without you!

Thank you to the Troussel Family Foundation!

Our Land Team desperately needed a new truck. The Troussel Family Foundation stepped up to help by supporting our Heavy Equipment fund. With their support we acquired our new Ram 1500, and a much needed watering trailer!

It is an honor to have met Jameson & Colleen Troussel, and we are excited about the partnership that has blossomed between their foundation and the Conservancy.



VOLUNTEER

Give back to nature with our flexible volunteer programs. You can hike and monitor our trails, lead outdoor fieldtrips, or welcome guests at the Elfin Forest Interpretive Center.

Learn more at:
escondidocreek.org/volunteer



To help save resources, please pass this publication on to a nature loving friend, or recycle after use.