



Canoers Help Clean Creek

By Sheryl Anayas, Science Interchange Reporter

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The debris from Marin County's creeks continually threatens the San Francisco Bay. So, a local organization called the Marin Conservation League (MCL) and the Oakland-based organization Save The Bay have collaborated for three years in a row to bring together Marin residents in a canoeing cleanup project in Gallinas Creek, which feeds into the San Francisco Bay. The last volunteer action was on September 15th, a combination of Save The Bay's "Canoes in Sloughs" program and Coastal Cleanup Day.



Courtesy Sheryl Anayas/Science Interchange

Marin volunteers pose at Gallinas Creek ready to embark on their creek restoration trip by canoes.

it's marshes, beaches, or creeks. From these individuals, Gallagher selects Beach Captains to head up each site cleanup. In late August, Gallagher hosts a Beach Captains meeting where team leaders are provided with information and volunteer recruitment materials ranging from bags and posters to t-shirts for their cleanup crews. At the end of the event, all teams report their results to Gallagher who consolidates and sends them to the Coastal Commission.

This year Marin had 1076 volunteers who collected 7104 pounds of trash and an additional 2731 pounds of recyclables.

MCL and Save The Bay led one of the 34 Coastal Cleanup projects that took place in Marin County. MCL is a non-profit organization and Marin's oldest environmental group, established in 1934. The non-profit organization Save The Bay has worked over the past 40 years to preserve, restore, and protect the San Francisco Bay and Sacramento/ San Joaquin Delta Estuary. Since 1997, Save The Bay's "Canoes in Sloughs" project has offered students in the 6th through 12th grades the opportunity to learn about the Bay through canoe trips.

International Coastal Cleanup is a project of the Center for Marine Conservation that raises awareness about pollution of the world's shorelines. It has occurred throughout the U.S. since 1984. The event takes place every year on the third Saturday of September. Volunteers help to rid beaches and riverbanks of garbage and debris. The California Coastal Commission organizes the event statewide. In 1998 alone, more than 52 thousand Californians picked up pieces of debris that weighed in at over 600 thousand pounds.

The Coastal Commission appoints a coordinator for each county. Chris Gallagher, of the Bay Model, has been the county coordinator for Marin since 1987. She says that her role is to find individuals willing to take responsibility for specific areas of the county whether

Last month's cleanup event at Gallinas Creek combined efforts to bring the Canoes in Sloughs program to the community level while observing Coastal Cleanup Day.

The Coastal Cleanup project in Gallinas Creek gives participants a chance to give back to their community. Also, said Josh Bagnato, education coordinator of Save The Bay, "It'll give people access to the Bay and an interest in the Bay that they maybe haven't had before."

As a critical element of this restoration project, volunteers get a hands-on experience while riding in canoes to collect trash in and around the creek. So why choose to transport Marin volunteers in canoes?

"I thought it would be a neat idea to do this by canoe and try to actually clean up the trash that washes further up into the creeks and marshland/wetland areas that you can't reach by foot," said Anita Franzi, MCL's former education coordinator who helped lead the day's cleanup activities. Some of the trash items found at Gallinas Creek that Saturday included plastic debris, beverage cans, and glass containers--nearly all of which were recyclable.

Gallinas Creek is one of among more than 25 of Marin's interconnected waterways that directly feeds into the San Francisco Bay. Bagnato said, "If the trash doesn't get picked out of Gallinas Creek now, when the rains come in January, the trash is going to get swept right into the Bay." By recycling our trash in landfills and picking up litter on streets, we can all help to prevent debris from further polluting our waterways.

RESOURCES

International Coastal Cleanup and the Center for Marine Conservation: www.cmc-ocean.org/cleanupbro/index.php3

To see what Save The Bay is doing about threats to the San Francisco Bay: www.savesfbay.org or call (510) 452-9261.

Marin Conservation League: www.conservationleague.org

California's Coastal Cleanup Day: www.coastal.ca.gov

To get involved in Marin's Coastal Cleanup Day, contact Chris Gallagher at the Bay Model by calling (415) 332-3871.



Courtesy Sheryl Anayas/Science Interchange

Collection of debris at the end of the day.