



# FOCL POINTS

Friends of Colorado Lagoon is a coalition of concerned citizens working to preserve and restore Colorado Lagoon



## President's Letter by Dave Pirazzi, FOCL President

Guess who came home with A's on their report card? The Colorado Lagoon did on Heal the Bay's end of summer Beach Report Card, and we couldn't be more proud of our great lagoon. Why the change from the more typical dry weather D's and F's? One big factor is the diversion of dry season runoff into the sewer system. Until this year, this runoff went straight into the lagoon along with the all the pollutants it carries – fertilizer, pesticides, petroleum by-products, fecal matter – everything that gets washed into our urban gutters. Another factor is improved tidal circulation resulting from cleaning the underground culvert for the first time in 50 years. These improvements, part of the lagoon restoration completed in 2010, contributed to cleaner and safer water in the lagoon this summer, and are a direct result of your involvement, thank you. They simply would not have happened if not for the tremendous community support, financial and volunteer, that have kept us going. Don't uncork the champagne just yet, these grades are only for the dry season, and only represent improvements in bacteria levels, one of many measures of water quality. But we are definitely making progress in the right direction.

Another reason for cleaner lagoon water is the completion of the Termino Ave Drain Project (TADP), which eliminated flooding in parts of east Long Beach and, thankfully, 3 of the 10 storm drains emptying into the lagoon. But it wasn't originally going to turn out this well. This massive LA County Public Works Project was controversial from the time it was originally proposed twenty five years ago. It was also the rallying point for the local community who wanted to stop further degradation of Colorado Lagoon. Friends of Colorado Lagoon formed twelve years ago in direct opposition to the proposed design of the TADP, which would have had devastating impacts on the lagoon and increased local flooding risks. We asked for improvements to the project that would safeguard the lagoon and prevent local flooding. Eventually, the county agreed to do an Environmental Impact Report and the resulting project design eliminated flooding and actually improved water quality in the lagoon and Alamitos Bay in the process.

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## New Sidewalk, New Bike Racks!

You may have noticed some colorful artwork has appeared next to the Lagoon Science Shack. They are actually bike racks, installed by the City as part of a sidewalk project along Appian Way. The new project will improve pedestrian safety, allow easier access to the beach, and gives us a great place to park our bikes.

The new ADA accessible sidewalk fully equipped with new Big Fish bike racks also brings internet capabilities to the Wetlands and Marine Science Education Center. In partnership with the City of Long Beach's Department of Public Works and 3<sup>rd</sup> District Councilmember Gary DeLong's office, the Lagoon has a safe alternative for students walking in the Appian Way bike lane on the way to school. This sidewalk was developed in coordination with the restoration plan and our new CNPS Beach Garden project will be planted adjacent to the new walkway fully equipped with educational signage.

We want to thank councilmember DeLong and Mr. Mike Conway, Director of Public Works for working with FOCL on the design of the sidewalk project and accommodating Lagoon's needs.



## Collaborative Marine Toxicology Research at the Lagoon Benefits Habitat, Fish and Community



Above, a Shiner Surfperch. To the left, Dr. Kevin Kelley, Hayley Zemel and Jesus Reyes perform research at the Lagoon with curious summer visitors helping with collection.

**by Vivian Wang:** Three local environmental organizations, Friends of the Colorado Lagoon (FOCL), Pacific Coast Environmental Conservancy (PCEC), and Tidal Influence, a community coalition, a non-profit organization, and an environmental advising group, respectively --have come together to work toward improving the water quality and overall health of the Colorado Lagoon, one of the last remaining wetland areas in Long Beach, California. The organizations, along with Dr. Kevin Kelley from CSU Long Beach, plan to determine the physiological condition of wild populations of two fish species, the Pacific staghorn sculpin and the shiner surfperch, that live in the Colorado Lagoon. The research will include measuring specific biomarkers indicative of fish health, in addition to levels of thyroid and corticoid hormones that are responsible for growth, development and adaptation during stress. All of these measures provide insight into the health and well-being of the animals and their ecosystem. By focusing efforts on this body of water before, during and after its scheduled December dredging, this collaborative partnership is hoping to understand the impact of human activity and pollution on habitat known to be important to economically important fish populations. "In environments that are affected by pollutants, organisms tend to be chronically stressed, which hinders their immunity and makes them more susceptible to sickness and infestations of parasites," said Jesus Reyes, founder of Pacific Coast Environmental Conservancy.

### FOCL Receives a California Native Plant Society, South Coast Chapter Conze Bequest Grant to Develop Beach Gardens

The South Coast Chapter of the California Native Plant Society awards grant to groups in the region that have a commitment to developing native plant gardens and educating their community about them. Luckily for us, FOCL has had designs for developing two interpretive gardens around the WAMSEC 1) a native beach garden and 2) a native coastal grassland garden. We have been waiting for the other components of the restoration to complete before addressing these projects. These 2 gardens will become part of our program's curriculum and will help make the public more aware of the various plant communities that exist in southern California and that once existed in and around Colorado Lagoon. The beach garden will include sand fencing as well as interpretive signage. The gardens will be accessible to the public on a daily basis. Thank you CNPS for your support!

*California Native Plant Society*  
*South Coast Chapter*



### FOCL Coordinator Wins Prestigious Award!

FOCL's Research and Monitoring Coordinator, Hayley Zemel, recently received an award to work as one of twelve California Sea Grant Fellows. This is a very competitive and prestigious position awarded to the finest marine researchers in the state. Currently a marine eco-toxicology Masters student at CSULB with advisor Dr. Kevin Kelley, Hayley's new position is funded for one year to work with State and Federal agencies to develop marine science-based policies for the protection and restoration of California's natural resources.

Hayley has supported FOCL as a volunteer, an intern and recently, as Monitoring Coordinator where she has undertaken the monitoring of various water quality parameters, developed and organized intern's research projects and has helped establish FOCL's safe fishing outreach as part of our NOAA/Montrose grant received earlier this year.

Hayley received this award because of her long-time commitment to studying marine environments and the pollution affecting them. In addition to working with FOCL and her teaching and research schedule as a Masters student, Hayley collaborates with Dr. Chris Lowe from CSULB as a rapid response team member for Monterey Bay Aquarium's White Shark tagging project. FOCL's commitment to monitoring the health of the Lagoon's habitat would not be possible without dedicated work like Hayley's. Congratulations Hayley!



**Native Trees** by Adrienne Bosler, M.S.  
FOCL Board Member & Education Committee Chair

The Coast Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*) is one of southern California's native tree species found on slopes and valleys of local foothills and in riparian corridors. *Wet* is the native Tongva name for the coast live oak, and a mash called *wéwish* was made from the acorns. California ground squirrels and scrub jays help regenerate this species by burying acorns in the ground which also protect this cache during wildfires. These magnificent trees stabilize slopes, provide nutrient-rich leaf litter and support a diversity of wildlife.



Be sure to visit the coast live oak and other native trees, shrubs and wildflowers planted by volunteers in 2009 on the eastern bank of the Colorado Lagoon.



Check out this historic photo from 1938 of the diving platform in the Colorado Lagoon. If you have any old photos of the Lagoon, please share them with us at [education@coloradolagoon.org](mailto:education@coloradolagoon.org)

**Power to the People**

by Eric Zahn, M.S. FOCL's Restoration Director

Taking the energy to conserve something is more challenging than blindly depleting something for our advantage. True altruism rarely exists in nature and like all organisms, we humans inherently only spend energy when we receive a benefit. This becomes especially dangerous when considering the remarkable population dynamics of *Homo sapien sapien* (a.k.a. YOU). Our species of hominid has experienced a classical exponential population growth trend over the past 1000 years. In fact it took almost all of human history to reach 1 billion people on Earth by the 1800's, but just one century to reach 2 billion. Due to innovations in medicine allowing humans to more easily procreate and live much longer, an additional 4 billion individuals were added to the total over the past 80 years. Seven billion advantage-oriented-creatures create an extreme strain on the Earth to provide water, food, shelter and other critical resources needed to support that many bipeds.

Needless to say, natural environments across the globe have been impacted by the prosperity of our species. History has repeatedly demonstrated (i.e. the Hetch Hetchy Dam) that the needs of humans outweigh the needs of natural ecosystems. Unfortunately, nature has often also been victimized by the greed of those of us who want more than we need to survive. Our southern California coastline is littered with evidence of skewed human values in the form of airports, agricultural fields, power plants, marinas, shipping ports, military bases, golf courses, neighborhoods and oil fields. However, over the past 6 years working at Colorado Lagoon I have been witness to the potential for humans to reverse this trend. I have seen that as much as people have the power to destroy, they also possess the power to build.

As our species started to inhabit cooler climates it became critical for us to build dwellings that held heat and protected us from harsh weather conditions. We became builders as a means to survive. At Colorado Lagoon I have seen this desire to build harnessed. During the past three years Friends of Colorado Lagoon has held 250 public events focused on providing people opportunities to build. Over 3,200 volunteers have joined us in building homes not for themselves, but instead for the native organisms of southern California's coastal salt marshes. In this instance, we humans have provided numerous other species with new niches and the chance for survival in the urban landscape we have created. Remarkably, volunteers donate their time and energy on precious weekends to achieve something that bucks the trends. It has been enlightening to witness this revolution.

What's more is during my travels I have discovered that this stewardship ethic is burgeoning. It is rare nowadays to find a natural area that has not been adopted by members of the community and is now receiving the tender loving care that humans are so capable of providing. This highlights that only we can save the Earth's ecosystems from ourselves. Organizations like the Sierra Club and Audubon Society have laid to groundwork for citizen led conservation efforts like the one that operates at Colorado Lagoon. FOCL would not be able to accomplish our challenging dreams of restoring Colorado Lagoon without the involvement of local citizens like you. So please set aside a 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday sometime soon and join us along the shore of the Pacific Ocean. This way you too can experience our quiet revolution. Power to the People!



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The resulting project design eliminated all flooding risks and actually improved water quality in the lagoon and Alamitos Bay in the process. In October, there was a public celebration honoring the completion of the multi-year TADP. There was no mention of FOCL, and we're fine with that. We congratulate the county on completion of the project, on time and within budget, and take great comfort in knowing our efforts led to a dramatically more beneficial project for our community.

What's next for the Lagoon? Dredging is scheduled to start in November or December to remove contaminated sediment, re-slope some of the banks, and remove the three drain structures that were abandoned by the TADP. The project will cost in the range of \$10M and, as always, funding has been an issue. FOCL has partnered with the city to bring in almost \$8M in grant funding to pay for the project, we're working hard to keep Army Corps funding from disappearing and close the gap. We know city budgets are tight and it is our desire to fund the project through federal, state and local grants. Along those lines, FOCL is negotiating with the city to do some of the work, like replanting the re-sloped banks using our community based restoration model, which has the potential to save the city several hundred thousand dollars. Hopefully by the time you read this, the city council will have approved the initial dredge contract so work can start. The sediment, once treated, will go to the Port of Long Beach's Middle Harbor project and timing is critical. We will do our best to keep the community informed and minimize impacts to our neighbors during this important project.

As always, we need your support to continue the fight for a clean, safe, restored Colorado Lagoon that we can all be proud of. This is a challenging time for state and local governments, and progress can only be made with strong community support and active involvement. We know that the current economy has forced many to cut back on charitable giving; we're all learning to do more with less. FOCL is an all volunteer organization and remains dependent on your donations of money and time to accomplish our mission. Please consider making a donation to FOCL to support our advocacy work, community based restoration, and environmental education. Given the state of school budgets, this need has never been greater.

We're also looking for a few passionate individuals to join our Board of Directors. We are a dedicated group of community members who pride ourselves on working collaboratively with our government, community, and other non-profits to restore, improve and protect the lagoon. We strive to remain non-political, non-confrontational, and focused on our mission, all while having as much fun as possible. If you are looking for a way to channel your passion right here in our community, please contact me.

Dave Pirazzi, President

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