

Hello Friends of the Four Rivers Association. Following a lengthy absence we're happy to have our *FOCUS on Four Rivers* newsletter back "online" in this new electronic format. With the transfer of personnel and others just moving on to new opportunities, our Association's newsletter and membership components have undergone some changes, accompanied by the inevitable glitches. We appreciate your patience while everything gets worked out.

If you have paid your membership dues of \$6 per person or \$10 for family, but have not received your membership card and complimentary parking pass, please contact us and we will make it right. We value your membership in our association as it supports our efforts to help our State Parks' staff provide interesting and educational activities which enhance your enjoyment of our public lands. But, perhaps, more importantly your membership provides us an avenue through which we can inform you of all the great activities, recreational and educational opportunities available in our Four Rivers region. We hope you will continue to support the Four Rivers Association with your membership, and will help us spread the word to others in our communities who would like to join our efforts.

If you would like to become a new member, please send a check for \$6 per person or \$10 per family, made payable to Four Rivers Association, to: Jennifer Morgan, Four Rivers Sector, 31426 Gonzaga Road, Gustine, CA 95322. You will receive a membership card (good for 10% off postcards, flower seeds, and maps at Romero Visitor Center, next to San Luis Reservoir) as well as a single day use parking pass at a Four Rivers state park, which is a \$6 value.

We are now publishing our newsletter online to save resources and money, however if you would prefer to have a paper copy mailed to you, please contact Jennifer at the address above, or write her at jmorg@parks.ca.gov, or call her at 209.826.1197 ext. 222.

With this fall edition, as before, we will try to keep you informed of what is interesting and what is going on in the California State Parks in our Four Rivers Region. What are the Four Rivers? We're talking about the region surrounding the San Joaquin, Merced, Tuolumne, and Stanislaus Rivers. The State Parks within that region include Caswell State Park, Turlock Lake Recreation Area, San Luis Reservoir Recreation Area, Pacheco State Park, Hatfield State Recreation Area, and others.

We also like to include information about happenings in other public lands within our Four Rivers region – the national and state wildlife refuges. You will find something to see and do in any season throughout the region. We hope you will take advantage of this wondrous natural resource we all help support and use this newsletter to get started.

22nd Annual Coastal Clean-Up Day at the San Luis Reservoir
Saturday, September 16 – 9 a.m. to Noon

International Coastal Clean-up Day is an annual service day that takes place on the third Saturday in September in all 50 states and more than 90 countries around the world, with more than 700 locations in California alone. In 1993, the *Guinness Book of World Records* recognized the California Coastal Cleanup Day as the world's largest beach clean-up. So, this could be your chance to say, "I've been part of a Guinness Record!"

So, join what could be the world's largest group of environmental volunteers to help collect litter from the waters and shoreline of San Luis Reservoir. Your efforts will help protect fish and wildlife, and enhance the natural beauty of the San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area for all its visitors.

Volunteers will be needed along the shoreline, as well as in boats on the reservoir. State Parks will supply garbage bags, rubber gloves, and a limited number of garbage grabbers. Volunteers will also be given a FREE day-use parking pass for each car – a \$6 value – and if they have a boat, they will receive a FREE launch for that day – another \$6 value.

All volunteers will check in at the Basalt Entrance Station at 9 a.m. They will be given supplies and directions to their clean-up area. Between noon and 1 p.m. volunteers will drop off their full bags of garbage at the entrance station. Each carload of volunteers will then be given a second FREE day-use pass for their next visit to San Luis Reservoir. That means two free afternoons to enjoy the park while helping to make it more beautiful.

San Luis Reservoir is located on State Highway 152 between Los Banos and Gilroy. Approximately seven miles west of Interstate 5, take the Basalt Area turnoff south from the highway and continue two miles to the entrance station.

For more information about Coastal Clean-up Day, please visit www.coast4u.org, and click on Coastal Clean-up Day, or contact Jennifer Morgan at 209.826.1197 ext. 222, or email her at jmorg@parks.ca.gov.

Path of the Padres hikes at Los Banos Creek Reservoir
Saturdays & Sundays, March through April, 2007

If you like the idea of hiking through some of California's spectacular foothills combined with a history lesson on the early 1800s Spanish Padres from the Mission San Juan Bautista, then the State Parks Path of the Padres hike is for you.

Consider this advance notice of the upcoming hikes which will take place in March and April of 2007. The hikes take place on most Saturdays and Sundays and are open to the public ages 6 years and older, by advance reservations only. Hikes for school groups can be arranged for Thursdays or Fridays. Reservations for school groups will begin being taken December 1st. General public reservations will begin on the first Monday in February of 2007.

The hike begins and ends at the Los Banos Creek Reservoir boat launch ramp. A pontoon boat carries passengers for 30 to 40 minutes to the west end of the reservoir, with short stops along the way to observe wildlife along the shoreline. Hikers disembark at the west end of the reservoir for a five-mile round-trip hike through the area where, in the early 1800s, the Spanish padres from Mission San Juan Bautista camped on their way to the Central Valley. Throughout the hike, the natural and historic features of the area are observed and discussed by the guide. Lunch stop is at the historic "baths" – deep pools in the creek carved in bedrock, which gave Los Banos (the baths) its name. As early as 1805 the mission padres and accompanying soldiers washed and rested there at Los Banos del Padre Arroyo, now simply Los Banos Creek.

Hikers also have the option of taking a side trip up a steep hill for a spectacular view of the Menjoulet Canyon and the proposed site of the Los Banos Grandes reservoir. The canyon floor is covered with 576 acres of old-growth California Sycamore forest, described by Department of Fish & Game biologists as the largest and most intact natural community of its kind remaining in California.

So, mark off one Saturday or Sunday next spring for the Path of the Padres, and get ready for reservations beginning early next year. More information and details will be available as the time approaches.

Wildflower Days at Pacheco State Park Weekends in April

One way to get through the damp chilly fog-shrouded Central Valley winter months is to think about Wildflower Days coming up in April, 2007 at Pacheco State Park.

In April, a series of guided walks through the foothills' spectacular spring wildflower displays at Pacheco State Park are offered. The guided walks—including a 2 mile one as well as an easier History Walk continue each weekend in April, providing an opportunity to enjoy some awe-inspiring beauty, and to learn to identify some of our local botanical gems. You can also take your time following the Self-Guided Trail.

Pacheco State Park's 10th Anniversary and 4th Annual Wildflower Day will be celebrated on **Saturday, April 21st, 2007**. We hope to offer Wells Fargo stage coach rides that day in addition to nature walks, a ranch barbecue, and more.

More details on specific activities and times will follow as the event nears, so stay-tuned.

Just west of our Four Rivers region is our second largest state park, Henry Coe State Park. This wilderness state park is east of Morgan Hill, and a great time to visit is for their annual **Tarantula Fest** on Saturday, October 7. For details, log on to www.coepark.org, or call (408) 779-2728.

Fall is a spectacular time to visit our local wildlife refuges!
Merced National Wildlife Refuge
San Luis National Wildlife Refuge
Los Banos State Wildlife Area

Things really start jumping during the fall and winter at our local wildlife refuges. The weather is cooler and now is a great time to get out and enjoy what there is to see and learn about the birds and animals which share the Central Valley with us.

The Tule Elk rut is in full swing at San Luis National Wildlife area on Wolfsen Road, about seven miles north of Los Banos on State Highway 165. The National Fish & Wildlife Service will host Tule Elk Tours on Sunday afternoon, September 10, at 4 p.m. and again on Saturday morning, September 30, at 8 a.m. The guided tours will begin at the information kiosk just inside the refuge and will continue around the Tule Elk enclosure with stops along the way to observe the elk, and hear talks providing information about the species. There's no need to sign up – just show up and experience our Tule Elk. For more information call Jack Sparks, Outdoor Recreation Planner for National Fish & Wildlife Service, Los Banos, 209.826.3508 ext. 21.

Crane Day will be coming in late October at the Merced National Wildlife Refuge on Sandy Mush Road. Crane Day provides a great opportunity to get to know our Lesser Sandhill Cranes which spend the winter right here in our "back yard" after raising their young on their breeding grounds in Alaska and Siberia. Crane Day provides tours and talks guided by National Fish & Wildlife biologists on a Saturday morning in October. To find out exactly when Crane Day will take place, call Jack Sparks, Outdoor Recreation Planner for National Fish & Wildlife Service, Los Banos, 209.826.3508, or check www.fws.gov/sanluis.

Other guided tours will take place at the local refuges throughout the fall and winter. Watch local newspapers for details or call the USNF&WS number provided above.

You don't have to have a guided tour to enjoy the birds and animals at our refuges. The refuges have self-guided auto tour routes where visitors can enjoy the natural residents from the security of their "automobile blind. Call 209.826-3508 for details.

Throughout September, the Tule Elk rut will continue and the songbird migration gets underway. Waterfowl, primarily ducks, will begin returning to the Grasslands Ecological Area wetlands.

In October, the Sandhill Cranes begin returning. Waterfowl should be present in large numbers and you should still be able to see the Tule Elk in harems and bachelor herds.

By November, the Sandhill Cranes should number more than 10,000 birds and thousands of waterfowl of numerous species should be here.

By December, the Snow Geese begin to arrive and the Great Horned Owls will begin nesting. By the end of the month, participants in the Annual Christmas Bird Count will be able to see more than 130 species of birds throughout the area.

Special Children's' Activities – Parents, whether your child is a budding naturalist or a couch potato, the Department of Fish and Game has a full calendar of activities for them to choose from. Besides numerous junior hunting days, you can find out about the Wild Night Family Overnight "Spooky Sleepover" at the San Francisco Zoo as well as the Sandhill Crane Festival by logging on to www.dfg.ca.gov/yo/ to read their Youth Adventures in the Outdoors calendar.

California State Parks Store

www.store.parks.ca.gov

Do you need an annual California State Parks Pass? What about some unique accessories and gift ideas for the nature-lover on your list, or apparel, backpacks – even publications and videos? You can find all this quickly and easily online through the California State Parks Store. Just visit www.store.parks.ca.gov. You can even purchase gift certificates for State Parks Store purchases and let your gift recipients do their own shopping. You can also find park-specific items offered by California State Parks cooperating associations.

Have you heard about the new Golden Poppy Pass that is now available? State Parks is pleased to announce the introduction of the department's new "Golden Poppy" Annual Day Use Parking Pass. This pass will sell for \$90.

The Golden Poppy Pass was created because the regular annual day use pass that costs \$125 and allows parking in "high demand" parks—which charge over \$7 per day—was too expensive for those who spend their time at state parks that

only charge \$4 to \$7 per day. Most of the “high demand” parks are southern California state beaches and parks, while most of the state parks and reservoirs in northern California charge from \$4 to \$7 per day. Therefore the new Golden Poppy Parking Pass is more economical and convenient around here.

This pass is valid for 12 months, beginning with the month when it is purchased. (It does not run from January 1 through December 31—if you purchase it in March your 12 months begins then.) This pass must be displayed on the rearview mirror or vehicle dashboard when visiting state parks that honor this pass.

So, check it all out. www.store.parks.ca.gov.

Geocaching – another way to get out there and experience California State Parks.

Geocaching is an adventure hobby which combines the outdoors, hiking, and gps (global positioning satellite). Using gps coordinates and personal gps units, participants are led to the locations of hidden caches all over the world, including our State Parks.

If you think geocaching sounds like something your or your family might enjoy, check out the website www.geocaching.com for information on what geocaching is and how you can get started.

Thank you for taking time to read our new newsletter! We hope it will help get you enthused so you’ll hop in the car and go out and explore some of the beautiful places that are being preserved in the Four Rivers region.

Please check back in December for our next newsletter, which will include more links to local nature groups as well as the start of our ‘local nature’ articles. (Did you know that we have orchids growing in the hills here?)

Signing off, your Four Rivers Association reporter, Madeline Yancey.