



Left: Students from Redwood High School volunteer in the restoration effort at Dry Creek Preserve. Right: A student from Golden West High School's Key Club removes invasive milk thistle from Kaweah Oaks Preserve. (Photos by SRT staff.)

## Natural Leaders: Service Learning Empowers Future Conservationists

You may observe a group of unfamiliar creatures on your next visit to a Sequoia Riverlands Trust nature preserve. While at first cautious about their new habitat, these resilient mammals acclimate quickly and soon begin busying themselves digging and depositing seeds in the soil. Sometimes their work takes them to the edges of creeks and ponds or to wetlands. Regardless of their activity, you will likely hear their chatter from yards away.

Who are these busy mammalian visitors? They're local middle and high school students taking part in SRT's service learning program. Service learning projects are a recent addition to SRT's environmental education program, which serves more than 1,800 youth and community members each year through classroom field trips, public guided hikes and nature programs, and other volunteer opportunities.

Last year, SRT saw an opportunity to offer local youth in middle and high school a deeper, more meaningful connection to the land. Since then, with support from Alcoa

Foundation, Sempra Energy Foundation, REI, and members like you, SRT has planned and implemented 11 service learning projects in which more than 150 youth practiced teamwork and problem-solving skills and obtained first-hand experiences with restoration, scientific monitoring and natural resource stewardship. SRT is expanding its service learning program to offer more opportunities in 2010.

"Service learning projects are a great way to get kids excited about conservation. Kids work in small groups to accomplish important work that restores native habitat, monitors water quality, inventories natural resources or enhances visitor experience to our nature preserves," said Laura Childers, Environmental Education Director. "Students also learn firsthand how volunteering can positively affect ecosystems near their home," continued Childers.

Tulare County is home to some of the most spectacular biodiversity and in-tact natural landscapes in the world, but is

*(Continued on page 2)*



## VISTAS

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## Service Learning

(continued from front page)

plagued by an assortment of environmental, health and socio-economic challenges that will only worsen without the public's interest in conservation and sustainability. The goal of SRT's service learning program is to help train a core group of natural leaders who will take pride in leading others to respect and steward the great open spaces and biodiversity of our local environment.



AP Environmental Science students from Golden West High School work to stabilize eroding hillsides at Dry Creek Preserve. (Photo by SRT Staff)

In addition to training natural leaders, studies show that community-based service learning projects provide a number of benefits to youth, including:

- Increased sense of self-efficacy with the knowledge that they can impact real social challenges, problems and needs;
- Higher academic achievement and interest in furthering their education;
- Enhanced problem-solving skills, ability to work in teams, and planning capabilities; and
- Enhanced civic engagement attitudes, skills and behaviors.

"I see this work inspiring the next generation of conservation leaders and empowering them to take further action in their communities," said Childers.

**You** can sponsor a local classroom's outdoor experience. Call SRT today at (559) 738-0211 to provide a class with hands on education or to become a member of Sequoia Riverlands Trust. If you're a teacher who is interested in bringing this meaningful outdoor experience to your classroom, please contact Laura Childers at extension 103.

## Southern California Edison

An Outstanding Conservation Partner

Sequoia Riverlands Trust would like to recognize and thank Southern California Edison (SCE) for its commitment to innovative, lasting conservation solutions in the southern Sierra Nevada. SCE realizes that collaboration is essential to tackling the region's most challenging—and most urgent—environmental challenges.

That's why SCE helps fund Sequoia Riverlands Trust's leadership in statewide conservation collaborations such as the Southern Sierra Partnership. When leaders of the most influential conservation groups in the state sit at the table together and work toward a common goal, results happen. SCE has partnered with Sequoia Riverlands Trust in this effort for more than two years, and has demonstrated an interest in supporting the trust's future conservation efforts.

While most of us think of Southern California Edison mostly in the context of the electrical power we use to run our homes and offices, Sequoia Riverlands Trust is thankful to view SCE as much more: a responsible corporate citizen and committed conservation partner in the southern Sierra Nevada and San Joaquin Valley.

## In Memorial: Deborah L. Bratt

12/14/60 - 9/21/10



Debbie Bratt was a force of nature – infectious optimism, enthusiastic, generous, caring, open and hardworking. Debbie's life ended unexpectedly on Tuesday, September 21. This loss has shaken the foundation of her family, loved ones, coworkers and friends.

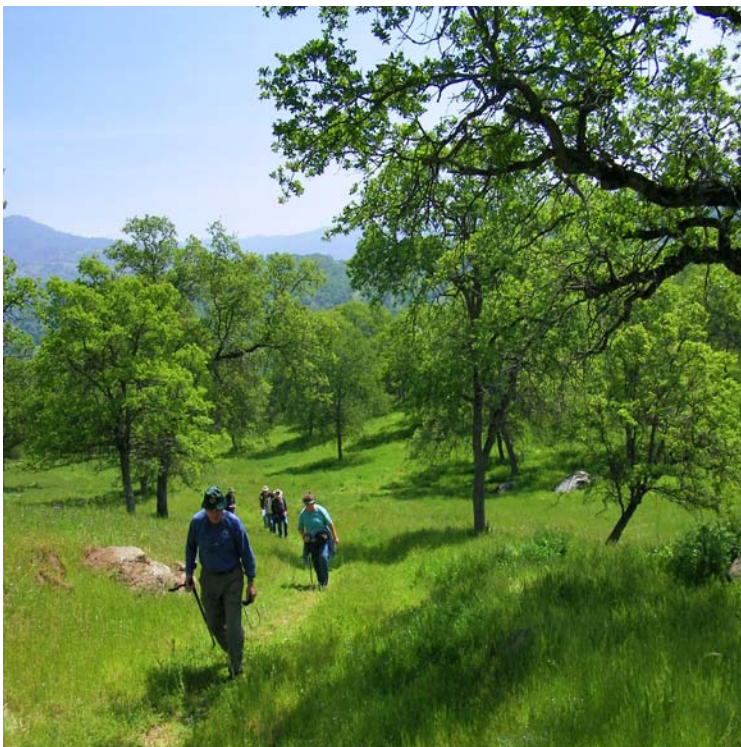
As Sequoia Riverlands Trust's Finance, Accounting and Grant Manager, Debbie was a dedicated, diligent, and absolutely integral member of SRT's team. In addition to accounting and administration, filling a room with laughter was another of her many skills. As a tribute to her generous spirit, the famous climbing sycamore tree at Kaweah Oaks Preserve will bear a plaque with her name on it. The majestic tree's invitingly outstretched limbs will forever symbolize the way Debbie embraced life, beauty and love.

Debbie, you will be missed by all those you touched.

*Contributions to the Deborah L. Bratt memorial fund can be sent to Sequoia Riverlands Trust, Attention Debbie Fund.*

## Connecting Land and People: Public Access to Nature Preserves

Seasonal Public Access at Blue Oak Ranch Starting Spring 2011



Hikers explore Blue Oak Ranch during a community day at the Preserve in April. (Photo by SRT Staff)

A main tenet of Sequoia Riverlands Trust's conservation approach is the importance of connectivity: conserving adjacent parcels of land that, together, provide an area large enough for wildlife to roam and native species to thrive. But the importance of connectivity isn't limited to the land or the species that live there full-time. SRT believes that people need a different kind of connectivity to thrive. That's why the land trust works to establish connections between the land and the adults and children who nearby. Part of that work is through providing public access to its nature preserves.

March through June of 2011, Blue Oak Ranch will be available for public use on the second Saturday of the month from 9 a.m.- 4 p.m. for hiking, bird watching and other light recreation. Located five miles north of Springville, Blue Oak Ranch is home to rolling blue oak woodland, chaparral, the headwaters of Sycamore Creek, and spectacular spring wildflower shows.

"By opening our preserves to conservation-compatible recreation and outdoor education, we hope to enhance awareness and appreciation of our special landscape," said SRT Executive

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## Public Access *(continued from page 3)*

Director Soapy Mulholland. “Our job is to maintain the integrity and connectivity of the land while providing an excellent source of education and recreation for the community.”

Blue Oak Ranch’s visitor access plan and the educational programs anticipated at the preserve are funded by a Sierra Nevada Conservancy grant and through generous contributions by members like you.

SRT is also working to offer public access at Dry Creek Preserve, near Lemon Cove. Hundreds of volunteers have put in thousands of hours of labor to restore this former gravel mining quarry to its native grandeur. Thanks to the hard work of these dedicated volunteers, the generous donations from members like you, and a Proposition 50 grant from the California Resources Agency, Dry Creek Preserve is now home again to a thriving population of native plants and animals. SRT plans to install visitor amenities and begin offering public access next year.

“Sometimes it only takes is a quiet walk along a creek to feel connected to nature and inspired about conservation,” said Mulholland. “SRT is working to provide that opportunity for the local community.”

***Be a part of it! Donate today at [www.sequoiariverlands.org](http://www.sequoiariverlands.org).***

## Get Connected! Visit SRT Nature Preserves

### Kaweah Oaks Preserve

**Hours of Operation:** Daily, one hour after sunrise to one hour before sunset.

**Visitor Amenities:** Four loop trails, interpretive signage, trail guide, picnic area, restrooms, parking area.

**Location:** 7 miles east of Visalia

**Entrance Fee/Donation:** None, but your donations help SRT maintain the Preserve.

### Blue Oak Ranch

**Hours of Operation:** Second Saturday of the month, March through June, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

**Visitor Amenities:** None

**Location:** 5 miles north of Springville

**Entrance Fee/Donation:** \$10 per adult, \$5 per child age 6-17, or \$25 per family. Children 5 and under free.

### Dry Creek Preserve

Stay posted for details on public access plans and visitor amenities in 2011.

*For expanded information, updates, driving directions and more, please visit [www.sequoiariverlands.org](http://www.sequoiariverlands.org).*



Dry Creek Preserve, a reclaimed gravel mine, protects 152 acres of rare sycamore alluvial woodland