

Coastline

GAVIOTA COAST CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2022



Growth and charred Manzanita after the Alisal Fire Photo: Guner Tautrim

Fire, ecology, and land stewardship on the Gaviota Coast

OBSERVATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED BY GUNER TAUTRIM

Last year Gaviota experienced yet another wildfire (the Alisal Fire) which burned just under 17,000 acres in total. Winter has come and gone and although we did experience a few good storms our “rain year” totals are fairly dismal with numbers in the 10-13 inches range depending on exact location. Rain came just days after the Alisal fire was contained and luckily that first rain was exactly what we like to see- effective! Effective rainfall is rain that is light on the land, reducing chances of erosion and increasing the infiltration (effectiveness) into our soils. This was a very nice first rain since much of our upper and lower watersheds were just days from recovering from the fire.

The difference between recovery in a “natural environment” and recovery in an “agricultural/grazing environment” is significant. Since my land stewardship acres are mainly the latter, I have a few observations worth noting. The fire that most recently burned was somewhat of a “cool” burn in our area. This is preferred to a “hot” burn which can have damaging effects on the soil and future recovery. However, fire ecology in today’s day and age is much different than fire ecology in

times when the indigenous population inhabited these lands. Much of our grasslands are what we call “invasive European annuals”- species brought over intentionally (or not!) from faraway lands. One thing we noticed in our grasslands is that after that first rain we had a 100% germination of Black Mustard (*Brassica nigra*). Although many people think this yellow flowering annual is pretty, it is the bane of those of us trying to diversify our rangelands. Mustard often times grows as a mono crop, allowing nothing else to grow around it or under it. It can grow 8-10’ tall in a season and come early summer it begins its dying phase leaving behind a dry, brittle thicket of standing debris that is prone to high fire danger. Once we realized we had 100% mustard coming up we decided to graze sheep in

this area. The sheep will very much enjoy eating young mustard and doing so (early) resulted in a much different outcome than “over the fence” to the east (right side of the photo). On the right (photo below center taken in late April 2022) you’ll see 8’ tall, already dried out, stalks of mustard.

... Continued next page

\$25,000 Match For Donations to GCC Operations Available Now Through June 30!

GCC is moving closer to securing properties on the Gaviota Coast for permanent protection and conservation. We need your assistance to maintain these efforts with willing landowners, government officials and agencies. Please consider donating to the Gaviota Coast Conservancy right now to protect this precious coastline for present and future generations.

Your contribution will be doubled if you donate between now and June 30. Gaviota Coast Conservancy Board members have generously made available a matching fund and will double your investment in GCC up to \$25,000! Please consider donating now. This is a critical moment in the conservation of the Gaviota Coast.



... from previous page

To the left of the fence you'll see a much different species palate. The challenge with fire and the grassland environment is that you can spend countless time and countless money to introduce diversity (and natives) only to be destroyed in the blink of an eye due to fire only to revert back to the invasive European annuals. This is frustrating for the land steward who is committed to managing for the long-term health of the ecosystem. Through observation, trial and error, we continue to evolve our management goals. Monitoring and adaptive management are the name of the game. We do not suggest we have the answers, rather we are committed to trying our best. In this situation we have found that timely and appropriate animal impact have been a useful tool in our tool box.

In the natural environment however, the tools in the tool box are much, much different. Much of our Chaparral (the majority of our upper watersheds) species rely on fire due to their timeless dependence on it. During the turn of the century and into the 1930's and beyond, ALL fire had a bad rap and there began decades of total fire suppression. In doing this we created the perfect storm for what we have now- an ecosystem that has been devoid of fire for so long that chaparral has grown to 30' tall and then dies leaving huge swaths of massive fire fuels that explode upon ignition. The Alisal fire gave us a chance to see this behavior as well as the polar opposite- a fire return interval of just a couple years. Many acres that burned in the Alisal Fire had just burned in the Sherpa fire. This will be interesting to observe how the landscapes of these adjacent environments react over the coming years.

Refugio Canyon

Fire Damage and Renewal on the Gaviota Coast

BY SALLY BERRY

Although I enjoy visiting the Gaviota Coast, I typically stay along the beach leaving the canyons and mountains unexplored. Today was different – I was invited to go along with small group to explore Refugio Canyon. This is an area that I have not been to before and it was time for me to explore new places. After the hard rain the night before, our group dwindled down to just three of us – Warren Powers, Janet Koed, and myself.

I felt "in good hands" with Warren as our trusty guide due to his familiarity with the area and the local history.

We anticipated seeing some destruction from the recent fire. What we didn't know is that we would also see some results of fresh debris flow. We met and drove up the road sloshing through the fresh mud and following a plow scraping away debris. After a bit of slipping and sliding up the winding road, we parked near the horse ranch. The three of us started walking up the trail at the Circle Bar B Ranch. We shared our stories of the ranch and reminisced about the horseback riding and the earlier dinner shows that used to be held at the ranch. The ranch owners were starting the messy clean up the ranch to make way for future visitors to come.

We continued the careful step-by-step mucky trek, sloshing our way up the hill. What once was a road was now a mixture of wet clay and soil, making our hike just a little bit more challenging. As we continued up the road, we started to see positive signs of this week's rain. The creeks regained a gentle flow of water not seen for weeks on end – a beautiful site. It was interesting how the new patches of fresh green and soft flow of water was mixed in with the charred remnants of the fire. I could start to see how destroyed nature helps heal part of this mess that had occurred. It was amazing, but also gave a lot of mixed feelings.

Warren informed us of a nearby larger waterfall and guided us in that direction. Continuing up the path, we finally could see the water fall in the distance below our perch at the road. It was a beautiful site but we wanted to get a bit closer. So, we agreed to skitter down a ravine, make our way over the rocky and muddy terrain, and across the creek towards the fall. The trek was well worth the journey. A picture does not begin to explain its beauty, the sounds of rushing water, the birds, the moist green surroundings. There was a fresh rain scent of nature with a mix of charred wood and humid air coming from the new growth. I had not smelled or felt a bit of humidity in quite a while but it felt good. After our brief



Photo: Sally Berry

meditation at the waterfall, we reversed our path to climb up silty rock ledges and back up the ravine. It was a bit challenging – but why not? We continued along the path, up the hill, skimming over streams and plowing onward. We finally twisted our way up the mountain to a point where we could view the ocean to the south.

Along our path, we encountered remnants of homes that now lie in rubble. We fortunately saw homes still standing too. Warren was able to fill in my knowledge gap with some stories and history the locals and land. We stopped at one of the charred remains that used to be a home taking a glimpse of the melted



Charred structure debris Photo: Sally Berry

parts of someone's personal life. We continued on down the "main road" that was now a rock-filled field of rubble which unfortunately, no owner could get up by car anymore.

As we made our way down toward our car, I reflected on the beauty of this wonderful area and how mother nature tries to renew the damage. The trip reminded me that occasionally I need to get off the beach and up into the mountains to see another type of beauty very close to where we live called the Gaviota Coast.

Freedom Trax

BY STEVE FORSELL

Are you familiar with our local non-profit known as NatureTrack? Since 2011, they have provided cost-free outdoor field trips for Santa Barbara County school-aged children, utilizing local trails and beaches in Santa Barbara. They have a dedicated volunteer group of docents who share their knowledge and love of the outdoors with k-12 students. There is never a cost to schools, students, teachers or parents. Sue Eisaguirre is the Founder and Executive Director.

Recently, Janet Koed and I hiked with NatureTrack at Jalama Beach. The purpose of our get together was to get a chance to see how their Freedom Trax devices worked for providing the power of navigation for wheelchair users. These devices provide access to the wheelchair bound individual who may never have had the chance to independently enjoy being on a beach or trail. The Freedom Trax devices attach to a manual wheelchair and allow access to areas that would otherwise be inaccessible. The devices are relatively light and can be easily transported.



It was a beautiful sunny day at Jalama and we experimented with the Freedom Trax. A manual wheelchair was quickly transformed into a battery-powered all-terrain vehicle that traversed the beach sand and a short trail hike for one gentleman. We were able to see just how well these devices worked. Sue offered us the use of the Freedom Trax for hikes that GCC leads. For more information go to naturetrack.org.

Dirty Work

Clean up on the Gaviota Coast

BY JANET KOED

Trash pickup with Gaviota Coast Conservancy is no walk in the park. Unlike beach cleanups where our volunteers have strolled scenic sandy places looking for discarded matter, highway cleanups present less serene surroundings. Semi-trucks go whizzing by. Foxtails attack our ankles. A seedy side of humanity is revealed. Perhaps Gaviota beachgoers are a little more aware of keeping their favorite places tidied up than those people speeding down the highway to get from one place to another as quick as possible.



Hard at dirty work! Photo: Janet Koed

It's my experience that sunbathers and surf rompers are more likely to leave a child's plastic beach toy behind. Sure, there are the party people who don't always take their beer cans or plastic cups back to the recycling bins. On the stretch of Hwy 101 that GCC is responsible for cleaning once a month, it's common to find cigarette butts, fast food containers, rags and plastic bottles. Some people don't think twice about throwing their Starbucks cups and

beer cans out the window. There is even a fair amount of toilet paper tossed or left (don't ask). Face masks are a little more sparse now than they were the past two years.

The volunteers who regularly help with this task like to trade stories of unusual finds. Today George Davidson and I came upon a conglomeration of broken headlight and bumper plastic pieces in one place. As we looked around, we found a dead deer nearby in the bushes. There was also a dead crow down the way. We pieced together a sad story. George shared of the time he found a wallet with a woman's driver's license and credit cards in it. She was very grateful to get the call that her wallet was found and that she could recover the contents. Last month Greg Helms found a handgun! It wasn't loaded but there was some speculation, within our group, about how it got there. On another excursion, a round of live ammunition was

discovered. Oh, and Phil McKenna once found a large bag of marijuana. What happened there?

Finds of \$1 to \$20 bills have been reported by Gaviota cleanup crew members. We hope the trash-tossers will get more generous with their cash. Better yet, donate to Gaviota Coast Conservancy!

A majority of the trash we find on

our monthly highway 101 clean sweeps is plastic that would eventually end up in the ocean. Help us keep Gaviota's scenic highway healthy!



Alfred Lang and Ken Hershberg Photo: Janet Koed

Opportunities

Conservation Opportunities Are Available Now

Gaviota Coast Conservancy is dedicated to protecting the rural character and environmental integrity of the Gaviota Coast for present and future generations.

BY DOUG KERN

Permanent protection for coastal lands is at hand. Your operations fund donation will be matched!

Gaviota Coast Conservancy has been seeking permanent protection for critical properties along the Gaviota Coast. We do this work in close cooperation with other environmental organizations and government agencies in the greater Santa Barbara area.

We're closing in on several properties and making progress. GCC is working with our partners and willing landowners to make these acquisitions to preserve the environmental integrity, rural character of the Coast and make it accessible in a limited, managed way so that it stays protected for present and future generations. There are conservation opportunities available and now is the time where we have willing sellers and funding available through private philanthropy and the California State 30x30 initiative.

These are expensive properties and will need the support of everyone who wants to leave a legacy of protecting the Gaviota Coast. You can help GCC by contributing to our operations fund while we secure coastal properties. Operational funding keeps the lights on and the doors open, and right now, your contribution to GCC will be doubled! GCC Board members are matching your donation up to \$25,000 through June 30th. Jack Johnson has also added matching funds! Please consider donating to GCC now and your generosity will be doubled!

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or would like to become involved in this process: doug.kern@gaviotacoastconservancy.org



Muddy hike in Refugio Canyon Photo: Sally Berry



Refugio Canyon View Photo: Sally Berry

Your Assistance is Urgently Needed and Appreciated!

Donate to the Gaviota Coast Conservancy!

Your Donation matched up to \$25,000 through June 30th!

Protecting the Gaviota Coast Since 1996

GCC Staff

Doug Kern, Executive Director
Janet Koed, Outreach Coordinator
David Torres, Administrative Assistant

GCC Board of Directors

Greg Helms, President
Donna Senauer, Vice President
Richard Hunt, Treasurer
Greg Karpain, Secretary
Nancy Black, Chair, Communications
Mike Brown, Chair, Development

Steve Forsell, Chair Outreach
Nate Kelly
Phil McKenna, Chair, Land Use
Michelle Sevilla
Peter Sterling
Guner Tautrim
Kathy Washburn, Chair, Governance

Coming Events

5/21 Chumash Earth Day
5/28 Herb Walk with Emily at Gaviota Wind Caves
10/5 Jack Johnson concert at Green Village, SB County Bowl
10/28 Coastal Cruise on Condor Express

Contact Us:

805-683-6631

info@gaviotacoastconservancy.org
www.gaviotacoastconservancy.org