

Almonte Marsh and the goat

No doubt, if you travel Miller Avenue, you have noticed an area of unkempt, overgrown vegetation at the intersection of Almonte Avenue, just south of the Tam High football field. What you might not know is that this is a protected wetland that has not seen much upkeep over time, due to a lack of available funds to allow the area's owner, the school district, to do the work. Residents of the neighborhood have for many years hoped for a restoration of this valuable wetland and the county has also looked for a solution, but funding has always been the roadblock.

Enter the goat

Across the highway, at Gate 6 Road and Bridgeway, there is an area known as the Gates Cooperative, which is a part of the Waldo Point Harbor floating home marina. For decades, Waldo Point residents, and the state and county agencies, have explored ways to clean this area up and bring it up to code. Finally, after a lot of hard work, a reconfiguration of the harbor and rehabilitation of the Gates area was agreed by all the stake holders. State, county and federal permits were issued. Of course, this required years of negotiation, planning, EIRs and so on. Everyone was happy that there were no marsh-type areas that needed to be preserved, and then the Gates Cooperative's pet goat died.

That's right, their goat died. Along comes the Army Corps of Engineers, who, at the 11th hour, just prior to issuing their permit, discovered a total of about one square foot of pickleweed in the area. Apparently, the goat had been eating it, and, absent the goat, the pickleweed returned. Full stop to the project, until and unless an acceptable offsite mitigation could be identified. An extensive search for that mitigation began, but was not bearing fruit.

Rapprochement!

In order to fulfill the needs of all the stakeholders and to bring this shaggy goat story to a conclusion, Supervisor and Mill Valley resident Charles McGlashan suggested that the Almonte Marsh be reclaimed to fulfill the offsite mitigation requirement. With the eager support of the Almonte residents, the concurrence of the numerous agencies, including the Army Corps and the sewer district and the school district, and of course the agreement of Waldo Point Harbor to fund the project to the tune of several hundred thousand dollars, the deal was sealed. Work has begun to remove the old, non-native species and do a general cleanup of the area. Very soon new, native plantings will be brought in and established.

Waldo Point Harbor will not only pay for the restoration, but will also maintain the new plantings for five years, to assure that the restoration was successful. After that, the maintenance will be done by the school district. So, the environment wins, the school district wins with a model marsh to serve as a teaching tool, the neighbors who have longed for the restoration win, Waldo Point Harbor gets its Army Corps permit and the agencies are happy. Everyone wins. Mill Valley, Almonte and Tam Valley folks can look forward to visiting the new and improved Gate 6 area, with a very nice public park and improved Bay access, and WPH residents can visit and enjoy the restored marsh.