

## **Arana Gulch Interpretive Program**

Implementation of the proposed trail system in the *Arana Gulch Master Plan* will create a unique opportunity for the Parks and Recreation Department in partnership with the Santa Cruz Natural History Museum to develop “*The Arana Gulch Interpretive Program*” within an urbanized setting. Opportunities exist for a diverse population of residents and visitors to view a variety of habitats and wildlife, and to learn about resource management and environmental stewardship. Some of the primary objectives of the proposed project are to maximize opportunities to educate, inform, and inspire users of the trail system. The interpretive program will enhance their enjoyment of Arana Gulch and its resources, and encourage them to take action to help protect our local natural resources.

Our proposed program includes interpretive signs, docent-led school programs, and other educational opportunities in coordination with educational partners and local experts. Few interpretive opportunities exist in close proximity to urban areas making access for many of the City’s senior residents a challenge. Arana Gulch, however, is located within short distances some of the City’s and County’s retirement and supportive living communities and can offer peace of mind, fresh air, room to breathe, to walk and to continue their healthy retirement lifestyle. A major occupational rehabilitation facility is also within a very short walk to the new westerly entrance of Arana Gulch.

Arana Gulch is the City’s only greenbelt property located within the urbanized area. The *Arana Gulch Master Plan* would provide greater access for wheelchairs, pedestrians, children in strollers and bicycles by multiple all-weather access points from all sides. The interpretive program in conjunction with the increase in accessibility would encourage greater use of the trails, by both locals passing through and out-of-town visitors to improve overall safety of the open space.

Through interpretive programs, visitors would learn about the natural value of the area, and be inspired to support programs to restore and protect Arana Gulch’s ecological integrity. With an informed public who understand the benefit of healthy local ecosystems, Arana Gulch will attract more funding for restoration to support native plants, animals, and sensitive habitats.

### **Proposed Program**

The Parks and Recreation Department will partner with the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History to create and manage the interpretive displays and docent-led school programs.

#### *Interpretive Displays*

Bike or walk, stop and learn. Interpretive signs will provide a permanent educational opportunity for students, families, seniors, and tourists visiting Arana Gulch. The Museum of Natural History will provide sign content with a balance of information and images that provokes thought and discussion through open-ended questions. Signs will

address diverse audiences. For example, signage could facilitate a scavenger hunt for young people. Bilingual signs could accommodate the diversity of our community. Sign content would inspire and empower visitors to change their behaviors to be better stewards of the environment. The Museum of Natural History works with artists and designers to create high-quality interpretive displays and has developed its own in-house exhibits.

Arana Gulch provides an ideal landscape and setting for learning opportunities that emphasize four major themes:

- Historic impacts
- Bird watching
- Wetland and riparian issues
- Native and invasive plant species

A historic impacts interpretation would include photographs and maps of the region chronicling the events of the past 100 years. This history includes clearing and farming the land, the adverse impacts of sediment created by logging and development upstream in the Arana Creek watershed, and the effects of the construction of the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor and its alteration of the tidal-influenced coastal lagoon.

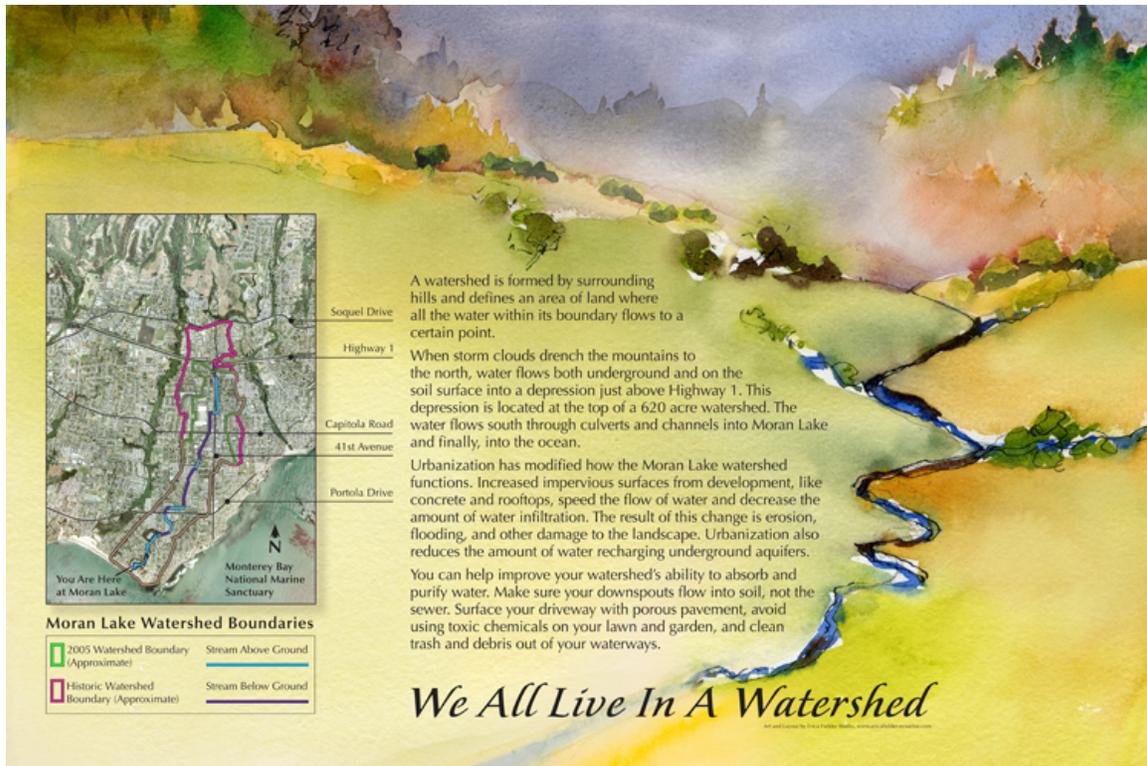


Erica Fielder Studio

Bird watching opportunities within the Arana Gulch Master Plan area will be provided at several unique points. The proposed pedestrian bridge over Hagemann Gulch will be located in the tree canopy nearly 50 feet above the ground. A wide section at mid-span has been incorporated into the design of the bridge to provide an area where people can stop to observe birds from above and within their natural habitat. To the south, the Coastal Prairie Loop trail provides opportunities for bird watching in oak woodlands and coastal prairie habitat. An overlook has been designed to enable observation of both

habitats at the south end of the Coastal Prairie Loop trail. The Creek View trail as it crosses Arana Creek, provides the only open water opportunity to observe aquatic birds in a natural setting. This overlook will provide interpretive displays on fisheries and other wildlife dependent on the creek habitat as well. The Marsh Vista Trail overlooking the riparian area will present unique bird viewing opportunities of waterfowl and birds of prey. These locations are ideal for interpretive signage and displays to inform visitors of the local bird life.

Wetland and riparian interpretation in Arana Gulch is critical in creating greater awareness of the important role of wetlands as wildlife habitat, a buffer zone for storm water run-off, and a filter for urban pollutants. This interpretation would highlight the connection between onshore actions and subsequent effects on marine species and the marine environment.

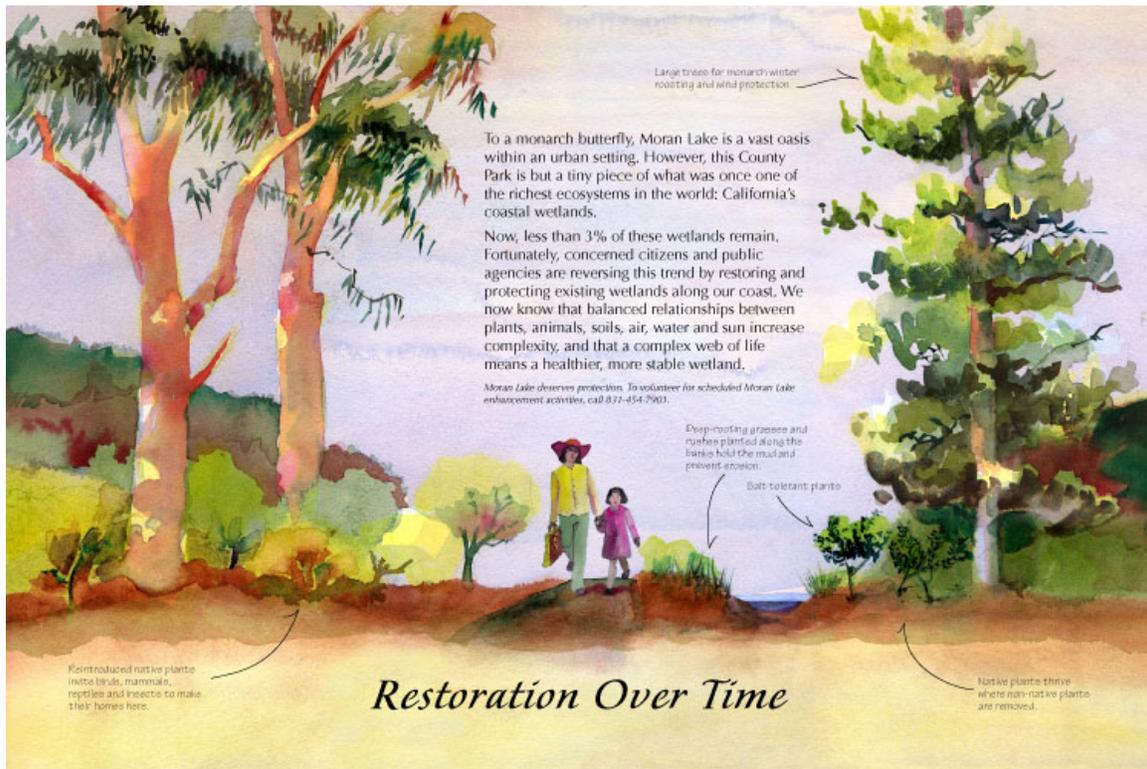


Erica Fielder Studio

Native and invasive species interpretation within Arana Gulch will be provided in several locations. Non-native plants are dominant and have crowded out native species including the Santa Cruz Tarplant, recognized as a threatened species by state, local, and federal authorities. The efforts undertaken in the *Tarplant Adaptive Management Program* have provided a valuable case study in invasive species issues. Arana Gulch demonstrates the significance of invasive plant issues and how their effects can be mitigated through rare species conservation, restoration of habitat, trail management, and a local stewards training program.

### *Docent-led School Programs*

Arana Gulch lies at the heart of the community – at a central and accessible location for schools. Topics for school tours would include the four themes described above (history, birds, wetlands and plants). The Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History has a strong docent program and the infrastructure to assume a lead role in developing and implementing a school program at Arana Gulch. The Museum’s model for field-based school programs is a three-part educational experience: 1) Museum staff visits the classroom for a pre-trip presentation, introducing key concepts and engaging students in an activity, 2) teachers receive an Education Kit with lessons and resource material to use in the classroom for two weeks and, 3) the class participates in an engaging, multi-sensory docent and staff-led field trip.



Erica Fielder Studio

This model program currently serves over 2,000 students and adults per year in the Museums’ third grade wetland walks and fifth grade watershed walks at Neary Lagoon, and the seventh grade Santa Cruz Sandhills Exploration field programs. All Museum school programs are aligned with California state standards and have a well-developed evaluation component. A similar program at Arana Gulch would easily fit into this model.

### *Walks, classes and workshops*

Santa Cruz has many local experts and resources to involve in the interpretation of Arana Gulch. These include: UCSC’s Environmental Studies department, university professors, graduate students, and undergraduates, some whom have worked with the UCSC Natural History Museum collections, and participated in the Natural History Field Quarter;

students from Cabrillo College; the Santa Cruz Bird Club; local experts such as Todd Newberry, a retired UCSC biology professor and author of The Ardent Birder; the local chapter of the California Native Plant Society; and various non-profits that run educational programs connected to watersheds and marine science, such as O'Neill Sea Odyssey, Save Our Shores, and the Coastal Watershed Council.

There is also potential to engage neighbors through the City-wide Neighborhood Associations network to do restoration work and lead walks (including limited mobility walks), similar to the Seabright Neighborhood Association and their work on Pilkington Creek, an effort coordinated by the Museum of Natural History. The Parks and Recreation Department can work closely with volunteer groups in organizing “clean up days” in Arana Gulch, similar to programs in place for our beaches and waterways.

Arana Gulch is an amazing natural, educational resource for our community. It provides open space, access to sensitive habitats, and an opportunity to connect with local wildlife and plants. As people travel on the Arana Gulch coastal trail they will gain knowledge of this unique coastal landscape. With knowledge comes connection. And with connection, comes stewardship.