City of Carpinteria

Environmental Review & Monitoring

Status Report 2023

Prepared For: The City of Carpinteria

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1.0 Introduction

This report documents the Environmental Review and Monitoring work for the City of Carpinteria during the 2023 calendar year by Mr. Vince Semonsen, the Consulting Biologist to the City. The City Biologist participates in the review of development projects for biological impacts, identification of appropriate mitigation measures and/or conditions of approval and is a voting member of the Environmental Review Committee (ERC). If warranted, he would provide oversight monitoring of construction projects ensuring the implementation of all mitigation measures. The City Biologist also conducts sensitive species surveys and nesting bird surveys on an as-needed basis, in addition to the regular oversight of our local sensitive species (i.e. monarch butterflies, southern steelhead and tidewater gobies). An evaluation of the Carpinteria creek corridor and the Cities five nature parks is also done annually.

In 2023 there were no major construction projects requiring biological oversight, and the restoration and revegetation projects had attained their performance criteria and therefore required very limited oversight. Rainfall during the winter of 2022/23 was epic, with water levels in Carpinteria Creek reaching the bottom of the Carpinteria Ave. bridge. The surveys and oversight of the Carpinteria beach sand berm work continued, along with some nesting bird surveys. There was only one ERC meeting held during 2023.

2.0 Construction Monitoring

2.1 Caltrans Linden-Casitas Interchanges Project

The high creek flows in early 2023 caused a number of problems at the Highway 101 overpass. All of the plantings in the creek channel were washed out and most of the willow cuttings under the overpass are gone. A lot of the irrigation sprinklers and piping within and along the creek channel were also damaged or destroyed (Photo 1). Some of the piping was washed downstream.

The remaining revegetation along the creek channel seems to be doing well.

Photo 1. Irrigation materials within Carpinteria Creek

In the 2022 status report for the City of Carpinteria, a recommendation was made to remove the irrigation systems in case they were “washed away by high flows”. This has now happened, and the remaining irrigation equipment should be removed.

The high water also washed away a portion of the western creek bank, just downstream of the Highway 101 overpass (Photo 2). Later in the year dirt and riprap rock was brought in to restore the creek bank. In previous discussions and emails, the City Biologist had suggested that the willow berm installed after the overpass construction, would redirect high flows toward the west bank. The berm angles out into the creek channel from the southeastern corner of the overpass thereby constricting the flow and forcing it toward the west bank (Photo 3). No explanation was ever given as to why this feature was installed but it will be an ongoing problem.

Photo 2. Washed out portion of the creek bank along the bike path

Photo 3. Willow berm extending out from the southeastern corner of the Highway 101 overpass

Lastly, the high flows deposited a large amount of sediment (i.e. rock and dirt) under the overpass. This material was dug out in June of 2023 (Photo 4). The City Biologist and City staff were not notified of this work. The City Biologist checked in with the crew removing the dirt; noting they were parking trucks in Environmentally Sensitive Habitat and under the dripline of native trees (Photo 5). They were asked to relocate their vehicles.

Photo 4. Removal of excess material under the highway overpass

Photo 5. Vehicles parked in Environmentally Sensitve Habitat

The small bioswale that runs along the Flood Control access road suffered some erosion from the amount of rainwater runoff but looked great by spring of 2023.

2.2 City Beach Sand Berm Work

The winter establishment and spring removal of the winter sand berm along the City beach was again surveyed and monitored by the City Biologist. The beach was surveyed for snowy plovers and other sensitive species just prior to any sand berm work. Pismo clams are now occupying the State Beach and are expected to migrate west to the City Beach. No snowy plovers or Pismo clams were seen during either of the pre-construction surveys in 2023. Once the berm work is underway, the City Biologist checks in with the operator, providing a brief training to ensure that the work is being done according to the conditions of the permit.

For various reasons the spring berm removal was delayed, requiring grunion surveys before the work could proceed. City personnel and the City Biologist spent three nights monitoring for a possible grunion run. During the second night approximately 20 grunion were seen coming up on the beach, but no large "run" was observed and no egg laying. Without a grunion run, the berm work could proceed (Photo 6).

Photo 6. Sand berm work at the City Beach

3.0 Long-term Revegetation Monitoring

All of the various long-term revegetation projects within the City limits have met their performance goals and are not being actively monitored by the City Biologist. However, they are still worth looking at and reporting on once a year.

3.1 Chevron Buffer Parcel

Chevron permitted access to the "Buffer Parcel" only once in 2023. A brief walk through of the site confirmed the continued health of the restoration plantings. A large-scale pruning operation of the eucalyptus trees within the Buffer Parcel had been done just prior to the site visit. Possible impacts to Monarch butterflies are discussed later in this report.

3.2 Bluff Trail

Portions of the Bluff Trail were built and revegetated as mitigation measures for the various developments on the bluffs. Some patches of iceplant remain along the trail, removal would benefit the native habitat. The landscape crews continue to prune the native vegetation along the trail (Photo 7). Contact should be made with the respective property owners/managers to address the landscape pruning within the mitigation areas.

Photo 7. Pruning of native vegetation

What looks to be a new section of the bluff trail has been cleared around the S&S Seed facility (Photo 8). The City Biologist was not notified of this work. Quite a bit of vegetation was removed and chipped up in preparation for establishing this portion of the trail.

Photo 8. Vegetation clearing for a new portion of the Bluff trail

4.0 Carpinteria City Parks

4.1 Rincon Bluffs Preserve

The Rincon Bluffs Preserve is unchanged from previous reports. The area supports a nice variety of native vegetation along with a fair amount of non-native weeds. The restoration of this parcel is in the planning stages and will address the various trails, garbage removal, and enhancement of the habitat.

4.2 Carpinteria Bluffs Preserve

The Carpinteria Bluffs Preserve is a beautiful and well-used preserve. Some grassland restoration continues by the local community. Tamarisk (salt cedar) remains in the northwestern corner of the property and should be removed. Some thinning of seedlings and removal of the dead and downed branches should be considered for the eucalyptus windrows (Photo 9).

Photo 9. Eucalyptus windrow

4.3 Tar Pits Park

The nine-acre Tar Pits Park on the coastal bluff includes some open grassland/coastal sage scrub, a nice strip of oak woodland, a riparian corridor, a patch of eucalyptus, and a long portion of beach. On the beach just east of the park is the Harbor seal haulout.

A recommendation for park improvements would be to close off and reroute the portion of the bluff trail away from the small riparian corridor. This area regularly floods and if left alone it would create some excellent habitat for plants and animals. Some pruning and thinning of the eucalyptus and eradication of mustard and iceplant are also recommended (Photo 10).

Photo 10. Iceplant within Tar Pits Park

4.4 Carpinteria Salt Marsh Park

There were no biological issues or concerns noted at the Carpinteria Salt Marsh Park. This area continues to provide important habitat for a wide variety of flora and fauna.

4.5 Carpinteria Creek Park

The Carpinteria Creek Park remains in good shape and looks to be well-maintained by the City's landscaping crews. The riparian corridor to the west of the park would benefit from an enhancement plan, with attention to removing the cape ivy (Photo 11).

Photo 11. Cape Ivy near the Creek Park

5.0 Flora & Fauna

5.1 Monarchs

In 2023, the City Biologist looked for winter monarch roosts along Carpinteria Creek and within the Chevron "Buffer Parcel". No roost sites were noted along the creek, however one roost was found within the Buffer Parcel. This was a new roost spot located approximately 200 feet to the northwest of the previous roost. A casual count estimated the number of butterflies at 500.

The 22/23 winter roost site had been damaged by some tree trimming work (Photo 12). Some consideration should be given to the Monarch winter roost when planning a tree trimming operation.

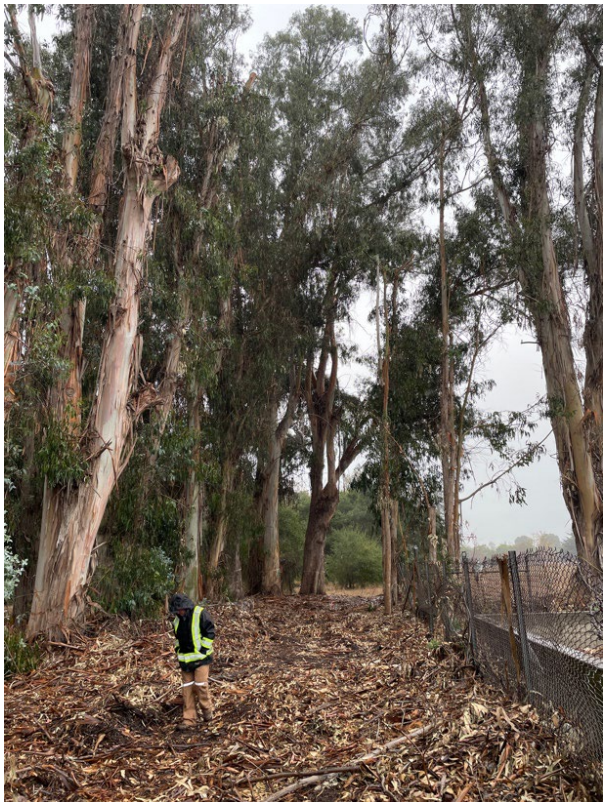

Photo 12. Winter Monarch roost site damaged by tree pruning

5.2 Carpinteria Creek

In early 2023, the Carpinteria watersheds were subjected to a number of atmospheric river storm events resulting in some very high water in our local creeks. Carpinteria Creek was running high enough to reach the underside of the Carpinteria Ave. bridge. Lots of fencing, cable, conduit, and other debris ended up in the creek (Photo 13). Over the course of the year a lot of this material was eventually removed. The City Biologist did some trash removal in this area.

Photo 13. Carpinteria Ave bridge

Seven patches of Arundo donax were identified along the Carpinteria Creek corridor and the City approved a removal operation by the City Biologist. A "cut and daub" treatment was implemented to eradicate this invasive species. The cut and daub method is basically cutting off the canes at ground level and daubing a glyphosate-based herbicide on the cut stem. These areas should be checked for new growth in 2024.

The high flows seemed to have improved the riparian habitat, with deeper pools and clean gravel beds; habitat preferred by our endangered southern steelhead, CA red-legged frogs and CA newts. None of these species were officially surveyed for in 2023 and none were seen by the City Biologist. Tidewater gobies were not observed in Carpinteria Creek during 2023.

Photo 14. Cape Ivy along Carpinteria Creek

Portions of the Carpinteria Creek riparian corridor are overrun with Cape Ivy (Photo 14). Some level of eradication would greatly benefit the overall health of the creek corridor.

Several homeless encampments were found within the riparian corridor and were reported to City staff. The creek corridor along the Motel 6 property and west of the Creek Park seem to attract the homeless folks.

6.0 Miscellaneous Consultation

In mid-February a review of the proposed "Carpinteria Farm, Hospitality and Residential Project" was undertaken with comments submitted to City Planners.

Work continued on the new skate park location next to the City Hall offices (Photo 15). It was completed and opened in 2023.

Photo15. Construction of the new skate park

Photo 16. Riparian corridor adjacent to 1274 La Brea Lane

The City Biologist again checked on the landscape encroachment into the riparian corridor adjacent to the property at 1274 La Brea Lane. The homeowners continue to expand their landscaping into the natural area and have upgraded the roadway (Photo 16). The SB County Flood Control District is aware of the situation and may eventually restore this area to its more natural state.

7.0 General Recommendations

Placement of bat boxes are recommended for installation under the Highway 101 bridge. They would fit nicely in the gaps between the concrete reaches (Photo 17). Some consideration should also be given to incorporating bat roosts into the design of the new Carpinteria Ave. bridge.

Eradication of Cape Ivy along both Carpinteria Creek and Lagunitas Creek would benefit the native flora and fauna.

CA red-legged frog, steelhead, and tidewater goby surveys are recommended within Carpinteria Creek. If no red-legged frogs are found then some thought should be given to reintroducing this sensitive species; our California State Amphibian.

Photo 17. Gaps under the Hwy 101 underpass