



OAK LEAVES

A PUBLICATION OF THE LOS OSOS / MORRO BAY CHAPTER OF SMALL WILDERNESS AREA PRESERVATION
P.O. BOX 6442, LOS OSOS, CALIFORNIA 93412-6442 ❖ (805) 546-1199 ❖ DECEMBER 1998 / JANUARY 1999

Annual Meeting Highlights SWAP's '98 Accomplishments and Plans for '99

SWAP's annual meeting and election of officers was held at the multi-purpose room of Monarch Grove School on November 7th. Guest speaker was California Coastal Commissioner, Pedro Nava.

President Gordon Hensley reviewed the year's activities, accomplishments and plans for the future. SWAP began 1998 with a transition from preservation activities to interpretive and stewardship work as part of the Adopt-a-Park agreement with San Luis Obispo County. Many new faces were welcomed to the Board.

Barbara Machado graciously facilitated a Saturday Workshop for the Board to develop goals and visions for the new chapter focus.

Gordon Hensley, Les Bowker, and Roger Verity and Bob McDougle met with representatives of the County Parks Department on issues related to the boardwalk and quiet title.

As Grants Coordinator, Hensley successfully solicited monies to complete SWAP's matching funds for the boardwalk project so that the project will soon be under way once it has been approved by the Coastal Commission.

Under Walk Coordinators Yolanda Wadell and Petra Clayton, 12 very different and intriguing Third Saturday Walks were given in the Elfin Forest. They have been doing an amazing job for many years and they continue to find new

An especially exciting event is the formation of a new chapter of SWAP in Cambria which will be a welcome addition to those in Santa Barbara, Verdugo Hills and Los Osos/Morro Bay.

Accomplishments and Plans continued on page 2



Winter Bird Fest Fast Approaching

How did those dinosaurs get into your backyard? That's the question Kevin Padian Ph.D., will explore during his keynote address, Saturday, January 16, at the third annual Morro Bay Bird Festival.

Padian, professor and curator at the Department of Integrative Biology and Museum of Paleontology at U.C. Berkeley, has written extensively on his interest in how "great ideas" in evolution get started, including a cover story co-authored with Luis Chiappe for the February 1998 *Scientific American*. His talk is entitled "How did birds evolve from dinosaurs? (And how do we know?)"

The four-day Festival, January 15-18, features an array of trips, lectures, social events and workshops focused on everything from warblers to elephant seals. Beginning birders will find a workshop to get them started. Advanced birders won't want to miss the extensive, all-day trip to see as many as possible of the 200-plus bird species wintering on the Central Coast of California.

A very special art show will be open from Friday through Sunday at The Inn at Morro Bay. Working in a wide variety of media, local artists and artisans — many of whom have national and international reputations — will focus on birds and the natural resources of the area. An artists' reception is scheduled Friday, Jan. 15, from 4:30 to 6 p.m.

Festival registration costs \$35 which includes entrance to all non-fee events, unlimited entry to the Natural History Museum, a Festival tote bag, map and bird checklist. Youngsters 12 and under are not charged for registration or field trips and workshops, except for van and ocean trips. A one-day \$15 registration option is available. Event fees range from \$10 for one of many carpool trips to \$55 for a day of birding at sea. The Festival's Registration deadline is December 30.

For more information or a registration brochure call

Bird Festival continued on page 4

Accomplishments, Plans *continued from page 1*

ways for people to appreciate the Elfin Forest. Bethany Griffiths and Flo Appell did a superior job of maintaining the membership and especially of making sure new and renewing members were thanked individually and in the newsletter.

Pat Grimes and Katy Budge (with help from all the Board and a supporting grant from PG&E) doubled the number of issues of *Oak Leaves* featuring a new focus on educational articles. Robin Knapp, Beth Wimer, Teresa Larson and Yolanda Waddell of the Education Committee have planned a docent program and will be developing the self-guided tour materials in the coming year.

Volunteer Coordinator, Janice Verity planned what was the highlight of the year, our Volunteer Recognition Event where everyone who worked to help SWAP in any way over the year was honored. Beth Wimer has kept careful notes of the many board meetings while Bob McDougle has kept us in the black and, according to his report at the annual meeting, is making some interest for the chapter as well. Jerry Deitz has been our very hard-working liaison for the upcoming Bird Festival.

The nominating committee presented a slate of officers who were all willing to continue their work for the coming year. Gordon Hensley, Beth Wimer and Bob McDougle were elected unanimously as president, secretary and treasurer. In another, bigger election, Gordon Hensley was elected to the new Los Osos Community Services District Board and under the demands of organizing that new entity, has since had to resign as President. (The Board will appoint someone to complete his term.)

1999 will bring many new activities for the Board as the boardwalk project gets underway and the Education Committee activities go into high gear. An especially exciting event is the formation of a new chapter of SWAP in Cambria which will be a welcome addition to those in Santa Barbara, Verdugo Hills and Los Osos/Morro Bay. Watch for news of their preservation project soon!

SWAP BOARD MEETINGS

The SWAP Board Meetings have been changed to the second *Monday* of each month at *6 p.m.*

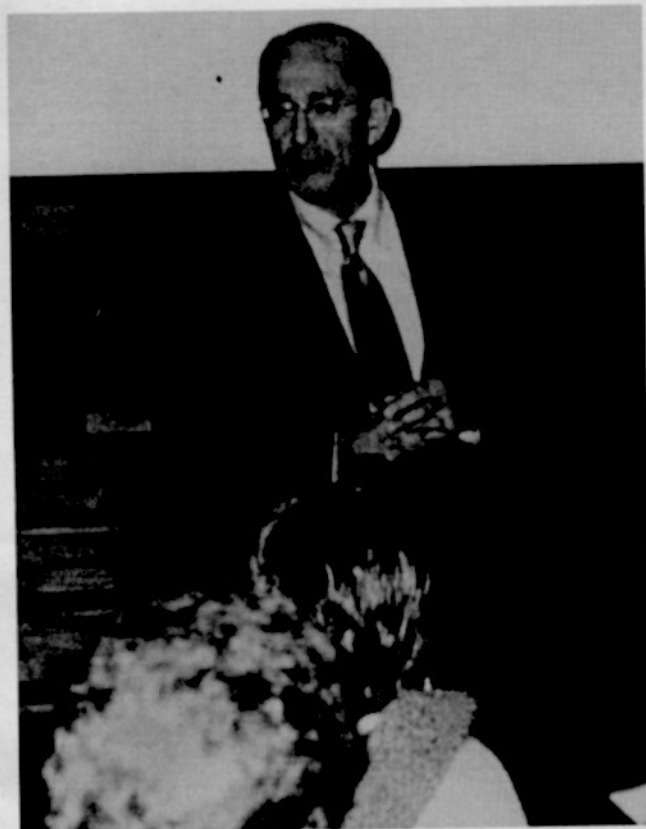
The December and January meetings will be held at the Morro Bay NEP Office, at 3rd and El Morro Streets in Baywood Park on Monday, December 14 and Monday, January 11.

Call 528-4540 to see what's on the agenda.

See you there!

december 14

january 11



California Coastal Commissioner Pedro Nava was the keynote speaker at SWAP's Annual Meeting on November 7.

Where To Call, Where To Write

If you have questions about SWAP activities or want to volunteer, please call our phone message service at 546-1199.

A recorded message will have information about the Third Saturday Walks and other current events.

If you have questions, concerns or comments about anything that's happening in the Elfin Forest, call or write:

Pete Jenny, SLO County Parks Facilities Manager,
County Government Center, SLO, CA 93408, (805) 781-5930.



1998 SWAP Board Members

Yolanda Waddell, Walks and Education Coordinator

Bob McDougle, Treasurer

Janice Verity, Volunteer Coordinator

Pat Grimes, Publications Coordinator

Gordon Hensley, Grants Coordinator

Beth Wimer, Education Committee

Robin Knapp, Education Committee

Bethany Griffiths, Membership Co-chair

Flo Appel, Membership Co-chair

Teresa Larson, Education Committee

Les Bowker, At Large

Ann Doscher, At Large

Caroline Gmelin, At Large

A SWAP Is Born

Los Osos/Morro Bay SWAP has sponsored the organization of a new SWAP chapter for the north coast area of SLO County. The North Coast SWAP is partnering with the American Land Conservancy, a national land trust, to identify and protect lands of significant natural, cultural, and open space resources.

The Conservancy has been involved in more than 30 projects since its founding in 1990. It has completed purchases of almost 90,000 acres of threatened land and water resources worth over \$200 million, and specializes in working with community-based groups such as SWAP.

Watch for more information on this new sister chapter and the exciting possibilities offered by its partnership with the American Land Conservancy.

Thanks 'Doc' and PG&E

Thanks to Jean "Doc" Gmelin who participated in the Early Warning Siren System test for PG&E and the County Office of Emergency Services. She named SWAP as the non-profit organization of her choice to be the beneficiary of a \$25 donation from PG&E.

Fundraiser Drawing

Many thanks to all those who participated in the drawing which raised \$300 to help pay the costs of materials for creating a self-guided tour of the Elfin Forest. Our thanks again to Judy and Gary Tewell of Los Osos Rexall for donating the beautiful Baywood/Los Osos coverlet.

Valerie Endres was the lucky winner of the coverlet. Richard Parker will be selecting the Elfin Forest painting of his choice, and Yolanda Waddell was the winner of the Elfin Forest shirt. Congratulations to all the winners and thanks again to everyone who entered the drawing.

in memoriam

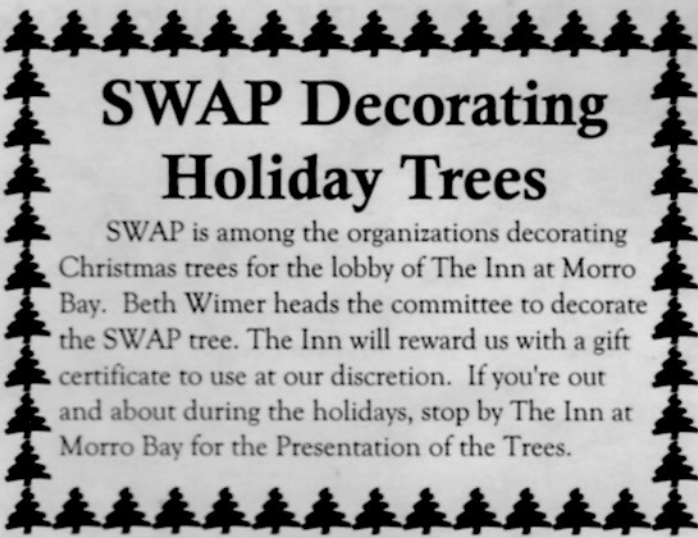
Virginia Black

SWAP has lost an active volunteer;
the local environment has lost a dedicated worker;
the community has lost a committed activist,
and we have all lost a gracious lady and dear friend.

Virginia Black's death is a cause for grief
throughout the county.

but it is also a reminder of a vibrant life
committed to learning about and living with nature.

We will miss her companionship
and remember well her deep love of nature.



SWAP Decorating Holiday Trees

SWAP is among the organizations decorating Christmas trees for the lobby of The Inn at Morro Bay. Beth Wimer heads the committee to decorate the SWAP tree. The Inn will reward us with a gift certificate to use at our discretion. If you're out and about during the holidays, stop by The Inn at Morro Bay for the Presentation of the Trees.

THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU

to New and Renewing Members:

Tommy & Sharon Prichett, Mark & Jerri Chadwick,
J. Richard Ewell, Bill & Grace Hall, Lora Stelle,
Dr. Steven Jio and Family, Les & Bonnie Wamsley,
Fran Elswick, David & Rosemary Bentley,
Virginia Black, Melvin & Darline Broneske,
Marie Campagna, Robert & Kathleen Copeland,
Virginia Culbert, Katie & Jerry Davis,
James & Esther Landreth, Mary Leizear,
Bob & Ceil McDougale, Kathleen Delzell,
Bob & Jean Hoffman, Robert Lane,
Don & Jo Parham, Ingrid Reti,
Donald & Rita Robinson, Barbara Rosenthal,
Bettina & Alvin Jay Salter, Connie Snapp,
Bunty Taylor, Norma & Bill Vaughan,
Doug & Morley Weir, Margaret Weiss, Siegrid Fenn,
Barbara & Wade Akle, Howard & Donna Krueger,
Randy Ball, Margo & Joe Osherenko,
Jeannine & Robert McCullagh, Jim Weldon,
Bernard & Fran Deitchman, Wes & Betsy Hamilton,
Marlin & Connie Harms, Bert & Elaine Townsend,
Jim & Jeanne Wood, Ed Conway, Ray & June Boyer,
Molly Elliot, Joanna Frawley, Jim & Karen Havlena,
Clement Jeffrey, Elizabeth Smith, Nancy Stephens,
Louise J. Daniel, Elsie & Jerry Deitz,
Ernest & Barbara Eddy, Arylane & Kenneth Hill,
Morro Coast Audubon, Beverly DeWitt-Moylan,
Pandora Nash-Karner, Katherine & James Baker,
Katy Budge, Pauline DeWitt, Phyllis Foulstone,
Annette Linderman, Eric & Kelly Nelson, Erma Peter,
John Pierce and Lisa Villa.

THIRD SATURDAY WALKS

December 19 – 9:30 a.m.

"The Estuary and the Forest" will be the focus of marine biologist and county supervisor Bud Laurent, who will help walk participants view the Elfin Forest and Morro Bay Estuary as a complete wetlands system. Those who attended Bud's walk last December will recall that his tour of the Elfin Forest comes complete with diagrams drawn in the sand and delightful descriptions of the creatures who inhabit the Estuary.

January 16 – 9:30 a.m.

Our annual Fungus Foray with Dennis Sheridan who will lead us in an exploration of the Elfin Forest floor for boletes, black elfin saddles, earthstars, golden caps and many other fascinating fungi. Some of the exploration may involve crawling, so don't wear your best levis. Do bring samples of mystery fungi from your yard for help from Dennis in identifying them. Only a very heavy rain will cancel this walk.

February 20 – 9:30 a.m.

Take a literary stroll through the Elfin Forest with historian Robert Pavlik. As you follow paths established by wildlife, Chumash and settlers of European extraction from the distant past to the present, Bob will introduce you to a variety of literary viewpoints and perceptions of the Central Coast's natural history. He will select passages from journals of early travelers, and authors such as William Henry Brewer and Robinson Jeffers.

Walks in the Elfin Forest begin at the north end of 15th Street off Santa Ysabel in Los Osos.

Wear comfortable shoes, long sleeves and pants to avoid poison oak and mosquitoes.

Please park carefully, avoiding driveways and mailboxes.

We ask that you not bring dogs or other pets.

The easy paced walks last 1-1/2 to 2 hours.

For more information call 528-4540 evenings.

The Big Sit is a Big Hit!



Participants on Jim Royer's "Big Sit" bird watch caught sight of 112 species of birds, more than any other Audubon group in the nation.

Elfin Forest Is #1 Again

by Yolanda Waddell

For the second year in a row, members of Morro Coast Audubon participated in a nationwide birding contest called "The Big Sit," using Bush Lupine Point in the Elfin Forest as the site for their day of bird identification (5 a.m. to 7 p.m.). And, for the second year in a row, the group spotted more bird species than any other Audubon group in the nation: 112 species.

Jim Royer, coordinator of the local "Big Sit," relates that the competition was invented by a Connecticut birder who prefers sitting and viewing birds to walking around. Participating birders must stay within a 17-foot circle; birds may be identified by their call, and spotting scopes are allowed.

Since Bush Lupine Point overlooks the Morro Bay Estuary, about half of the birds counted were waterfowl and shorebirds. Rare birds sighted included the Eurasian Widgeon, an Osprey, a Ruddy Turnstone, and a Black Skimmer.

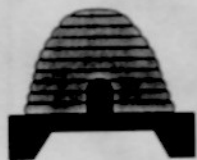
Thanks to our Audubon friends for reinforcing what we of SWAP have long known: that the Elfin Forest is a treasure – for our community, the Central Coast, and our nation.



Bird Festival continued from page 1

1-800-231-0592 or visit the Morro Bay Bird Festival web site at www.morro-bay.net/birds.

The Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival is a cooperative effort of the Friends of the Estuary at Morro Bay, the Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce, Morro Coast Audubon Society, Morro Bay National Estuary Program, California State Parks, Small Wilderness Area Preservation and Central Coast Natural History Association.



**"That which is not good
for the beehive
cannot be good for the bees."**

**Marcus Aurelius (121-80),
Roman emperor, philosopher.
As quoted in *Meditations*, bk. 6, set. 54.**

Taxonomy and the Desert Sand Almond

By Dirk Walters, Ph.D.

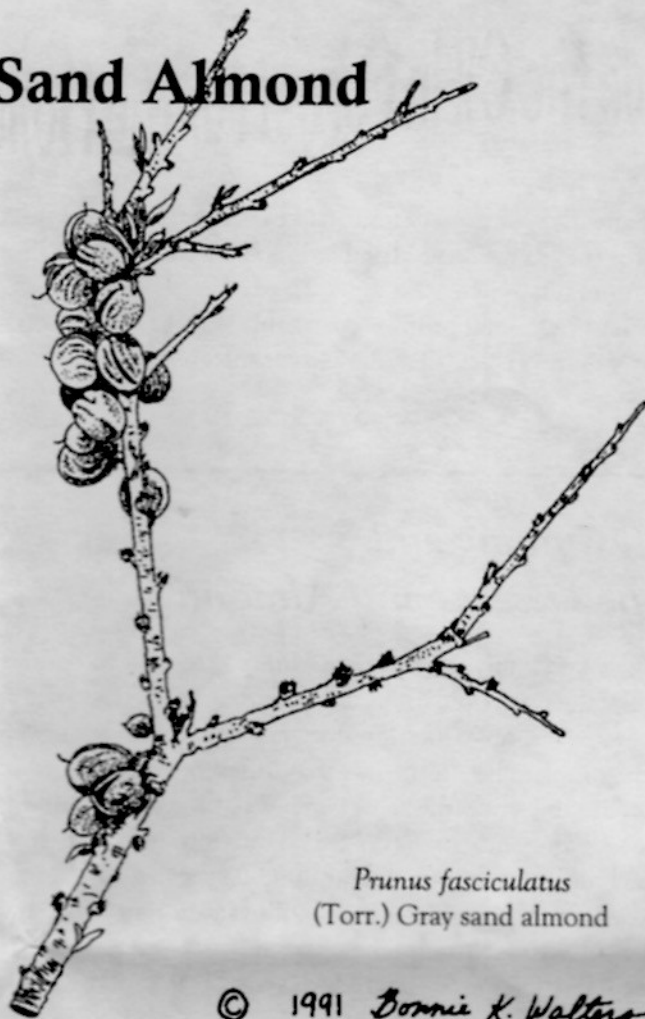
Bonnie's drawing for this Elfin Forest plant is a fruiting twig of the desert dune or sand almond (*Prunus fasciculata* var. *punctata*). It is a fairly common shrub in the drier part of dune scrub. It is often overlooked because it isn't very conspicuous. My guess is that at this time of the year (early November) the sand almond would have lost all its leaves and fruit and resemble only a mound of dead twigs. It is one of our extreme summer deciduous shrubs. That is, it loses its leaves shortly after the rains stop in the spring.

The flowers of the sand almond are borne in small clusters in the leaf angles and tend to be relatively inconspicuous. The petals are white to yellowish white and up to 1/4 inch long. The fruits that are shown resemble small almonds and are a little over 1/2 inch long. The dry, fibrous pulp around the stony "pit" would not tempt anyone to nibble. However, the kernels inside the pit are large enough that they might be thought worthwhile to collect.

There is some evidence that desert tribes did in fact eat them. However, they never ate them raw. The raw "nuts," like most members of the cherry, peach, plum group (the genus, *Prunus*) contain a family of compounds called Cynogenic glycosides. Cynogenic glycosides are not generally poisonous until after bacteria in our digestive tracts partially digest them.

Digestion causes the cyanides to be separated to form Hydrocyanic acid. Red blood cells absorb this substance and this prevents oxygen from being released into tissues that need it. Most references say that eating a single raw pit would not be fatal, but eating several could be. Leaching removes and cooking destroys the poisonous compound. Native desert tribes probably used both techniques to

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Prunus fasciculatus
(Torr.) Gray sand almond

© 1991 Bonnie K. Walters

make the ground nut meats safe to eat.

Several of our coastal species can be paired with forms found growing in our interior deserts. Some pairings are between distinct species (e.g. Nipomo lupine and varieties of *L. concinnus*, and Indian Knob yerba santa (*Eriodicyon altissima*) and narrow leaf yerba santa (*E. angustifolium*). Other pairings involve a single species that is found growing both on the coast and in the desert. Two examples of this type are the sand food, or as I prefer, flowering golf ball (*Pholisma arenaria*) and the sand almond. If you look carefully at any two groups of individuals of the same species growing in widely separated areas, you will find describable differences in appearance, physiology, and ecology between the two groups of plants. This is certainly true of our coastal desert or sand almond. Our plants are more prostrate and possibly possess shorter and broader petals than the same species that grows in the Mojave and Colorado deserts. These differences lead Dr. Hoover to recognize our coastal plants as a distinct species and he gave it the name, *Prunus punctata*.

How can one taxonomist group two populations into a

Taxonomy and the Sand Almond continued on page 6

Give the Elfin Forest for the Holidays!

Signed, color prints of Barbara Rosenthal's original design for the Elfin Forest Mural at Los Osos Rexall are available for holiday giving.

The 17 x 5 inch prints are available shrink-wrapped on foam core for \$12. Call 528-4540 for information.



Taxonomy and the Desert Sand Almond continued from page 5

single species in one instance while the second recognizes the same two populations as two different species? The seemingly simple question does not have a simple answer. The problem lies in the fact that different taxonomists do not see the world the same way. What is a significant difference to one, may only be a trivial difference to another. Each decision as to the definition of a species should be based on much study of the plant's variation patterns, breeding behavior, chromosome characteristics and environmental studies as well as today's actual DNA variation studies.

Even if both taxonomists have all this information (and rarely do they ever have it all) they both still have to evaluate the data and come to a conclusion. Where one can defend similarities, another will see differences, and this is using the very same data. Dr. Hoover made a determination based on his knowledge of sand almonds and came to the conclusion there were two species. In the Jepson Manual, Dieter Wilken concluded that the two forms of sand almond were only distinct enough to be recognized as minor variants or varieties.

Which interpretation is the absolutely correct one? This is not knowable because no matter how thorough the study, data will always be incomplete. Because our data is never complete, the researcher must make her or his best interpretation based on what is available at the time. Once a decision is made and published, others can evaluate it and either accept or reject it. If others are swayed by your arguments and accept your interpretation, then your name and the interpretation upon which it is based will be judged to be the most correct one available. Of course, if new data becomes available, then it is possible that a new interpretation will be in order. Therefore, any species designations must be considered tentative and subject to change.



Time for Reflection as Year Draws to a Close

Morro Bay NEP Tallies

98 Accomplishments

By Katy Budge, MBNEP Newsletter Coordinator

It's hard to believe another year has gone by, but here we are looking ahead to the tasks and challenges of 1999. Before we launch ahead into another calendar year, however, let's look back at what the people of the Morro Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP) have accomplished in 1998.

- ✓ **Action Plan Demonstration Project (APDP) funding and implementation.** To date, several projects have received the funding go ahead from the Watershed Committee (WC), Local Policy Committee (LPC), and Bay Foundation. One of them, the Morro Bay Watershed Run-Off Model, is already completed!
- ✓ **Farmer-to-Farmer Video.** "Change on the Range: Solutions for the Estuary" made its debut in November, 1998, and is being highly praised as an effective teaching tool for a variety of audiences. The video was funded by the MBNEP and made possible by the hard work of Joe Clokey of San Luis Video Publishing and Scott Robbins of Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District. Our thanks also to the landowners — John Maino, Lisen Bonnier, John Tonini, and John Swift — who not only appeared in the production, but have made a firm commitment to the health of the estuary.
- ✓ **Completion of Draft Technical Studies.** By late 1998, three of the technical studies will have been completed. These three studies — Stream Flow and Sediment Loading, Bay Bathymetry and Tidal Circulation, and Habitat Characterization and Assessment — have contributed valuable knowledge about the bay, and will be crucial building blocks in writing the Characterization Section of the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP).
- ✓ **Draft Base Programs Analysis (BPA).** The goal of the BPA is to provide a comprehensive catalog of local, state and federal agency programs that protect or otherwise affect the estuary and watershed, analyze whether these programs are effective, and provide recommendations for improvement. To achieve this detailed analysis, an exhaustive inventory of 42 agency programs was compiled and evaluated by Lisa McCann, Jonathan Civita, and John Boland of the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), and Cy Oggins, Audrey Blumeneau and Michael Rasnick of the California Coastal Commission. All six were generously "loaned" to the NEP by their agencies to help with this project.

Watershed Model Completed



The grand opening of the Morro Bay Watershed Run-Off Model was held November 20 at the Rancho El Chorro Environmental Education Center, where the model will be housed.

4-H youth demonstrated how this model is used to teach children about ways to keep the water in their streams and estuary flowing clean and silt-free. Attendees were also able to watch what happens to detergents flowing down the street from their car wash, to track the fate of oil or anti-freeze that is spilled in the gutter, and were even reminded of the ultimate fate of any pet waste that is left lying in the streets.

This colorful 12' x 12' concrete scale model relief map of the entire Morro Bay watershed is an intriguing and very effective teaching tool that was built this fall (on schedule and under budget) by youth and adult members of the 4-H Watershed Project and the 4-H SLO Scientists with funding provided by the Morro Bay National Estuary Program, US EPA and the Bay Foundation.

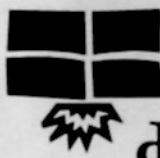
For more information, contact Judy Neuhauser, 4-H Watershed Project Coordinator at 781-5944.

- ✓ **CCMP and Technical Characterization.** Text continues to be developed and a draft document for review is expected by the Spring of 1999.
- ✓ **MBNEP Website.** Though parts of the site are still "under construction," the MBNEP finally has a presence on the World Wide Web, thanks to the volunteer efforts of Brian Stark of the Land Conservancy, Dave Paradies, staff (Melissa Mooney, Ellen Perryess, and Katie Kropp), and Fixnet — our local internet service provider who donated the site.
- ✓ **Annual "Turning the Tide" Poster Contest.** This annual contest for grades K-12 proved popular once again this year, with 211 entrants. Judging was held at the Octoberfest in Baywood Park.
- ✓ **Ongoing Efforts.** In addition to these milestones listed above, the MBNEP continues several ongoing efforts, such as the Volunteer Monitoring Program, the monthly "Turning the Tide" newsletter, and continuing to build on valuable partnerships with other local groups.

In review, 1998 was a very good year! On to 1999!

**RENEW YOUR COMMITMENT
TO THE ELFIN FOREST TODAY!**

for future generations.
partner in helping to preserve the Elfin Forest
reminder letter. Each of you is an important
members who renew **BEFORE** we have to send a
your dues, and please join those conscientious
"anniversary date"—the date you last paid
Also, please check your address label for your
give rather than to receive.
else, or just to satisfy your own holiday urge to
end gift to SWAP can be a great gift for someone
Forest during the holidays! A tax-deductible year-
We urge you not to forget your favorite Elfin
very important continuing support.
and thank you to renewing members for your



Welcome to our new members
**Remember SWAP
at Holiday Time**

12/98
P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412 - 6442
Mail to Small Wilderness Area Preservation,
Make checks payable to SWAP,
EVERY membership counts!!
you last sent in your membership.
Check out the label on this newsletter for the date
Have you renewed your membership on time?

- I want to help, please call me!
 Protector \$50 Life Member \$1000
 Steward \$25 Champion \$250
 Member \$12 Defender \$100

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City/State/Zip _____
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Name _____

MEMBERSHIP FORM

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Pacific Gas and Electric Company.