



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) 528-0392 ❖ OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2003



Bill Hoffman (in striped shirt), Environmental Specialist for the Morro Bay National Estuary Program tells visitors that the swath of trees in the background marks the path of Chorro Creek through the Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

Chorro Creek Ecological Preserve Hollister Ranch Preserved

A 580-acre property spreading below Hollister Peak and across Chorro Creek became California's newest ecological reserve in July, thanks to the efforts of the Morro Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP) and The Trust for Public Land.

The Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve, once slated for a golf course and resort, includes approximately two miles of Chorro and San Luisito Creeks, large swaths of restorable floodplain and hillsides on both sides of scenic Highway One. The MBNEP, who identified the property as its highest priority for public acquisition because of its habitat value and potential for trapping sediment above the estuary, facilitated a purchase agreement between the previous owner and the Trust for Public Land. Last year, Trust for Public Land bought the property with funding assistance from the Packard Foundation. Meanwhile, several State agencies assembled approximately \$5.0 million to allow the transfer to the Department of Fish and Game for permanent protection as an ecological reserve.

The Preserve was dedicated on July 24.

*You are invited to
participate in SWAP's...*

Annual Meeting of the Los Osos/Morro Bay Chapter

Saturday, October 18
Noon to 2:00 p.m.
at the Church of the Nazarene
1480 Santa Ysabel at South Bay Boulevard
in Los Osos (1/2 block east of South Bay Blvd.)

We will:

Hear a talk by Mike Multari, Director of the MBNEP

Honor our volunteers

ELECT MEMBERS to the Board of Directors

Hear reports from our Treasurer & Conservation Chair

Open the floor to hear
your suggestions for the Elfin Forest

Provide lunch for our volunteers and members

We look forward to seeing you
and hearing from you at the Annual Meeting.

SWAP Annual Meeting and Volunteer Recognition

By Yolanda Waddell, SWAP Secretary

It is a requirement by the State of California that every non-profit organization registered with the State must hold an annual meeting in order to report on the organization's progress to its members. It's our pleasure to do so for members as wonderful as you! Please join us at **noon on Saturday, October 18, at the Nazarene Church in Los Osos.**

Our speaker for the meeting will be Mike Multari, Director of the Morro Bay National Estuary Program. Mike will talk about the goals of the National Estuary Program, which are protecting and restoring the natural resources of Morro Bay and its watershed, and how the Elfin Forest is important to achieving those goals. Also speaking will be SWAP Treasurer Bob

Annual Meeting *continued on page 2*

Annual Meeting continued from page 1

McDougle, who will give a financial report, and Conservation Chair Pete Sarafian, who will talk about SWAP's activities in the Elfin Forest during the past year.

We take this annual opportunity to recognize the contribution to SWAP by our volunteers. SWAP, as an all-volunteer organization, would accomplish little if it were not for the many dedicated individuals who give their time, energy, and in most cases, their financial support. An example of the "SWAP" kind of volunteer are Ron Rasmussen, our Board Chairman, who joins Pete Sarafian every month in pulling weeds, as well as chairing the Board, representing SWAP, and writing articles for *Oakleaves*.

Another is Pat Sarafian, a SWAP Board member and Chair of Property and Records. This year, she went searching for a larger storage unit because our old one was too crowded, and coordinated the move to the new unit as well as organizing all the contents on shelves. She also pulls weeds frequently, distributes SWAP brochures and newsletters, signs up new members, phones volunteers, sets up our booth, and does many other tasks as they come up.

Do you have suggestions that you've been saving to tell to a SWAP Board member? Now is the time! Bring your suggestions or observations to the annual meeting. Also, all paid-up members will have the opportunity to vote in an election of SWAP Board members.

After the meeting, we hope you will join us for lunch. We'll have yard-long sandwiches with all the trimmings. Come, participate, and enjoy!

SWAP, as an all-volunteer organization, would accomplish little if it were not for the many dedicated individuals who give their time, energy, and in



Above: Ron Rasmussen, SWAP Chair, also pulls weeds, writes articles for the *Oakleaves*, and represents SWAP at meetings of other organizations.

Photo by Jean Wheeler.

Pat Sarafian, SWAP Board member, successfully engineered a move to a larger storage space last Spring. Now she and other Board members can reach what they need without having to move boxes and other objects.

Photo by Yolanda Waddell.



A Big Thank You to Ruth Zank

Every time our members make a donation to SWAP, they receive a thank-you note. Since we have supportive members who renew every year as well as new members joining us, there are many thank-you notes to send. Ruth Zank, our Membership Committee Correspondent, has been sending out those notes for the past several years. Now she has taken on other activities, and we will certainly miss having her as part of our volunteer team. Thank you, Ruth, from SWAP. You have been an important part of our organization.

SWAP BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Board of Directors of
Small Wilderness Area Preservation (SWAP)
consists of the following members:

Ron Rasmussen, Chair
Pete Sarafian, Vice Chair
Bob McDougle, Treasurer
Yolanda Waddell, Secretary
Bob Meyer, Member at Large
Pat Sarafian, Member at Large

SWAP BOARD MEETINGS

The SWAP Board of Directors
meets on the 2nd Monday of each month at 7 p.m.
at the Coast National Bank,
1193 Los Osos Valley Road on
Monday, October 13, and Monday, November 10.

All Board meetings are open to the public.
To confirm the date,
time and location
(which are subject to change),
phone 528-0392.

October 13

November 10

The Dusky-Footed Woodrat (*Neotoma fuscipes*)

By Jean Wheeler



The dusky-footed woodrat lives along the coastal mountains from the Columbia River in Oregon to northern Baja California and inland to the Sierra foothills. Like its relative, the desert woodrat (*N. lepida*) the dusky-footed woodrat is sometimes called a packrat for its habit of collecting shiny objects to treasure in its brushy home.

Dusky-footed woodrats are about 7-8 inches long from the tips of their noses to the base of their tails. The tails are almost as long again as the body and covered with short brown to black hair. Their fur above is dense and soft gray-brown with black hair tips while their bellies and the bottoms of their tails are white. The tops of their feet are also white, but the rear feet are sprinkled behind the white toes with the dusky-colored hairs that give the species its common name. Their ears are large, rounded, and covered with fine fur.

Best known for the large, conical, multi-roomed piles of brush they build and live in, the adults are solitary. These brush homes are at least 2-3 feet and as much as 6 feet high with similar diameters at the base, yet only one adult resides in even the largest, and some adults build more than one such home. Sometimes the brush homes are woven among branches a few feet up in a tree, but more commonly they are piled on the ground against the trunk of a live oak tree or intermingled with outer branches that reach to the ground. They will have at least one nest room, latrines, and multiple storerooms for foods, with runways leading out onto the ground. These mostly nocturnal rodents feed on a variety of seeds, acorns, nuts and fruits, green vegetation, and fungi. Some rooms of the home may be allocated to storage of acorn halves until the toxic chemicals of the acorns leach out, and they become edible.

Mothers will share their homes with their offspring for only the first two months of the youngsters' lives, after which the young move into nearby brush homes, still close to their mother. Litter size is from 1-4. Most litters are born in the spring, but some are born as early as January or as late as October. Woodrats live to about 3-4 years, and when a mother dies, usually one of her offspring will take over her house. Woodrat houses have been known to be maintained for decades by many generations of the same family.

Woodrats are important contributors to species diversity, both as an important food resource for predators and by habitat enhancement through the brushpile homes they build. They are a major source of food for small to medium sized predators including foxes, coyotes, large snakes, and especially owls (this species comprises most of the diet of the California Spotted Owl, for example). Their houses provide shelter from temperature and moisture extremes for a multitude of species, mostly insects and spiders but even some vertebrates such as salamanders and lizards. Research has shown that species diversity is increased with the



Woodrat nests, like this one found in the lower Elfin Forest, look like piles of sticks. Actually they have several chambers within the nest, and as mentioned by Pete Sarafian, can cause plants, including weeds, to grow around their nests. Photo by Yolanda Waddell

presence of woodrat houses. As you follow the boardwalk through our Elfin Forest this fall and winter, look under the live oaks and especially where their outer branches descend to mingle with the branches of surrounding shrubs. See if you can detect these brushy apartment complexes with their woodrat landlord and many tenants of diverse invertebrate and, occasionally, vertebrate tenants.

Woodrats Sow Weed Seeds

By Pete Sarafian, Conservation Chair

In search and destroy missions through the remote reaches of the Elfin Forest this year looking for weeds, I've come upon an act of nature that is potentially horrific. Our beloved woodrats are cultivating beautiful crops of weeds. As we whittle away at the narrow-leaved iceplant (*Conicosia pugioniformis*), many of the remotest infestations left are growing around woodrat nests. Apparently, the little rodents are eating the seedpods, and are leaving conveniently fertilized, undigested seeds to sprout in the vicinity of their domiciles. At first, the link was too scary to accept, but the association between woodrat nests and iceplant is too prevalent to ignore. It appears that the woodrats also have a taste for the seeds of a spiky seedpod that may be castor bean (*Ricinus communis*). Fortunately, it appears that the castor bean has not been propagating in the Elfin Forest. This is another nasty weed that we can do well without. Nature appears to be so cruelly indifferent to our human efforts at restoration.

Return of the Natives

By Ron Rasmussen, SWAP Chair

Visitors to the Elfin Forest often remark on the presence of the green plastic fence enclosing a triangle of ground near Lupine Point because it seems to detract from the experience of enjoying the natural beauty of the Forest. If they had seen the area 2 years or so ago they might have been even more disappointed. The area was crisscrossed with motor bike trails and the main vegetation was veldt grass, an alien weed. Erosion was beginning to take its toll and soon much of the area could have washed into the bay. Something needed to be done immediately to save this part of the Forest.

With the collaboration of County Parks, a grant from the Morro Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP), and a host of SWAP volunteers a program of restoration was begun to return native plants to the area. Because the Central Coast has really only two seasons, a "wet" and a "dry," most native plants grow when water is available and mature very slowly over the years. To be successful in a revegetation effort new plantings must be protected until they are well established; thus the need for a fence. In addition, new plantings are encouraged to grow through individual watering.

Even with special treatment the re-growth of native vegetation to the point where the fence can be removed will require perhaps another two years. After the fence is removed, the area will still be fragile, as is the entire Forest. SWAP volunteers and County Parks will continue to preserve existing native vegetation and to restore other areas that have been degraded. This ongoing program will ensure the preservation of the Elfin Forest for future generations.

County Parks Plans Revegetation

By Pete Sarafian, Conservation Chair

This fall and early winter, San Luis Obispo County Parks Department is planning to revegetate up to three different areas in the Elfin Forest. In conjunction with SWAP, the Morro Group and the California Conservation Corps (CCC), they will install new fences to protect a fresh planting of native plant seedlings. County Parks will install one fence in the triangular plot north of the currently fenced half-acre near Bush Lupine Point overlook. Another will be going up in a triangular area just to the east of the nearby boardwalk intersection and Fairbanks' monument. A third area further east by the 14th Street sand trail may be fenced and planted as well. These are areas designated as degraded habitat for the endangered Morro Shoulderband Dune Snail. Past and present human activity has left these areas partially denuded. An area between the 14th Street trail and the downhill slope to the west along the boardwalk is slated to have erosion controls installed as well.

Let's All Pull Together!

SWAP First Saturday work parties are held at 9 a.m. to noon on the first Saturday of each month. Volunteers should meet at the north end of 15th Street. Dress for sun and wind and bring work gloves if you can. Some work gloves, tools and drinking water are provided. Call 528-0392.



Pete Sarafian takes the lonely trek to the Elfin Forest compost pile, with a wheelbarrow full of weeds.

Weed Warriors on Vacation

By Pete Sarafian, Conservation Chair

Bowing to personal schedules and vacation plans, the Wonderful Weekend Weed Warriors "wimped out" this summer and stayed away in droves. August's turnout was the SWAP Board of Directors plus two. Thank heaven for Jay Bonestell and Ann Calhoun, who joined board members Ron Rasmussen, Pete Sarafian and Yolanda Waddell in pulling veldt grass and trying to make up for lost time. Fortunately, some left over money was available from last year's San Luis Obispo County Weed Management Area funds, to bring in the California Conservation Corps. They cleaned up the South Bay Boulevard embankment of veldt grass earlier in the spring and summer. Hey folks, the weeds don't stop growing! Each year we are caught in the cycle of trying to catch up. There are far more weeds than a small crew can keep up with.



Weed Warriors Ann Calhoun and Linda Young needed some rest after three hours of digging veldt grass. Photo by Yolanda Waddell.

WALKS in the ELFIN FOREST

Third (and Second) Saturday Walks

October 11, 8:30 a.m. (Pre-Big Sit! Walk) (Second Saturday - Note earlier time)

This Second Saturday walk, beginning at 8:30 a.m., will be a preview of an international event, the Big Sit!. The following day, Sunday, October 12, is the day for the Big Sit! at Bush Lupine Point in the Elfin Forest. Coordinator Jim Royer, an experienced and avid birder, will lead the walk on Saturday. Join Jim on his tour of the Elfin Forest to find and identify many of the bird species which are active during the day; usually Jim and walk participants find 40 to 60 species. This walk is for those who just enjoy looking at birds as well as for more experienced birders. You'll come away from this experience knowing more about birds, their calls, their habits and habitats.

October 18, 9:30 (Third Saturday)

Join John and Yvette Nowak for a closer look at some of the native plants in the Elfin Forest. John, a horticulturist, and Yvette, a teacher and naturalist, will fill you in on how to identify plants in the various habitats of the Elfin Forest, even when they aren't in bloom; and how they fit into those habitats. You'll get some ideas on how to incorporate native plants into your garden, and learn how some of the plants were used by the Chumash and early California settlers.

November 15, 9:30

Al Normandin will lead us on an enjoyable fall season discovery tour of the Elfin Forest. During November, many of the plants are "resting", waiting for winter rains, but there is much to observe. Al has been a docent with the Natural History Association and is very familiar with the plants, birds and animals of the Elfin Forest. He'll help us to tune in to the sounds, sights and fragrances of the varied habitats in this small wilderness. Bring a hand lens and binoculars.

December 20, 9:30

Winter Solstice is upon us! Bob and Joan Field will lead a Solstice walk based on seasonal change and the concept that the diversity, abundance, and distribution of life depend on the interactions of the sun's energy and the earth's matter. The tide will be ebbing rapidly on the morning of December 20, so Bob will point out some changes due to the ebb and flow of tides. He took digital photos of the Elfin Forest in August of this year, and will bring them to show the differences in the Forest between August and December. Joan is familiar with the plants of the Elfin Forest, and will talk about their seasonal changes. If it rains, wear a poncho and join us. However, heavy rain will cancel the walk.

Walks in the Elfin Forest begin at 9:30 a.m. (unless otherwise noted) at the north end of 15th Street off Santa Ysabel in Los Osos. Wear comfortable shoes, long sleeves and pants to avoid poison oak. Please park carefully, avoiding driveways and mailboxes. We ask that you



(Above) Bob Pavlik read selections from works by several natural history writers on his Literary Stroll in the Elfin Forest in July. Photo by Pat Sarafian.

(Below) Archaeologist John Parker (August 3rd Saturday walk) explains how the ice age caused a dramatic drop in sea level off the Central Coast. Photo by Bob Meyer.



MBNEP Sponsors State of the Bay Conference in November

On November 14 and 15, 2003, the Morro Bay National Estuary Program will present a State of the Bay Conference to provide the public with an update on the health of the estuary, and to celebrate the role our community plays in preserving this rich natural resource for future generations. The conference begins on Friday afternoon, November 14, at the Los Osos Community Center and will continue for a full day of workshops and events on Saturday, November 15, at the Morro Bay Community Center. For more information, contact the MBNEP at 805-772-4162.

Where To Call, Where To Write



If you have questions about SWAP activities or want to volunteer, please call 528-0392 and leave a message.

A recorded message will have information about our 3rd Saturday Walks, Work Saturdays, and other events.



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

Chuck Lowe, SLO County Parks Supervising Ranger,
1087 Santa Rosa Street, SLO, CA 93408, (805) 781-1967.

Thirty-Third in a Series

California Buckwheat

By Dirk Walters, Ph.D.;

Drawing by Bonnie Walters

Bonnie's drawings for this issue of *Oakleaves* is a composite of something new and something old. The flowering branches and leaf clusters are newly drawn from life while the two drawings of the single inflorescence and the diagrammatic flower are from Dr. David Keil's and my plant taxonomy textbook.

Two species of shrubby California buckwheat, the genus *Eriogonum*, are represented in these drawings. To the left is one that made the spectacular show this August in the Elfin Forest. It is Coastal California buckwheat (*Eriogonum parvifolium*). It can be found to a greater or lesser degree all along the Elfin Forest boardwalk. It is more common in the drier shrubby areas and less common where oak trees dominate. Coastal California buckwheat is restricted to coastal bluffs and dunes along the central and south coastal regions from Monterey to San Diego Counties. I once found a single plant on Bishop Peak, above San Luis Obispo, but I have not been able to find it there since.

The drawing to the right is a representation of the much more widespread species known simply as California or wild buckwheat, or as I prefer to call it, common or interior California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*). In spite of the name, common California buckwheat is not found in the Elfin Forest, but is found in shrub-lands and open woods throughout the rest of California and extending beyond into surrounding states. In the dry inner coast range of San Luis Obispo County common California buckwheat can be practically the only shrub species present.


In identification keys, these two species usually "key-out" close to each other. This means that they look very similar. The most reliable difference between the two is the shape of the leaves. Common buckwheat has narrow leaves that are widest near the middle while Coastal buckwheat has leaves that are widest at the base. In both species, during summer, the leaves roll up and can resemble short needles if not examined carefully. The inflorescence distribution that seems such an obvious difference in the drawings is not as reliable because smaller individuals of Common California buckwheat will have the small, stalk-less inflorescence clusters characteristic of *E. parvifolium*. At least in our area, the rolled down margins of leaves and the leaves clusters at the nodes prove to be unreliable characteristics. I mention this because I have seen both of these used to distinguish these species in identification books.

The genus, *Eriogonum*, is one of the largest genera in California with well over 100 species recognized in the Jepson Manual. The most characteristic trait of the genus is its basic or unit inflorescence. The unit inflorescence is a cluster of stalked flowers surrounded by a group of fused bracts (involucre) with soft, rounded tips. In our two shrubby species, the involucre is not narrowed into a stalk, but resembles a hollow cylinder attached directly to its branch. It sort of reminds me of a miniature tin can with a bouquet of tiny flowers coming out of the top. The 10 to 20 individual flowers are tiny and when newly



opened are white to very pale pink. As they age and become pollinated they turn reddish, ultimately drying to a brick red as fruits mature. The sepals continue to be attached to the tiny triangular single-seeded fruit (achene) even after it matures. Like all but a couple of genera in its family, Polygonaceae, the parts of the flower are in multiples of three. Flowers consist of 6 sepals, no petals, 9 stamens and a single pistil with 3 styles and stigma.

I looked these plants up in many different references trying to find a human connection. Most of them didn't mention either species at all and those that did tended to just talk about how common they are. I suspect they would make a great landscape plants since they require little or no care and bloom in late summer and early fall when few other plants bloom. Their fruits would be great for attracting birds to one's back yard. I expected to find that a plant with the common name, buckwheat, would have played a prominent role in Native American life. It may have, but my limited references didn't indicate it. One reference mentioned fruit edibility and a second mentioned possible medicinal uses of leaves and stems. Both were only in passing, however. Maybe, we should just enjoy it where it grows.


O A K L E A V E S

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Co-editors are Yolanda Waddell and Jean Wheeler; layout is by Katy Budge.
Editing assistance by Pat Grimes.
Contributors to this issue: Wendy Brown, Cheryl Lesinski (MBNEP), Bob Meyer, Ron Rasmussen, Pat Sarafian, Pete Sarafian, Yolanda Waddell, Dirk and Bonnie Walters, Jean Wheeler
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Thank You to our New and Renewing Members

Compiled by Wendy Brown, SWAP Database Coordinator

New Members:

Linda Bailey* Linda Hahn Carol & Jim Marble Roy & Junie Wolf

Renewing Members:

Thomas H. Alden*	Vic, George, & Doris Croy*	David Keil*	Billy R. Pewitt*
Arthur & Lillian Armstrong*	Alice L. Cushing*	Roberta Knapp*	Ronald E. Rasmussen*
Morro Coast Audubon Society*	David & Evelyn Dabritz*	Henrietta Lichtenbaum	Stanley Reichenberg*
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	Joyce Heller*	Lori Olson	Linda Young
	Susan Howe*	Richard S. Parker*	

*Thanks to those listed above who donated more than the \$12 membership dues.
The additional donations will be used for special projects in the Elfin Forest.

New or renewing members who donate \$100 or more will receive a Boardwalk T-shirt as SWAP's thank you gift.



SWAP Shoppers' Order form

Shop
with
SWAP!!



(Please print when filling order – and indicate HOW MANY)

Name _____ Phone (with Area code) _____

1. MURAL SHIRTS (indicate sizes)

Words on shirt: "El Moro Elfin Forest Natural Area,
Small Wilderness Area Preservation, Los Osos, California"

___ Short Slv. T-Shirt (med., Lg, XLg, XXLg) @ \$15.00 = _____
 ___ Long Slv. T-Shirt (med., Lg, XLg, XXLg) @ \$17.00 = _____
 ___ Sweatshirt (med., Lg, Xlg, XXLg) @ \$25.00 = _____

2. BOARDWALK SHIRTS (Only Short Sleeve T-Shirts)

___ Med., Lg, XLg, XXLg, XXXLg @ \$15.00 = _____

3. POCKET GUIDES

A very useful 24-page guide listing plants and animals of the Elfin Forest

_____ @ \$1.00 = _____

4. MURAL PRINTS

signed 5 1/2" X 17" prints by artist, Barbara Rosenthal

___ Black matted Mural @ \$20.00 = _____

Shipping cost if outside of Los Osos/Morro Bay \$2.50 = _____

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Please check renewal date on your label.

Join Us at SWAP's Annual Meeting, Oc-

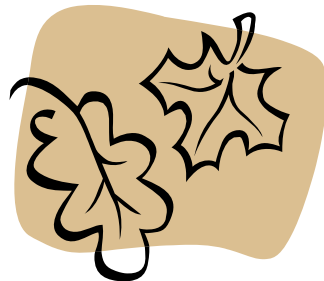
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Volunteers Needed For Oktoberfest



SWAP will have a booth at the Baywood Park Oktoberfest on Sunday, October 26.

We need volunteers to talk with visitors, give out literature, and sell T-shirts. If you can work a two-hour shift between 9:00 am and 4:00 pm on that day, please call SWAP's message phone at 528-0392. Give your name, shift preference, and phone number. Someone will respond to your call within 24 hours. Also, SWAP will be at the Estuary Visitor Center some weekends.

Join us ~ you'll have fun!

National Estuary Program Visitor Center Open

Have you been to the new Estuary Visitor Center? It is now complete and open every day from 10 am to 5pm. Located on the Embarcadero near Marina Street, the Center is an educational opportunity for the many tourists that visit our area each year. Exhibit topics include Habitats In and Around the Estuary, Birds of Morro Bay, Essential Eelgrass and more.

The Morro Bay National Estuary Program is looking for people to help staff the Center on weekends and busy holidays. If you are interested in volunteering some time, call Cheryl Lesinski at 772-3834.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

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Member \$12 Defender \$100

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I want to help, please call me!

Have you renewed your membership on time?

Check the label on this newsletter

for your renewal due date.

EVERY membership counts!!

Make checks payable to SWAP,

Mail to Small Wilderness Area Preservation,

P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412 - 6442