



DUNESBERRY

NEWSLETTER OF FRIENDS OF THE DUNES

SPRING/SUMMER 2022 | VOLUME 41 | ISSUE 1

WIGI FOREVER

By Mike Cipra, Executive Director

Wigi is the word for Humboldt Bay in Soulatluk, Wiyot language. Have you ever found yourself wondering what Wigi was like before it was developed and industrialized as Humboldt Bay?

What is now the city of Eureka was once Jaroujiji, and from its western shore of Humboldt Bay to around 14th street, there was likely a coastal maritime forest similar to what you can hike through today at the Samoa Dunes and Wetlands Conservation Area. From 14th street south, records show that the plant community transitioned quickly to old growth redwood forest.

This all was and remains Wiyot Country—its land and water stewarded by Wiyot People from time immemorial. Everywhere Friends of the Dunes works to conserve is Wiyot land.

This recognition of the importance of Wiyot land stewardship is central to our conservation work today.

At the Samoa Dunes and Wetlands Conservation Area, we are working to transfer a portion of this conservation acquisition to the Wiyot Tribe for permanent Wiyot ownership, stewardship, and eco-cultural restoration. These are the eastern parcels, the ones you've probably never been to because there are no trails there and we don't publish them on our maps. These beautiful lands and waters are where the dunes meet the Wigi.

We heard directly from our partners at the Wiyot Tribe that these are culturally significant places for Wiyot People. We are reuniting this land with its people because it is the right thing to do. It's right from the perspective of environmental justice—confronting the history of genocide in Humboldt Bay and how that has impacted land ownership for generations. Giving this land back to the Wiyot Tribe also happens to be what is best for the land itself.



Samoa Dunes & Wetlands' eastern parcel. Photo by Mike Cipra

Conservation land ownership is challenging because it is forever. That's the commitment—total—and total commitment requires love and patience to be sustainable. We know from conversations with partners at the Wiyot Tribe that no one is going to love this land more than Wiyot People, and no one has been more patient in working for land return than the Wiyot Tribe. We'll be making an announcement with more specifics when our land donation to the Wiyot Tribe is complete. We expect it to happen soon. You, our members and supporters, deserve to know how we arrived at this moment of historic land return, because you have given us the time and trust to develop this deepening partnership with the Wiyot Tribe, and to do the right thing for the land and for its people. Wigi forever.

VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT

Alex Rumbel

By Suzie Fortner, Programs & Operations Director

Alex Rumbel is what I like to call a “Super Volunteer” – someone who is reliable, positive, learns new tasks quickly, takes on new challenges with enthusiasm, and is always excited to help out whenever and wherever needed. Alex joined the Friends of the Dunes team in December 2021 as a Visitor Services volunteer at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center and she immediately proved to be incredibly talented at this position. On two separate occasions, out-of-town visitors dropped a \$100 bill into our donation box after chatting with Alex! When asked how she does it, she said she asks people about themselves. Simple. But it makes people feel comfortable and welcome at the Nature Center, which in turn makes them want to support the work we do. Alex enjoys volunteering with Friends of the Dunes because she loves interacting with the public and sharing her love for the environment with other people. Her favorite thing about volunteering at the Nature Center is meeting new people from throughout California and across the world, while also learning new things about dune ecology.

In addition to volunteering at the Nature Center, Alex has also been finishing up a Bachelors of Science in Botany at Cal Poly Humboldt and in May, she graduated magna cum laude! She is also a super student who helped digitize and geolocate herbaria data from across California and gave a presentation for IdeaFest called “Mapping Species Ranges in the California Floristic Province.” She has a special interest in lichens and California native plants, and spends her free time hiking, biking, kayaking, fishing, (any excuse to get outside) and participating in habitat restoration projects.



Oh, and did I mention Alex is also a talented musician? She played trumpet for the Cal Poly Marching Lumberjacks and is also a vocalist, guitarist, bassist, trombonist, and percussionist. Alex says that “musicianship strikes the perfect balance between creativity and discipline in my life, and I use Marching Lumberjack rehearsals as my escape from my academic schedule.” What an impressive human!

Now that Alex has earned a well deserved B.S. in Botany, she has relocated out of Humboldt and back to her hometown of Carson City, Nevada. We miss her, but are so grateful to have had her and her volunteer super-powers helping out at the Nature Center over the past 6 months.



WELCOME TO THE TEAM



Whitney Vickers

Non-Profit Intern

Whitney is a senior at Cal Poly Humboldt, completing her degree in wildlife with a concentration in conservation biology and applied vertebrate ecology. Whitney began working at Friends of the Dunes as the Non-Profit Intern in February of 2022 to further facilitate her passion for conservation and ecological preservation. Whitney has worked and volunteered in various non-profit wildlife and conservation organizations from Los Angeles to the Bay Area and now Humboldt Bay. This summer, you might run into Whitney at the Arcata Marsh where she is also interning as a student researcher studying the local river otter population. In her free time, Whitney loves to hike, cook, and tend to her vegetable garden.

Eloise Dresser

Restoration & Stewardship Technician

Eloise is a student at Cal Poly Humboldt, completing her degree in Environmental Science with a concentration in ecological restoration, along with a minor in Botany. Eloise is passionate about preserving the natural beauty and function of ecosystems through ecological restoration and conservation. She has been volunteering with various non-profit organizations since moving to Humboldt County in 2020, and has been working at Friends of the Dunes since March 2022. Eloise's hobbies include hiking, taking photos out in nature, and caring for her many indoor plants.



D.E.R.T. SUMMER NIGHTS



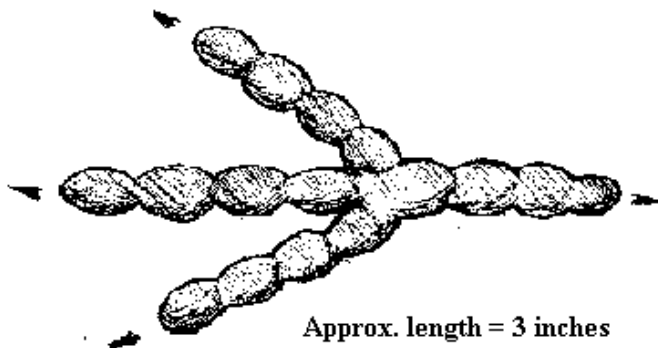
Our Summer Nights event resumes! Get outside and help the Dunes Ecosystem Restoration Team remove non-native plants and make space for native biodiversity in our amazing dunes. Join us the first Friday of each summer month (June-August) from 5 to 7 pm, at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center. Work clothes strongly advised, tools and training provided by restoration staff. For more information contact Dante@friendsofthedunes.org.

Our regular monthly Saturday and Sunday D.E.R.T. days are still happening! Please refer to our online calendar for dates and locations at friendsofthedunes.org/calendar.

Beach Discoveries

By Janelle Chojnacki, wildlife graduate student, ecologist, naturalist

Scanning and scrutinizing the ground while picking a slow path through the dunes can reveal multitudes about the wildlife using a dune ecosystem. Beaches in Humboldt County such as Gold Bluffs, Little River, Mal-le'l Dunes, North and South Spit, and Centerville Beach have incredibly fine sand, which allows for wildlife tracking when winds aren't too strong. Wildlife tracking involves observing the tracks and signs left behind by wildlife as they move across a landscape and they can be incredible opportunities to understand animal behavior in a very non-invasive manner. Tracks and signs on the beaches can include track marks left by feet, paws, hooves, or tails as well as scat, scratches and scrapes, digs, territorial markings, and many other types of markings. Recently at Little River, I was perplexed by the tracks of a toad, which look more like small tentacles brushed in gentle curves along the sand, rather than the prints of a small amphibian's feet. Last year, as I searched the sand for the tracks and nests of a small shorebird, I stumbled across large and loping black bear tracks. This bear had meandered, likely the night before, back and forth along the entire length of the beach, occasionally going to the wave slope, sometimes visiting the vegetated back dune, and occasionally digging around or even sitting down in the places I stood just hours later. On these beaches I have observed the tracks and signs of animals that I rarely, if ever, observe directly, including racoon, opossum, skunk, otter, elk, deer, bear, fox, coyote, eagles and many other bird species, as well as the tiny tracks of mice, lizards, and insects.



Common raven foot print. Raven feet can measure up to 4 inches long. Copyright illustration by Kim Cabrera.



Janelle surveying for western snowy plovers using her spotting scope at Little River State Beach.

Tracking is an important part of monitoring a shorebird which nests on many of our local beaches in Humboldt County; the Western snowy plover. This small shorebird leaves tracks with toes splayed across almost 180 degrees, with each foot oriented slightly inward towards the bird's body. I follow these tracks diligently to locate and monitor nests (another kind of sign!) in order to better understand these birds' breeding success. I also use tracks so that if a snowy plover's nest fails, I can understand why. Snowy plover nests are frequently predated by a variety of omnivorous species including skunk, fox, and, most commonly, ravens. Raven tracks are quite unique. Their hallux, the hind toe, has a few sections (the footpad) and a long nail (talon) at the end. The front three toes of a raven's foot point forward and also have long talons and several footpad sections, and both feet face forward as the bird walks. Sometimes one or more talons drag in the sand, and sometimes the raven lets its tail drag as well, which shows up as a wobbly line between the track marks. If you find tracks that show a raven's feet directly next to each, it may have been landing or taking off, in which case the primary feathers of the wings often leave small lines in the sand around a foot on either side of the feet as the bird's wingtips brushed the sand on its ascent or descent.

(Continued on page 5)

While egg and nest predation by ravens is part of the natural order of the biological world, ravens benefit significantly from human activity which has enabled their populations to grow to an unsustainable level and is resulting in too much pressure on many species which ravens predate, including the snowy plover. All of us can help this cause by cleaning up after ourselves when we have picnics or bring food to the beach as well as by not feeding ravens or any wildlife away from the beaches.

As I comb the beaches for signs of what passed before me, I continue to be delighted in the fact that I am sharing the beaches with an incredible diversity of creatures. I hope to see black bear tracks again soon, but even if I don't see them, I still know that I am walking in the footsteps of giants (as well as tiny shorebirds!).



Common raven taking flight on a foggy morning day at Little River State Beach. Photo by Janelle Choknacki

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Humboldt Coastal Resilience Project Update

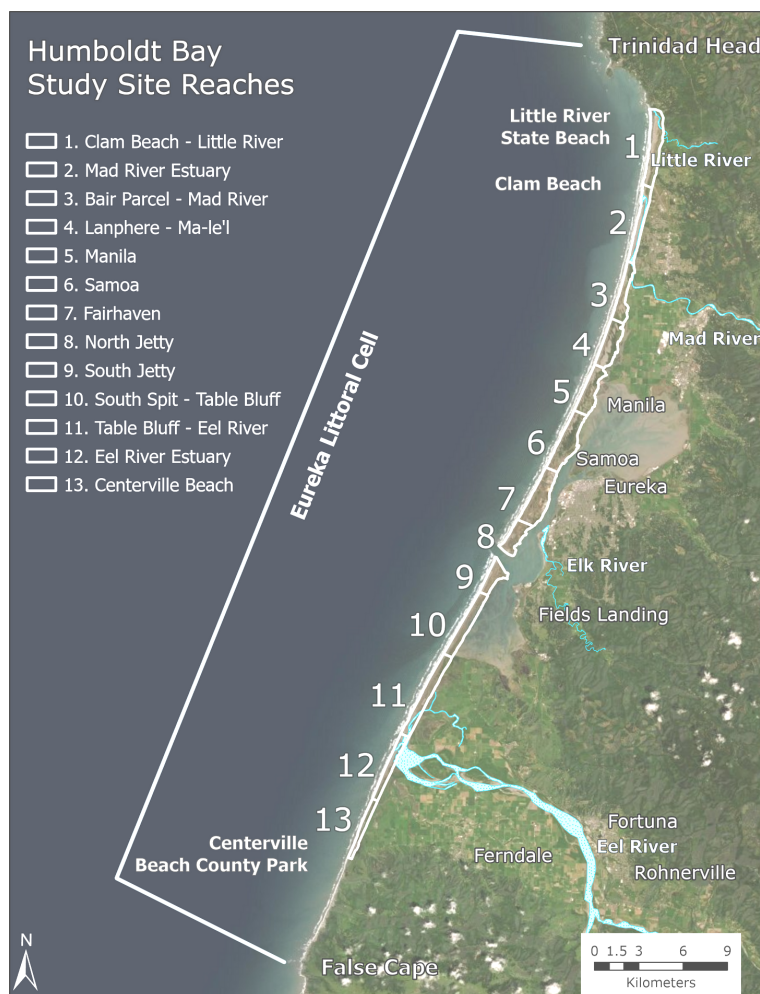
Researching Coastal Vulnerability to Sea-Level Rise in Humboldt Bay

By Lara Shindato, Masters Candidate at Arizona State University

My name is Lara Shinsato and I am a Masters student at Arizona State University, studying under Dr. Ian Walker at University of California at Santa Barbara. Our project is part of the Humboldt Coastal Resilience Project and focuses on characterizing the vulnerability of Humboldt Bay's outer barrier beach and dune systems to sea-level rise.

The study area consists of the outer barrier shoreline of the Eureka Littoral Cell (ELC), from Trinidad Head in the north to False Cape in the south. This 52-mile stretch of coastline has an increased vulnerability to sea-level rise due to the combination of accelerated local sea-level rise rates, vertical land movement from shifting tectonic plates, changes to the sediment budget, and the erosion of beaches and dunes. The dunes serve to protect inland estuaries, neighborhoods, and critical infrastructure from coastal erosion, flooding, and longer-term sea-level rise. Our focus is on assessing the vulnerability of the dune barrier system to show how their features could be impacted by future flooding and erosion from sea-level rise, and on specific adaptation methods (such as ecosystems restoration) that could make dune barriers in the region more resilient to these impacts.

To characterize the vulnerabilities of the outer barrier system, we identified 21 environmental and socio-economic variables that indicate various aspects of exposure, risk, and hazard in the region that would be impacted by sea-level rise. The study site was compartmentalized into 13 segments or reaches of the barrier system, based on the presence of topographic change, erosion monitoring profiles, geomorphology, and shoreline change rates. Environmental variables focus on physical and biological features along with natural hazards. Socio-economic variables include cultural features associated with the Wiyot Tribe, population and land use data, and critical infrastructure in the area.



Results from the analysis identified areas of vulnerability to sea-level rise for each of the 13 reaches based on various aspects of vulnerability, as well as a comprehensive (overall) vulnerability. Having a variety of vulnerability maps that are not only specific to different stretches of beach in Humboldt County, but also encompassing a wide range of variable types and vulnerability themes is crucial to future sea-level rise planning as it identifies areas of concern for a large range of interested stakeholders. While some groups may want to focus on physical vulnerability to the outer barriers, others might be more interested in how it would impact communities, ecosystems, or critical infrastructure. The results of this project will provide a launching point for future community planning to mitigate and adapt to the effects of ongoing and future sea-level rise in Humboldt County. While these results are still preliminary, project partners have begun sharing them with key stakeholders to gather feedback and ground the study in local context.

Friends of the Dunes, GHD, and project partners are currently working to share preliminary results of the Vulnerability Assessment through stakeholder meetings and community outreach efforts. To learn more or get involved, please contact suzie@friendsofthedunes.org.



CULTIVATING COASTAL CONNECTIONS

by Daisy Ambriz-Peres

Friends of the Dunes has had a jam packed schedule this year! It's been a little hectic behind the scenes gearing up for one event before launching the next, but overall the experience has been incredibly fulfilling. We've served hundreds of community members, bringing them closer and sharing the love we hold for our coast.

We are recipients of an Explore the Coast grant from the State Coastal Conservancy that is funding family programs. Our goal is to welcome people that typically face barriers to enjoying the magical public spaces we have available on our coast. With this grant funding, we have created: Explorando Juntos, Nature Newbies, and Family Nature Connections.

We've partnered with numerous community groups, nonprofits, and agencies to offer a wide range of educational experiences at a plethora of locations. Our monthly Spanish Explorando Juntos program has had incredible success. The intention is to get people outside and feel comfortable interacting with guides while speaking in their native tongue. When someone speaks their native language, they are more likely to learn and ask questions. We've partnered with the Trinidad Coastal Land Trust to offer birding walks and tide pooling. We've worked with the Humboldt Bay



Children learning about the plant life cycle at an Explorando Juntos event. Photo by Daisy Ambriz-Peres

National Wildlife Refuge to create a fun Wetland Exploration where children dip-netted for marsh critters and painted with watercolors. One of our newest and most treasured partnerships has been with Paso a Paso from St. Joseph's Hospital. They've helped us expand our outreach considerably and provide full lunches for participating families.

Our first Family Nature Connections event was a giant hit! We celebrated the changing of seasons with a Spring Equinox event. We had different stations of fun, spring-themed crafts and activities. Snacks and herbal teas were shared. The celebration ended with loads of beach fun for many families. We hope to have two more Family Nature Connections events this year, one in August and the other on Halloween.

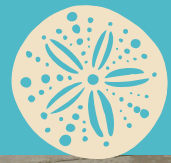
Nature Newbies will provide workshops for people to learn the basics of outdoor recreational safety and fun. This program will also host a series of introductory level guided walks around the coast. The goal is to show and educate people on the basics of outdoor recreation so they can have the basic knowledge to feel comfortable going exploring nature. We recently had a Camping 101 Workshop where we demonstrated how to build and put out campfires with a local Wildlands Firefighter, how to camp by leaving no trace led by the Backcountry Horsemen's Association, how to cook outside and how to set up a tent led by community volunteers.

We have many more events to come and we hope to increase our reach to people that have previously felt unsafe or uninvited in outdoor spaces. If you are interested in volunteering for these events please let us know! We would love to have more volunteers and brain power to organize, outreach, and plan for the programs that lie ahead.



Young naturalist learning how to use binoculars observing her family and friends dip netting at an Explorando Juntos event at the HBNWR. Photo by Daisy Ambriz-Peres





Restore Joy

By Emily Baxter, Education Coordinator

On June 2nd, our annual restoration and beach cleanup event that engages hundreds of students from all over Humboldt County finally returned! For the first time in three years, over 600 students gathered once again at the Mike Thompson Wildlife Area on Humboldt Bay's South Spit to be stewards of our dunes and ocean at Kids Ocean Day.

Throughout May, I had the privilege of visiting classrooms across the county to teach students about the biodiversity of our coast and dunes, introduce them to some of the threats to biodiversity, and engage them in solutions. Small actions taken by many people can make a huge difference in our impact on this Earth. These students' largest collective action for the Earth during Kids Ocean Day was dune ecosystem restoration.

After a morning of hard work and fun, everyone gathered on the beach for an aerial art formation: we spelled out our iteration of the statewide theme of Joy -Restore Joy, and together we formed three ochre sea stars (*Pisaster ochraceus*). Our theme felt particularly fitting this year; just as we are all battling and healing from the impact of a virus, so are sea stars. Sea Star Wasting Disease had decimated their populations severely, but recent reports show that

they are doing better! As we begin to understand our new normal and what measures we can take to stay safe and healthy, we can begin to restore activities that bring us joy. For these students, being able to have fun outside while on a field trip in nature definitely fits the bill. One thing I realized while planning this event and talking with teachers is that this was one of the first field trips in three years for many of these students! Thinking back to the field trips I got to take as an elementary school student, the ones that took place in nature stand out the most. Whether or not these students remember the details of June 2, we hope they remember that there was joy.

The California Coastal Commission coordinates Kids Ocean Day statewide with proceeds from the Whale Tail License Plate and voluntary donations on the state tax return to the Protect Our Coast and Oceans Fund. At five sites along the California Coast, students participate in free Ocean Day field trips that focus on stewardship of our coast. Our local Kids Ocean Day event is coordinated through a partnership between Friends of the Dunes and the Bureau of Land Management's Arcata Field Office with support from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, California Conservation Corps, California Department of Fish & Wildlife, and California State Parks Lifeguards. A huge thanks to all our wonderful volunteers who make this large event possible, as well as to all the teachers and school staff who work so hard for their students.

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Sand Sculpture Festival

LAUNCH PARTY!

**Saturday, July 9th from 11 am to 5 pm
Humboldt Coastal Nature Center Beach**

Join us as we launch the 27th annual Sand Sculpture Festival! Five teams have been personally invited to participate in a sand sculpture demonstration Launch Party. Families and friends are welcome to picnic at the beach while they wait for the demonstration teams' sandy masterpieces to take shape over the course of the afternoon. A dispersed version of the festival will take place the rest of July.



2022 People's Choice, Best of Show, & Golden Shovel Award: Built by Team Maximum Wattage Representing Pure Water Spas.

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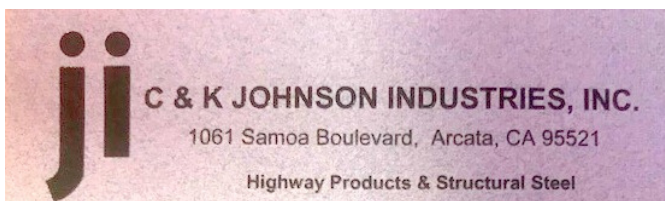
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Save the Dates! In-person events this season

- **Sand Sculpture Festival Launch Party**
Saturday, July 9th (more information on page 9)
- **Bee-Day Party & 40th Anniversary Celebration**
Saturday, August 20th
- **Wine by the Sea**
Saturday, October 1st



Visit friendsofthedunes.org/calendar for a complete list of upcoming programs.

Join our email list for updates about guided walks, restoration days, and school programs.

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