



DUNESBERRY

NEWSLETTER OF FRIENDS OF THE DUNES

SPRING/SUMMER 2024 | VOLUME 43 | ISSUE 1



The Impact of Our Work

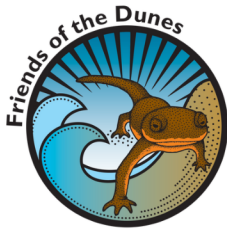
By Suzie Fortner, Executive Director

As I embark on my new role with Friends of the Dunes as Executive Director, I have been reminiscing about the path that led me here. I have loved nature since I was young, a trait I attribute to having spent a lot of time in nature as a child and having parents who encouraged my curiosity about the natural world. Those early experiences in nature led me to pursue a marine biology degree and a career in environmental education. After moving to Humboldt to attend graduate school, I became involved with Friends of the Dunes as a volunteer because it was obvious that I had shared values with the organization - particularly that everyone, especially children, should have access to nature and free nature education programs. Those early experiences in nature have an impact - they make ripples in our lives, influencing our relationship with nature and encouraging the development of environmental stewardship values.

“If we want children to flourish, to become truly empowered, let us allow them to love the earth before we ask them to save it.”

- David Sobel

While environmental education programs drew me to this organization, what has inspired me more than anything and kept me here for so many years is the dedication and generosity of you, our members and our volunteers. Your support makes an impact, positively influencing both our human and non-human communities. During my time with Friends of the Dunes, I have witnessed the impact of our work within our community firsthand. To cite a few examples, I was a new staff member and bystander during the transformation of the “Stamps Dune House” into the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center. Since then, I have seen countless visitors be introduced to Humboldt’s coastal environments through this facility and become dune admirers, members, naturalists, volunteers, and advocates for biodiversity.



Friends of the Dunes is dedicated to conserving the natural diversity of coastal environments in Humboldt County, California, through community supported education and stewardship programs.

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RESTORATION MANAGER
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On May 30th, we organized our 19th Annual Kids Ocean Day (featured on page 9). I've been lucky enough to be involved in some capacity with 17 of the 19 events. Each event engaged between 500 and 1,000 local students in coastal stewardship activities, demonstrating how we can work together to make a much larger impact than any individual can do alone.

Through the Humboldt Coastal Resilience Project and the data collected on dune topography over 8 years, we have seen more clearly than ever before the changes to dune height and volume over time, including the response of foredunes to erosion caused by extreme storm events. The researchers on this project have published these results showing that restored dunes are more resilient to sea level rise and climate change than unrestored dunes. This research has since helped secure funding to embark on the most ambitious restoration projects in the history of our Humboldt dunes, including the restoration of the entire foredune at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center and the Wadulh Unit of the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge. On pages 3 and 4, you can read more about these projects that are removing invasive plants to make space for increased native biodiversity and enhancing the resilience of our coastline.

In 2020, we took on the management of the Samoa Dunes and Wetlands Conservation Area, consisting of 357 acres of impressively diverse coastal environments, including the southernmost extent of the stika spruce/shore pine forest assemblage that is unique to our Humboldt dunes. After decades of private ownership, we have opened up this property for public access and have seen the community embrace this special place to learn about, explore, enjoy, and care for the land. We are now working with the Wiyot Tribe on a historic landback project for the long-term management of this property and will be updating our community on that effort soon.

Thanks to your unwavering support, we have had such a positive impact on our community and coastal environments over our 42-year history. This is a journey we undertake together, a collective effort that relies on the support of our community. We need you, our members and volunteers, to ensure the continuation of this important work for many years to come. Your support is not just valuable, it is the lifeblood of our organization. I am deeply grateful for the role you play in helping us thrive and make a difference in our community.



Children running on the beach during a Dune Detectives Summer Camp. Photo by Zeen Vincent.

Foredune Restoration at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center

By Justin Legge, Restoration Manager

As most of the Earth is impacted either directly or indirectly by human activity, ecological restoration has emerged as one of the most important tools to stem the biodiversity crisis and repair damaged ecosystems. By restoring ecosystems, we can help rebuild habitats, reintroduce native species, and promote ecological balance. This supports the survival of countless plant and animal species and ensures that vital natural processes are maintained for the benefit of both nature and humanity.

Come witness the transformation that has taken place on our foredune at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center! Over the last year, through funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Redwood Community Action Agency work crews have successfully eliminated almost all of the invasive European beachgrass (*Ammophila arenaria*) from our foredunes. These foredunes that were suffocated by this invasive species can start to return to their native dune habitat. Now more than ever, our volunteers are vital to the project. We will continue to sweep the area and remove the European beachgrass that resprouts from left behind rhizomes. Generally, it takes a few cycles of removing the resprouts to fully win the battle against the invasive European beachgrass.



The Redwood Community Action Agency's restoration team at the HCNC Property. Photo by Justin Legge.

Select portions of the foredunes at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center property saw ecosystem restoration activities as early as 2008, undertaken by volunteer support. The foredune restoration plot just south of the South Beach Access trail was our main focus and where our volunteer Dune Ecosystem Restoration Team (DERT) met regularly. Year after year of volunteer work transformed this plot back into a thriving and diverse native dune ecosystem. This area of the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center property has seen an abundance of native plant life return to what was once dominated by the invasive European beachgrass. If you were to be transported into the middle of this plot, you would never know it had been suffocated by invasive species not too long ago. Coastal sagewort, beach strawberry, the endangered beach laiya, silver leaf beach pea, and so much more native plants abound. Moving into late spring the colors are becoming more and more exciting!

What I find most interesting about our ongoing restoration project at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center is that you can walk through a timeline of dune ecosystem restoration if you know what to look for! Our foredunes are a very sensitive part of our coastal dune ecosystem, and have been the focus of most of our dune ecosystem restoration work over the years. Each volunteer hour is significant. Each rhizome of the invasive grass pulled supports the return of a native species. Our community working together to support our dune ecosystem has been a powerful and beautiful thing to witness over the years, and extremely fulfilling to take part in. I hope you can join us! DERT workdays at the Nature Center take place every 2nd Saturday of the month from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.



The first dig of European beachgrass at the HCNC, north past the Wildberries Trail. Aerial photo by Justin Legge.

Bringing Resiliency and Biodiversity Back to the New Wadulh Unit of Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge

By Andrea Pickart, Ecologist, Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge

The US Fish and Wildlife Service, in cooperation with our partners, is undertaking our most ambitious dune restoration project on 160 acres of our new Wadulh Unit north of the Lanphere Dunes. Wadulh (pronounced Wa-DUSH) is the Soulatluk word for dunes, and the name acknowledges the historic and current Wiyot stewardship of our dunes. The Wadulh Unit encompasses 300 acres of once active dunes, as well as wetland swales and stabilized forested dunes. Restoration will return the foredune and backdune to a semi-stable condition, bringing back the natural resiliency of dunes to climate change as well as re-establishing the biodiversity lost when invasive species overran the dunes beginning in the 1960s. The project is a model of collaboration, with Redwood Community Action Agency and Friends of the Dunes the recipients of a combined total of \$14 million in grant funds from the California Coastal Conservancy, California Wildlife Conservation Board, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. All hands are on deck to accomplish this ambitious project, with labor provided by American Conservation Experience, California Conservation Corps, Samara Restoration, Mattole Restoration Council, and Redwood Community Action Agency. Friends of the Dunes and GHD will oversee outreach components, and Tsek Houdaqh, the Wiyot youth program, as well as community volunteers overseen by Friends of the Dunes will contribute labor. Work on the ground is being overseen by Jillian Zimmerman, Restoration Manager, and Nicole Matonak, Restoration Biotech.



Heavy equipment operated by GR Sundberg scraping the lupine/duff layer and burying it in trenches at the Wadulh Unit of the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Andrea Pickart.



Workers with Mattole Restoration Council transport cut yellow bush lupine to a burn pile. Photo by Max Deleon.

Wadulh was the site of the first introduction of yellow bush lupine to the northern part of the North Spit, and its subsequent spread can be traced on historic air photos. Research conducted in the 1990s demonstrated that yellow bush lupine is an “ecosystem engineer,” an invasive species that significantly modifies the environment in which it occurs. Bush lupine is a fast-growing, short-lived shrub that invades the open, low-growing dune mat community. It fixes nitrogen, and is characterized by rapid turnover, causing increased soil nitrate and the accumulation of an organic “duff” layer, conditions that facilitate secondary invaders such as invasive annual grasses. The result is a novel scrub community dominated by bush lupine and coyote brush, with an understory of annual grasses and ferns—none of which occur in the native dune mat community. This vegetation is extremely dense and stabilizes the dunes, creating an environment in which natives species are unable to survive and natural sand movement is halted.

This project represents the first large scale project to restore bush-lupine invaded dunes. Methods have only been carried out on a small scale. Restoration requires not only removal of non-native species, but also a return of the nutrient rich soils to their naturally depauperate state. This is being accomplished with a variety of methods. In areas where lupine has been present for a somewhat shorter period of time and where some native plants persist, manual labor is being used to cut down lupine shrubs and to rake up and bury the duff layer. In the oldest bush lupine areas, comprising 70 acres, heavy equipment was used to clear the dense vegetation and duff and bury it beneath 3 ft of sand. European beachgrass is also present on the foredune and is being treated by a combination of herbicide application and burning. Native plants will be introduced to the site during the last year of the restoration project in winter 2025/26. Samara Restoration is collecting seeds from nearby dunes and will grow plants in pots to be planted throughout the site. The scale of this task requires that a helicopter be used to transport plants from a staging area out to multiple locations on the dunes. Sand fencing will be erected temporarily to slow the movement of sand while plants become established and will later be removed. As with all restoration projects, adaptive management and maintenance will be required, and will be provided by in the long term by US Fish and Wildlife Service.



A Redwood Community Action Agency employee weedeating annual grasses. Photo by Andrea Pickart.

The community is invited to participate in this exciting project through scheduled volunteer days. Friends of the Dunes will be organizing these days, which will concentrate on the planting portion of the project. In the meantime, watch for tours of the site and updates on the project through Friends of the Dunes.

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Welcome to the Team!



Ashley Osia
Development Director

Ashley earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Central Missouri and holds a post-baccalaureate certification from Cal Poly Humboldt. Although she started in the arts, Ashley soon discovered her true calling in the nonprofit sector. She has made significant contributions to various organizations with over a decade of experience as a successful nonprofit executive in Humboldt County. Currently, at Friends of the Dunes, Ashley leads the fundraising team and coordinates the organization's annual activities. As a passionate advocate for environmental preservation, Ashley is committed to using her role to protect and conserve the natural world. In her free time, Ashley continues to explore her creative side through printmaking and light shows for bands.

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Volunteer Highlight: Mercury Lawton

By Daisy Ambriz-Peres, Outreach Manager

Mercury Lawton's volunteer story with Friends of the Dunes is one of enthusiastic participation, ecological curiosity, and a joyful connection with nature. Mercury's journey with Friends of the Dunes began in August 2023 when she stumbled upon our organization through a simple Google search. She was looking for locations in the area where she could volunteer her time. It was serendipitous that we were the first link that popped up!

Mercury's contributions are diverse and impactful. She volunteers weekly at the Humboldt Nature Center, where her enthusiasm and dedication shine through. Her role in events like the Get Outside Gear Sale showcased her adaptiveness, while leading children at Kids Ocean Day highlighted her ability to inspire the next generation of nature lovers. At Wine by the Sea, Mercury's vibrant presence added to the celebratory atmosphere, and during the Lupine Bash, she worked tirelessly to remove invasive species and restore native plants, embodying the hands-on spirit of conservation. Currently, Mercury is studying Forestry at College of the Redwoods balancing her academic commitments with her volunteer work, demonstrating a deep commitment to both her education and the environment.

Mercury's love for the coast and passion for conservation led her to our community, where she quickly became an essential and beloved member. From the beginning, Mercury's involvement has been marked by a profound sense of purpose and joy.

"When I go to the Nature Center or out to the dunes, it allows me to connect with nature, new friends, and myself," Mercury shared. "This community has welcomed me and taught me so many wonderful things about the plants and animals in this area. To share this knowledge and place with others brings me joy. Every event or restoration day that I attend, I get even more excited to be a part of the next one. I'm proud to be a friend of the dunes."

As Mercury continues her journey with Friends of the Dunes, we look forward to seeing the positive impact she will undoubtedly have on our coast and the people she meets. Her contributions are a vital part of our mission to conserve, connect, and restore our native coastal environments, and we are proud to have her as a treasured member of our community.



The 43rd annual Lupine Bash at the Ma-le'l Dunes North Unit of the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Mercury Lawton is found squatting in the lower right corner. Photo by Justin Legge.

From Tides to Trails: Youth Conservation Training at the Coast

By Daisy Ambriz-Peres, Outreach Manager

The week-long immersion Coastal Naturalist Training with the California Conservation Corps (CCC) was nothing short of extraordinary. From April 15-20, Suzie Fortner and I had the privilege of guiding 24 enthusiastic corps members from the Fortuna CCC Center through an intensive, hands-on exploration of Humboldt's coastal environments. This unique training program was designed to connect youth with nature, foster a deep appreciation for conservation, and introduce them to potential careers in environmental stewardship.

The importance of conservation cannot be overstated, especially in regions like Humboldt County where coastal dunes harbor such a rich diversity of flora and fauna. These dynamic ecosystems are crucial for biodiversity, climate resilience, and the overall health of our environment. The CCC members, with their motto of "Hard Work, Low Pay, Miserable Conditions, and More!!" were perfect candidates for this program. Their dedication to the manual removal of invasive plant species has already made significant contributions to dune restoration, and this training was the next step in deepening their understanding and commitment to conservation.

Each day of the training was packed with field-based learning, hiking, and insightful sessions with guest speakers. We were fortunate to have 12 experts join us, each sharing their knowledge and expertise. The guest speakers, many of whom are professionals in various environmental fields, expressed their admiration for the CCC members' positive attitudes and hard work. These interactions provided the participants with valuable

insights into potential career paths and the various ways they could continue contributing to conservation efforts into the future.

One of the highlights of the week was the tidepooling adventure at Agate Beach. For many of the crew members, it was their first time exploring tidepools and the experience was nothing short of magical. As they hopped from rock to rock, their eyes wide with child-like wonder, they eagerly searched through the pools of water teeming with life. The excitement was palpable as they discovered a hidden world just beneath the surface.

By the end of the week, our second cohort of 24 CCC members had earned their California Naturalist Certification, joining the ever-growing community of California Naturalists. This certification is offered in collaboration with the statewide UC Environmental Stewards Program.

As we reflect on this incredible week, we are filled with gratitude and pride. The dedication and enthusiasm of the CCC members were truly inspiring and it was an honor to share our passion for coastal ecosystems with them. These new naturalists are now champions of conservation, ready to share their knowledge and love of the coast with others. The future of our coastal environments is brighter with their involvement and we look forward to continuing this essential work of connecting people with nature and fostering the next generation of environmental stewards.

The success of this training program was made possible by a Youth Community Access Grant from the California Natural Resources Agency, awarded to the UC Environmental Stewards program with Friends of the Dunes as a partner.



Celebrating Kids Ocean Day

By Emily Baxter, Education Manager

On May 30th, our Kids Ocean Day event brought over 700 students from across the county, from kindergarten to 6th grade, to the Mike Thompson Wildlife Area on Humboldt Bay's South Spit. They spent the day being stewards of our beaches and helped to restore the dunes.

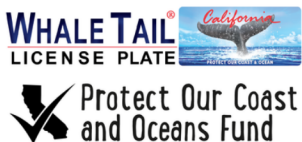
Throughout the spring season I have been visiting all of these students in their classrooms to teach them about the biodiversity of our coast and dunes, introduce them to some of the threats to biodiversity, and talk about solutions. When one person takes a moment to care for our planet, the effects may be greater than we realize. 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 statewide theme, "Make Ripples," and together, we formed a Salmon (*Oncorhynchus spp.*) splashing into water, causing a ripple.

This year, a salmon was chosen to represent the Kids Ocean Day event in Humboldt County. This remarkable species perfectly symbolizes the concept of creating ripples of change within our community. Salmon make ripples when they create their redds, or nest-like depressions in gravel for egg-laying, and when they fight upstream. They are a keystone species, playing a vital role in maintaining the health of our oceans and watersheds. They benefit other species as food and their bodies enrich habitats through the cycling of nutrients from the ocean to freshwater streams. Their representation reminds us of the importance of caring for nature and each other. Salmon have long been intertwined with human livelihood, emphasizing the interconnectedness between our actions and the well-being of our environment.



Over 700 children creating an aerial art image. Design by Jess Barger. Photo by Gabe Adams with the plane piloted by Mark Harris.

The California Coastal Commission funds Kids Ocean Day events 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 with support from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Watershed Stewards Project, 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.



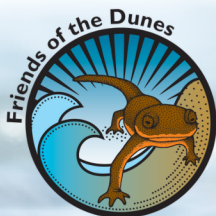
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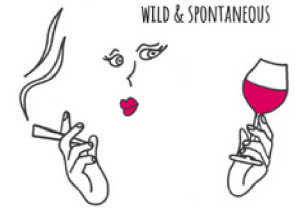
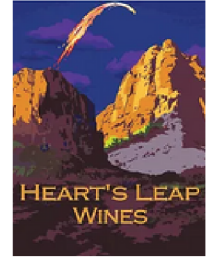


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- **Fall Coastal Naturalist Training Begins!**
Wednesday, September 4
- **Wine by the Sea**
Saturday, October 5



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

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