

ENVIRONMENT

THE HISTORY AND THE FUTURE OF

ECO MALIBU

BY STEVE WOODS

ITS BEEN 3 YEARS SINCE THE COMPLETION AND SUCCESS OF THE MALIBU LAGOON RESTORATION PROJECT. ECOMALIBU HAS PLAYED AN INTEGRAL PART IN THE PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF RESTORING THE HEALTH OF THE MALIBU CREEK WATERSHED AND ITS IMPACT ON WATER QUALITY AT SURFRIDER BEACH

EcoMalibu, a non-profit organization, is charged with the restoration and stewardship of the Malibu Lagoon, and its surrounding environments. To that end, EcoMalibu has engaged a stellar roster of Board of Directors who have been intimately involved in the Malibu Lagoon Task Force, a body comprised of 88 stakeholders, including Malibu residents, homeowners' associations, environmental groups, local business owners, surfing groups, developers and government agencies. The Task Force commissioned numerous scientific studies to determine: why the Malibu Creek and Lagoon, as well as Surfrider Beach (Surfrider), were polluted; why the wildlife populations were in decline; and, how to fix these problems. The water pollution at Surfrider was believed to be the cause of countless surfers getting sick, including three reported deaths.

These studies recommended a variety of solutions to clean up the polluted waters, and increase wildlife health. These recommendations were unanimously supported by the Task Force members, and were divided into short-term and long-term plans charged with restoring the water quality and health of the watershed. The Lagoon restoration was listed as a high-priority, short-term objective. The Task Force also recommended long-term plans to acquire as many open-space properties as possible in the Civic Center area -- properties that were once part of the historic wetland -- and return the once-mighty wetland in the heart of Malibu closer to its original size and stature.

In 2010, EcoMalibu began promoting the upcoming Malibu Lagoon restoration, and encouraged other water quality and wildlife habitat improvement projects in the historic wetland area. EcoMalibu then formed a Board of Directors made up of academics, scientists, and local activists with decades of experience working in and around the Malibu area. They quickly crafted a mission statement: "To recover, restore, and protect the lower Malibu Creek watershed and the historical wetland in the heart of Malibu by educating the general public about wetland and riparian ecosystems, promoting restoration to ensure clean and safe water for purposes of recreation, habitat, and food sources". EcoMalibu's first order of business was to create a website to house and distribute the volumes of scientific studies which included recommendations on how to resolve the problems in Malibu Creek and Lagoon, and the historic wetlands.

In 2011, after decades of research and planning, design, engineering, and environmental review, and raising the requisite money, the Lagoon restoration project was finally set to break ground. Then, suddenly, several unscrupulous individuals, motivated by self-interest, launched a misinformation campaign in an attempt to stop the project. These opponents falsely claimed that the Lagoon was healthy, and didn't need to be restored. They claimed that the public was never informed, and didn't have an opportunity to provide input on the project; simply, this wasn't true. The public was heavily involved in the creation of the Lagoon Restoration Plan, and was routinely informed about items related to the restoration project. The opposition claimed the project would cause massive traffic gridlock on Pacific Coast Highway, which never materialized. They also claimed that thousands of animals would be killed as a result of the restoration; another untruth. In fact, extraordinary efforts were implemented to protect fish and wildlife, and these safeguards had been part of the plan from the beginning. False accusations were leveled stating that the project would discharge polluted water into the ocean at Surfrider, increasing the risk of illness to surfers and beachgoers. The project had always planned to install a multimillion-dollar treatment plant to filter, clean, and disinfect any water leaving the construction area. Also, the project foes claimed that the Lagoon restoration would ruin the shape of the wave at the world-famous Surfrider Beach. These, and many other false accusations, were made by the project opponents, yet all were eventually proven to be wrong.

As participants in the Task Force, EcoMalibu felt compelled to combat the many lies promoted by the project opponents. The EcoMalibu.org website was redesigned to make it easier for the public to understand the empirical studies, which established the need for the restoration. Videos were acquired and posted, showing the years of community input that shaped the Lagoon project. A video showing the Lagoon Restoration Plan being presented to the Malibu City Council in 2001 was also made available on the website. EcoMalibu also began videotaping and posting interviews with wetland experts discussing, in simple terms, the details of the restoration plan, and addressing the many false statements being made by the opposition.

Beyond the campaign of misinformation and scare tactics, the opponents also filed lawsuits to try to stop the project. While these tactics caused a two-year delay, they were ultimately unsuccessful. This was in large part due to EcoMalibu's efforts to distribute the facts in a format that was easy for the populace to comprehend. Unfortunately, this two-year delay exposed millions of visitors at Surfrider Beach to dangerously polluted water, and caused countless animals to suffer in a degraded habitat. It was later learned that the opponents in the Malibu Colony believed that the proposed construction would decrease their summer rental income, and increase the pedestrian traffic walking by their homes. Eventually, after numerous hearings, the Coastal Commission castigated the opponents for filing frivolous lawsuits, and costing the State of California an inordinate amount of tax-payer money.

EcoMalibu videotaped and photographed the construction process, showing the extraordinary measures that were used to protect the wildlife, surfers, and beachgoers. During construction, EcoMalibu photos documented more than a dozen non-permitted waste-discharge pipes hidden underground, along with hundreds of tons of trash, unnatural HWY construction fill and debris dumped in the swampy low lying wetlands during the 1930's in order to help Malibu's first developers subdivide a Colony summer home beach community for the booming movie industry of Hollywood. All of these pollution sources were removed during construction.

Following the completion of the Lagoon restoration, in May of 2013, EcoMalibu continued to document the progress of the restored Malibu Lagoon with their innovative use of underwater video and photography. EcoMalibu felt it was critical to show the community, who had been bombarded with negativity about the restoration, the benefits and value of the project; among the positive benefits are having a healthy natural wetland in the city's center and maintaining the overall character of Malibu -- a California Gem -- as well as maintaining its inherent, and enviable, property values. EcoMalibu captured ongoing photographs and video of the Lagoon, as the more than 70,000 native plants took root and grew, and as the fish, birds, and other wildlife flourished over the following three years; videos of the increased water circulation as a result of the new Lagoon configuration were also recorded and posted (the increased water circulation minimized the excessive build-up of algae that had formerly starved the lagoon of oxygen). Furthermore, the magnificent wave quality that Surfrider is known for continued to be one of the world's best point break as evidenced during the epic swell of Hurricane Marie. The post-construction videos and slideshows serve to promote future wetland restoration projects, both locally and throughout the world. EcoMalibu continues to compile information about the lagoon project, including the scientific monitoring used to track the project's success.

ENVIRONMENT

As the Lagoon project matures, EcoMalibu is working on the following four major programs:

First, the education of the public regarding the importance of wetlands, given the role that they play in cleaning water and protecting our coast against issues associated with climate change, is preeminent. EcoMalibu is developing programs for students, interns, and volunteers to engage in an extraordinary environmental experience through hands-on activities at the Lagoon. Students and volunteers will learn about the wetlands, using the Lagoon as a living laboratory. They will also participate in hands-on restoration by helping to remove invasive vegetation, and installing native plants for wildlife habitat. It is EcoMalibu's hope that these opportunities will inspire future wetland scientists. As part of this effort, EcoMalibu will continue to document and highlight the Lagoon restoration project, to use as a model for encouraging increased and improved wetland restorations throughout California -- and the world.

Second, EcoMalibu will continue advocating for the restoration of the historic wetland, promoting clean water and sensible development, and mitigating Malibu's notorious traffic problems. EcoMalibu produced a short documentary, entitled "Decision Malibu," in an effort to support "Measure R," a ballot initiative that requires majority approval by the citizens of Malibu for developments larger than 20,000 square feet; "Measure R" was overwhelmingly passed by Malibu residents. Currently, "Measure R" is being challenged in court by a consortium of commercial developers. Additionally, EcoMalibu has weighed-in on the Civic Center Wastewater Treatment plant, suggesting improved methods and techniques to ensure clean water for the Malibu Creek and Lagoon, as well as Surfrider Beach. EcoMalibu had previously published in "The Local" a vision for a "Central Park," located in the civic center area, as an alternative to destroying the pristine coastal bluffs habitat next to Bluff's Park. The alternative features a children's park and recreational facilities that would reduce the massive traffic increases proposed by the commercial developers. As issues arise that may impact Malibu's natural resources, EcoMalibu will continue to advocate on behalf of the environment.

Third, EcoMalibu is currently producing an educational, step-by-step, how-to video instructing homeowners how to construct and maintain a "Rain Garden." The rain garden video will teach the viewer how to convert their landscape into an eco-friendly environment, using native vegetation for the purpose of cleaning and conserving water. In action, rain gardens intercept polluted storm-water runoff from rooftops and driveways, and divert it into the landscape; this polluted runoff is cleaned and filtered as it passes through the soil, and pollutants are extracted by plant roots. Additionally, rain gardens are constructed with native plants, and use 93% less water than a typical lawn. The rain garden video will also feature details on how to convert the water used for the laundry into a "gray-water" irrigation system. Promoting rain gardens, and using gray-water for irrigation, can dramatically cut water usage (and its inherent expense), and systematically reduce the pollutants that reach our rivers, creeks, streams, wetlands, and, ultimately, our life-giving ocean.

To rally surfers around this cause, EcoMalibu has designed a unique surfing competition that will occur at the world-famous Malibu Surfrider Beach, when ideal wave conditions are forecast "On one perfect day" in October, 2017. The contest, entitled the Malibu NoseRiding Invitational (MNI), is a timed noseriding contest (maneuvering the surfboard from the front end) designed for surfers to accumulate the most timed noserides on a series of waves. It's a simple, objective judging system that appeals to a wide audience, one that even non-surfers will appreciate. It invites eight world-class women surfers to compete nose-to-nose with eight world-class men surfers for the first time in the history of professional surfing. The event will be streamed live over the internet, and edited for a one hour television special. EcoMalibu will also produce a series of short, educational videos that will be incorporated into both the live webcast and the one-hour television program. The audience will quickly learn about the issues of sea level rise, and the potential impacts to surf spots around the world (You can see a presentation of this program at MalibuNoseRiding.com).

EcoMalibu is currently raising funds to ensure our educational outreach, and advocacy efforts. Funds will be used to further promote the importance and need for wetland restoration, implementing EcoMalibu's student and volunteer programs, video production, and website development. Further, EcoMalibu is seeking sponsors and donors to help launch the climate change initiative that couples a surf contest with targeted educational messages.

The Local Malibu hopes that you will consider supporting EcoMalibu programs for your end-of-year giving. EcoMalibu will treat your donations with the same respect that they would expect for their own contributions, which is why they adhere to a "Donor Bill of Rights." Of course, your donations are tax-deductible to the fullest extent provided by the law. Thus, please visit the EcoMalibu.org website to learn more about their programs and the organization.

If you get a few minutes during this water fowl migration season, bring your binos and check out one of the most visited State Parks wildlife habitats in Malibu.

Contact EcoMalibu via email at info@ecomalibu.org, or you can donate through the website at EcoMalibu.org, or via mail: EcoMalibu, P.O. Box 4064, Malibu, CA 90264

The LOCAL



Biological monitor supervising Lagoon construction July 2012



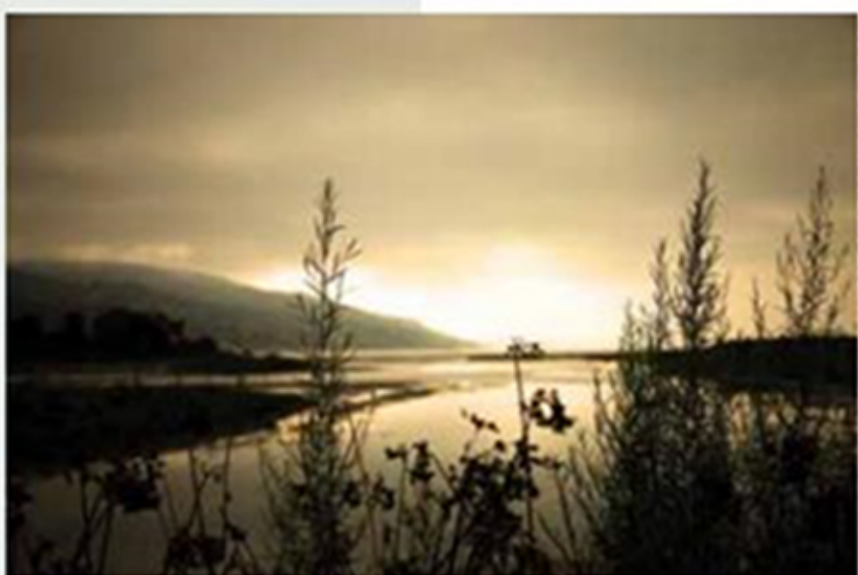
Student volunteers and interns planting native vegetation Malibu Lagoon June 2014.



Underground pipes, trash, and debris removed from Malibu Lagoon during construction phase of lagoon restoration. September 2012.



Malibu Noseriding Invitational



One of the most visited State Park wildlife habitats in Southern California

PHOTO: TIM HORTON

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A large flock migratory Terns Santa Monica Audubon Society bird surveys have reported increases of bird counts and the number of bird species since the restoration.

PHOTO: TIM HORTON



Improved tidal and wind driven circulation during open and closed berm seasons has more species staying year around.

PHOTO: TIM HORTON



With improved water quality comes increases in fish populations and increased waterfowl populations that depend on a thriving fish community.

PHOTO: TIM HORTON

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