

# THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE COASTAL RANCHES CONSERVANCY

FALL 2016



Gaviota Creek, a hidden jewel

## Can We Save Gaviota Creek?

**Free-running streams** provide crucial habitat for wildlife and are increasingly rare in Southern California. Even after 5 years of drought, Gaviota Creek is one of the very few streams that still have running water. This water supports pond turtles, red-legged frogs, and steelhead trout that are no longer found in most other streams, now dry.

Because it runs between the north and southbound lanes of Highway 101 for part of its length and is difficult to access, we call this creek a “hidden jewel”. But Gaviota Creek is far from

pristine. Proximity to the highway means road pollution and trash is dumped directly into the stream bed. Concrete grade structures that support the highway span the stream

bed acting like small dams and make it difficult or impossible for steelhead trout to move up or downstream. The campground and access road at Gaviota State Park encroach

on the flood plain, disrupting the natural sediment flow and reducing the size and productivity of the estuary. With the support of the State Park, CalTrans, and many of the surround-

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Proud Fisherman, Gaviota Creek in the 1950's

ing land owners, Coastal Ranches Conservancy is working to solve these problems and help save Gaviota Creek. It often takes a private non-profit organization to accomplish things that a government bureaucracy doesn't have in their budget.

**To save Gaviota Creek, we need your financial support. If you like what we are doing, please consider making a donation by visiting our website at:**

[www.coastalranchesconservancy.org](http://www.coastalranchesconservancy.org)

## Gaviota Watershed Plan Released

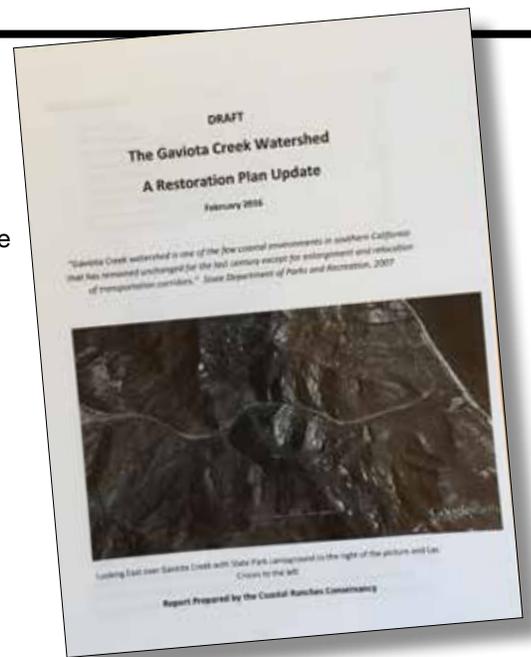
Coastal Ranches Conservancy has completed a draft Gaviota Watershed Plan and circulated it widely for review and comment. The Plan calls for the following steps:

- Remove all barriers to steelhead migration along the main stem of Gaviota Creek
- Improve stream water quality through bio-filtration of floodwater runoff from Highway 101 and remediation of excess sediment
- Restore the creek's estuary and floodplain to its natural condition by relocating the State Park access road and campground.

- Relocate the Highway 101 roadside rest areas away from the creek and watershed
- Protect the watershed from intensive development by supporting the acquisition of conservation easements from willing sellers

You can view the Plan here:  
[http://coastalranchesconservancy.org/DRAFT\\_Gaviota\\_Watershed\\_Plan\\_Update\\_2.5.pdf](http://coastalranchesconservancy.org/DRAFT_Gaviota_Watershed_Plan_Update_2.5.pdf)

Send your comments and questions to us at:  
[info@coastalranchesconservancy.org](mailto:info@coastalranchesconservancy.org)



## Trout in the Classroom Comes to Vista School



### Coastal Ranches Conservancy

is sponsoring a Trout in the Classroom program at Vista de Las Cruces school which is located only a few hundred feet from Gaviota Creek. This provides hands-on learning for students about watersheds and the living things that depend on them. Each class gets a small aquarium and trout eggs to raise and observe the life cycle of the fish. Students learn how their



everyday choices make a difference in their watershed for the health of fish. Since 1999, Central Coast Salmon Enhancement has conducted Trout in the Classroom for many local schools. Last year they had over 400 elementary school students in the program.

To learn more, you can visit them at:  
[www.centralcoastsalmon.com](http://www.centralcoastsalmon.com)

## 2015 PROJECTS FUNDED BY COASTAL RANCHES CONSERVANCY

### • Kids in Nature-

Cheadle Center for Biodiversity at UCSB

### • Tide Pool School-

Hollister Ranch Conservancy

### • California Rangeland Trust & Land Trust for Santa Barbara County-

Financial support for acquisition of future conservation easements in Gaviota Creek Watershed

### • Steelhead Barrier Removals on Gaviota Creek-

Matching funds for Proposition One grants

# Growing Oak Trees with New Technology

**Drought** is starting to really take a toll on oak trees along the Gaviota Coast. In the drier locations, many 100-200 year old trees are dying. With natural oak reproduction already at low levels, property owners should consider planting more oak trees to supplement natural replacement.

Oak seedlings do best if they have a "nurse" plant to provide shade and protection from wind. Along the Gaviota Coast, coyote bush and larger oaks are common nurse plants for baby oaks. If none of these are present, oak seedlings have a hard time getting established as they tend to dry out too fast, before they can get their tap root down to moisture. Coastal Ranches Conservancy has been experimenting with a new self-watering device called the Waterboxx that seems to largely solve this problem (see [www.dewharvest.com](http://www.dewharvest.com) for more information).

**OAK SEEDLING SURVIVAL RATES... HAVE GONE FROM LESS THAN 50% TO MORE THEN 90% USING THESE DEVICES.**

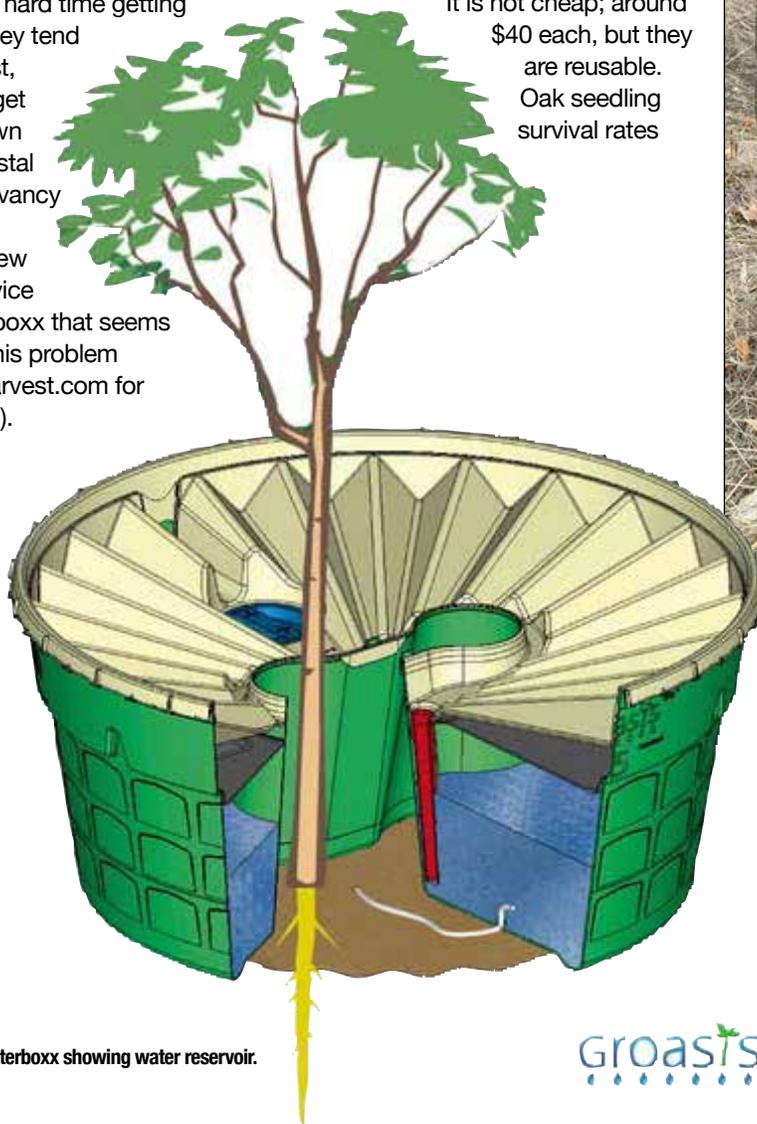
The Waterboxx shelters the growing plant from wind and weeds, holds a reservoir of water, and dispenses that water through nylon wicks into the soil around the seedling by capillary action.

The manufacturer also claims that it can collect moisture from the air; "harvesting" the dew to help maintain the water reservoir.

We have tried these watering devices for a couple of years now, as well as other similar designs. The Waterboxx works and is the best product out there we have found so far.

It is not cheap; around \$40 each, but they are reusable. Oak seedling survival rates

in our experience have gone from less than 50% to more than 90% using these devices and with a lot less time spent watering. For planting in those locations where there is no close-by water source, just use a water jug to fill the reservoir a couple of times during the dry season. Oak tree seedlings are available free from the Santa Barbara County Farm Bureau (805-688-7479) each Spring and from the Botanical Garden and nurseries like Santa Barbara Natives and San Marcos Growers at other times of the year.



Cut-away view of Waterboxx showing water reservoir.



The Waterboxx with oak seedling planted last Spring. The Waterboxx is recessed below the natural soil line a few inches and provides good protection from wind and weeds while supplying a small, self-regulated amount of moisture.

## COASTAL RANCHES CONSERVANCY

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[www.coastalranchesconservancy.org](http://www.coastalranchesconservancy.org)

**SUPPORTING NATURE CONSERVATION, RESTORATION,  
AND EDUCATION ON THE GAVIOTA COAST**

Visit us at:

[www.coastalranchesconservancy.org](http://www.coastalranchesconservancy.org)



### **A Rare Visitor to the Gaviota Coast**

This Golden Eagle was caught by a wildlife camera getting a drink from a water trough. With nearly all of the streams along the Gaviota Coast now dry, wildlife are frequently dependent on man-made water sources like this one. California Condors visiting from the Big Sur flock have also been seen recently drinking from nearby water troughs.