

Volunteers plant, help Toro Creek

Willow trees could slow soil erosion

By Katie Green
The Californian

The effort to slow down soil erosion around Toro Creek is getting a boost from volunteers who started work on the project this past weekend and plan to continue through mid-April.

More than 30 adults and children shoved, twirled and pounded metal T-bars into the sandy stream bed behind Toro School on Saturday in an effort to plant willow trees.

The Bureau of Land Management, the Return of the Natives group and the Watershed Institute are sponsoring the weekend willow tree planting, which is part of a six-week series of stream-restoration workdays in the Toro Creek watershed.

If the trees survive, they will reduce erosion in Toro Creek and prevent the stream from cutting under the community and school, said Bob Curry, a stream expert at the Watershed Institute at California State University, Monterey Bay.

"We can hold this together during the lifetime of everyone standing here today. But you better warn your kids," Curry said, speaking on the bluff overlooking Toro Creek.

"For 35 or 40 years we can patch and glue to keep stuff together," Curry said.

But in the end, the stream will win, Curry said. "We're going to slow it down, but we can't stop it. It's going to take out this school, going to take out this community," he said.

Curry said erosion in the Toro Creek watershed has been increasing recently because the streams are carrying less sediment from the hills.

The stream travels faster and has less sediment to distribute downstream, Curry said, so it gouges soil out of the stream banks.

Slowing down the stream



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To volunteer

Volunteers will meet behind Toro School from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturdays for the next five weeks. The work can be muddy, so dress appropriately. For more information, call the Return of the Natives Restoration Education Project 582-3689.

will slow erosion. Cement culverts may prevent erosion in the region of the culvert, but they speed up the water and make erosion much worse downstream, Curry said.

Unlike culverts, willow trees slow down the water and capture soil in their elaborate root systems.

Some of the tree planters live in Toro Park or nearby regions. Frank Vogl, an environmental coordinator at the Naval Postgraduate School, lives upstream from Toro School.

He battles with the stream in his back yard every year, he said.

"Everything we talked about today is applicable to me," he said, "but on a much smaller scale."

Some volunteers had planted before. Jon Detka, a senior at CSUMB, is an intern for the Watershed Institute's War on Weeds.

For the last couple of years, he has been coordinating a willow tree-planting project with Linda Kamarath's sixth-grade class at Laurel Wood School in Salinas.