



Going Where We’ve Never Gone Before: Land Conservation

By Flora Brain, Mattole Restoration Council



Above: Mattole River watershed residents take in the view of the Lower North Fork Mattole and areas further West from newly conserved land on March 13, 2026. The place now called Choo-wil-chooch’ kah-be brings back the name of a nearby Indigenous Mattole village site. Photograph by Flora Brain

After six years of ideas, input, dreams, hopes, and hard work, the Mattole Restoration Council has achieved something we’ve never done before. We’ve now successfully conserved land in the watershed to be managed in perpetuity for public benefit, including habitat conservation and restoration, tribal and public access and recreation, and open space. These uses and values now guide our nonprofit’s ownership and management of 76 acres near the mouth of the Lower North Fork of the Mattole River.

This land was named Choo-wil-chooch’ kah-be by our partnering tribe, the Bear River Band, in honor of a nearby Indigenous Mattole village by the same name.

On March 13, 2026, Bear River Band tribal members and staff joined Mattole River watershed community members in celebrating this landmark achievement. It was beautiful to see the group gathered together, and even more beautiful to see a large group of people walking across this now publicly accessible land.

It is hard to resist the human urge to seek to change our environment. Especially when passionate, restoration-minded

lovers of the land get together, ideas abound: We could take out *all* the Scotch broom and Himalayan blackberries! We could cut down *all* the Eucalyptus trees! We can hold community fire trainings and return good fire to this land! We can plant pollinator islands, and restore that “County ditch” into a functional wetland and stream! We could...we can...

It’s true. We could do many things, and surely in time we may. Like all landowners, land stewards, and restorationists, we will make mistakes and have opportunities to learn from them.

For the moment, though, let’s simply rejoice in the stable future of this beloved land. And let’s rejoice in the land herself, and get to know all the creatures and plants and life forms she harbors. See pages 14 and 16 for some recent and noteworthy discoveries.

In generations to come, I hope our grandchildren’s great grandchildren can walk this land and see even more abundance than it holds now. Perhaps in place of current kids’ Eucalyptus seed games, future children here will gather acorns from oaks tended with good fire. Perhaps the (tastier!) native California blackberries

See “Land Conservation” - continued on pg. 15

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MATTOLE RESTORATION COUNCIL MISSION

The mission of the Mattole Restoration Council is the restoration of natural systems in the Mattole River watershed and their maintenance at sustainable levels of health and productivity, especially in regards to forests, fisheries, soil, and other plant and animal communities.

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Sanctuary Forest is a land and water trust whose mission is to conserve the Mattole River watershed and surrounding areas for wildlife habitat and aesthetic, spiritual and intrinsic values, in cooperation with our diverse community.

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MATTOLE SALMON GROUP MISSION

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From the Executive Directors

By Sarah Vroom, Richard Sykes and April Newlander



Dear readers and friends of the Mattole,

Another season passes, and the Mattole River watershed is brimming with life. Across the watershed, residents are actively engaged in restoring the health of our lands and waters. Crews are working in forests and along rivers, thinning and conducting prescribed burns alongside fire departments, HumCo Prescribed Burn Association, and Tribal partners. Decades of dedicated restoration work are translating into tangible benefits for the people who call this place home. Salmon are being talked about—and seen—in stretches of river where community members gather and travel. There is something unforgettable about watching someone's face light up at the sight of returning salmon, even if it's through a video. These moments remind us why this work matters.

Restoration is a collective effort, made possible through the dedication of willing landowners. We thank all the landowners of the Mattole who do their part to keep the watershed healthy and thriving. While we cannot highlight them all here, a few stand out for their exceptional commitment. Bob Stansberry has long supported watershed restoration through his participation in forest thinning, beneficial fire, and stream restoration projects, as well as by providing access for biologists and fishery technicians. Gil Gregori and Robie Tenorio have long been devoted to restoring and stewarding hundreds of acres in Mattole Canyon Creek, exemplifying leadership and care for the land. Lost Coast Forestlands (LCF), managed by local forester Tim Metz, stewards thousands of acres in the Mattole headwaters and actively participates in fish and forest habitat restoration work throughout LCF lands. Conservation easements held by Sanctuary Forest help protect vital water resources while supporting sustainable forestry practices that enhance forest health. In addition, Lost Coast Forestlands employs dozens of residents in forestry and restoration, contributing to the region's economy.

The Mattole River & Range Partnership (MRRP) continues to advance a shared vision through the coordinated efforts of its member organizations. The Mattole Salmon Group focuses on salmon recovery through population monitoring and habitat restoration that directly benefit the fish. The Mattole Restoration Council addresses upslope conditions – leading fuels reduction, prescribed fire, invasive plant removal, place-based education, riparian restoration, native plant cultivation and grassland restoration. Sanctuary Forest concentrates on conserving key lands, stewarding lands, and improving streamflow to support ecological resilience and reliable water resources.

Here is a summary of the groups' current work:

The Mattole Salmon Group is currently working with Humboldt County, the State Coastal Conservancy and others to design and implement a project to stabilize the Mattole River streambank and Lighthouse Road, while improving habitat for fish. This area has experienced tremendous erosion and diminished habitat complexity in recent years, not to mention the regular loss of access for local residents and visitors to the Mattole Beach. Construction work on this is expected in 2027.

The Mattole Restoration Council recently closed out our biggest implementation year on record. Forest health and fire resilience continue to be a major focus of our work, and we completed a large scale shaded fuel break on Apple Tree Ridge surrounding Petrolia in partnership with Humboldt County RCD and CAL FIRE. Our fire and fuels training program has offered local fire departments and fire practitioners from all over the North Coast opportunities to gain skills in fire ecology, wildland chainsaw operations and fire behavior. Huge gratitude to the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection's Wood Products and Workforce Development grant and the State Coastal Conservancy Fire Resilience program for supporting classroom and live fire training events. Our staff continues to collect seeds and grow native plants for restoration projects all over northern California and control invasive plants in the King Range NCA. And last but certainly not least, we are so thrilled to announce that we recently closed escrow on 76 acres of open space near downtown Petrolia. This State Coastal Conservancy acquisition project is open to the public now and we are hard at work on plans for a trail network.

Sanctuary Forest recently completed its largest implementation season yet paying out nearly \$4 million to local contractors and suppliers. Thanks to the CA Department of Water Resources and the CA Wildlife Conservation Board for the grants that support both impactful restoration work and the local economy. Our most recent water project was completed in Vanauken Creek, where two flow augmentation ponds were built in 2025, storing over seven million gallons combined. With managed public access being planned in Vanauken Creek, this will be a place for all to enjoy in the foreseeable future. In the forest, we kept Edwards Excavation and Restoration Forestry busy this past winter with thinning projects in Vanauken Creek and on the neighboring McKee Creek property owned by Sanctuary Forest. We are also excited to announce the closing of another conservation easement with Lost Coast Forestlands, adding 2,200 acres of conserved lands in the headwaters of Baker Creek, extending into South Fork Eel River headwater tributaries. This conservation easement was funded by CAL FIRE's Forest Legacy Program.

Sincerely,

Sarah Vroom, Richard Sykes and April Newlander

Building Healthy Forests, Streams and Communities

By Anita Pirog, Sanctuary Forest, Inc.

Sanctuary Forest began as a land trust in 1987, primarily working on land conservation and acquisition. Later, it became apparent that logging impacts and drought required intensive instream restoration and groundwater recharge in the upper Mattole River watershed. Today, Sanctuary Forest works extensively in these areas, working to improve streamflows to benefit fish and people, and lately, also working to restore forest health.

2025 was a busy year for Sanctuary Forest! We built two large ponds totaling 7.84 million gallons of storage in Whitethorn to augment the streamflow during the dry season in Vanauken Creek, an important fish-rearing tributary to the Mattole. Also in 2025, Sanctuary Forest completed more instream structures in McKee Creek along with riparian and upslope forest thinning. Local contractors and their staff were employed to implement these projects. Join us as we speak with two people who were instrumental in these endeavors : John Neil and Logan Edwards.

John Neil is a Seasonal Implementation Specialist for Sanctuary Forest. He spent his 30-year career in restoration construction and came out of retirement in 2023 to oversee our implementation projects.

How did you get started in restoration work and what changes have you seen?

JOHN: “Back 25, 30 years ago, I started doing restoration work with Bill Eastwood and ERWIG [Eel River Watershed Improvement Group] and all those founding fathers of the restoration business—Scott Downie, George Mullins. I was the young kid working on the crews, trying to figure it out. When we first started approaching restoration work, we were using chainsaw winches and hand work and planting willow trees and, and slowly we moved into bigger equipment like backhoes and then finally we jumped to the excavators with big rock. So I've been around the industry for a long time and a lot has changed.

Why did you decide to come back to working on restoration projects?

JOHN: “My vision, being a contractor for so long, was to help local people, to keep them working. People could pivot into the construction business to make a living here and Sanctuary Forest is playing a huge role in helping us achieve this, keeping the economy going around here. With [the local] economy crashing, I thought, these restoration jobs are good living wages. It's real to me. So, I talked to Tasha about starting to mentor the younger generation here. The important part is keeping our generational kids around here because it's such a great place to grow up and live, but not if you can't make the money to raise your family here. People are going to move away. The final goal is for the wildlife and the fish, but for me it was about trying to save our economy and our community. It's exciting to watch us save the ecosystem, but it's also exciting to see us saving the economy here. We're winning everywhere.”

What is your role at Sanctuary Forest now?

JOHN: “I do progress checks, make sure the progress is happening correctly. When you're working on this restoration work, you need to be able to look at the whole project and figure out how it's going to operate. How, besides the finished project, you're going to get in there and get the application part done. In the restoration business, it's a lot more difficult [than general construction] because you're working in really tight quarters, usually in the creeks. When you get into the forest, you have to be a lot more in tune with your surroundings and how you're going to get your job done without making a big mess.



Above: John Neil, Implementation Specialist for Sanctuary Forest Photograph courtesy of Sanctuary Forest, Inc.

Are there skills that people can develop to help them get these kinds of restoration jobs?

JOHN: “There are always different levels of skills that come to the table. The first year on the job, the crew could be tying the chokers on the end of the logs as we pull them, they could be cutting the brush down or cleaning up behind the operators. They actually learn a lot more than you would think just by watching somebody run a piece of equipment. George Mullins was the person that mentored me. For the first year, I never ran the tractors, but I watched him work. And then when I got my opportunity to sit on the tractor, I would say, how would George do this? So, I was able to learn by watching. And that's what is happening. These guys are learning by watching their peers do the job. And after watching for a while, they get out there and they know what to do. The hand crew is just as important as the operator crew; you need to have both skill levels on the job. You need that whole [range] from the hand crew up to the operators and engineers. And the guys that have been on the hand crew, I've started seeing them running the tractors on the jobs now. And then there are new people coming behind that are on the hand crew. People are moving up in their jobs because it seems like we're getting more work and the jobs are getting bigger and lasting longer.”

How else can environmental nonprofits support the community?

JOHN: “I think they do a lot by teaching the community what we're doing and why we're doing it, so the community understands what's going on; field trips to the older projects to see how the new projects are going to look in three, four, five years. I think a lot of people, when they see the heavy equipment in the creeks, they think, I thought you guys were about saving fish, what are you doing? [But] you need the heavy equipment in there to rebuild what's wrong and to try to achieve what we're trying to achieve. I think projects we're doing today are substantially better built and way bigger and stronger. People are starting to see a track record of successes. We can see the results and understand it really works. And that's the thing—it really works, we're standing by what we do.”

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Building Healthy Forests, Streams and Communities

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Logan Edwards owns Edwards Excavation & Restoration along with his wife. Their company built the ponds at Vanauken, some of the instream structures in McKee Creek, and is working on forest thinning projects in McKee Creek. He has been working in restoration since he was 17 years old.

Do you see restoration work becoming a larger part of the local economy?

LOGAN: “Yes. What I've seen is projects are getting larger over time. I think it's the track record of outfits like Sanctuary Forest who are able to apply for larger grants now that you've proven yourself [to the funders] over the years. And my company is also geared up to do larger projects. But in general, I've seen restoration projects go from a lot of large woody debris, just putting logs in, and now there's a little bit more to that. And some techniques [Sanctuary Forest] has pioneered, at least the first place I've seen them. I'm impressed with how they work. They're fairly intrusive on the stream while you're doing it, but then the result is impressive, bringing the water level and groundwater up, and slowing and widening the creeks. The other thing that I see is more of the forest health around the stream is being looked at a lot more closely now than it used to be. Everybody's eyes used to turn off at about a hundred feet away from the stream or less. Now we're looking at the whole watershed and the forest health in that watershed and the role of fire in that landscape. Potential prescribed fire, and the prepping for that and how that benefits the creeks.”



Above: De-watering the site at McKee Creek in preparation to construct a log weir. Photograph courtesy of Sanctuary Forest, Inc.



Above: Logan Edwards, co-owner Edwards Excavation and Restoration Photograph courtesy of Sanctuary Forest, Inc.

Is your crew gaining new skills through this type of restoration work?

LOGAN: “Every job you do, you get more skill. And what we're doing is fairly unique, everybody on the crew is now learning these techniques. Some of the instream stuff has nuance... each circumstance is different. Each site is different because creeks are very dynamic. Some of the techniques we're doing now were kind of new to us. Some of the log weir structures are not hard to figure out, but if you fully understand them, you can build them better; if you know how they function and the do's and don'ts. Campbell Thompson was really helpful in that because he had been doing that for years before we started. It was good to have his guidance and mentoring on that type of structure. At this point we're doing pretty good at it. I have a great crew, great people, great skills, good attitudes. Years ago, I decided I was going to hire people not just off their skill level and ability, but also off who they were as people. The quality of the person and their positive attitudes. That decision has really built my business.”

What advice would you give someone interested in entering the restoration field?

LOGAN: “If you're going to get into it on the heavy equipment side, it's a little hard to get into at this point with insurance, paperwork, and requirements. It was less complicated even a few years ago. But it can all be navigated if you're motivated. My wife is a major part of making it possible to navigate all that. A lot of people hire bookkeepers to do that paperwork, but it's hard to find anyone willing to do it. So that's another opportunity for local workforce—people who understand the business management side. With our local economy not being very strong right now, I feel very fortunate to have this work and to be able to provide these jobs. I'm very thankful for the opportunity and the trust in me to give me the first job and let me prove myself.” 🐸

To learn more about the restoration methods employed in the upper Mattole River watershed like large wood loading, log & boulder weirs, forest thinning and more, please visit sanctuaryforest.org.

Prescribed Burn on Prosper Ridge

By Ali Freedlund, Mattole Restoration Council



Left: East corner of Unit 2, many hands and engines help. Photograph by Lindsey Holm

Below: Morning briefing with Burn Boss Henri Holbrook. Photograph by Sarah Vroom



'Twas a dry week in March when
prep work began:
Binocular searches found no nests
small units were marked
a skid steer cleared a skid road from
the main road and back again.
Fuels were clawed away from: elder trees
(for their protection) and from
crumbly stumps (that could burn for weeks,)
hazards were flagged or felled.
Permits were numbered,
maps created with drop points
a 3-foot-wide dirt path scratched to
lay hose to hold the eastern flank,
water tanks (solid and portable) filled,
many eager resources with engines, muscle,
tools were named.
A window slid open-
public announcements emailed and posted,
fuel sticks measured moisture
Spot Forecasts given and oh wait!
the window banged closed.

But, maybe in a day?...
Go/No Go decisions were scrutinized
The window lifted again--
Cooler weather, the call went out--
more people signed up, engines rallied
Prosper Prescribed Burn is ON!
The day arrives: waivers are
signed, a briefing is held, radios given,
leaders introduced, squads assigned:
holding, firing, engines, safety, weather, a
roving UTV. A few hearty souls cut further
into holding lines, a young child further
scrapes back to ensure the survival of
elder tree, hoses are lain down unit lines,
test fire is lit and we all eagerly watch
healthy orange flames consume the fuel.
Diesel/gas driptorches are in hands,
one draws a line of fire in an arc around
test area with careful instruction.
We wait.
Another line about 4 feet from previous one
is fired and connected to the end of the first
one.

We wait. The fire runs up to meet the black and simmers
even to the point of steam rising.
More drip lines carefully placed until the orange flames
merge and we watch.
Small 5 foot high tan oaks catch fire and become glitter,
a hose is unspooled from engine home and
slooshes water on the side edge of a fir tree.
We watch, grub hoes in hand.
Test fire is announced successful, onward with
acres in Unit 1 in the same slow and careful manner.
Radios respected we listen to leaders call
for updates, for engine checks, for all squads
safety checks.
"Please remember to drink water."
Weather reports are issued on the hour
every hour and lines of fire continue down
the hill with more slooshing with hoses
of fir tree sides that catch but
are quickly extinguished.
Zero anxiety, Unit One is complete.
Unit Two is begun with bramble fire lit with

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Above: Unit one on the recent Prosper Ridge fire wraps up at a road. Photograph by Sarah Vroom



Above: Northern holding line, Unit 2. Photograph by Ali Freedlund

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drip torch by young man, age 11, following
safely beside his dad, the Chief.
More driptorch flaming lines
box in the bramble, begin in the forest, slowly
and once fireline meets the black -
fire falls back—almost at musical tempo,
definitely an orchestration.
Unit two flashier fuels and Whoosh a young fir
flares all the way up—a swirling torch - but
falls back down in seconds and
again: the slow, methodical steps of firing,
meeting the black, dying
back, radio checks, all squads, safety,
weather report, firing again.
Night crawls into its own black, our faces
aglow with firelight and smiles—all in
the grip of this unified energy with
this huge tool of change carefully handled
and respected. We all inwardly bow
not only to leadership, fire engines, preparations,
drip torches—hoses, radios, snacks, blacks but
to each other and to being on fire for a
Good Fire. 🐟



Above: Youngest fire practitioners beam with their experience. Photograph by Joseph Sandoval

The Mattole Salmon Ceremony: Celebrating Salmon While Sustaining a Community

By Ruth Wortman, Bear River Band tribal member, and Richard Sykes, Mattole Salmon Group

Since its inception in 1980, the Mattole Salmon Group (MSG) has attempted to recover and sustain native salmon populations using what it considers the best biological information coupled with local community knowledge and support. MSG biologists and fisheries technicians attempt to understand population size and distribution, survival, and life history paths. They assess habitat factors like sedimentation, water temperature, dissolved oxygen, refuge from predators, and food sources. MSG restoration crews implement designs to restore spawning beds, pools, and winter floodplains. MSG board members approve grant proposals, accept financial reports and tour project sites. All of this work occurs solidly in the physical world where you can see what is happening and measure it. However, local support and appreciation for Mattole salmon has a far longer history and also operates in a world not normally accessed by MSG. Thanks to the Bear River Band of the Rohnerville Rancheria, a traditional spiritual celebration is once again practiced and open to the entire community.

In 2019, the Bear River Band Tribe celebrated the first “open” salmon ceremony at the mouth of the Mattole River since 1958. The word “open” is used because some tribal members practiced the ceremony secretly after 1958. Secrecy was necessary as tribal members feared physical harm from local residents if they conducted the ceremony publicly. It should also be noted that the act of practicing the salmon ceremony was a federal crime until passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act in 1978.

The return of the salmon ceremony to the Mattole in 2019 was led by the Bear River Band’s Men’s and Women’s Cultural Coordinators at that time, Barry Brenard and Ruth Wortman. Spring of 2026 marked the 7th year that the Tribe and the local community came together for this celebration.

There would be no ceremony absent the retained knowledge of Barry and his brothers Hank and Donald (Sparky). Barry trained Ruth and others in its meaning and how it is conducted. As Barry explained in a 2023 recorded interview in the Humboldt Area Archives: “The ceremony has been celebrated within the Northern California tribal region for hundreds of years. It entails the reproduction, life and death of the salmon as occurs naturally. The dance steps and intricate moves in the ceremony depict certain traditions that tribes want to keep alive, like being able to go from the physical world to the spiritual world and back. The lead medicine person in the ceremony is a woman and she has to cut her way into the spiritual world. We don’t cut our way in; she cuts our way in. And therefore opens that door for the procreation of life and helps us interact in that sense. The women dance in a particular manner that depicts the way the female salmon behaves in the river before she lays her eggs. And the men’s dance steps depict what the males’ behavior is in the same fashion according to their gender. So after the women spin, then the males come. The salmon lay their eggs, the men come in and apply the seeds. Therefore there’s a binding of natural material that causes life. And then the mature male and female go out and die and give their bodies to the earth and to the animals. And, if you have ever seen the spawning



Above: Baby basket carried into ceremony in 2019. Used with permission. Photograph by Maddy Rifka



Above: Ruth Wortman and baby Lillian in Salmon Ceremony at Mattole Beach, 2019. Used with permission. Photograph by Michael Evenson

methods of salmon, their nutrients accumulate around the river. So the whole system, the ecosystem, is benefited by their participation in life. And hopefully with our doing the salmon ceremony, we are doing the same for our families, and our communities. We want good healthy people in our system and the only way they’re going to get it is through that cultural aspect. Especially with all the influences of today—so many messages bombarding people today, no matter whether you’re old or young. This outside influential messaging that has become the norm is not healthy in some aspects. Some of it is healthy, some of it is not, just like everything in life. But we just want our people to realize that through the benefit of that ceremony, we’re connected to it and keeping it alive, to realize and learn the values and beliefs in that ceremony and carry on those really good humanistic values and attributes and belief systems. And when we teach protocols and etiquette for ceremonies, we want the kids to be aware that it’s important but we also want it to be enjoyable so they’ll learn it. So far we’ve been doing a pretty good job. During the first years of the salmon ceremony we solidified the intricate protocols and dance steps for the next people learning. That was with our adult women, and now it’s the younger ones leading.”

Ruth remembers leading that 2019 ceremony, the first after so many decades: “So the very first ceremony, we had 11 dresses; none of them had anything on them. One dress had four Abalone shells on it, and that was to represent the creator’s eye and the north and the south and the east and the west. And the medicine person wore that. And that was me! It was really scary because, as the medicine woman, you’re stepping into this role of spiritual responsibility, spiritual payment, so if there was an incident that happened or an ill will that took place, a payment needed to be made, that would have come from me. It would have come either with me knowing that it came and happened, or with me not knowing that it came and happened. So when you step into this person of the medicine woman, you’re really putting yourself in a position to just accept whatever comes—the good and the bad. At that time, it was also my job. Now that I look back on it, I feel honored and blessed to be that person to step into this position. A lot of people are afraid of this position because you don’t really know what’s going to happen in the spiritual world; there’s no way to say. Being that person and taking that first risk, I felt I was showing my tribal community that you can do this position and honor this role, and honor your family,

and survive. You hear legends about people doing things in the spiritual world that are not in a good way, and then payment comes later down the road. I remember telling myself, ‘If you weren’t meant to do this, Ruth, you wouldn’t be this person here.’”

Celebration of the salmon ceremony might not have resumed absent a chance request. In September of 2019, Ellen Taylor and Michael Evenson of the Lost Coast League were meeting with Hank Brenard, Environmental and Natural Resource Director for the Bear River Band at that time to talk about conservation opportunities for Rainbow Ridge. At the tribe’s office center, there was a floor-to-ceiling photograph of the mouth of the Mattole River—home to the Bear River Band, and also home to Ellen and Michael. Michael recognized that the community’s 40-year effort towards salmon



restoration would be greatly enhanced with the tribe’s deep spiritual connection with the fish. He asked Hank “Would you consider holding a salmon ceremony?” and Hank immediately and enthusiastically said “Yes!”

Left: Michael Evenson of the lower Mattole Valley and Jim Bowie of Bear River Band shake hands at the 2019 salmon ceremony.

Right: Mattole Beach on the day of the 2019 salmon ceremony.

Group photograph courtesy of Mattole Salmon Group Beach photo by Maddy Rifka



Above: Salmon ceremony dancers in 2024. Used with permission. Photograph by Maddy Rifka

*“I feel honored and blessed...
A lot of people are afraid of this position because you don’t really know what’s going to happen in the spiritual world; there’s no way to say. Being that person and taking that first risk, I felt I was showing my tribal community that you can do this position and honor this role, and honor your family, and survive.”*

-Ruth Wortman

Hank then went to Ruth, who had just taken the job of Women’s Cultural Coordinator and told her to “Get ready, you are doing a salmon ceremony next month.”

The ceremony has grown since 2019 with more involvement by the local community. The April 2026 ceremony included about 75 tribal and community members. Ruth’s sister Maggie was the medicine person. The ceremony was followed by a community potluck meal featuring traditionally prepared salmon cooked on an open fire by Thomas Dunklin.

The Bear River Tribe intends for the ceremony to be inclusive of the whole community, native and non-native. The intent is to share the power and magic of being open to a spiritual connection with the salmon. That is why the public is invited to participate and add a potluck dish to the feast following the ceremony. The ceremony not only supports and sustains the fish but also the community of tribal and non-tribal members who come to reflect, celebrate and connect. 🐟



Forest Thinning in the Headwaters: A Look at McKee Creek

By April Newlander,, Sanctuary Forest, Inc.

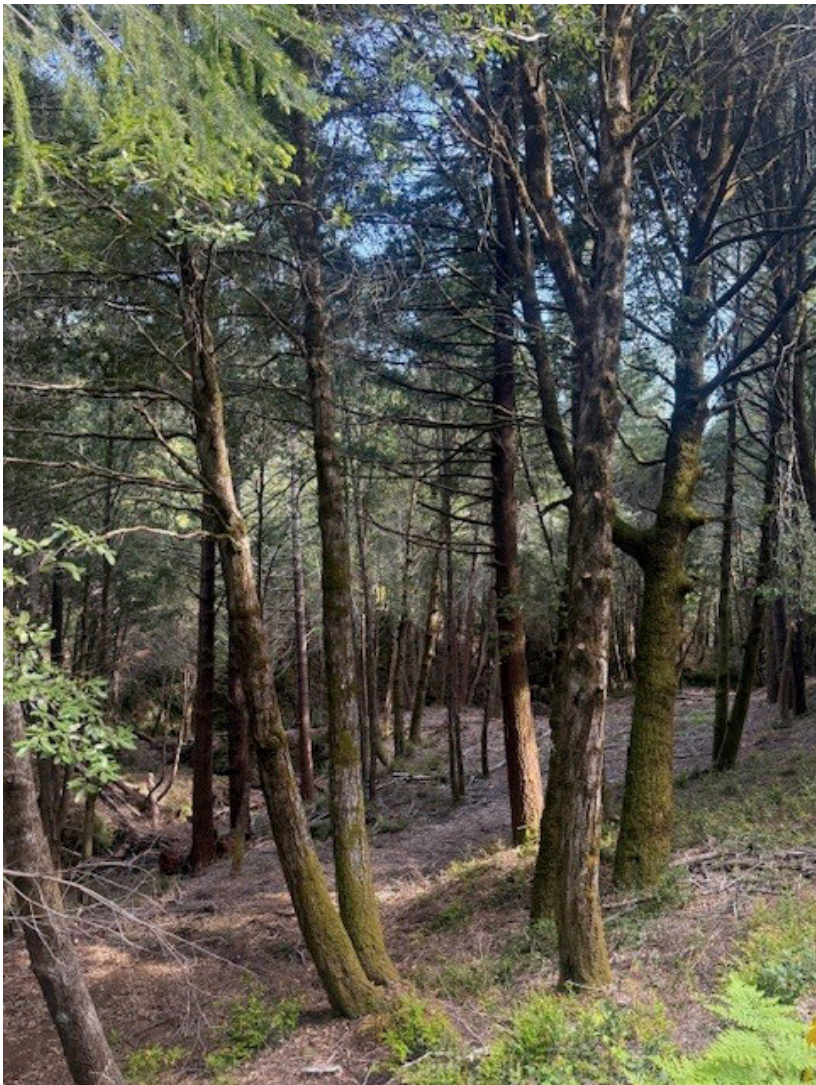
When you enter the Mattole River headwaters from Ettersburg junction, McKee Creek quietly parallels the road as it winds toward the coast. About a half mile in, the forest begins to look a little different—brighter, more open, with dappled sunlight reaching the creek below. It’s a subtle shift at first, easy to miss if you’re just passing through, but once you notice it, it’s hard not to see it everywhere along that stretch. Along roughly a mile of McKee Creek, sits 300 acres of land stewarded by Sanctuary Forest. When Sanctuary Forest acquired the McKee Creek property in 2018, we knew we had our work cut out for us. The purchase, funded by the California Wildlife Conservation Board, outlined a specific purpose: improve streamflow and drought resilience, protect and enhance forest health, and support habitat for species that depend on this watershed. Since then, Sanctuary Forest has been working steadily to improve both the stream and the surrounding forest. Work began in the stream itself. Early efforts focused on instream habitat—placing wood, improving channel structure, and creating conditions that support fish through the dry season. More recently, the focus has shifted upslope, where forest conditions play an impactful role in everything from water availability to wildfire risk.

In 2022, drought conditions in California intensified and the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) released funding through its Urban and Multibenefit Drought Relief Program to address urgent impacts to fish, wildlife, water supply, and public safety. Sanctuary Forest secured funding through this program to carry out work in McKee Creek. The project combined instream habitat improvements with forest thinning, supporting thinning across approximately 70 acres of overly dense forest and habitat enhancement along about 3,000 ft. of fish-bearing stream.

About 34 acres along the creek were thinned, opening the riparian corridor, allowing more light to reach the forest floor and the stream itself. It also created a shaded fuel break along Briceland-Thorn Road: the primary access route for residents west of Ettersburg junction. Within these riparian areas, crews focused on removing small-diameter trees. These younger trees tend to



Above: Tim Metz (Restoration Forestry) and Walker Wise (Sanctuary Forest) review areas treated by hand crews. In these areas, “lop and scatter” methods leave cut material spread across the forest floor, generally no more than 18 inches deep. Photograph by April Newlander



Above: Riparian thinning along McKee Creek creates a shaded fuel break along Briceland-Thorn Road, the primary access route for local residents. Photograph by April Newlander

use a significant amount of water, so reducing their numbers helps retain more water in the soil and ultimately the stream. During the dry season, when flows are at their lowest, these differences can help maintain connectivity in the stream and support habitat for fish and other aquatic species.

Thinning was also prioritized along ridges adjacent to the Mattole/South Fork Eel watershed divide—an area identified as important for fuel reduction to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire. Additional funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), through its Environmental Quality Incentives Program, and from CAL FIRE’s Forest Improvement Program (CFIP), made it possible to expand thinning efforts upslope.

With this combined support, crews treated roughly 81 additional acres across ridges and steep terrain. Methods varied depending on slope and accessibility. On gentler terrain, mechanical equipment such as masticators were used to break down smaller trees and brush, leaving a layer of woodchips that help to protect the soil. On steeper slopes, where machinery could not safely operate, hand crews used chainsaws and hand tools to thin trees and “lop and scatter” the resulting material across the forest floor.

Whether along the creek or higher on the slope, the approach remained consistent: remove smaller, suppressed, or damaged trees and retain the strongest, healthiest individuals. The goal is not to clear the forest, but to create space—allowing remaining trees better access to sunlight, water, and nutrients. This approach supports both forest health and fire resilience. In dense stands, trees compete for limited resources, often resulting in slower growth and increased vulnerability to stress. Thinning reduces that competition, helping trees grow more vigorously and improving overall stand resilience. At the same time, thinning addresses wildfire risk. Overly dense forests often contain “ladder fuels:” smaller trees and brush that allow fire to move from the ground into the canopy. Once fire reaches the canopy, it becomes more difficult to control and more likely to burn at a high severity. By reducing these ladder fuels and breaking up continuous vegetation, thinning makes it less likely that fire will burn at a high severity.

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Sanctuary Forest Stewardship Hike on Sept. 12

By Anna Rogers, Sanctuary Forest, Inc.

Join Sanctuary Forest on Saturday, September 12 for a tour of the Vanauken Community Forest Project titled “Stacking Strategies: A Watershed-Wide Approach to Restoration, led by Walker Wise, Tasha McKee and Cam Thompson. Participants will be introduced to Sanctuary Forest’s restoration work in the Vanauken Creek tributary of the Mattole River, including our streamflow augmentation ponds, instream habitat improvements, riparian forest thinning, upland shaded fuel break and plans for public access.

Meet at the Sanctuary Forest office in Whitethorn at 10 a.m.; the tour is estimated to end by 3 p.m. Bring lunch, plenty of water, dress in layers and wear sturdy hiking shoes. This hike will be moderate difficulty and will be a slow-moving tour of about 2 miles total, over uneven ground with some steep sections, with lots of time for discussion. Participants will have the opportunity to carpool. This hike is free of charge, though donations are gladly accepted and help Sanctuary Forest to offer this program year after year. For questions or to RSVP, email anna@sanctuaryforest.org or call (707)986-1087 x 9#.

Support from the Wildlife Conservation Board and from volunteers and local businesses has made this program possible! Local businesses and individuals that have made generous contributions are: 101 Netlink, Blue Star Gas, Charlotte’s Perennial Gardens, Chautauqua Natural Foods, Fern & Find – Local Online Marketplace, Grandma LaVerne, Gyppo Ale Mill, Humboldt Redwood Company, J Cafe, Lost Coast Tree & Habitat, Madrone Realty, MerMaid Coastal Cleaning, Ned Harwood Construction, Randall Sand & Gravel, Redwood Properties, Ridgeline Farms, Seascape Property Maintenance, TOP Properties NorCal, Whitethorn Construction, Whitethorn Winery, and Wyckoff’s Plumbing. 🐟



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In total, about 115 acres have been treated at McKee Creek with the work carried out by Edwards Excavation and guided by Registered Professional Forester Tim Metz. The ability for Sanctuary Forest to complete forest thinning work is largely dependent on funding. The combination of DWR drought funding and cost-share support from NRCS and CFIP resulted in a large-scale effort to bring the forest into better balance with the landscape.

So, what comes next? This isn’t a one-time effort. The work is ongoing. Forests continue to grow, and conditions continue to change. At McKee Creek and across the Mattole headwaters, additional thinning and prescribed burns are being planned. These efforts are happening in collaboration with neighboring landowners and partners, including Lost Coast Forestlands and the Mattole Restoration Council. Recent funding through the North Coast Resource Partnership (NCRP) Capacity Grant Program will support planning for future burns and help build local capacity for restoration and fire-related work.

Next time you are driving the stretch of road alongside McKee Creek, take the time to look. The changes are easy to miss at first. But then you start to notice the extra light in the trees or catch a glimpse of the creek below. These small shifts add up—shaping how water moves, how fire behaves, and how the forest grows over time. It’s not about reaching a finished state but about paying attention, staying involved, and adapting as the landscape continues to change. 🐟



Top: A shaded fuel break in Vanauken Creek watershed.

Above: Instream restoration work, like this log weir in McKee Creek, will be in progress this summer in Vanauken Creek.

Left: The Meadow Pond in Vanauken Creek watershed.

All photographs courtesy of Sanctuary Forest, Inc.



Above: Tim Metz (Restoration Forestry) and Walker Wise (Sanctuary Forest) review areas treated with mechanical thinning, where a masticator breaks down vegetation and leaves a deep layer of woodchips across the forest floor. Photograph by April Newlander

Steelhead Season: How Did it Rate?

By Richard Sykes, Mattole Salmon Group

I have been fishing the Mattole River, mostly from shore, almost every season for the past 20 years. I work for the Mattole Salmon Group (MSG) and this year we decided to post signs in various locations on the river and at the local stores to alert anglers of the risks of invasive aquatic species and to remind them of the regulations. On a late afternoon in early January while installing these signs at the lower river takeout just upstream of the estuary, I was surprised to see three boats loading up. Anglers from Fort Bragg, Sacramento and the Bay Area said they had a great time and even caught a few fish. I was impressed since in my experience the river was still too muddy to fish. But the possibility of catching a big Mattole River steelhead gets people motivated – muddy water or not, the fishing season had begun.

Steelhead fishing season on the Mattole is just three months – from January 1 to March 31*. If river flows, as measured by the USGS gauge in Petrolia, are above 320 cubic feet per second (CFS) then it's legal to fish (as long as you follow all the rules: license, barbless hooks, no bait, catch and release wild fish, etc.) However, at flows above about 1200 cfs the river is generally too turbid to fish. In winter it only takes a rainstorm of a few inches to turn the river into a muddy mess the color of a double-shot latte. I mostly fish from shore in one location just a couple of miles upstream of Petrolia where we receive 80 inches of rain and some years the river may be too high and muddy to fish virtually every day of steelhead season.

River conditions in 2026 resulted in fishable water nearly half the days of the season. Dry conditions in January and a historically dry March made for very good fishing conditions the entire second half of January and almost all the days in March. I was in the valley for much of that time and cleared my calendar for a couple of hours almost every morning. There was a period in March where I fished the same riffle pool complex every day for 10 days and had fish on every day, landing and releasing at least one fish most of those days. These fish were bright and silver, fresh from the ocean on their way upstream to spawn. Only a couple fish were downstream migrating fish, skinny with scratch marks and tails frayed from moving gravel to create their redds.

It was a great fishing season for me but I wondered if this was truly an exceptional steelhead return – something more than MSG's rough estimate of two to four thousand spawning adults each season. So I asked around to a couple of anglers I know and a fishing guide one of our Salmon Group board members met during the season. Here's what they had to say.

Pete Griffith started fishing the Mattole when he came up to Humboldt County to study fish biology at Humboldt State



Above: At the net! Photograph by Brad Jackson



Above: A 32 inch hen steelhead, mint bright. Photograph by Pete Griffith

University in 1977. He makes the trip from San Francisco a few times each season if the river is fishable. For him, 2026 was as enjoyable as ever. He caught about the same number of fish as the last several years. He did note that the 75 degree days in March were magnificent but also kind of scary since it was like that for way too long to be winter.

Pete often fishes with his friend Brad Jackson who is truly a fishy fellow. He was one of the founding owners of the Fly Shop in Redding. He sold his interest in the shop years ago but remains in Redding. Like Pete, he was a fish biology major at Humboldt State. He started there in 1972; he fished the Mattole that year and has fished here regularly ever since. Brad finds the Mattole unique among California rivers due to its nearly intact ecosystem with regards to salmon and steelhead. Brad told me, "The fish are unique too. The Mattole steelhead are genetically pure with no hatchery influence. Each fresh fish is exceptional in confirmation and color – each is a jewel! Overall, the feel of the Mattole Valley is a bit like middle earth in a JRR Tolkien novel." When it comes down to 2026, Brad said it seemed like there were more fish than the past few years but not the numbers he remembers from the early decades he fished here. Like Pete, Brad mentioned that there are a lot more boaters in recent years and it's getting a little crowded on the river.

MSG Board Member Lindsay Merryman ran across Aaron Grabiell during the fishing season earlier this year. Aaron has fished the Mattole since 2004 and he has been guiding fishing trips on the river for the past 5 years. He operates a company called HarvestWild that provides fishing and hunting guide services. He guided 15 days on the Mattole this year and comes because of the numbers of fish, their quality and how they fight. He too worries about the number of boats and anglers and is concerned that the fishing pressure could impact the fishery, especially if anglers don't obey the rules – no bait and no barbed hooks. Aaron says 2026 was about average for returning adults. Which means some spectacular days fishing but absent a record number of fish. Aaron and his clients will keep coming, regardless.

It seems to me that most everyone is having an exceptional time fishing whether or not there are more fish this year versus previous years. Fortunately, the Mattole River still has a robust population of wild steelhead. We also have a river free of significant invasive species like New Zealand mud snails which can be spread by anglers and others who bring these species from other watersheds on wading boots and gear that is not cleaned properly. So clean and dry those boots and gear. We enjoy an amazing river with fantastic fish. Let's keep it that way. 🐟

*There is a second fishing season annually from the 4th Saturday in May until August 31 but few anglers fish during this period as there are typically very few steelhead or trout in the river at this time.

Encouraged by Coho, Discouraged by Chinook

By Nathan Queener, Mattole Salmon Group

Salmon returns to the Mattole last winter (2025-26) had something for everyone – or at least, both the optimists and the pessimists.

It was the second straight year of encouraging numbers of returning coho salmon, and while the numbers were not equal to the winter of 2024-25, coho still were more numerous than in any other year since the winter of 2007-08. Thirty-three live adult coho were seen by surveyors (compared to 63 in 2024-25), and we estimate the total number of returning coho at around 100 fish.

In comparison, between 2010 and 2023 only 42 live adult coho were seen in total across all of those years, and in several years it seemed certain the number of returning adults were in the single digits. So while the low hundreds is still not very many fish, it seems almost miraculous after much lower numbers for nearly two decades.

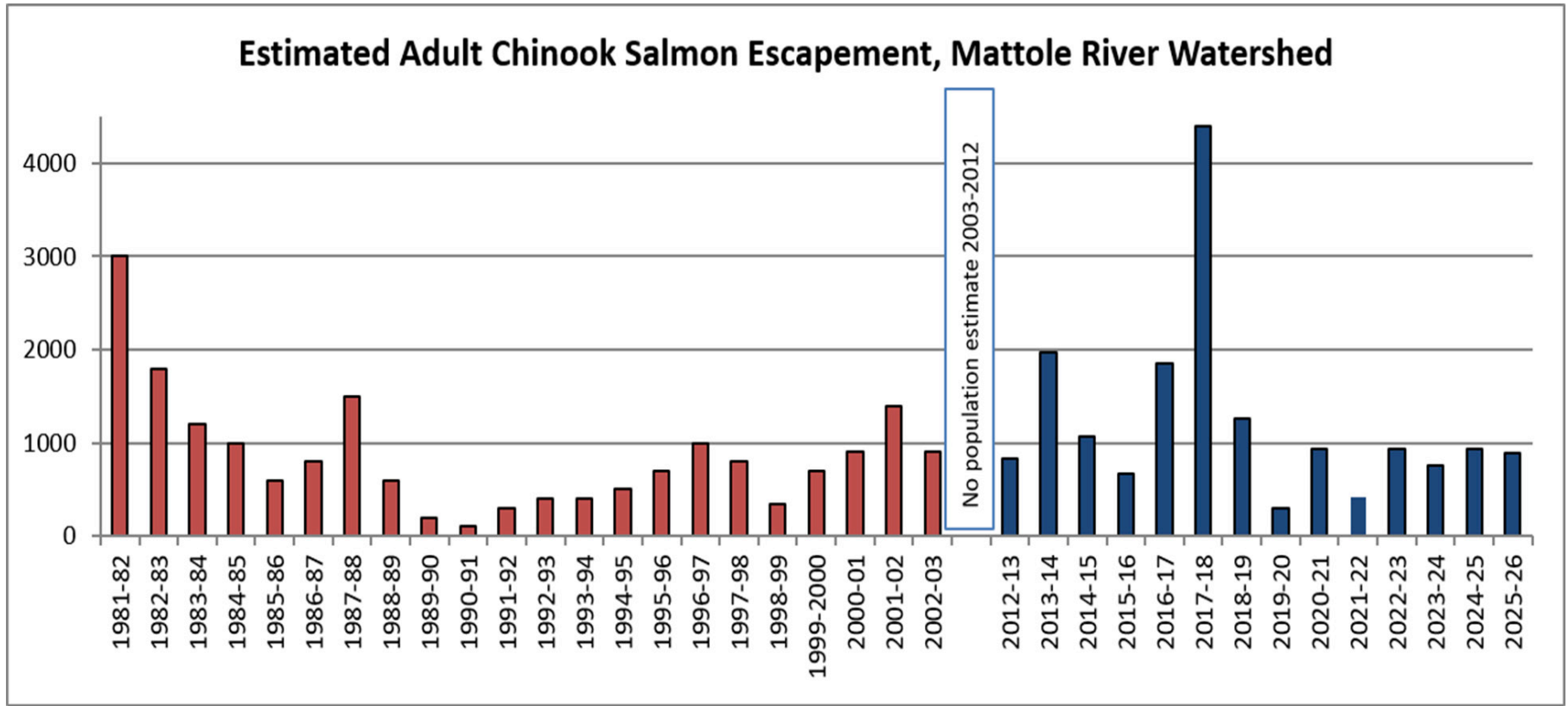
In contrast, Chinook numbers, while not terrible, were not anything to get too excited about. The final estimate of 888 returning adults was very similar to returns the previous three years, and well below some years with greater abundance from 2013-2018, especially the remarkable run of 2017-18.

Expectations were high for an above-average Chinook run given the closure of ocean fishing for salmon the previous two years, and early-winter storms in October and November that allowed fish to move upstream quickly – spawning Chinook were seen in Thompson Creek upstream of Whitethorn on November 18th, one of the earliest dates that we have observed spawners finding there way up 55+ river miles.

After a couple of weeks of encouraging numbers of spawning Chinook, early December Chinook observations dwindled quickly to nothing, and no spawning Chinook were observed after December 29th. This is in contrast to other years where there is a second peak of Chinook abundance in late December, and some Chinook are seen into late January, or even the first few days of February. The early end to the season may have been due in part to the early start, but was still not what we had hoped to observe. 🐟



Above: Ryan Gonzalez retrieves the carcass of a large wild male Chinook salmon from the Mattole River upstream of Whitethorn, in November 2025. Photograph courtesy of Mattole Salmon Group



First Ever Program at the Future Mattole Resilience, Education and Research Center Site!

By Flora Brain, Mattole Restoration Council

In May 2026, Mattole Restoration Council held its first ever multi-day program based out of the future site of the Mattole Resilience, Education and Research Center! Through our Mattole Field Institute and a longstanding collaborative partnership with Cal Poly Humboldt, we welcomed 11 students for a week of immersive instruction in watershed restoration-related topics.

Students were joined by Mattole Salmon Group and Restoration Council staff, agency biologists with US BLM, ecologists and bat technicians from USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Research Station, Cal Poly Humboldt Environmental Science and Management Department Chair and Aquatic Ecologist Dr. Alison O'Dowd, and Zoology professor and Marine Biologist Dr. Dawn Goley for five packed days of hands-on instruction, restoration, and stewardship. The local community was invited to attend two of the evening talks, and tag along for the first attempt to capture bats with mist nets along the Lower North Fork of the Mattole.

And boy, did we ever catch some bats! Much to our and our partner Ecologist and bat researcher Ted Weller's delight, in roughly just one hour of mist netting starting at sunset, Ted's team of permitted bat handlers caught and collected data on 5 different species. Most exciting: we caught not just one, but three of the elusive hoary bat: all of them snarling with their uniquely fierce combination of loud clicks and rustling rattles reminiscent of the snake. Also caught (and like all these bats, released unharmed) was one of the bats that Ted previously thought really only frequented eastern Humboldt: our California state bat, the pallid bat. To the sheer delight of Jesse May Campbell – a previous Mattole Field Institute student who got her start working with Ted during a Mattole Field Institute course – they also caught a Mexican free-tailed bat: Jesse's first chance to handle one. Also caught were California myotis bats and another individual also in the Myotis genus – whose true identity to species can only be revealed through tests unable to be performed on this splendid night along the Lower North Fork.

Ted's ability to illuminate the life experiences of these tiny flying mammals – pointing out lactating female bats, unique hand-wing structures, how some bats mysteriously glow under a black light, and each species' bizarre and fascinating physiologies – contributed to a thrilling night. His ability to engage with community members young and older as well as university students, and do it all while holding one wriggling tiny bat in hand and with multiple other bats stuffed in his vest and kept calm, was the mark of a true teacher and biophile. We are grateful for his shared interest in the Mattole River watershed's biodiversity.



Above: Students and ESM Professor Alison O'Dowd (waving) celebrate the results of macroinvertebrate sampling in the Lower North Fork Mattole. Inset photos are some of the benthic macroinvertebrates encountered. Inset photos by Elyse Contreras. Group photo by Flora Brain



Above: BLM Fisheries Biologist Zane Ruddy (right, holding fish ID guide) orients students to the native salmonids of the Mattole River as they prepare to head to the river on day 1. Aside from hands-on experience, Mattole Field Institute courses offer students valuable opportunities to meet and work directly with professionals in nonprofits, agencies, and academia. Photograph by Flora Brain

Students also had the rare opportunity to snorkel with large adult Mattole River steelhead, guided by Fish Biologists Emma Held (Mattole Salmon Group) and Zane Ruddy (US BLM Arcata Field Office). Dr. Alison O'Dowd led a session – hopefully to be repeated annually – on sampling benthic macroinvertebrates in the Lower North Fork. MRC Native Plant Materials and Nursery Manager Christina Cortez and fellow staff members Alex Durrant, Skye Anderson, and Moses Brown led sessions on native grass seed collection and processing, and practicing medicine person and Bear River Band tribal member Ruth Wortman shared from her heart many stories and life experiences – including bringing Indigenous ceremony back to Mattole Beach, weaving a baby basket in the river, and simply being in relation to this land.

Students also joined Fish Biologist Nathan Queener (Mattole Salmon Group) in the creation of willow shade mat structures placed at the mouth of Mill Creek, an important cold water tributary to the lower Mattole, for the benefit of salmonids seeking refuge as the summer begins to heat up. Last but not least, this capable and eager group pulled and beat back flowering Scotch broom on the newly conserved land named Choo-wil-chooch' kah-be, right outside the door of their merry base camp.

All in all, these 11 bright, shining students got a short week's taste of what it means to work in the watershed restoration industry: dirt under the fingernails, dancing around the poison oak, connecting with the wildlife and the habitats this magical watershed harbors. They also got something more: deep connections with one another, the local community, and with potential future employers all working in service of this place.

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On Self, and the Wisdom We Can Connect to When Working Outdoors

By Daphne Cheney, Mattole Restoration Council

It's the end of my second week, meaning I am halfway done with being a Mattole Restoration Council intern. During this time, I have predominantly been exposed to forest health and prescribed fire operations, native plant mapping, invasive plant removal, and marine mammal surveying. The opportunity to take part in the work that the MRC does in this watershed has been incredible.

With a fellow intern and MRC staff, I walked proposed burn units on Prosper Ridge and worked to identify potential holding lines. We visited a site being managed for elk on Lacks Creek. On a very windy day, we walked beach segments north of Petrolia in search of stranded marine mammals. We freed a beautiful cottonwood tree by annihilating English ivy on MRC's newly conserved land. For me, all of this field work has been infused with the feeling of deep-rooted interconnectedness.

Being on this land, along the winding Mattole River and among the serene bay groves, has revealed a lot to me. I have begun an intense exploration in Self. Our society is often more focused on what we do rather than who we are. By being an intern and spending the beginning of my summer here, I have become

more aware of the impacts I want to have on the world, and how that connects to who I am as a person.

The pulse behind the turmoil that is pursuing an undergraduate degree has become evident to me while spending time in this incredible watershed, and getting to know the inspiring and tough people who make this place home. I genuinely feel I have learned something new every day. Despite being a full time student, where my job is to learn, there is no substitute for the intense wisdom we can connect to when we work outdoors. Being an intern has been uplifting, and I hope to become a more familiar face within this watershed in years to come.

Daphne Cheney and Jack Hellesoe were interns with the Mattole Restoration Council's Ecosystem Restoration Program during the month of June 2026. Their internships were made possible with support from Trees Foundation and a grant through Redwood Region RISE.

Redwood Region RISE (RRRISE – Resilient, Inclusive, Sustainable Economy) is a community-led coalition advancing a sustainable and inclusive economy through a 10-year Economic Roadmap. As part of the statewide California Jobs First initiative, RRRISE aligns regional action with statewide goals to create quality jobs, support environmental stewardship, and uplift communities through four key sectors. Learn more at bit.ly/Redwood-RISE.

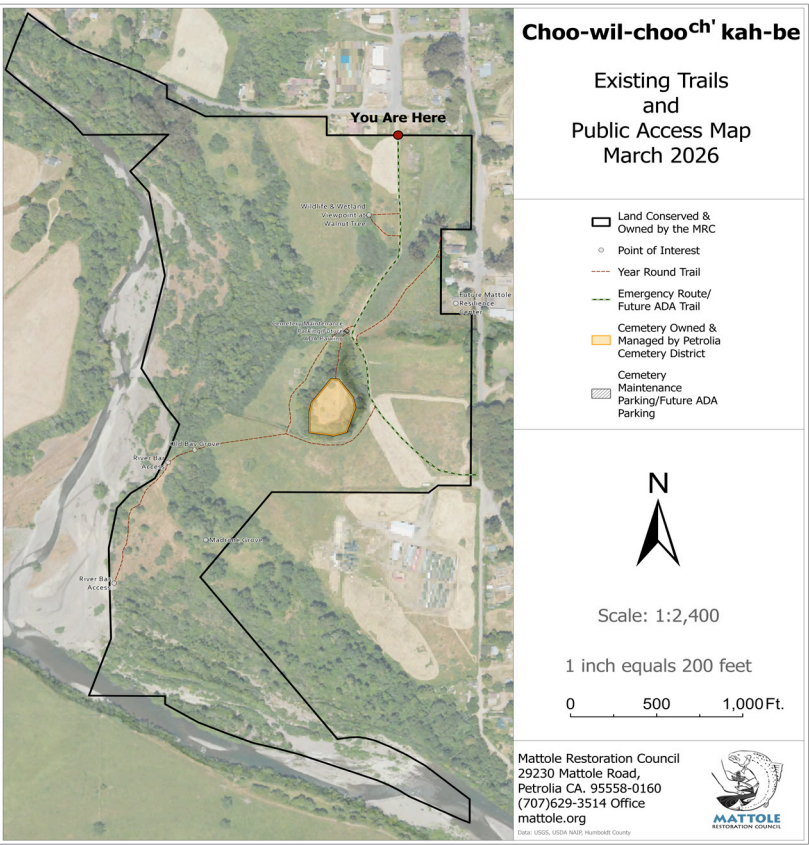
Land Conservation

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will replace the Himalayan blackberries, and other local foods, basketry materials, and culturally significant plants will be cultivated and tended. Perhaps soon, there will be additional trails – accessible to all – where kids and grandparents can walk or roll together and sit on a bench and share what they see. Perhaps soon, we will see juvenile salmon rearing in wetlands and off-channel ponds, maybe even elk wandering in and condors flying above. These are



dreams, but one dream is already true: there is happiness within the people now walking on this conserved land.



Clockwise from top right: Map of the newly conserved land. Mattole watershed residents, friends, and supporters gather for the ribbon cutting and first day of public access. Ember Bee Freedlund of the Mattole Valley community (right, in leopard print jacket) and Lillian Bowie of Bear River (left, in red dress) together cut the ribbon. With Mattole Valley children listening behind him, Barry Brenard, Bear River Band's Men's Cultural Coordinator, speaks the newly given name of the conserved land during the ceremony marking the land's conservation.

Map by Mattole Restoration Council. Ribbon cutting and group photographs by Malia Freedlund Photograph of Barry Brenard by Lynn McCulloch

“Faller Fridays” Bring Workforce Development to Rural Communities

By Damien Roomets, Mattole Restoration Council

From January 9 through March 27, 2026, the Mattole Restoration Council offered Faller Fridays: a series of hands-on courses at rotating rural locations focused on teaching proper chainsaw operation for beginning and intermediate sawyers.. This wildland fire chainsaw course was developed to provide new sawyers with a solid foundation for safe and efficient chainsaw handling and operation while bucking, limbing, brushing, and slashing, and felling trees for project work or fireline construction.

Participants learned:

- 1. Basic chainsaw safety, maintenance & operation
- 2. Chainsaw tasks & techniques: Handling, Bucking, Limbing, Brushing & Slashing
- 3. Chainsaw tasks & techniques: Felling
- 4. Forest Thinning techniques/ Fireline Construction

Students received an NWCG certification for their completion of the course, readying them for careers in forestry and fire. 🐟

Funding for this project was provided by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection’s Business and Workforce Development Grants.



Clockwise from top right: Trainees Allison Hernandez, Georgina Quinn, and Frank Surber looking safe and confident with their new skills; MRC partner organization Native Health in Native Hands brought their crew for one of the Faller Friday courses; Trainers and participants get set up for Faller Friday focusing on chainsaw maintenance in Eureka, CA.

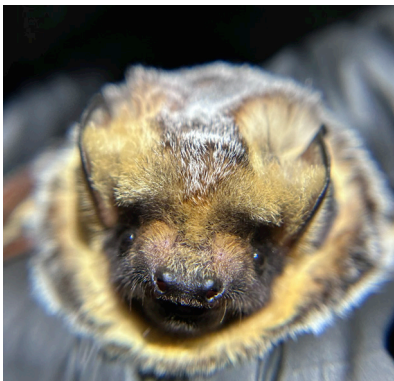
All photographs by Damien Roomets

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Mattole Restoration Council is grateful to Jim Groeling, who graciously offered the use of his house in Petrolia for this Mattole Field Institute course. We are also deeply grateful to the California Strategic Growth Council, whose support, via a Community Resilience Centers Planning Grant, is enabling MRC and community and tribal partners to plan the Mattole Resilience, Education and Research Center (MRERC). Currently in escrow on the MRERC site, the MRC hopes to continue to utilize Jim’s beautifully restored historic house as the Phase 1 Center, while simultaneously planning with our partners for the eventual construction of the ultimate Mattole Resilience, Education and Research Center on the footprint of Jim’s large barn next to the house. When complete, the Mattole Resilience, Education and Research Center will increase community resilience through improved climate and emergency response in coordination with our local partners, expand local workforce development opportunities, boost nature-based solutions and food security, and offer year-round services and programming to support resilience in the Mattole. 🐟



The California Strategic Growth Council’s (SGC) Community Resilience Centers Program (CRC) funds neighborhood-level resilience centers to provide shelter and resources during climate and other emergencies, as well as year-round services and programming that strengthen community connections and ability to withstand disasters. For more information, visit <https://sgc.ca.gov/grant-programs/crc/>.



Left: Students in Cal Poly Humboldt’s ESM469 class lean into chef Michelle Dow, who prepared dinners during the field course - the first one held at the site of the future Mattole Resilience, Education and Research Center in Petrolia. Photograph by Flora Brain



Above: A hoary bat in the hand of a researcher. Photo by Elyse Contreras
Above right: Jesse May Campbell - a member of US Forest Service Ecologist Ted Weller’s bat research team and a previous Cal Poly Humboldt INRSEP+ student who met Ted during a Mattole Field Institute course - observes a pallid bat for wing damage during the first-ever mist netting for bats along the Lower North Fork Mattole River. This research endeavor, open to the public and during the May 2026 Mattole Field Institute watershed restoration field course, illuminated a surprising diversity of bats and inspired future wildlife biologists from university students to local Mattole Valley youth. Photo by Elyse Contreras