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# POINT REYES LIGHT

NEWS

## Tribe funds shoreline restoration work

by **Sam Mondros**

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**Black acacia, pepperweed and pampas grass have choked out native plants favored by pollinators at Shields Marsh in Inverness Park, where restoration work funded by the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria will soon begin. (David Briggs / Point Reyes Light)**

Prescribed burns and grazing will help restore six sites owned by the conservation nonprofit Audubon Canyon Ranch with the goal of preserving flora and ecosystems considered culturally significant to the area's Indigenous stewards. Lupine, bog dogwood, salmonberry and cattail are among the plant species choked out by invasives along the shores of Tomales Bay and the Bolinas Lagoon. The work will be funded by \$200,000 granted by the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria earlier this month.

The sites—Toms Point, the Walker Creek delta, Cypress Grove Preserve, the Shields Marsh in Inverness, the Olema Marsh and the Martin Griffin Preserve in Stinson Beach—were chosen based on common stewardship objectives, said Wendy Coy, a spokeswoman for A.C.R.

The Coast Miwok lived for thousands of years along the east and west shores of Tomales Bay. Through controlled burns, raking excess brush, hunting, gathering and grazing, they preserved food sources and drove out invasive species, said Greg Sarris, chairman of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria. Later, the introduction of livestock and tilling lowered the water table and permanently altered the landscape. Indigenous fire practices ceased.

“It’s a very, very delicate practice to do controlled burning, especially along the coast where you can get wind,” Mr. Sarris said. “We had people who worked with fire, doctored it, breathed it. All the controls that were in place in precontact times, many of them are not available these days. We did not have oat grass and other flammable [brush] that is dry and burns much more quickly.”

Toms Point on the east shore of Tomales Bay comprises 70 acres of coastal bluffs, terraces and dunes that are home to 270 plant species and four rare plant species. Yet the ecology is out of balance, said Jim Jensen, a land steward at Cypress Grove who has worked on A.C.R.'s facilities and preserves in West Marin. Invasives such as coyote brush, pampas grass and ice plant are driving out native grasses and wildflowers.

At Shields Marsh, a publicly accessible, four-acre marsh on the west shore, teams will

restore native plants, piggybacking off work done in 2015 when it was first donated. The site is home to Point Reyes bird's beak, an endangered herb native to California marshes. Removing black acacia trees, pampas grass, ice plant and pepperweed will return the habitat to feeding insects and improve foraging for roosting songbirds.

Further south, coyote brush and Douglas fir have disrupted the balance at the 1,000-acre Martin Griffin Preserve on the Bolinas Lagoon. Audubon Canyon's C.E.O., Tom Gardali, said prescribed burns, chopping and manual removal of invasive species will reduce the brush and the firs that have turned the coastal prairie into a forest.

"Audubon Canyon Ranch has the privilege and responsibility of holding land within the ancestral territory of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria," Mr. Gardali said. "We are grateful for their generosity in sharing time, expertise and guidance as well as this additional round of funding to improve the health of some of California's most diverse coastal habitats."

Prescribed burns could start this fall at the Martin Griffin Preserve and Toms Point, where they will be led by Peter Nelson, a wildfire expert and tribal member of Graton Rancheria who has worked with A.C.R. Archeological and environmental impact reviews have been completed or are in process for work at Martin Griffin Preserve, Cypress Grove and Toms Point. Work planned at Shields and Olema Marshes and the Walker Creek delta do not require environmental approval, Mr. Gardali said.

A.C.R. has received funds from Graton in the past, but this is the first grant that will address areas in West Marin. In 2017, the tribe donated \$25,000 to help fund a prescribed burn at Bouverie Preserve in Glen Ellen.

"I think it's great we're working together for ways to establish a sacred relationship with the land," Mr. Sarris said. "The landscape was our sacred Bible. Now all that we have are a few shards of that text left, and we're clinging to those shards to understand what we can do today."