

WATSONVILLE WETLANDS WATCH

OUR MISSION IS TO “PROTECT, RESTORE, AND FOSTER AN APPRECIATION OF THE WETLANDS OF THE PAJARO VALLEY”

Watsonville Wetlands Watch is a non-profit organization working to restore wetlands and coastal prairie in the Watsonville Slough System, an 800 acre freshwater wetland complex in the Pajaro Valley. To accomplish this work, we partner with a range of private and public entities, such as the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the City of Watsonville, private landowners, farmers, universities and research institutions. We operate the Patrick J. Fitz Wetlands Educational Resource Center in Watsonville, where students and community members learn about the Watsonville Slough System and are encouraged to participate in the restoration and protection of these valuable resources. Over 1500 students participate in our programs annually.

Restoring Coastal Prairie

Our restoration projects are focused on converting recently active strawberry fields and historically farmed fields to native coastal prairie – an incredibly diverse grassland ecosystem comprised of native perennial bunch grasses and annual and perennial wildflowers. We believe converting agricultural fields to coastal prairie is a valuable step toward sequestering and storing atmospheric carbon, as native perennial grasses accumulate carbon in below ground and above ground litter, living and decomposed roots. California native perennials are believed to extend their roots over 10 feet down into the soil profile, whereas agricultural practices commonly use short rooted annual species and repeated annual soil tillage.

Restoration of the Central Coast’s coastal prairie has many benefits to wildlife as well, providing important habitat for a diversity of grassland dependant and special status species, such as the Burrowing Owl, Northern Harrier, Short-eared owl, Grasshopper Sparrow and others.

Watsonville Wetlands Watch currently manages 350 acres of wetlands, grasslands, and upland habitats, and is actively restoring 147 acres of native grassland and associated upland habitat.

8,000 – 12,000 native plants per acre are planted on native grassland installations.

Other restoration practices are used when native plants are not installed, including removal of invasive species, grazing, mowing, and raking of grasslands.



The California Conservation Corps planting native coastal prairie plants, 2009