

Santa Rosa Plain Ecological Reserve Yuba Unit



Summary of Cleanup Activities

Prepared By
Sotoyome Resource Conservation District

Prepared For
California Department of Fish and Game
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The Sotoyome Resource Conservation District, under contract with the California Department of Fish and Game, implemented a series of cleanup activities on the Yuba Unit of the Santa Rosa Plain Ecological Reserve on June 19, 2006. The majority of cleanup activities took place over a 2 week period. Minor details were completed throughout the summer months of 2006.. The following is a summary of activities completed onsite.



Outline of site activities:

Pre-cleanup activities

Eviction Effort

Debris removal/separation

Facility sealing

Acacia Grove removal

Biohazard Disposal



This site was historically a naval training site, followed briefly by a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) storage site, and has also been known as the Santa Rosa Airport site. The Reserve is owned by the California Department of Fish and Game, and supports a variety of bird and wetland species to include the endangered California Tiger Salamander. Until very recently, activities onsite also included transient residences.



Infrastructure onsite includes four large bunkers and two smaller facilities herein after referred to as Huts #1 and #2. The larger buildings have been referred to as the Acacia Grove bunker (westernmost structure), the Covered bunker (northernmost structure), The Communications bunker (easternmost structure), and the Busy bunker (southernmost structure). These names were assigned temporarily for ease of project oversight, and are not identified or approved of in any legal document. For ease of project explanation, these bunker names shall be utilized throughout this report.



The Reserve is located in southwest Santa Rosa, roughly sandwiched between Fresno Avenue to the West, NorthPoint Parkway to the north, West Hearn Avenue to the East, and Yuba Avenue or Tapadera Drives to the South. In Sonoma County, California, (APN # 034-141-003). The black border shown here is for reference purposes only, and does not accurately depict Reserve boundaries.



For several years use of the Reserve by the transient community has led to a build up of debris both in the existing structures and around the wetlands and vernal pools. Activities of this nature are not only aesthetically displeasing, but also serve to degrade wetland habitat and plant and animal success onsite. As such, cleanup efforts included the removal of existing debris onsite, both inside the bunker structures and outside of them.

Because this site is surrounded by residential development, neighbors have taken advantage of the 69.29 acre Reserve, walking dogs, riding bikes, admiring the bird species, strolling or jogging on the asphalt paths. Transient activity onsite has served to decrease the overall habitat value of the site as well as the public's feeling of safety when walking the existing trails through the site.

Pre-Implementation Activities:

Prior to implementing cleanup activities at this site, a number of standard planning activities took place.



Identifying whose jurisdiction the site fell under was the most difficult of these planning activities. Jurisdiction determination was sought to identify the law enforcement agency that would assist with the eviction of transients residing onsite. Due to the location of the property, it fell under both the jurisdiction of the City of Santa Rosa, and the County of Sonoma. Ultimately, it was decided that the property was state owned, and was therefore under the jurisdiction of the State of California Highway Patrol. However, it was then determined that the Highway Patrol did not have the resources to assist in the eviction effort, and so Lieutenant Steve Riske, of the California Department of Fish and Game, led the eviction effort.

Pre-Implementation Activities (continued):

June 12, 2006

Re: Cleanup of the Yuba Unit of the Santa Rosa Plain Ecological Reserve

Dear Neighbor,

The Sotoyome Resource Conservation District is a non-regulatory local district that offers educational, technical, and administrative services to the public. We offer a variety of services, to include water quality monitoring, watershed assessment, restoration planning, project management, education on natural resources, farm and ranch planning, project permitting, and k-12 education. We also assist landowners in finding funds for restoration projects, and in managing project funds. Our ongoing education series includes topics on invasive plant eradication, soil and water conservation practices, erosion control, and funding.

We are currently overseeing the cleanup of a site in your neighborhood. This site, illustrated roughly in the photograph above, was historically a naval training site, followed briefly by a FEMA storage site, and has also been known as the Santa Rosa Airport site. This site, now referred to as the Yuba Unit of the Santa Rosa Plain Ecological Reserve, is owned by the California Department of Fish and Game. The reserve supports a variety of bird and wetland species. Recent use of the site by the transient community has led to a build up of debris, and may have decreased the public's feeling of safety when walking the trails through the site.

The Sotoyome RCD has been contracted to restore this site. Work on this site will include:

- • **Evicting the current residents**
- **Mowing the site**
- **Removing the debris both in the buildings and on the grounds**
- **Removing the Acacia grove that is being utilized as a campsite**
- **Welding the buildings shut to prevent future re-habitation.**

This cleanup effort shall commence **June 19th**, and is not expected to last longer than 2 weeks. Contractors will be accessing the site via the maintenance gate where Yuba Road ends to the west. **Residents should expect daily activity, increased use of Yuba Road, and equipment sounds M-F, from 8:00am to 6:00pm. Please avoid walking the paths through the site on these days.**

NOTIFICATION OF WORK SCHEDULED IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

JUNE 19-30, 2006

Upon identification of the authority which would assist RCD staff in evicting transients onsite, notices were sent out to all neighboring residents, explaining the activities to take place, and providing contact information should concerns arise.

Pre-Implementation Activities, continued:

Wetland exclusion:

In an effort to protect onsite wetlands from disturbance during the cleanup activities, SRCD staff installed orange construction fencing around wetland areas most likely to be disrupted by vehicles.



Staff met onsite with North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board staff to identify the best locations for placement of this fencing, and to discuss potential California Tiger Salamander concerns. It was determined that CTS would not be impacted given the nature of activities onsite. SRCD staff were advised to contact NCRWQCB staff should soil disturbance be necessary. Soil disturbance was not necessary to complete the cleanup activities.

Eviction Effort:

Approximately 48 hours prior to the scheduled debris cleanup, eviction notices (obtained from the California Highway Patrol) were posted onsite by SRCD staff and DFG wardens. At that time, transients were informed verbally about the eviction as well.



The following day (24 hours prior to scheduled debris cleanup) signs which had been torn down were reattached, and transients were again informed of the impending eviction.

The day of the eviction several of the transients had not yet begun to move out. Lt. Steve Riske and two other DFG wardens again spoke to those resistant to leaving. SRCD staff assisted one of the residents with moving his things out of a bunker and off site.



For the first few days of the debris cleanup, transients continued to “move back in” each evening. Lt. Riske came out regularly during the next few weeks, to ensure that none had moved back into the facilities. During this time, transients camped out at the edges of the property, presumably waiting for the cleanup activities to cease so that they could move back into the bunkers.

All facilities onsite were welded shut, and SRCD staff have noted no re-habitation evidence as of October 2006.

Acacia Grove Bunker:

Debris buildup in this bunker was the greatest of all buildings onsite. It appeared that this facility was not habited, but had been used to store the trash from all other buildings onsite. There was also evidence that offsite garbage was being deposited into this facility. As the cleanup crew got further and further into the material, it became clear that it had begun to decompose. As such, it was necessary to utilize a bobcat with a bucket to scoop the liquid-like substance from the floor of the building.



Debris in the Acacia Grove Bunker was stacked over 5 feet high, and completely covered the entire interior floor of the facility.



Upon completion of debris removal, the doors and all potential entrances and vents were welded shut.

Acacia Grove continued:

This bunker was deemed the Acacia Grove Bunker because it was surrounded by a grove of Acacia trees. These trees are non-native, and highly invasive, but are also bushy and so provided concealment to would-be inhabitants. To reduce the potential for future transient activity, these Acacia trees were cut down, and the stumps ground wherever possible.



Covered Bunker:

The facility referred to as the Covered Bunker is located in the northeast area of the property. This bunker is covered by an external “roof” which is thought to have been installed at some point prior to DFG ownership, presumably due to roof leakages. This bunker contained the least amount of material, and was habited when cleanup activities began.



Upon completion of debris removal, the doors of this facility were welded shut. No external vents or alternative entry's were identified.

Communications Bunker:

The facility referred to as the Communications Bunker is located on the easternmost portion of the property. This bunker was surrounded by materials thought to be the remnants of communication tower building kits, and so received its unofficial title. This facility was inhabited at the time that this cleanup effort took place, and its residents were the most resistant to leaving. Upon entering the facility, staff discovered that it was being utilized as a multiple person living residence, as well as a bicycle repair shop. The majority of the bicycles appeared to have been stolen, and there were a significant number of tools, parts, and hardware both inside and outside the bunker.



Upon completion of debris removal on this site, the facility was sealed by welding shut all doors, vents, and potential future entrances.

Busy Bunker:

The facility referred to as the Busy Bunker is located on the Southern portion of the property. SRCD staff observed a number of people moving into and out of this bunker during the months of pre-cleanup preparation, and so deemed it the Busy Bunker. This facility was inhabited by a man known as Alan at the time of cleanup efforts. Alan informed staff that he had been given permission to stay onsite and “keep it clean” for a number of years. The method in which Alan kept the site clean was to store all of the trash found onsite and generated by site residents in the Acacia Grove Bunker.



Upon completion of debris removal on this site, the facility was sealed by welding shut all doors, vents, and potential future entrances.

Hut's #1 and #2:

The facility's identified as Huts were arbitrarily assigned this name based upon staff perception of their appearances.



Hut #1 is located adjacent to the Acacia Grove bunker. This facility was previously welded shut, and did not require any additional interior cleanup. Materials were removed from the exterior of the building.

Hut #2 is located on the northwest portion of the property. This facility showed evidence of once having a door that had been torn from its hinges. SRCD staff were unable to locate the door anywhere onsite. As such, it was necessary to cut a fitted steel plate to secure the building. This plate was then welded to the front of the building, and the facility thus secured.



Biohazard Disposal:

Due to years of unknown site usage, a risk of encountering biohazards onsite was identified. For this reason, the contractor hired to remove the debris was equipped with appropriate personal protection equipment, and required to produce a site specific Health and Safety Plan prior to starting work. A copy of this plan was kept onsite at all times.

Materials found onsite include several hypodermic needles, and other drug use paraphanelia. The subcontractor secured these materials in an approved biohazard disposal container, and SRCD staff disposed of them through the Sonoma County Syringe Access and Safe Sharps Disposal Program.



Scrap Metal removal:

In an effort to reduce disposal costs, staff instructed the subcontractor to separate scrap metal and large furniture from the debris onsite, and to pile it outside the structures for ease of pickup later. This material was then removed by local interested parties and taken to recycling facilities. SRCD staff transported a large percentage of these materials to local recycling centers.



Remaining activities and Ongoing Management Recommendations:

SRCD was unable to completely remove all trash onsite due to lack of available funding, and continued debris deposition on the property. Remaining debris at the time of projects end included approximately 25% of the debris originally staged around the Communications Bunker (or approximately 10% of the total debris on the property). This debris is made up of human feces and urine in various containers, general trash, and random pieces of wood (i.e. remnants of furniture and pallets). SRCD estimates the cost of removing this material to be approximately \$2500.00 plus disposal costs.

Ongoing maintenance recommendations for this site include:

1. Bi-weekly site visits to remove debris and sweep up glass.
2. Graffiti is rampant onsite, and will require frequent repainting.
3. Annual mowing or grazing will be necessary to comply with fire protection requirements.
4. Acacia seedling will need to be pulled to avoid future shelter for transients.
5. While staff believe that welding the facilities should be sufficient to avoid future habitation, we cannot pretend to know the ends to which transients will go to get into the buildings. Therefore, we would suggest either removing the facilities completely and reestablishing the natural topography of the site, or packing the entry ways and burying the doors with soil and planting this soil so as to encourage a natural "hill" appearance. These suggestions have not been fully researched, but SRCD is happy to do further investigation of these options should additional funding become available, and should site conditions (i.e. transient activity) warrant it.

Future site activities:

This site lends itself to a number of exciting management and restoration possibilities. Because it is located in a neighborhood setting, and is home to a wide variety of plant and animal species, it is also a highly visible site. SRCD staff received a number of inquiries regarding the work and future plans for the site. What follows is only a brief list of possible site usages.

1. Conducting non-native plant removal efforts, and re-vegetating with native species, to enhance ecological value.
2. Install bird watching stations and interpretive signs for the public to better understand and appreciate the value of this property.
3. Establishing a presence onsite would significantly contribute to the reduction of less than ideal activity onsite.

Please Note: Since the original drafting of this report, funds have been allocated to complete the removal of the remaining debris onsite. This debris is scheduled for removal in December of 2006.

Agencies and contractors involved in cleanup activities included:

California Department of Fish and Game
Lt. Steve Riske and Lt. Kyle Hiatt
PO Box 14929
Santa Rosa, CA 95402

California Highway Patrol
Officer Simmons
6100 Labath Ave
Rohnert Park, CA 94928

City of Santa Rosa
Fire Department
955 Sonoma Avenue
Santa Rosa, CA 95404

Dewitt Tree Services
PO Box 7926
Santa Rosa, CA 95407

Jim Stuart Welding
PO Box 9571
Santa Rosa, CA 95405

North Bay Corporation
PO Box 1916
Santa Rosa, CA 95402-1916

NRC Environmental Services
1605 Ferry Point
Alameda, CA 95401

Syringe Access and Safe Sharps Disposal Program
County of Sonoma
Department of Health Services
Prevention and Planning Division
475 Aviation Blvd. Suite 210
Santa Rosa, CA 95403