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High school students repot seedlings that will be used in native plant restoration programs supported by Jug Handle Creek Farm and Nature Center's Greenhouse Project. Helene Chalfin photo.

Environmental stewardship: The heart of 'going green'

Submitted by
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A "Green" gem on the Mendocino Coast is Jug Handle Creek Farm and Nature Center. The farm and nature center is located just south of and adjacent to Jug Handle State Reserve and the Ecological Staircase near Caspar.

A successful founding purpose of Jug Handle Creek Farm was to help save the land of the ecological staircase, a marine terrace sequence that provides a unique look at ecological succession over a period of half a million years.

The 35 acres of the center includes forests and meadows, nature trails, and a 120-year-old Victorian farmhouse once owned by the Tregoning family, founding settlers in the Caspar area.

The Nature Center is dedicated to environmental stewardship and sustainable use of coastal land and water resources. Free science and ecology day programs are provided to local schools as well as a summer nature day camp and school children from throughout the region stay overnight at the farm greenhouse or campground.

Students learn about Jug Handle Ecological Staircase,

stewardship of natural resources, watersheds, redwood forest ecology, native plants and tidepools. The Greenhouse Project enables children and adults to propagate thousands of native plants that are used in restoration projects by State Parks and others. And, there is also a kitchen garden at the farmhouse that is shared with guests, volunteers and the Fort Bragg Food Bank.

Students and adults have worked with staff and volunteers at Jug Handle Nature Center to grow, transplant and plant native trees and shrubs at watersheds from as far south as Gualala to as far north as Seaside, above Westport.

Working with a variety of resource agencies and landowners, the nature center has participated in an impressive number of projects, including: Big River restoration and stream monitoring as well as coastal revegetation at other State Parks properties including Glass Beach, Jug Handle State Reserve, Little River Beach, MacKerricher State Park, and Point Cabrillo Lighthouse; also, Caltrans frontage revegetation, Garcia River restoration projects, erosion control at Noyo River, and revegetation at Jackson Demonstration State Forest, Mendocino Land Trusts' Navarro Point,

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Green

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Point Arena Lighthouse, and timber company lands.

Many more sites are in need of native plant restoration. The nature center welcomes all volunteers interested in any aspect of environmental stewardship, including greenhouse plant propagation, tree planting, invasive plant weeding, trail maintenance and leading field trips.

Current educational programs include: birds of the North Coast, growing plants for rain gardens, marine

mammals, Native American uses of native plants, native plant identification and propagation, tidepools, water and watersheds, watershed wildlife, and whale migration. Volunteers are always welcome.

The center works closely with Fort Bragg and Ukiah students who are part of the Math Engineering and Science Achievement Club (MESA) and with students from Mendocino High School's School of Natural Resources (SONAR) group.

The center was recently awarded a Coastal Conservancy grant for improvements to educational/visitor facilities and to trail and

campground areas. Proposed sanitary facilities will demonstrate water conservation by utilizing captured rainwater and will provide a model of sustainable water use.

"Demonstration projects like this one are vital to increase water conservation adequately to cope with climate change and population growth," according to Joel Gerwein of the Coastal Conservancy, in a letter of support for Jug Handle Nature Center to the Community Foundation of Mendocino County.

However, recent budget restrictions have put a hold on Coastal Conservancy

grant funding and Jug Handle Creek Farm and Nature Center especially welcomes any organization or individual that would like to become a part of their donor group to provide matching funds for the Conservancy grant and other projects.

For information on the education programs and the native plant nursery, contact Helene Chalfin, education director, 964-1825, jughandle-ed@mcn.org, 15501 N. Highway 1, 17, Caspar, CA 95420. For information about guest bookings, call 964-4630 or visit www.jughandlecreek-farm.org.