

CENTRAL COAST WILDS

Tarplant Management at Anna Jean Cummings County Park Joe Rigney

In 1989 the Santa Cruz Redevelopment Agency acquired the 96.5-acre O'Neill Ranch located in Soquel in Central Santa Cruz County. In December of 1996, the agencies Board of Directors approved a Master Plan for the property, to be called the Anna Jean Cummings Regional Park. This Master Plan included an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) that identified significant impacts to special status plant species on the site, including Santa Cruz tarplant (*Holocarpha macradenia*). Although it was once common, Santa Cruz tarplant had not been seen on the site since 1993.

In order to mitigate these impacts to a less than significant level, the EIR proposed that a management plan be developed for the Santa Cruz tarplant. In November of 1999, Ecosystems West Consulting Group prepared the *Management Plan for Santa Cruz Tarplant (Holocarpha macradenia) on the O'Neill Ranch in Santa Cruz County, California*.

In June of 2000, the Santa Cruz Redevelopment Agency hired Central Coast Wilds (CCW) to implement the management plan. To date, CCW has successfully implemented three years of management activities.

An intensive mowing regime was applied to the area, consisting of a single mowing in the fall and monthly mowing from January to June. Mowing has generally occurred at the end of these months. In order to minimize thatch build-up, the area was raked twice per year, once in the fall and once in the spring. In the first year and a half, the site was raked by hand. For the second year and a half, a landscape rake pulled by a tractor was used. Two sites were hand hoed in 2000 in order to expose native seed bank. Although hand hoeing was expected to occur in the fall of 2001, the late contract signing date combined with the early onset of winter rains made hand hoeing inappropriate in 2001. Hand hoeing occurred in fall of 2002, prior to the onset of winter rains.

In the early spring of 2001, two Santa Cruz tarplant were observed. However, by the flowering season, both of these plants had died. No tarplant were observed in 2002. In 2003, two tarplant were observed in flower, in roughly the same area as the two plants observed in 2001. Due to the slope of this area, it had not received the same regular mowing regime as the rest of the site, though it had been hoed. This has led me to believe that the intensive mowing regime may actually be decreasing tarplant regeneration. Given that there is now significant bare ground on the site, I have recommended that mowing be decreased to once in the fall and two to three times in the spring. Raking is recommended to continue twice yearly.

The success criteria outlined in the management plan for this project calls for a minimum of ten tarplant to be observed during the first flowering season, with an increase of total population size during the course of the project. To date, the success criteria have not been attained for this project. CCW has recommended that negotiations commence to determine an appropriate seed source for an attempt to seed the site. To date, the county agencies involved have not authorized this approach.

At this time, CCW has not signed a contract for the fourth year of tarplant management. It is expected that the project is going to be transferred from the county Redevelopment Agency to the county Parks and Recreation Department. Given the current fiscal crisis in the county, it is unclear whether or not Parks and Recreation will continue the project, though according to the EIR the agency is required to do so.