

Re-blazing a trail from the ocean

Restored path to be on 55-mile route

By Elizabeth Fitzsimons
STAFF WRITER

September 25, 2007

DEL MAR – The fish were jumping in the San Dieguito River yesterday just beyond what will be, come springtime, a graded hiking trail through newly restored coastal sage scrub.

The path is still a narrow, bumpy thread of dirt where dried mustard, Russian thistle and ice plant have invaded and taken root in the shadow of Interstate 5 on the Del Mar Fairgrounds.

But those non-native plants soon will be uprooted and replaced with the indigenous plants that are supposed to be there. And the trail will be leveled, widened to 6 feet across and covered with decomposed granite – the newest section of the planned 55-mile Coast to Crest hiking trail from the ocean to Volcan Mountain near Julian.



CRISSY PASCUAL / Union-Tribune
Shawna Anderson of the San Dieguito River Park Joint Powers Authority showed off the trail being restored for the Coast to Crest hiking trail.

Volunteers began the work Saturday, and for the next five months work parties of 30 to 40 people will return twice a month to the 1.15 acres lining the north side of the San Dieguito River west of I-5.

The San Dieguito Estuary North Bank project was announced yesterday in a dirt parking lot belonging to the Del Mar Fairgrounds. It is funded by a \$19,350 grant from the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project and administered by the San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy.

Across the river, on the south side, a three-year, \$86 million restoration of the San Dieguito Lagoon is under way by Southern California Edison. On the north side, the land north of the trail is a dusty lot, part of it littered with golf balls from a driving range.

“It’s not the most beautiful area of the fairgrounds, but we’d like to change that,” said fairgrounds general manager and chief executive Tim Fennell. The fairgrounds granted access to the land to the San Dieguito River Park Joint Powers Authority, which is responsible for creating the trail.

There were glimpses of how the area might look. Egrets swooped in low over the river, and every few moments, a mullet fish would leap

from the water.

“It's going to be 55 miles from coast to crest,” said county Supervisor Pam Slater-Price, who also serves on joint powers authority.

“It's going to be the Yosemite of Southern California,” she said. “We're so fortunate to be at the right time, at the right place, to have this for future generations.”

The area is home to the California gnatcatcher and the brown pelican. An osprey is known to make its home here, too, said Leslie Woollenweber, resources specialist with the San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy.

On Saturday, volunteers removed 458 pounds of trash and filled a Dumpster with invasive plants.

“Wherever we've taken out a lot of the invasives, we'll be filling in with native vegetation,” such as coast goldenbush and California sagebrush, Woollenweber said. “Once you get a majority of natives, they can create a barrier against the non-natives.

Work will stop in March when nesting season begins for many of the birds in the lagoon, such as the endangered Belding's Savannah sparrow, which lives in the pickleweed, one of the area's native plant species.



The San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy is restoring a 1.15-acre stretch of the 55-mile Coast to Crest Trail.

■ Elizabeth Fitzsimons: (619) 542-4577; elizabeth.fitzsimons@uniontrib.com

[»Next Story»](#)

Find this article at:

http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20070925/news_1m25restore.html

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.