Friends of the DUNES

DUNESBERRY

NEWSLETTER OF FRIENDS OF THE DUNES

FALL/WINTER 2026 | VOLUME 45 | ISSUE 2

The Power of Community

By Suzie Fortner, Executive Director



Community members work together and take action to restore our precious dunes.

At Friends of the Dunes, our work is rooted in **collective action**. We cannot complete this work in isolation. Our mission statement says it clearly: this is *community-supported* conservation. It not only requires community, but by working together toward common goals, we create community. I am incredibly grateful for you, our ever-growing community of donors, supporters, partners, and volunteers who know the intrinsic value of ecologically diverse coastal environments and understand the benefits of connecting people to these special places. Thank you for being a part of this community and participating in this important work.

This time of year, I look forward to slowing down and reflecting on all we have accomplished together since January. We began the year with over 120 volunteers helping plant 15,815 native plants in our foredunes at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center! Our community really showed up for this project, and the results were undeniable this spring when our foredunes were covered in colorful blooms after too many years of being stifled by invasive plants. In March, we hosted a 1-week immersive Coastal Naturalist Training for the California Conservation Corps, with contributions from 16 guest speakers. Through this course, we certified 23 corps members and 2 crew leaders as California Naturalists. In May, we acquired 6.52 acres of neighboring property located on our access road at 150 Stamps Lane. After years of advocating for the cleanup and restoration of this property, we worked with the California State Coastal Conservancy and willing sellers to purchase the land for public access and conservation. Exciting plans are taking shape with input from our community, and we are excited to share ideas for future improvements that will integrate this parcel into our conservation and public access plans for the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center property.

Friends of the Dunes is dedicated to conserving the natural diversity of coastal environments in Humboldt County, California, through community supported education and stewardship programs.

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Dunesberry design and layout by Ashley Osia

The Power of Community

(continued from page 1)

In June, we brought 750 students to the beach for a day of action caring for the coast during our annual Kids Ocean Day Event. This event required collaboration with many partners. We worked closely with the Bureau of Land Management's Arcata Field Office and the California Coastal Commission to coordinate the event, and received additional support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the California Conservation Corps, Watershed Stewards Project, 14 participating schools, and over 30 volunteers.

That's only halfway through the year! The following pages highlight much of the work we accomplished since June. In July, we were awarded a significant 30x30 grant from the California Ocean Protection Council through the California Sea Grant College Program to expand our restoration efforts at Humboldt Coastal Nature Center inland from the foredune, build habitat connectivity, and improve resilience. This funding also enabled us to hire four Restoration Technicians who will amplify the work our Dune Ecosystem Restoration Team has already started. Read more about our restoration updates on **page 3** and the restoration technicians on page 4. This September through October, we held our public California Naturalist Course and graduated 21 newly certified California Naturalists on October 28th. This year, demand for scholarships to cover the course registration fee was high, and our community really stepped up to help. Sixteen individuals and one foundation contributed to the scholarship fund, allowing us to honor every scholarship request and reduce barriers to participation for individuals who couldn't afford the course fee. You can read more about the course from participants' perspective on **page 5**.

It hasn't been all work and no play. We hosted many engaging programs for our community, which you can read about on **pages 8-9**. Through our Bay to Dunes program, we've provided field trips to the coast for 654 local students, connecting them with coastal environments through hands-on activities and educational games. We provided these programs for free and covered bus transportation expenses thanks to grants from the Humboldt Area Foundation and Humboldt Sponsors, as well as donations from community members to our school bus fund.

As the year comes to an end, I am filled with gratitude and admiration for all the amazing work we've accomplished together this year. But of course, there is always more work ahead, and your continued support has a huge impact. I look forward to collaborating with you as we continue working to conserve and steward our coastal environments.



Photo by Bob Wick

Restoring Our Coastal Dunes: A Season of Progress

By Justin Legge, Stewardship Director & Restoration Manager

Over the past several months, the dunes at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center have continued to undergo a transformation. At Friends of the Dunes, our restoration efforts are helping recover the natural processes that shape these dynamic landscapes while creating opportunities for community members, students, and volunteers to participate in their stewardship.

Restoration crews have continued the challenging work of removing invasive plants, including European beachgrass, yellow bush lupine, ice plant, and invasive annual grasses. These species can dramatically alter dune ecosystems by stabilizing naturally shifting sands, changing soil conditions, and competing with native vegetation. By removing them, we are helping restore the dynamic habitat that supports the specialized plants and wildlife of our coastal dunes.

This fall marked an exciting new chapter as we welcomed four new Restoration Technicians and three College Corps Fellows to our stewardship team. Their work is helping us expand restoration into areas farther inland from the foredunes, where invasive vegetation and accumulated organic material have altered native dune habitats. Managing the large volumes of removed vegetation is another important part of the restoration process. By removing the organic matter from the dunes and consolidating invasive plant material in designated staging areas, we can reduce its impact on recovering habitats and prepare it for disposal.

We have also been strengthening connections between restoration, education, and community participation. In October, I had the opportunity to present *Dunes: The Work Restoring Coastal Ecosystem Function* through Cal Poly Humboldt's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. We held an in-person field trip at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center and an online lecture for those unable to attend in person. The presentation explored the remarkable ecology of coastal dunes, the history of human impacts on these landscapes, and the science and practice behind restoring their natural functions. Sharing this work with our local community members is an important reminder that successful restoration depends not only on what happens in the field, but also on helping people understand why these places matter.

Perhaps the most rewarding part of this work has been witnessing the landscape respond over the summer and fall. Where invasive vegetation once dominated, native dune plants have now reclaimed the space. Without having the clear evidence of maps and photo points, it is hard to believe you are standing in the same place! Each DERT volunteer workday, monitoring survey, and educational program contributes to a much larger effort to help our coastal ecosystems thrive.
Thank you to the volunteers, restoration crews, students, funders, and community partners who make this work possible. The progress we are seeing is a testament to what sustained collaboration and a shared commitment to these remarkable coastal landscapes can accomplish.

Dune Ecosystem Restoration Team (DERT)
Join us with gloves, shovels, and brush axes for dune restoration. Remove invasive plants and help native ones thrive. No experience needed; snacks and tools provided. Meet us a few minutes before 10 a.m. for training and scenic views.

D.E.R.T. Meets:

- 2nd Saturday at Humboldt Coastal Nature Center
- 3rd Sunday at BLM's Ma-le'l Dunes South

Check friendsofthedunes.org/calendar for dates and details.



Native dune plants reclaiming fordunes previously suffocated by invasive European beach grass. Photo by Justin Legge.

Welcome to the Team!



AmeriCorps VISTA Member: Growing up near the Santa Cruz Mountains, **Harrison Perfect** developed an admiration early on in life for the beauty and peace found in the outdoors. He graduated from the University of Colorado Boulder with a degree in philosophy, focusing on the study of our decision-making processes. After university, he discovered his passion for working within the nonprofit space through housing and food security organizations. He is extremely excited to join the Friends of the Dunes team in a development capacity through AmeriCorps VISTA to steward our environment and pursue his passion for nonprofits and the outdoors. The intricacy and profundity of our landscape deserve to be preserved and understood, and he is happy for the opportunity to take part in that process.

Restoration Technicians



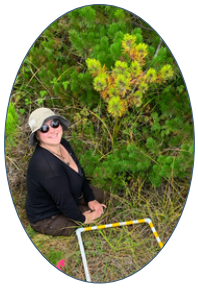
Growing up in the Central Valley of California, **Geniva Hayden** moved north to attend Humboldt State University, now Cal Poly Humboldt, studying Environmental Education and Interpretation. She was lucky enough to discover Friends of the Dunes through their Coastal Naturalist Training and volunteering at events like Kids Ocean Day. The coastal dune environment is the one place that has always caused her to feel so much inspiration, freedom, and a sense of belonging and place. Facilitating that powerful connection for others, it is her privilege to be able to pour energy into helping steward and restore this incredibly special place for all to enjoy. She looks forward to seeing everyone out enjoying the stunning pink and yellow colors filling the dunes this spring!



Nathan Wells' love of the outdoors started young, growing up in Humboldt County and camping with his family in nearby parks, including Stone Lagoon, Grizzly Creek, Swimmer's Delight, and Sue-Meg State Park. After earning his Bachelor of Arts in Graphic Design from San Jose State University, he returned to Humboldt and worked as a graphic designer for several local businesses and organizations. His work expanded into running his own business that included video production, stop-motion animation, and product design. In 2022, a growing desire to give back to the local community and spend more time working outdoors led him to volunteer with Pac-Out Green Team, Humboldt Trail Stewards, and Friends of the Dunes. His experience with the Dune Ecosystem Restoration Team led to his position as a Restoration Technician, where he spends his days traversing the Friends of the Dunes property, removing invasive species and participating in other ecological restoration projects. In his free time, Nathan enjoys hiking, backpacking, biking, strategy board games, and woodworking.



After years of volunteering at Friends of the Dunes restoration workdays, **Penny DellaPelle** is thrilled to be continuing her stewardship efforts, now as an employee! She grew up exploring the coastal dune and chaparral ecosystems of San Luis Obispo County, on the ancestral land of the Chumash people. In 2023, her passion for ecologically-based solutions and environmental justice led her to transfer to Cal Poly Humboldt to earn her B.S. in Environmental Science and Management. While a student, Penny began volunteering at Friends of the Dunes through the Natural Resources Club, where students participate in weekly environmental volunteer workdays. She eventually became club president and helped organize more than 50 volunteer workdays with a wide variety of local nonprofits and government agencies, prioritizing community-building and the joy in service. Penny is passionate about staying curious and finding awe, whether through the natural world, the arts, or a blend of them both.



Isabella Juggler moved up to Humboldt from Los Angeles in 2020 to attend Cal Poly Humboldt, earning her Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Ecology, Conservation, and Management in 2024. She has worked in the unique Humboldt dune ecosystem since Spring 2024 and applied to the restoration technician position with FOD to pursue her passion for non-profit, ecology-based fieldwork. She is deeply interested in applying and expanding her knowledge as a professional plant and nature enthusiast and identifier, especially locally. In her free time, Isabella loves to travel, hike, cook, and hang out with her 3 cats, Aloysius, Jasper, and Rainbow.

Coastal Naturalist Graduation

By Harrison Perfect, AmeriCorps VISTA Member and Anouk Robison-De Fever, Programs Assistant

We were extremely honored this year to be participants and Teaching Assistants in Friends of the Dunes' **Coastal Naturalist Training** course, immersing ourselves in the cultural history, geology, native species, and stewardship practices of Humboldt Bay and its surrounding coastal dune environment. One of the most prominent things we recognized, through the input and shared knowledge of our generous educators, is what is required of us as naturalists and active community members for continuing the stewardship of our interconnected ecosystems.

One of our first guest speakers was Ted Hernandez, Cultural Director of the Wiyot Tribe, who taught us some of the history of what is now Arcata and Eureka, as well as emphasizing the fact that living and relying on land, as we all do, makes us an intrinsic part of the land. We are not separate from nature if we are walking on the soil, eating the food it grows, and participating in the water cycle by hydrating ourselves. We then have a duty to be good neighbors to everyone we share the land with and good stewards of that which keeps us all alive. To prepare us for our field trip to Digawututklh, Ted also gave us a moment to reflect on what we were bringing to that area in terms of mind, body, and spirit. He asked that we do our best to bring good energy with us and to really consider and participate in the restoration and healing happening while we walked through the forest and across the dunes down to the ocean's edge. This set the tone for us to have a gorgeous and mindful walk led by Annie Fehrenbach of the CA Geological Survey and Natalie Calderon, Forestry Technician for the Wiyot Tribe, who gave us a window into one of the oldest dune forests that was saved from the tsunami 300 years ago by the dunes and their system of moving sand. The combination of these sessions helped us glean how Indigenous and Western scientific processes work together to symbiotically heal the land.

Our last classroom session was a panel on Civic Engagement led by three environmental advocates from our community: Jennifer Kalt of Humboldt Waterkeeper, Tom Wheeler of the Environmental Protection Information Center, and Alicia Hamann of Friends of the Eel River. Providing insight into the current developmental plans for Humboldt County, they encouraged us to use evidence and reason to look for positive changes that we can play a part in creating, such as involving ourselves in projects and their approval to make sure they properly reflect our integration with the land around us. This attitude echoes an idea termed 'radical optimism' introduced to us by Suzie Fortner from Coastal Naturalist alumni Michelle Fullner and her podcast Golden State Naturalist. Whether one wishes to speak about dam removal on the Eel River or the Heavy Lift Marine Terminal in Humboldt Bay, when you understand the importance of informing yourself, voicing your opinion, and taking a stand by weighing in on factors that will make an impact, a world of possibilities opens up around you. We can now utilize our newly acquired naturalist skills towards the goal of bettering our communities and their surrounding environments.

Our gratitude extends to all the guest speakers involved in our California Naturalist Course, from whom we were able to learn and grow. It extends to Suzie Fortner, our Executive Director, and Jennifer Ortega, our Education Manager, who made this all possible. To our generous donors as well, who allowed for such an amazing and diverse group of people to come together, share knowledge, and create some lovely lasting friendships. And to our fellow participants who showed us that together, we can look to the future of our natural environment with more optimistic, learned eyes. To everyone involved, we can most simply say **thank you**.



Coastal Naturalist participants at graduation!

Thank You Sustaining Members!

Linda Alm
Christine Aus & Jim Gurman
Robert Ayers
Bruce & Petra Bingham
Pat Bitton
Debra Burstiner
Donna & Jim Clark
Patty Demant
Jill & Scott Demers
Michelle Dowling
Robert Earl
Yvonne Everett & Judith Mayer
Will Ferson
Colin Fiske
Spring Garrett & Mitchell Higa
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Jennifer Savage
Ray Swedenburg
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Simeon Tauber
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Joe Tyburczy
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Nora Winge
Dale Wright
Rebecca Zettler & Kit Mann

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- **As a member, you'll automatically become part of our organization.**
- **Your donations are tax-deductible since we are a 501(c)(3) charitable organization (EIN 68-0373871).**

Help us safeguard these precious natural habitats through community-supported education and stewardship programs. Thank you for your generous support!
friendsofthedunes.org/monthlydonation

SCAN ME!



Volunteer Highlight: Yvonne Everett



By Ryland Sherman, Restoration & Stewardship Manager

Long before joining the Friends of the Dunes Board of Directors, Yvonne Everett was spending time on the North Coast. Her family made trips to the area when she was growing up, camping among the redwoods and visiting the beaches. Years later, she would return to Humboldt as a professor, bringing her students into the dunes to learn about restoration firsthand.

Yvonne earned her bachelor's degree in International Relations from Pomona College before continuing her education at UC Berkeley, where she received a master's degree in Wildland Resource Science, specializing in agroforestry, and a PhD in Wildland Resource Science, focusing on landscape ecology. Her studies took her to Sri Lanka, where she researched traditional agroforestry practices and their benefits to ecosystems and community livelihoods. After working in community-based natural resources management in Trinity County, she moved to Humboldt in 1998 and began teaching applied ecology and environmental planning at Humboldt State University, now Cal Poly Humboldt.

While teaching, Yvonne regularly brought students into the field to see how the concepts they discussed in class applied to actual resource management and conservation projects. Some of those trips were with Friends of the Dunes. Students helped remove invasive plants while learning how much time and labor go into restoring dune habitats. Others worked on early planning projects at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center, looking at trails, accessibility, and facilities.

Yvonne also spent plenty of time in the dunes with her family. She remembers exploring Lanphere and Ma-le'l Dunes on weekends and participating in the Coastal Naturalist Training program alongside her teenage daughter. These experiences gave her a connection to the dunes that extended well beyond her work at the university.

After retiring, Yvonne wanted to continue working with local conservation groups. She had known Friends of the Dunes for years through her teaching and was interested in the restoration projects the organization was taking on. She joined the Board of Directors in 2024 and now helps with organizational planning and community events. She also serves on the Board of Directors of the Watershed Research and Training Center and remains involved with conservation and restoration work in Sri Lanka.

When talking about Friends of the Dunes, Yvonne comes back to the importance of community involvement. Removing invasive plants and restoring native habitat are important, but she also recognizes the need for people who understand and support that work over the long term. "*I also know that the restoration won't last if it can't continue*," Yvonne explains. "*You need a functioning organization, but you also need people in the community to understand why that might be valuable and why it might be important.*" Yvonne would like to see Friends of the Dunes continue its ongoing restoration work throughout the dunes. She's also interested in expanding educational programs for children and teenagers, particularly those who might not otherwise have opportunities to spend time on the coast.

"*It's all about the community of place, participating in and understanding the place*," Yvonne shares. "*We all need to be responsible for our place and for the health and well-being of the ecosystems and the people in the place.*" For Yvonne, the dunes have been part of her life as a child, a parent, a professor, and now a Friends of the Dunes Board Member. We're glad she's continuing to share her time and experience with the organization.

For more information about volunteering, please email info@friendsofthedunes.org!

Community Education Highlights

By Verenice Sanchez, Outreach Manager

As the season's quiet shifts are guiding us into a slower pace, beach buckwheats have brushed the dunes with rusty red tints, migratory birds are on the move, and the Pacific chorus frogs have resumed their song. Throughout it all, our mission of stewardship and reciprocity continues to connect people to this rare and beautiful coastal dune ecosystem. This past season, we brought the dunes to the community through a lineup of walks, workshops, and talks:

Monday, June 22 | Summer Solstice Yoga

We welcomed the summer with a relaxing yoga session led by B Sweeny. Bathing the dunes in warmth, the sun created a truly magical backdrop as participants moved through each pose and breath.

Saturday, July 18 | 2nd Annual Pollinator Party

Over 50 guests joined us for a family-friendly celebration of nature's hardest-working insects. The afternoon featured live music, face painting, and hands-on crafts where kids learned about pollination through play, observed insects up close at our observation station, and explored mimicry and camouflage through art.

Saturday, August 8 | Science on Tap Trivia with Sequoia Siren

We partnered with Sequoia Siren at Paskenta Mad River Brewery to host a dune trivia night. Guests put their ecosystem knowledge to the test, competing for prizes and bragging rights.

Saturday, September 12 | Turmeric Sunprinting for Latino Conservation Week

In celebration of Latino Conservation Week and California Biodiversity Day, we collaborated with Ciencia para Todos for a unique turmeric sunprinting workshop. Participants headed into the dunes to thoughtfully forage materials, record local species on iNaturalist, and craft custom turmeric sunprinted canvas totes.

Friday, October 2 | Wadulh Restoration Presentation

As the featured presenters for Friday Night at the Refuge, we highlighted the ongoing work at the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge's Wadulh Unit, one of the largest dune restoration projects in history.

Saturday, October 3 | Science Fair with Friends of the Lost Coast

We traveled to Garberville with interactive displays for the Friends of the Lost Coast Science Day. It was a wonderful opportunity to engage families in coastal dune restoration while connecting with other organizations doing incredible work, from stream restoration to coastal conservation!

We would love to host you at one of these unique free events. ***Please stay tuned to friendsofthedunes.org/calendar for the latest offerings!***



Guests at interactive stations during Pollinator Party. Photo by Verenice Sanchez.

Spooky Dunes



By Jennifer Ortega, Education Manager

Spooktacular Event! On Saturday, October 24th, close to 100 kids and their adults participated in Spooky Dunes. They joined us for a tour through the dunes, meeting silly and spooky characters who inspired curiosity about the unique dune ecosystem. At each tour stop, there was learning to be had and a stamp on a treasure map. Once all stops were made, the kids returned to the Nature Center to pick a treasure from the pirate chest. Volunteers from the Redwood Chapter of Environmental Education and Interpretation, Friends of the Dunes Coastal Naturalists in training, Bay to Dunes guides, and College Corps Fellows dressed in costumes representing creatures found in the coastal dunes. Thank you to everyone who volunteered their valuable time to make Spooky Dunes a success.

Tunes in the Dunes

By Ashley Osia , Development Director

A huge **thank you** to everyone who made the inaugural **Tunes in the Dunes** fundraiser a success! We extend our sincerest appreciation to all the attendees, business partners, vendors, auction donors, volunteers, musicians, and friends without whom it would not be possible. The concert was held at Humboldt's best-kept-secret venue, the gorgeous Humboldt Coastal Nature Center, and celebrated coastal conservation with an unforgettable evening of live bands, delicious locally sourced food and beverages, and community spirit. Guests were treated to performances by hometown favorites The Compost Mountain Boys and A Banjo Makes 3 while taking in the stunning ocean view and savoring freshly grilled Humboldt Bay oysters. Bluegrass music filled the air, and smiles were abundant as we all danced around in the sand. Tunes in the Dunes not only provided a memorable experience but also played an important role in supporting our conservation efforts as well as free environmental education programs for both children and adults. Together, we partied with a purpose and raised essential funds that help continue the mission of Friends of the Dunes!



A sold-out crowd supports conservation and grooves to the Compost Mountain Boys and A Banjo Makes 3. Photos by Ashley Osia.

Thank You, New & Renewing Members

Marianne Ahokas
Tom & Katy Allen
Karen Angel & Martin Morgan
Susan Barnstein
Terry Bean
Kanan Beissert
Doug Blaisdell
Ruth Brown
Susan Buckley
Gretchen Campbell
Simona Carini
Crystal Carter
Robert & Laura Chapman
Samantha Chavez
Maisy Cooper
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Jesse Wheeler
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Rachel Whitaker
Marguerite Winnacott
Danielle Witten
Tad Wright
Katalin Young

Humboldt Coastal Nature Center



Humboldt Coastal Nature Center Winter Hours
Wednesday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
707-444-1397

Our gift shop at the Humboldt Coastal Nature Center is a vibrant stop for unique, locally inspired treasures. We are thrilled to announce the arrival of new items this fall that will highlight the incredible work of local artists and authors. These new pieces capture the essence of our region's natural beauty and make perfect gifts for nature lovers. Save the date for two **holiday sales** - *Small Business Saturday* (November 28) and our *Winter Wonders* (December 10-12) sale!

In addition to these artistic offerings, we're excited to feature signed copies of "Rewilding," a collaborative guide to gardening on the North Coast by local biologists Pete Haggard and Jane Monroe. Pete, with his extensive background in wildlife management, and Jane, with her deep-rooted expertise in biology, have combined their knowledge to create an invaluable resource for anyone eager to engage with the ecosystems in their back yard and beyond.

Visit our gift shop to explore these new additions and find the perfect gift that supports conservation in Humboldt County.

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Save the Date!

November 28 - HCNC Gift Shop Sale
December 2 - Dunes Cooperative Meeting
December 10-12 - HCNC Gift Shop Sale
December 21 - Winter Solstice Yoga
April 3 - Get Outside Gear Sale
Spring TBA - Pollinator Party



Visit friendsofthedunes.org/calendar for more details and a complete list of upcoming programs.

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