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WATER DISTRICT'S TREE-PLANTING PROGRAM BENEFITS LOCAL BUSINESSES AND PROTECTS CARMEL RIVER

The Monterey Peninsula Water Management District recently completed a tree-planting program that benefits local small businesses and improves the wildlife habitat along the Carmel River.

In late 1994, District was awarded a \$19,800 grant from the federal Small Business Administration (SBA) to hire local businesses to grow and plant 1,200 native riparian trees along the Carmel River. The SBA grant specified that all materials and labor used to grow and plant the trees must be provided by local small businesses.

The District's project was chosen from among 170 grant applications submitted from throughout the state.

The goal of the District's program was to propagate sycamore, elderberry and boxelder tree seedlings from seeds and cuttings collected from trees along the Carmel River, then plant the native seedlings in the District's river restoration areas to provide a more diverse and "natural" habitat. Typically, willows and cottonwoods are the only native tree species used in District erosion control projects because of their rapid growth and excellent erosion protection benefits.

The District's mission includes restoration of riparian habitat along the Carmel River to improve erosion protection, aquatic habitat for species such as steelhead, and other wildlife habitat. Riparian habitats that fringe rivers are considered to be some of the most damaged and threatened in California, with less than 10% of the historic riparian habitat area remaining statewide.

The District contracted with the Native Revival Nursery in Aptos for the propagation of the boxelder and sycamore seeds, with the Elkhorn Ranch for the growing of elderberry cuttings, and with Coburn's Flower Farm in Carmel Valley for the planting.

The tree seedlings took from between 7 and 12 months to sprout and grow large enough for transplanting. The trees were all planted last December at the District's Schulte Restoration Project. The Schulte Project began in the late 1980's to restore over 30 acres of stream terrace property damaged in the 1976-77 drought and lost to erosion during subsequent wet years.

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