

Community Comment
10/09/15
Sam Pennisi

Arcata's Redwood Park

My first experience with public service happened when I was a student at HSC. Yes, it was so long ago it was still a college. As a forestry major, I was interested in the community forest and the forestry club was looking for a service project. My personal interest was in recreation and environmental education so we approached the City Council about constructing a nature trail off the meadow. It was to be about a half a mile in length and would point out various points of interest. We had some beautiful redwoods, very large stumps, sprouts from the stumps that were quite large, other species growing from a redwood stump, and historic skid roads and springboard cuts.

~~The council liked the idea and offered tools and chips to help. We showed up every Saturday morning for almost 18 months. We cut trail, cleared brush, built bridges, and cut steps. We designed a brochure and had points of interest marked by a numbered post and told that points story. As you could imagine, it was a lot of work. Sometimes we had a big turnout and sometimes just a few of us showed up. We gave regular updates at council meetings so we got to practice our public speaking skills. The reception by the city to this idea and work that we did was a gift to a bunch of students. As an activity outside of our normal classes, this work taught us much. Most of my work mates went on to become professional foresters. In their jobs, they had to work in teams, keep to schedules, react to unexpected problems and get creative with the resources that were available. The work on this trail was a good introduction to a professional career along with the course and lab work that went along with a college degree.~~

When I was teaching planning and design classes, I went back to the city and the county and other communities and sought out projects that my students might do to give them a taste of a real hands on experience. We did more work in Redwood park and eventually developed a master plan that removed the road from the meadow, developed a creative playground and suggested other features that we see today. Many of the projects were done in small teams and presented in public at council meetings. That's good experience for a young person to have. I thank the various communities that worked with these college classes. The students were better for the experience.

~~Sharon and I walk daily on this trail for exercise and I am dismayed with what I see in the forest adjacent to the meadow. The trail is pretty well defined but people walk where they please. There are no signs that help them understand the damage caused to the forest floor vegetation and the soil compaction that occurs. The forest has become a campground in fact. But we don't allow camping but we also don't do anything about it. Two days this week, I counted no fewer than five tents within 50 yards of the meadow. The camping in random spots causes more compaction and the various side trails, up or down steep slopes adds to erosion problems. And, there are no facilities. Many mornings, the smell of human waste is stunning. When the rains come, and they will, the many steep side trails~~

haphazardly created will be an erosion problem. This will, of course, lead to problems in the streams.

The City takes good care of the harvesting that goes on. I would ask that we all take as good care with the people problems that are damaging our forest.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.