

New San Elijo Lagoon nursery sows native plants

By [Jared Whitlock](#) ([/staff/jared-whitlock/](#)) 10:05 a.m. Oct. 22, 2015



[David Kramer, principal of Oakhurst Builders, 2nd from left]

[San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy](#) officials and donors on Oct. 21 cut the ribbon on the San Elijo Nursery, which will help the conservancy restore the San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve. — *Jared Whitlock*

Native plants are needed to restore the San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve, but many of them can't be found commercially. That's where the new San Elijo Nursery, one of the few of its kind in Southern California, comes in.

San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy officials and donors on Oct. 21 cut the ribbon on the nursery, located near the reserve's Santa Inez trailhead, on the border of Cardiff and Solana Beach. In a cloth greenhouse onsite, conservancy biologists are overseeing an effort to propagate plants that are native to the 979-acre reserve. When mature, they'll be used to restore the lagoon, creating habitat for wildlife.

Another goal of the effort: public engagement.

"This offers another opportunity to bring the community to the reserve to learn about the habitat — its value, its importance," said Doug Gibson, conservancy executive director and principal scientist, during a speech at the ribbon cutting.

Students, along with the rest of the community, will be able to get their hands dirty at the nursery, learning the art and science of horticulture. The hope is that they'll also gain a greater appreciation of natural areas and land stewardship, Gibson said.

"Volunteers and students will help with planting, for example, or separating seeds from plants so they can be placed into soil," he said. "Someone might not be interested in volunteering to pull weeds, but maybe they're interested in this."

Gibson said he's wanted a lagoon nursery for years, but was initially reluctant to pursue it because similar endeavors across Southern California didn't last. But, he later told the Encinitas Advocate, the conservancy is now to the point where it has a strong volunteer base that will play a big role in the nursery over time.

And thanks to established conservancy education programs, volunteer stewards will be trained in gathering native plant seeds in the reserve and propagation.

"I'm confident this will be something that has enough support to continue and perpetuate itself," Gibson said.

The 1,000-square-foot nursery, which broke ground last spring, can hold 3,000 seedlings. Propagation will focus on native plants such as coastal sage scrub and southern maritime chaparral.

Many plants native to the reserve aren't commercially available. For those that are, the conservancy in the past often had to wait for contract growers to scour and collect seeds. Gibson said the nursery will make the conservancy more self-reliant, as well as reducing the group's carbon footprint and likely saving on costs.

"If there's a plant species we want to enhance, we'll already have a seed bank for it," he said.

The nursery will aid restoration in conservancy focus areas, such as Stonebridge Mesa, at the eastern end of the reserve.

Joe DeWolf, community restoration program specialist, said the conservancy will only collect and propagate plants that are native to the lagoon.

"We want to protect the genetic integrity of the lagoon, which is important for restoration," DeWolf said. The plants and seeds in the nursery aren't for sale, he noted.

The nursery is on San Diego County land, and it's made possible through a partnership with the county Department of Parks and Recreation. Funding and support came from the John & Elizabeth Leonard Family Foundation, Rancho Santa Fe Garden Club, Oakhurst Builders and Ned & DeeDee Reynolds.

Also, Supervisor Dave Roberts allocated county neighborhood reinvestment funds toward equipment purchases.

Visit www.sanelijo.org (<http://www.sanelijo.org>) to learn more about the conservancy and future events.

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