Bay-side restoration projects in full swing

For the first time, waters of a high tide flooded into a newly built channel carved through pasture along Freshwater Slough on Thursday.

In the morning, an excavator removed the earthen plug separating the new channel from Wood Creek and the slough, giving the tides the chance to wet ground they hadn't in decades. The system of meandering channels dug earlier this week are based on historical slough channels from before the diking and draining of Humboldt Bay to create farm land.

"It's been going to plan," said North Coast Regional Land Trust Project Manager Ryan Wells. The effort aims to restore lost habitat for salmon, especially federally protected coho salmon. Salt marsh and back channels where salmon can grow and escape high flows are in short supply around the bay since much of it was diked and drained.

The land trust bought the 54-acre property in 2005, and is doing the project on 29 acres.

Another 4,500 feet of the small Freshwater tributary Wood Creek is also being restored.

The project has already attracted a lot of attention: On Thursday, an applied ecological restoration class from Humboldt State University toured the grounds.

Another bay-area restoration project on the edge of Arcata has been in progress for the past three weeks. The city used an 1870 map to redesign the old meandering channel of Fickle Hill Creek, a small seasonal creek that connects to Beith Creek and Gannon Slough, two other waterways that have had work done on them as part of the city's Baylands project.

The creek in the lower reaches is essentially a straight ditch, and the project looks to create fish and wildlife habitat, while also relieving flooding upstream.

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RESTORE

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"It's building on past restoration efforts there, and we have some more phases to do next year," said Director of Environmental Services Mark Andre.

Dan Gale, a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Partners for Fish and Wildlife and Coastal Program said that the complex habitats that link upland freshwater systems to the bay are long gone, diked off in ways that aren't hospitable for fish. Projects like Wood Creek and Fickle Hill Creek can act as pilot projects that can show that agriculture and fisheries restoration can coexist, he said.

"Every little bit helps," Gale said.

Arcata Forest Technician Javier Nogueira creates a log habitat feature as part of restoration efforts on the seasonal Fickle Hill Creek in southern Arcata on Friday.