



WILDLANDS PROGRAM BUILDS LOCAL WILDFIRE RESILIENCY

Though the long-awaited rain has started, we haven't forgotten that California is on the heels of a devastating wildfire season, amidst one of the most severe droughts in over a century. For many, the "new" reality of fire is forcing us to reckon with an old paradigm of fire suppression and the dismissal of indigenous fire science and stewardship. Wildfire is a powerful teacher, demanding creative adaptation, community care, and ultimately the restoration of a healthy relationship with fire.

This year, the [Wildlands Program](#) at OAEC has been busy with LOTS of hands-on land stewardship, skill building, and community organizing, while navigating (and hopefully one day, changing) the rules at the local, state, and federal levels. Through grants, restoration projects with our neighbors, and collaborations with vocational training organizations, we are using our demonstration site to build the capacity of our local area to become more fire-literate and fire-resilient. Fire doesn't recognize fence lines or property boundaries, so it's critical that our community — from individual landowners to public land managers — continues to think and act as an interconnected whole.



In October, after months of pushing paper to secure the grant, new Wildlands Program staff, Hannah Wilton, gets her hands dirty and kicks off OAEC's participation in the North Bay Forest Improvement Program!

On the fire mitigation front, OAEC was awarded a grant in July through the [North Bay Forest Improvement Program](#) of the Rebuild NorthBay Foundation and Gold Ridge RCD for on-site forest stewardship projects that reduce wildfire risk and promote forest health. OAEC is also in the process of securing matching funds outside of this program through the Natural Resource Conservation Service. Building on decades of fire mitigation work, we were excited to once again tackle areas of dense vegetation and high fuel-load in our mixed hardwood and conifer forest with our own OAEC staff crew, Circuit Rider, and Spye General Engineering. As part of a broader regenerative disturbance strategy, we are also joining forces with Fire Forward for a possible understory burn this winter and exploring an opportunity to graze sheep across the grasslands that connect OAEC and two neighboring parcels.

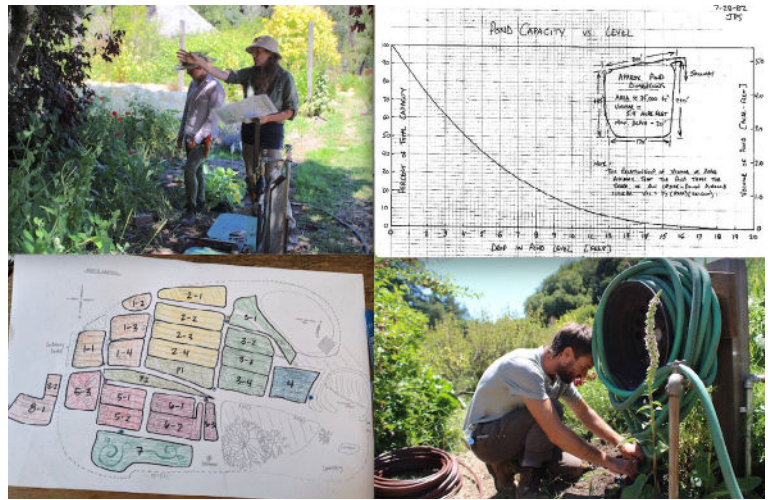
With various limbing and thinning projects underway, we recognized the opportunity to stack functions and use the brush to restore a number of eroding gullies on-site. Strategically packing these channels with biomass slows the flow and traps sediment from going downstream to Dutch Bill Creek, one of the most critical watersheds for the recovery of endangered Coho salmon and threatened Steelhead Trout in the Russian River system. To do this legally, we had to acquire two permits from the State Water Board and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Through this pilot project, OAEC hopes to model solutions that integrate fire and water resiliency and create efficient pathways for land tenders to implement low-tech restoration.

MOTHER GARDEN ADAPTS TO DROUGHT CONDITIONS

Despite OAEC's many efforts to save water through our [Conservation Hydrology Demonstration Site](#), the [Mother Garden](#) was not spared from the challenges of this year's unprecedented drought. The pond, which was built in 1978 in response to the last mega-drought in 1976-77, supplies all of the agricultural water for the entire OAEC site (landscaping, gardens, nursery, lower greenhouse, orchards, animals, etc.) as a separate source from the potable well. Fed entirely by surface water run-off, the pond normally fills to capacity by late December, but this past year, it never refilled. In the summer of 2021, the pond had never been that low in its 43-year history. After installing additional meters and crunching numbers from historic usage and rainfall data, the OAEC staff and residents collectively realized that we could not continue to "pre-prepare" for an emergency. This was the emergency.

Much of the landscaping around our newer main buildings had been installed originally using drip irrigation, but the main agricultural gardens and older landscaping sections needed to be converted to drip, which included some costly upgrades, such as a new low-micron filter. Many garden beds were immediately retired for the season, and we strengthened our resolve to transition even more of the garden to perennial food crops and drought-tolerant landscaping over time.

We were thrilled to see that in the south garden – the sunniest, hottest garden – according to our calculations, the conversion to drip is saving over 70% and our overall ag water usage came down by 73%! By early October, we were close to being back on track with historic pond levels.



Conversion to a style of dry summer gardening that more closely mimics the natural cycles of our California climate will mean a change in aesthetics, but we are confident that the Mother Garden will be as beautiful and abundant as ever!

Thankfully, with the recent late October 2021 deluge, the pond is full again. However, climate change is here and we will never return to "normal." This summer's pond crisis was a wake up call that our water budget can no longer be based on a yearly cycle, but rather, we will have to save more in the "pond piggy bank" for the extreme years ahead.

As always, we will continue to experiment, try new techniques, learn from our mistakes, and share what we've learned. And while individual action is key, collective action is paramount. Our best efforts at the community scale will only be a drop in the bucket compared to the actions of the largest water users and climate change exacerbators.

OAEC WELCOMES NEW FISCALLY SPONSORED PROJECTS

Under the leadership of outgoing Finance Director Jenyng Wu, OAEC pivoted our [Movement Building](#) efforts during the pandemic closure towards streamlining and upgrading systems of support for our Fiscally Sponsored Projects (FSPs). Fiscal sponsorship gives an administrative home to new social change organizations who don't have or need their own 501-c3 by providing accounting, tax, HR, strategy and fundraising support. We have had a long history of offering fiscal sponsorship, including our flagship FSP, CalCAN, which grew from a tiny seed of an idea to a large statewide coalition over the course of their ten years at OAEC. We have taken on a few new projects this year, prioritizing groups with whom we have had long-standing programmatic relationships. OAEC is honored to play this important role to host and incubate nascent social movement projects and programs, and we are proud to feature their work here:



[People Over Plastic \(POP\)](#) is a BIPOC Storytelling Collective committed to dismantling systems of oppression connected to the most controversial material on the planet: PLASTIC. With 99% of plastic coming from fossil fuels today, POP believes conversations about the climate crisis AND the plastic crisis must center people of color and indigenous voices who are most impacted. In POP's podcast, Shilpi Chhodray, long-time communications leader in the #BreakFreeFromPlastic movement, brings listeners stories from inspiring individuals who challenge the unjust social, political and economic systems that are connected to the plastic pollution crisis.



[Peak Plastic Foundation](#) creates integrated storytelling campaigns to fight plastic production and pollution and to empower global collaborative action. Founders Stiv Wilson and Megan Ponder co-produced a documentary called *The Story of Plastic* that won an Emmy Award this year for Outstanding Writing! The film tells the hidden story of plastic pollution, from production to incineration, and features heroes from the #Break-FreeFromPlastic movement who are rising up against big plastic around the world. If you missed our online screening, you can [watch](#) the film for free on YouTube until the end of November. Congrats Stiv and Megan!



[Celebrating Women's Leadership in Food \(CWLF\)](#) advances a social movement of women in food and farming by creating spaces for women to celebrate, connect across difference, build trust, and create community. CWLF seeks to cultivate new forms of leading together to shift paradigms of power and meaningfully address ecological crises and social inequity. This year, CWLF held a 5-part series in the 21-day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge and coordinated rural farmers to distribute over 10,000 plants to Bay Area urban farms.



[Tribal EcoRestoration Alliance \(TERA\)](#) is a multi-tribal coalition based in Lake County, California in the ancestral territories of Eastern Pomo, South-eastern Pomo, Lake Miwok, and Wappo people, and is a collaborative that works to revitalize ecology, economy, and culture through indigenous-led stewardship. TERA brings together traditional knowledge with restoration ecology, preparing individuals for meaningful careers that help heal communities and relationships with the land.



Fenceline Watch, based on the Gulf Coast surrounded by fossil fuel infrastructure, is a response to the rapid oil and gas expansion in the midst of a global climate crisis and is dedicated to the eradication of toxic multi-generational harm on communities living along the fenceline of industry. This October, Fenceline Watch joined hundreds of other environmental justice advocates in Washington, DC to demand that the Biden administration declare a climate emergency and stop the expansion of new and current fossil fuel projects.



Leap Lab is a network of science centers throughout the US that model self-reliance to build thriving communities. Leap Lab offers innovative, regionally-appropriate educational resources in ecology and sustainable systems to school and community groups through exhibits, curricula, expeditions, DIY kits and more.

BEAVER RESTORATION WITH MAIDU SUMMIT CONSORTIUM

OAEC has been working with the [Maidu Summit Consortium](#) (MSC) since 2018 to support tribal members in planning for and implementing innovative restoration practices on their ancestral lands at Tāsmam Koyóm, including the development of a [Beaver Recruitment Strategy](#). Completed in 2020, the strategy outlines low-disturbance restoration approaches that are culturally in alignment with Maidu Traditional Ecological Knowledge to encourage the return of beaver as a vital component in restoring wet meadow and riparian function in the valley. Many of the sub-tributaries of Yellow Creek have excellent conditions to support beaver recolonization and could be further enhanced with the addition of Process-Based Restoration (PBR) instream structures (aka Beaver Dam Analogues) placed in key locations. OAEC is working with Swift Water Design to train Tribal members and other project partners on how to install Beaver Dam Analogues, and together over the past two years, have completed 103 structures and reactivated 3.54 miles of stream channel.

This fall, the Dixie Fire burned several sites important to and managed by MSC, including Tāsmam Koyóm. Much of the enhanced riparian zone around Yellow Creek is recovering rapidly from the burn due to increased hydration of the valley floor. As Tāsmam Koyóm recovers, OAEC and other restoration partners are providing ecological design and adaptive management strategy to support MSC. Working with MSC to demonstrate the efficacy of beaver and PBR in a post-fire context will further legitimize and make it more accessible to other tribes and land managers in the arid west.



Instream structures helped to rehydrate the floodplain, enabling the vegetation to resprout quickly (compared to the torched forest in the background) after the Dixie Fire burned Tāsmam Koyóm.

SEED COLLECTION NAMED FOR KENT WHEALY



It is our great pleasure to announce the dedication and naming of the OAEC seed collection in honor of seed preservation visionary and mentor, Kent Whealy. Kent co-founded the celebrated [Seed Savers Exchange](#) (SSE) which became the country's largest cooperatively run, non-governmental seed bank. In the 1980's, Kent visited the gardens here numerous times and invited Mother Garden Biodiversity Program Director, Doug Gosling, to become the curator and grower for parts of the SSE collection, including lettuce, basil, and artichoke varieties, a few of which continue to be grown out in the OAEC gardens to this day and still cannot be

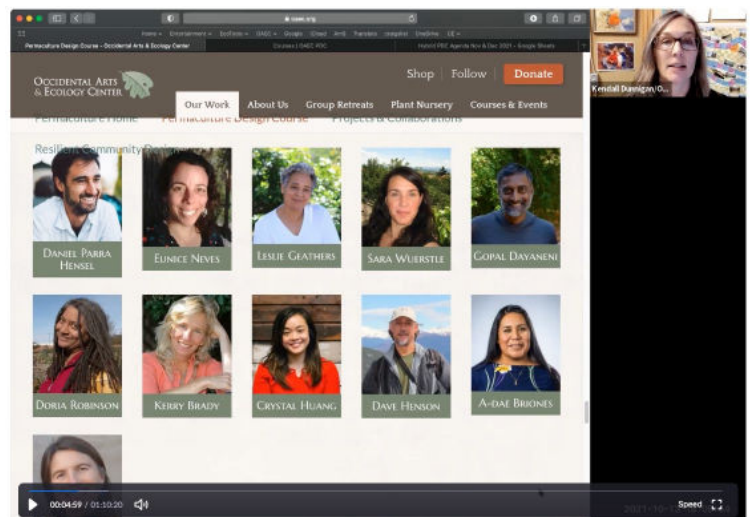
found commercially. It was this work with Kent and SSE that inspired major growth of the OAEC [seed program](#). We now curate a collection of over 1,000 open-pollinated heirloom varieties of food crops, culinary and medicinal herbs, fiber, dye, and other plants. We share this living collection with the public through OAEC's [Mother Garden Biodiversity Nursery](#) and by hosting California's three largest seed exchanges at the Ecological Farming Conference, the Bioneers Conference, and Sonoma County's Community Seed Exchange, which will resume post-Covid.

Following Kent's passing in 2018, and in honor of Kent, the Ceres Trust made a very generous, sustaining, multi-year grant to the OAEC Mother Garden Biodiversity Program. We have deep gratitude for Kent and for his extraordinary contributions to a healthier planet rich with beauty, diversity, and abundance available to all for generations to come.

PERMACULTURE DESIGN COURSE PIVOTS TO ONLINE & HYBRID FORMATS

Last year, the [Resilient Community Design](#) program synthesized 25 years of experience teaching permaculture into a comprehensive and accessible online course. The March online course had over 100 participants, tripling the number of students from our usual on-site trainings, while also reaching a more diverse and international audience than ever before. For the webinars, we were able to feature more BIPOC and social justice speakers, tapping into a wider national and international group of long-time OAEC colleagues, ensuring that our PDC speaks to the diverse voices of the communities that it serves. Furthermore, we apportioned funds from OAEC's Movement Building Retreat Fund to subsidize part or all of the course fees for groups of key staff and/or community members from a number of social change partner organizations, including Urban Tilth, the Indigenous Environmental Network, Sogorea Te' Land Trust and Living Vikasa Vidya Vanam, a progressive land-based school in Gollagudem, India.

This fall, we will open our doors to students in a new 'hybrid' format that is the best of both worlds: online foundational lessons that prepare students for a 7-day hands-on skills and design intensive here at our site. We truly believe this [PDC 2.0](#) will be our best offering yet!



PANDEMIC IMPACT ON OAEC

Like so many, OAEC faced the enormous challenge this past year of continuing to navigate ever-changing Covid restrictions. While making decisions to protect the safety of our community residents, staff, and guests, OAEC has worked exceptionally hard to stay financially solvent, to retain and support our staff, and most importantly to continue and even expand our social change programs.

Starting mid-March of 2020 when Covid hit, we were forced to cancel all of the many workshops and [Movement Building](#) retreats we had scheduled, and we remained closed to all groups and events until late fall 2021. Pre-Covid, about 35% of our income came from such on-site activities, as we've endeavored over the years to diversify our revenue sources to not be over-reliant on donor and foundation support. While these necessary cancellations have created a big hole in our budget, in the long run, we believe OAEC is on a good financial footing. Our many dedicated funders stuck with us, and we successfully accessed federal Covid relief funds. Our off-site program work continues as strong as ever, and we've used this 'down time' to continue to upgrade our facilities, including breaking ground on new barn construction after our beloved barn burned down last year.

Beyond necessary changes to OAEC's daily activities and operations, we also faced larger questions about our response and responsibility as a social change organization in this time of increasing economic inequality, exacerbated by the pandemic and ongoing climate crisis. Continuing to share OAEC's design methodologies and models for community resiliency has never felt more important as a framework and strategic tool for communities seeking just and regenerative pathways forward.

The 2022 calendar is already filling fast with retreat bookings and we look forward to welcoming leading social and environmental movement organizations back to the Center as soon as possible for refuge, rest, reflection, and creative and courageous planning in these critical times.



The rise in the highly contagious delta variant put a wrench in our plan to reopen to guests earlier this summer, but we have begun to hold garden volunteer day (by [RSVP](#) only) and hope to open our doors to a handfull of small Movement Building retreats and Permaculture Design courses this fall.