

Oak Tree Planting Project¹

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Abstract: An Oak Tree Planting Project was conducted during 1989/90 in San Luis Obispo County by the Integrated Hardwood Range Management Program (IHRMP)/Central Coast. The local media and an IHRMP workshop were used to publicize the Planting Project and give information on the status of oaks (*Quercus* spp.) in California and oak planting techniques. Outreach efforts resulted in participation in the Oak Tree Planting Project by homeowners and ranchers as well as by 4-H, environmental, school, community, and homeowner-association groups: over 3,500 acorns were planted at about 1,200 sites (three acorns per site). The Oak Tree Planting Project provided a good opportunity for community awareness and involvement in helping ensure that oak trees will be around for future Californians to enjoy.

California has lost about one million acres of oak woodlands during the past 45 years to development and other causes of removal (Bolsinger 1988). In addition to this, several species of oaks are not regenerating well (Griffin 1971, 1976, Muick and Bartolome 1986). In response to these concerns the IHRMP was developed in 1986 to maintain and where possible increase the acreage of California's oak rangeland resource to provide wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, wood and livestock products, high quality water supply, and aesthetic value. The IHRMP realizes the importance of involving and educating the public and that restoration of the oak woodlands can be accomplished in part through the use of educational programs and planting projects.

The Oak Tree Planting Project was an educational program conducted in San Luis Obispo County by the IHRMP/Central Coast. It was designed to use public participation to increase awareness of the importance of oak woodlands. It was felt that a hands-on experience would leave a valuable impression on the individuals participating in the project, as well as increase declining oak populations.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

The objectives of the Oak Tree Planting Project were to (1) inform the people of San Luis Obispo county of the importance of having oak trees on and surrounding their property, (2) replace oak trees in some places where they were no longer growing, and (3) monitor growth and survival of the planted trees. The Oak Tree Planting Project was broken into four phases.

Phase One.—A workshop was held in September 1989 to generate interest in the project and to discuss the importance of oaks in our environment. This workshop provided information on the value of oaks, oak identification, collection and storage of acorns, oak planting and protection techniques, weed control, irrigation, and an example of a successful planting project on the central coast.

Phase Two.—The IHRMP/Central Coast collected acorns from the three common tree-sized oaks that occur in San Luis Obispo County: valley oak (*Quercus lobata*), blue oak (*Q. douglasii*), and coast live oak (*Q. agrifolia*). The acorns were stored for later planting by IHRMP and to give to homeowners, ranchers, and groups that needed acorns for planting.

Phase Three.—At the start of the oak-planting season in December 1989, a publicity campaign was launched (local newspapers, radio, and IHRMP newsletter) (fig. 1) to inform local residents of the Oak Planting Project and the availability of acorns and planting directions from the IHRMP. Also, a follow-up letter was sent to workshop participants to determine what assistance they might need for planting.

Phase Four.—Beginning in December 1989, acorns were planted. The IHRMP established two demonstration sites in San Luis Obispo County. Each demonstration site consisted of 40 planting sites, each cleared of weeds and protected with a wire enclosure. The IHRMP also coordinated planting activities of individuals and groups by providing acorns and helping to connect acorn planters with planting sites and available planting sites with planters.

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Figure 1—The Oak Tree Planting Project and the availability of information on oak planting was advertised by newspaper, radio, and newsletter.

PROJECT RESULTS

About 70 people attended the workshop of which 15 signed up to participate in planting. The greatest response was generated from radio and newspaper publicity at the start of the planting season. Many individuals and several agencies and community groups participated in planting activities (fig. 2).

The California Conservation Corps (CCC) assisted with the demonstration sites. They dug holes, planted acorns, constructed and installed aluminum screen protection cages, and cleared competing weeds from around each planting site. Several San Luis Obispo County 4-H groups volunteered their time to individuals and community groups with large areas to plant (fig. 3). For example, the 4-H groups helped the San Luis Obispo County Recreation and Parks Department plant a site at the Lopez Lake Recreation Area, and assisted the Toucan Terrace

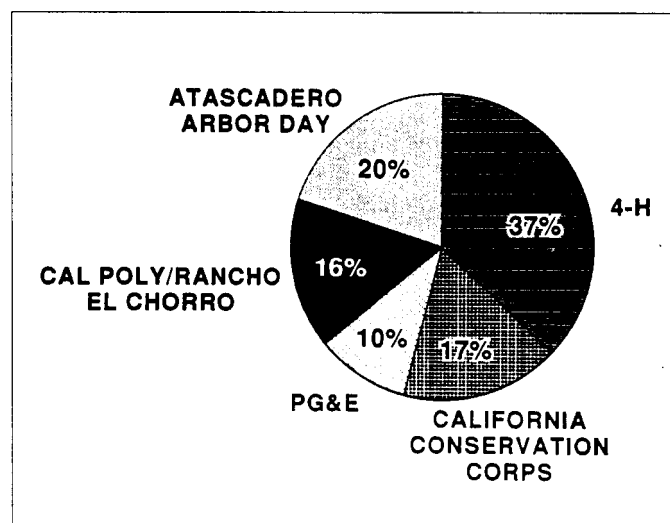


Figure 2—Newspapers, radio, and workshop publicity resulted in participation in the IHRMP Oak Tree Planting Project by individuals, several agencies, and community groups.



Figure 3—UCCE 4-H assisted community groups with planting.

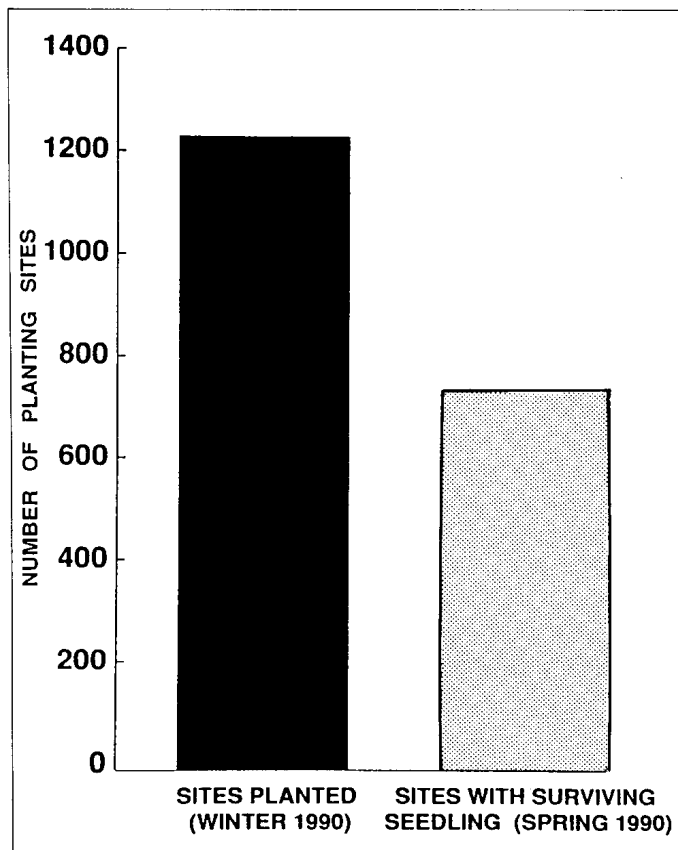


Figure 4—The participants in the Oak Tree Planting Project, planted and protected over 3,500 acorns at about 1,200 planting sites (three acorns per site) in winter 1989/90. Most plantings produced a healthy oak seedling.

Homeowners Association plant and protect 50 live oaks on 27 acres of "green space" along Highway 101 in Pismo Beach, California. PG&E sponsored a day of tree planting on the Santa Margarita Ranch just north of San Luis Obispo; approximately 10 volunteers planted 100 valley and blue oaks.

Several spin-offs were generated by the Oak Tree Planting Project. For example, Natural Resource Management (NRM) students from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, explained the values of oaks and planting techniques to a class of 6th-grade students in San Luis Obispo County. The following week, the 6th graders and NRM students met at Rancho El Chorro Environmental Education Center in San Luis Obispo County and planted 80 coast live oaks. The 6th graders will help care for the seedlings and monitor survival and growth. The NRM students hope this becomes a long-term, on-going project between Cal Poly and Rancho El Chorro, with more planting and research.

In all, the IHRMP gave away over 3,500 acorns and about 1,200 sites (three acorns per site) were planted and protected (fig. 4). Of those sites planted, response to a mail questionnaire indicated that over half germinated and were doing well in June 1990.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our efforts in the Oak Tree Planting Project were very well rewarded. This type of project is an ideal opportunity for community awareness and involvement, as well as a method to increase oak populations. It was apparent that best results were achieved when careful instructions and on-site demonstrations of acorn planting and protection techniques were provided to participants. Furthermore, a long-term commitment to the protection and maintenance of the planting sites seems necessary for long-term survival of the planted oak trees.

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