

**When English Ivy Comes A-Creepin’**  
**Jacoby Creek Land Trust Receives Grant to Control Invasive Plant**  
By Shannon Tracey, Jacoby Creek Land Trust

Walking through the forests of Jacoby Creek on a sunny day, the casual observer might never notice an invader lurking in the underbrush. Yet, a glance downward will reveal a dangerous pest beneath the soles of your shoes. It is English Ivy, an invasive weed from Europe whose spread endangers the balance of nature in coastal areas like the Jacoby Creek watershed.

Luckily, the forests of Jacoby Creek have an ally in their struggle to survive the English Ivy invasion. The Jacoby Creek Land Trust recently received just over \$9,000 from the US Fish and Wildlife Service to remove English Ivy. Under the Land Trust’s lead, the California Conservation Corps, youth groups and community volunteers will take action to rid lower riparian areas of Jacoby Creek of this ecological intruder.

**Attack of the Virulent Vines**

English Ivy, *Hedera helix*, has found its way into the wild spaces of Humboldt County. While most non-natives fail to gain a significant foothold in an unfamiliar environment, a few species like English Ivy spread aggressively through the areas they enter. These so-called *invasive weeds* displace the native vegetation, steadily changing diverse plant communities into a mono-weed culture.

English Ivy possesses a unique combination of traits that makes it a particular threat to our coastal redwood forests. Unlike other Humboldt County invasives like Pampas grass and Scotch broom, English Ivy does not depend on the direct sunlight of roadsides and other disturbed areas to take root. Instead, it can grow in the low-light conditions of the mature forest floor, taking over the forest from within. What’s more, English Ivy then sends vines up the trunks of trees – even the giant redwood – that encircle and constrict the growth of the tree. This fatal squeeze can bring down trees of all sizes, resulting in a condition known as an “Ivy desert” – an ecologically barren area covered in insidiously lush-looking English Ivy.

**Eradication and Education**

With the funding from US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Land Trust will hire a California Conservation Corps crew to clear about 2,500 square feet of English Ivy over three days. Then, local volunteers will plant trees to prevent re-establishment of new vines. Says executive director Susan Ornelas, “We are excited to involve the community in a hands-on project that will improve our local watershed.”

Ivy removal is slow but satisfying work, as the plant’s thick, matted roots require persistence to cut and extract from the soil. To save trees strangled by vines, ivy-fighters cut out a foot-high ring through the ivy around the tree. The section of plant that is removed kills the ivy by cutting off the flow of water and nutrients between leaves and roots. The dead vines will drop from the trunk and healthy tree growth will resume.

Ultimately, prevention is the best way to keep English Ivy from causing further damage to our North Coast forests. “English Ivy is a popular landscaping choice with disastrous consequences,” Ornelas notes. Introduced as ground cover in private homes and businesses, English Ivy escapes to dominate wild areas. “I have seen pieces of ivy plants come down the creek during a winter storm and insert themselves on the shore farther downstream.” says Ornelas, “It’s not a good idea to pile ivy prunings near the creek.”

To do your part in protecting wild places from English Ivy, begin at home. When gardening or landscaping, choose native plants, or non-invasive exotics that fit into the ecology and climate of the redwood coast. “Native plants attract native birds and wildlife, and require less tending and watering than non-native species” says Ornelas.

“By working together, we can keep English Ivy from destroying the unique ecosystems of the redwood region,” she says. “And everyone benefits from that.”