



***In Memoriam
Donna Olsen
1931-2020***

If you have trudged across the uneven grasslands of the Warm Springs Unit of the Refuge and been deeply impressed by what you saw, you can thank Donna Olsen.

It was Donna and our friend Stuart Guedon who said to me one day, "Come on, we'll take you out to a place that will astonish you." When we came to the edge of the Carruf property there was an immense sign, almost as big as one of those Foster and Kleiser advertising signs that used to line our highways. As I recall, it said, "Available now. Will build to suit." We stumbled along across the bumpy ground until suddenly spread out before us was a sight that took my breath away--an array of purple, yellow and orange flowers, Downingias and Contra Costa Goldfields that made up something I had never seen or imagined before, a vernal pool. I realized then that we would have to do everything in our power to acquire that beautiful site.

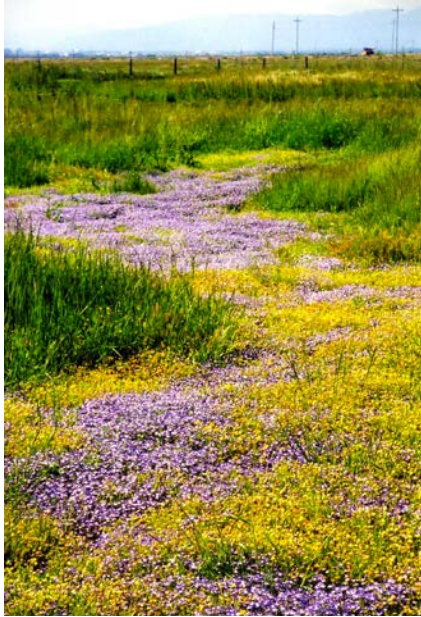


Photo by Donna Olsen

It was a period of a slight depression in our economy so the Carruf property ended up owned by the Sanwa Bank. Donna Olsen must have heard some development was in the offing, so she managed to phone the president of the bank at his office in Los Angeles and spend a half hour telling him in no uncertain terms what was going to happen if he tried to build on that land. She described every agency she could think of that could throw up roadblocks. Not only that, but she warned him the local citizens would rise up against him! With anyone else this conversation might have been haranguing, but Donna would have used that sweet, persuasive voice. The bank president could not have known he was speaking to a beautiful woman, but he would certainly have been impressed by her soothing voice.

The next thing we heard was that the Fish and Wildlife Service was purchasing the land! I'm sure Donna was amused when the President of Sanwa Bank showed up for the dedication of the land.

Unknown to us at the beginning, other than the flowers, there were two endangered or threatened species, the Vernal Pool Tadpole Shrimp and California Tiger Salamander.



Photos courtesy of USFWS



Adding Warm Springs--which now totals 719 acres -- to the Refuge would seem a great legacy for most people, but it was not all that Donna accomplished. In 1971, after the first Earth Day, Donna and colleagues did what was revolutionary at the time, establishing a recycling center that became the Tri-City Ecology Center. Over time she held every office in that organization and as of this next year, in a remarkable show of steadfastness she would have celebrated 50 years with the organization.

Donna was an original member and co-chair of this committee, CCCR. After two or three years, I thought about cutting back the monthly meetings to every other month and she would have none of it. "Regular monthly meeting are how organizations stay strong."

Donna forever changed the shoreline of San Francisco Bay.

Farewell and thank you, Donna.

Florence M. LaRiviere