A butterfly is a caterpillar with a vision
Mission Statement

Located in Sunol Valley at the confluence of Alameda Creek and the Arroyo de la Laguna, the Alameda Creek Watershed Center provides a community gathering place where history and science come alive. The Center inspires generations of visitors to discover and understand the history of water development and agriculture in the Sunol Valley and help protect this watershed and its natural resources.
Vision Statement

To cultivate an increasingly informed public that understands the significance of Alameda Creek, its watershed, its role in the SFPUC water system, and its biological diversity, and reflects this understanding by conserving water and taking action to protect and restore its natural resources.
We don’t need more information. We need to know what it means. We need a story that explains what it means and makes us feel like we fit in there somewhere.

Annette Simmons, The Story Factor
Theme:

Here at the Sunol Water Temple, we honor the watershed and the water that flows through it.
At this unique confluence of waterways, we also see the confluence of people and nature, and we are reminded of the significance of water in sustaining both.
Nature’s Chorus

Red-winged blackbird (Agelaius phoeniceus)
The bright-shaded, showy female lives in marshes high and dry, sometimes miles away, looking for insects in a meadow. It lives near areas that are home to a diverse array of species, including the Alameda Creek watershed.

Western meadowlark (Sturnella neglecta)
Look for this bird singing in a meadow or field. It has a clear call that carries across the open, grassy areas, making it perfect for searching and hunting. There it finds insects in low grass among low-lying plants.

Golden eagle (Aquila chrysaetos)
The Alameda Creek watershed has the highest concentration of nesting pairs of golden eagles in the world. The large raptor needs high vantage points to look for small mammals and other prey. Its strength though is not matched by its weak call—a whistle or a yelp.

Western toad (Anaxyrus boreas)
You’ll find the western toad in marshes, meadows, and creeks throughout the Alameda Creek watershed. Like other toads, its skin secretes a poison called bufotenin as a defense against predators.

Western rattlesnake (Crotalus oreganus oreganus)
A rattlesnake’s rattle is used to warn prey of danger by making a hissing sound. As its name suggests, this species is found in parts of North America's southwestern deserts.

Coyote (Canis latrans)
One of the most vocal mammals in North America, a coyote’s call ranges from loud howls and barks in the distance, to soft, loping mechanical noises. Its ability to communicate allows it to effectively perform a variety of tasks, such as hunting, foraging, and communication.
Native Land. Native People

The Ohlone Legacy
Ancestral Ohlone-speaking tribal groups likely arrived in this area over 5,000 years ago. The diverse landscapes, from the mountains to the bay, sustained their lives and culture. As literate people of nature, the Ohlone read these landscapes, timed their harvests and festivals to the seasons, and actively managed the land with fire to increase yields.

Loss of a Way of Life
When the Spanish arrived in 1769, the Ohlone way of life changed forever. They were brought into the mission system and forced to abandon their language, traditions, and religion. When Mission San José was secularized in 1836, most native people did not return to pre-mission native ways.

Cultural and Spiritual Revival
Yet later, tribal members revitalized their languages and religious (Kaksu) and healing ceremonies. Intermarried missionized Bay and Plains Miwok, Yokut, and Ohlone families gathered on rancherias near present-day Sunol, Pleasanton, and Niles during the Ghost Dance, a revival of spiritual traditions that was celebrated during the 1870s as the religion of the round house (Tupentak). Today, a different renaissance is taking place. The Musquekna Ohlone and two other Costanoan tribal groups are revitalizing their native heritage and bringing life back to their language, songs, dances, and stories.
The Rise of Ranching

Agricultural Heritage
You might see cattle on watersheds lands today. They are representative of the valley’s rich ranching history that began with the Mission San José. Founded in 1797, the mission used the area's temperate Mediterranean climate, abundant winter rainfall, and ample creek water to support crops, horses, sheep, and the largest herd of cattle of any California mission.

Sunol's Namesake
When Mexico secularized the missions in 1834, the land was distributed for private ownership as ranchos. The town of Sunol takes its name from two of the first owners of the property where it stands: Antonio María Suñol and María de los Dolores Bernal de Suñol.
Cattle Brands

Mission San José
Established 1797

Rancho San Ramon
José Maria Amador
Established 1834

Koopmann Ranch
Established 1918 to present day
Harnessing the Water

**Calaveras Reservoir**
The Spring Valley Water Company first purchased farmland in Calaveras Valley to supply water to San Francisco. With mules, blasts of water, and eventually steam power, crews cleared the hillsides and started building the original Calaveras Reservoir in 1913. The Spring Valley Water Company was San Francisco’s sole water supplier in 1930 when the city purchased the private company.

**Mule Power**
Long valued for their strength and stamina, mules served as pack animals in ancient Egypt and Greece and draft animals on American farms. Before being replaced by the combustion engine, mules also played a significant role in the construction of roads, railways, the Calaveras Reservoir, and even the Panama Canal.
The Making of a Temple

Creating a Monument
To celebrate their pure water source—and raise the public profile of their business—the Spring Valley Water Company commissioned a monument. Bay Area architect Willis Polk modeled the structure after the ancient Roman Temple of Vesta in Tivoli, Italy, built in 80 B.C.E. The Sunol Water Temple was built in 1910.

Reverence for the Water
The temple serves as a focal point for the watershed, both figuratively and literally. It’s a figurative reminder of the water’s significance to downstream communities, both natural and human. It literally stands at the confluence of Alameda Creek and Arroyo de la Laguna. There it gathers water collected in the filter galleries.
Morphological changes in steelhead trout
Ranching in the Sunol Valley
Virtual watershed wildlife trading cards
Changes to the Alameda Creek watershed over time
Niles Canyon Railroad and

History of Sunol
Architecture of Sunol Water Temple
Muwekma Ohlone
Wander Through a Watershed

Scores of landscapes exist within the Alameda Creek watershed. On this Watershed Discovery Trail, you'll learn about key habitats from evergreen forests to aromatic sage scrub. Each habitat can be examined separately, but they are inextricably linked; watershed plants and animals thrive or struggle together.
Chaparral

Woody, drought- and frost-tolerant plants tangle together to create a dense, nearly impenetrable thicket. Chamise, manzanita, hollyleaf cherry, and toyon provide foraging and nesting habitat for birds and small mammals like gophers and deer mice. They in turn attract larger mammals like cougar, coyote, long-tailed weasel, gray fox, and bobcat. Both mixed chaparral and chamise-dominated chaparral are found in the watershed.
Valley Needlegrass

Grasslands cover the hills and valleys of the Alameda Creek watershed, blanketing them with wildflowers in the spring and gold-stemmed grasses in the heat and drought of summer. Here you will find both native and non-native grasses, forbs, and wildflowers. Native plants include purple needlegrass, western lupine, golden yarrow, and silver bush lupine.
Early Water Works

A Dam for Drinking Water
Built by the Spring Valley Water Company, the Sunol Dam began operation in 1901 at the upstream end of Niles Canyon. Instead of diverting water like the Niles Dam, it forced a backup of groundwater to flood Sunol Valley's gravel beds. The water would then collect in the filter galleries and travel to San Francisco through an aqueduct.

Restoring Natural Flow
The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission removed both the Niles and Sunol dams in 2006. Though they were important elements of early urban water supply, they were also a barrier to fish migration and other fish that travel upstream in Alameda Creek to spawn.

In the 1840s, José de Jesús Vallejo became the first to divert water from Alameda Creek for commerce. He built Niles Dam, near the mouth of what we now call Niles Canyon, and a 2,700 foot aqueduct to carry the water needed to power his flour mill. The SFPUC removed the dam in 2006, but part of the aqueduct is still visible today.

When the Spring Valley Water Company purchased Vallejo's dam, they reinforced and enlarged the aging structure with rocks and concrete.
Drawn from Antiquity

Blending with the Environment

Polk studied the surrounding landscape and noticed that it was comprised of a colonnaded temple. He decided to emulate this as a guide for the construction of the temple. After Polk's death, admirers of his work inscribed a tribute to him on the temple's top step.

When architect Willis Polk designed this temple, he wanted it to stand out as a monument, yet harmonize with its environment. He modeled it after the ancient Roman Temple of Vesta in Tivoli, Italy. It too rests over and celebrates a source of water.
The Water Beneath Your Feet

Over many thousands of years, ancient streams etched the Sunol Valley into California’s landscape and deposited gravel and sand on the valley floor. These sands and gravels are a natural filter for the water located beneath the Valley’s surface.

A Subterranean Cistern

When the Spring Valley Water Company began developing water supplies in Alameda Creek, it built nearly 9,000 feet of underground “filter galleries” to capture and channel subsurface flows to the Water Temple. Over 100 years old, a portion of the filter gallery is still used today; it lies under the grassy “filter beds” outside this Center. Today only a small amount of water is diverted into the Hetch Hetchy Regional Water System. The rest of the water is released into Alameda Creek.
Along the Banks of a Stream

The Muwekma Ohlone, like other California Indians, have long known about the resource richness of plants that grow along streams. Some plants have food value, while others have value as cordage, nets and basket making material, as well as medicine.

Gifts from Nature

Wild grapes, berries, and rose hips added sweetness or tartness (plus antioxidants) to the Muwekma Ohlone diet. Wild rush fibers became fabric for front aprons. Tules, sedges, and even the vines of poison oak provided fiber for basket making. Willow and mugwort yielded medicines to treat a variety of ailments. Today these plants and others are still woven into the cultural fabric of the Muwekma Ohlone.
Known for its fur and black-tipped tail,
This fox can jog quickly over hill and dale.
It can also climb trees, unlike coyote and dog,
And den high above or deep down in a log.

Do you see me?