

Ladybugs ride to the rescue to keep up community park

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The Ladybugs were swarming July 17 in the Hunter Creek subdivision. But these were not the typical bugs renowned for eating and controlling the pest population of aphids.

Rather, they were four long-term residents of the community perched atop riding lawn mowers taking it upon themselves to keep their grass well manicured in the Hunter Creek Community Park, about nine miles north of Klamath.

Lori Collins, Wanda Kirkpatrick, Sally Rodgers and Marge Boyles don't have a uniform yet to go with their Ladybugs nickname, but they are armed with a single mind to keep the 2.3 acres from becoming unsightly.

"We've just kind of taken it on this summer, every two weeks," Rodgers said. "We just make a date, come out and it takes us 20-30 minutes tops."

She and Collins grew up in the small neighborhood, which has just 64 properties. They both had moved away for more than a decade, but eventually returned to their roots.

However, they learned Del Norte County didn't have the funds to upkeep the little park, 29 miles south of Crescent City.

"We returned home and were disappointed to see how our old neighborhood had gone downhill a little," Rodgers said. "So we've done our best to get involved."

They teamed with Boyles, who's lived in Hunter Creek for 13 years, and Kirkpatrick, who has called the area home for more than four decades. Each live on several acres, necessitating owning riding lawn mowers, However, Boyles is renowned for helping her neighbors, "mowing the neighborhood," mostly with a push mower, the others said.

So, what had grown during the years of the park's neglect?

"Very, very tall grass," Collins said, holding her hand about three feet off the ground.

Plans almost changed in March, when the county floated the idea of transferring ownership of the park to the nearby Yurok Tribe, which was in search of a plot of land to install playground equipment they had in storage.

"As a community, when we heard they were going to give the land over to the Yurok tribe, the subdivision came together and said, hey, you know, it's our park, we've invested our time," Rodgers said. "The (Hunter Valley Community) service district has been amazing since the 60s taking care of our neighborhood. So if anybody should own it, it should be the people in Hunter Creek."

Paul Crandall, general manager and treasurer of the Hunter Valley Community Service District, said after residents fought to keep their park, the land was not transferred to the Yuroks. He said the Yuroks had to look elsewhere to install the playground equipment, adding the nonprofit donating it was obligated to install it on tribal land.

So he said the service district is working deals to have its own playground equipment installed to replace the lone, aging swing set.

"A lot of people in the subdivision — and who don't live in the subdivision — are donating money toward the park," Rodger said. "We hope to put up a fence, a new bus stop and make it more friendly."

Meanwhile, they wait for the county to decide whether to transfer ownership of the park to the service district. With the help of menfolk armed with weed-eaters to trim the fence line, the Ladybugs plan to keep Hunter Creek a welcoming centerpiece to their subdivision.