

Carlos Alcalá: Wetlands are nature's cleaners

By Carlos Alcalá - Bee Columnist

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Water treatment plants: Nearby resident Joseph Nason wandered over to Auburn Boulevard and Norris Avenue to see what the Sacramento Utilities Department was doing there. He saw a big hole in the ground and what looks like an observation platform. It's an unusual wetlands building project. It won't be just a pretty place, though it might be that, too. It's designed and funded as water treatment. Runoff from the neighborhoods south of Auburn Boulevard (or any neighborhood, for that matter) typically contains a lot of pollutants, said Patrick Sanger, who does public outreach for the Utilities Department. Pesticides from lawns, oils from autos and other residential contaminants are bad when they get to open water, but in a suitable wetlands area, the plants actually break them down into beneficial or harmless organic components. It takes a few days, and then the water goes safely into Arcade Creek. "There's no downside to it," Sanger said. It's all part of a broader effort by the city to clean up the creek area. It's hoped that the wetlands project, a disc golf course and other projects will discourage what Sanger called, "non-conforming uses," more commonly known as homeless camps.