



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

helping people help the land

Minarets High School

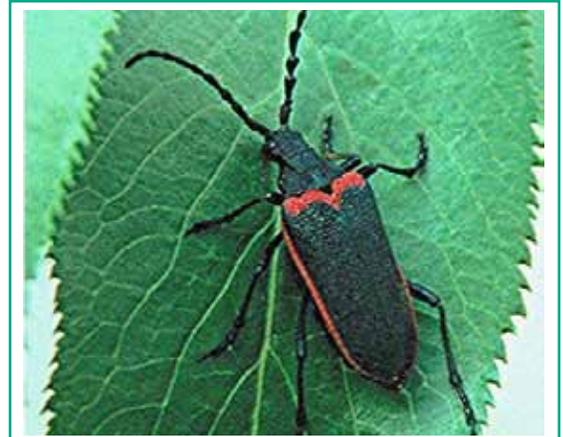
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— Neil MacDougald,
Coarsegold Resource
Conservation District

A rare beetle found nowhere else in the world but California will not have to leave its rural Madera County home because of a new high school being built there.

That is because dozens of elderberry bushes the insect can use to live on have been planted next to the construction site.

The mitigation effort became necessary when it was discovered that construction of the new Minarets High School would eliminate habitat used by the Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle.



The Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle lives along six central California rivers and their tributaries. (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service photo)

The brightly colored, red and black beetle is on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service threatened species list. It only exists in scattered localities along the San Joaquin, Kings, Tule, Kaweah, American and Sacramento rivers and their tributaries.

Female beetles lay their eggs in cracks and crevices of elderberry bark. It takes two years for an adult beetle to appear, emerging from pupation in the spring as the elderberry flowers begin to open. It then spends most of its life feeding off material found inside elderberry bush stems.

Planting elderberry bushes to replace those being eliminated by the construction was the brainchild of the Coarsegold Resource Conservation District (RCD). “Natural resource conservation will be a major component of the new school’s curriculum,” said RCD Director **Neil MacDougald**. “That’s why we are getting involved.

“We’ve talked to the community to find out what it wants in a high school,” said School Superintendent **Dr. Stephen Foster**. “We learned it would like a School of Natural Resources with classes in agriculture, fire science and other similar courses to help students make a career path.”

With help from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office in Madera, Spring Valley 4-H Club and Southern California Edison, which provided 90 elderberry bushes it raised in a nearby nursery, the RCD held a field day to plant the new bushes.

NRCS is assisting the district with preparing a range management plan to care for 200 acres of adjacent ranch land the school had to acquire to mitigate a vernal pool that was also removed when construction began. Dr. Foster says the school district has agreed to let the RCD manage the ranch land, which plans to have high school students operate it. “The RCD will use this land as a demonstration site. Our ag program can use it to graze animals,” concluded Foster.

Coarsegold RCD President Tom Wheeler joins a student to plant an elderberry bush.



Brian Ziegler photo

One of the newly planted elderberry bushes.



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