



CLAREMONT CANYON

CONSERVANCY

FALL 2015 *News*

A COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATION SUPPORTING THE LONG-TERM STEWARDSHIP OF CLAREMONT CANYON

President’s Message: Oakland steps up to the plate *by L. Tim Wallace*

IT IS MY PLEASURE TO ANNOUNCE that Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf will be the keynote speaker at the annual meeting of the Conservancy on November 15.

Mayor Schaaf will update us on the progress of Oakland’s wildfire hazard mitigation grants and other efforts of the Oakland Fire Department to keep our communities safe. The Conservancy applauds the Oakland City Council’s June 5th decision to accept the \$3 million FEMA grant so that wildfire hazard mitigation work can begin. The Oakland grant may ease somewhat the financial burden on hill residents, who voted to tax themselves for wildfire prevention services for a period of ten years and who supported the removal of eucalyptus trees and other fire-hazardous vegetation in the hill area.

I can now say with confidence that all three FEMA-funded grants—Oakland’s, the Park District’s and UC’s—are set to move forward. Thanks to excellent media coverage, the public is now better informed about the need for wildfire prevention projects and better understands the responsibility that comes with providing a safer environment for all. Recent news stories, including those appearing in the East Bay Express and broadcast on KPFA, have been more objective and less influenced by emotionally charged claims from fringe groups that oppose the work. An informal poll on the North Hills Community Association’s online forum suggests that as much as 90 percent of hill residents support the FEMA projects. We believe that most fire professionals and wildland workers do as well.



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Eucalyptus trees tower in the distance as birders return to Signpost 29 at the end of last May’s unseasonably chilly bird walk. The group is seen here emerging from a landscape of live oaks, bays, willows, and redwoods now thriving where eucalyptus trees were removed by UC about a decade ago.

Fieldwork on FEMA-funded projects could begin in early 2016, although it remains to be seen whether litigation will slow or prevent implementation. Two lawsuits have been filed to challenge the projects. The Hills Conservation Network filed suit against FEMA, Oakland, and UC on the grounds that the projects go too far; they leave too few eucalyptus, pine and acacias standing in the East Bay hills. The Sierra Club then filed suit, claiming that the projects don’t go far enough. In their view, the original designs submitted by Oakland and UC were science-based and should have been approved and included in FEMA’s final Environmental Impact Statement.

The Conservancy strongly opposes the HCN suit and supports the Sierra Club position, hoping to see less thinning and more complete removal of fire-prone, non-native trees. We realize that FEMA’s final EIS was a compromise. We accept it, nevertheless, in the interest of moving the projects forward and without further delay.

November 15 Annual Meeting, 4-6 PM, keynote speaker is Mayor Libby Schaaf

THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE CONSERVANCY will be held this year at the Claremont Hotel (see



back page for details). After light refreshments and brief updates from our board, we will hear from our invited speakers, first from Norman LaForce from the San Francisco Bay Chapter of the Sierra Club, fol-

lowed by our keynote speaker, Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf. Mayor Schaaf will update us on Oakland's continued efforts towards fire safety in the city's open spaces, parks, and neighborhoods.

Please come to hear these interesting presentations. Please be sure to RSVP, as we expect a strong turn-out this year.

Claremont Canyon is the largest relatively undeveloped canyon on the western slope of the Oakland/Berkeley hills. Most of the canyon's watershed is owned by the East Bay Regional Park District, the University of California, the East Bay Municipal Utility District and the City of Oakland, with about one-fifth in private hands.

The **Claremont Canyon Conservancy** promotes the long-term stewardship of the entire watershed, coordinated among the stakeholders to preserve or restore a healthy native ecosystem, reduce wildfire hazards, and foster education and research.

Join the Conservancy:

Founding Sponsor: \$1,000 over 10 years.

Family Membership: \$50 per year.

Student or Limited Income: \$25 per year.

Contact Us:

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Email: info@ClaremontCanyon.org

Website: www.ClaremontCanyon.org

The Board of Directors: L. Tim Wallace, President; Joe Engbeck, Vice President; Barry Pilger, Treasurer; Marilyn Goldhaber, Secretary; Fred Booker, Steve Holtzman, Jon Kaufman, Jerry Kent, Bob Strayer and Dick White, Members at Large.

The **Claremont Canyon Conservancy News** is edited by Marilyn Goldhaber and Joe Engbeck.

EVENTS IN THE CANYON

PLEASE JOIN US FOR OUR FALL/WINTER SERIES in Claremont Canyon. Stewardship outings include twice monthly (first Tuesday and third Saturday) restoration work in Garber Park in collaboration with the Garber Park Stewards, and once a month (usually the fourth Saturday) for weed management and trail maintenance elsewhere in Claremont Canyon. Please check our website for meeting places and last minute additions and changes.

When venturing into the canyon, it is good to wear long sleeves, long pants, sturdy shoes and a hat. All of our events are free and open to the public. To RSVP or ask questions, contact us through our website or email info@ClaremontCanyon.org.

Saturday, November 7—Broom Pulling in Dwight Canyon, 10 AM-Noon, led by Steve Glaeser of the Berkeley Path Wanderers. Meet at Dwight Way near the running track of the Clark Kerr Campus. We'll have two hours of pulling French broom and other invasive species along the trail with lots of ups and downs as we haul the weeds out to the street for disposal. This is a rewarding work-out, and even fun. We use weed wrenches because the tap roots can be up to three feet long, very empowering. Wear sturdy shoes and bring water. Refreshments served afterwards. No need to RSVP.

Sunday, November 15—Annual Meeting at the Claremont Hotel, 4-6 PM (details on page 8).

Sunday, December 13—The Birds of Claremont Canyon, 8-11 AM, led by Dave Quady, Audubon Christmas Bird Count Leader, and Kay Loughman, creator of Wildlife in the North Hills.

Join us to look for winter birds in Claremont Canyon. Meet at the top of the canyon at Four Corners (the Claremont Avenue/Fish Ranch Road/Grizzly Peak Boulevard intersection). We will drive to a couple of locations to sample different habitats in search of resident and migrant birds. We'll bird from roads, and hike on trails as much as conditions permit. Rain or high wind cancels.

Call Dave at 510-704-9353 before 9:00 PM on Saturday, December 12 if you're unsure whether the walk will happen in light of the next day's weather forecast. Dress warmly and bring binoculars and a field guide, if you have them.

Volunteers improve the experience of Claremont Canyon

By Jon Kaufman

TWO OR THREE TIMES A MONTH Conservancy members gather to build and maintain trails, remove invasive weeds, collect trash, and make Claremont Canyon a great place to hike, walk your dog, or just enjoy the vista.

The past several months were especially busy ones for our volunteers. The Garber Park Stewards continue to remove invasive ivy and other weeds, and plant natives in their special corner of the canyon. We are pleased to have staff members from the Claremont Hotel volunteering with us (page 4).

We continue to work with the East Bay Regional Park District removing French broom from the lower Norfolk Trail in Gwin Canyon. Our goal is to clear and widen the trail for fire safety reasons and to allow the trail to eventually connect up with trails on UC land. Historically, the Norfolk Trail dead-ended at the border of the two properties. But that is now about to change.

With the help of Cal student volunteers on Berkeley Project Day (October 24th), we will begin a new section of UC's Willow Trail leading west from the bottom of the steps at Signpost 29—grading the land, constructing new steps and installing creek crossings.

This is a lot of work and we appreciate our dedicated volunteers, the students, and our members who funded the purchase of materials needed for Berkeley Project Day. We are most grateful to Ashby Lumber for donating lumber and hardware for this project. A special thank you goes to our engineer-in-chief Tom Klatt and to Ann's Catering for providing the lunches. Conservancy board members Fred Booker, Jon Kaufman and Bob Strayer all worked hard on these endeavors.

Details about our activities are in our monthly email and are posted on the home page of our website. If you would like to receive our emails, you can sign up at www.ClaremontCanyon.org.



© 2015 John Colbert

*This beautiful picture of Gambel's White-crowned sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) was taken by hill resident and ardent birder, John Colbert, on one of his frequent treks with Erica Rutherford along the Ridge Trail (also known as the East-West Trail) of the Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve.*

Both White- and Golden-crowned sparrows arrive in the area in September and stay until April. They are mostly ground or low vegetation feeders in mixed flocks with Dark-eyed juncos. While they eat primarily seeds in winter, we've watched them sally out from vegetation to catch insects.

Five subspecies of White-crowned sparrows are currently recognized. Our local subspecies is called Gambel's. Thomas Nuttall, a 19th century field naturalist named our western subspecies after his understudy, William Gambel, in 1840, when William was 17. Gambel went on to become a medical doctor before dying of Typhoid fever in Plumas County in 1849—at age 26.



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Regional Park District Ranger David Worley and volunteer Carolyn Burgess tackle French broom on the lower portion of the Norfolk Trail.

The Claremont Hotel's sustainability group comes to Claremont Canyon

By Steve Holtzman

SINCE BEING ACQUIRED by Fairmont Hotels & Resorts in March 2014, the Claremont Hotel Club & Spa has stepped up its efforts to participate in conservation and stewardship activities in Claremont Canyon. Having long been the home of the Conservancy's annual meetings, the Hotel, under the leadership of General Manager Len Czarnecki, has expanded its emphasis on sustainability. A dedicated Sustainability Committee, comprised of managers and colleagues from the hotel, club and spa, has assessed and prioritized projects to promote this mission in a range of ways, from an expanded focus on conservation and efficiency in the hotel's operations to stepped-up involvement in community sustainability efforts.

Working with the Conservancy, the Hotel has embarked on a series of initiatives to further integrate it into the canyon environment. Among other things, the Hotel hopes to explore a direct trail link between its property and Garber Park, reducing guests' and community members' need to walk along Claremont Avenue to the park.

The hotel is also seeking to build participation by hotel staff in the monthly work days organized by the Conservancy and the Garber Park Stewards. Lauren Fong, a Sustainability Committee member and Claremont Spa Services Manager, is helping in Garber Park.

The Hotel is exploring further cooperative efforts with the Conservancy, the East Bay Regional Park District, and the University of California to expand

Lauren Fong is all smiles after freeing a hillside of ferns from invasive ivy during a work day in Garber Park last summer.



© 2015 Shelagh Brodersen

and improve trails across, up and down the canyon. The Sustainability Committee's vision includes fostering a complete trail network connecting the lower, upper, north and south sides of the canyon, simultaneously providing recreation opportunities for Hotel guests and increasing accessibility to the canyon for the broader community of walkers and hikers.

Potential projects include supporting the Conservancy's and UC's impending effort to extend the existing Lower Norfolk Trail and continue it eastwards to connect with the Willow Trail; creating switchbacks on the existing (and very steep) Panoramic Ridge trail (also known as the East-West Trail); and sponsoring the building of a new trail connecting the north and south sides of the canyon.

The Conservancy supports these initiatives and is working to connect EBRPD planning, Hotel and Conservancy funding and volunteer support.

New trail maps installed in four places

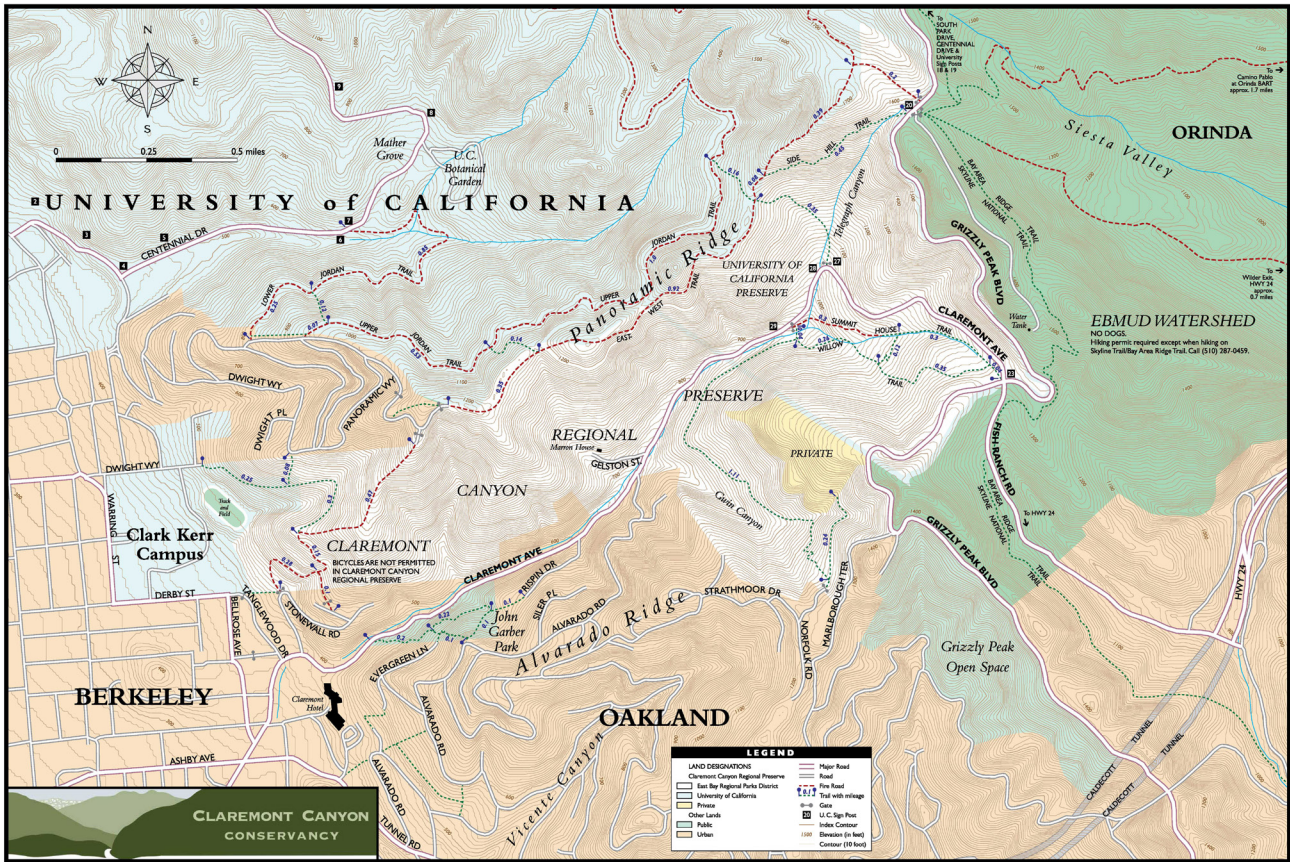
By Fred Booker

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE that it has almost been a year since we rolled out the latest update of the Conservancy's trail map of Claremont Canyon — with a promise to have it out at trailheads soon. Well, that time has finally arrived. As this newsletter goes to press, holes have been drilled in the ground, concrete poured, frames assembled, and four trail maps installed at the following trailheads: at the top of Dwight Way, UC Signpost 29, UC Signpost 27, and at the top of the Summit House Trail at the Four Corners' intersection of Claremont Avenue with Grizzly Peak Boulevard/Fish Ranch Road. (Two additional trail maps are available for placement at locations soon to be determined.)



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A doe and her fawn graze peacefully at the corner of Claremont Avenue and Alvarado Road.



The work was accomplished over two week-ends by Conservancy board members Barry Pilger, Bob Strayer, Fred Booker, and hills resident Chuck Scurich. As soon as the installation was completed, we saw people stopping to admire the signage and check out the trails. One hiker found he was nowhere near where he thought he was—and was able to navigate his way home.

Our map has gone through several iterations over the years, all created by Eureka Cartography of Berkeley. The map now includes mileage for all trails throughout the canyon, including those in Garber Park. We've also added connecting stairways around the Claremont Hotel and the soon-to-be-started extension of the Norfolk Trail.

This final version of the map was sent as a digital file to KVO Industries in Santa Rosa, a specialty sign manufacturer producing high quality interpretive signs for industry, municipalities and parks. KVO reproduced the map on digitally imaged paper impregnated with UV resistant melamine resins laid over multiple layers of resin-impregnated kraft paper. The

finished 1/2-inch-thick product is referred to as a high pressure laminate panel. The finished panel was then mounted to a powder-coated backing panel and metal frame for placement in the field.

I think it looks great.

If you would like to explore a high resolution and downloadable version in the comfort of your home, please visit our website's maps page: www.claremontcanyon.org/maps.



Our new trail map at the entrance to the Summit House Trail near Four Corners.

© 2015 Fred Booker

The Sierra Club corrects its record on its vegetation management strategy for the East Bay hills

Reprinted from the online Yodeler, September 16, 2015, with permission from the San Francisco Bay Chapter of the Sierra Club.

AS WE SLOG THROUGH OUR FOURTH YEAR of drought and once again watch wildfires devastate communities all across California and the West, we must acknowledge that the hotter, drier conditions we face due to climate disruption are not going away. With that in mind, it's more important than ever to prioritize fire prevention in our vegetation management strategies for the Bay Area's East Bay hills.

Ever since the Great Fire of 1991 ravaged the East Bay hills at a cost of 25 lives and 3.9 billion in present-day dollars, the Sierra Club has worked with fire experts, public officials, and environmental groups like the Golden Gate Audubon Society, the California Native Plant Society, and the Claremont Canyon Conservancy to develop an ecologically- and fiscally-sustainable model for fire management that not only reduces the risk of fires, but also promotes diverse and healthy ecosystems.

The preferred strategy for vegetation management in the East Bay hills entails removing the most highly flammable, ember-generating trees like eucalyptus in phases—only in select areas considered most at risk for fire along the urban-wild interface. Once the flammable non-native trees are removed, less flammable native species can reclaim those areas and provide for a rebound of biodiversity. This model of fire prevention can be summarized as the “Three R’s,” Remove, Restore and Re-establish (see box).

Clearing up misconceptions:

There is a lot of misinformation floating around about this preferred model for the care and management of vegetation in the East Bay hills. Here are the facts about a few of these misunderstandings:

The Sierra Club's approach does NOT call for clear-cutting. Under “Remove, Restore, Re-establish” thousands of acres of eucalyptus and other non-natives will remain in the East Bay hills. Our proposal only covers areas near homes and businesses where a fire would be most costly to lives and property. In fact, removing monoculture eucalyptus groves and providing for the return of native ecosystems will create a much richer landscape than the alternative—thinning—which requires regularly scraping away the forest floor to remove flammable debris.

Our preferred approach does NOT focus on eucalyptus merely because they are non-natives. Rather, it is because they pose a far higher fire risk than native landscapes. Eucalyptus shed ten to fifty times more debris per acre than grasslands, native live oak groves, or bay forests — and that debris, in the form of branches, leaves, and long strips of bark, ends up draped in piles that are a near-optimal mixture of oxygen and fuel for fire. Eucalyptus trees ignite easily and have a tendency to dramatically explode when on fire. Also, eucalyptus embers stay lit longer than embers from other vegetation; coming off trees that can grow above 120 feet tall, those embers can stay lit as the wind carries them for miles.

Any herbicide use to prevent the regrowth of eucalyptus once they've been cut down (they quickly sprout suckers otherwise) would be hand applied in minimal amounts under strict controls. Any herbicide application must undergo a full environmental review to prevent impacts on humans, wildlife, and habitat. There are also methods other than herbicide that can be used to prevent regrowth, and the Sierra Club encourages the agencies that manage the land where fire mitigation occurs to explore these alternatives to find the most sustainable, responsible option.

REMOVE the most flammable non-native trees in select areas most at risk for fire.

RESTORE those areas with more naturally fire resistant native trees and plants.

RE-ESTABLISH greater biodiversity of flora and fauna, including endangered species like the Alameda whipsnake.

The Sierra Club's eucalyptus management policy is the right approach for East Bay hills

By John Hitchen, retired East Bay Regional Park District Supervisor. The original version of this article appeared in Berkeleyside, an independent online news site, September 8, 2015.

EUCALYPTUS TREES ARE MAGNIFICENT and picturesque, but they are inherently dangerous and invasive, depriving native plants of the chance to thrive wherever they grow.



Claremont Hotel, Berkeley Cal.

THE UPPER SLOPES OF CLAREMONT CANYON (beyond the hotel tower and flagpole) were once largely grassland. In the late 1800s and early 1900s eucalyptus trees were planted to attract home buyers and timber merchants.

In some cases, exotic plants can co-exist with natives, but, in the case of blue gum eucalyptus, this is not the case. The species has evolved in the extraordinarily harsh, dry climate of Australia to grow and spread quickly to then be burned to ashes in catastrophic wildfires.

According to Jared Farmer, in his recent book “Trees in Paradise,” the moist cool climate of the Bay Area allows the blue gums to re-seed and spread to an extent rarely found elsewhere on Earth.

The Berkeley hills were once primarily grassland and chaparral with native trees along the riparian corridors. Eucalyptus planting was encouraged by a combination of state forestry officials and a number of get-rich-quick entrepreneurs who quickly found that the “miracle trees” had no economic value and were growing so fast that they would actually become a liability to property owners. Ironically, the East Bay Regional Park District’s original acquisitions were purchased at extremely low cost from EBMUD, whose managers foresaw the runaway cost of maintaining eucalyptus plantations.

Unless we are willing to see our human habitat wiped out repeatedly by firestorms fueled by these powerful but dangerous trees, and our native vegetation overcome by them, regaining some measure of control over their spread is essential.

The FEMA project for the East Bay hills is simply another small step towards discovering just how we humans and our California native plants may peacefully co-exist with these incredibly powerful giant trees. The Sierra Club should be commended for their support for eucalyptus management including carefully applied herbicides. (See the article on their website published on Aug. 13, 2015.) The Sierra Club does not take a position on how to treat the stumps, but the proven safe and effective material is Garlon 4 Ultra, which is NOT manufactured by Monsanto, is not a glyphosate, and is not sprayed, but rather dripped or brushed onto the cambium layer of the cut stump.

Doing nothing about our hill area eucalyptus problem guarantees progressively more catastrophic firestorms and soaring maintenance costs. It guarantees that eucalyptus will become the dominant species in our beloved East Bay hills, to the detriment of our native redwoods, oaks, bay trees, toyons, ceanothus, and other indigenous species.

I urge everyone to take a close look at the plant community under a eucalyptus grove, and see the potential for something much more stable and diverse than eucalyptus woodland.



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THE CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY

Dear Friends and Neighbors

Please join us on

Sunday, November 15, 2015, 4-6 PM

The Claremont Hotel

Sonoma Room

Annual Meeting

Reception	4:00 PM
Presentations	4:30 PM
Open Forum	5:30 PM

Keynote Speaker: The Honorable Libby Schaaf
Mayor of Oakland
to speak on "Oakland Fire Safety"

Complimentary wine bar and refreshments. Bring a friend or neighbor.

RSVP: info@ClaremontCanyon.org or call 510-843-2226