



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

President's column by Jon Kaufman



MEMBERS OF THE CONSERVANCY'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS spent much of the past summer working with UC Berkeley Forestry Professor Emeritus Joe McBride developing a plan to manage vegetation in Strawberry and

Claremont canyons. I am pleased to report that Joe's plan is now available at www.claremontcanyon.org/fuel-management-proposal.

We urge UC to follow the plan as it is the standard for how to minimize the damage of a future wildfire. Last year, UC received a wildfire prevention grant from CalFire but has yet to issue its implementation plan. We humbly and sincerely offer Professor McBride's plan. It is budgeted and ready to go.

The McBride plan is important because, as board member Jerry Kent points out, the current vegetation situation in the hills is identical to what existed prior

to the 1991 wildfire that cost 25 lives and 3,082 homes.

The plan is a detailed prescription for what to do to reduce flammable invasive plants, replace them with safer vegetation, make escape routes safer in an emergency, and includes a set-aside of 170 acres for the rare and endangered Alameda Whipsnake.

We owe Professor McBride our deepest thanks for his contribution. His plan will serve, not only to guide the University about what it should do with its CalFire grant and its own resources, but as a model for other communities in the wildland-urban interface.

Undoubtedly, some will say the plan goes too far. We say that its prescriptions are necessary to reduce the risk of what a future wildfire will do. Our lives and our homes are of primary importance. We also say that removal of eucalyptus and pine trees will not leave the ground barren and unsightly. The land will recover. Just drive up Claremont Avenue to Signpost

29, park, walk through the gate to the redwood bench, and look around. The eucalyptus trees there were removed and native bays, willows and coyote brush have grown up to replace them. The vista is both beautiful and more firesafe.

The McBride plan includes tree and brush removal on strategic ridgetops needed to stage fire fighting equipment and stop a wildfire from moving canyon to canyon. EBMUD and the Park District already maintain some ridgetops this way, including this one in Claremont Canyon near the top of Panoramic Way (left).



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STEWARDSHIP IN THE CANYON

PLEASE JOIN US for stewardship events in Claremont Canyon throughout the fall and winter months: once a month (third Saturday) in Garber Park led by Shelagh Brodersen of the Garber Park Stewards and once a month in the upper canyon (fourth Saturday) led by Jon Kaufman and others. All levels of fitness are welcome. Check the Conservancy website for added events and to see where to meet. We usually meet at the Claremont Avenue entrance when working in Garber Park and at signpost 29 for upper canyon events. Events are scheduled for 10 AM till noon. When volunteering, please wear long sleeves, long pants, and sturdy shoes. If you have gloves, please bring those too but we'll have extras. For Garber Park contact GarberPark-Stewards@gmail.com. For all other events contact info@ClaremontCanyon.org.

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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Website: www.ClaremontCanyon.org

The Board of Directors: Jon Kaufman, President, Marilyn Goldhaber, Vice President, Nancy Mueller, Secretary; Members-at-Large are Josh Borkowski, Jerry Kent, Elizabeth Stage, Bob Strayer, and L. Tim Wallace.

Treasurer: Kay Loughman

The Claremont Canyon Conservancy News is edited by Marilyn Goldhaber and Kay Loughman.

Saturday, December 7—The Birds of Claremont Canyon, led by Dave Quady, Audubon Christmas Bird Count leader for Claremont Canyon.

Join us to look for winter birds in Claremont Canyon. Dave will also lead a special owling adventure in the wee morning hours, followed by a break for breakfast. Join us for one walk or both. Dress warmly and bring binoculars, field guide and flashlight (for owling).



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Daytime Bird Walk, 8:30 AM. 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.

Owling, 4:30-6:30 AM. Meet at the trailhead on the north side of Claremont Avenue (Signpost 28) about one half mile uphill from the Alvarado Road intersection. After a brief owling lesson, we'll listen for owls at a couple of locations in the canyon. We will walk a little, but mostly stand quietly in the dark and listen. Owling is chancy: we hope to hear an owl or two; if we're lucky we may see one.

Call Dave at 704-9353 before 9:00 PM on Friday, December 6 if you're unsure whether the walks will run in light of the next day's weather forecast.



© 2019 Shelagh Brodersen

Garber Park Steward and volunteer Vivian DeWoskin seems to be having a lot of fun. Shelagh said on Battle for the Bay (or Creek-to-Bay) day—see page 4, “This lady raked almost half the park trails, which made walking through Garber a much more pleasurable experience.”



© 2019 Sandy Friedland

The Gwin Canyon Trail goes through a shaded woodland of oak, bay, willow, and buckeye leading up eventually to Norfolk Road.

A wildland-urban hike: Gwin Canyon to Garber Park *by Sandy Friedland*

(Note: Do this hike with a friend because two cars are required for a short shuttle.)

THIS MODERATELY DIFFICULT 3.5-mile route begins at Signpost 29 and finishes at the Claremont Avenue end of Garber Park. The hike traverses parkland trails and parts of the neighborhoods above the Claremont Hotel, where many of the lovely houses were rebuilt after the 1991 Berkeley-Oakland Hills fire. Streets in those neighborhoods are narrow and lack sidewalks, so stay alert for cars. On the way to Signpost 29, drop one car off near the Claremont Avenue entrance to Garber Park, just past the parking lot for Claremont Hotel employees, and then drive .04 miles up to Signpost 29 and park the second car near the gate.

Start walking down the steps of the Willow Trail just beyond the posted map and follow the sign to the 1.1-mile Gwin Canyon Trail. The Gwin Canyon Trail eventually climbs about 350 feet through trees and shrubs to a cul-de-sac at the end of Norfolk Road. Once at Norfolk Road you are out of the preserve and onto urban streets. Bear right at the first intersection onto Strathmoor Drive where you will get your first stunning panoramic view.

At the next intersection, turn left onto Drury Road. Take the second right onto Dartmouth Drive and walk

to the end of the pavement. There you will find an unmarked dirt path. Walk to the end for a spectacular view of both north and south sides of Claremont Canyon.

Retrace your steps to return to Drury Road staying on Drury until it becomes Amito Avenue—which then becomes Gravatt Drive. Continue straight, taking a left onto Stephens Way. Enjoy the view to the south as you walk down to rejoin Gravatt. Turn left, staying on Gravatt till it meets Alvarado Road.

Go left onto Alvarado, and then take the sharp right onto Slater Lane. At the end of Slater, turn right onto Evergreen Lane, which leads to the south entrance to Garber Park. You should be able to pick up a brochure there that includes an annotated trail map of Garber Park.

Entering Garber Park, turn right at the sign for the Loop Trail. Follow the loop all the way around. Do not take the spurs that go to Alvarado Road or Rispin Drive but continue on the lower half of the Loop Trail till you reach the large fireplace. From there, follow the sign pointing to Claremont Avenue. Take the steps down to where you parked the first car.

Happy hiking!

A version of this story appears in the current issue of Claremont- Elmwood Social as the last of a three-part series on hiking in Claremont Canyon.



Roadside clearing by Nancy Mueller

THIS SEASON THE OAKLAND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT UNIT, under the leadership of the incomparable Vince Crudele, made significant progress in reducing vegetation on city and public roadside properties. Major thoroughfares in our area include Tunnel Road, Sky-line Boulevard, Grizzly Peak Boulevard, Hiller Drive, Clarewood Drive, Panoramic Way, and Claremont Avenue. I'm pleased to say that Oakland is doing its job in the hills along major roads and near open spaces. Claremont Avenue was one of the later roads to receive treatment. Just when I was about to call Vince, Oakland's team came through and cleaned up the area from Garber Park to Signpost 29. Throughout Oakland over 150 acres were cleared and over 50 miles of roadside vegetation abated. Goats grazed nearly 1,000 acres on city-owned parcels, many in the hill areas.



A sample of Oakland's roadside clearing along Claremont Avenue is seen above. Also along Claremont Avenue, near the large EBMUD water tank, a small triangle of Park District land (top, left) dips down. Unfortunately it's a tempting place for illegal dumping. After a few concerned calls, the District did its job and hauled away the flammable material before the height of fire season.



Nancy Mueller and Shelagh Brodersen on Creek-to-Bay Day.

Battle for the Bay by Shelagh Brodersen

THIS YEAR, THE CITIES of Oakland, San Francisco, and San Jose challenged each other for the biggest, best, and most impactful cleanup on Creek-to-Bay Day, calling it "Battle for the Bay." The friendly battle, which occurred September 21st, included trash removal, habitat restoration, tree planting, and beautification as part of Coastal Cleanup Day, the largest volunteer day in California and the world!

While San Francisco won the battle with 3,011 volunteers, Oakland took first place in carting away the most trash and debris, an astonishing 109,460 pounds in one day.

The Garber Park Stewards did its part with our 14 volunteers picking up 300 pounds (at least!) of debris in the 13-acre, City of Oakland woodland at the base of Claremont Canyon, John Garber Park. We did more than pick up trash. We raked, weeded, and smoothed the trail. On your next trip to Garber you will notice a nice "bridge" across the newly cleared drainage ditch at the parking lot, one of many improvements we're making to the Claremont Avenue entrance for safety of pedestrians as well as cars.



© 2017 Courtesy of the OCPR Program

Doug Mosher (center, above sign), OCPR Program Manager, with the Skyline/Moon Gate neighborhood group and Oakland firefighters meet for a community exercise in disaster preparedness.

Introducing the Oakland community preparedness and response program

by Doug Mosher

IN LIGHT OF CONTINUED WILDFIRE and earthquake disaster threats to Oakland, the Oakland Firesafe Council has begun a new program called Oakland Community Preparedness and Response (OCPR). The program, which launched in September, will help citizens and groups in the Oakland hills and foothills—both high-risk areas due to the “very high-hazard wildfire zone” at the Wildland-Urban Interface and the 120-mile-long major earthquake zone along the Hayward Fault—to prepare for these threats. The goal is to bring about fewer injuries and deaths and lower financial losses in the event of a major disaster, such as a wildfire or earthquake.

Starting in January, the OCPR program will deliver custom educational workshops and materials to existing neighborhood groups, help new neighborhoods organize, communicate emergency evacuation and notification procedures, and promote Oakland’s CORE/CERT disaster preparedness and response training. We will work alongside police, fire and emergency preparedness experts on these and other activities.

At this time, we are requesting that leaders of Oakland hills’ and foothills’ community groups contact us to take advantage of the program: ocpr@oaklandfiresafecouncil.org, 510-499-8933.

The OCPR program received support from three grants awarded earlier this year from CalFire, the City of Oakland, and the California Fire Foundation to cover the first two years of operation.

“When disaster strikes, we, as neighbors, are the first responders. Neighbors helping neighbors provide information, immediate first aid, and, evacuation assistance for those with mobility problems. Because, in an earthquake, wildfire or other large disaster, police and firefighters will be tied up elsewhere and we will need to take charge of our disaster response. To be prepared, we must first get organized. OCPR provides tools, tips and support for interested neighborhoods through CORE/CERT (emergency preparedness training), Neighborhood Watch (crime prevention training) and Firewise™ a national certification program for neighborhoods focused on vegetation management and home hardening.” ~ Sue Piper



Annual Meeting November 17, 4-6 PM

by Marilyn Goldhaber

THE ANNUAL MEETING of the Claremont Canyon Conservancy will be held once again in the Skyline Room of the Claremont Hotel. The name “Skyline Room” is fitting as we will learn all about a place called Skyline Gardens. At last year’s annual meeting, Glen Schneider, who directs the garden project, gave us a brief overview. We had heard good things about Glen, that he was an expert on local native vegetation and an inspiring teacher, but we discovered that he is also a wonderful story teller—with a great story to tell, how native plant restoration can bring about a healthier landscape and aid fire safety efforts of our landowners as well. So, we invited Glen back to update us in more detail about the restored meadow lands on the high ridges just over the eastern summit of Claremont Canyon.

After light refreshments and brief updates from the Conservancy’s board of directors, we will hear from Glen. All are invited to attend free of charge (see back page for details).

Restoring the high ridge meadow areas above Claremont Canyon

by Glen Schneider

ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION IS THE PROCESS of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem. The Skyline Gardens Alliance has been doing just that in the high ridge volcanic area between Tilden and Sibley regional parks. This is East Bay MUD watershed land, traversed

north-south by the Skyline Trail. Under special permit from EBMUD, we are doing a botanical census and restoration on 250 acres from the steam trains in Tilden to Highway 24. This area is a Noah’s Ark of native plants and is the most botanically diverse area of its size in the East Bay. We have verified 281 native species to date.

The Skyline Gardens Alliance is sponsored by the East Bay Chapter of the California Native Plant Society. Our effort is now 3 years old. We hold workdays twice a week (Wednesday afternoon and Sunday morning). To date, we have held more than 250 workdays totaling nearly 1,800 volunteer shifts.

Along the rocky ridge spines, we have discovered special areas that have really won our hearts. They contain spectacular, sometimes nearly intact, remnants of *what must have once been*. They are true meadows, containing hardly any woody plants and some of the best and most diverse populations of native grasses that I have ever seen in the East Bay: Idaho fescue, June grass, squirreltail grass, purple needlegrass, California brome, California melic, bent grass, and even pine bluegrass. They also contain a rich assortment of native perennials and bulbs: mule’s ears, checker bloom, yellow biscuit root, cobweb thistle, star lily, Ithuriel’s spear, coyote mint, soap root, and many others. These wild ones grow not just as relicts, but often in great abundance, literally by the thousands.

With such rich native flora here, our strategy is to exhaust the seed bank of the “invasives” like Italian thistle, poison hemlock, wild oats and bromes, erodium,

rose clover, and many others species, mostly from Europe. Our motto is “remove the exotics.” Most of the exotics are annuals and their seeds are actually quite short-lived in the soil and quite straightforward to eradicate in a three-year time frame. That said, eradication takes tons of work, albeit glorious and fulfilling work, and requires diligence and exacting follow-up to make sure the exotics do not reseed.

One of the pioneering techniques we’re using is vinegar spray (5% acetic acid, just like you use in your kitchen) to kill young invasive seedlings. This technique is quite effective, especially on the broadleaf plants (dicots), when applied within two months of the first rains that bring up new growth. Vinegar is a “contact spray” that burns the foliage of plants, but unlike systemic weed killers like Roundup (glyphosate), it is not taken into the stems and roots. Vinegar may require follow-up sprays or hand weeding, especially on large-seeded grasses like wild oats.

As to results...the picture (top, right) is a high-ridge meadow terrace, looking southwest, after one year of mowing, spraying and hand weeding.

All plants in this early April photo are natives: besides the bloomers (blue dicks, poppies, and the yellow biscuit root), there are several species of native grasses (purple needlegrass, California melic, and June grass), soap root, golden aster, and buckwheat. Gone is the blanket of thistles, rose clover, and erodium that had covered and choked the natives growing underneath.

In the third year, once the invasive seed bank is nearly extinguished, we can then sow with a mix of locally gathered native annuals. After that, having put into place the essential elements of ecosystem recovery, our job is to keep tabs on the occasional weeds and let the natives sort themselves out.

Here’s another shot, looking east to Mount Diablo, along the Skyline trail (lower, right). Three years ago, this trail edge was a menacing thicket of Italian Thistle. Underneath were a few poppies and popcorn flowers. With the thistles gone, the natives have come roaring back. Our spirits soar as we nurture this beautiful land back to wholeness.

For more information or to volunteer, email: skylinegardens@ebcnps.org. Or, visit our website: skylinegardens.org.



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Skyline Gardens’ high ridge meadow looking southwest (top photo) and east toward Mt Diablo (lower photo),



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THE CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY

Dear Friends and Neighbors

Please join us on

Sunday, November 17, 2019, 4-6 PM

The Claremont Hotel

Skyline Room

Annual Meeting

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

Guest Speaker: Glen Schneider, Director of Skyline Gardens

“Restoring the high ridge meadow areas above Claremont Canyon”

Refreshments and wine bar. Invite a friend or neighbor.

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