



2002 Report to Our Members

Claremont Canyon Conservancy
Oakland/Berkeley

Report to our members:

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: What we have been doing and what we are working on in Claremont Canyon

This has been a busy year. Instead of having too many Board meetings, we elected to have four Founding Sponsors and Board Members act as an Executive Committee to make operational decisions within the guidelines set out by the Board. They are: Tim Wallace, President; Bill McClung, Vice-President; Tamia Marg, Secretary; and Joe Engbeck, Board Member. We meet every 3-4 weeks, and should anyone want to review our meeting Summaries, please ask Tamia (tmarg@california.com). The Executive Committee finds itself working more than half-time for the Conservancy; it all takes more time and more energy than we thought.

MEMBERSHIP:

As of our November 17 Annual Meeting, we have 115 Founding Sponsors, who have contributed \$1,000 or pledged \$1,000 over a ten-year span, and 80 regular members who have donated various amounts. We're more than half-way to our goal of 200 Founding Sponsors within the first year of our existence. Can any of you help by bringing in a friend? We need your help!

NON-PROFIT STATUS:

We have obtained all the legal requirements of being a non-profit organization from both the federal and state authorities. Again, if you need numbers and dates for tax reporting purposes, please contact Tamia, our Secretary.

ASSISTANT:

We have hired Amber Bach as Assistant to the Executive Committee to assist with administration and organization, develop a database of members and residents in Claremont Canyon, research grant and funding opportunities, and develop a membership

outreach campaign. She is the Conservancy's only paid employee, comes highly recommended and is much needed.

FUEL REDUCTION:

The Conservancy has been instrumental in two major fuel reduction efforts, one conducted by UC and one by EBMUD.

Last summer UC took out eucalyptus trees along a 500 feet stretch of Grizzly Peak Blvd, south of the Claremont Ave/Fish Ranch Road and Grizzly intersection (Four Corners). The CCC urged UC to do even more. From the fire perspective, this ridgeline area is key to fire safety. We were pleased when UC took on Phase II of their project in the fall of 2002, extending 150 feet down from Grizzly Peak Blvd. This effort included removing about three acres of eucalyptus resprouts from the 1991 fire, which had grown about 40 feet tall.

The second project involves EBMUD. EBMUD agreed to work with CDC crews under CDF to reduce the fuel loading on about 6 acres of heavy chaparral immediately northeast of the Four Corners saddle. This area had been identified by CDF Battalion Chief John Elliff as a place firefighters could potentially take a stand against fires coming from the Contra Costa County side. The Conservancy helped scope the project. The CDC and EBMUD collaboration in January and February of 2002 went smoothly in every respect. About 22 tons of fuels per acre were cut and then chipped or burned in small piles. The Conservancy praised the participants formally for their excellent work together, and both the project and the Conservancy's comments were noted in the Spring EBMUD newsletter.

The Conservancy has requested EBMUD to be diligent with the broom and eucalyptus on their side of Grizzly Peak, across from the UC land mentioned above. In response, EBMUD brought back the horse-logger they have worked with for years to concentrate on this area.

We have met with the site manager and people responsible for the Pacifica Foundation /KPFA radio tower land, and given them some ideas for managing their land after the Fire Department asked them to clear their land. Hopefully, we have created an opportunity for a Merritt College class in restoration to look at the challenge of this ridge-top site with some natives and many weedy flammable exotics.

CARS:

Last summer, two cars went hurtling off Grizzly Peak Blvd into the Canyon within hours of each other (resulting in multiple injuries and one fatality) once again proved the need for better guard rails along this scenic drive. Believe it or not, UC planners tell us that 26 vehicles have gone over the edge and are still at the bottom of Claremont Canyon - and any one happening during critical fire weather could have been disastrous. We would like to see low stone walls along these dangerous spots, a step up from guard rails, and a city beautification project that would be appreciated by both local and visiting sightseers.

We are also encouraging UC to place felled eucalyptus logs to discourage Off Road Vehicles from their destructive driving on dirt roads off Grizzly Peak Blvd.

Also, both Claremont Ave and Grizzly Peak Blvd are favorite dumping grounds for vehicles. It is especially disconcerting when the dumpers feel that the best way to erase their tracks is to set the cars on fire. Again, we have just been lucky these incidents have not resulted in a conflagration. More vigilance is needed.

We are working with two dedicated neighbors from the North Hills Phoenix Association, Dan Grasseti and Judy Proller, on road improvements in our area. The report that we generated pointed out places that lacked critical safety features. These include striping or reflectors on major thoroughfares as well as guardrails in key spots along precipitous edges and curves where vehicles all too frequently miss the turn. While some of the road safety issues can be addressed without too much cost, the city of Oakland claims that guardrails cost about \$80-120 per foot to install, reflectors \$37,000 per mile, and striping \$231,000 per mile or something close to that. These are advisable, but expensive improvements to our roads that it appears we must lobby for. It is only luck that we have not witnessed this scenario: a car misses a turn on Grizzly Peak Blvd and, instead of being deflected by a guardrail, hurtles over the road edge, and finally comes to a halt, sitting on some tinder dry grass on a hot windy day in October.

PRIVATE LANDOWNERS:

The Conservancy has assisted private land-holders in the Canyon in various ways. Working with Camille Rogers and the City of Oakland Fire Department, we have been able to mitigate some of the extreme clearing requirements. Bill McClung's firm, Shelterbelt, has been active in selective cutting of hillside lots, including some steep ones. We will soon have as part of our web site the "Making Decisions" segment from the East Bay Vegetation Management Almanac, to give landowners an idea of the choices they have in vegetation management.

Bill made a report on how well the private landowners (adjacent to the EBRPD land) took care of their land and vegetation vis a vis the fire hazard in Claremont Canyon. The conclusion was that the private property managers were for the most part doing a good job in contrast with the overgrown vegetation of the Park land. We were invited to present this report at a meeting of the EBRPD Operations Committee.

On another front, we hope to negotiate a resolution to the controversy created by the Oakland Fire Dept regulations in requiring private lands already under vegetation management regime to be razed. Erosion control and moving chips off the property are two of the issues to be discussed.

REDWOOD RESTORATION PROJECT:

UC's land to the south of Claremont Ave, below Grizzly Peak Blvd, was the site of a massive effort to plant redwood seedlings in the early 70's. Around 1972, after it was assumed the eucalyptus there had died due to a freezing winter, they were logged. By the time the eucalyptus recovered, growing multiple stems from each trunk, the redwoods were still young. Now as the eucalyptus are being felled once again, the maturing redwoods are being revealed. They should now grow vigorously in response to the increased water and sunlight. While redwoods did not occur naturally in Claremont Canyon during historical times, they are native to the Oakland/Berkeley Hills and still occur naturally just a couple of miles south along the ridge

in Redwood Regional Park, Roberts Regional Park, and in Oakland's Joaquin Miller Park. We are eager to see this type of conversion to a more native, less flammable forest.

The 3 acres of resprouts that was recently cleared by UC is sorely in need of a followup restoration plan. We have suggested one to UC that would be a potentially exciting ongoing volunteer project, involving the planting of redwoods and other natives found in the vicinity.

TRAILS:

Ideally the Gwin Canyon trail should connect with the trail leading to the northern ridge of Claremont Canyon via Gelston Road. With permission from the EBRPD, we have staked out a connector trail to link the EBRPD land on the south and north sides of Claremont Ave. The trail now needs to be constructed and EBRPD is deciding who will do this work.

PACIFICA:

The Pacifica Foundation owns about 3 acres above Grizzly Peak Blvd and Gwin Canyon and to the south of EBMUD. We have contacted their "land steward" and have assisted him in finding appropriate resources to reduce the dense broom and eucalyptus on their property.

VOLUNTEER Projects [\(click here\)](#):

Eight volunteer projects have taken place in Gwin Canyon working with the East Bay Regional Park District people on clearing the trail, identifying native and non-native plants, pulling broom and other invasive exotics, and establishing a rapport with a group of knowledgeable and helpful Parks employees.

Two volunteer trail-clearing projects were also organized in Garber Park. The City of Oakland Fire Marshall Ed Geblein made three on-site visits and has promised some \$30,000 for fuel reduction efforts if the Parks and Recreation Manager, Martin Mataresse, can get the green light. Here is where much time is spent - trying to coordinate bureaucratic meetings, not offend anybody, and make things happen.

Another volunteer project involved about 8 visits to an acre or so on UC land on Claremont Ave at the sharp turn where the UC Ecological Study Area sign is usually engulfed by hemlock and thistle in the early summer. UC has been cooperative and appreciative of our efforts, and the place does look better and is less flammable. Remember that most fires start from roadside ignitions.

PRECEDENT:

Several tours have enabled us to witness first hand wildfire hazard mitigation projects in the Bay Area. We visited Angel Island, where David Boyd, the State Parks resource ecologist, gave us a tour of the 80 acre, 1992-96 euc removal project. He explained the tactics they used, pointing out successes and pitfalls. We also went to China Camp to see his euc removal and broom control there. We toured Lawrence Berkeley Lab to see their fuel reduction program, and discuss fuelbreak/bufferzone strategy with Rich McLure, LBL's grounds manager.

NATURAL RESOURCES AND FIRE:

We continue to meet with different specialists in botany, ornithology, entymology, hydrology, and fire on site in Claremont Canyon to get a better picture of the complexity of the Canyon in the midst of the urbanized Bay Area.

This year we are working on the first annual Fire Hazard Assessment Report of Claremont Canyon. This year's is part of our initial grant requirement, but it is so important that we want to make it more detailed, and to make it an annual Report to you, our membership. Please scroll down for a posted copy.

WHIPSNAKE:

One of our Board members is reviewing the current status of the Alameda Whipsnake and its impact on projects we want to do within the Canyon. The preeminent Whipsnake expert, Carol Swaim, is conducting a study of this endangered species on UC and EBRPD land along the south-facing ridge of Claremont Canyon. You might have noticed the strips laid out on the hillsides to catch the snakes so they may be tagged and tracked.

EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH:

We offered one educational seminar (with limited attendance but we'll get to all of you with an invitation next time) with speakers Steven Edwards, Director of the EBRPD Botanical Garden in Tilden, and Richard Schwartz, a notable scholar of Berkeley history. Edwards outlined the pre-settlement era landscape from the geology and other natural history of Claremont Canyon and its surrounds to the native peoples who lived here. From there, Schwartz took us through the times of the Spanish Land Grants to the settling by Easterners before statehood and up to the early 1900's.

FUEL MODELING:

The Conservancy acted as a client to a group of graduate students in Professor John Radke's class in the GIS Center at UC Berkeley. Our interest was to forecast the speed and extent of fires ignited at likely locations along Grizzly Peak Blvd. under a typical October Diablo Wind situation. We supplied the students with our vegetation map and weather data from the EBRPD Fire Chief, Dennis Reins. This project, while inconclusive was the first step in learning how GIS and fuel modeling software can help us determine the most effective vegetation management strategies.

MAPS:

We have developed a map showing public and private ownership within the Canyon based on numerous sources, as well as a preliminary map of vegetation types in the Canyon based on a high resolution 1999 aerial photo. In addition we are working on developing a GIS database so that we will have a spatial inventory of the canyon that we can work with and update over time.

Eureka Cartography in Berkeley is putting together a GIS data base for Claremont Canyon. With GPS input from CCC members and students of the local environment, we can begin to form a graphical knowledge base that will be a useful educational and planning tool.

PHOTOS:

Along with the maps we hope you tap into the photos shown on our website which show the Canyon in the 1930's, Claremont Ave after the eucalyptus clearcut of the 1970's, and the views today. You'll see the Canyon is far from sleepy - it's dynamic, an ever-changing tableau of vegetation and human intervention. Without much intervention in the past few decades, the French broom and the eucs have grown exponentially and so has the fire hazard.

GRANTS:

In November, 2002, we applied for a grant of \$10,000 from the San Francisco Foundation to bring young people from local schools for managed field trips and stewardshi[projects in Claremont Canyon.

Last year, we worked hard in preparing three grant applications for the Conservancy, but were unsuccessful. With the EBRPD and the Diablo Fire Safe Council, we identified and developed three fuel-reduction projects on the EBRPD land in the Canyon. With support from the EBRPD, we applied for \$126,000 in funding from the 2002 Community-Based Wildfire Prevention Program to reduce dangerous fuel loads -- especially French broom, eucalyptus, and other exotics - in strategic (for fire fighting) locations in upper, middle, and lower Claremont Canyon. We committed \$14,000 of funds raised by the Conservancy and other in-kind help to match these applications.

We need to now find out why we failed, and do our best to return to these projects with the same or some other granting agency. It is critical that we reduce the fuel loads throughout the Canyon as soon as possible. If any of you know of any possible granting source, please let us know so that we can act on it quickly. We'll do the work if you can point the way!

AND SO?

As you can see, your Conservancy has been busy and fairly productive. Our limiting factors are money to instigate the things that we think ought to be done to reduce fire risks, restore the Canyon, and make it more amenable to the public. It's a treasure, full of wonderful sights and sounds, and with a history that would take many newsletters to tell about. We must consider it's future now.

If any of you have any suggestions about what we can do to do a better job, please let us know. We'd love to hear from you - any suggestions, new ideas, better ways to do something, getting in new members, volunteering for projects, anything you can think of to make the Conservancy better - please let us know.

And again, many thanks for joining us all in this effort to make Claremont Canyon a place we can all to go and appreciate in its fullest.