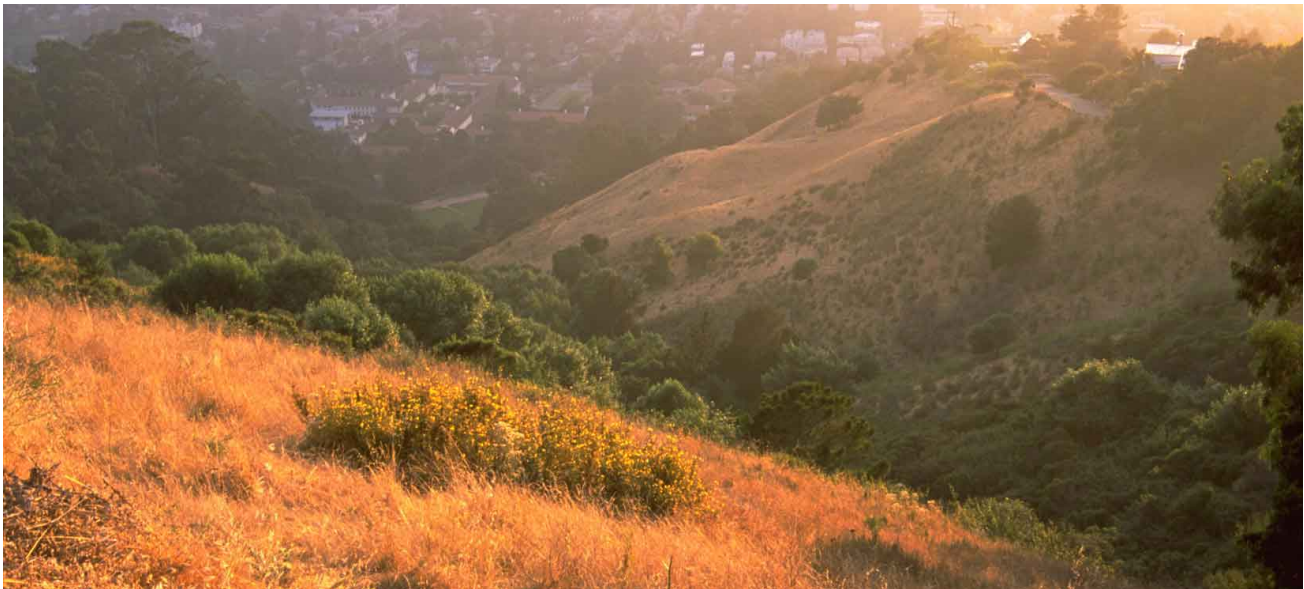


THE CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY

FALL 2003

News

A COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION FORMED IN 2001 TO SUPPORT THE
LONG-TERM STEWARDSHIP OF CLAREMONT CANYON



Fall in the Canyon

It's fire season, and most of us head into this part of the year with some fears about what the next two months might bring. We hope that Fate is kind and blows mostly cool sea breezes our way. Among the Conservancy missions, reducing the threat of wildfire looms particularly large in these dry hot months. Small fires are inevitable, but the Conservancy has been busy trying to shave the odds against catastrophic fire.

Our challenges are complex: we need to protect the value of the homes in the Canyon as well as the intrinsic value of the vegetation that comprises the Canyon wildlife habitat, much of which lies within a public preserve. How do we achieve protection of these valuable assets, recognizing that both habitat and homes constitute major sources of fuel? (...continued below.)

Backyard Gatherings Old and New Members

The following informal meetings are an opportunity to meet together in a friendly environment, share food and drink and bring in new members. Please RSVP to ClaremontCanyon@Hotmail.com or call 843-2226.

Lower Canyon Meeting, October 5, 2-4 PM
The Meryash Family, 200 Stonewall Road

Mid Canyon Meeting, October 19, 2-4 PM
The Bar-Lev Family, 84 Gypsy Lane

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Founding Sponsor Program

In and near Claremont Canyon are over 1,000 private households. One in ten has joined the Conservancy as a Founding Sponsor by pledging \$1,000 to help establish our organizational base. We also have less expensive ways to be members, but we hope many other neighbors will join the 132 Founding Sponsors who have made this major tax-deductible contribution to our work.

Wildfire Prevention District

Planning is now underway by the Oakland City Council to create a new Special Assessment Management District to fund fire prevention and vegetation management services in the Hills area. A vote by mail should occur in November. The Conservancy approves this move in principle and encourages our members to vote for it. We plan to provide input on specific actions within Claremont Canyon. For more information call Sue Piper at 843-3828 or go to www.keeпоaklandfiresafe.org.

Firewise

Join the Firewise Communities Workshop on October 15th and 16th, 2003, at the San Ramon Valley Conference Center. The workshop hosts up to 100 participants and features how to improve safety in the wildland/urban interface. Call (510) 893-9888 or email amber@diablofiresafe.org.

Stay Connected

If you have not recently received emails from the Conservancy, we may have the wrong email address for you. You are invited to get on our list by emailing ClaremontCanyon@Hotmail.com.

Fall in the Canyon (...continued from page 1)

We begin with two assumptions. First, that fire safety and preservation of the environment are everyone's responsibility, public and private landowner alike. And second, that only through partnership and coordinated effort can we shape these responsibilities into wise and well-planned action. Accordingly, we have formed good working relationships with many agencies and individuals, each of whom holds an important piece of the overall puzzle. This past year we have been busy sharing information (and the workload!) with these allies. In addition, we reach out to those who live on the Canyon's edge to encourage and applaud their efforts to create defensible space in and around their homes where fire safety begins.

In the next few pages we describe some of the year's accomplishments. Much is going on as the Conservancy works toward better understanding and control of wildfire, preserving habitat for wildlife, and attracting responsible hikers, birders and naturalists to enjoy this wonderful Canyon.

Permission and cooperation are the key factors in getting projects actually done, as the Conservancy owns none of the land. We've been getting substantial cooperation from the two major landowners - UC Berkeley and the East Bay Regional Parks District, each owning over 200 acres in Claremont Canyon - and trust we will continue to build on this foundation of mutual good will.

Liaisons with the Landowners

Tom Klatt, Director of Emergency Planning for UC, has worked hard to reduce wildfire hazard and promote restoration projects. With his help, we now have a Memorandum of Understanding with UC that permits us to carry out approved

stewardship projects on UC land in the Canyon

We have continued to keep a close working relationship with the EBRPD during their reorganization after the inestimable General Operations Manager, Jerry Kent, recently retired. Fire hazard mitigation in EBRPD lands now is the responsibility of Fire Chief Dennis Rein and Fire Captain Brian Cordeiro, while Claremont Canyon's public access is the responsibility of Ed Leong. We worked hard to encourage EBRPD to use CDC crews for clearing invasive exotics and creating effective buffer zones in the Canyon. This year the EBRPD made extensive use of these crews in thinning vegetation along Claremont Ave and around Gelston Road.

We have applied for three grants that would allow significant fuel hazard reduction to be done within the Canyon on EBRPD land, focusing on removing invasive exotic plants within a buffer zone adjacent to neighborhoods. Another more inclusive grant application we are working on will contribute to long-term stewardship in partnership with the large landowners.

Fuel Reduction

Last year, we saw the completion of Phase II of UC's program to remove eucalyptus trees near the intersection of Grizzly Peak Boulevard and Claremont Ave/Fish Ranch Road. UC is expanding the area of eucalyptus cutting this year, creating more opportunity for the Conservancy's stewardship in the follow-up vegetation management.

Upon the Conservancy's urging, deadwood, weeds, and debris were removed from Garber Park by the City of Oakland. Since then, Conservancy volunteers have worked on more clearing and trail maintenance in the Park.

EBRPD cleared several acres of broom from the Stonewall Road trailhead up to Panoramic Hill after we appealed for better management there.

Roadside maintenance by the City of Oakland covered most of Claremont Avenue this year but not much of Grizzly Peak Boulevard. We took up the slack and mowed and weed-whipped portions of Grizzly Peak Boulevard.

We met with City of Oakland fire officials to create a policy allowing private lands, under an approved vegetation management regime, to be exempted from City regulations that prescribe razing the grounds. The policy is under review.

Trails

Encouraged by the Conservancy's interest, Claremont Canyon Park District supervisor, Ed Leong, cleared the main path in Gwin Canyon to make it walkable once again and promised that his crews would pay more attention to keeping back the brush, poison oak and hemlock from taking over. Our Trails Committee met in the field with Ed Leong and reviewed with him the route we selected for a cross-canyon connector from Gwin Canyon to the north ridge of Claremont Canyon. We are waiting for a response from EBRPD.

Volunteer

Fifty paid and purely volunteer projects to reduce fuel hazard by selectively cutting brush and weeds near roads and trails were conducted. The paid efforts were primarily for the use of gas-powered mechanical tools. Earth Day (April 19) was recognized with a workday in Garber Park.

Joan Collignon organized a series of nature walks that offered a (free) tour around

and into the canyon with different experts and a chance to understand the depth, diversity, and history of the place. On National Trails Day, June 7, members participated in a discussion about vegetation management and a butterfly and native plant walk along the trail in Gwin Canyon.

A successful volunteer effort of both adults and high-school students was organized to plant 50 local redwood seedlings. Later, we installed a drip irrigation system to help the young trees through the summer. Most have survived and are doing well. We supervised a project of pulling Yellow Star Thistle, an invasive weed, along the Side Hill Trail on UC land, one of the most botanically diverse hillsides in the Canyon.

Volunteer organizational work by the officers and Board, some of whom work on Conservancy matters almost half time, amount to an enormous effort that keeps the Conservancy functioning.

Education and Research

We are continuing to work on our plan to replace the very hazardous eucalyptus stand in the upper canyon with a cool, moist, relatively fire-safe redwood grove. Joe Engbeck has enlisted the help of recognized experts including forest geneticist Bill Libby, and has acquired a supply of redwood seeds from trees indigenous to the Oakland/Berkeley Hills.

Laura Baker is sampling live-fuel moisture in coyote brush in the North Coastal Scrub habitat in Claremont Canyon to assess more precisely its flammability. These data are being shared with EBRPD Fire Chief Dennis Rein and Wei Luo, a graduate student of John Radke's, involved with the Wildland-Urban Interface Fire Physics Group. Dick White has been exploring different issues with the problem of modeling fire events in Claremont Canyon with Wei Luo, Rich McClure (LBNL), and Matthew Wasilik (UC's EECS). Tamia Marg is exchanging information with Wei Luo on vegetation so that more realistic modeling software can be developed. Through high-resolution aerials and ground-truthing, Tamia hopes to improve on the first vegetation map of the Canyon she did last year.

Joe Engbeck and Tamia Marg are continuing to work with Eureka Cartography on the GIS base map of the Canyon. The aim is to have a tool that may be used for planning and educational purposes. To increase our understanding of how habitat is used and to help determine the best approaches to vegetation management, we are collecting plant and animal surveys, conducted in the Canyon by people from CNPS, Audubon, UC, and Point Reyes Bird Observatory.