

THE CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY

FALL 2005



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

Looking up the canyon from Drury Court on the southern slope. Photo by Sharon Beals © 2004.

Message To Our Members

Since its inception, the Claremont Canyon Conservancy has been concerned with fire safety in Claremont Canyon. This year the Board of Directors voted on the following policy statement, which reflects our perspective. We publish it here along with an updated statement of mission because, together, they form the foundation of our principles and goals that inform our work.

Fire Safety Policy

The Claremont Canyon Conservancy advocates an integrated fire management plan (IFM) where all parties share in the responsibility of creating defensible space to reduce potential damage and to aid firefighters in their role of fire suppression. IFM requires careful attention to potential sources of ignition under power lines and along narrow road edges where cars park, creating congestion and preventing access by firefighters. In an IFM plan all landowners, both public and private, help create a canyon-wide landscape managed to meet the twin goals of maintaining the natural resources of the Claremont Canyon watershed and achieving greater defensibility against catastrophic wildfire. Central to the protection of the homes in and around the canyon is the achievement of defensible space at individual home sites and in neighborhoods. Also important is the strategic man-

agement of vegetation on public lands adjacent to the urban/wildland interface so that firefighters and residents can fight wildfires effectively. Buffer zones (corridors of managed vegetation, equipment staging areas, etc) need to be planned specific to each site based on evaluation by knowledgeable experts. While the main emphasis is upon the reduction of exotic invasive vegetation such as broom and eucalyptus, some native vegetation may be reduced at specific sites where appropriate and when in keeping with the long-term goal of adaptive management.

Updated Mission Statement

The Claremont Canyon Conservancy is dedicated to the preservation and restoration of Claremont Canyon's natural landscape and to the promotion of fire safety throughout the canyon and in adjacent residential neighborhoods. The Conservancy works closely with public and private property owners and various government agencies to ensure the best possible stewardship of the canyon as a whole. We support educational programs designed to improve fire safety and seek out the most effective measures that private property owners can take to protect their own properties from wildfire. The Conservancy supports and actively conducts strategic fuel reduction projects in the canyon. We promote stewardship through general weed management to help restore the natural balance in the various ecosystems within the watershed, through educational programs that increase public awareness and appreciation of the canyon, and through advocacy for improved access to the canyon.

Know Your Enemy: The Yellow Star Thistle

by Laura Baker

This summer, a bumper crop of yellow star thistle emerged in response to our heavy winter and spring rains. One of the worst invasive weeds in California, yellow star thistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*) thrives along roadsides and other disturbed areas. If left unchecked, it can produce dense stands that displace native plants and animals, threaten natural ecosystems, and significantly deplete soil moisture. So far, YST is confined to small areas within the interior of the Claremont Canyon and the Conservancy is dedicated to halting its further spread.

Yellow star thistle probably arrived from southern Europe as a contaminant of alfalfa seed (*Invasive Plants of California's Wildlands*, Bossard et al., 2000). It was first observed in Oakland in 1869, and by 1995 it was estimated to cover 10-12 million acres in California. One plant can produce nearly 75,000 seeds, and in heavily infested areas seed production varies between 50-200 million seeds per acre. The seeds are transported to new areas primarily through human activities. Large amounts are carried by road maintenance equipment and other vehicles, but seeds are also transported by wind and by animals and humans when their bristles cling to clothing or fur.

The thistle seeds germinate with the fall rains, and by summer the seedlings change color — from green to bluish-green— and begin to produce flower heads. The plant produces long wicked spines prior to the opening of the flowers, an adaptation that protects it from being browsed. These sharp spines make painful scrapes on bare legs and hands!

The best approach to controlling this weed is early eradication of spot populations, which is the strategy we are using in Claremont Canyon. Hand-pulling (and bagging) is possible in smaller areas. Once a population has

spread, mechanical means such as weed-whipping or mowing and chemical herbicides may become necessary. In addition, six species of insects have been approved by the USDA as biological control agents and released in California (three weevils and three flies). Their larvae feed on the thistle's flower heads, using the developing seeds as a food source.

This summer the Conservancy focused thistle eradication efforts in several different parts of the canyon. The Four Corners intersection was identified as one hotspot from which the thistle was spreading. Tamia Marg worked the southwest side of Grizzly Peak Blvd., hand-pulling and bagging thistle plants, while Bill McClung, Paul McGee, Sam Goldhaber and others removed thistle from the UC property on the northwest corner. Scott Hill from EBMUD monitored the northeast corner, and Ed Leong's and Brad Gallup's crews from the East Bay Regional Park District removed thistles from Gwin Canyon. Further down the canyon, Bill McClung and Paul McGee worked to remove thistle from the chert wall.

The largest project undertaken was a three-day, all-out attack mounted by the Conservancy against the thistle infestation along the Sidehill Trail on UC property, one of the canyon's richest native wildflower communities. The Conservancy provided funds to hire a small crew from MANOS in Oakland to work with me to hand-pull the huge thistle population— enough to fill over 60 large plastic garden bags. UC's Tom Klatt arranged for the transport and disposal of the bags. Next year, we hope to tackle thistle along Grizzly Peak Blvd. north of Four Corners.

Yellow star thistle is a formidable adversary, and keeping the canyon free of it requires perseverance. If you would like to join the fight, please consider making a donation of time or money to help the Conservancy banish this noxious weed from our watershed.

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Biologist Laura Baker of the Conservancy holds the bouquet-sized plant of silvery grey leaves, bright yellow flowers and pointy spines.



Standing atop of a mountain of bagged thistle, workers complete their day of removing the thorny menace from Claremont Canyon's Side Hill Trail.

Max Moritz Speaks at November 20 Annual Meeting

Max Moritz, PhD, of UC Berkeley's Department of Environmental Science Policy and Management, was recently appointed to co-direct (along with Professor Scott Stephens) UC's new Center for Fire Research and Outreach. The new center aims to foster academic collaboration across the UC Berkeley campus, other UC campuses and government agencies, and to become the focal point for scientific research on wildfires. The center will provide a clearinghouse for information needs before, during, and after wildfires. Dr. Moritz, who has published widely in the area of wildfire ecology, will be the keynote speaker at our Annual Meeting.

Fall Neighborhood Walk Arouns Learn How To Best Protect Your Home

The Conservancy, in collaboration with neighborhood groups, is sponsoring Sunday morning walk-arounds with fire safety expert, Frank Beall, professor of environmental sciences at UC. Many of us heard Dr Beall when he was our keynote speaker at last year's annual meeting. Join him on a tour in the urban/wildland intermix and learn what homeowners can do to prepare for a wildfire. The tour is free. All are welcomed to join. For details and to reserve a spot on one of these leisurely walks, please email claremontcanyon@hotmail.com.

October 30 – South Canyon (Strathmoor Drive)
November 6 – North Canyon (Stonewall Road)



**MEMBERS, FRIENDS AND
NEIGHBORS, Please join us**

Annual Meeting
of the CLAREMONT
CANYON CONSERVANCY

The Claremont Hotel
November 20, 2005, 4-6 pm

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

Keynote Speaker: Max Moritz, Ph.D.
"Wildfires and Ecosystems"

*No-host wine bar with complimentary refreshments.
Bring a friend or neighbor.*

RSVP: ClaremontCanyon@hotmail.com
call 510-843-2226



Sulfur shelves are also called “chicken of the woods” and considered delectable by some mushroom enthusiasts. They are occasionally known to cause gastric distress, however; particularly those growing on eucalyptus. Since many eucalyptus stumps in the region have been treated with herbicides, sulfur shelves from suspect areas should be avoided. There are also some poisonous fungi (such as the jack-o-lantern mushroom) that may resemble sulfur shelves to the uninitiated.

The Sulfur Shelf, First Mushroom of the Season

By Martin Holden

The sulfur shelf is one of the most conspicuous mushrooms found in the East Bay Hills. Sulfur shelves begin to sprout from stumps and on older, weakened or burned trees, particularly eucalyptus, in early October before the fall rains have come. Typically, the mushrooms begin as small efflorescences, like bright yellow marshmallows. Given time, they may grow into huge multi-tiered clusters weighing twenty pounds or more.

Sulfur shelves (*Laetiporus gilbertsonii*, recently separated from *L. sulphureus* on the West Coast) are polypores, shelf-like fungi that have small pores on their undersides, rather than gills. Their most conspicuous feature is their bright yellow color (sometimes banded with orange); hence the name. This fungus takes advantage of the moisture and sugars from dead and dying trees, which is why they flourish when everything else is dry. Like many other fungi, they provide an invaluable service by helping to decompose wood, returning its valuable nutrients to the soil.

Last fall, several big, black stinkbugs took up residence on a large sulfur shelf growing on a stump near the Clark Kerr Campus. They lived there happily for two months, eating the succulent fungus and lolling in the sun, in a luxurious beetle heaven. It reminded me of a story in Steinbeck’s *Cannery Row*, where Doc wonders if stink bugs are praying when they stick their hind ends in the air (as they often do). Now I think that they *are* praying— for a big, beautiful *L. gilbertsonii* to call home.

More about Mushrooms

What we usually think of as mushroom season in California begins after the first cool winter rains. Mushroom lovers around the Bay Area head for the forests. On January 21, 2006 the Conservancy will sponsor its annual Mushroom Walk in Garber Park with much-admired mycologist Robert Mackler. Explore Garber Park with Robert and get all your questions answered about fungi, whether edible, interesting or dangerous— such as the deadly *Amanita* pictured below. Can’t wait? On December 3, Robert will be available from 10:00 am - 2:00 pm at the Oakland Museum during its 36th Annual Fungus Fair. There will be hundreds of freshly gathered specimens, cooking and art demonstrations and activities for the whole family. Note that most mushrooms that grow locally are NOT good to eat. For more on the Fungus Fair, see www.museumca.org/events/fungus_fair.html.



Lovely but deadly: Amanita phalloides, pictured here growing in Claremont Canyon, and the closely-related A. virosa are responsible for most mushroom-related fatalities in the U.S.



© 2004 Sharon Beals

*Fall comes early to the buckeye (*Aesculus californica*), which loses its leaves in the late summer to conserve moisture. These buckeyes, mottled with lichen, are growing on the shady, north-facing slope of Claremont Canyon in Garber Park.*

UC Berkeley Removes Fire-Hazardous Trees from Campus Property in Hills

Fall is fire abatement time at the University of California and several projects are underway to remove more than 3,000 non-native trees, the majority of them fire-hazardous eucalyptus, from campus property in the hills.

In Claremont Canyon, UC, in partnership with the Conservancy and the City of Oakland, is nearly done with its fifth season of a 10-year abatement project (see following article) that began in 2001 just below Grizzly Peak Blvd at Fish Ranch Road.

UC's other major vegetation management projects are at Frowning Ridge, which is atop Grizzly Peak and overlooking Strawberry Canyon and the UC campus, and at Upper Strawberry Canyon at the intersection of Centennial Drive and Grizzly Peak. The work at Upper Strawberry, now finished for the season, was a pilot project of a major effort, funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), that will continue through 2009.

UC has nearly 1,000 acres of flammable materials that stretch from the Berkeley hills to north Oakland.

UC aims to remove 50,000 non-native, fire prone trees by 2014 and create a network of defensible space, safe evacuation routes and fire containment zones to prevent a recurrence of a major firestorm.

More Redwoods for Upper Claremont Canyon

Those fire-dangerous eucalyptus trees in upper Claremont Canyon are coming down on schedule and preparations have been made—just like last year—to replace them with coast redwood seedlings. The University of California is currently removing the eucs on a parcel-by-parcel basis as funding becomes available to pay for the removal work. So far this year, about one thousand eucalyptus stems have been removed from the upper canyon area. At the same time, the Claremont Canyon Conservancy is raising about one thousand redwood seedlings that will be ready to plant early next year after the winter rains have brought renewed moisture to the Oakland/Berkeley Hills. The actual planting will be done by Conservancy volunteers. Anyone interested in joining the effort should contact the Conservancy for details.



Homes at the urban-wildland intermix, as seen from the Ridge Trail of the Claremont Canyon Preserve, stand out against the cloudy sky. Just below the homes, most of which were rebuilt after the 1991 firestorm, is the mixed hardwood forest of Garber Park. The entirety of Garber Park was spared during the firestorm.

Nature Photographs of Sharon Beals

For the last several years, San Francisco photographer Sharon Beals has regularly visited the East Bay to observe the native flora and habitats of the remarkable open land in Claremont Canyon. Sharon's photographs have appeared on the Conservancy's websites and newsletters, entirely donated (see panorama on page 1, photo on this page, and elsewhere in this newsletter). In gratitude, the Conservancy sponsored a reception for her exhibit at the UC Berkeley Faculty Club this past July. Sharon delighted us with a colorful slideshow and a native plant discussion. From exquisite close-ups of flowering native plants to vast stretches of closed canopy hardwood forest on steep slopes, Sharon's work reminds us of the beauties and values of the land. For more pictures see www.sharonbeals.com.

Fires in the Canyon

No year in Claremont Canyon is fire free, including the current one. During this past year, at least three, perhaps more, small fires broke out along or near

Grizzly Peak Blvd., ignited by the usual sources: traffic flares, fire works and car fires. The fires all occurred on calm days and were quickly put out. They show how effective fire fighting can be under calm conditions, especially when fire officials can be alerted promptly

Report any suspicion of fire no matter how small. Report all hazardous activity near wildlands. Because city and park services are often complaint driven, do not hesitate to call when you see trash dumped along the roadside or other unsightly or dangerous material. We want our Canyon to be safe and beautiful.

Know Whom to Call

- Report all fires: 911
- Dangerous activity along roadsides (off hours): 777-3333 or 238-7391
- Illegal roadside dumping: 434-5101
- UC Campus Police: 642-6760
- Regional Parks Police: 881-1833
- Free yard waste removal (Oakland) 613-8710
- Free chipping services (Oakland) 283-7388

What To Do if a Wildfire Threatens Your Home

- If you are warned that a wildfire is coming, listen to KCBS (740AM), KGO (810AM), and Berkeley's WNZV (1610AM) radio for reports and evacuation information. Follow the instructions of local officials.
- Back your car into the garage or park it in an open space facing the direction of escape. Close the car doors and windows. Leave the key in the ignition. Close garage windows and doors, but leave them unlocked. Disconnect your automatic garage door opener.

Oakland Wildfire Prevention District

Last year, Oakland voters approved the creation of a Wildfire Prevention Assessment District to promote fire safety in the East Bay Hills. The District has a budget of 1.7 million per year, which is spent on vegetation management, public education, fire-safety inspections of public and private property, and enforcement (if necessary). You may have seen District's mobile billboard promoting its mantra of: "Prevent, Protect, Prepare." Below is a summary of some of the District's recent activities.

Police Activity: There has been increased concern about the turnouts on Grizzly Peak Blvd. becoming "party spots" where people gather to have barbecues. Lt. Green of the Oakland Police Department has alerted officers to the importance of patrolling this area, especially at night on red alert days. OPD is prepared to issue citations and tow illegally parked cars if necessary. Residents are encouraged to report potentially hazardous activities to the OPD at 777-3333.

Fire Department Oversight: Vince Crudele (238-7391) has been appointed as the Fire Inspector for the Oakland Fire Department District 1. He is working closely with CalTrans to improve fire safety in the 24 corridor, and with EBMUD to patrol its properties. He is also working with the city to ensure that proper access and egress are maintained at construction sites in the area. OFD has also posted no smoking/no open flame signs in hazardous fire areas, and is considering installing seasonal no-parking signs and doubling fines on key evacuation routes. Another possibility is the closing of pullouts, and the institution of curfews during particularly hazardous weather conditions.

Vegetation Management: Substantial roadside mowing has been done along Claremont Ave., Tunnel Rd., Skyline Blvd. and Grizzly Peak Rd., overseen by LeRoy Griffith of the OFD, assistant fire marshal in charge of

vegetation management. The District has also sponsored a goat-grazing below Skyline and above the Caldecott Tunnel entrance. The District has been working in cooperation with the University of California clearing highly-flammable invasive eucalyptus and Monterey pine from Frowning Ridge, at the crucial intersection of Grizzly Peak and South Park Road.

The District board has also issued a list of "pyrophytes" or highly-flammable plants, which it proposes be banned from sale or planting in Oakland. This proposal has yet to be voted upon by the City Council. The list includes all species of broom, red and blue gum eucalyptus, jubata, pampas and fountain grasses and Monterey pine.

A wealth of useful phone numbers, emergency safety brochures and other information is available at the Wildfire Prevention District web site: www.oaklandnet.com/wildfirePrevention

Claremont Canyon is the largest relatively undisturbed canyon on the western slope of the Oakland/Berkeley Hills. Much of the canyon's watershed is publicly-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 reduce wildfire hazards, preserve or restore a healthy native ecosystem, and promote education and research.

Join the Conservancy

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

Family Membership: \$50 per year.

Individual, Student or Senior: \$15 per year.

Contact Us

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Website: <http://www.ClaremontCanyon.org>

The Board of Directors: Tim Wallace, president; Joe Engbeck, vice president; Tamia Marg, secretary; Marilyn Goldhaber, treasurer; Laura Baker, education; Bill McClung, stewardship. Other board members at large: Joshua Bar-Lev, Martin Holden, Matt Mitchell, Donald Pierce, David Sharp and Dick White.

The Claremont Canyon Conservancy News is edited by Marilyn Goldhaber, Joe Engbeck and Martin Holden



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Photographer Sharon Beals chronicles the seasons in Claremont Canyon (see inside, page 6).