



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

President's Message

By L. Tim Wallace

THE WELCOME RAINS OF THIS WINTER AND SPRING have renewed the natural beauty of Claremont Canyon. Take a few minutes to stop and enjoy a view or head out on one of the canyon's interesting trails. You'll see new growth and vigor everywhere.

On the cooler, moister side of the canyon, ferns and flowering forbs thrive under canopies of oak, bay, willow and buckeye. On the drier, rougher, south-facing side of the canyon, the landscape is moister than it's been in a few years. Glossy green leaves and spring flowers abound: the small ivory florets of coyote brush, the red spiky petals of Indian paintbrush and the deep purple blossoms of wild lupine.

As the weather warms up, lizards scoot a little faster, snakes slither along quicker and birds settle in to breed and raise their young. Though they hide from us most of the time, black-tailed deer browse the new growth, foxes roam for prey, and the dusky-footed wood rat builds its mounded nest of sticks and twigs. Two threatened species, thought to be in Claremont Canyon—the red-legged frog and the Alameda whipsnake (see page 5)—may be in need of special protection.

Of course, people are important to canyon life too, from those who enjoy the natural beauty and spectacular views, to those who help maintain the landscape by attending restoration workshops, building trails (see page 3), and protecting us from fire.

These are the values that inspired us to form the Conservancy 15 years ago with the goals of fostering a native habitat, enhancing public access and reducing the most obvious hazards that lead to devastating wildfire.

If you've followed the decade-long story, you'll know that removal of eucalyptus in old groves planted years ago is the number one program of

wildfire hazard mitigation in Claremont Canyon, both on East Bay Regional Park District land and on University of California land. The City of Oakland has a similar program of wildfire hazard mitigation but elsewhere in the hills. All three agencies were granted FEMA disaster prevention funds more than a decade ago to deal with the problems of eucalyptus and other hazardous vegetation, but the money has been held up as land managers and the public sort out the environmental review process with the federal funders.

As you may recall, the EIS—the Environmental Impact Statement—for the three grants was approved by FEMA and is now considered complete on the federal end. The next step is for each of the grant recipients to conduct their own EIR's (Environmental Impact Reports), as required under state law. The Park District has completed and approved its EIR and UC has issued an addendum to its fire management plan as a final step to its EIR. Oakland has yet to conduct an EIR for its portion of the grant. The City is now hiring consultants to prepare a vegetation management plan to include areas covered by the FEMA grant. Public input will be sought throughout the process, which is anticipated to take a year or more to complete.

The Conservancy actively supports all three wildfire plans funded by FEMA and has recently prepared a five-page letter to UC supporting the university's efforts. The letter, available on our website, details why we think their plan and addendum meet all the requirements for reducing fuel loads in a safe and effective manner while protecting native plants and wildlife—including the threatened Alameda whipsnake and the threatened red-legged frog.

A remaining hurdle involves two lawsuits filed against FEMA by groups opposed to the grants but for opposite reasons. One group wants few, if any, trees removed while the other claims

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that entire groves should be removed all at once, as originally specified by two of the grant recipients. The second lawsuit was brought about by the Sierra Club; the Conservancy, as well as other environmental groups, including the California Native Plant Society, concur. Efforts to settle the two opposing litigations failed in mediation earlier this year and a trial in federal court is expected to take place within several weeks.

Unfortunately, the process has been painfully slow while the eucalyptus forests continue to grow. Don't be surprised, though, if you see tree removal work taking place this summer.

Bring Back the Oaks

By Jim Hanson with assistance from Janis Bankoff

BRING BACK THE OAKS, a video focusing on the build-up of fire fuels in the East Bay hills, and a sensible way to deal with it, was released this spring with the hands-on participation and financial support from the Conservancy.



© 2016 Janis Bankoff

Filmmakers Corinne Weber and Marc Boubli with Conservancy volunteer and commentator Bob Strayer (right) filming on location.

Monday June 6, 7 PM

BRING BACK THE OAKS

Video Screening and Reception

Hiller Highlands Country Club

Details at www.claremontcanyon.org

Inspired by the controversy surrounding FEMA's decision to fund three agencies for hills fuels management, members of the Sierra Club, the Claremont Canyon Conservancy, and the East Bay Chapter of the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) realized that many East Bay residents are not aware that there is a financially-sound strategy for removing high fuel load vegetation that reduces fire risk while retaining the natural beauty and diversity of the East Bay hills. Summarized as "Remove, Restore, and Re-Establish" by the Sierra Club, a good example of this approach can be found in Claremont Canyon at UC's Signpost 29, located along Claremont Avenue 1.5 miles behind the Claremont Hotel.

CNPS and Sierra Club member Jim Hanson made the suggestion and Norman LaForce, the Sierra Club's Chair of the East Bay Public Lands Committee, raised the seed funds from SPRAWL-DEF to get the video off the ground.

Conservancy volunteer Bob Strayer took videographers Corinne Weber and Marc Boubli of Carpe Omnia Productions through Claremont Canyon and the North Oakland Sports Field to document fuel build-up from blue gum eucalyptus. The group also toured the restored oak, willow, and bay woodlands and their quilt of native shrubs and forbs at the former eucalyptus site on the south side of Claremont Avenue at signpost 29. Over the winter the producers and volunteers teleconferenced to review and assemble the video footage and photos. Special thanks go to the many photographers who skillfully and sensitively captured the natural beauty and diversity of these hills.

The Sierra Club's Norman LaForce noted, "The video graphically depicts the more fire safe and more ecologically diverse woodland ecosystem we can re-establish through the removal of the monoculture eucalyptus plantations in the hills."

BRING BACK THE OAKS can be viewed at the following link: <http://www.sierraclub.org/san-francisco-bay/hillsfacts>.

Trails in the Canyon

By Joe Engbeck, reprinted from our Fall 2010 newsletter with minor updates.

In our last newsletter, we published a copy of our newly updated trail map and directed our readers to access a downloadable version from our website. Below is a description of the trails that can be used as a companion to the map.

THE MOST POPULAR TRAIL in Claremont Canyon is the Panoramic Ridge Trail, formerly called the East/West Trail, and sometimes referred to as the Stonewall-Panoramic Ridge Trail. It begins at the Stonewall Road entrance to Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve and climbs steeply for about a half-mile, enabling hikers to enjoy spectacular vistas of almost the entire San Francisco Bay Region. The trail then levels out as it runs easterly for a half mile along the crest of Panoramic Ridge before beginning to climb steeply once again. At that point, an unmarked, narrow trail called the Side Hill Trail angles off to the right, traversing a relatively undisturbed south-facing slope that features a wonderful array of spring and early summer wildflowers as it climbs gently to reach Grizzly Peak Boulevard at about 1,600 feet elevation. The Side Hill Trail intersects Grizzly Peak Boulevard about .8 miles north of Four Corners.

The northern ridge can also be reached via a small side canyon that runs parallel to Claremont Canyon, just to the north, called Dwight Canyon. Dwight Canyon has a rocky, exposed, one-person path that is accessible from the back side of the Clark Kerr Campus.

Equally interesting, but less traveled, is the trail that begins on the south side of Claremont Canyon at the end of Norfolk Road (very limited parking) and continues down through Gwin Canyon. At present this trail, which is on Park District land, dead-ends on the slope above Claremont Creek, though we hope to see it connect someday to a network of fire roads on UC land. That network currently includes the Summit House Trail and the Willow Trail—one a road and one



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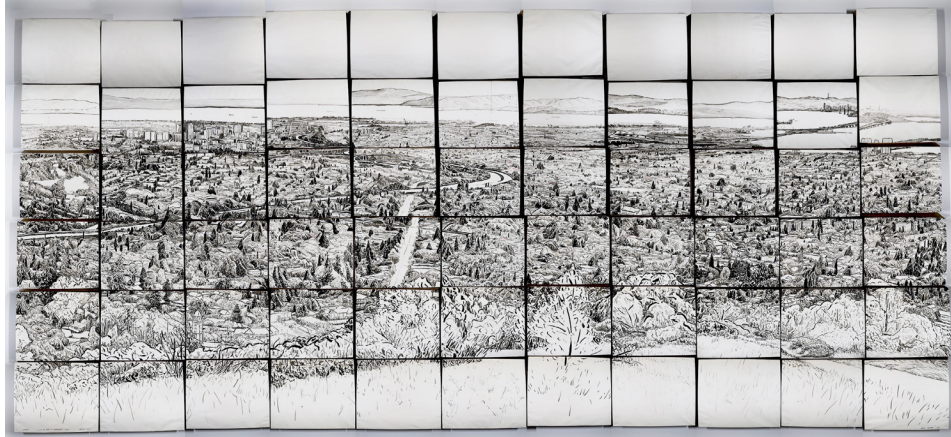
a narrow, winding path that run parallel to each other all the way up to Grizzly Peak Boulevard at Four Corners. These two fire trails veer off from Claremont Avenue about .5 miles above Gelston Road at UC's Signpost 29 directly across the road from the dramatic, orange-hued, vertical layers of a geological formation known as Claremont Chert.

Farther up Claremont Avenue at signpost 28, another UC-maintained fire road climbs up a steep slope to the top of Panoramic Ridge where it's easy to cross over into Strawberry Canyon and connect with the Upper Jordan Trail.

Back down the canyon, a loop trail runs through John Garber Park in the western-most corner of Claremont Canyon (not far from the Claremont Hotel). Enter this rustic, heavily wooded, 14-acre city park from the end of Evergreen Lane (off Alvarado Road) or from the end of Rispin Drive (off Claremont Avenue). Both entry points are in residential areas and have very limited parking. You can also enter from Claremont Avenue or Alvarado Road, now that connector trails have been re-constructed by the Garber Park Stewards. There are a few off-street parking spots on Claremont and street parking on Alvarado. Look for the new signage.

The network of trails in Claremont Canyon is a work in progress—and we invite your ideas. The Conservancy's long range plan calls for development of a walking trail right up the bottom of the canyon parallel to Claremont Avenue and Claremont Creek.

© 2016 David Wilson



Art Installation Features View from Claremont Canyon by Marilyn Goldhaber

ONE DAY LAST FALL WE received an email asking if any of us at the Conservancy knew about an art piece composed entirely on location high along the ridge of Claremont Canyon. Attached to the email were photos of the piece showing the unfolding of a landscape—from open space to urban development to the Bay and beyond. We had indeed heard something about a fellow who was perched on a cut log near Panoramic Way patiently drawing all summer.

From the email, I was able to track down the artist, David Wilson, and later found a photograph of him at work (see back cover). In responding to my request for permission to use that photograph, Wilson's photographer, Alan Conner, quipped, "I'd be honored! I love this trail and seeing David work his magic was touching."

David moved to his current home in Oakland about a year and a half ago and began to reori-

ent himself by taking daily walks to the top of Claremont Canyon, a one and a half-hour journey from his home in the flatlands. When commissioned to do a large piece to be displayed in the hub of Silicon Valley, David chose the vista looking toward the South Bay that had become part of his daily meditation. "The relationship of open space to the developed space is a potent symbol of the area," he says. For David drawing is very much about action and presence: "I draw from a place of direct observation."

David would bring a 2x2-foot sheet of rice paper mounted on wood and draw with Sumi ink and pen. "I would focus on a point of view and each day would continue from memory where I left off." The completed work, which measures 12x22 feet, has 60 original drawings assembled by framing each in a small box and mounting them individually. The artist is currently working on a round of other drawing projects, as well as organizing programs and events at the Berkeley Art Museum.

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.

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

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Join the Conservancy:

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

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Volunteer:

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.

The Claremont Canyon Conservancy News is edited by Marilyn Goldhaber with assistance from Kay Loughman.

Email us: info@ClaremontCanyon.org

Website: www.ClaremontCanyon.org

Alameda Whipsnake/Striped Racer Research Project

By Jessica Sheppard, Resource Analyst, East Bay Regional Park District, with input from Doug Bell, Wildlife Program Manager, EBRPD and Ricka Stoelting, Research Associate, Swaim Biological, Inc. Edited by Kay Loughman.

CLAREMONT CANYON REGIONAL PRESERVE is hosting a research project focused on the Alameda whipsnake (*Masticophis lateralis euryxanthus*), also sometimes referred to as the Alameda striped racer (*Coluber lateralis euryxanthus*). This elusive and speedy snake is protected at the state and federal level and may be found in the park.

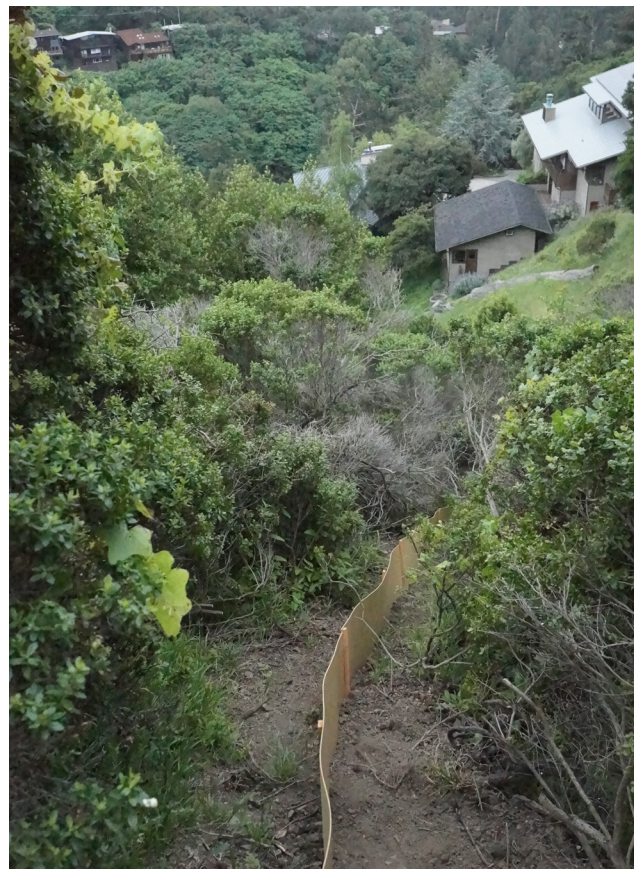
The East Bay Regional Park District is implementing its 2010 board-approved Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Resource Management Plan (<http://www.ebparks.org/about/stewardship/fuelsplan>) in the East Bay Hills to lower the risk of catastrophic wildfires. Because this plan calls for altering some habitat of the Alameda whipsnake, the US Fish & Wildlife Service called for several mitigation measures, including designing and implementing a study to determine how Alameda whipsnakes might be affected by the fuels management activities.

Swaim Biological Inc. has been hired to implement the US Geological Survey study protocol, titled “Measuring the response of the Alameda striped racer *Masticophis lateralis euryxanthus* to fuels management in the East Bay Regional Park District, California” by Richmond et al. (2015). Karen Swaim has been studying the Alameda whipsnake for over 25 years, and holds a US Fish and Wildlife Service Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery Permit.

The Swaim team has placed traps* throughout several District parks in potential Alameda whipsnake habitat. Traps were activated in mid-April and are checked daily. Captured snakes are marked, measured, weighed and released on-site. This intensive trapping will continue through spring, concurrently with vegetation reduction in certain pre-designated areas. Trapping and vegetation treatments will take place over the next five years. The results of this study should provide information on the population of Alameda whipsnakes in Claremont Canyon and elsewhere, as well as help us understand how vegetation treatments affect whipsnake movements throughout their habitat.

* To monitor snake response, the researchers use drift-fence funnel trap surveys. A drift-fence funnel trap, is basically a length of 1-2' tall, thin fenceline (plywood, erosion-control fabric or other material) inserted into the ground to a slight depth (say 2" covered by soil) at whose terminal ends can be found box-style traps (in this case, wire mesh panels covering a wooden frame) with one or two large funnels projecting from inside the traps onto the fenceline. Upon approach to a drift fence, a snake or lizard or other small mammal typically will orient parallel to and travel along the length of the fence until it reaches the end of the line where it slithers, slinks or crawls right into the funnel trap.

If you come across a trapline during your hikes, please be respectful of this very sensitive research project; and inform Park District if any evidence of vandalism is observed. Thank you for your assistance!



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Drift-fence placed in chaparral on south-facing slope of Claremont Canyon.

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*CENA made the initial \$1,000 contribution to found the Conservancy in 2001.

Conservancy Membership

By Marilyn Goldhaber

HONORING OUR MEMBERS: From our founding in 2001, we have encouraged nearby residents and community organizations to support the Conservancy by becoming Founding Sponsors with a commitment to contribute \$1,000, either all at once or over ten years. Many of our Founding Sponsors have pledged

to continue their support into the future with another \$1,000 to cover the next ten years. Thank you!

We are pleased to list on the opposite page our Founding Sponsors since 2001 through April 2016. Below, we also honor an additional 128 current members from other categories of membership, who have supported the Conservancy in our most recent membership drives.

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THE CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY

SUPPORTING THE LONG-TERM STEWARDSHIP OF CLAREMONT CANYON



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Local artist David Wilson sits atop the Ridge Trail to capture the changing presence of the landscape (see page 4).