

THE CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY

SPRING 2004

News

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



Board of Directors: L. Tim Wallace, president, Joseph Engbeck Jr., vice president, Tamia Marg, secretary, Marilyn Goldhaber, treasurer, Laura Baker, Joshua Bar-Lev, Klaus Burmeister, Betty Croly, William J. McClung, Nancy Mueller and Dick White.

Take a Walk on the Wild Side

Weekends are the perfect time to catch up on your sleep, but if you're looking for a reason to get out of bed, we can give you a couple. There are still a few spots left on our two upcoming guided nature walks in Claremont Canyon when local experts will uncover the natural wonders of this wild canyon.

On April 25th, we'll be looking up as Dave Quady helps us identify local birds. From wrentits to thrashers to finches to sparrows, birds create a musical presence everywhere in the watershed: along the creek, in the coastal scrub, under the oaks, and above us in the sky. Dave is a practiced guide who has led the Audubon Christmas bird count in Claremont Canyon for 25 years.



February rains brought an abundance of mushrooms for trekkers to admire (above) on a mushroom walk in Claremont Canyon lead by mycologist Robert Mackler.

On May 1st, Dr. Jerry Powell will be pointing out butterflies and other insects of note. Jerry, a lepidopterist at UC, has been studying and counting butterflies and moths for many years and has a deep understanding of their relationship with native plants in the Canyon. Insects weave a subtle but profound influence on all aspects of ecology. Jerry, who is co-author of *California Insects*, will help us understand the various roles that they play.

From spring through winter, the Conservancy celebrates the seasons with its nature walks and brings the Canyon closer with each visit. For those of you who were unable to attend the mushroom walk with Robert Mackler, the geology walk with Walter Alvarez, or the wildflower walk with Dianne Fristrom, there are accounts of these on our website. Later in the year we'll have walks to explore the redwoods and other plant communities. You won't want to miss these so be sure to check postings on our website.

The walks, which are free, fill quickly and are generally limited to 20 participants with preference given to Conservancy members. Pre-registration is required: call or email Laura Baker at 510-849-1409 or Lbake66@aol.com. Be sure to leave a phone number.

Laura Baker is a biologist and a member of the Conservancy's executive committee.

Top photo: SF Bay glistens on a warm March afternoon, viewed from the top of Claremont Canyon.



Public-spirited Rotary Club volunteers plant redwood seedlings in Claremont Canyon in 1975 (above). Conservancy member Joe Engbeck stands next to a surviving redwood (below, right) some 30 years later.

Redwoods of Claremont Canyon

In December 1972 a prolonged cold snap hit the San Francisco Bay Area killing thousands of eucalyptus trees in upper Claremont Canyon. The eucs were still standing, but they looked terrible—stark and dry and colorless like so much kindling waiting for a spark. With the wildfire of 1970 still painfully fresh in everyone’s memory, UC Chancellor Albert Bowker decided to take bold action. He had all the eucalyptus trees cut down and hauled away.

Logging crews used chainsaws, trucks, bulldozers, and other heavy equipment to do the job. Afterward, the upper canyon looked like a war zone. To minimize erosion, the area was seeded from the air. But it still looked terrible, so the Piedmont Rotary Club came forward with a reforestation plan. They persuaded UC planners to let them plant some 550 Monterey pines and coast redwood seedlings.

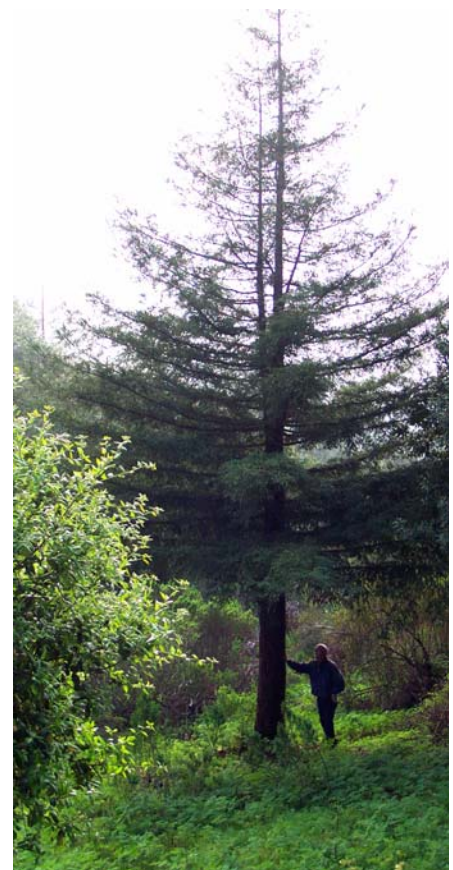
The actual planting was done on a Sunday morning in April 1975. The seedlings were small, about 12 inches high in one-gallon containers, but most of them survived. On the other hand, the root systems of the eucalyptus trees were not dead. Soon almost all of the stumps began to sprout, sending up four or five or six new stems to replace those that had been frozen and cut down. As a result, the upper canyon turned back into a forest of fast-growing, fire-hazardous, eucalyptus trees, some of them now 12 to 18 inches in diameter (dbh) and as much as 80 feet tall.

Recently, with support and encouragement from the Conservancy, UC began to cut down the re-sprouted eucalyptus trees in the upper canyon. Mature oaks, laurels, elderberrys and other trees and shrubs are being left alone. Like the pines and redwoods that were planted in

1975 they are now enjoying the sunlight and moisture that were being monopolized by the eucs. So far, about 3,000 eucalyptus stems have been cut down and the program is scheduled to continue.

The Monterey pines, perhaps 100 of them, have reached middle age and look a bit dry; they’re not in their favorite near-ocean environment. On the other hand, more than 200 redwoods have also survived. In fact, most of them are healthy and full of youthful enthusiasm, just beginning to prosper and grow rapidly. Many are 10 to 20 feet tall with main stems that are 10 or 12 inches in diameter. Quite a few are as much as 60 feet tall and growing taller by four to six feet per year. A few have trunks that are over seven feet in circumference (28 or 29 inches dbh).

The Conservancy’s plan is to continue what the Rotary Club started 30 years ago—replacing the old, very dan-



gerous eucalyptus forest with a cool, moist, relatively fire-safe and beautiful forest of redwoods, oaks, laurels, and other native trees and shrubs. The Conservancy has a supply of seeds gleaned from redwoods native to the East Bay Hills that will be used to continue and extend the reforestation program that was started in 1975. It looks to be a lovely and enduring accomplishment that we will all be able to enjoy and be proud of, and proudly leave to future generations.

Joe Engbeck is a writer, environmental historian and a member of the Conservancy's executive committee.

Stewardship

The Conservancy conducted over 50 volunteer or professionally organized stewardship sessions in Claremont Canyon. These included trail maintenance in Gwin Canyon and Garber Park, weed control and riparian stewardship at UC's Ecological Study Area 28, and the management of an acre of land at the southwest corner of Claremont Avenue and Grizzly Peak Boulevard.

The largest project was the hand-pulling of several acres of yellow starthistle in the upper Canyon above the *Side Hill Trail* where we have had several of our nature walks. Laura Baker and Tamia Marg led the thistle removal project using day laborers. Follow-up work will be an important part of our stewardship in the coming years.

The most fun we had was planting redwood seedlings in an area cleared of eucalyptus last spring. This project, organized by Tamia Marg, included high school student volunteers from Bentley and College Prep.

Garber Park

The Conservancy has an ongoing partnering relationship with the Vicente Canyon Neighborhood Organization in Claremont Canyon's Garber Park, a 13-acre area of mature live oaks, big leaf maples, buckeyes, and California bay laurels. Stewardship projects in that area included trail work, weed removal and creek protection work at the Rispin end of the park. About 20 dedicated souls regularly work there about once a month and have done so over the past few years. Recently, high school student volunteers from St. Mary's, College Prep, and Bentley have been helping out and earning community service credits at their schools.

On April 24, we will celebrate Earth Day in Garber

Park with the Vicente Canyon Neighborhood Association from 9:00 A.M. until 12:00 P.M. The next regular stewardship session in Garber park will be on May 2, June 6 and July 4 from 11:00 A.M. until 1:00 P.M. Call Bill McClung 510-841-8447 or email at wmcclung@rcn.com.

Bill McClung is an editor, publisher, small business owner/land manager and a Conservancy board member.

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French broom has moved into Garber Park but is being eradicated through hand-pulling by volunteers like Conservancy member Matt Morse from Vicente Canyon.

Liaisons with the Agencies

When we formed our organization two and a half years ago, Claremont Canyon was being overlooked and ignored. Little had been done by the major stakeholders to control the spread of French broom, poison hemlock, yellow starthistle and the other invasive exotics. Damaged eucalyptus were re-sprouting. Roadsides were minimally managed and trails on parkland were virtually ignored.

All this has changed. The Conservancy, through its executive committee, has made a difference. We have forged ties, created liaisons and provided a means for monitoring and follow through. We find ourselves working with committed agency personnel, some new, some transformed, some moving into new positions of authority. A FEMA grant awarded to local public agencies in in the aftermath of the 1991 firestorm finally became available after nearly 10 years of delay.

One of the executive committee's first projects was at Four-Corners (the ridge top intersection of Grizzly Peak Blvd, Claremont Ave, and Fish Ranch Road). EBMUD's Scott Hill removed over 100 tons of vegetation there on five acres, coordinating his efforts with the State Forestry Department to obtain crews for cutting, chipping, piling, burning and removal. They continue to maintain the area, suppressing the influx of invasive plants.

We are also working closely with Tom Klatt of UC in the university's program of eucalyptus cutting in the upper part of the Canyon. That area is probably the most dangerous area in the Canyon for spreading fire under Diablo wind conditions. Some 3,000 trees have been felled so far and their stumps painted with Garlon to prevent resprouting.

The Conservancy developed a memorandum of understanding with UC following a meeting with Chancellor Berdahl, which allows the Conservancy to undertake stewardship programs at specified sites along Claremont Avenue and Grizzly.

Agreements with the Park District have included trail maintenance work by Ed Leong and his crew, and broom removal under the supervision of Dennis Rein, Chief of the Park District's fire fighting and prevention

work. In February, the Park District used an "All-Terrain Brushing Machine" to remove brush and extend grasslands along the fire trail on Panoramic Ridge. These areas will be closely monitored by Conservancy.

Camille Rogers, supervisor of field inspectors for the Oakland Fire Department, has been key to getting proper roadside maintenance in the Canyon. This is extremely important since 80 to 90 percent of wildfire ignitions occur along roadsides. City officials have been amenable to cleaning up Oakland's Garber Park for fire abatement and allowing our stewardship projects to go on there.

Coordinated work with all the public agencies is our legacy and our future in Claremont Canyon.

Grants

Last September, we were notified of three grants awarded to the Conservancy by the US Fish and Wildlife Service to coordinate work with the agencies in Claremont Canyon. While the final contract has not yet been signed, we are apparently going to receive funds for three projects: Upper Gwin Canyon - \$36,000; Mid-Canyon Area - \$50,000; and for the Stonewall area - \$40,000. Monies will be used to remove invasive exotic vegetation that present a fire hazard.

The grant monies flow from Fish and Wildlife to the State Fire Safe Council, and from there to the Diablo Fire Safe Council and on to the Conservancy. Amber Bach, representing the Diablo Fire Safe Council, is our liaison person. The Conservancy's executive committee is busy meeting with our agency partners, mapping and structuring the three projects. Once geographically and developmentally defined, our work plan has to pass environmental approval so no endangered flora or fauna will be harmed.



Conservancy president Tim Wallace points to a map of three areas of Claremont Canyon targeted by US Fish and Wildlife grants for exotic vegetation removal. Other board members, Klaus Burmeister, Betty Croly, Laura Baker and consultant Afton Crooks, look on.

All this takes time but the projects are definitely in the pipeline for Claremont Canyon.

Other grant applications are continually being prepared by the Conservancy to assure the future of the Canyon.

Tim Wallace is an agricultural economist, UC professor emeritus and president of the Conservancy.

Lessons from Wildfires in Southern California

Last year's wildfires in Southern California resonated deeply with us at the Conservancy, reminding us of our own devastating fire in the East Bay Hills 12 years before. While the fires in Southern California burned over vastly larger acreages, an eerily similar number of lives were lost (26 there versus 25 here) and dwellings destroyed (3,361 homes versus 3,276). Both fires were driven by hot, dry, east (Santa Ana/Diablo) winds blowing late in October, traveling through shrubland and forest adjacent to urban development.

The Southern California fire has been called the worst urban-wildland fire in California history, covering 742,000 acres. It beckoned to be studied and some of the country's most highly qualified experts got involved. In a report by Jon Keeley with coauthors C.J. Fotheringham and M.A. Moritz, three lessons emerged:

(1) Although these fires were massive, they were not unprecedented, and future fires of this magnitude are to be expected; (2) current fire management policy is not effective at preventing these massive fires; and (3) future developments need to plan for these natural fire events much the same way we currently incorporate engineering solutions to earthquakes and other natural catastrophes.

The goal of the Keeley report is to turn these lessons into sound policy for wildfire readiness in California.



Joe Engbeck of the Conservancy and Tom Klatt of UC chat about coordinating fire mitigation work in Claremont Canyon at an interagency meeting on the UC campus, March 9.

Pre-fire fuel management, usually by prescribed burning of land on a rotational basis, was previously thought by fire experts to control the size of massive fire events. The authors counter this, saying that “under extreme weather conditions there is overwhelming evidence that young fuels, or even fuel breaks, will not act as a barrier to fire spread.” They say that extremely high winds can spread the fire around fuel managed areas, or jump over them from fire brands that can travel up to a mile or more.

Fuel manipulations still play a role in extreme wildfire readiness, they say “but their application needs to be carefully considered if they are to be effective and provide benefits equal to or exceeding their cost.” They may not stop the spread of fire under severe weather conditions, but “they do reduce fire intensity,” they say, and “provide defensible space for fire suppression crews.” They also can be effective for smaller fires in less extreme situations. The key to effective use of fuel management areas is their strategic placement, as opposed to number of acres treated.

The authors summarize their findings by pointing out that massive wildfires will undoubtedly occur again but that a combination of buffer zones and better planning will enable us to engineer an environment that minimizes their impact on property and lives.

From “Lessons from the October 2003 Wildfires in Southern California” by Jon E. Keeley, C.J. Fotheringham, and Max A. Moritz, Western Ecological Research Center, Three Rivers, CA 93271. Excerpted for the News by Marilyn Goldhaber, public health researcher and member of the Conservancy’s executive committee.



Redwood trees silhouette the skyline, seen from the top of Claremont Avenue near Grizzly Peak Boulevard. These trees were obscured from view until last year when UC began its removal of re-sprouted eucalyptus.

Integrated Fire Management in Claremont Canyon

The Conservancy is committed to reducing the risk of wildfire in Claremont Canyon and to figuring out how best to protect people and homes from being destroyed by such fire. Working with experts in various scientific fields, we have learned some surprising and very promising facts.

Our search for real and reliable answers to the fire safety issue took a leap forward in October of 2003 when two members of the Conservancy, Laura Baker and Tamia Marg, attended a Firewise Conference. They listened and learned from fire-fighters, land-use planners, developers, public and private landowners, homeowners, insurance writers, members of regulatory agencies, and others who have studied various aspects of the wildfire question. The conference was sponsored in part by the California Fire Safe Council and focused on both fire prevention and fire suppression.

Most of us have been mystified by the fact that wildfire burns some houses and skips others—leaving

them standing amid the blackened debris of their neighbors. Some common assumptions about why houses burn may be completely unfounded, while other more real dangers can be overlooked. To remedy this problem, we are beginning to focus the Conservancy's attention on new ways of looking at fire hazard mitigation on the wildland-urban interface. We know now that what we need in Claremont Canyon is a multidisciplinary, science-based approach that takes a comprehensive look at the vulnerability to fire of both land and structures.

Effective protection of a home from wildfire begins with an assessment of both the site and the structure. Defensible space around a home is key to whether a building will survive. Beyond the immediate home site, smarter vegetation management practices that emphasize strategic placement over sheer acreage will help ensure that firefighters gain critical time and safer access when fighting fires that threaten structures. More specific answers to the question of how best to protect our homes and our community as a whole can be provided by architects, traffic engineers, firefighters, and

other specialists. This kind of information can be made available to the community through a local FireWise conference.

Truly effective fire hazard mitigation must include not only fire prevention, but also emergency preparedness and fire suppression. For example, we must keep dry flashy fuels from accumulating along roadsides, and we must be especially vigilant about roadside ignitions on Diablo wind days, and be ready to extinguish such fires should they get started.

Integrated fire management emphasizes long-term community planning of fire-fighting strategies to develop solutions that continue to work over time. Such strategies can be both effective and fiscally responsible.

Tamia Marg is a wildlands manager and a member of the Conservancy's executive committee.

Claremont Canyon Members on Oakland's New Wildfire Assessment District Committee

The Oakland City Council is assembling an eleven-member citizens' advisory committee to advise on the use of funds for fire abatement in the Oakland Hills. A vote last November resulted in a 74 percent approval of the creation of a Wildfire Prevention District through a tax on residents in the designated area, which includes Claremont Canyon. As it stands now, Bob Sieben of Hiller Highlands and Tamia Marg of upper Claremont Canyon, both members of the Conservancy, will be the two appointees from District 1 under Council Member Jane Brunner.

Overview from the Treasurer

For a young organization, the Conservancy finds it self on solid financial footing. This is what we intended when we began our Founding Sponsors Campaign in 2001, appealing to local residents and neighborhood organizations to pledge \$1,000 (over a ten year period) to assure our work in the Canyon. We currently have 141 Founding Sponsors, mostly from the neighborhoods in and around Claremont Canyon, and 125 regular members. From these constituencies, we have raised over \$72,000.

During 2001, we applied for and received from the State Bureau of Land Management a \$27,000 capac-

ity-building grant for launching our organization and setting up our office. We also applied for grants to fund coordinated work projects in the Canyon. Three of these grants were recently approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We expect about \$126,000 in grant monies to flow in over the next five years.

Our position of strength is not just financial but comes from the enormous amount of volunteer work of the Conservancy board, especially from its executive committee. Our current balance is approximately \$46,000. More detail on our income and expenses can be viewed on our website under *Archived Reports*.

Marilyn Goldhaber is treasurer of the Conservancy.

Stay Connected

If you have not recently received emails from the Conservancy, we may have the wrong email address for you. Please email us to get on our list.

Claremont Canyon Conservancy

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Family Membership: \$50 per year

Founding Sponsor: \$1,000 over 10 years

Claremont Canyon is the largest, relatively undeveloped canyon on the western slope of the Oakland/Berkeley Hills. Much of canyon's watershed is publicly owned by the East Bay Regional Park District, the University of California, East Bay Municipal Utility District and the City of Oakland, with about one fifth in private hands. Claremont Avenue traverses the length of the canyon, from its highest point at Grizzly Peak Blvd to its base at the grounds of the Claremont Hotel.

The Claremont Canyon Conservancy promotes long-term stewardship of the entire watershed, coordinated among the stakeholders to reduce wildfire hazards, improve public access, preserve or restore a healthy native ecosystem, and promote education and research.

News edited by Marilyn Goldhaber

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