

THE CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY

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

SPRING 2008 *News*



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IT HAS NOW BEEN SEVEN YEARS since the University of California started removing eucalyptus trees from its land in upper Claremont Canyon. And every year for the past five years, just as winter turns to spring, the Conservancy has planted coast redwood seedlings where eucalyptus were removed and chipped on site. On March 1, a crew of twenty-four Conservancy volunteers planted the last redwoods from the Conservancy/University nursery on a gentle slope overlooking Harwood Creek.

Conservancy Overview

by Marilyn Goldhaber, Joe Engbeck and Bill McClung

SPRING IS AGAIN IN FULL FORCE in our Berkeley and Oakland neighborhoods with flowers in every variety on display in front yards everywhere. In nearby wildlands, however, you see mostly green, green, green, as many native plants bloom during what we normally call “winter.” But keep an eye out for one of California’s late bloomers, the California buckeye, as you drive in your car or pedal your bicycle up Claremont Avenue and over to Fish Ranch Road.

As you begin your journey up the road, look for graceful branches of native buckeye trees overhanging Claremont Avenue just behind the Claremont Hotel. Further up and into the canyon, glance over your shoulder and down across the creek to see a dense cluster of mixed buckeye and other hardwoods (see photo on back page). By June there will be a profusion of snowy blossoms carpeting the canopies.

At the upper reaches of the canyon you will find a different type of carpet, a carpet of wood chips covering the ground where eucalyptus trees were removed and chipped on site by University of California wildfire mitigation crews. Chipping of eucalyptus boles is a practical means of disposal but also a temporary solution to

suppress weeds in the opened-up areas and a way to invigorate the soil through decomposition.

Throughout the wood-chipped landscape tiny redwood seedlings reach for the sky. This year an Eagle Scout project led by Tommy Adams of *Piedmont’s Boy Scouts of America Troop One* spent a day in January planting 100 redwood saplings, and, in March, Conservancy volunteers planted 160 more little redwood trees. Altogether, about 8,000 eucalyptus stems have now been removed from the canyon, and a little over 3,500 redwood seedlings have been planted.

UC is poised to continue its removal of eucalyptus and other nonnative hazardous trees on its properties in both Claremont and Strawberry Canyons with funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The public will be given a chance to respond to these plans in the very near future and we will be asking for your help at that time (page 5).

While UC is caretaker of about half the wildlands in Claremont Canyon, the East Bay Regional Park District watches over the other half, the 208-acre Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve. Extensive plans are underway there, as well, for vegetation management and large tree removal funded by voter-supported Measure CC. *Continued on page 4.*

Nature Walks and Stewardship Sessions

by Bill McClung

OUR UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION of Claremont Canyon is greatly enhanced by being in the Canyon with friends and knowledgeable people. Every season, we have good times together, scheduled and impromptu!

To the right, we list our expert-guided nature walks and stewardship sessions scheduled for May. Later in the year, we will add tours to discuss vegetation and wildfire dynamics with Berkeley scientists Scott Stevens, Joe McBride, and others.

On the third Saturday morning each month we hold our monthly stewardship sessions from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. We go to a place in the Canyon to observe the flora and fauna, manage weeds, repair trails, pick up trash, and do other work to help preserve and enhance the landscape.

On some Thursdays at noon we join the KPFA volunteers in maintaining the 2.5-acre Pacifica Foundation property above Grizzly Peak Boulevard at Marlborough Terrace, a remarkable site overlooking Gwin and Claremont Canyons. The Conservancy has joined with two dedicated KPFA volunteers, Bob Nelson and Robert MacConnell, to study and try to restore the native flora in areas where the Foundation removed eucalyptus last summer.

Schedule of Events

May 7 — Wildlife and Wild Plants near Drury Court, with Kay Loughman, Bill McClung and Paul McGee, 1-2:30 pm.

May 10 — Spring Birds of Claremont Canyon, with Dave Quady, 7-11 am., starting at Four Corners. With a bonus session: the “dawn chorus” of breeding birds near Gelston Road at 5 am.

May 16 — Butterfly Walk with San Francisco butterfly mavens Barbara Deutsch and Liam O’Brien, 11 am - 1:30.

May 17 — Monthly Stewardship, 10 am to 12 noon.

May 24 — A Ramble Across Canyon from the Side Hill Trail to Gwin Canon with Martin Holden, 10 am - 12 noon.

May 31 — The Trees and Plants Along the Trails of Garber Park with Lech Naumovich, 10 am to 12 noon.

For details, questions and suggestions, please contact Bill McClung at wmcclung@rcn.com.

University Resources Project

by Casey Amberger and Dexter Dong

WITH ITS PROXIMITY TO CLAREMONT CANYON, the University of California provides a wealth of resources for the Claremont Canyon Conservancy and its members. Campus libraries yield valuable information about what the canyon looked like historically and how it has changed over time. This information can be



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THE AUTHORS, both UC Berkeley student interns, earn university credit for the work they do for the Conservancy. Here they are examining madrone seeds recently fallen from trees near Marlborough Terrace and Grizzly Peak Boulevard.

used in a variety of ways, perhaps even help determine restoration goals.

The Jepson Herbarium, located in the basement of the Valley Life Sciences building, is a very interesting resource for vegetation records. The best way to find historic records for Claremont Canyon is by searching the Herbarium’s online database of its California native plant collection. By searching for Claremont Canyon in Alameda County, you will be presented with 58 records of plants collected in or around Claremont Canyon. Of note are six plants collected by Willis Lynn Jepson himself between the years 1896 and 1918. All but one of these have links that take you directly to scanned images in Jepson’s original journal.

The Herbarium also has resources that can’t be accessed online. Most significant are vegetation maps of Claremont Canyon by students in Jepson’s lab in the early part of the twentieth century. Although made by amateurs without modern tools, these maps are beautiful documents and might be useful to assess general vegetative trends. Another interesting resource available at the Herbarium is Jepson’s personal journals, which can be searched to find references to Claremont Canyon, especially around the dates when Jepson collected specimens in the canyon. Collections managers, Kim Kersh and Richard Moe are very helpful in navigating the online databases and accessing maps and journals.

In addition to the Jepson Herbarium, the Earth Sci-

ences Library in McCone Hall on the north side of campus can also serve as a great resource for the Conservancy. This library has a large collection of maps, which can be checked out and scanned, or viewed on site. Although we couldn't find any specifically for Claremont Canyon, there was a multitude showing the Berkeley and Oakland hills, with Claremont Canyon partially or totally included. These maps included USGS quads, scientific vegetation maps, historic maps and development maps. The staff at the front desk is very helpful; and maps can also be located using the university's online library database Melvyl.

The Bancroft Library, now located on Allston Way, west of the UC Berkeley campus, proved a potentially rich resource as well, with archives of photographs of the canyon from the late 1800s and early 1900s. In those times, the Claremont Hotel is seen surrounded by rolling grasslands before homes were built in the hills. David Kessler is an excellent source at the library — and a Claremont Canyon Conservancy member, as well.

Our research shows the wide array of information about Claremont Canyon available at the UC Berkeley campus. Hopefully our efforts will be useful to the Conservancy and can perhaps aid future interns. Our contacts were especially helpful; and we are fortunate to have started relationships with these resources on campus.

“Field Truth” -- Update on Measure CC

by Mary Millman

THE EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT and its consultants continue their enormous task of drafting an environmental impact report (EIR) for proposed wildfire mitigations to be taken throughout 21 East Bay parks covered in Measure CC, which was passed by voters in 2004. While Claremont Canyon is one of the smaller parks covered by the measure, it is important because of its proximity to high-density urban population, its two-mile wildland-urban interface, and its history of especially destructive wildfires.

The Park District's initial effort began with computer mapping of the parks' existing topology, fuels, vegetation, wildlife, structure placement, and weather. Next, potential treatment areas were identified, mapped and delineated by the degree of wildfire hazard, such as proximity of fuel to structures and the presence of “high-risk” eucalyptus. For Claremont Canyon, twelve numbered treatment areas have been identified for analysis and consideration as to whether initial treatment or maintenance should be conducted within each.

A *potential treatment area* is a location where the fuels produce flame lengths greater than eight feet, which means that fire-fighting personnel cannot directly suppress the fire. *Maintenance areas* are those where work is already under way or covered under previous programs.

Computer mapping is initially prepared on the basis of aerial photography and other sources of recorded information. Thus, an important aspect of the final evaluation is the site visit for “field truthing” high hazard areas.



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ON MARCH 17, the Conservancy was fortunate to accompany Assistant Fire Chief John Swanson (in helmet) of the Park District and fire ecologist Carol Rice of Wildland Resource Management (below, left) on an informal tour of Claremont Canyon. The team met with (l. to r. above) Tamia Marg, Martin Holden, Bill McClung, Joe Engbeck, and others at several places in the canyon including Grizzly Peak Boulevard (above) and Drury Court (below).



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Three public meetings have been held to report on the progress of the Measure CC Plan and EIR, and receive feedback. The next such meeting will be May 7, 7-9 PM, at the Trudeau Center in Oakland. All are welcome to attend. This will be the last public meeting before preparation begins on the EIR.

A final meeting, projected for late summer, will present a draft Plan and EIR. The Park District estimates that these documents will be ready to implement by early 2009.

(Continued from page 1.)

For all its ecological and scenic values, there is little doubt that Claremont Canyon presents a high risk of uncontrollable wildfires that have the potential for massive destruction of neighborhoods to the west and south of the Canyon. To understand this risk and to help our agencies mitigate them, we formed the Claremont Canyon Conservancy in 2001 in the belief that all involved could become better stewards of the land.

We have worked closely with and supported the four major public landowners — East Bay Municipal Utility District, University of California, East Bay Regional Park District, and the City of Oakland — both to identify hazards and to seek programs of vegetation management that will reduce the chances of such disasters in the future. All agencies have acknowledged the hazards and responded with substantial programs, some supported by grants from FEMA.

We understand that federal funding requires significant environmental reviews, including public comment, which is now under way for major programs on UC property in both Strawberry Canyon and Claremont Canyon. FEMA is currently reviewing public comments on the Draft Environmental Assessment for the Strawberry Canyon portion. The Claremont Canyon portion is expected to be open for public comments in the near future.

For the Strawberry Canyon portion, FEMA reported receiving 53 letters supporting the project and 24 opposing. While we acknowledge that there will be differing points of view about publicly-funded projects of this sort, the

Claremont Canyon Conservancy stands firm in its conviction that large-scale vegetation management is necessary to reduce the probability of future wildfires in our wildland canyons. The fire of 1923 along the northern ridge of Strawberry Canyon and the fires in 1970 and 1991 along the southern ridge of Claremont Canyon—each of which destroyed hundreds of homes—are unmistakable indicators of the power of wind-driven, wildland vegetation fires.

Judgments will vary on what and how vegetation management should be done to reduce the risks of wildfire, and we are keen to see continued long-term programs to mitigate those risks that will protect our communities and the ecological and aesthetic values in the wildlands we love so much.

It is our firm belief that inaction in the face of dangerous wildfire-fuel configurations that threaten our communities is not a rational response to hazards long identified by fire professionals.

We commend the University for its efforts over the last seven years and want to express our appreciation to FEMA for providing additional funding to complete this important work in Strawberry and Claremont canyons. From our over 500 household members and others in some 10,000 households potentially affected by major fires in either of these canyons, we believe there is overwhelming local public support for these projects.

We urge FEMA and UC to move this critically important work forward without delay.

THESE GOOD HANDS are inspecting winter madrone seeds at the corner of Grizzly Peak Boulevard and Marlborough Terrace. Madrones seem to favor the rocky chert slopes there and many of these seeds as well as seedlings have now been planted at the KPFA restoration site across the road.



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Members Tell Us What They Think

TWO YEARS AGO, the Conservancy conducted a survey by mail to 385 members for whom we had good mailing addresses. One hundred and thirty, or 34%, responded at that time, and we reported the results in our Spring 2006 Newsletter.

Since then, another 98 members have joined the Conservancy and were given the opportunity to respond as they joined. Forty-one responded. Below we update our previous findings to report how these combined 171 members feel about Conservancy projects and goals.

As before, our members show considerable interest in the three main goals: fire safety, ecological health/natural resources, and public access, with over 90% showing support for all three.

Approximately 96% say they are in favor of removal of eucalyptus trees and replanting deforested areas with native redwoods. An even higher percentage (99%) support the management of invasive, fire-prone, exotic weeds along road-

sides and trails. A high percentage (96%) also supports buffer zone work for fire safety.

The Conservancy is eager to work with the public agencies on their lands and help them obtain grants and pursue line items in their budgets for this work. About 98% of survey responders support the Conservancy's work with public agencies to encourage them, as much as possible, to accomplish Conservancy goals.

A CLUSTER OF WHITE MUSHROOMS springs from decomposing wood chips. Beneath the chip-mulch, a world of fungal and microbial activity does its job breaking down the chips into nutrients for the soil.



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An Open Letter to Conservancy Members and Friends

“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.”

Acting in accord with the above mission statement, the Claremont Canyon Conservancy has attracted the financial support of over 500 households and thousands of volunteer-hours in service over its six years of existence.

But the Conservancy’s efforts now face a serious challenge.

Over the past decade, the University of California and the East Bay Regional Park District together have removed over 8,000 eucalyptus and other non-native trees from Claremont Canyon, reducing the fuel load dramatically and giving native species an opportunity to flourish. Both agencies are planning more fuel management projects in the near future.

UC is poised to continue its fuel reduction work in both Strawberry and Claremont Canyons with funding from FEMA. But that work is now being threatened by objections from people who oppose large-scale tree removal, claiming that non-native trees have been scapegoated and present no greater wildfire threat than many other forms of vegetation, including native vegetation.

The Conservancy board believes that this position does not represent the views of the majority of

Claremont Canyon residents and neighbors. Nor does it reflect the nearly unanimous opinion of fire officials and fire ecologists who place such trees as the blue gum eucalyptus at the highest level of wildfire threat. We fear that stalling of the proposed FEMA/UC programs will cost taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost time and unnecessary paperwork and will jeopardize future vegetation management projects in our area.

We will all be losers if essential fuel reduction work in Claremont Canyon is derailed.

The Board of the Claremont Canyon Conservancy is unanimous in requesting that you write to FEMA’s regional office in support of the proposed Claremont Canyon work as soon as the public comment period for the environmental review documents is announced. Your endorsement of this planned work will express not only your approval of this future activity, but will be an affirmation of all that the Conservancy has been working to achieve since its founding.

Notification of the public comment period is expected to appear in local newspapers. In addition, we will make every effort to inform you as soon as the comment period is announced. For more information please see the FEMA website: www.fema.gov/plan/ehp/envdocuments/ea.region9.shtm.

We thank you for your past support and thoughtful consideration of this urgent matter.

*The Board of Directors of the
Claremont Canyon Conservancy*

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*MARILYN GOLDBABER, Founding Sponsor
 and Board Member, makes her way through
 the giant cowparsnips in Garber Park.*

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Honoring our Members

FROM OUR BEGINNING IN 2001, we 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. We are grateful for the response and happy to list on the opposite page, in approximately the order the commitments were made, our first 211 Founding Sponsors.

We also are grateful for all of our other members who support our work with their yearly contributions. Below are 146 other members who made a contribution in 2007 or 2008 at the family, student or other levels.

To all of you, a hearty thank you!

The Conservancy is holding steady at about \$25,000 per year from member dues, just enough to cover our budget. To accomplish future goals, we naturally hope that our membership will grow. If you know neighbors, friends or colleagues who you think would like to support our work, please invite them to become part of the Conservancy. Local businesses, in particular, are invited to show their community support by becoming a **Business Founding Sponsor**. At the bottom of the list to the left are 19 businesses and small foundations that have pledged or made in-kind donations at the Founding Sponsor level.

Many of you have contributed to our **Stewardship Fund**. If you are a Founding Sponsor who has completed your commitment of \$1,000, this may be a good option for you. The **Stewardship Fund** goes directly for projects in the canyon, including nature walks, UC internships, weedy fuel removal, maintenance of redwood seedlings, and trail/nature pamphlets (projected). Please feel free to contribute to these programs or suggest others.

Join the Conservancy

Founding Sponsor: \$1,000 over 10 years.
Family Membership: \$50 per year.
Student or Fixed-Income: \$25 per year.

Contact Us

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The Claremont Canyon Conservancy

News is edited by Marilyn Goldhaber and Joe Engbeck.

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FLOWERING CALIFORNIA BUCKEYE trees (Aesculus californica) flank either side of Harwood Creek, as seen from the road, mid-canyon, in June.

A CALL TO ACTION: your help is needed, see page 5

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UC BERKELEY STUDENT INTERNS stroll through Garber Park with their Conservancy mentors.