



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

**President's Message** by *L. Tim Wallace*

WE'VE JUST ABOUT DONE IT: a tenth anniversary! And what a ten years. We began as a group of individuals interested in activating a fire response program for Claremont Canyon. We've broadened that interest to include trail development, natural landscape restoration, long range fire risk reduction planning, and educational tours of the canyon led by experts. Working with volunteers we have helped make the canyon more fire-safe, more natural, and more accessible by trail.

Great team-work between the Conservancy, U.C., the City of Oakland and the Regional Parks personnel has made it all possible. Many different projects have been accomplished, much has been learned, and the evidence is now there for everyone to see and enjoy.

One of the more important accomplishments was the publication of an "Advocate Plan" for Claremont Canyon. The Plan was written by two board members (Joe Engbeck and Jerry Kent) who conferred at length with many others both inside and outside the Conservancy. The 42-page plan lays out the Conservancy's vegetation management goals, proposed fire hazard reduction measures, and landscape preservation goals, and describes a carefully limited system of trails for use by hikers, walkers, trail runners, etc.

The trail system is also intended to facilitate educational programs in a range of subjects from geology, to botany, to bird and wildlife observation. Next month, for example, Jerry Kent will conduct a windshield tour of the canyon with a focus on fire hazard reduction planning. Tom Klatt of U.C. will lead a walking tour of the newly constructed trails in the upper Claremont Canyon.

In early September, the Conservancy hired a brilliant young San Francisco-based environmental law specialist, Jonathan Ball, to advise the Conservancy about whether to intervene in a lawsuit between HCN and the Park District.

Although the Conservancy ultimately decided not to intervene, several members of the Conservancy's board of directors testified against the terms of a settlement agreement that had been reached by the District and HCN, arguing that the proposed agreement violated the Park District's own 2010 Wildfire Hazard Reduction plan and might result in excessive and unnecessary environmental damage. We also argued that the agreement incorporated misleading factual analysis from HCN, and could result in expensive ongoing maintenance costs. Meanwhile, the Park District has promised to invite the Conservancy and other environmental groups to attend informational meetings about issues that directly affect the canyon.

The Conservancy supports the removal of all eucalyptus trees in Claremont Canyon, especially those on ridgelines where they are exposed to the full force of the hot, dry, northeasterly winds that occur during fire season. This and other Conservancy policies are described in a nicely illustrated story in the fall issue of Bay Nature magazine.

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*THE BERKELEY PATHWANDERERS explore the ridges of Claremont Canyon last April on an Earth Day walk led by Joe Engbeck.*

Now we are in the midst of a project designed to discourage the dumping of trash at Sign Post 29 across the road from the exposed chert in mid-canyon. Meanwhile, we are still waiting for FEMA grant monies to be released so that fire hazard reduction work can be completed in the upper canyon. After years of delay caused by the actions of HCN, we can expect progress on those projects in the next few months.

These are only a few of the projects the Conservancy has tackled during the decade since the organization was formed in 2001. We have more war stories to share with you, so it is with great pleasure that I invite you to the Conservancy's annual meeting at the Claremont Hotel, November 6, 4-6 pm.

## **Tenth Anniversary Meeting November 6 at the Claremont Hotel** *by Marilyn Goldhaber*

MEMBERS, FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS are all invited to the Claremont Hotel for the Conservancy's Tenth Annual Meeting (see back page for details). We will review a decade of our work and talk about future plans for the canyon.

Our keynote speakers are Ken Blonski, Carol Rice and Cheryl Miller, all local heroes who help guide our East Bay community in wildfire safety. The three have recently authored a book, "Managing Fire in the Urban Wildland Interface." Mr. Blonski, Fire Chief with the East Bay Regional Park District, is responsible for fire management in 65 parks and over 100,000 acres in the urban wildland interface. Ms. Rice, a fire ecologist, and Ms. Miller, a landscape architect, are both in private practice, each with years of experience consulting with public agencies and private parties on a wide range of projects involving construction, planning, policy and consensus building.

Their presentation "Going Fire Safe and Native" will focus on the value of native plants in planning fire safe environments. "Many native plants and ecosystems have adapted to periodic fire. Our homes and gardens ... not so well adapted," says Miller. "California's natural fire regimes occur at relatively frequent intervals, acting as a self-sustaining check and balance, with few intense damaging fires. Our need to suppress fire around homes challenges us to explore alternative techniques to mimic fire's disturbance," says Miller.

The authors will explore with the audience ways to support native plants and achieve a more fire safe place to live. They will show how fire management practices can enhance both native plant regimes and our homes and gardens in our mutual effort to survive.

*"Fire is a natural, reoccurring event in many wildland ecosystems. As a natural event, wildfire is not necessarily a disaster. When wildfire interacts with the human-made vulnerabilities at the edge of an urban area, however, it can result in catastrophe. The types of structures and vegetation associated with human habitation can help determine the extent of damage from fire." (Excerpt from the book)*

### **Join the Conservancy:**

Founding Sponsor: \$1,000 over 10 years.  
Family Membership: \$50 per year.  
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### **Contact Us:**

PO Box 5551, Berkeley CA 94705, 510-843-2226  
Email: [ClaremontCanyon@hotmail.com](mailto:ClaremontCanyon@hotmail.com)  
Website: [www.claremontcanyon.org](http://www.claremontcanyon.org).

**The Board of Directors:** L. Tim Wallace, President; Joe Engbeck, Vice President; Marilyn Goldhaber, Secretary; Barry Pilger, Treasurer; Shelagh Brodersen, Steve Holtzman, Jon Kaufman, Jerry Kent, Tamia Marg Anderson, and Dick White.

## **The Advocate Plan** *by Joe Engbeck*

THE CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY was created ten years ago to find ways to reduce the possibility that wildfire might once again roar through the canyon, incinerating native vegetation, destroying homes, and wrecking people's lives. Discussion of the best way to accomplish that objective was unfocused at first, and the conflict between fire safety objectives and the desire to preserve natural landscape values and improve pedestrian access to the canyon threatened to result in a permanent stalemate.

But little by little, through continued study of the subject and through ongoing debate and compromise, various policy issues were resolved. Experienced firefighters, students of fire history, and experts in various academic fields all contributed to the Conservancy's understanding of vegetation management issues and home protection strategies. Continued discussion both within and outside the Conservancy forged the practical and political compromises that are part of real life in this and every other field of human endeavor. Simple answers based on unsubstantiated personal opinions were replaced by more sophisticated understandings; personal agendas were replaced by community-based agreements.

It is important, however, that the Conservancy's whole membership base (not just its hard-working committee members and other activists) remains aware of these understandings and agreements and continues to be generally supportive of them. Only if that remains true can the Conservancy hope to deal realistically with the difficult issues that are part of the fire hazard reduction effort in the canyon and throughout the adjacent Oakland/Berkeley Hills.

The Claremont Canyon Conservancy's Advocate Plan for Claremont Canyon is based on the relevant and available literature, and on interviews, tours of the canyon, and advice from a wide range of groups and individuals. It is a summary of the Conservancy's best thinking about how to deal with the risk of wildfire in the canyon. It is fully intended, however, to be a living document—one that will continue to change as more is learned and as new information becomes available in the coming years.

An excellent opportunity to tour the canyon with an expert on hill area fire safety issues will be open to Conservancy members on October 29 when Jerry Kent will lead a special auto tour of the canyon, stopping at strategic locations to discuss the fire safety policy recommendations outlined in the Advocate Plan. Jerry served for many years as the East Bay Regional Park District's assistant general manager for operations. In 2011 he coauthored the Conservancy's Advocate Plan for Claremont Canyon. The plan can be read or downloaded from the Conservancy website: [www.claremontcanyon.org](http://www.claremontcanyon.org). The 42-page plan, printed and spiralbound, will also be available for a small fee at the Conservancy's annual meeting on November 6.

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

**The Claremont Canyon Conservancy News** is edited by Marilyn Goldhaber and Joe Engbeck.

*LECH IS SEEN behind a flower of giant cow parsnip that has gone to seed during the Stewards June workshop on passive restoration and seed collection.*



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### **The Garber Park Stewards** by Shelagh Brodersen

THE GARBER PARK STEWARDS have had a busy second year. We just completed our second annual participation in the City of Oakland's Creek to Bay Day, where volunteers continued removing invasive weeds in preparation for winter planting. In addition, Lech Naumovich, botanist of Golden Hour Restoration Institute, conducted a workshop on vegetation mapping, the third in a series of Citizen Science Workshops in Garber.

The Garber Park Stewards have been working with the City of Oakland Wildfire Prevention Assessment District to secure a special project for fuel load reduction in Garber Park. Beginning last spring we began developing a comprehensive fuel management plan for the park. We held several community meetings, and in July submitted a final set of recommendations. Hopefully, by the time you read this article work will have begun on this most important project.

Starting in December, 2009, the Stewards conducted twice-a-month stewardship days. During the first year we focused our efforts on the Evergreen entrance, removing over 100 cubic

yards of dead wood. These efforts culminated with our first ever native planting in February of this year. The Evergreen Lane entrance is now called Restoration Site One. The five planting beds have flourished and we will be expanding the restoration planting at the Evergreen Lane entrance hillside this winter.

Our restoration efforts expanded this year to the Harwood Creek area. Beginning at Creek to Bay Day in 2010 a dedicated group known as the *Blackberry Bashers* have eliminated the highly invasive and flammable Himalayan blackberry from the area surrounding the trail at Harwood Creek. This area which we fondly call *Bob's Place* is now Restoration Site Two. Harwood Creek is also the area where we expect a City of Oakland Measure DD project to be implemented this winter. This project will restore and stabilize the creek bank along Harwood Creek, which will improve the drainage into Claremont Creek at Claremont Avenue.

Our efforts have been made possible by the City of Oakland and the many volunteers who have joined us in our efforts to restore Garber Park to its natural beauty. Won't you join us? Our stewardship days are the first Tuesday and the third Saturday of the month. The next Citizen Science Workshop will be November 19 where Lech will conduct a nature photography workshop. We are also planning a special second year anniversary celebration at our December 17 Saturday stewardship session.

For more information about the Garber Park Stewards and their restoration efforts please visit our blog [www.garberparkstewards.blogspot.com](http://www.garberparkstewards.blogspot.com) or email us [GarberParkStewards@gmail.com](mailto:GarberParkStewards@gmail.com). We look forward to seeing you in Garber Park sometime soon.

*JOYCE SASSE DISCOVERS a cream bush (Holo-discus discolor) in Garber Park. Not yet in bloom, this pretty white flower will be a fall highlight.*



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*JON KAUFMAN (without cap) helps Tom Klatt secure a new signpost while Lynn Yamashita stirs cement.*

### **Trails in the Upper Canyon** by *Jon Kaufman*

VOLUNTEERS FROM THE CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY have been busy over the last several months, building and maintaining trails in the upper canyon and then naming the trails and installing directional signs.

Summit House Trail starts across from the chert inside the gated parking area (U.C. signpost 29), and follows the fire road up past the grove of redwood trees before wending its way up to Four Corners where Claremont Avenue, Fish Ranch Road, and Grizzly Peak Boulevard meet. Willow Trail, which volunteers constructed over the past year, also begins across from the chert but goes down to the creek before meandering up-canyon through a broad patch of willow forest to join the Summit House Trail.

As many people have already discovered, these trails are fun to walk, but they also provide access to the area for the identification and removal of eucalyptus sprouts and other invasive plant species. A few years ago this part of the upper canyon was covered with eucalyptus, pine, and acacia trees—very much like the area on the north side of Claremont Avenue. Today, throughout much of the upper canyon, it's obvious that oaks, bays, willows, and other native trees and shrubs are rapidly recovering and thereby restoring the area to its natural appearance.

In the coming months, Conservancy volunteers will be working on a new guardrail and log bench to enhance the utility of the staging area at signpost 29 and to discourage roadside dumping.

## **SCHEDULE OF EVENTS**

PLEASE JOIN US FOR OUR FALL/WINTER SERIES in Claremont Canyon. Stewardship outings include twice monthly (first Tuesday and third Saturday) restoration work in Garber Park in the lower canyon, in collaboration with the Garber Park Stewards, led by Shelagh Brodersen; and once a month (second Saturday) for weed management and trail maintenance elsewhere in Claremont Canyon led by Jon Kaufman.

Dates for Garber Park are **Oct 22, Nov 1 & 19, Dec 6 & 17**. Meet at the Evergreen entrance, 10 AM-noon. Dates for the stewardship work sessions elsewhere in the canyon are **Nov 12 & Dec 10**. Meet across at U.C. signpost 29 on the north side of Claremont Avenue, about one-half mile uphill from the Alvarado Road intersection (at the chert), 10 AM-noon.

Additional events are listed below, including two that are sponsored by other groups to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Tunnel Fire. All are free and open to the public. Please check our website for updates and additions. RSVP to [info@ClaremontCanyon.org](mailto:info@ClaremontCanyon.org).

When venturing into the canyon, it is good to wear long sleeves, long pants, sturdy shoes and a hat. Vegetation volunteers should also bring gloves.

**October 15—The Berkeley Project**, 9 AM-1 PM. Cal students join again with Conservancy volunteers for a morning of trail maintenance and weed removal. Includes lunch offered by *Rick and Ann's*. Meet at U.C. signpost 29 (at the chert) on the north side of Claremont Avenue, about one-half mile uphill from its intersection with Alvarado Road.

**October 15—Neighborhood Potluck and Remembrance of the 1991 Tunnel Fire** at the home of Russ and Annetta Aubry, 4949 Grizzly Peak Boulevard. Check the Conservancy website for time and details.

**October 20—Twentieth Anniversary of the 1991 Oakland Hills Tunnel Fire, 5:30-7:30 PM**. Commemoration at Oakland City Hall sponsored by the City of Oakland and United Policyholders, a consumer advocacy group that helped residents with insurance issues after the fire. The event will honor the 25 who died, the many who suffered loss, and those who assisted in the recovery.

**October 29—Canyon Tour with Jerry Kent**, 10 AM-noon. Traveling by car, we will stop at four strategic locations in Claremont Canyon to discuss fire safety recommendations in the Conservancy's Advocate Plan. Meet at Four Corners (Claremont Avenue and Grizzly Peak Boulevard), caravan to Gwin Canyon, the Stonewall area, Panoramic Way (with a short walk up to the ridge), and finish at mid-canyon on Claremont Avenue. RSVP for this event to [JKent58@aol.com](mailto:JKent58@aol.com).

**November 6—Tenth Annual Meeting**, 4-6 PM at the Claremont Hotel (see pages 2 and 8 for details).



Two CAL STUDENTS on last March's Berkeley Project Day break for lunch after a morning removing French broom with Park District Rangers and Conservancy volunteers.

**November 19—Nature Photography with Lech Naumovich, 10 AM-noon,** sponsored by the Garber Park Stewards. Bring cameras and meet at the Evergreen entrance.

**November 26—Walking the U.C. Trails with Tom Klatt, 10 AM-noon.** Join Tom to learn about and experience the new trails in upper Claremont Canyon that were built largely by volunteers. Meet at U.C. signpost 29 (at the chert) on the north side of Claremont Avenue about one-half mile uphill from its intersection with Alvarado Road.

**December 11—The Birds of Claremont Canyon with Dave Quady, Audubon Christmas Bird Count Leader.** Join us to seek the birds that reside or winter in Claremont Canyon. Dave will also lead a special owling adventure in the wee morning hours, followed by a break for breakfast. Join us for one walk or both.

**Owling Walk, 4:30-6:30 AM:** Meet at the trailhead on the north side of Claremont Avenue, about one-half mile uphill from the Alvarado Road intersection. After a

brief owling lesson, we'll listen for owls at a couple of locations in the canyon. We will walk a little, but mostly stand quietly in the dark and listen. Owling is chancy: we hope to hear an owl or two; if we're really lucky we may see one. Rain or high wind cancels.

**Daytime Bird Walk, 8 AM until about noon.** Meet at the top of the canyon, at the Claremont Avenue/Fish Ranch Road/Grizzly Peak Boulevard intersection. We will drive to a couple of locations to sample different habitats in search of resident and migrant birds. We'll bird from roads, and hike on trails as much as conditions permit. Rain or high wind cancels.

Call Dave at 704-9353 before 9:00 PM on Saturday, December 10 if you're unsure whether the walks will run in light of the next day's weather forecast.

**December 17—Winter Natives with Lech Naumovich, 10 AM-noon,** sponsored by the Garber Park Stewards. The Stewards will be celebrating their second year anniversary. Dress in layers and bring a small planting tool. Meet at the Evergreen entrance.



BIRD WALK LEADER, DAVE QUADY (in green vest) stops for a picture at Four Corners with (l. to r.) Erica Rutherford, Sharon and Ray Johnston, and Lynn Horowitz on last spring's bird walk.



## Restoring a North Coastal Grassland for Wildfire Safety, A Personal Journey by Marilyn Goldhaber

IN 1989, MY FAMILY AND I MOVED to our new home on a steep, narrow road that dead-ended in a marvelous wildland park. Our lot was the last on the street and was itself effectively a wild garden with a shady front yard of live oak trees and a sunny back hill covered with grass and forbs. Upwards from our lot rose the ridges and draws of the park, the steep 208-acre Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve. The Preserve, part of the East Bay Regional Park District's 65-park system, connected to University land in upper Claremont Canyon and to untold acres of open space along the East Bay Hills.

I felt incredibly lucky to be living so close to nature yet close to all the amenities of a comfortable urban life. It didn't take long, however, to discover that I had moved to a high wildfire danger area. In 1991, the devastating Oakland Tunnel Fire came rushing within throwing distance of our home. While the winds turned in our favor that day and we were spared, more than 3,000 other families lost their homes and 25 people lost their lives. Eight years later, in 1999, we witnessed another wildfire, this time in the Preserve just beyond our fence. Again, we were fortunate that our home was spared, as winds that day were calm and the two-acre blaze was brought quickly under control by a bevy of fire fighters and helpful neighbors.

The experience of these two fires set me on a journey—a journey of learning and of caring: caring for our property, caring for the land, caring for the community, and finding out, as best I could, how to live at the wildland-urban interface.

I began my journey by learning more about the canyon's vegetation and the fact that it must be managed both on private property and along the interface between private and public lands. I learned that our native vegetation, a mixture of perennial grasses and scattered low-lying shrubs with live oaks in the canyon draws (a typical *north coastal grassland*) is naturally more fire-safe as well as more beneficial to our local birds and other wildlife. Most annual grasses that we see on our hills throughout

the East Bay are not native. They produce flashy fuels, or, in the case of shrubs like French broom, they include dry, woody twigs and leaves that burn hot in a fire. Eucalyptus and other Australian trees are particularly hazardous if ignited during a "Diablo wind" day, when hot, dry winds rush in from the east every fall.

Taking a hard look at the land behind my fence, I found it to be a rather good example of a north coastal grassland. Native bunch grasses were there, scattered coyote brush, and an array of flowering forbs, including lupine, sticky yellow monkey flower, Indian paintbrush and more. Mixed in, of course, were the inevitable annual grasses. Also a colony of French broom had moved in and was threatening to spread. Two groves of eucalyptus were close by, a small one to our east and a larger one to our west. What to do about these?

While I was thinking about all this, I joined eleven of my neighbors on a neighborhood task force studying issues related to Claremont Canyon. In 2001 the task force decided

to incorporate as a nonprofit membership organization and the Claremont Canyon Conservancy was formed. The Conservancy roster grew quickly—in the first year more than 100 families and later more than 500 families joined the efforts to educate ourselves and to work cooperatively with the managers of our adjacent public lands.

The managers, it turned out, were more than willing to listen, share information,

and, eventually, when mutual confidence was gained, work together with us. In 2004 the Conservancy applied for and received a federal grant to aid the Park District in reducing vegetation in the Stonewall area, as well as in two other areas of Claremont Canyon. It was agreed that eucalyptus trees would be dealt with first and the entire Stonewall portion of the grant therefore went to removing trees at the edge of the Park District's large eucalyptus grove in the vicinity of an East Bay MUD water tank. Later in 2008, the aforementioned small grove (about 30 trees) was removed as well.

By 2009, the grassland behind our fence was notably in need of attention. Most obvious was overgrown brush and



*THE AUTHOR (IN GREEN JACKET) STANDS BEHIND HER FENCE on Park District land with Assistant Fire Chief John Swanson, fire ecologist Carol Rice and Conservancy member Bill McClung. The group along with several other Conservancy members visited sites along the wild-urban interface in 2009 to assess wildfire safety in Claremont Canyon. Photo © 2009 Martin Holden*

poison oak along the fence line and French broom encroaching into an otherwise fairly pristine area. The situation seemed manageable to me, however, and I started drawing the Park District's attention to what must have seemed a minuscule problem among its 100,000 acres of parkland in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. Nevertheless, in 2010, much to my satisfaction, the District embarked on a brisk program to cut, pile and burn brush in the Stonewall area. This was a response, not just to my plea, I'm sure, but to their own plans to protect homes, a 14-acre eucalyptus grove, the Elmwood District adjacent to the grove, and, potentially, the entire the City of Berkeley.

With a sense of gratitude and with the District's permission, I took it upon myself to monitor the land in the lower Preserve. I was already visiting there daily, having recently acquired a new puppy eager to go out on leash. With the District's support and through the auspices of the Claremont Canyon Conservancy, I began to conduct follow-up forays—hand pulling broom seedlings as they emerged in the burn areas and elsewhere in the lower Preserve. My goal was complete eradication of French broom in lower Claremont Canyon. My thought was that while the District has its hands full with a serious broom problem in the upper Preserve, volunteers could help hold the line and maintain a broom-free lower Preserve.

Wildfire hazard mitigation efforts, such as those described here, have been part of landowners' work in Claremont Canyon for years. The challenge has been to mobilize enough human and financial resources to maintain a valid fuel break that in case of a fire could buffer homes and provide a place for fire fighters to stage equipment and personnel. Last July, the Conservancy applied for another Federal wildfire prevention grant



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*A FUEL BREAK IS CREATED in March of 2010 by cutting, piling then burning brush and weeds in the Stonewall area. The same hillside is shown below one year later recovering nicely.*

to supplement landowners' efforts in Claremont Canyon. The aim is to provide a platform for sharing knowledge and skills among multiple parties and to get more boots on the ground and more tools in the hands of people capable of doing the work. Grant awards are highly competitive and therefore it will be a couple of months before we know whether our project will be funded. In any case, it is wonderful to see so many people working together to create a community-wide approach to wildfire safety.



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*A NEWLY INVIGORATED NORTH COASTAL GRASSLAND emerges in spring of 2011. Conservancy volunteers are monitoring the area for new broom seedlings. An estimated 10,000 seedlings were hand-pulled over two years.*



P.O. Box 5551  
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[www.ClaremontCanyon.org](http://www.ClaremontCanyon.org)



*A NORTH COASTAL GRASSLAND is refreshed on Park District land.*

## THE CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY

SUPPORTING THE LONG-TERM STEWARDSHIP OF CLAREMONT CANYON

**Dear FRIENDS, AND NEIGHBORS,** *Please join us ...*

**Sunday, November 6, 2011, 4-6 p.m.**

**The Claremont Hotel**

### ***Tenth Anniversary***

Reception	4:00 p.m.
Presentations	4:30 p.m.
Open Forum	5:30 p.m.

Keynote Speakers: Ken Blonski, Fire Chief, Carol Rice, Fire Ecologist, and Cheryl Miller, Landscape Architect,  
*“Going Fire Safe and Native”*

*Complimentary wine bar and refreshments. Bring a friend or neighbor.*

**RSVP:** [info@ClaremontCanyon.org](mailto:info@ClaremontCanyon.org) or call 510-843-2226