



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

## President's Message

by L. Tim Wallace

SPRING IS HERE AGAIN and, as usual, there is much going on in Claremont Canyon and at the Claremont Canyon Conservancy. Earth Day is just around the corner with lots to do in Garber Park and along Claremont Avenue. Won't you please join us for this event as well as our other activities. A schedule of events can be found on page 5.

As we go to press, we anticipate the release of Federal Emergency Management Administration's (FEMA's) draft environmental impact statement (EIS) covering wildfire hazard mitigation projects planned for the East Bay Hills.

After the draft EIS becomes public, presumably by the time you are reading these words, there will be a 45-day review period followed by a series of public hearings and opportunities for citizens to weigh in. When after reviewing all the public comments FEMA gives its final approval, funds for the projects will be released to the three agencies, the University of California, the East Bay Regional Park District, and the City of Oakland, which received wildfire hazard mitigation awards several years ago.

We hope this will mean that the invasive and fire hazardous eucalyptus trees in the upper reaches of Claremont Canyon, north of Claremont Avenue, can finally be removed and the process of restoration, already well under way on the south side of the canyon (see photo below), can begin.

We do not know what FEMA's final EIS will ultimately include. We believe strongly, however, that it would be a major mistake for FEMA to favor thinning over complete removal of hazardous trees. The result would be expensive, long-term maintenance of decadent forests—as Jerry Kent so aptly describes on page 2. As an advocate for both mitigating fire danger and promoting native habitats in Claremont Canyon, we believe it is essential to remove as many eucalyptus trees as is possible and cost effective under the FEMA awards.

I ask you, our members and the public, to please stand by and be ready to take action by writing letters and speaking out at public meetings. I promise to be in touch with you through our website, emails and letters to our members as the process unfolds.

*EUCALYPTUS TREES STILL STAND ON UC lands to the north of Claremont Avenue (left side of picture and in the distance), while oaks, bays and other native vegetation repopulate the south side (right side of the picture and middleground). UC is one of the recipients of the FEMA awards for wildfire hazard mitigation work, but funds were held up for nearly a decade awaiting completion of the EIS.*



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## Costs for Growing Large Eucalyptus Trees Will Sky-Rocket *by Jerry Kent*

AGENCY DECISIONS ABOUT GROWING large blue gum eucalyptus trees may be as risky as Frank Havens' Mahogany Eucalyptus and Land Company of the early 1900s. That enterprise ultimately went belly-up when Havens' 3,000 acres of eucalyptus trees in the East Bay Hills failed to become a "gold mine," proving to be unusable for hardwood lumber. One hundred years later, the East Bay Regional Park District (Park District) and other agencies could be stuck spending untold millions trying to deal with Havens' large and dense groves, now identified as extreme wildfire hazards.

The Park District's 2010 Wildfire Hazard Mitigation Plan and EIR (the Plan) specified that 1,200 acres of dense eucalyptus groves would be managed but failed to inform the public or the Park District board about the potential costs required to implement the Plan. Calculations show that the Park District's eucalyptus fire hazard reduction strategy could cost well over 100 million dollars during the next 30-50 years.

The Plan recommends thinning groves to 20-30-foot spacing between trees—then following up with ongoing pruning and removal of sprouts, ribbon bark, ground fuel, and understory every 3-5 years. The Park District's eucalyptus groves would eventually become single-age stands with bare understory until the remaining large trees begin to fail and must be removed. No one knows for sure when a tree will fail, but around 150 years of tree age is a good guess, based



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*FALL COLORS GRACE THE SOUTH SIDE of Claremont Canyon (viewed from the bench at sign-post 29 last November). When care is taken after large tree removal to preserve native vegetation and discourage weed incursions, restoration can occur naturally.*

on structural problems and liability concerns connected with several of the older blue gum eucalyptus trees in the Bay Area.

The Plan did not offer realistic cost projections for the management of the Park District's 1,200 acres of blue gum eucalyptus, for either thinning or ongoing maintenance, and completely omitted all costs related to the eventual removal of the 60,000 trees that will eventually fail in groves thinned to approximately 50 large trees per acre.

Blue gum eucalypts are massive trees that can be expected to exceed 150 feet in height, have five-foot diameters, and weigh over 40 tons each. Aging, gigantic blue gum eucalypts, often referred to as "widow makers," can also become serious public safety hazards with removal costs of \$1,000-\$4,000 per tree. Planted trees do not live forever, so removal of large numbers of eucalyptus trees will not be a simple matter, and should not be dependent on individual tree hazard, disease, age, or condition of single trees. To be done economically, agencies responsible for management of large acreage must be able to take advantage of economy-of-scale contracts when the time comes for removal.

Apparently, cost was not a factor in determining how to deal with high risk eucalyptus groves, even though the *Response to Comments* section of the Park District's Plan EIR stated that "there is widespread agreement that the conversion of eucalyptus and pine plantations to plant communities that present a lower wildfire risk and a higher concentration of native plants is an effective way to reduce fire risk."

The conversion process from eucalyptus to native vegetation should begin as soon as possible for high-risk groves impacted by *Diablo* winds. Priority should be given to groves that occur along high ridges, along evacuation routes, on the leeward side of the hills above homes, and all groves that re-sprouted after the 1972 freeze. Converting to native vegetation at the earliest feasible time in these selected groves, rather than waiting until costs skyrocket in the future, will help keep agency costs lower. These priority groves deserve special attention. There will be plenty of blue gum eucalyptus acreage remaining elsewhere in the East Bay Hills for the public to enjoy.

**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.

### **Join the Conservancy:**

Founding Sponsor: \$1,000 over 10 years.  
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### **Contact Us:**

PO Box 5551, Berkeley CA 94705, 510-843-2226  
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**The 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, and Dick White.

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

## The Science Behind Eucalyptus Fire Hazards

by Carol Rice

*Eucalyptus has a reputation for being a serious fire hazard, and like all reputations, some of it is earned, some is not. This article describes fuel characteristics of eucalyptus that make it more or less prone to ignite and burn with intensity. For the full article, including references, please visit the Conservancy website.*

### FUEL CHARACTERISTICS

THREE FUEL CHARACTERISTICS ARE IMPORTANT: volume, arrangement and chemical content.

**Volume:** Eucalypts are big plants. They produce a lot of fuel. But wildfire burns small material most readily and almost disregards material larger than three inches in diameter. Ignoring the trunks and larger branches, there is still a lot of volume in the tree's foliage, bark and debris.

Fuel loads measured in Sibley Preserve, Angel Island and Golden Gate National Recreation Area range from 29-50 tons/acre. By comparison, grasslands range from 1-5 tons/acre; north coastal scrub rarely exceeds five tons/acre, eucalyptus stands have a quantum level more volume of fuel to burn. Like adding a log to the campfire to boost the heat, more fuel increases wildfire's intensity.

Fuel characteristics are often bundled into fuel "models" that describe typical volume, airiness, and arrange-

ment of the fuels. The most recent, widely-used guide to these fuel models is Scott and Burgan, 2005.\* Scott recommended the use of "TL189" to represent mature, unmanaged eucalyptus stands. This has the most volume, with 14.1 tons/acre without duff, and the highest flame lengths of forested fuel models.

**Arrangement:** The distribution in space of burnable biomass is an important factor in determining the fire hazard of any vegetation type. Eucalyptus branches, leaves, and bark slough off in long pieces that are end up draped on one another, creating a near optimum mixture of oxygen and fuel. This fluffy arrangement provides a "goldilocks situation:" not too dense and not too airy, but one that provides close enough contact for the fire to burn and transfer heat easily to the next particle.

Near-ground fuels in unmanaged stands tend to be continuous horizontally, further facilitating fire spread. But the most significant aspect of fuel arrangement is vertical continuity. If the lowest branches are quite high (10-20 feet), and if the surface-level fuels are short and sparse, fire is not likely to reach the tree crown. Predicting crown fire potential considers the tree crown base height, moisture content of the leaves, and fire intensity. That's how important fuel arrangement is.

The stringy bark of *Eucalyptus globulus* is an unusual aspect of trees in the East Bay because bark provides yet another way for fire to climb into the tree canopy. In Australia, bark characteristics are routinely rated as part of a tree's overall fuel assessment.

*Article continues on next page.*



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**DO YOU RECEIVE OUR MONTHLY EMAILS?**  
*We email members and followers once a month to update them on current news and activities like stewardship and nature walks. If you would like to receive these monthly emails, please send your email address to us through our website by clicking on "Contact Us."*



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*UC BERKELEY STUDENTS JOINED CONSERVANCY MEMBERS and East Bay Regional Park rangers in two "Berkeley Project" events, last November and again in March, to remove French Broom from the upper end of the Stonewall Trail where it meets Panoramic Way (the November event is pictured here and on page 6). There's a lot of broom left but we made a dent and got to the broom before it went to seed. We thank the students for their hard work and Ann's Catering, Whole Foods, and Safeway for donating lunches.*



“Science behind Eucalyptus” continues from previous page.

Management of fuels makes a crucial impact on both volume and structure. Removing surface fuels and all shorter trees and pruning lower branches generally prevents crown fires. The legacy of cutting eucalyptus trees but allowing regrowth, however, can be disastrous. It results in dead debris suspended between multiple stems and/or understory shrubs and a low branch height in a nearly continuous arrangement of fuels—horizontally and vertically. This equates to a nearly certain level of torching and crown fire.

**Chemical Content:** Eucalyptus leaves contain enough oils to be sold as a product. Oils have approximately three times the energy as cellulose, so it burns hotter. The leaves of blue gum eucalyptus also release a number of terpenes and phenolic acids. The volatiles are important because they are released as flammable gases at lower temperatures, and ignite more easily. Keep in mind that combustion is the burning of gases just outside the solid material—volatiles act as catalysts, and eucalyptus has more of them.

Studies of eucalyptus’s crude fat content find that it ranges from about 10-20% of its dry weight (whereas tropical leaves typically have about 3%); this was the highest percentage found of all plant sources measured, even higher than chamise (also called “greasewood”).

**FIRE BEHAVIOR**

EUCALYPTUS IS FAMOUS for “exploding into flames.” However, this occurs only when the fuels below it burn with enough intensity for the foliage in the crown to ignite. This happens either when there are abundant fuels at the base of the tree or when the crown is low. However, when a tree crown burns, flame lengths are typically twice as tall as the tree. Since eucalyptus trees are so tall, that’s quite a long flame!

A continuous bed of dead leaves, twigs, bark and branchlets—like those found in unmanaged eucalyptus stands—can ignite during dry periods in all seasons. Dead fuels respond to the weather rather quickly. Small-diameter materials dry

out in a few hours—stems the size of a pencil can be as dry as the atmosphere in one day. Luckily, eucalyptus often provides an enhanced layer of moisture through fog drip, but that effect is short-lived during dry times. By contrast, foliar moisture in grass and brush inhibits fire ignition and fire spread for approximately seven months of the year.

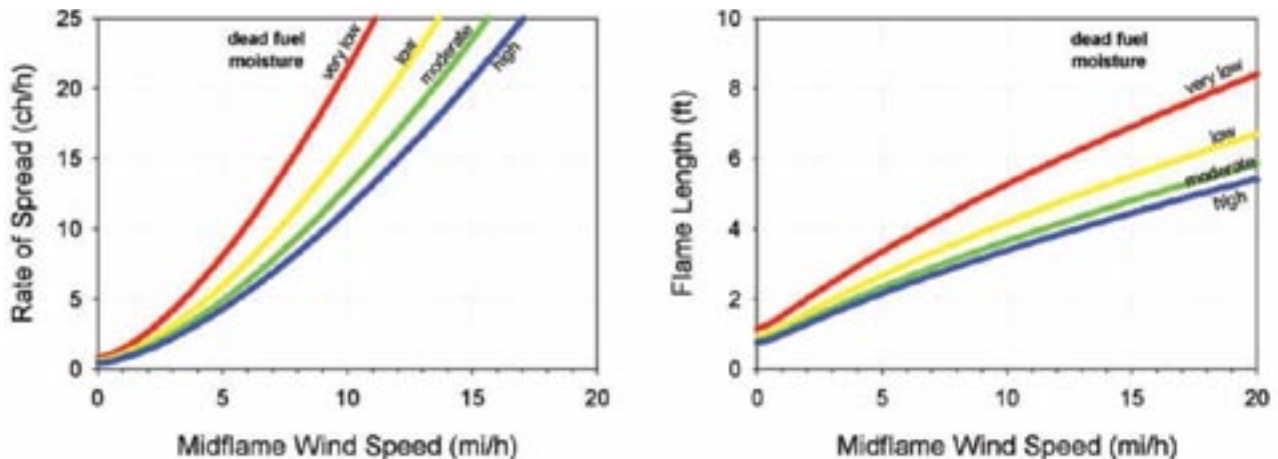
It is during the other five months of the year when foliar moisture is low that fire danger is highest. This is particularly true when winds flare up, as with our *Diablo* winds that occur in the Bay Area each fall. Ground fires spread more rapidly and burn more intensely with increasing wind (see the chart below). When fires reach into the crown of trees, they become even more intense and unpredictable.

When eucalyptus trees ignite, they can distribute embers long distances. Embers were a major source of structure ignition, as determined by evaluations of losses in recent fires. The distance embers can spread to start new fires is affected by the height of the tree, its position on the slope, and roughly, the shape and size of the particle. Eucalyptus is a tall tree and is often located high on the slope, promoting long ember cast. The leaves, bark or other particles are thin enough to be lifted but large or long enough to be still burning when they land. Australia’s new fuel assessment features a prediction of spotting distance, based on bark type, and routinely predicts a distance of three miles or more when the trees have stringy bark like *Eucalyptus globulus*. In both the US and Australia, fire intensity is another important factor in how far embers can spread.

**CONCLUSION**

EUCALYPTUS STANDS ARE OFTEN QUITE HAZARDOUS because of the high volume of dead debris they produce, their typical arrangement of fuels, and their oily foliage. Eucalyptus stands can be made fire-safe through repeated intervention to reduce the fuel volume and alter the forest structure. If a landowner does not have an assured stream of funding, eucalyptus stands pose a real and daunting concern.

Rate of spread and flame length of ground fires in un-managed eucalyptus stands, by moisture level and wind speed\*



\* Scott, Joe H. and Burgan, Robert E. 2005. Standard fire behavior fuel models: a comprehensive set for use with Rothermel’s surface fire spread model. Gen. Tech. Rep. RMRS-GTR-153. Fort Collins, CO. USDA Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Sta. 72p.

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

PLEASE JOIN US FOR OUR SPRING SERIES of nature walks and stewardship events in Claremont Canyon. Stewardship work parties occur once a month in Claremont Canyon (second Saturday) led by Jon Kaufman and twice a month (first Tuesday and third Saturday) in Garber Park led by Shelagh Brodersen of the *Garber Park Stewards*. All levels of fitness are welcome. Check our website for updates and to get on our emailing list.

Claremont Canyon regular work dates are **May 11 and June 8, 10 a.m.-noon**. For the meeting place, watch for the monthly emails or check the Conservancy website. Work dates for Garber Park are **April 20 (Earth Day), May 7 & 18 and June 4 & 15**. Meet at the Evergreen entrance, 10 a.m.-noon. .

When venturing into the canyon or park, please wear long sleeves, long pants, sturdy shoes and a hat. If you have gloves, please bring those too but we'll have extras. Please RSVP to [GarberParkStewards@gmail.com](mailto:GarberParkStewards@gmail.com) for Garber Park events and to [info@ClaremontCanyon.org](mailto:info@ClaremontCanyon.org) for all other events.

### April 20—Two Events for Earth Day, 9-noon

**Earth Day along Claremont Avenue:** Meet at the big parking turn-out across from the water tank on Claremont Avenue. We will be removing invasive ivy from the trees just behind the parking area and picking up trash near the road. (This is a big area and most of our work will be well off the road but since Claremont is a busy street we do not recommend this site for young children.) From Ashby Avenue, go .4 miles up Claremont Avenue. The parking turn-out is just beyond 7380. Look for our sign.

**Earth Day in Garber Park:** Join the Garber Park Stewards to remove invasives along Harwood Creek. Help pull Cape ivy and poison hemlock along the Loop Trail and Restoration Site 2 where invasive weeds are rapidly surrounding the newly planted natives along the creek. We will meet at the Evergreen Lane entrance to Garber Park.

### May 5—Bird Walk with Dave Quady and Kay Loughman

Meet at 7 a.m. at Four Corners (intersection of Grizzly Peak Blvd. with Claremont Ave./Fish Ranch Rd.) to look for some of the birds that breed in Claremont Canyon. We'll pick an area that looks interesting, and search until about 11 a.m. for year-round resident birds as well as the neotropical migrant birds that have returned to breed. Bring binoculars if you have a pair (Dave will have a few pairs to share) and a field guide if you have one.

For something different, meet Kay and Dave at 5 a.m. at the foot of Gelston Street to enjoy the 'dawn chorus,' as breeding birds break into song before the sun rises. We will stand quietly and try to identify birds by their songs until about 6:30 a.m., leaving enough time to get a quick breakfast snack before our 7 a.m. meeting at the top of the canyon.

Rain cancels. Please check the Conservancy website for last-minute updates.

*A GREAT HORNED OWL'S NEST was seen last spring in the managed eucalyptus grove near the Stonewall Road entrance to the Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve. In the picture to the right, a mother owl and chick are about to devour a freshly caught California vole (probably caught by the father owl). Normally nocturnal hunters, great horned owls may also hunt during the day when food requirements are difficult to meet—for example, when raising young. Two eggs were hatched in last spring's nest but after three weeks only one chick remained. Great horned owls do not build their own nests, and often use the vacated nest of a red-tailed hawk. This same nest was previously occupied in 2008, producing three owl chicks, all of which successfully fledged.*



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



THE GARBER PARK STEWARDS continued their restoration work all last season removing invasive plants, stabilizing trails and fostering native plants in the park. On January 19, the Stewards hosted a passive restoration workshop, led by Lech Naumovich of the Golden Hour Institute, where attendees learned how to use on-site resources (seeds, vegetation, debris, organic matter) to improve habitat conditions for target native plants. Garber Park is fortunate to have well-established and thriving colonies of native plants close to planting areas. Attendees learned how to harvest five native plants that grow in abundance in the park including California blackberry, osoberry, willow, cow parsnip and, a local favorite, thimbleberry—each with its own set of propagation techniques.

In the picture to the left, Cal students and Conservancy members gather at the Clark Kerr campus last November before setting out for a day of French broom removal.



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Lech describes how to transplant cow parsnip seedlings from a well-established area to a more needy location.

## 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 for the next ten years, until 2021, with another \$1,000. Thank you for your trust.

We are pleased to list on the opposite page, in approximately the order the commitments were made, our 227 Founding Sponsors (anonymous not listed). Below, we also honor an additional 88 current members from other categories of membership, supporting the Conservancy during our most recent membership drive.

Since our founding, more than 500 households in the Canyon and surrounding community have joined with us to preserve/restore the land, support our programs and to learn along with us how to best mitigate the threat of wildfire.

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SUPPORTING THE LONG-TERM STEWARDSHIP OF CLAREMONT CANYON



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*The wildlands of Claremont Canyon flow east-to-west, from Grizzly Peak Boulevard at the top, to the Claremont Hotel at the bottom, opening out to the urban landscape and on to San Francisco Bay.*