

THE CLAREMONT CANYON CONSERVANCY *News*

SPRING 2006

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



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UC Forestry Club poses on a pile of eucalyptus chips after a day of planting redwoods.

Redwood Planting Program

by Joe Engbeck

As you have probably noticed in driving up Claremont Avenue to Grizzly Peak Boulevard, the eucalyptus forest in upper Claremont Canyon is continuing to recede as the University of California follows through, parcel by parcel, on its budget-year-by-budget-year removal program. Once again, the Claremont Canyon Conservancy is following close behind. Working closely with the University's euc removal project, the Conservancy is continuing its redwood planting program. This year, during the first week of March, more than 1,000 seedlings were planted by Conservancy members and other volunteers, including members of the U.C. Forestry Club.

For the most part, the little redwood seedlings are being planted alongside the main watercourses in the upper canyon. The idea is to enlarge and extend the cool, moist, relatively fire-safe redwood grove that was first planted in the upper canyon in 1975, so that its distribution will eventually resemble that of naturally occurring coast redwood stands in this part of California. The result we are hoping for is a combination of newly opened roadside vistas, redwoods following the main watercourses, and areas of grassland and native oak-laurel forest—all in parts of the canyon that have long been smothered by eucalyptus trees, with their copious and highly flammable ground-covering debris.

This year's redwood planting effort drew the attention of a reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle. His story (complete with photos) ran on page one of the Bay Area section on March 6. As a result of this exposure, the Conservancy received more than a hundred email notes from enthusiastic supporters of the planting program. Some people arranged to make financial contributions, others signed up as new members of the Conservancy. Many volunteered to help with the physical labor—planting, watering, or whatever else might be helpful. Truly a heartwarming response!

Gwin Canyon Fuels-Reduction Project Completed

by Martin Holden

We are pleased to announce that the Gwin Canyon unit of the Claremont Canyon Conservancy's fuels-reduction project has been completed. Gwin Canyon is the large, southern branch of Claremont Canyon; it joins the larger canyon east of Alvarado Road. This work was part of a larger project on East Bay Regional Park District land in the canyon, funded by a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The first phase of the Gwin Canyon project involved removing several hundred Monterey pines that had germinated in the canyon after the 1991 fire. The second phase involved the creation of a fire-safety buffer zone

behind the houses on Marlborough Terrace, Norfolk and Strathmoor, which extended into parkland 100 feet from structures, down to the EBMUD water tank. Fuel reduction efforts here consisted of removing dead vegetation, clearing dense thickets of coyote brush and poison oak, limbing trees and tall shrubs, cutting tall grasses, and reducing exotic invasives such as Himalayan blackberry. Now that it has been established, this buffer zone will require regular maintenance. The Conservancy looks forward to helping homeowners work with EBRPD authorities to best maintain the buffer zone and protect their properties in the future.

Many, many hours of work went into this project, from the initial planning and funding to final implementation. We thank EBRPD staff for their assistance, including Fire Chief Dennis Rein, Fire Marshal Ken Blonksi, Fire Captain Brad Gallup, and Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve Supervisor Ed Leong. We also thank Amber Bach Gardner from the Diablo Firesafe Council for her role in seeing the project through. All of the work contributed by the Claremont Canyon Conservancy was donated by volunteers, led by board members Laura Baker and Tamia Marg.

Over the coming months, the other two units of this fuels-reduction project will be completed, with eucalyptus removal in the mid-canyon and Stonewall Road areas. The Stonewall unit has so

far received an additional \$18,000 in private funds from concerned neighbors to augment the federal grant. This project is an excellent example what we can accomplish together to promote fire safety in the Canyon.

If you are not yet a member of the Claremont Canyon Conservancy, we hope that that you will consider joining—or, if your membership has lapsed, that you will renew it (see page 7 for contact information).

Members Tell Us What They Think
by Marilyn Goldhaber

In February of 2006, we mailed surveys to 385 members and former members of the Claremont Canyon Conservancy. One hundred and thirty, or 34%, responded. Most of the respondents (92%) report close contact with Claremont Canyon by hiking in, driving through, or just viewing the landscape, presumably from their homes (over half). A few hearty souls (5%) report hiking the canyon daily and many more (49%) do so once a month or more. About a quarter drive through every day.

Interest in Conservancy Goals

Members show considerable interest in the Conservancy's three main goals: fire safety (96% report interest), ecological health/natural resources (96%), and public access (90%). Founding Sponsors are more passionate than regular members about fire safety (75% versus 51% put fire safety in the highest category of interest). Both member groups are equally passionate about the canyon's natural resources (57% in both groups put plants, animals, and birds in the highest category of interest).

Although the Conservancy has no current plans for the canyon's Harwood Creek (sometimes called Claremont Creek), 95% of members express support for future creek and watershed work. About 69% strongly support this work and another 26% say "it's OK." Litter patrols received good support from members (95%), but not as strong as did other concerns: 46% of members strongly support litter patrols while 49% say "it's OK."

Approximately 90% of respondents support trail improvement for public access (53%



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Harwood Creek crosses under the road and spills out at the lower end of the canyon near big leaf maples and a row of planted redwoods..

strongly support while 37% mildly support). Another 10% are unsure or do not support work on trails. Members are somewhat in favor of improving roadside turnouts, with 30% strongly supporting and 53% saying “it’s OK.” Another 17% do not want to take on the role of improving roadside turnouts or are unsure whether this falls under the goals of the Conservancy.

Support for Conservancy Projects

Approximately 96% of members are in favor of removal of eucalyptus trees and replanting deforested areas with native redwoods. An even higher percentage (98%) of members support the management of invasive, fire-prone, exotic weeds along roadsides and trails: 83% strongly support, with another 15% saying “it’s OK.” A high percentage (95%) also supports buffer zone work for fire safety: 66% strongly support and 29% say “it’s OK.”

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 94% of members support the Conservancy’s working with the public agencies to encourage them, as much as possible, to do the necessary work to accomplish Conservancy goals.

Fuel Reduction Canyon Wide

Some of our members advocate reducing all fuels on public lands throughout Claremont Canyon for fire safety reasons (14%), while others say that a canyon-wide approach is too costly and disturbs too much habitat: 58% support removal/reduction of non-natives only, 8% do not support a canyon-wide approach, and 20% report not knowing how to proceed on this complex issue. Discussions with the landowners on managing fuel farther into the canyon will continue, with input from environmental and fire safety experts.

Private Responsibility for Fire Safety

The Conservancy believes that all parties share in the responsibility of promoting fire safety in Claremont Canyon, including the homeowner. While 36% of members were unable to say whether they had taken additional measures over what the City requires to achieve defen-



Paul McGee, with an armful of French broom, clears the area in front of the Claremont chert along Claremont Avenue. A student of exotic weeds and native plants, Paul is also an attorney, Founding Sponsor of the Conservancy, and a part-time worker for Shelterbelt Builders, a land restoration company with projects throughout the Bay Area. On volunteer days, Paul’s knowledge and skilled presence are much appreciated.

sible space on their own land (not sure, not applicable, left blank), 44% said “yes” that they had taken additional measures. Another 20% said “no” that they had not.

Willingness to Participate

About 20% of survey respondents say they would like to participate occasionally, even often, in outdoor work, hikes and social gatherings. Most of the remaining members contribute by regularly offering dues and donations.

We are in great debt to the dedicated, hard working board of directors of the Conservancy, lead by Tim Wallace. This year we say a fond farewell to two outgoing board members Joshua Bar-Lev and Laura Baker, whose strong voices and dedicated leadership were guiding lights to the Conservancy. And, we greet and welcome two new board members, of whom you will hear about in our next newsletter, Ann-Elise Emerson and Matt Morse.

Gratitude for Our Volunteers and Donors

We stand in gratitude to our steady volunteers, like Paul McGee, above, for their love of the canyon and willingness to contribute time and energy to the Conservancy. On the following pages we honor all our members who have joined since 2001, in particular our Founding Sponsors, whose pledges of \$1,000 or more launched the Conservancy. We thank all who have made our organization a success.

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Stewardship of the Canyon

Virtually everything that the Conservancy does is a form of stewardship, whether advocating wildfire safety, preserving native habitats, or maintaining public access to our beautiful canyon. Our organized stewardship events typically attract a dozen or so volunteers, who have a great time pulling French broom, maintaining a trail, or preserving a natural area.

Two favorite spots of stewardship are the sunny Side Hill Trail on U.C. property in the upper canyon and the shady, densely wooded Garber Park, a City of Oakland park in the lower canyon.

In previous years, we cleared a season's worth of yellow starthistle from the Side Hill Trail by uprooting and bagging mature plants and removing them from the site. This year, we headed out earlier in the season in small groups as new seedlings were just beginning to sprout, pulling them as carefully as possible so not to disturb the soil and invite more weeds. If we continue this way for a few more years, we hope to eradicate this pest from Side Hill Trail and slow its spread into other areas of Claremont Canyon.

In Garber Park, we coordinate yearly with the Vicente Canyon Neighborhood Association in trail maintenance and control of invasions of cape ivy, broom, and other invasive plants. A very successful joint work party was held there in April, on Earth Day.



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A redwood seedling is eased into the ground.

Spring Nature Walks and Tours

Earlier this spring, we held our annual bird walk, butterfly walk, and wildflower walk. These walks are generally leisurely and enjoyable for most fitness levels. However, two upcoming tours are for the more vigorous hiker. Check our website closer to the date for details.

June 3, 10:00 A.M. – Ridge Trail / Geology Hike: Bring a lunch and hike this challenging uphill trail with geologist Martin Holden on National Trails Day.

June 10, 10:00 A.M. – Redwood Tour: Tour the upper Canyon with board member Joe Engbeck and U.C.'s Tom Klatt. Check out the redwoods that were planted 30 years ago and those that were planted recently.

Winter Mushroom Walk

by *Martin Holden*

In January, noted Bay Area mycologist Robert Mackler led one of his popular fungal forays into the moist oak forests of Garber Park. A past president of the Mycological Society of San Francisco, Bob Mackler has been explaining the mysteries of mushrooms to since the 1970's. Bounding through the wintry woods in his big boots and mushroom-dyed cap, he resembled a real-life Tom Bombadil. We were only a few paces into the park before we discovered our first fungus—a log festooned with Tukeytails (*Trametes versicolor*). Though not really edible, the leathery polypore is traditionally used to boost the immune system.

Previous walks had focused on the role of fungi in the changing ecosystem of the canyon. This time, we concentrated on the adaptations that allow particular fungi to live in the canyon's varied environments. Some of the factors that we looked at were moisture, soil chemistry, and light. We also learned about the "lifestyle" specific to each fungus, whether *parasitic*, *saprophytic*, or *mycorrhizal*.

An abundant parasite in the canyon is the bracket fungus *Ganoderma* known as the "artist's conk," which grows on bay laurel trees. Brown on top, with a white underside which you can draw on (if you're good at drawing upside-down). Among the many saprophytes observed in the canyon was *Marasimius quercophilous*, which helps to decompose oak leaves. Without such "composting" fungi, the canyon would soon be filled to the brim with debris!

But it was the mycorrhizal mushrooms that generated the greatest interest. These fungi live in a symbiotic relationship with the roots of host trees, receiving sugars from



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Bob Mackler (holding mushroom) leads yearly forays into the densely wooded Garber Park..

them while helping them absorb vital nutrients from the soil. The oak trees in Garber Park have two important mycorrhizal partners—one delectable, and the other deadly.

The delectable one, of course, is the chanterelle (*Cantharellus cibarius*). This last winter was the best chanterelle season on record in coastal California, and though the season was nearing its end, it wasn't long before walk participants had discovered handfuls of the golden, funnel-shaped fungi. Growing nearby was a fine example of the "death cap," *Amanita phalloides*. Bob explained that this poisonous mushroom is a fairly recent introduction from Europe, apparently having been introduced in the vicinity of the Stanford campus about 40 years ago. Now, it's responsible for most of the mushroom-related fatalities in California.

The competition for the cutest mushroom in Claremont Canyon ended in a tie. One contender was a tiny LBM ("little brown mushroom"), scarcely half an inch high, that grows in the moss on the bark of the big-leaf maples. The competition is the Candy Cap (*Lactarius rubidus*), a dusky red mushroom that smells just like maple syrup when dried. It can be used in cookies, or in one of Bob Mackler's favorite recipes: Candy Cap creme brulée.

The Claremont Canyon Conservancy News is edited by Marilyn Goldhaber, Joe Engbeck, and Martin Holden.

Claremont Canyon is the largest relatively undisturbed canyon on the western slope of the Oakland/Berkeley Hills. Much of the canyon's watershed is publicly 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.

Join the Conservancy

Founding Sponsor: \$1,000 over 10 years.
 Family Membership: \$50 per year.
 Student or Senior: \$15 per year.

Contact Us

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Outgoing Board member Laura Baker scans the Side Hill Trail for new sprouts of yellow starthistle, after last year's removal project (see inside, page 6).