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

SPRING 2010 News

Looking down from Four Corners (Grizzly Peak Boulevard and Claremont Avenue/Fish Ranch Road) one can see Phase 1 of the eucalyptus removal area rebounding with native vegetation (oaks and bays) and rapid growth of 35-year-old planted redwoods (see article on pages 4-5 for more).

President’s Message
by Barry Pilger

THE LUSHESS OF CLAREMONT CANYON will linger this spring due to the persistent rains we have experienced. Annual grasses are beginning to show hints of brown, but their reluctance is apparent as through the end of April, at least, they continued to get soaked regularly.

The upper canyon, during this soggy time, played host to visits by several locally elected politicians who wanted to see for themselves the effect of complete removal of eucalyptus, acacia and pine from parts of the Canyon. The trail from Four Corners to the chert formation provided a perfect venue. At one point, midway, surrounded by huge bay and oak trees just a stone’s throw from a dense willow thicket, one of these officials said, “what’s not to like about this; now just what was done here?” I answered that this was an area where eucs were felled, lopped and scattered. He replied, “But I was told this area had been clear cut.”

He had been told that. Falsely. When the eucs were removed from the upper canyon what was exposed was a stunted bay and oak forest that had been living, sort of, under a dense eucalyptus canopy. That this elected official had been misled by others reminds us that the effort to continue the removal of hazardous, highly flammable, invasive exotics has moved into the political arena where prevarications, half-truths, and alarming misstatements are the unfortunate norm. Why should this political battle be any different? In the words of one Berkeley city council member, “shouldn’t it count for something that 98% of hill-area residents want those non-native trees eradicated?” Well, yes, but only if we are willing to stand up and be counted—and correct misstatements by those who seek to mislead.

Some of today’s news is more promising. The East Bay Regional Park District’s Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Resource Management Plan was certified unanimously by its board of directors, and fire mitigation work will begin shortly on scores of treatment areas, using funds provided by Measure CC, which was approved six years ago. The work is complex and involves reduction of the fuel load by thinning vegetation, including eucalyptus and pine trees. But the three federal grants for similar work on U.C., City of Oakland and Park District lands in and near Claremont Canyon have now been delayed at least another two years for what we believe to be an extraneous environmental study, caused largely by opponents, who seem to believe that eucalyptus trees are not a significant fire hazard. Ironically, the study will cost more than the work that is planned in Claremont and Strawberry Canyons.

The Conservancy board continues to press these issues with public officials, agencies and other stakeholders in hopes that our surroundings can be made both more natural and more fire-safe.

Since our last newsletter, the board has welcomed two new members, Jon Kaufman and Shelagh Brodersen, both of whom come with wonderful credentials as neighbors and active volunteers. We have spent considerable effort organizing ourselves for the long term. A day-long planning retreat in February is now yielding results as we have identified both short- and long-range issues that confront Claremont Canyon. Stewardship initiatives in Garber Park and on the Canyon’s headslope are showing results. A new website is in development, an oral history project is under way, and our vigilance is ongoing. Next winter, after the ground is softened by the first rains, we will be conducting a ‘shock and awe’ campaign against French broom. We hope to mobilize a large number of volunteers to confront this exotic and highly invasive pest.

As always, your participation, your ideas and your support are welcome. We thank you, our members and supporters, as we tackle the challenges ahead.
Garber Park – A Partnership between the Conservancy and the City of Oakland
by Shelagh Brodersen

Garber Park, a 13-acre oak woodland open space park, owned by the City of Oakland, is once again receiving much needed TLC. The Garber Park Stewards, a small but growing group of volunteers is holding regular twice-a-month stewardship sessions in the park to enhance the native plants along the Loop Trail which is between Alvarado Road, Evergreen Lane and Rispin Drive. They have tackled Cape Ivy, repaired creek bridges, removed debris, and are actively working with the City of Oakland for vigorous vegetation management to reduce the wildfire hazard. This work has built upon the efforts of Bill McClung, Matt Morse, and others who have been conducting Conservancy-sponsored stewardship sessions and nature walks in Garber Park as well as once-a-year Earth Day work parties with the Vicente Canyon Neighborhood Association.

The newly-formed Garber Park Stewards began last fall in response to Council member Jane Brunner’s outreach for volunteers to help maintain North Oakland Parks. I volunteered to lead this enthusiastic team of Garber Park advocates. Our vision? To reduce the risk of wildfire, improve the limited trail system while protecting, maintaining, and restoring the natural beauty of Garber Park. Martin Matarrese, Parkland Resource Supervisor for the City of Oakland is actively working with us in identifying the steps we need to take towards a comprehensive plan for the future of Garber Park. The Garber Park Stewards were given a real boost in their ability to implement their ideas when the Claremont Canyon Conservancy board recently voted in favor of forming a partnership with the Garber Park Stewards and the City of Oakland. Up to $1,000 was awarded to fund Earth Day activities on April 17 this year, and a special fund dedicated to Garber Park as well as once-a-year Earth Day work parties with the Vicente Canyon Neighborhood Association.

Please join us on one of our regular workdays—the 1st Tuesday of the month and the 3rd Saturday of the month. Questions? Contact Shelagh—GarberParkStewards@gmail.com.

Conservancy board member Shelagh Brodersen heads up the “Garber Park Stewards.” Shelagh has long been active in community work, most recently as Chair of the North Hills Phoenix Drainage Committee. She is a former public school teacher who enjoys backpacking, bicycling, and traveling. “I have long been an advocate for the environment,” says Shelagh, “and welcome the chance to work actively with the Claremont Canyon Conservancy in finding the best ways to balance fire safety concerns with the need to protect, restore and maintain the natural beauty of Claremont Canyon.”

Schedule of Events

Please join us for the events below, which include stewardship outings to Garber Park in the lower canyon (see article to the left) and the headslope in the mid and upper canyon, as well as our spring series of expert-led nature walks. All events are free for members and the general public. Please wear long sleeves, long pants, sturdy shoes and a hat. Vegetation volunteers should also bring gloves.

For questions and to RSVP please email info@ClaremontCanyonConservancy.org.

May 8—Final Headslope Session with Tom Klatt, 9:30-noon, concentrating on the eradication of French broom. Meet at the Chert Wall .4 miles above (east of) Alvarado Road along Claremont Avenue. Make sure you bring good shoes, strong gloves, long sleeves, and a small hand cutting tool. In Tom’s words, this is a “pull and drop” operation.

May 11—Wildlife and Wild Plants along Drury Court with Bill McClung, Paul McGee and Kay Loughman, 11 AM-1 PM. The leaders will point out different modes of vegetation management that have been applied to private parcels on this interesting, quiet street and identify native plants and wildlife at the wildland-urban interface. This short, easy walk has a great views and is wheelchair accessible. Meet at the bend of Drury Court.

May 15—Garber Park Stewards, 10 AM-noon. Meet at the Evergreen Lane entrance to Garber Park. Volunteers clear fallen debris, pull invasive weeds, and improve the trails.

May 29—“Infinite in the Small” with Jerry Powell and Barbara Deutsch, 10 AM-noon, an opportunity to observe and learn about butterflies and other species of the micro-fauna that comprise well over 80% of terrestrial animal life. This walk will be leisurely and for all fitness levels. Meet at the end of Panoramic Way. Limit is 20 persons so please RSVP early.

June 1—Garber Park Stewards, 10 AM-noon. Meet at the Evergreen Lane entrance to Garber Park. Volunteers clear fallen debris, pull invasive weeds, and improve the trails.

June 5—Geology Ramble with Martin Holden, 10 AM-noon. Meet at the Stonewall trailhead to the Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve. This hike is vigorous and steep in places but highly informative with expansive views of the Bay.

June 19—Garber Park Stewards, 10 AM-noon. Meet at the Evergreen Lane entrance to Garber Park. Volunteers clear fallen debris, pull invasive weeds, and improve the trails.
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 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.
Family Membership: $50 per year.
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Website: www.ClaremontCanyon.org

The Board of Directors: Barry Pilger, President; Joe Engbeck, Vice President; Marilyn Goldhaber, Treasurer; Mary Millman, Secretary; Shelagh Brodersen, Martin Holden, Jon Kaufman, Jerry Kent, Tamia Marg, Dick White, and L.Tim Wallace, Members at Large.

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

Ken Moore
Wildland Restoration Pioneer
by Mary Millman

January 8, 2010 was a dark and stormy Friday night. No one had really recovered from the holidays. Everyone should have been home and if he or she were of a certain age, getting ready for bed! So it is difficult to overstate our amazement that fifty or more people drove up to Skyline Boulevard to the Trudeau Center by 7 PM to hear Ken Moore—self-styled “Wildland Restoration Pioneer” and undisputed wunderkind of weed busting tools—talk for two hours about how to eradicate invasive exotic French broom from our wildlands.

The Conservancy and two co-sponsors, the East Bay Regional Park District and the Hills Emergency Forum, had invited Ken to discuss his approach to combating French broom invasions, a subject that was discussed at length in the Conservancy’s last newsletter. With his carefully selected tools close at hand, and drawing upon his wealth of experience, Ken addressed every aspect of control and eradication techniques that he had personally field-tested for efficiency, maximum utility, and lasting results. His broom-fighting tool kit, complete with its light and flexible tool belt, includes all of the mechanical assistance needed for field work.

The keys to broom control, according to Moore, are efficient removal of the individual plants according to an overall plan designed first to protect uninvaded areas from infestation and then to attack the better-established stands. This needs to be done in a manner that does not disturb the soil and does not distribute the seeds. In this era of declining resources, Ken’s expertise has been especially valuable to wildland stewards and interested citizens who wish to make a positive contribution to the broom problem.

Ken Moore came to the attention of the Conservancy through our participation in California Invasive Plant Council’s (CalIPC) invasive species workshops where he is a field instructor. Though Ken has been eradicating invasive plants for forty years, he has worked alone most of the time. Now, however, the increasing presence of invasive species and recognition of the threat they represent, has led the California Department of Agriculture to establish a statewide Invasive Species Council. It is hoped that coordinated and well-funded efforts to control invasives will reach threatened areas with methodologies that have been field-tested for efficiency and reliability.

Ken Moore’s contribution to practical invasive eradication is both fundamental and inspiring.

Though Ken’s talk officially ended at 9 PM, he was still swamped with questions at 9:30. It is now Spring, the ground is wet and suitable for pulling up the broom sprouts, and we are hopeful that this year and in the years to come we will see widespread application of the eradication techniques he has tested and developed.
Making Claremont Canyon Fire-Safe
by Barry Pilger, Tim Wallace, and Jerry Kent, with editorial assistance by Marilyn Goldhaber and Andrea Pflaumer

The Claremont Canyon Conservancy was formed nine years ago to work with public agency landowners in Claremont Canyon for the benefit of all. These agencies include the University of California, the East Bay Regional Park District, the East Bay Municipal Utility District, and the City of Oakland. This article tracks the history of the Conservancy’s relationship with the University of California. Future newsletters will chronicle relationships with the other three agencies.

Over the last nine years, the Conservancy has developed a strong working relationship with the University of California and its restoration and fire safety projects in Claremont Canyon. Much of our shared concern has focused on the dense groves of eucalyptus on U.C. land in the upper portion of the Canyon. If a fire were to start there on a Diablo wind day, or start anywhere along the ridge that frames the upper canyon (see photo on the opposite page), the resulting conflagration could quickly move into the 120-foot tall tree canopy and send live embers flying downwind to ignite spot fires in the lower canyon and in adjacent residential areas. The saddle-shaped topography of Claremont Canyon, combined with the highly flammable nature of eucalyptus and the potential for hot, dry, Diablo winds blowing over the hills from the northeast, could lead to disaster for residents below.

U.C. and other public agencies that own land in Claremont Canyon embarked on the first large-scale eucalyptus removal program during the winter of 1972 following a nine-day freeze. Damage from the freeze was severe. Dead limbs, leaves, and branches covered the ground; tree trunks stood amid the debris, stark, ominous, and apparently dead. As a result, the hills were declared a State Disaster Area. With the memory of a devastating 1970 wildfire still fresh in everyone’s mind, thousands of dead-looking eucalyptus stems throughout the hills and on U.C. land were felled and hauled away, leaving only the stumps. Many of those stumps, however, were not really dead and soon began to send up vigorous, fast-growing sprouts. In addition, hundreds of new eucalyptus seedlings were able to germinate and become established in the mineral soil that was churned up and exposed by the logging operation. The Berkeley Rotary Club planted redwood trees in Tilden Park and the Piedmont Rotary Club planted trees in the upper reaches of Claremont Canyon, hoping that they would outpace and replace the eucalyptus.

However, the eucalyptus continued to multiply and grow. A second major effort by U.C. to tackle the problem began in the mid-1980s, but was halted temporarily in response to protests by a local group. It wasn’t until after the 1991 Oakland Hills Fire that U.C.’s Fire Mitigation Committee agreed to establish an effective fuel management strategy for all campus areas including the hill area and upper Claremont Canyon. The problem facing U.C. in the late 1990s was how to reduce existing stands of eucalyptus and manage the proliferation of other non-native vegetation, much of it fire prone. This meant logging eucalyptus, pine, and acacia and eliminating broom, poison hemlock, and cape ivy.

At the same time, a neighborhood group, the Claremont-Elmwood Neighborhood Association, convened a task force (this was later to evolve into the Claremont Canyon Conservancy) to study wildfire mitigation in Claremont Canyon. Findings from the task force were presented in 2001 to U.C. by the Conservancy’s founding president Tim Wallace in a meeting with the U.C. Chancellor and several university administrators. Wallace introduced the newly formed Conservancy and its goals, and described the enormous liability U.C. would face if a fire were to start in the University’s neglected eucalyptus forests and then spread to adjacent neighborhoods.

The Chancellor directed staff to confront the problem and establish a long-term program to lower the risk of another wildfire. Work commenced under the supervision of U.C.’s Fire Mitigation Program, directed by Tom Klatt in his role as emergency preparedness manager.

A few years earlier, Tom Klatt had been designated the University’s representative on the Hills Emergency Forum (HEF), a multi-agency task force formed after the 1991 fire. HEF consisted of local fire chiefs and agency representatives from Oakland, Berkeley, U.C., the East Bay Regional Park District, and the East Bay Municipal Utility District, all of whom were stakeholders in the area. The HEF’s firefighters and vegetation management specialists gave Klatt advice about “best practices” for tackling the Canyon’s fire hazard problems and provided information from the HEF’s 1995 fire mitigation plan and program.

With funds from a FEMA grant, supported
by the HEF, and backed by the Conservancy with its 200 (later growing to 500) members, U.C. began the first in a new series of projects to clear eucalyptus, pine, acacia, and broom. To make sure that U.C. was operating with the support of the community, the Conservancy polled its membership and found that the vast majority (98% of respondents) approved of the plan for removing eucalyptus and converting the University’s land to native vegetation. This was the start of seven years of work in Claremont Canyon. Throughout those years, the Conservancy conducted stewardship projects with its members volunteering to remove invasive non-native brush, including French broom and poison hemlock. With the advice and encouragement of Professor William Libby, a world-renowned forest geneticist with a special interest in redwoods, the Conservancy also planted redwood seedlings grown from the seeds of naturally-occurring redwoods in the Oakland/Berkeley Hills. This popular planting program involved more than 200 volunteers working in collaboration with the U.C. Forestry Club and its faculty advisor, Forestry Professor Kevin O’Hara. A local Boy Scout troop was also involved. The redwood program was based on board member Joe Engbeck’s suggestions and was carried out over a five-year period.

The presence of the Alameda whipsnake (listed as endangered in 2003 and found on University property) required U.C. forestry projects to undergo scrutiny by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. While preparing grant requests for federal funding, the University discovered that one of U.S.F.W.S.’s approved strategies for habitat restoration was the removal of exotic trees and closed canopy forests, enabling whipsnake habitat restoration and fire safety projects to proceed hand-in-hand. Year by year as the eucalyptus trees were removed, the upper canyon gradually returned to a more natural, native flora that included local shrubs and native trees such as oaks, bays, madrones, and redwoods. Vegetation on the south side of Claremont Avenue, where the University and Conservancy have worked, is now significantly more fire-safe than the highly flammable eucalyptus grove along the north side of the road (see photo above).

Under the guidance of U.C.’s Tom Klatt, the Conservancy has run a focused volunteer program over the past two years to remove newly germinated eucalyptus, pine, and acacia from the Canyon’s headslope. These efforts have proved remarkably effective in eradicating invasive trees while allowing natives to establish themselves in the cleared areas. These workdays are currently focused on broom, as the eradication of eucalyptus resprouts is nearly complete.

To date, U.C. has removed close to 19,000 eucalyptus trees and converted 165 acres of its land to native vegetation. U.C. has employed several approaches to dealing with the logged material but now favors chipping and leaving the biomass on site as mulch and weed suppression. To avoid the problem of re-sprouting, eucalyptus stumps are treated with a small amount of herbicide applied directly to the cambium layer of the stump immediately after felling. According to Klatt, the herbicide is quickly transported to the root system of the tree, binding tightly to organic material, thereby minimizing the possibility of leaching into the soil or nearby creeks. The surrounding native flora should be unaffected and remain healthy. “Studies of these herbicides have been funded by the National Park Service,” explains Klatt. “They’re peer-reviewed and found to be safe for use by the Park Service.”

The use of eucalyptus chips has saved U.C. thousands of dollars and helped the University achieve its goals. In addition to suppressing weeds, the chip beds retard erosion, smother and rot the extant eucalyptus seed stock, and make it much easier to attack resprouts and pull seedlings. This mulch helps retain valuable soil moisture during our long, dry summers and provides nutrients for native trees that tend to thrive once the eucalyptus are removed.

But work on U.C. land in Claremont Canyon is far from complete. In 2005, U.C. was awarded two FEMA grants totaling $840,000 for work in Claremont and Strawberry Canyons. In 2006, the City of Oakland, the East Bay Regional Park District, and U.C. applied for and won a $4 million FEMA grant to continue the removal of hazardous vegetation in the East Bay hills. These projects have already been delayed for four to five years by FEMA, and will now be delayed another two years as a result of FEMA’s April, 2010 decision to require a programmatic environmental impact statement before releasing any further funds for mitigation of the wildfire hazard.

The Conservancy Board and its membership have benefited from collaboration with Tom Klatt and U.C.’s wildfire hazard mitigation program. But continued advocacy, maintenance of the successful partnership forged over the years, and more hard work will be necessary to attain the objective we all seek: a safer, more natural, and more easily accessible Claremont Canyon.
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in order as they joined, October 2001 through March 2010


Founding Sponsor Claudine Torfs takes a break from weeding in her adopted spot, “Goosberry Glen.”


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Honoring our Members
by Marilyn Goldhaber

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. We are grateful to list on the opposite page, in approximately the order the commitments were made, our first 207 Founding Sponsors. Below, we honor our recent members from other categories of membership, who have supported the Conservancy with their yearly contributions since spring 2007. Thank you for your support.

In the photo to the right, Founding Sponsors Bill McClung and Jon Kaufman tackle poison hemlock, an aggressive invader in the upper canyon where eucalyptus were removed. Jon (in foreground) is the Conservancy’s newest board member.

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Steven Winkel & Barbara Sahn
Stephen Wong
Dog and hikers enter the Stonewall trailhead of the Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve.

Cheryl Schleifer (l.) and Mary Millman (r.) with their latest recruit, Saint Teresa student Aiden Guthrie, pull up invasive cape ivy in Garber Park on Earth Day. The Conservancy joined with the Garber Park Stewards and the Vicente Canyon Neighborhood Association to clean up the forest floor of broken branches, weeds and debris.