

SUMMER 2006



## Open Space Vision

The Open Space Vision plan that Dan Cather described in last fall's newsletter should be ready for review at public hearings later this summer. Please check the website; the date and location will be posted when confirmed. We hope you will attend and help to shape how the Open Space will be used in the next couple of decades.

The original Open Space plan gave resource protection precedence over public use and assigned the highest value to "scenic views and beauty." It anticipated the development of more facilities than currently exist or are contemplated. The pattern of use that developed in the Open Space has probably not changed that much in 30 years, although there are certainly more people using it today.

The draft report reviews the plans and policies that gov-

ern the Open Space and describes its budget. It then lists a number of possible program expansions, public information initiatives, operational items, and facility improvements. Some examples: (1) upgrade the living history program to state curriculum standards; (2) develop an interactive website; (3) clarify trail use and closure policies; (4) build a loop road at Borges Ranch; (5) restore Borges Ranch hay barn. Public input will influence the priorities that are set.

Several members of the Foundation and the public at large have been very concerned about the damage cattle did to the trails and service roads during our wet winter. The draft report provides information about grazing but draws no conclusions. Fire prevention, the cost of fence maintenance, and habitat impact are some of the major considerations. These issues will be discussed at the public hearing.

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## Foundation Wins Award

On April 5, 2006 the California Park and Recreation Society (CPRS), District III, recognized the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation as an Outstanding Non-Profit Organization Partner for its work in our open space and in Heather Farm Park. CPRS is a professional society for city and other public agency workers in the parks and recreation field. District III includes Contra Costa and Alameda counties. The Foundation was one of six organizations recognized and the only one from Walnut Creek. We were the only group involved in habitat restoration, although a couple of the other honorees worked on parks.

Foundation President Lesley Hunt and Board members Bob Brittain, Bill Hunt and Bob Wisecarver were present to receive the award.

Bill Hunt was also recognized as an Outstanding Volunteer in a separate award for his work in restoring the Heather Farm Park Nature Area.

**WALNUT CREEK  
OPEN SPACE EVENTS**

*And*  
**HAPPENINGS**



**WCOSF  
OAK WATERING**

**Saturday, August 5 at 8:30 a.m.**  
Meet at the Rock Oak Road entrance to Lime Ridge North, located at the end of Rock Oak Road, to help water this year's seedlings. For information call 939-6610.

**AMPHITHEATER TONIGHT**

**Saturday, July 22 8:00 p.m.**  
What do Jelly Fish, Parley Garfield and the Frogs, and the Fortune Smeller have in common? To find out, join us for an evening of stories, magic, tomfoolery, and special guests: The Little Litter Band. You bring the goodies; we'll supply the gags. Meet at the Sugarloaf Amphitheater at the end of Youngs Valley Rd.  
Info: Call Ranger Bruce at 944-5766

**METEORS AND  
MARSHMALLOWS  
SLEEPOVER AT SUGARLOAF**

**Friday, August 12, 2006**  
The Perseid meteors are billions of years old, travel trillions of miles, and are destroyed in seconds! Reserve your spot now for this informal and relaxing night of sky watching. Goodies, trivia games, prizes, and more. Bring sleeping equipment, binoculars, and warm clothes. \$6 per person. Available for the first 20 family reservations. Call Ranger Bruce Weidman at 944-5766 for reservations.

**AMPHITHEATER TONIGHT**

**Saturday, August 26 9:00 p.m.**  
Bring a blanket, some snacks, and enjoy an evening under the stars and in the orchard.

Tonight we will show a documentary about the Lewis and Clark expedition, a 45-minute National Geographic film. Call 944-5766 for info.

**TRACKS IN WILD WALNUT  
CREEK**

**Saturday, September 9, 9:00 a.m.**  
Want to know more about wildlife in the City's preserve system? Interested in learning techniques and basic nature skills for identifying 'what' has been walking on the same trail as you? Then join Iain Beveridge, Lime Ridge staff, for an exciting look into Wild Walnut Creek and learn which animals walk on four toes, five toes, or just on their toenails. Make your own tracks to this program! Wear hiking shoes, a hat, and bring water. Meet at the end of Valley Vista Rd. Please call 930-7731 for more info.

**HOWE HOMESTEAD  
PARK TOUR**

**Sunday, Sept. 10th, 2:00 p.m.**  
Come and visit this often overlooked park and former estate of James Howe and his wife Mia. Learn about Jim's fascinating globe-spanning career as an Associated Press correspondent and his interesting hobbies such as pigeon flutes, smoked meats, and wine. Meet at the Homestead Parking lot at 2950 Walnut Blvd.  
Info: Call Ranger Art Janke at 930-7731.

**MONTHLY BIRD WALKS**

**Led by Ranger Dan**  
**3rd Saturday of each month**  
Nuthatches, sapsuckers, and titmice, oh my! Have you ever wondered what kind of bird that is in your backyard, or what went whizzing by you on the trail? If you have the interest to find out, then come on one of our monthly bird walks and learn about our fine-feathered friends that call our parks their home. These walks are for everyone, including first time birders. Bring binoculars, bird book, water, and wear good hiking shoes. For information call Ranger Dan Bylin at 942-0225.

**July 15th at 8:00 a.m.** Birds of the Chaparral and Coastal Scrub. Lime Ridge. Meet at the end of Valley Vista Rd. next to Boundary Oaks Golf Course.

**August 19th at 7:30 p.m.** Owl Prowl at Borges Ranch and Shell Ridge Preserve. Meet in the Borges Ranch parking lot. Bring a flashlight and sturdy hiking shoes.

**Sept. 16th at 8:00 a.m.** Birding Borges Ranch. Meet at the Bob Pond/Hanna Grove Activity area.

**ONGOING EVENTS**

**OLD BORGES RANCH  
HISTORY TOURS**

**Fourth Saturday of Each Month  
2:00 p.m.**  
Meet at the Old Borges Ranch parking lot at 1035 Castle Rock Road. Join Ranger Dan Bylin on a tour of the historic Old Borges Ranch. A visit to this Nationally Registered Historic Site is like taking a step back in time. Learn about the Borges family that arrived in the Walnut Creek area in 1899 and the history of their family.

**LIME RIDGE HIKE  
Second Saturday of Each Month  
9:00 a.m.**

Put on your good hiking shoes, grab a water bottle, a snack, and a hat, and join this Ranger-led hike into the incredible Lime Ridge Preserve. This hike will pass through oak woodlands, grasslands, and inland scrub habitats that many animals call "home". **RAIN CANCELS.** Meet at the kiosk staging area located at the corner of Cowell and Ygnacio.  
Info: Call Ranger Art Janke at 930-7731.

**PETS NOT PERMITTED AT  
PROGRAMS OR EVENTS**



**Have you been to our  
website lately?**

For updates on Foundation activities between newsletters, more information about the Open Space, ways to enjoy it, and to learn more about how you can become involved, **visit our website at [www.wcosf.org](http://www.wcosf.org).**

**Land Acquisition Fund**

Contributions received since 2/3/2006.

**Under \$100**

Alison Hill  
Kathryn Jelter  
Alisdair and Jenny McGregor  
Robert and Jerilyn Pond, Jr.

The Land Fund welcomes contributions for any reason or occasion. Please send contributions to the Foundation address.



# FOUNDATION RESTORATION PROJECTS

## Quail Habitat



Small world we live in when Quail information from our website is read in South Carolina at the Quail Unlimited headquarters. It turns out they were interested in copying our information into their monthly magazine. After some back and forth correspondence to fill in some missing information, it went into print in the May/June issue. Not only were they interested in the material itself, but it also fit well along side two articles on large scale government desert quail habitat improvements. I believe they wanted to show their members what a small group of volunteers could do, and how easily it could be done.

As for the current status of both Borges and North Lime Ridge projects, little has been done this year. Weeding around the Coyote Bush and brush piles cleared out some overabundant grass and weeds. Anyone interested in seeing two very prime projects should visit both sites. Both places are thriving thanks to the wet late winter.

## Oak Habitat



We were very concerned early this spring that we might have no seedlings this year because the first several checks showed nothing growing. However, we now have sprouts in 19 sites that were delayed by the cool weather.

While we were disappointed at the small number of seedlings, we learned a valuable lesson from the wet weather. All plantings in low ground failed, and the ground around them was saturated well into April. They drowned. Now we know not to plant in these low areas, a lesson we might otherwise not have learned for years. A sizable tree in a low wet spot at Sutherland died this winter, probably another drowning victim.

Examination of our enclosures after the grazing season was complete, showed that the heaviest wire withstood the cattle best.

## Native Plant Regeneration

We continue to learn about grasses. Planting seedlings in the Sutherland quarry has produced poorer results than just scattering seed. Elsewhere, the opposite is

true. Site preparation matters. Every year we do more of it, and every year our results improve. Mowing and raking at Sutherland, even after the weed seeds had dropped, decreased the weed cover by nearly half. The difference between the plants at Heather Farm, where we have also solarized, flamed, and laid down weed blocks, and the other sites is dramatic.

May is the month when grass seeds ripen, and we have gathered four different species. We have collected from both familiar and new sites in Lime Ridge and Shell Ridge.

## Weed Control Project



The late rains mean that the mowing season for black mustard and Italian thistle was short. Between the weather and a shortage of volunteers, we were able to mow only one of the mustard patches that we have been working on for several years and part of another.

On the bright side, this was a bad year for vetch, and after several years in which it seemed to be spreading exponentially, this is quite a relief.

## Heather Farm

This year we had time to do a much more thorough site preparation than we did the first year, and it paid off in a fine grass crop. There is a large area where virtually every seedling grew into a 3-foot plant with a plentiful amount of seed – more than enough to support the next planting season. We have been able to make some general observations about the effectiveness of the various preparation treatments which will guide us this coming winter.

The poppies raised by the second grade students at Sun Terrace School provide a nice splash of color in the grass.

We planted a number of trees and shrubs of various species around the edges of the grass area. Almost all are alive and growing, although they are still small.

Our attempt to re-seed a small burned area with poppies, lupine and grass does not appear to be successful at this point, but it is hard to identify native grass until it is large enough to produce seed heads. This patch might surprise us in a couple of years.

## IT'S RATTLESNAKE SEASON!

We have been receiving a lot of anecdotal evidence from Open Space staff and visitors, as well as information from other local public agencies, that this is shaping up to be a particularly heavy rattlesnake season. A large number of snakes have been reported throughout our area. The reason is unclear but may be due to our several years of good winter rains. An increase in vegetation provides good food reserves to the animals at the bottom of the food chain and that leads to more successful hunting for predators. Rattlesnakes are a resident of our Open Space properties and can coexist well with hikers and riders as long as people are aware of their presence.

The western rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis*) shows a great variety of color variation based on its specific location. The snake has a patterned back with colors ranging from light brown to black. One of the most distinguishing features is the distinct ringed pattern found on the tail just above the rat-

tles. A mimic that is also found in our Open Space is the gopher snake (*Pituophis catenifer*). This snake, with similar coloring to the rattlesnake, will flatten its head and shake its tail in dry grass to mimic the appearance of a rattlesnake as a defensive maneuver.

The general rule for the observance of snakes is the t-shirt rule. If the weather is comfortable for the wearing of a t-shirt – not too hot or too cold – then the weather is right for snakes to be active. The suggestions for keeping safe are generally very simple. Stay where you can see your feet and hands at all times and that obviously is on the trail. Don't put your hands or feet in crevices in a rock or wood pile or step over a downed log without looking to see what is on the other side. If on a bicycle, don't allow your speed to pass the area that you can adequately scan in front of you, much as you don't allow your auto speed to outpace your headlights. Heed the rattle. It's there to protect both you and the snake.

Supr. Ranger Nancy Dawson Dollard

Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation  
P.O. Box 309  
Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0309

Non-Profit Rate  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
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### Yes, I want to help protect and preserve Walnut Creek's Open Space

We invite all who share this goal to join the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation. Memberships and contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowable by law. There are numerous areas where you can help. If you are interested, please leave a message at 925-939-6610, drop us a note or email, or visit our website at [www.wcosf.org](http://www.wcosf.org).

#### I would like to join the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email (*we never share*) \_\_\_\_\_  
Skills I am willing to share \_\_\_\_\_

#### I would like to volunteer!

\_\_\_\_\_ Oak Restoration Project  
\_\_\_\_\_ Native Grasses  
\_\_\_\_\_ Quail Habitat  
\_\_\_\_\_ School program

#### MEMBERSHIPS

Benefactor.....\$250  
Sustaining.....\$100  
Family.....\$40  
Individual.....\$25  
Senior.....\$15

#### OPEN SPACE FOUNDATION BOARD

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