

How You Can Get Involved

Volunteer Opportunities in the Walnut Creek Open Space

How can you help the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation work to preserve and enhance Walnut Creek's 2700 acres of open space and to educate area residents so that they can enjoy this wonderful resource?

The Foundation has a long-standing history of promoting active projects engaged in plant restoration work. There are also many other ways to contribute either on occasional short projects or regularly in a variety of areas other than restoration.

We are establishing a number of standing committees within the Foundation to provide a way for general membership to participate as volunteers to help protect and enhance our open space.

The list of the Foundation's proposed committees and some of their planned areas of focus:

- **Trails** Committee – Advocate for trails, maintenance, survey/assessment, establish an "ambassador" program.
- **Outreach** – Provide web site content, newsletter and Facebook articles, school and library displays and posters.
- **Education** – Arrange public lectures, guided walks, and children's programs.

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Supervising Ranger Nancy Dollard Retires

Nancy Dawson Dollard, Walnut Creek Open Space Supervising Ranger, retired in early October. She had worked for the City since 2005 after experience in San Diego, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. The Foundation didn't have much interaction with previous Supervising Rangers, but Nancy was different. She became a real supporter, advisor, and partner and we will miss her greatly.

Her final gift to us was an offer to use her expertise with outreach and volunteer recruitment to help us organize our program and take it to a higher level, and to organize our historical records. We accepted with gratitude. (If you'd like to help and then take over the role, see separate article.)

Now that she's no longer working, Nancy plans to spend a lot of time with her grandson Lucas. She will move to the Sparks area once she sells her Walnut Creek house.

—Lesley Hunt



Retiring Ranger —Nancy Dollard (right), Open Space Supervising Ranger since 2005, at Bayberry Pond, with Lesley Hunt, Open Space Foundation president. Nancy retired in October. *Photo: Brad Heckman*

Welcome New and Returning Board Members

Foundation Board elections were held in October, and we welcomed the return of Bill Hunt and Sean Micallef, and the election of a new member, Elizabeth Hudson. Elizabeth, active in our area's equestrian community as well as Foundation activities, has also signed on as our treasurer this year. Welcome all!

Board members Dick Daniels and Bob Simmons move to positions on the Foundation Advisory Board.

Board meetings are held on the third Wednesday of the month (except for December, when we have our holiday party), at 7 p.m. in the 3rd floor conference room at Walnut Creek City Hall.

Encouraging the Natives on Buckwheat Hill

Buckwheat Hill is at the Sutherland Drive entrance to Shell Ridge Open Space, and to the left as you go through the entrance gate.

The face of this hill was formerly covered with non-native, invasive grasses and weeds. But there were also more than 10 native plants growing on this hill, so Foundation volunteers in the open space decided to make a project of increasing the numbers and variety of native plants.

We found the native buckwheat (*Eriogonum nudum*) growing in large areas, even among the dense non-native grasses. It grows in full sun and can survive intense heat. Its long lasting, small whitish flowers grow at the top of a long bare stem and turn a rust color as they mature. Butterflies and deer love the buckwheat flowers.

With the help of volunteers, including school children, we have removed most of the non-natives and replaced them with additional buckwheat, native bunch grasses (*Stipa cernua*, common name: nodding needle grass), poppies, penstemon, clarkia, buttercups, and other natives. Deerweed, soaproot, and tarweed are



Healthy patch of cernua on Buckwheat Hill, Sutherland entrance, Shell Ridge Open Space, groomed by Foundation volunteers, tarweed blooming in foreground. Photo: Linda Judd

other native plants that were already growing there.

The bunch grasses are surprisingly hardy. Though they are slow growing at first, the cernua can grow deep roots, sometimes to 10 or more feet. Weeding out the annual invasive grasses for a year or two helps the cernua compete against them and grow on their own. It is thought that

they can live 150 years or more!

Can you find the patch of two-year-old cernua and the smaller cernua patch that we planted last year on Buckwheat Hill? Would you like to volunteer to help increase native plants here? See other stories in this newsletter to learn how you can help.

—Linda Judd

How You Can Help Improve Our Open Space

We can all contribute to the improvement of the open space user experience. Here are some common sense ideas:

If you walk or go for hikes, consider taking a small bag with you and if you spot a piece of trash along the trail, pop it in the bag and bring it back home with you and put it in your garbage or recycling can. If everyone picked up only one or two pieces of trash, the trails would be better for it. If you see someone picking up trash, thank them.

When a person with a dog leashes them or calls them to heel when they see you approach, give them a smile and a thank you.

When hiking or bike riding, stay on the officially designated trails. Creation of new trails and use of illegal trails disrupts the wildlife habitat and degrades the ability of the land to resist erosion during the rainy months.

If you see a problem on a trail such as a downed tree blocking it, a missing

or defaced trail marker, a damaged fence, or some other issue, take the time to report it to city staff via email: publicworks@walnut-creek.org. That way, the problem can be scheduled for repair before it becomes a larger issue.

Thanks for supporting the Walnut Creek Open Space and the Foundation!

—Kime Smith

Goats at Indian Valley Pond

Goats are often used to clear fire breaks and to clear dense vegetation because they do a great job of eating everything. But what happens when they get into a restoration area? They eat...everything.

Such was the case when goats, which have been used to clear fire breaks in the open space, accidentally grazed Indian Valley Pond for several days over the past summer.



Scraped Clean – Goats, brought in to clear dense vegetation below Indian Valley School, devoured scores of plants at Indian Valley Pond's restoration area, leaving only a few soap root stubs. Photo: Sean Micallef

All of the vegetation was eaten to near ground level. Cages that protected planted trees and shrubs were scattered and most of the plants were nowhere to be seen. Recently planted grasses and wetland plants were lost and probably a good number of larger plants as well.

But how many? We will have to wait and see how well the area recovers over the winter and will cross our fingers next spring! But with change also comes opportunity. The goats cleared away the weeds as well and we have used that opportunity to expand our planting areas.

—Sean Micallef

Open Space Restoration Projects

Lots of ways to get involved with the Foundation, as seen elsewhere in this newsletter. People who like to work the land are welcome at any of these restoration projects.

Habitat Restoration for Wildlife (North Lime Ridge)

Continued planting blue oak acorns in cattle guard enclosures, carried out exceptional weeding of summer weeds (asteraceae, polygonaceae, and convulvulaceae). Planted 30 coyote bush seedlings. Volunteer narrow leaf milkweed developed in four grove settings. Team noted that there has been some cattle damage to the site, with electric fencing not an effective control for cattle.

—Gary Muerle

Indian Valley Pond

See "Goats at Indian Valley Pond," above.

South Slope Fossil Hill

Many new annuals we planted put on a very good show, including *Layia platyglossa* (Tidy Tips), *Plagiobothrys* (Popcorn Flower), *Salvia columbariae* (Chia) and *Lasthenia* (Goldfields) and *Nemophila menzeisii*.

Everything that we have planted in the last 6 years has reproduced on its own, some more than others. In some places, poppies have disappeared either because it was too wet or because they were out-competed by *Stipa pulchra*. They have thrived in other areas, though.

We have several areas where the native grasses have reproduced in large numbers. When this happens, the individual plants are not as tall and robust as are the newly planted plugs, but the true nature of a meadow starts to show.

—Phil Johnson

Volunteer Opportunities in the Walnut Creek Open Space

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- **Membership** – Maintain list, recruit volunteers, recruit members, plan volunteer appreciation events.
- **Animal Habitat Restoration** – plan projects for creation of habitat for wildlife in the Open Space and coordinate work with plant restoration efforts.
- **Special Projects** – Form temporary committees for events such as an annual fundraiser, user survey, or bio-blitz.

If you want to personally contribute to any of these activities or if any of them sound interesting to you and you would like to know more, please send an email to volunteer@wcosf.org.

Interested in graphic design or photography? Have expertise in trail design, statistics, or natural history? We'll find a place for you!

—Kime Smith

Bayberry Pond

After several years in which nothing happened on the Bayberry drainage project, everything suddenly fell into place a couple of weeks ago. We got permits, and now we're racing against the rain. The pond is deepened, the gully repaired, and only the seeding remains. There will be a longer article about the changes in Lime Ridge North in the next newsletter.

—Leslie Hunt

Deer Lake

While we did some watering in the summer and collected some acorns in the fall for winter planting, it's been a quiet summer at Deer Lake. Sometimes that is nice.

—Bill Simmons



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 **Yes, I want to help protect and preserve Walnut Creek's Open Spaces.**

We invite you 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. Interested? Drop us an email at volunteer@wcosf.org, visit our website at www.wcosf.org, or fill out the form below and mail it to WCOSF, Box 309, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0309.

I would like to join the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation

NAME _____

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PATRON-\$500 BENEFACTOR-\$250 SUSTAINING-\$100 SPONSOR-\$50 FAMILY-\$40 INDIVIDUAL-\$25

I WOULD LIKE TO VOLUNTEER TO: MAINTAIN OAKS PLANT NATIVES CREATE WILDLIFE CORRIDORS HELP WITH OUTREACH

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