

How Our Restoration Projects Are Doing

Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation volunteers have spearheaded five restoration projects in Shell Ridge and Lime Ridge Open Spaces for the past several years, and renewed family-oriented acorn-planting events. Here are project updates:

Fossil Hill – Phil Johnson

The Fossil Hill Restoration Project continues to expand. We added close to 1 acre last year, and intend to add 1-1.5 acres this year.

Thanks to Foundation membership support, we were able to purchase multiple sets of tools, including battery-powered weed whackers, for our core team members so we could continue to work safely during the pandemic.

While last year was very dry, we still had a good show of wildflowers for a short period of time. We created a number of paths through the project, originally intended for the use of team members working on the project. A happy by-product was the use of these paths by many members of the public who were trying to stay safely distanced.

Buckwheat Hill – Linda Judd

This year on Buckwheat Hill we will be experimenting with different grasses and annual flowers that can survive the gophers, voles, ground squirrels and drought. There are also some volunteer oaks that can use a bit of help.

Lime Ridge North – Gary Muerle

We, the Oak Habitat Restoration volunteers, have had great success

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Seven Hills Ranch – 90% of its trees will be cut down to accommodate development. Website with opposing info and petition: savesevenhillsranch.org.

Foundation Opposes Seven Hills Ranch Development

Last year a Southern California developer proposed a senior living development on the 30-acre Seven Hills Ranch property which abuts Heather Farm Park on the northwest. It will see seniors through from independent living to skilled nursing care all in one place. The facilities will take up most of the thirty acres; 90% of the trees will be cut down and the wetland will be isolated.

The Open Space Foundation has worked to restore a nature area in Heather Farm. Its health depends on its proximity to the wildlife corridor that runs through Seven Hills Ranch to Shell Ridge. For that reason,

the Board voted to oppose this development. We will have a longer article in the next newsletter.

An ad hoc group called Save Seven Hills Ranch has formed to oppose the development and you can read more about it at their website savesevenhillsranch.org, sign the petition, and spread the word.

—Lesley Hunt



Yes, We're Still Planting Oaks

The Foundation is continuing to offer a series of family volunteer activities this year.

The series began with an acorn gathering event in the fall, and continued with a subsequent session to find and mark locations for the prospective new trees.

A January event consisted of planting the community-gathered acorns, sprouted and vetted by the series' host, Bill Hunt. The acorns need to be stored in a cool, damp environment after picking. Some will start to send out a small shoot called a "radicle." The radicle emerges from the pointed side of the acorn and will, when planted, work its way down to form the root system of the seedling. Once that is started, the top of the radicle will start to form the stem.

Volunteers who participated were divided into masked family "bubble" groups to comply with COVID-19 restrictions. We provided each group with shovels, sprouted acorns, and wire mesh enclosures. An experienced Foundation volunteer accompanied each group.

We planted acorns in the flagged areas previously selected and marked. We had earlier prepared the sites by scraping a two-foot circle in the grass.



Acorn Planting Day – Volunteer oak planting team prepares soil for acorn-planting. Many families volunteered for this restoration activity sponsored by the Open Space Foundation.
Photo: Earl Bates

Clearing grass and weed from around the planting site reduces competition for water, thereby increasing the acorn's chance of success.

In the middle of the circle, we dug an eight-inch diameter hole to a depth of about 4 inches. Next, we inserted the wire mesh cylinder, and some of the soil put back in the hole to hold the cylinder in place. The mesh screen is buried like this to discourage rodents from tunneling under the screen to

feed on the acorns. We then gently placed three acorns within the mesh and buried them to a depth of about one inch. Finally, we bent the tops of the cylinders over to prevent the pesky rodents from climbing over the top to get access and to prevent browsing on the seedlings by deer once the oak's stem emerged.

Replacing Old Oaks and Expanding Their Numbers

This volunteer series is geared toward replacing old oaks and expanding their numbers in the Shell Ridge area in our open space. In reaching this goal, however, it does much more.

It provides an opportunity for families to get fresh air, sunshine, and exercise together, to learn more about the biology of oaks and their propagation from seasoned Foundation volunteers, and to get an understanding of why we must all lend a hand in caring for the wonderful resource we have at our doorsteps. Both the families who volunteered and the Foundation leaders enjoyed the event.

Please join us as we continue to nurture these young trees through upcoming volunteer watering days! Email us at: contact@wcosf.org.

—Kime Smith

How Are Restoration Projects Are Doing

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this year by creating healthy new oak seedlings and saplings in Lime Ridge. We continue with our innovations and fun by doing acorn collecting, sowing, weeding, watering, and protecting. You too can join us if you have a hankering!

Indian Valley Pond – Sean Micallef

Ongoing drought and gopher predation represent continuing challenges for

restoration at Indian Valley Pond. Our work to combat these challenges include making gopher cages, watering existing plants, and planting native plants in the fall in order to maintain the pond ecosystem for native plants, frogs, and other wildlife.

Bayberry Pond – Lesley Hunt

We've been gathering seeds, identifying

promising volunteer oaks, watering last year's plants, and weeding dittrichia (invasive weed) at various locations around the Open Space. We expect to continue these activities next year.

Got a hankering to get involved? Send an email with your contact info to: info@wcosf.org. We'll get right back to you.

Why Are Single-Track Trails Closed to Mountain Biking?

At a recent meeting of the Walnut Creek Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Commission (PROS), a mountain biker suggested that more users with bikes would respect the posted signs designating trails as pedestrian and equestrian-only if they knew the reason for the ban on bikes. Some of the reasons are explained below.

The open space division is designing a new, sustainable trail for mountain bike use. They're also evaluating existing single-track trails for modifications to permit mechanized use. Re-routing parts of tracks, widening and hardening trail beds, and removing obstructions may make mountain biking sustainable on them as well.

The procedures for evaluating trails were developed by division staff based on standard procedures in use by the U.S. Forest Service, National Parks Service, East Bay Regional Park District, and other similar organizations. These procedures were then shared with and were jointly agreed upon by a City-led committee that included biking, hiking, and equestrian users. Members of the Foundation Board, the PROS Commission, and division staff were also a part of the committee.

Until a trail has been evaluated by open space staff and any necessary modifications to accommodate biking as an activity are made, the trail is marked as a "no biking" trail.

The existing "official" single-track trails are legacy trails. They pre-date the technology which allows mechanized traffic to navigate natural surface trails. These trails were "designed" by people walking on foot or traveling on horseback. In some cases, cattle-created paths were formed and later used by people. All of the traffic on the trails moved at about 2-4 miles per hour.

Trail design for safety and sustainability is required. How can a new activity be added to those already

allowed on a single-track trail? First, the open space staff evaluates the pathway for potential needed design modifications, if any, to support the proposed new activity. These changes are necessary to ensure that the path will be safe for all the permitted uses before adding a new planned use. The staff will also assess the proposed usage mix for its effect on trail sustainability.

All trails must be safe. Multi-use trails, expected to support mountain biking, must be designed for traffic moving as much as five to fifteen times faster than other traffic on a single-track. Tracks may need to be re-routed to slow down the maximum speed of travel. Vegetation may require removal to increase the line-of-sight along the trail. Paths may need widening to allow for enough space on the trail bed for users to pass safely without leaving the trail bed. These are some of the changes known to help avoid collisions with users and with trees.

Legacy trails, never designed for mechanized traffic and currently closed to mountain biking, fall short of consistently implementing these safety requirements.

What is meant by sustainability?

In addition to safety, sustainability is an objective of the department's usage review process. Trail design aims to serve the user community, protect the resource, and provide a good experience for planned activities over time.

If trails do not meet users' needs, users often modify them by creating cutoffs or "social" trails. These modifications are not made with safety or sustainability in mind. They reduce habitat for plants and animals and create erosion.

When designed for sustainability, open space staff aims for sustainability. For example, the path must be laid out and oriented on slopes minimize erosion. Erosion ruts damage the trail bed, making the trail less enjoyable for any use. Silt from erosion disturbs and reduces habitat for wildlife.



Not Infrequent – Cyclists ignore sign, at North Lime Ridge. Photo: Kime Smith

Turns in the trail need to accommodate the speed of expected traffic. If they don't, traffic moves off the trail and damages the adjacent areas, including fragile plant life. Tracks intended to be two feet wide can become more than ten feet wide.

Our single-track trails marked as "no bikes" can only accommodate slow-moving traffic at this time. They cannot handle mechanized travel without re-design; this is evident from the numerous "social trails" and the visible damage to the trail bed. The amount of trail maintenance and restoration work needed to support mechanized use on these legacy trails, without additional work to prepare them first, is not economically feasible.

Changes are coming in our open spaces to accommodate mechanized use of trails, as mentioned above. Our hope is that the biking community will recognize that trails marked as "off-limits" to biking are marked that way to preserve the resource and make single-track trails safer and more enjoyable for all users now and in the future.

—Kime Smith



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- Still Planting Oaks
- Single Track Trails and Mountain Biking
- Restoration Project Updates



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

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Editorial Team and Contributors:
David Ogden, Kime Smith, Lesley Hunt, Earl Bates.

Design and Production:
Maryann Chin

Printing: Tom Meyer,
Galaxy Printing, Concord

Contact us: contact@wcosf.org

Website: www.wcosf.org

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