

MOST's Campaign to Forever Protect Bald Hill

Saving the summit and expanding the preserve!

by Kate Powers

Marin County has a rare opportunity to permanently preserve the summit and sixty undeveloped acres of Ross Valley's Bald Hill; and the excitement is palpable. The Bald Hill summit property has been a decades-long acquisition priority. The privately-held parcels, just south of the county's existing Bald Hill Open Space Preserve boundary, lie within the Town of Ross. The property also lies adjacent to San Anselmo's town limits, and abuts Marin Water's watershed lands to its west. Marin Open Space Trust (MOST) is nearing the end of its Campaign to Forever Protect Bald Hill by raising \$2.1 million for its purchase—MOST's largest acquisition to date.

In October, the County authorized a purchase of the property from MOST, for the below market price of \$850,000. County funds will come from the Open Space District's acquisition budget and will not affect the county's general fund. The property will be added to the Bald Hill Preserve and managed by Marin County Parks.

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Still from CAL FIRE LNU video: "Assisting at a TREX burn at LandPaths Grove of Old Trees by Occidental"

BRINGING "GOOD FIRE" BACK TO THE LAND: Can intentional fire be an antidote to our current wildfire regime?

Redwoods are highly fire-adaptive species that prefer frequent, low intensity fire across the forest floor.

by Terri Thomas and Mike Swezy

As a result of the catastrophic wildfires in California over the last five years, and with the expectation that climate change will continue to exacerbate wildfire conditions well into the future, there is a groundswell of organization and planning around bringing managed fire to the forefront as a land management tool. Federal, state, and private land managers are increasing annual acreage goals for burning landscapes that are susceptible to fire. New training programs are in development to create a new cadre of prescribed burn practitioners. Increased funding for pre-fire fuels management, and increased liability protection for fire managers practicing under approved standards, are gaining momentum. Fundamental to this movement is the understanding that thousands of years of knowledge and experience gained by Indigenous peoples' use of fire prior to European settlement holds promise to restoring a more fire-resilient natural landscape.

The recently released [California Strategic Plan for Expanding the Use of Beneficial Fire](#)

is focused on building a culture where beneficial fire guides future land management. The goal is to use beneficial fire to manage 400,000 acres of fire-prone lands in California annually by the year 2025. Prescribed fire, cultural burning, and fire managed for resource benefit (see "Managed Fire: definition of terms" on page 7) can improve the resilience of Marin's fire-dependent and fire-adapted ecosystems while reducing fuel for wildfire. Beneficial fire may also improve the stability of carbon storage, increase a mosaic of habitat and forage that supports biodiversity, reduce the spread of invasive species and fungal and insect pests, improve water management and nutrient cycling, enhance rangelands, support traditional and subsistence food harvesting, and renew cultural and religious practices.

Stewardship by Prescription

Prescribed fire is the application of fire according to a written "prescription" or plan including identified weather and fuel conditions

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President's Message

Implementing MCL's newest guiding principle on climate change

Two years ago, Marin Conservation League's Strategic Plan added a new Guiding Principle: Integrate climate change understanding into all of MCL's work. It states, "Act knowing that global climate change has profound local and regional environmental effects." and, "Recognize that actions and policies for local mitigation and adaptation, especially innovative ones, can have regional or national impacts."

We've certainly begun implementing that new Guiding Principle, adding to our substantial past work. The MCL Board adopted policy statements on [greenhouse gas emissions reduction](#) and [sea level rise](#), and is working on other climate change-related policies. For adapting to climate change, our Issue Committees are working on many advocacy positions, whether or not it's an issue's main focus. For example, MCL's Land Use, Transportation and Water Committee members are: carefully considering advocacy on Marin Water's water supply options in response to climate change-exacerbated drought; working with other environmental groups in advocating for an elevated causeway for State Route 37 that would integrate adaptation to sea level rise with near-term flood reduction and congestion relief improvements; and are commenting on Marin jurisdictions' 2023-2031 Housing Elements, discouraging development in areas that

are likely to be impacted by sea level rise and other environmental hazards.

MCL Parks & Open Space Committee members are supporting practices that reduce drought- and heat-heightened wildfire risk while preserving native vegetation on open space lands and are supporting the [National Park Service framework of "resist, accept, direct"](#) in managing increasing climate change-driven challenges.

Meanwhile, for mitigating climate change, Climate Action Working Group (CAWG) members advocate for best ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as rapidly as possible, and the Agriculture Land Use Committee supports carbon sequestration on working lands.

But whether adapting to or mitigating climate change, we carefully consider "innovative" actions and policies when they make sense. Innovative approaches can have two important types of beneficial impacts: (1) Marin may benefit from using new effective ways to adapt to and mitigate climate change, and (2) Marin's actions and policies may benefit jurisdictions elsewhere by demonstrating which innovations work—and by disseminating that information, it becomes possible to "...have regional or national impacts".

As Chair of the CAWG, I understand that a crucial part of CAWG's work is evaluating

which building and transportation electrification innovations to advocate for in order to accelerate clean energy use. For example, MCL supports [MCE Clean Energy's "MCE Sync"](#)—an innovative program that shifts charging times for electric vehicles (EVs) away from peak electricity use hours, thereby increasing grid reliability and customer savings (by charging at cheaper times), ultimately reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We are also studying many other potential innovations that we might advocate for MCE and Marin jurisdictions to promote. Look for more on this soon.

Whichever the MCL Issue Committee, constantly developing and evaluating best ways to adapt to and mitigate climate change—and address the many other environmental challenges we face—requires dedicated volunteers that put in real work and time. The payoff: engaging in interesting work with fine colleagues, knowing that we're doing the best we can do to promote positions that improve the environment—and that special gratification when advocacy succeeds and the environment benefits. I invite readers to check out working with our Issue Committees. We've got great a team of active members ... and we'd like to add to that team.

Robert Miller



www.marinconservationleague.org/donate

DID YOU RENEW?

Dues are tax deductible and ensure the preservation, protection, and enhancement of Marin's natural assets for generations to come.

THANK YOU!

CLIMATE ACTION

MCE Sync — MCE's EV smart-charging program*by Kate Powers and Bob Miller*

Marin Conservation League supports use of MCE Sync, an app-based software program specifically designed for residential customers to automate charging their electric vehicles (EVs) when it's least expensive and the cleanest energy on the electricity grid. MCE's home-charging EV customers can now enroll their eligible EV and charger, set the time for when their vehicle needs to be fully charged (the "ready-by" time), and then leave it to MCE's Sync program to charge it off-peak and save money without special hardware. Almost 20% of all new car sales this year have been electric and the average EV driver charges about 80% of the time at home, so the potential impact from this program is increasing.

Load shifting and why it matters for EV charging

Load shifting helps optimize electricity use. It's not a new concept: industrial and commercial firms have used it for years for cost-saving purposes. Load shifting moves electricity consumption from one time period to another. Unlike many energy cost-saving strategies, it tackles the "when" rather than the "how much". When load shifting occurs during periods of highest electricity use, it is also called peak-shaving.

The goals of MCE's EV charging program are not only to save customers money, but also to increase grid resilience, and decrease greenhouse gas emissions.

MCE's Sync meets these goals in three ways:

1. It shifts EV charging demands on the electricity grid away from the 4 to 9 pm window when energy demand is greater and when power supply to the grid is dirtier (less solar energy is available) and most expensive for MCE to procure.
2. It reduces customers' energy bills by automatically charging their EVs during less expensive time-of-use off-peak hours. Customer savings from using the app average \$14/month.
3. It moves customers toward low-carbon charging and automatically aligns EV charging to when, in real time, the generation of renewable clean energy is most available.

MCE Sync is also integrated into the "Peak FLEXmarket" program that responds to Flex Alerts during heat waves when the grid is stressed the most. It shifts EV charging demand outside of FlexAlert hours, reducing its customer EV charging consumption by up to 98% during those hours, helping to prevent blackouts.

Download the Sync app and give it a try

MCE Sync is free and available for download from the Apple App Store and Google Play. **MCE is committed to greatly increasing enrollment this year. Check out the enrollment incentives. We encourage you to [sign up](#) and use it!**

Get the Full 2023 EV Tax Credit Right Now — Here's How to Start!*Courtesy of our friends at Ride and Drive Clean*

If you're ready for an EV in 2023, whether it's your first or your fifth, you may be befuddled by the evolving rules for the revamped federal EV tax credit, now called the Clean Vehicle Credit. Ride and Drive Clean, a nonprofit collaboration based in Marin, can help you sort through the complex federal and state incentives. Demystifying rules and regulations is part of our mission to accelerate EV and clean energy adoption.

EV tax credits are serving three good ideas—making EVs more affordable, bringing good-paying jobs back to America, and reducing carbon emissions. By the end of 2023, because of state and federal incentives, more people, including residents of low-wealth communities, will have acquired their first EVs. More domestic jobs will have been created in manufacturing and assembly. And many, many gigatons of atmospheric carbon will have been avoided.

Focus on this

Through the end of February and perhaps March, buyers can receive the full federal tax credit for many EVs from many manufacturers and on many models, including these (note exclusions below):

Audi (Q5 TFSI e quattro PHEV)**BMW** (330e PHEV, X5 xDrive45e PHEV)**Ford** (Escape PHEV, F-150 Lightning, Mustang Mach-E, Lincoln Aviator Grand Touring)**GM** (Chevy Bolt EV, Chevy Bolt EUV, Cadillac Lyric)**Nissan** (Leaf, Leaf Plus)**Rivian** (R1S, R1T)**Stellantis** (Chrysler Pacifica PHEV, Jeep Wrangler 4XE PHEV, Jeep Cherokee 4XE PHEV)**Tesla** (Model 3, Model Y)**Volkswagen** (ID.4)**Volvo** (S60 PHEV)

Because there is now a price cap, not all trim packages qualify and your adjusted gross income (AGI) may not exceed:

- \$300,000 for married couples filing jointly
- \$225,000 for heads of households
- \$150,000 for all other filers.

New however for 2023, used EVs priced below \$25,000 can qualify for up to \$4,000 in federal tax credits.

Attend a webinar to learn more

The process may seem daunting in part because EVs are new to most people. We offer a [calendar](#) of events and webinars, listed on our website. Join us this month to learn about:

- Current and coming EV models
- Updated federal tax credit for new and used EVs
- Federal tax credit for home chargers

We make it easy for anyone to join a webinar, get the latest information, and ask questions of EV experts. Sign up at <https://rideanddriveclean.org/events/>

To dig into the details on your own, here's a list of [qualified models](#). Note that this list will be updated as new information is known.

"EVs are for everyone," said Carleen Cullen, founder of Cool the Earth, the nonprofit backbone of Ride and Drive Clean. "We're thrilled that the state and federal governments are focusing on incentives to spur the transition to clean transportation and that many of the incentives are for residents of low wealth communities who suffer disproportionately from climate change and poor air quality, so they can participate as part of the solution."

Sign up at Ride and Drive Clean <https://rideanddriveclean.org/signup/> to stay up-to-date.

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Though the 60-acre property is currently zoned for single family homes (estates), it has not been identified as a site for new housing in Ross' Draft 2023-2031 Housing Element, in part because of its steep terrain. The property is owned by an overseas finance and real estate company. Until recently, attempts to convince the company to sell the property have been unsuccessful.

Bald Hill gets its name from its treeless 1,132-foot summit. The hill provides a landmark backdrop for the towns of Ross, San Anselmo, and Fairfax and at the summit there are panoramic views of San Francisco Bay. The landscape is home to valleys of redwood groves, oaks, madrone, California bay laurel, freshwater springs, mushrooms, wildflowers, butterflies, spiders, and other wildlife. Forty-six acres of Bald Hill's western slope is the current area of protected county open space—Bald Hill Preserve. Areas of the Preserve "support unique and irreplaceable remnants of natural biological diversity". The acquisition of the summit parcels will increase the Preserve's acreage from 46 to 106. The Preserve is accessible from many trails in nearby communities and open to hikers and dogs off leash, as well as horses and bikes on marked trails and fire roads. Motorized vehicles are not permitted.

A preservation priority

For more than forty years, the county, the towns of San Anselmo, Ross, and Fairfax and several land conservation groups have worked to protect Bald Hill, piecing together the Bald Hill Preserve and funding acquisitions through public grants and funds, and hundreds of private donations.

As early as 1976, the protection and preservation of Bald Hill was identified as a high priority. At that time, San Anselmo included a provision in its General Plan to coordinate with Ross to preserve the Bald Hill summit. In 1987, the San Anselmo Open Space Committee (SAOSC) initiated a campaign with the town of Ross to purchase Bald Hill. It led, in 1990,



Still from drone video: Bald Hill/
San Anselmo, Ross by René Voss

The summit property of Ross Valley's Bald Hill has been a decades-long acquisition priority.

to a Ross and San Anselmo bond measure that would have raised \$1.6 million to buy the property. The ballot measure required a two-thirds vote and failed, falling short by 180 votes.

The Bald Hill Preserve was formed in 1994, original acquisitions occurring between 1993 and 1996, included SAOAC's 1996 purchase of a five-acre parcel on Bald Hill Ridge. Since then, adjacent lands have gradually been added to the public open space, but throughout time the hill's summit has remained privately owned. Over the years, other attempts were made to purchase the 60-acre property, including a 2012 solicitation from the mayors of Ross and San Anselmo. That too failed.

In 2015, MOST and the San Anselmo Open Space Committee led a campaign to acquire the 16-acre former Sky Ranch property for \$1.2 million, partnering with Fairfax, San Anselmo, and Marin Water. Contributors included the California Wildlife Foundation, the Tamalpais Conservation Club (TCC), SAOSC and 175 individuals. The property was transferred to the county's Bald Hill Preserve at the discounted price of \$630,000. The accumulated properties connected the Preserve to more than 100,000 acres of additional public lands and hundreds of miles of public trails stretching west to Point Reyes and south to the Marin Headlands.

In 2020, through negotiations with MOST, brothers Amir Kia and Ali Kia Shabahangi

donated a conservation easement (See [What is a Conservation Easement?](#) in our Jan Feb 2022 issue.) on their undeveloped 5-acre hillside parcel previously owned by the San Francisco Theological Seminary. The parcel is situated on the eastern slope adjacent to the 60-acre summit parcels.

At last, in 2021, the owners of the 60-acre summit property put it on the market and MOST negotiated a purchase agreement. With the agreement in place, MOST was focused on completing the fundraising and expects to close the transaction in the next few weeks. Many generous Ross Valley residents, private donors, the TCC, and the town of Ross have contributed. The SAOSC is contributing the funds it has raised over many years for this purpose.

Planning for preservation

In 2008, the County prepared a ten-year Marin County Parks and Open Space Strategic Plan and Land Conservation Plan. The plans identified areas to target for preservation stating, "Despite the County's history of land preservation successes, its system of preserved lands will not be complete until an additional 15,000 acres are preserved. The County must actively create and pursue new land preservation opportunities using all of the land conservation tools available to it." Establishing

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MOST's Campaign *from page 4*



Photo: René Voss

Contribute to the preservation of the last undeveloped parcel in San Anselmo's Upper Hawthorne Canyon.

this priority preservation strategy for contiguous open space parcels prevents fragmentation of intact ecosystems and protects biodiversity, habitat, wildlife corridors, and resiliency to climate change.

In response, in 2008 MOST was formed. As a private nonprofit land trust, MOST has pursued the mission of permanently preserving Marin County's remaining unprotected lands that are at risk of development. MOST partners with park agencies and other local land preservation organizations to support their land protection goals. MOST has the advantage of being able to mobilize quickly to respond to preservation opportunities and has wide experience in working with landowners.

In 2015, MOST received MCL's Marin Green Award for Environmental Leadership for its commitment to environmental conservation and protection of open space. MOST received recognition for the award by both the State Senate and Assembly, and by Congressman Jared Huffman.

MOST project updates

Fairfax open space: MOST is funding the town of Fairfax's effort to purchase a tax-defaulted parcel to improve access to the town's open space and to Hawthorne Canyon.

Harry Barbier Memorial Park: MOST has facilitated a donation to the City of San

Rafael of the only remaining privately-owned parcel in the middle of Harry Barbier Memorial Park, at the summit of Gold Hill.

San Geronimo Valley: In December, the Marin Board of Supervisors entered into an option agreement (a 10-month option period) to purchase the former San Geronimo golf course property from the Trust for Public Land for \$4.5 million.

Last June, MOST secured \$3.2 million in state grants to acquire a permanent conservation easement from the Trust

for Public Land covering 135 acres of the 157-acre San Geronimo Valley property. (See [Status Update: San Geronimo Commons](#), in our Jan Feb 2022 issue.) The easement protects the open space and will allow for major restoration work. Prior to the easement, the county contracted with TPL to purchase the property for \$8.85 million but that purchase was blocked by a lawsuit.

Fundraising campaign for Hawthorne Canyon parcel

Last August, MOST negotiated a reduced purchase price and secured a purchase option for the last undeveloped parcel in Hawthorne Canyon (9.4 acres), adjacent to San Anselmo's Hawthorne Canyon Open Space Preserve. With the purchase, 43 contiguous acres would be protected in perpetuity. **A \$550,000 fundraising campaign is just getting started and has a June 15 deadline.** Half of the funding needed will depend on private donations.

If you'd like to contribute to the preservation of Upper Hawthorne Canyon or discuss other potential open space projects, [email](#) MOST, call 415-884-2270 or visit MOST's [website](#). 🌿

EDITOR'S NOTE

2023 is the year of "we"

In this issue, we offer glimpses of a few of the many collective actions that are taking place around the county to preserve, protect and enhance the natural world in the midst of change. Contributing to one or more of these efforts is to generate personal impact and augment the collective efforts of others. Donate, support, contribute, learn, volunteer, show up, sign up, ... stay with us.

"There will always be something worth doing."

— Rebecca Solnit

Bringing "Good Fire" Back to the Land from page 1



Still from CAL FIRE LNU (see pg 1)

Re-establishing a fire regime in a forest with growth over a hundred years old improves wildfire resilience and improves forest health.

under which the fire can be safely conducted. The "prescription" is written to achieve a specific management goal such as habitat restoration or fuel reduction. Weather variables including relative humidity, temperature, and wind speed and direction are included in a prescription. Burn plans evaluate vegetation, topography and other site factors. They also include identification of a minimum level of firefighting resources, ignition pattern, smoke management considerations, safety plans, public notification provisions, and contingency plans for fire suppression if needed.

One key aspect of a prescription is setting goals that are particular for each plant community. For example, Bishop pine forests are generally considered to be fire-dependent. Heat opens closed cones and releases seeds. The bare mineral soil created by a burn allows for easy seed germination. A prescription in this forest type may need to include mechanical or manual treatments to create openings in the forest where a new generation could begin. Prescribed fire could then be applied to forest openings to turn woody debris into minerals and allow for restoration.

Seasonal timing is important also. A fire in coastal bunch grass dominated prairie may have a goal that focuses more on selecting perennial native grasses over non-native and competitive Mediterranean annual grasses. In this case, a late spring fire reduces annual seed production by burning germinating seedlings, favoring perennial grass seedling establishment.

Other site conditions like slope and fuel moisture help determine how burns are accomplished. Slope makes a difference as fire will burn quickly going up a steep hill, but slowly going down slope. The moisture in woody dead and downed material affects the intensity of fire created. Dry fuel burns quicker and hotter.

"If fire there will be – must be – then replace fires of chance with fires of choice." – Stephen J. Pyne

The techniques for putting fire on the ground are also included in a plan. Methods such as burning in cross-slope lines, called strip head fires, allow for one line of fire to burn into an area that has already burned, and therefore into a safer space. On the other hand, a "backing fire" starts at the top of a slope and burns downhill, creating a slower fire. A well-written prescription can result in a fire with multiple benefits creating a mosaic of habitats that maintain biodiversity while reducing fuels.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Fire

Beneficial fire also includes cultural burning to realize tribal goals, such as subsistence and ceremonial activities. Prior to the arrival of Europeans, Native Americans used fire as a management tool. The Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria (FIGR) has direct authority over 250 acres of tribal lands outside of

Rohnert Park, and works with many state and federal land management agencies as together they define ways to engage tribal cultural interests. Fire is only one of these. These relationships continue to evolve. The tribe is currently working with Audubon Canyon Ranch and Sonoma Land Trust in archaeological and cultural surveys to identify culturally significant plants and apply mitigations – in effect, to co-manage resources.

FIGR also consults with Marin Water and Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority (MWPA) on cultural issues involving fire management. These are two of many other landowners that are beginning to understand the cultural resource connections to their fire activities. Marin Water is planning several small burns (5 - 50 acres) in Oak woodlands and Douglas-fir forests, and along Ridgecrest Boulevard on Mt. Tamalpais. They are collaborating with State Parks and FIGR to implement these cultural prescribed burns.

Agencies in Action

Agencies and non-governmental organizations of Marin County have begun to implement beneficial fire programs on a year-round basis. In particular, Audubon Canyon Ranch has begun an ambitious and positive "Fire Forward" program. The program received a \$2 million grant from CAL FIRE to hire staff to train five to six people per year building three cohorts of trained personnel. Cohorts are currently working in Cypress Grove near Marshall and Martin Griffin Preserve on the Bolinas Lagoon restoring coastal prairie and removing encroaching Douglas-fir.

Agency support for beneficial fire can greatly boost the frequency and quality of prescribed burning. MWPA supports its seventeen member agencies with funding, consultants, and environmental compliance. Marin County Fire Department (MCFD) provides a highly trained work force for project implementation. MCFD partners with almost all of Marin's public land agencies, either through direct responsibility or through working agreements. The National Park Service has long experience with burns in Olema Valley, primarily in grasslands infested with French broom, Douglas-fir and coyote bush. State Parks (Bay District) has several planned burns for Jack London, Millerton Point at Tomales Bay, and China Camp State Parks. MCFD is supporting large

"Good Fire" cont. p. 7

Good Fire *from page 6*

Prescribed fire can improve the resilience of Marin's fire-dependent and fire-adapted ecosystems, while reducing fuel for wildfire. It may also improve the stability of carbon storage, increase a mosaic of habitat and forage that supports biodiversity, reduce the spread of invasive species and fungal and insect pests, improve water management and nutrient cycling, enhance rangelands, support traditional and subsistence food harvesting, and renew cultural and religious practices.

private landowners using prescribed burns to manage fuels, including a current project on the Hill Ranch on Big Rock Ridge.

A June 2022 workshop on Beneficial Fire was sponsored by Marin Conservation League's Parks and Open Space Committee. Staff from CAL FIRE, FIGR, the National Park Service, California State Parks, Marin Water, Marin County Parks and Open Space, Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority, Marin County Fire, San Rafael and Novato Fire Districts, and Fire Forward of Audubon Canyon Ranch made presentations and discussed current prescribed burn initiatives. This was an exciting assemblage of agencies and NGOs to problem solve and to discuss working through barriers to increase support for prescribed fire as a valuable wildfire prevention and land management tool.

Practical solutions to barriers

Barriers to beneficial fire are substantial. They require not only attention, but partnership and commitment for resolution. Barriers include financial liability, public perception, smoke impacts, overlapping jurisdictions, and lack of available prescribed fire staff and resources during a burn window. Opportunities to work across overlapping jurisdictions takes time to manage, requiring surveys, data collection and analysis, reports, and regular communication and collaboration. This may entail complicated environmental compliance for a range of possible resource impacts on air quality, water quality, cultural resources, erosion and biological resources including rare species, native vegetation, wildlife habitat, and biodiversity in general.

Fear of a prescribed fire's escape and smoke are two public concerns that require advanced communication regarding purpose, timing and location of projects. Two strategies include

using a prescribed fire itself to draw public attention, i.e., bringing concerned residents into the field to observe a burn during or after it has occurred and regarding smoke, reminding the public that a small amount of smoke from a prescribed burn can reduce choking smoke from a catastrophic wildfire.

To address liability, recent state law raised the level of protection for certified burn bosses operating within professional standards of practice and established a \$20 million Prescribed Fire Claims Fund to cover losses from prescribed fire. Interestingly a recent review of US Forest Service prescribed burn projects found 99.84% successfully met prescription standards. Of the 0.16% of burns that did escape control, even fewer caused damage.

More research needed for coastal California

Prescribed fire has been researched in California for decades but primarily in the Sierra Nevada. UC Berkeley conducted a 17-year study at Blodgett Forest Research Station (Blodgett) researching the relative benefits of beneficial fire and other techniques to reduce forest fuels. Over 4,000 acres have were subjected to various treatments including a no treatment control, mechanical means (chain saws and masticators) to cut and remove vegetation, prescribed fire to remove small trees and debris, and combined mechanical removal with prescribed fire. Results suggest that prescribed fire is an important tool in maintaining the health of the forest while protecting it from wildfire.

More research is needed to determine how fuel removal techniques can best operate in Marin habitats. Marin County land managers are planning to use similar methods as those mentioned above in local forests and continuing to employ grazing and mechanical

techniques in shrublands and grasslands. Marin agencies can employ similar research methods as occur at Blodgett to analyze which techniques are most effective, ecological, and efficient in Marin's habitats. MCL will continue to advocate that land managers work together with researchers to conduct similar studies tailored to ensure the best approach to Marin's wildfire prevention. The long-term nature of this work allows for extended monitoring and tracking of success. 

MANAGED FIRE: definition of terms

Beneficial Fire: A term used to collectively refer to prescribed fire, cultural burning and fire managed for resource benefit. Also known colloquially as "Good Fire".

Prescribed Fire: The intentional application of fire to land for wildland management goals typically conducted in compliance with a written prescribed fire plan that outlines the conditions necessary for the burn to be "within prescription."

Cultural Burning: The intentional application of fire to land by California Native American tribes, tribal organizations, or cultural fire practitioners to achieve cultural goals or objectives, including for subsistence, ceremonial activities, biodiversity, or other benefits. Cultural burning can differ from prescribed fire in terms of size, seasonality, timing, prep-work/planning, and post-fire treatment.

Fire Managed for Resource Benefit: The strategic choice to manage unplanned ignitions to achieve management objectives, such as ecosystem restoration or hazard reduction. Fire managed for resource benefit is typically deployed in wilderness areas, national parks, and other areas in public ownership under specific conditions or circumstances. It can also be referred to as "managed fire."

Trail Partners at 10 years – a review of ‘Slow and Say Hello’ by Nona Dennis

During your walks into a Marin County Open Space Preserve, such as Rush Creek or Camino Alto, you may have noticed within the main trailhead sign a small yellow-on-black logo that says: ‘Slow and Say Hello!’ Or perhaps, on the Marin Water watershed you’ve passed a Slow Zone sign at Lake Lagunitas; or on a Saturday morning ride in a state park, like China Camp, you’ve encountered volunteers under a pop-up canopy emblazoned with the yellow-on-black ‘Slow and Say Hello’ and ‘Put Yourself in My Shoes.’

Possibly you’ve never encountered any of these signs nor are even aware of the story behind them ...

Trail Partners is the volunteer effort of three collaborating organizations that represent different modes of trail use and that promote the importance of protecting natural resources on our public open spaces and parklands while, at the same time, fostering visitor safety and well-being. Working together, the Marin Horse Council (MHC), Marin County Bicycle Coalition off-road program (MCBC), and Marin Conservation League (MCL) for ten years have pursued the shared goal of reducing conflict among different user groups and reinforcing basic concepts of respect for trail rules, each other, and the environment of our public lands. Most visitors who fill the fire roads and trails of Marin’s public parks, open spaces, and watersheds already “get it,” but still too many don’t, ultimately leading to habitat degradation and compromising the outdoor experience for everyone.

Origins of a collaboration

The Trail Partners’ “Slow...” campaign to promote communication rather than confrontation, and stewardship rather than negligence of

natural resources, has its origins in an event ten years ago. Simmering conflict among recreation modes has never been far below the surface on many public lands (Marin is no exception). It was at an all-time high in 2012, it seemed, when a serious injury accident involving two equestrians and their mounts,



Phoenix Lake Road near the historic log cabin provides a popular location for Slow and Say Hello outpost.

spooked by two cyclists speeding down an illegal trail in a County open space preserve, brought the conflict into public view and debate. A member of MHC, the owner of one of the spooked horses and of a nearby stable, reached out to MCBC and proposed meeting. “Couldn’t we begin working together rather than separately,” he suggested, “and come up with a positive solution to the problem of conflicting trail behaviors?” To encompass the needs of wildlife and other natural

inhabitants of Marin’s public lands, as well as to engage a range of trail visitors on foot, MCL was asked to join as an equal partner and agreed.

The Director of Marin County Open Space District (District), an everyday witness to trail use and misuse, was enthusiastic about the proposal and facilitated early meetings to help engender mutual trust among the organizations. The District also agreed to initially

Trail Partners cont. p 9

Trail Partners *from page 8*

underwrite the group with staff assistance. The nascent Trail Partners found other public land managers in Marin eager to join in "partnering" by supporting the effort financially – State Parks, Marin Water (MMWD), and the National Park Service (Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Point Reyes National Seashore). These public land managers deal with trail conflicts on a frequent basis but lack the resources to be everywhere. Although "conflict" rarely reaches the level of an injury accident like the one described above, close encounters between mountain cyclists and slower moving walkers, hikers, and equestrians are frequent enough to create anxiety and disrupt the experience of quietude, even displacing slower movers from roads or paths where they once felt safe. Unleashed dogs add another set of concerns to the mix. In addition to managing visitor use, land managers are also responsible for protecting natural resources on our spectacular lands in the public trust – lands that were preserved for our enjoyment by those before us who took action to save them in perpetuity.

Trail Partners' campaign strategy

Over recent decades, recreational use of Marin's public lands has increased exponentially. The COVID-19 shutdown hugely amplified a trend that continues as residents of Marin and people from around the Bay Area and beyond come to Marin to relax and recreate. The Trail Partners recognized that most people recreating on public lands will do the right thing if they know what that is and understand why rules exist. But many still need reminding of basic "trail etiquette" – respect for posted speed limits and trail rules, for each other's modes of recreation, and for the environment. Enforcement of regulations, alone, can't close the behavioral gap.

That's where Trail Partners comes in – to promote the idea that through education and persuasion, people, whether regular Marin visitors or visitors from other places, have a better chance of understanding the safety needs of others and the sensitivity of natural resources that surround them. As a consequence, they will behave more responsibly and share trails and roads more amicably. The principal campaign slogan "Slow and Say Hello" recognizes two key attributes that define a comfortable encounter on the trail: speed control, regardless

of travel mode; and communication – a wave, a greeting, even a smile. It also helps for each visitor to be mindful of the others' recreational experience, hence the slogan: "Put yourself in my shoes." And finally: "Remember: You are a visitor in wildlife's home."

The "Slow and Say Hello" program, and its effect

By early 2014, the Trail Partners had crafted a mutually approved Memorandum of Understanding, a design theme and slogan, and with an educational brochure in hand, they began a schedule of "outposts" around the county: setting up table and canopy on Saturday mornings at popular trailheads, with volunteers offering a "fun" trail quiz with prizes, or just there to talk with visitors about stewardship. The theme "Slow and Say Hello" is echoed on the Trail Partners' website (safetrailsmarin.org) and on caps, tee shirts, and posters. An informational brochure serves as a guide to the expectations and responsibilities of each of the primary visitor groups (equestrians, mountain bikers,

hikers and walkers) toward each other and the environment.

How effective can a campaign like "Slow ... " be in transforming behavior when it is premised on the reality that some people will, and some people will not, change their behaviors? Will bicycles stop speeding? Will people make civility toward others the norm on the trails we all enjoy? The expectation of 100% success has never been the goal. The realistic hope of the campaign is that, over time and with repetition, a critical mass will pay closer attention to safe trail behavior and, in turn, apply pressure to their peers to act accordingly.

To that end, the Trail Partners' aspirational Mission continues to be to: "... engage and educate all Marin trail visitors in the safe and responsible use of trails and resource protection and help shift the trail culture to one that is mutually aligned and cooperative." Trail Partners is looking for volunteers to participate in its 2023 outposts. If interested, please contact MCL by [email](mailto:) or call 415 485-6257.



Be a Ring Mountain Docent

CNPS is looking for volunteers for Ring Mountain Preserve!

Ring Mountain Preserve is not only famous for its beautiful views and for its geologic history and cultural artifacts, but it boasts a unique ecology that includes a bounty of diverse wildflowers and rare species in the spring. (See MCL's [Serpentine Prairie on Ring Mountain](#) in March April 2021 issue.) The Preserve is hugely popular when the wildflowers are in bloom. Unfortunately, it is now covered with social trails and dog walkers.

For the first time, Marin County Parks and the California Native Plant Society have joined forces to form the Ring Mountain Preserve Wildflower Docents. The effort hopes to foster stewardship of the special landmark, protect its natural resources, and ensure public enjoyment. The Docents will be providing educational outreach, identifying plants, and encouraging care.

The Docent opportunity will run from April 2 through mid-June. Training will run Tuesday evenings through March, with one in-person Saturday field training. No experience is necessary, but plant familiarity is helpful.

Details and forms to sign up will be available soon. For additional info, contact Stacey Pogorzelski at marincnpsvolunteers@gmail.com.



Tiburon mariposa lily

Photo: Courtesy Sarah Swope

STATUS UPDATE

Chileno Valley Newt Brigade – Protecting Rites (and Rights) of Passage

by Kate Powers, with Sally Gale, Jerry Meral, and Eric Gold

Well, it's that time of year again! Rain has prompted the emergence and migration of bright orange-bellied creatures. Propelled by their side-to-side gait with thick tails and limbs jutting out at right angles from their torsos, their protruding eyes gaze toward their migration destination which lies across Chileno Valley Road.

These creatures, *Taricha torosa* or California newts, are a native species. They migrate down from the West Marin hills to Laguna Lake in the Walker Creek Watershed. Salamanders and newts are believed to navigate with the help of small organs in their tiny brains that guide them relative to the Earth's magnetic field. They also rely on nasal glands in their snouts. Similar to salmon, they smell their way back to their natal ponds.



California newt at risk crossing the double yellow line.

Richard James - coastodian.org

tracks crossings and road deaths and may help monitor the viability of local populations which may in turn persuade future investment in protection measures. The 2021-22 season tallied 4,408 newt lives saved, and 980 dead newts (of all newt species). Volunteers have tallied more than 4,000 newts, frogs and turtles already rescued this season.

Volunteers are trained to encircle the soft-bellied newts with their fingers just behind the front legs, picking them up and moving them gently past the road's edge and pointing them toward the lake. While nightly hand-moving of newts is very effective, a longer-term solution is needed. Volunteers work until approximately 9 pm, yet newts cross all night and often during daylight on rainy days.

The newts move at night when darkness protects them from predators and rain keeps them moist. They sometimes move en masse, all pointed in the same direction, toward the water of their birth. Like most amphibians, they have skin through which they can both breathe and take in water. Once in Laguna Lake, they will take part in a great profusion of swirls and gyrations as mating takes place. Eggs are then released into the fresh water and aquatic larvae will eventually hatch.

The newts have been making this trek long before Chileno Valley Road was

built, fragmenting the watershed. Other amphibians found on Chileno Valley Road during migration have included other species of newts and salamanders, western pond turtles, and frogs – both the Northern Pacific tree frog and the federally listed threatened red-legged frog. Some amphibians, like frogs, are able to traverse the road and out of harm's way fairly quickly. Others are slow-moving and more at risk.

The Chileno Valley Newt Brigade (CVNB) is continuing its efforts to prevent newts, frogs and turtles from being run over as they cross Chileno Valley Road. (The effort was previously described in [Nature Note on Newts](#) in our Nov Dec 2020 newsletter.) Amphibians are one of the most vulnerable groups of vertebrates on the planet. CVNB's data collection



Photo: Crissy Pascual/Argus-Courier Staff



Photo: Crissy Pascual/Argus-Courier Staff

Ultimately, the Chileno Valley Road must be modified so that newts and other species can safely pass under the road on their way to and from Lake Laguna. To that end, CVNB is seeking \$30,000 to fund a feasibility study of safe road crossing alternatives and a cost-benefit analysis of various options.

In March 2021, a report of best management practices and technical guidance was prepared for Caltrans by Western Transportation Institute of Montana State University in collaboration with the US Geological Survey (USGS) titled "[Measures to Reduce Road Impacts on Amphibians and Reptiles in California](#)". It assesses various designs for passage and for barrier systems.

CVNB is currently meeting with USGS scientists and engineers. USGS is working on a similar project in Santa Clara County where thousands of newts are killed each year crossing Alma Bridge Road to Lexington

Status Update: Newt Brigade cont. next page

Newt Brigade *from page 10*



Photo: Cattie Clune

Reservoir. [Peninsula Open Space Trust](#) will lead that study. Many of the solutions studied there could be applicable to Chileno Valley Road.

The County will be the lead agency in the Chileño Valley study. CVNB will help raise funds, not only for the study, but also ultimately for a road modification project. The project could entail a mix of solutions. Alternatives may include closing the road on mass migration nights—several nights a year; modifying the existing storm culverts which currently are not newt friendly; installing new newt-friendly tunnels specifically designed to help amphibians cross dangerous roads; installing new culverts designed specifically for amphibians with fences to guide the newts into them; or raising the roadway.



Photo: Crissy Pascua



Photo: Crissy Pascua/Argus-Courier Staff

CVNB needs "Brigadier" volunteers. If you'd like to volunteer or donate to the feasibility study, email Sally Gale at sallygale@gmail.com. More information is available at CVNB's website: www.chilenovalleynewtbrigade.org



In Memoriam: **Judy Schriebman**

In late November, many of us learned that environmental activist and MCL member, Judy Schriebman, passed away from breast cancer. She was 67.

Judy moved to Marin at the age of two. She claimed it was her experience growing up near Marin's open spaces, family trips to state and national parks, and her love of animals that ensured her dedication to the natural world. Judy graduated with a degree in Zoology from Berkeley, and was certified in Classical Homeopathy and Clinical Hypnotherapy in post-graduate work. She was committed to sustainability and to a healthy environment for current and future generations. One of her focuses became water.

In 2008, Judy became a founding member of the Gallinas Watershed Council (GWC). GWC's mission is to connect people to the creeks in their watersheds, to advance conservation and to promote watershed protection and restoration. Judy was not only the sustaining force behind GWC's continuing advocacy and community education but she was also a resource to other watershed advocates and volunteers. In 2014, MCL awarded GWC the Ted Wellman Water Award, presented to an awardee who maintains Ted Wellman's high standards for protecting and preserving water resources in Marin and the State.

Judy's many roles in the County included being elected to the

Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District Board in 2007. She was a progressive force in that public office for 15 years, most recently serving as Board President.



In addition to GWC, she was also one of the founding members of the Watershed Alliance of Marin. Judy also sat on the Marin Group—Sierra Club Executive Committee, serving as Chair for the last three years. While these are among the most visible of Judy's recent commitments, just as importantly, Judy inspired others. She consciously built relationships by actively connecting people to each other, to resources, and to the work of environmental advocacy.

Judy is deeply missed by her family and by the many who worked closely with her, experiencing the power of her commitment and the underlying strength of her heart. She was a leader and a role model, not one to walk away from complex issues or stiff opposition. Instead she always seemed to find a way to sustain passion, shoulder responsibility, and work even harder.

Judy's daughter gave birth to a first grandchild (a grand daughter) just before Christmas. Despite her absence, there's no doubt Judy's little one will still come to understand the meaning of her grandmother's work from the legacy in Marin that Judy has left behind.

— Kate Powers, editor

MARIN CONSERVATION LEAGUE
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Board of Directors meetings are held at 6:00 PM on the 3rd Tuesday of the month.

Issue Committee Meeting Schedule

(subject to change—check website)

Land Use and Transportation:

1st Wed. of the month, 10:00 AM—12:00 PM

Parks and Open Space:

2nd Thurs. of the month, 3:00 PM—5:00 PM

Climate Action Working Group:

3rd Fri. of the month, 9:00 AM—11:00 AM

Agricultural Land Use:

Meets quarterly, 4th Fri. of the month,
9:30—11:30 AM

North Marin Unit:

Check website for times

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Invitations will be mailed in March.

The Key Room at Homeward Bound in Novato
WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU!



SPECIAL AWARD FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ACHIEVEMENT:
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