

**Ballona Creek Renaissance**  
 (we call ourselves "BCR")  
**P.O. Box 1068**  
**Culver City, CA 90232**

Web site:  
<http://www.BallonaCreek.org>

**Contact information:**  
 Jim Lamm, President  
 Phone: (310) 839-6896  
 E-mail:  
[jim.lamm@ballonacreek.org](mailto:jim.lamm@ballonacreek.org)

**Officers and Directors:**  
 Jim Lamm, President  
 Scott Malsin, Vice-President and  
 Webmaster  
 Bobbi Gold, Secretary/Treasurer  
 and Newsletter Editor  
 Lucy Blake-Elahi  
 Steven Coker  
 Bob Hadley  
 Cathi Lamm  
 Irene Reingold  
 Gerald Sallus  
 Mim Shapiro  
 June Walden

**Advisory Council:**  
 Lori Escalera  
 Pat Hadley  
 Marina Curtis Tidwell

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**Protecting the Ocean from Us**

The photos were appalling. Eight-foot mounds of Styrofoam and other plastic debris on Hawaiian beaches, swept by ocean currents from the coast of California. Albatross chicks dying by the thousands on Midway atoll, their stomachs stuffed with fragments of plastic which their parents mistook for food. Rail yards covered by a snowfall of tiny white plastic pellets waiting to be swept by wind or rain into streets, storm drains and ultimately the ocean.

We were watching a presentation by Sarah Abramson and Kirsten James, staff scientists for Heal the Bay, sponsored by BCR on May 22. And they gave us hope.



Sarah Abramson (left) and Kirsten James

Our awareness of the problem of marine plastic debris was raised by last summer's Pulitzer Prize-winning five-part series "Altered Oceans" in the LA Times. Kirsten and Sarah briefly described various aspects of the problem in words and images. Then they turned to positive thoughts and actions: a discussion of legislation designed to greatly reduce the problem at its sources.

California normally leads in socially and environmentally conscious legislation, but in this matter we lag behind Oregon, Washington and Alaska. Nevertheless, our elected officials are realizing the seriousness of the problem.

The May 22 presentation focused on the "Pacific Protection Initiative", a package of five bills currently in the state legislature. These measures are a result of an aggressive stance by the California Ocean Protection Council, a state agency formed two years ago. Its three voting members, appointed by Gov. Schwarzenegger, are Lt. Gov. John Garamendi, Secretary of Resources Mike Chrisman and Secretary of Cal-EPA Linda Adams (plus two non-voting members and staff). In February, the Council voted unanimously to pass a strong resolution which included a set of detailed recommendations proposed by the Heal the Bay. Kirsten, Sarah and Heal the Bay have been strongly supporting the following five bills through their outreach and contact efforts:

Bills In the State Senate:

**SB 898 (Simitian).** This bill addresses the problem of derelict fishing gear, which includes nets, lines, crab and shrimp traps/pots, and other recreational and commercial harvest equipment that has been lost or abandoned in the marine environment. Commercial nets, usually made of nondegradeable plastic, can drift for thousands of miles, trapping and drowning not just fish but also seabirds, turtles, seals, and dolphins as well as human swimmers and divers. It can also entangle the propellers, rudders and anchors of boats. The problem is measured in thousands of tons worldwide. The bill would require the California Integrated Waste Management Board to address derelict fishing gear and calls for the creation of guidelines and programs to remove and properly dispose of it.

*Current status as of press time: passed the Senate on June 6th (27-12). Will now move onto the Assembly, but not yet scheduled before its next committee. It was previously passed by the Senate Appropriations Committee and Senate Environmental Quality Committee.*

**SB 899 (Simitian).** Plastics contain toxic chemicals which can leach into the rivers and oceans, adversely affecting marine life and its ability to live or reproduce. Some of these are known human carcinogens. This bill would provide phased bans on the worst of these chemicals.

*Current status: passed the Senate on April 23rd. Will next be heard in the Assembly by the Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials committee; this hearing has not been scheduled but will likely be in late June.*

Bills In the State Assembly:

**AB 258 (Krekorian)** This bill addresses the problem of accidental release of pre-production thermoplastic resin pellets, commonly called "nurdles", from plastic industry facilities. "Nurdles" are BB-sized pellets of plastic which are melted and formed into innumerable plastic items. However, they are easily scattered by winds at various facilities such as railroad yards and are too small to be caught by storm drain traps. When they end up in the ocean, fish and birds mistake them for food. Their mass can outweigh plankton. AB 258 would require the state board and regional boards to implement a program to control discharges

of preproduction plastic - specifically, to require plastic manufacturing, handling, and transportation facilities to implement best management practices to control discharges and install a monitoring and reporting program.

*Current status: passed the Assembly on June 5th (44-35). It will now move onto the Senate, but has not yet been scheduled for its next committee.*

**AB 820 (Karnette)** This bill prohibits the sale or distribution of expanded polystyrene (Styrofoam) food containers at state facilities after January 1, 2009, including all campuses of California Community Colleges, California State Universities and the University of California upon approval by the Board of Regents of the University of California .

*Current status: Unfortunately AB 820 was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee for cost reasons and did not make it out for a floor vote. It had been previously passed by the Assembly Natural Resources Committee.*



The trash net on Ballona Creek at Lincoln Blvd captures trash after a rain, but during heavy storms, the net is removed because the volume of water is too great.

**AB 904 (Feuer)** AB 904 prohibits a food provider from distributing food service packaging to a consumer unless the packaging is either compostable or recyclable. (Effective date to be determined.) After July 1, 2012, the packaging must be recovered for composting or recycling at a rate of 25 percent or more. Violation is subject to significant fines.

*Current status: AB904 was not voted on by the Assembly Floor and will become a two year bill. Previously passed by the Assembly Appropriations Committee and Natural Resources Committee.*

June 8 was the midpoint of this year's legislative session when bills had to either pass out of the house in which they were introduced or be shelved for at least a year. Bills now have until September 14 to get to the governor's desk.

The journey of these bills through the legislature to become law is difficult and uncertain. Please urge your State senator and assembly member to support these bills. Check the following website for updates on the progress of these bills:

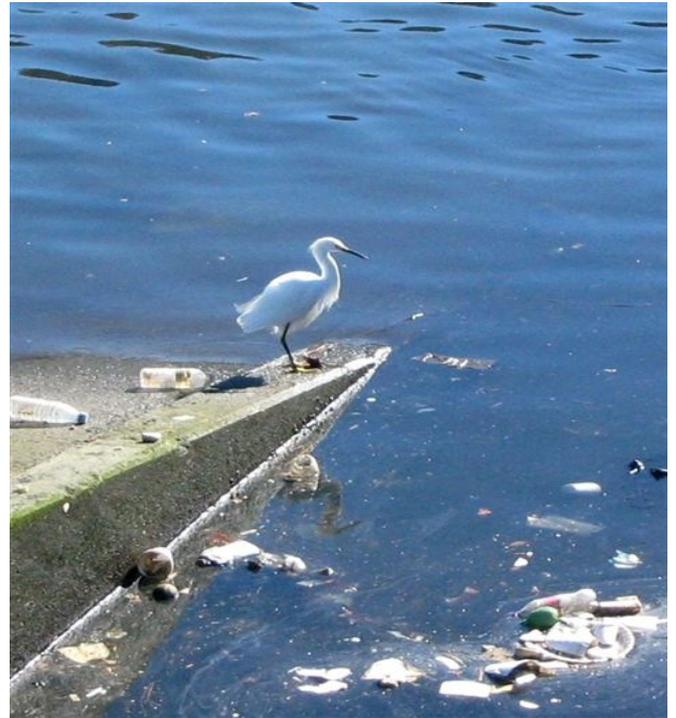
[www.healthebay.org/currentissues/ppi/default.asp](http://www.healthebay.org/currentissues/ppi/default.asp).

Progress is occurring locally. You may have read earlier this year about the City of San Francisco banning non-recyclable plastic bags in large grocery chains. Some local jurisdictions that have banned the use of polystyrene (Styrofoam) in certain consumer situations are Santa Monica, Malibu, Calabasas, Huntington Beach and Ventura County.

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors on May 22 unanimously agreed to consider banning plastic foam food containers from restaurants and stores in unincorporated areas. The board directed legal and sanitation officials to first study the effects of removing the containers from county facilities and then whether they should be outlawed from food-service and retail outlets countywide. A few weeks prior, supervisors had launched a similar study on whether to ban plastic grocery bags.

Members of the audience participated freely with questions and comments. There were complaints about lo-

cal recycling efforts, such as the lack of aggressiveness on the part of grocery chains and other stores in promoting recycling, re-use, or (best of all) non-use of plastic bags. For example, Ralphs and other supermarkets pay 5¢ for each brown bag returned and reused by that consumer (3¢ for plastic bags),



Egret fishing in creek amidst floating trash.

but hardly anyone seems to know it. One participant recounted how he had asked the clerk for a brown bag; the clerk put the items in a brown bag and then put the brown bag into a plastic bag. It's clear that education of store personnel and the general consuming public is needed in addition to laws.

## **Creek and Bikeway Projects**

Two projects to enhance the experience of Ballona Creek and its bikeway were recently completed, and at least four more are in planning stages.

### **LA County's Ballona Creek Earth Day Planting**

Ballona Creek Renaissance participated again this year in LA County's annual Ballona Creek Earth Day planting event on May 14. The location was a plot next to the creek bikepath, just east of Overland Ave. About 40 students from Community Harvest Charter

(Middle) School, on West Adams Blvd near Arlington Avenue, participated, led by teacher Jon Pearson.

The site had been prepared by the County and various native plants had been purchased. The students received planting instructions from the Mountains and Recreation Conservation Authority (MRCA), tools and hands-on guidance; BCR boardmember Steven Coker provided ample amounts of the latter. BCR president Jim Lamm and boardmember June Walden led students on a short tour to learn about the CDS

filter just downstream (see our February 2005 newsletter on our website) and the native plant garden at the south end of the pedestrian bridge. Jim also brought display materials describing BCR's activities.

The County installed an irrigation system controlled by a solar panel to sustain the new plants through the dry season until they become established. As natives, they can then survive on normal rainfall.



BCR's Steven Coker gives planting tips to two Community Harvest students.

Representatives from LA County Supervisor Yvonne Burke also attended.

**The Mountains and Conservation Recreation Authority** (MRCA) will enhance three existing bikepath entrances and convert them to rest stops, at Sepulveda and Inglewood Blvds and McConnell Ave. These entrances will be similar in style to the attractive improvements which MRCA installed at the Centinela Avenue gate in May, 2005 (see our June 2005 newsletter for photos). Construction documents for these projects are almost complete and are being reviewed by staff.

In particular, the McConnell Avenue entrance area has an unusual culvert with a little water which could be used for planting willows and other riparian plants that need more access to water than is available at other places on top of the creek levee. Willows were common in the area before the creek was channeled and the wetlands ceased being wet.

**The City of Culver City** has begun the first phase of an improvement project from Overland Avenue west to the pedestrian bridge across the creek and possibly even as far as Sepulveda Blvd. A statement from the City reads as follows: "The Project is intended to transform this segment of the creek and bike path by enhancing the beauty of the creek and providing a peaceful and beautiful way station for travelers along this segment of the bike path as well as amenities for library patrons, school students and nearby residents." The basic project features will include:

- Removal of the concrete-covered slope between the bikepath and the school property (not the creek bank itself!) and replacement with a retaining wall and terraced landscaping with native, drought-tolerant plants and irrigation.
- More attractive fencing between the bike path, the school property and the creek.
- Enhanced gate at the entrance to the creek bike path at Overland Avenue, adjacent to the Julian Dixon County Library.
- A rest area with benches, water fountain and trash receptacles.
- Lighting along this portion of the bike path.
- Educational displays regarding this section of Ballona Creek including information on storm water pollution prevention.

This first phase of the project will involve planning, design, and development of construction documents. During this phase the City and its consultants will work with area stakeholders and the community to introduce and refine the project scope and design a conceptual plan. The goal is to complete the planning and design activities in time to submit the Project for construction funding for the next Rivers Parkways grant cycle in October 2007.

Subject to City Council approval, the existing "Postcards From Ballona" mural along the bikepath next to the library will be restored and protected by an anti-graffiti coating in a separate effort at about the same time as the other enhancements.

## Mid-City Planter Rehabilitation Project

This community project, in which BCR assisted and which was featured in our March 2006 newsletter, has been completed with the installation of artistic metal and stone work by Brett Goldstone on the Hauser Blvd. bridge, dedicated at an April 28th volunteer work day. The project spanned eight blocks along the creek in that area. Many community members and the City of Los Angeles spent countless hours repairing and painting the damaged block planters, replacing the unviable dirt with good quality soil, repairing the irrigation system, and planting hundreds of native and drought-tolerant plants. Brett Goldstone's signature style work can also be seen downstream at Centinela Avenue on Ballona Creek and several places along the Los Angeles River.



Artistic elements added to the existing fence

## BCWTF Greenway Committee

By Jim Lamm

Since its inception in Spring 2006, the Greenway Committee of the Ballona Creek Watershed Task Force continues to build a framework and next steps for a renewed creek corridor, seeking ecological restoration and community benefits. Led by Watershed Coordinator Jessica Hall, the committee and the task force have become the informal incubator, clearing-house, and point of coordination for projects along the creek.

From Mid-City Los Angeles through Culver City to the ocean, about a dozen stakeholders have gathered monthly to walk or ride sections of the 9-mile open-channel creek, record detailed observations about existing conditions and future possibilities, and meet afterward to discuss their findings. Observations included wildlife, water, and vegetation to bike path and channel characteristics, bridges, signs, and drains. In some locations the group scouted adjoining tributaries, business streets and overlooks.

Here are some of the many interesting observations we enjoyed: native ferns, raccoon paw prints in the creek-bottom mud and swallows' nests under the Duquesne Avenue bridge; an obscure pedestrian bridge under the Santa Monica Freeway overcrossing; and mini-watersheds at some cul-de-sacs adjacent to the creek east of Culver City.

Fieldwork culminated on March 1, 2007, when committee participants gathered for lunch to celebrate that milestone and to look ahead toward shaping project concepts that could be developed, funded, and

implemented by appropriate groups and agencies. Current efforts focus on teaching each other more about various aspects of creek improvements before developing design concepts for candidate projects along sections of the creek which are not already part of a pending improvement. Ecology, flood management, recreation, and neighborhood concerns all are part of the mix.

The committee seeks to work in concert with such past and ongoing planning efforts as the Ballona Creek Watershed Management Plan, Culver City's Ballona Creek & Trail Focused Special Study, US Army Corps of Engineers Lower Ballona Feasibility Study, and the Baldwin Hills Park Master Plan. The Landscaping Guidelines and Plant Palettes for the Los Angeles River Master Plan, which include structural constraints affecting planting locations, are a starting point for Ballona Creek improvements.

Participants have included representatives from numerous public agencies, elected officials, local governments, environmental and cycling organizations, UCLA landscape architecture graduate students, and interested residents.

The Greenway Committee, which is open to anyone interested, now meets from 11 AM to 1 PM on the first Thursday of each month in Culver City City Hall in the third floor Patio Room (but this July it will meet on July 12, the second Thursday). For more information, contact Jessica Hall at (213) 576-6687 or by email at [jhall@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:jhall@waterboards.ca.gov).

## Domoic Acid Poisons Birds and Marine Mammals

It happened again this spring: hundreds of shorebirds and marine mammals dying on our beaches and in Ballona Creek. Pelicans, dolphins, seals and sea lions have been most strongly affected.

The cause of many such deaths is Domoic Acid, a chemical produced in algae on which certain fish feed. Individual fish don't consume enough algae for it to kill them, but the birds and mammals that eat enough fish can get a lethal dose. The chemical affects the brain, causing seizures. Birds have fallen from the sky, and sea lions are found staggering and drooling on the sand.

Two organizations located at Fort MacArthur in San Pedro, the International Bird Rescue Research Center (IBRRC) and the Marine Mammal Care Center, have been trying to save birds and animals brought in while still alive, but the illness is so severe that the success rate is low. The number of birds and animals brought in has far exceeded their capacity. These organizations work with researchers to try to understand the causes of the problem and methods of dealing with it. IBRRC has some pathetic videos of afflicted pelicans and sea lions on its website at [www.ibrrc.org](http://www.ibrrc.org)

Although domoic acid is a naturally occurring toxin produced by algae, blooms of the algae have been especially virulent in recent years, and it's probably our fault. One factor is the unchecked growth of algae in the creeks, rivers and oceans due to excessive nutrients in our runoff. Agricultural and lawn chemicals reach these waters when, for example, homeowners spread lawn food on their grass, then overwater it, sending the chemicals in runoff down the street into storm drains. Another factor is over-

fishing, which reduces the number of fish available to keep the algae in check.



Sickened sea lion seen in IBRRC video

Domoic acid also accumulates in the meat of certain shellfish and bivalves, posing a threat to people who fish for and eat them. A 1987 incident on Prince Edward Island, Canada, in which 3 people died and hundreds were sickened, many permanently affected, was attributed to this toxin. In California, numerous researchers monitor for domoic acid and other toxic substances in mussels. Commercially harvested shellfish are routinely checked and should be safe to eat. But in April, the State Department of Health Services issued an advisory against eating sport-harvested shellfish, anchovies, sardines, and both sports-harvested and commercially caught lobsters and crabs from Los Angeles, Orange, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura counties.

## Around the Watershed

### Yet Another Sewage Spill into the Creek

5,000 gallons of sewage spilled into Ballona Creek on Wednesday, May 23, causing beach closures. Tree roots apparently blocked a set of Los Angeles city-owned sewer pipes leading to a Hollywood condominium complex in the 4200 block of Wilshire Boulevard at about 4:30 p.m. Wednesday, but the problem was not reported until seven hours later. City sanitation crews repaired the sewer line shortly after midnight and notified the county Health Department a short time later. Lifeguards posted warning signs by 6

a.m. the next day, urging beachgoers to avoid contact with the water in areas of Venice and Dockweiler beaches. The beaches were cleared for reopening Saturday afternoon.

### Keeping Trash out of Storm Drains

The City of Los Angeles has taken on a very ambitious goal of reducing, and possibly eliminating, trash from Ballona Creek, Los Angeles River, and Santa Monica Bay by keeping it from getting into the storm drain system through the use of storm drain screen

covers. The intent is to have all curb inlets to the storm drain system in the City fitted with a cover within the next four years.

Several members of the South Robertson Community Council Green Team got a good look at the new screens and were surprised not at the amount of trash the screens had caught and accumulated, but at the dams composed of mud and grass clippings blocking the screens. This is apparently the result of gardeners in residential neighborhoods mowing lawns and then blowing the grass clippings into the street. Continued buildup could block water from entering the storm drains and cause local flooding.

In response to this problem, a new mounting was developed for these screen covers that eliminates the small pocket area in front of the screen cover where accumulation occurs, ensuring that routine street sweeping picks up this material. The old mounting will be used in commercial and industrial areas where green waste is not predominant.

### **Even Better, No More Trash At All in LA!**

The City of LA has just announced the beginning of a 20-year master plan process known as SWIRP (Solid Waste Integrated Resources Plan) leading to reduction of solid waste to zero. The Bureau of Sanitation will work closely with community stakeholders to develop the guiding principles and vision to lead the way for Los Angeles to become a zero-waste city. Two of the goals of this program are to eliminate the use of landfills for all but inert material that poses no environmental harm and to develop new technologies to convert non-recyclable municipal solid waste into useful products such as renewable energy, green fuels and/or chemicals.

Although minimizing or eliminating plastics remains best in BCR's view, it was good news to hear that Los Angeles is now accepting Styrofoam for recycling. Watch for upcoming SWIRP workshops where you can learn more and provide your own good ideas or visit [www.lacity.org/san/srssd/swirp](http://www.lacity.org/san/srssd/swirp) for more preliminary information.

### **City of LA's Plastic Bag Recycling Program.**

BCR is pleased to be a partner with the City of Los Angeles for its new Plastic Bag Recycling Program. Although shopping with your own reusable bags is best, this program will result in a healthier Ballona Creek and Ocean. The California Legislature passed Assembly Bill 2449, effective July 1, 2007, requiring that certain retail establishments set up at-store recycling programs enabling customers to return clean plastic carryout bags to the store. The bill also requires manufacturers of plastic carryout bags to develop educational materials to encourage reducing, reusing, and recycling plastic bags and to make those materials available to stores.

### **It's "Too Darn Hot"!**

With this theme reflecting the collective concern about global warming, the Los Angeles League of Conservation Voters ([www.lalcv.org/](http://www.lalcv.org/)) hosted their annual environmental awards reception. Attended by over 200 community and government leaders and activists, the event honored three people and one organization for their continued commitment to make our cities cleaner and healthier: California Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, environmental attorney Jeryllyn Lopez Mendoza, Culver City Council Member Gary Silbiger, and Liberty Hill Foundation. BCR's Jim Lamm was among those who spoke briefly about the awardees and our shared environmental challenge.

### **Visit us at the Fiesta!**

BCR will again have a booth at the annual Fiesta la Ballona at Veteran's Memorial Park, at the corner of Overland Ave. and Culver Blvd in Culver City, both Saturday and Sunday, August 25-26. Come chat with us and look at our exhibits and informative displays.

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Editor: Bobbi Gold

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P.O. Box 1068 Culver City, CA 90232

Address correction requested

## JUNE 2007 NEWSLETTER

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