

**Ballona Creek Renaissance...**

A 501c(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to renewing Ballona Creek and its watershed for a healthier, more sustainable environment and community.

(We're also known as BCR)  
[www.ballonacreek.org](http://www.ballonacreek.org)

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## CLEANING UP THE CREEK AND WETLANDS

Spend your Saturday morning cleaning up trash from Ballona Creek??? Sure.

Ballona Creek Renaissance has organized several cleanups at the Centinela Ave. creek crossing, co-sponsored by the Del Rey Neighborhood Council, LA City Council District 6 (Bill Rosendahl), and the LA City Office of Beautification, with the cooperation of Los Angeles County Public Work Flood Control District. We also occasionally co-sponsor wetlands cleanups in partnership with Friends of Ballona Wetlands at their regular monthly event.

The Centinela Ave. cleanups have been very popular because there is where the concrete channel bottom changes to a natural bottom and plants grow along the edges of the creek. There, the creek begins to look a bit less like a storm drain and more like a natural creek with birds, fish and rocks; the entrance park and artistic gate are also attractive. BCR provides tools, instructions, plastic bags, water and light refreshments; you provide the labor. Young children, supervised by parents, are enthusiastic volunteers and are the right age to learn to be good citizens of the planet. We sign for school service learning credit.

Following are a few photos from recent cleanups. We announce them in our occasional email blasts and on our website under "Recent and Upcoming Events". To learn more about how we conduct cleanups, visit our [web page](#). (note: blue text in this newsletter is a clickable link in the online PDF version.)



BCR President Jim Lamm fishes a shopping cart out of the creek.

*(continued next page....)*



Upper left: volunteers from L.A. Conservation Corps remove trash.

Above: BCR's creek information booth, with boardmembers David Valdez and Sandrine Cassidy Schmitt, educates both volunteers and passersby about the watershed, its problems and opportunities.

Left: Volunteer Benjamin Schmitt, 11, stands by bags of trash removed from the creek and awaiting pickup by trash trucks. BCR signs for student service learning credits.

## THE BALLONA WETLANDS RESTORATION PROCESS (AND CONTROVERSY)

### Coastal Conservancy Approves Wetlands Restoration Study Funding

The California Coastal Conservancy held its January 19 meeting before a packed house at the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook Visitor Center in Culver City. On the agenda were projects up and down California, but, as expected, the one which attracted the most speakers was the proposed Ballona Wetlands restoration. BCR's Jim Lamm and Bobbi Gold both spoke in favor of the project, as did many other organizations and agencies, although some groups called it excessive or urged a minimalist or phased approach.

In the end, the Conservancy board voted unanimously for the staff recommendation, authorizing up to \$6.25 million for engineering, hydrologic analysis, geotechnical assessments and public access design. In addition, the Conservancy authorized up to \$240,000 to the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Foundation for data collection, technical review and agency coordination to support environmental impact analysis and permit ap-

plications. Funding for actual construction is not included and will have to come from other sources.

This lengthy process will involve not just the science of wetlands ecology but also public desires for educational and recreational access. Considerable scientific work has been done already and much more is in progress to establish baseline conditions of wildlife and soil conditions.

In previous newsletters we've published both supporting and dissenting views, and we expect all to continue to fight for their ideas of what should be done and how. Next, we present an abridged well-illustrated article, written exclusively for BCR by someone with extensive experience in wetlands restoration. Other concept illustrations, photos and detailed documents are available on the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission (SMBRC) website at [www.ballonarestoration.org/](http://www.ballonarestoration.org/).

# BALLONA WETLANDS RESTORATION: OUR LONG ROAD TRIP TOGETHER

By David W. Kay

*Dr. Kay is President of the Board of Directors of Friends of Ballona Wetlands. As manager of Southern California Edison's Environmental Projects Division, he led a team that restored the 440-acre San Dieguito Wetlands complex in northern San Diego County on lands historically used as an airfield, waste treatment lagoons and agriculture. His full article is available from our website at [www.ballonacreek.org/images/files/davidkayarticle.pdf](http://www.ballonacreek.org/images/files/davidkayarticle.pdf).*

Few of us have ever set out on a road trip without a destination. Such adventures may leave great memories but usually end sooner than expected, short of cash and far from where we thought we were going. As adults, we choose a destination first, map possible routes and then make the trip. If you set a goal and execute a good plan to get there, chances are you'll reach your destination. Otherwise, you'll likely end up far from where you truly want to be.

Much Ballona Wetlands controversy concerns what methods or what land to buy, without considering the desired goals. This disconnect is understandable, given inflexible positions from long-standing disagreements, politics and litigation.

Fortunately, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is our time-tested legal framework that forces us to pick a destination and a reason to go there, plan various routes and detail the preferred mode of travel. By mandating a careful, open process, CEQA can make the journey take much longer than we prefer but ensures a result fair to all concerned. Most importantly, it enables justifiable projects to actually get built instead of being caught in an endless loop of argument.

## Regional Goals Must be Clearly Articulated, But Need Not Enjoy Unanimous Consensus

Many regional goals for the 600-acre Ballona ecological reserve enjoy unanimous support: public open space dedicated to conservation in perpetuity, protected wildlife habitat, well-regulated public access and educational opportunities. Other goals lack consensus and may never be accepted by some. Should the restoration favor aquatic organisms with much open, blue water, or terrestrial organisms with landscape dominated by marsh and upland habitat? Or, balance the two with a mix of many sub-habitats? Shall the restoration be executed by conventional excavation and grading, followed by re-vegetation, or be hand-built in a minimally invasive way? Shall existing and restored wetland be connected to Ballona Creek, Marina Del Rey or directly to the ocean? Who gets to decide our road trip destination, the route and which car we'll drive? We'll all be passengers and we're



Concept illustration of Alternative 5 for Ballona restoration.

chipping in for gas, so don't we have say about where we're headed and how we'll get there? The answer is, "it depends".

Under CEQA, a project is defined by its proponent (developer). The proponent is not required to advance alternatives that don't meet their goals, and the public cannot force them to. The developer must mitigate any significant, adverse environmental impacts of their project, but may abandon the project if mitigation is unacceptable. They can't be forced to advance a project that does not meet their goals. That's state law, and it's consistent with other familiar tenets of American governance, such as property rights.

For Southern California Edison's (SCE) San Dieguito Wetlands Restoration, the goal was to create and restore tidal wetland to offset the impacts to fish eggs and larvae from the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station. The Coastal Commission added additional goals, such as a largely self-maintaining design always open to the tide, as well as wetland and upland habitat composition and performance standards.

Absent prescriptive design requirements, California (the Ballona project proponent) is free to set its own project goals. Represented by the Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) and the Coastal Conservancy, and through a series of many public workshops incorporating the advice of a scientific advisory panel (SAP) and various policy makers, California has decided that Ballona shall be restored, and that an abundance of high quality, productive wetland and upland habitats shall be created, enhanced or preserved, accessible by

regulated public access

([http://www.santamonicabay.org/smbay/Portals/0/ballona/GoalsOpportunitiesConstraints\\_July\\_2006.pdf](http://www.santamonicabay.org/smbay/Portals/0/ballona/GoalsOpportunitiesConstraints_July_2006.pdf)).

Those are our goals for a Ballona restoration, and that is the destination of our road trip. Most of us concerned with Ballona agree upon those overarching, regional goals and are willing to make the journey. Disagreements remain about how to get there, however, and there will be much arguing about those details. That's OK. That's our process.

Our CDFG and Coastal Conservancy have completed over 1800 projects at a cost of \$1.5 billion, many restorations of tidal lands, because we the people have ordered it done. Indeed, Ballona will be one of the last remaining tidelands to be restored by a state program created in 1976 expressly for that reason. Los Angeles regional taxpayers have contributed dollars to fund all of those state-wide projects. Now it's our turn, and our fellow Californians have already made a substantial investment with

ing nothing will not meet our goals for public tidelands, the No Project route is not viable. However, if other alternatives cause significant adverse environmental impacts which cannot be mitigated, then those alternatives are also unviable and "No Project" becomes the default.

Our designated project managers at the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission (SMBRC) have published five different conceptual alternatives (plus No Project) ranging from a very minimal enhancement of existing tidal functions to an extensive re-contouring of the entire 600 acres, including removing the concrete channel of Ballona Creek and replacing it with a meandering vegetated earthen channel (<http://www.santamonicabay.org/smbay/ProgramsProjects/HabitatRestorationProject/BallonaWetlandsRestoration/BallonaKeyResources/tabid/185/Default.aspx>). These alternatives have been vetted at several public workshops to obtain input but are only conceptual alternatives and do not constitute the CEQA-required



San Dieguito project area in 2003, before Southern California Edison restoration

the land purchase and ecological reserve designation.

So, we the people decided to protect, restore and enhance our remaining coastal wetlands; that's the road trip destination. We will have a say about what road to take and what car to drive, how fast to go, etc. That part of the CEQA process has barely begun.

**Choosing a Road Trip Route and a Vehicle**

CEQA requires we advance at least one alternative that satisfies the purpose and need of the project; the regional goals. Usually, more than one alternative is proposed, as well as a "No Project" (do nothing) alternative. Since do-

environmental analysis of alternatives. We expect the SMBRC to begin the CEQA process this year leading to preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). This phase is our opportunity, during a comment period and at public meetings, to tell the SMBRC which alternatives to consider in the EIR, and what potential environmental impacts to analyze. It's **not** our time to argue about goals, because we established them long ago. The EIR must analyze each alternative and recommend an "environmentally preferred" alternative, defended by facts.

We will have additional opportunity to review and comment upon the alternatives

and argue which should be preferred after SMBRC publishes a Draft EIR. The SMBRC must consider all comments, written and verbal and address them in the Final EIR some months later, which is the end of the CEQA documentation process. However, during the Coastal Commission's subsequent permit proceedings we will have additional opportunity to argue for revisions to whatever preferred project emerges from the EIR.

While we can't be sure which conceptual alternatives will be included in the process, the SMBRC appears to be leaning toward Alternatives 4 and 5. Alternative 4

would be a comprehensive restoration of most former wetland areas without removing and re-contouring the Ballona Creek hard channel. A No Project alternative will also likely be addressed.

Conceptual Alternative 4 resembles both the conceptual plan from the Friends of Ballona Wetlands non-profit group and the alternative that was ultimately constructed by SCE at San Dieguito. All three include a balance of subtidal basin (blue water), intertidal saltmarsh (green areas), and non-tidal upland (brown) that incorporate public access. These plans all recognize physical landscape constraints and existing conditions. For example, both Ballona and San Dieguito contain areas of historical infilling, leaving degraded wetland or upland. Subtidal basins could be constructed in filled areas by simple excavation and grading, while areas of degraded wetland could be enhanced by subtle grading and tidal channels. Neither San Dieguito nor Ballona resembles the historical natural wetland area and both are surrounded by dense suburban development and bisected by roads.

Some voices have proposed for Ballona what I will call the Community Alternative, advocating a minimal tidal restoration using only low impact construction methods (community members with hand tools and no mechanized earthmoving). They also advocate additional land purchase. Their goal might look like the Ballona conceptual Alternative 1.

Alternative 1 does not meet our regional goals of a Ballona restoration, simply because it does not restore tidal function to a large enough area of the property, at least half of which was filled in by the material dredged from Marina Del Rey's construction. The Community Alternative simply does not get us to our destination. However, because it has quite vocal backers, the SMBRC should include the concept as an EIR Alternative. Failure to do so will leave us feeling that we never gave that proposal a hard look, and there will forever be second guessing. Also, you never know what good ideas will emerge from a non-viable alternative until we scrutinize it at the EIR level. Some of those ideas could improve the other alternatives.

Returning to our road trip, we decided our Ballona journey destination is a comprehensive restoration, and the EIR will give us viable routes. We also must choose a vehicle. However, a few are advocating that we should not make the trip at all, and that wherever we go, we walk or ride bicycles to get there. That would be great opportunity lost.

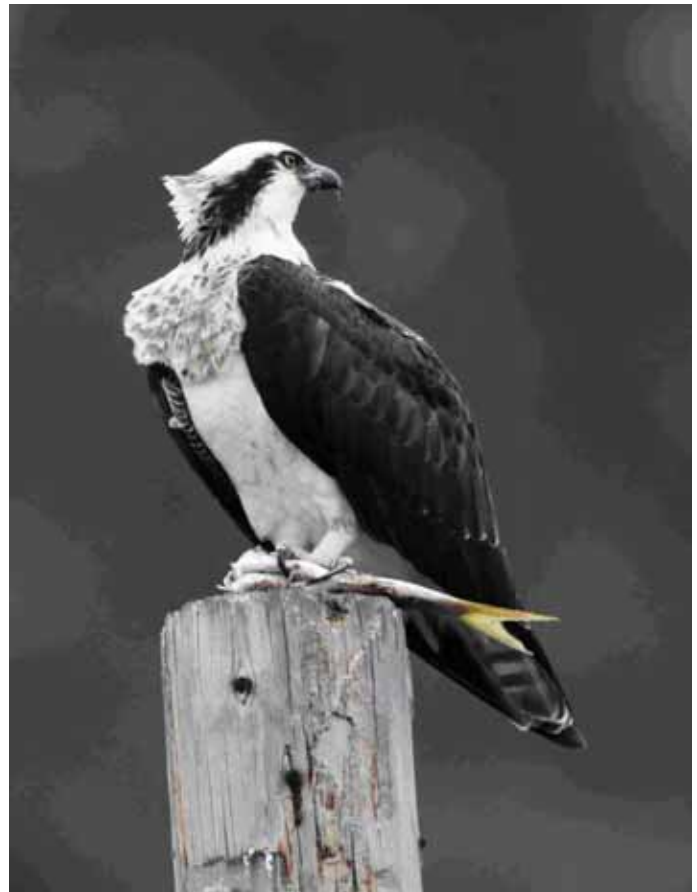
### **The Car is Irrelevant; It's Just a Means to the End**

Californians have much wetland restoration experience. One indisputable fact is that wetland biota recover very quickly after the land has been re-shaped using proper techniques. In San Dieguito, hundreds of acres of upland

and degraded wetland were essentially scraped bare by many large bulldozers and scrapers, and massive volumes of dirt were relocated from one area to another. However, wetland plants and the six inches of soil beneath them were first carefully salvaged, preserved and propagated in the nursery while all the re-contouring was done. Salvaged soils and prepared plant cuttings, along with thousands of nursery-reared plants, were carefully replaced on the new land surface that had been reshaped so high tides would touch much more land than before. The results have been astounding. Just one year after construction ended, San Dieguito meets all but one of the very stringent standards required by the Coastal Commission. The last standard, plant cover, is just a matter of time and should be reached by 2013 even though habitat construction was finished only last year ([http://marinemitigation.msi.ucsb.edu/mitigation\\_projects/wetland/index.html](http://marinemitigation.msi.ucsb.edu/mitigation_projects/wetland/index.html)). Most importantly, the project satisfies the public's original regional goals.

See for yourself next time you drive to San Diego. Exit the I-5 at Via De La Valle, turn east, and then right at San Andres. Or, see the photo archive at <http://sdlagoon.com/>

The goal at San Dieguito (as at Ballona) is a full tidal system supporting a variety of wetland and upland



An osprey eating a mullet caught in the new San Dieguito lagoon.

habitats including some endangered species. That large scale, mechanized excavation and grading was the car chosen for the road trip had little bearing on the final destination, other than the time taken to get there. San Dieguito could never have been restored to its present state in a hundred years with volunteers and hand tools. Even weeding by volunteers has been inadequate.

The Ballona restoration will cover an area nearly 30% larger. In such a densely populated area where quality habitat is so scarce, we should not wait that long, nor settle for less than comprehensive restoration. Bulldozers must be our vehicle, or we will pedal down the highway forever on our bicycles, never reaching our destination in our lifetimes.

### Litigation: Our Third Branch of Government

I have never known a major, modern coastal development project, be it habitat or a shopping mall, navigate

CEQA without a lawsuit. It's just part of the process; we should acknowledge this and plan for its inevitability. Judges decide if a case has merit, and CEQA case law is very complicated. Yes, it slows down our project and costs money, but at least when we are finished we know we've turned over every stone. Someone will be unhappy about the outcome, but that's always the case in our democracy.

The ultimate, actual Ballona restoration will not look exactly like any of the plans in the EIR. The final plan will emerge from our CEQA process. SMBRC must navigate that process openly and transparently, give all ideas fair consideration and validate or dismiss each with facts. In the end, Ballona will be restored in a very good way. Construction will be rapid and biota will take up residence long before we finish decorating their new home. We know this to be true, because we have taken this road trip so many times before. Let's look forward to reaching that familiar destination.

## A SNAPSHOT OF BCR'S PRESIDENT JIM LAMM

### "Connecting Creek and Community"

Volunteering is nothing new to Jim or his wife Cathi, also a BCR board member. They began their married life together as Peace Corps volunteers in Iran. Cathi, a now-retired Culver City Middle School teacher, was the first Lamm to be active on Ballona Creek. Beginning in the mid-1990s, her students took part in creek-related service learning, including helping to paint BCR's 1997 "Postcards From Ballona" mural near the Overland Avenue creek bike path entrance.

Jim traces his involvement with BCR to early 1998. "My work as an architect/manager on the Metro Rail consultant team", he recalls, "had reached an intensity that crowded out family, church and community. At a weekend retreat next to Santa Barbara's Mission Creek, I prayed for a change, and two weeks later found a better opportunity in a less intense situation. The door to reconnecting with other aspects of my life opened wide, and soon I was able to join Culver City's Planning Commission as well as BCR."

After becoming BCR president in November 1998, Jim and BCR have experienced many opportunities and challenges in countless hours of visioning, planning, painting, planting, cleaning, teaching, advocating- and connecting! Our partners are many: public agencies, other non-profit organizations, schools, businesses and, of course, community residents.

For Jim, re-connecting community and creek has become a faith-fueled passion. And this goes beyond "creek" to place, nature, watershed, environment and

helping people and groups connect with each other, find common cause and work together. Having helped create a growing base of plans, projects, and networks, Jim and BCR look forward to more "new beginnings", toward a cleaner, healthier, and more vibrant and attractive creek and watershed.

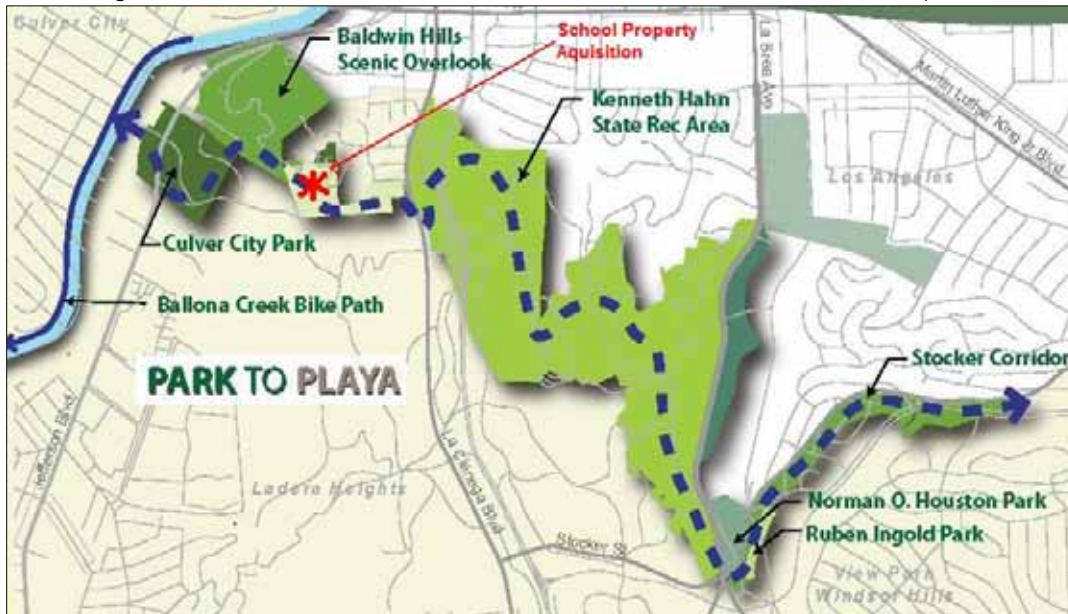


In BCR's various volunteer opportunities, bike rides and other public events, Jim sees peoples' eyes opened to the signs of nature along the concrete-encased creek and to the improvements that either have happened already or are on the way.

Recently, BCR responded to the Del Rey Neighborhood Council's request for help with its volunteer plantings along the Culver Boulevard greenway and paths. "It's been great to re-connect with this neighborhood just downstream from Culver City", said Jim. "We had a good time and got a better sense of how we can work together in the neighborhood as well as at our new creek cleanups." In fact, to Jim, these examples illustrate an old BCR vision whose time may be coming: to help cash-strapped local governments create, care for and maintain paths, waterways, parks, and open spaces-- through nonprofits, volunteers, and partnerships. Are you ready to "Adopt-Our-Creek"?

## ANOTHER LINK IN THE “PARK TO PLAYA” TRAIL

Progress continues in the development of a public trail through the Baldwin Hills to Ballona Creek, eventually becoming a 14-mile continuous trail, called “Park to



plants and restore native vegetation to the Baldwin Hills Park Lands. Invasive plants grow fast and hog resources (water, soil nutrients, and sunlight), crowding out native plants that can't find room to grow and animals that can't find appropriate food or nesting locations, leading to local extinction of species. A volunteer work day is scheduled for Earth Day, April 22, at Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area.

One of the worst offenders is *Ricinus communis* (castor bean), a native of east Africa which likes our climate. It is very aggressive, growing large and fast all around Los Angeles, including the Baldwin Hills and Ballona Creek. There are several varieties of castor bean with strikingly

Playa”, to the sea at Playa del Rey. The trail through the hills is largely complete except for a gap between Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area on the east side of La Cienega and the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook to the west.

different colors, including black-purplish, dark red-metallic, bronze-green, maroon, bright green with white veins, and just plain green.. Its shiny seeds are attractive but extremely poisonous. Please learn what this plant looks like (see photos below) and avoid it.

A portion of that gap was recently closed when Los Angeles County acquired a former Culver City and later private school property adjacent to the Scenic Overlook, thanks to the efforts of the Baldwin Hills Regional Conservation Authority. The exact facilities are to be determined as the County performs various soil tests to see what public uses can safely be permitted; old oil wells had been drilled beneath the property, and a gas pipeline runs beneath it. It will be primarily an access point to the trail with possibly some interpretive exhibits.



Improvements are in progress at two pocket parks in the Stocker Corridor on the east side, at Norman O. Houston Park, owned by L.A. City, and Rueben Ingold Parkway (note unusual spelling of Rueben), owned by L.A. County. Recent additions to the Baldwin Hills park/parkway system are aimed at passive recreation like hiking and walking rather than organized sports.

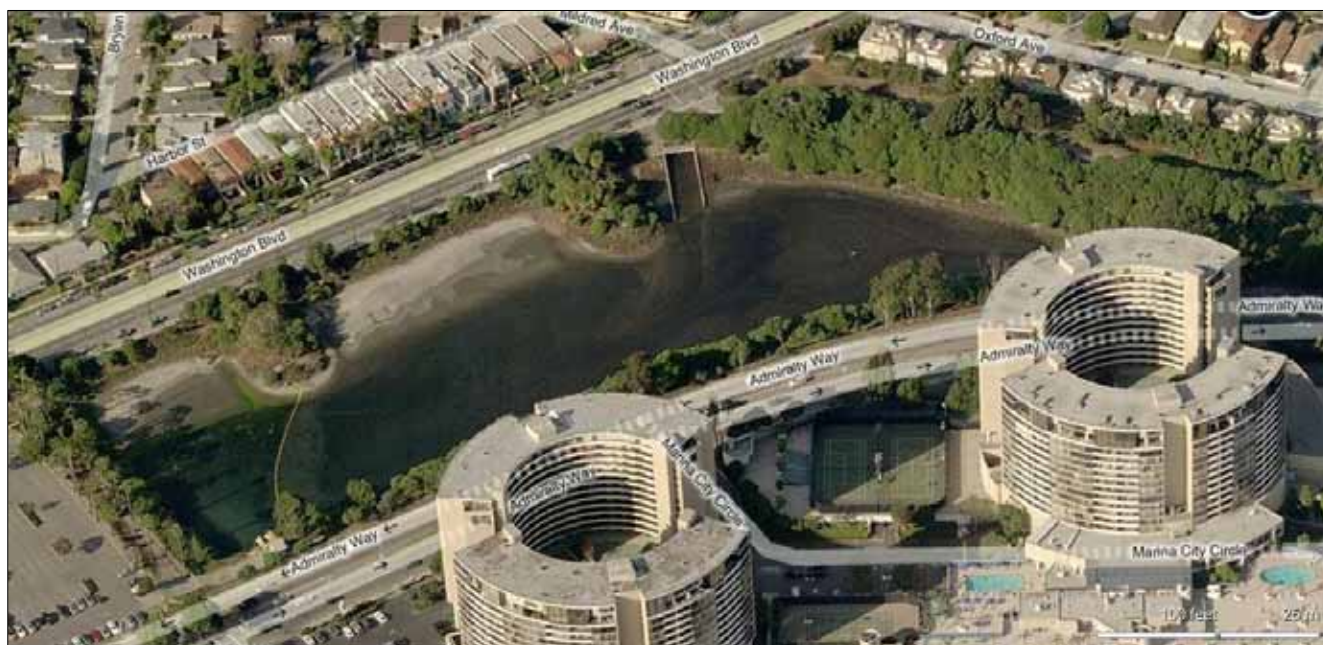
### Baldwin Hills Parklands Restoration Project

Generation Water, in partnership with Baldwin Hills Conservancy, Council for Watershed Health and Mujeres de la Tierra, has begun a 2½ year Habitat Restoration Project to identify, map, and remove invasive



Castor bean leaves and seeds

# THE OXFORD BASIN MAKEOVER



The Oxford Retention Basin is a little pond connected to the north end of Marina del Rey, squeezed in between Washington Blvd, Admiralty Way and the bikepath around the Marina.

Built in the 1960s on the site of a former landfill, the basin collects stormwater runoff from two drains serving Los Angeles City and Culver City. It's also connected to Basin E of Marina del Rey. The balance of saltwater to freshwater thus depends on recent rainfall. It has developed into a little habitat with an odd assortment of birds and other animals and non-native plants and trees.

In the 1980s, when it was popular to give baby rabbits and chicks as Easter gifts to children, rabbits and chickens were often dumped in the basin when they became older and less adorable. The problem was compounded by good-hearted people who brought food to feed the hungry animals abandoned there. Fortunately, this practice has died out as we've become more sensitive to animal needs.



The connection of the basin to the Marina means that runoff pollutants discharged into Oxford Basin do get into Marina del Rey, sometimes into the waters surrounding Mother's Beach. In addition, pollution from boats in the Marina, such as oil and possibly copper leaching out of paint, finds its way into the basin. Local residents living in a low-lying neighborhood on Oxford Avenue, east of the basin, have also experienced periodic flooding of their streets when the water level in Oxford Basin is too high to allow their streets to drain. Despite the various problems of the Oxford Basin, it is nevertheless an interesting location (what one can see of it through the chain-link fence) with much potential for improvement.

Los Angeles County is planning a \$10.3 million upgrade which will convert the basin into a more environmentally sustainable habitat and attractive interpretive location for pedestrians.

The goals of this project are to maintain Oxford Basin's flood control capacity, increase flood protection along Oxford Avenue, and improve water quality within the basin. This project will also improve the aesthetics and recreation opportunities of the site, restore habitat and establish native landscaping.

This project will include the following improvements:

- Excavation of about 2,700 cubic yards of accumulated sediment along the bottom of Oxford Basin to restore basin capacity;
- Construction of a low wall along the northwestern and southern boundaries of Oxford Basin to protect Washington Avenue from possible flooding;



- Modifications to catch basins on Oxford Avenue to increase flood protection
- Removal of approximately 6,200 cubic yards of contaminated soil above the water line to allow new landscaping to flourish;
- Removal of non-native plants and trees, many of which are dying, and replacement with native plants;
- Installation of a decomposed granite walking and jogging path around the circumference (about 2/3 mile), with observation areas, informative signage, and wild-life-friendly lighting to improve public safety;
- Removal of the chain link fence and installation of lower, more attractive fencing;
- Reconfiguration of tide gates and installation of a berm to improve circulation of water and maximize tidal exchange;

The County is in the process of finishing design documents, then securing permits and funding from various state and federal agencies, and hopes to begin construction in 2013.

*Josh Svensson of LA County Department of Public Works reviewed and contributed to this article. Ground-level photo courtesy of LA County DPW. Aerial photo from Bing Maps.*

## AROUND THE WATERSHED

### Culver City Community Green Space Plan

This project will generate both environmental and social benefits in Culver City parks and open recreational spaces, including Ballona Creek.

The City of Culver City and North East Trees, a non-profit organization, received a grant of \$250,000 from the State of California Strategic Growth Council for a Proposition 84 Urban Greening Planning Program for Sustainable Communities. BCR and Culver City Unified School District are participating in its information-gathering phase.

This state program provides funds for projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions *and also* provide multiple benefits. The Culver City Green Space Plan aims to increase the value of Culver City Parks to a broader segment of the local community (those who live and work in Culver City) through passive recreation or wellness activities while also improving the environment.

This planning project (if implemented) will make the City's parks and other open spaces more appealing to those who may not use our open spaces much, such as some seniors, people with disabilities, preschool-age children and children not participating in organized sports, by providing more opportunity for "passive" recreation. Popular passive recreation activities include reading, walking, watching birds or people, attending performances, painting or drawing, photography, playing chess or cards, observing public art, tai chi or yoga.

The plan will be developed through community outreach beginning with online and paper surveys at public places like supermarkets, followed by two public workshops. The information gathered will result in a vision to convert some park and open space to passive recreational space, which will be in addition to existing ballfields and other active recreation. From there, five design concepts will be developed for future implementation. A planning docu-



ment will be developed to outline the final vision for passive recreation spaces in Culver City. Construction funds are not part of the grant.

The survey phase was completed April 1. Two public workshops are scheduled:

- **Saturday, April 28**, 10 am-11:30 am in the Rotunda Room, Veterans Memorial Building, 4117 Overland Avenue, Culver City, and
- **Wednesday, May 9**, 7 pm – 8:30 pm in the Garden Room of the same building.

For more information visit

<http://www.northeasttrees.org/Culver-City-Green-Space-Plan.asp>

**Want to volunteer with BCR?** Some ways to be involved are: staffing our booths at events, planning public programs, researching grant opportunities, planning fundraising events, working with native plant gardens ...and other ways according to your skills, interests, experience and available time. Contact Jim Lamm at (310) 839-6896 or email [jim.lamm@ballonacreek.org](mailto:jim.lamm@ballonacreek.org) .

## New Rain Garden at Baldwin Avenue

We've written about several installations of "rain gardens" in Culver City over the past few years. They are gardens constructed adjacent to streets, intended to capture some rain runoff which would otherwise flow into the storm drain system. The rain nourishes the plants in the garden and also sinks down into the soil and underlying layers, which filter out pollutants.

The City of Culver City has constructed a new rain garden by on both sides of Baldwin Avenue at Farragut Drive, a long block north of Ballona Creek. This rain garden is designed to intercept the initial run-off from a local drainage area of about 5.5 acres and allow it to percolate through the soil. The rocks stabilize a channel with gravel underlying the soil, where the rain will settle and sink. Curb cuts will allow some water already



running down the street to enter the garden.

The rain garden was constructed by removing 355 cu. yd. of the existing soil and backfilling the first layer with 3 feet of rock and the second layer with 2.5 feet top soil separated by permeable fabric. The sides of the rain garden were lined with impermeable liner to assist in containing the run-off within the rain garden.

The plants are drought-tolerant California natives, although a sprinkler system and weekly maintenance will help them become established in the first year or two when rain alone may not be sufficient. Mulch will help keep down the weeds. The cost of \$62,675 was funded entirely by Proposition 50 Grant Funds.



Left: construction photo by Culver City Public Works

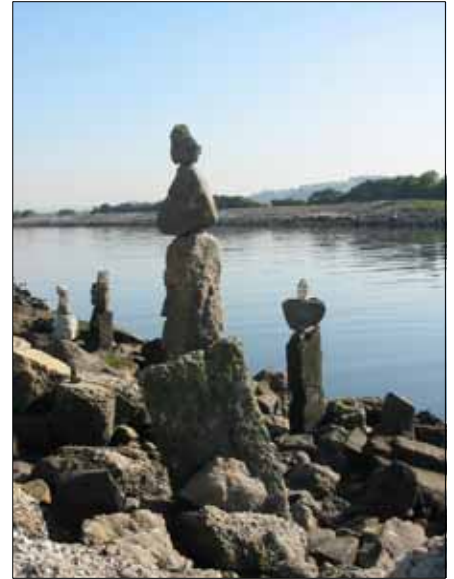
## Do La Brea Tar Pits Pollute Ballona Creek?

A November 29, 2011 article in the L.A. Times blamed overflows of oily water from La Brea Tar Pits for the oily sheen sometimes seen on the surface in places along Ballona Creek. Casual observers often assume an oil spill or dumping somewhere upstream. However, Jessica Hall and other watershed experts note that the L.A. basin and many other places in Southern California are full of oil. (Just look at all the oil pumps.)

In her LA Creek Freak blog (co-hosted by Joe Linton) Jessica wrote in December: "So I'm pretty unimpressed by the observation of an oily sheen there. Back when I first observed it in 2000, city staff told me they were al

ready aware of it, and pretty sure it was from a natural source, observing that tar seeps are fairly common along Wilshire [Blvd] east of the tar pits. There is also fairly high groundwater, which is pumped out of many apartment building basements. Tar seeps + sump pumps = oily water downstream. In 2004, I took Ballona Creek Watershed stakeholders on a 'watershed walk' where we easily observed tar seeps as far east as Lafayette Park, oozing between cracks in the concrete. Indeed, in my 2001 group thesis, Seeking Streams, we mention the active tar seeps at a parking lot across the street from Lafayette."

Bottom line: the tar pits do contribute to oil in the creek, but they're far from the only culprit. It's a natural phenomenon here and in many other streams in California.



### The Rock Master Resumes

Our April 2011 newsletter featured John Nielsen's rock assemblages at the western end of the creek. These collections of three rocks, precariously balanced without glue, mortar or mechanical support, continue to attract public attention. In 2011 he took a 6-month sabbatical in Scandinavia where he created a 6-week similar installation at the invitation of a mu-

seum in Norway and some free installations in public places. John, who calls these constructions "trioliths" (not "sculptures") works along the north creek bank near the Pacific Avenue bridge. The popularity of his work has soared. Many passersby stop to chat or take photos. John and a few others are exploring options to turn his talent into a small stream of income. BCR is in the process of obtaining a permit for his work in the channel. (photo by Michele Bigelow)

### Tafoni: Geology at Work in the Creek

Just a few yards downstream from John Nielsen's rock assemblages are different interesting rock formations, these entirely natural. The little craters or pits on the rocks in these photos are called "tafoni" (singular: tafone).



The geological process involves salt acting on granular rocks such as sandstone. They're generally found near coastal waters and also inland deserts where salt has accumulated. These photos were taken on the north bank of Ballona Creek immediately west of the Pacific Avenue bridge. You can see them from the bikepath extension atop the jetty beyond the bridge. Other examples

are on the north (Marina) side of the same jetty and also on the south bank next to the parking lot. If you go to look, bring binoculars for close-up views and visit near low tide. Many more are on Google Images, some very impressive.



Editor: Bobbi Gold

This newsletter reflects and celebrates the diversity of the people and activities of the watershed and beyond. La Ballona Creek Renaissance Program is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Our Tax ID # is 95-4764614. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. Please mail contributions to Ballona Creek Renaissance, P.O. Box 843, Culver City, CA 90232. For address corrections, additions or deletions, please call (310) 837-3661 or email [editor@ballonacreek.org](mailto:editor@ballonacreek.org). Unattributed photos are the property of BCR.



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Address correction requested

## SPRING 2012 NEWSLETTER

**BALLONA CREEK RENAISSANCE** needs your help to renew the Westside's forgotten river and its watershed!

\$1,000     \$500     \$250     \$100     \$50     \$25    \$\_\_\_\_\_ other

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Please use my entire contribution to benefit BCR's programs, **OR**

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