

Ballona Creek Renaissance...
dedicated to renewing Ballona Creek and its watershed for a healthier, more sustainable environment and community.

(We are also known as BCR)
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Extending Our Reach

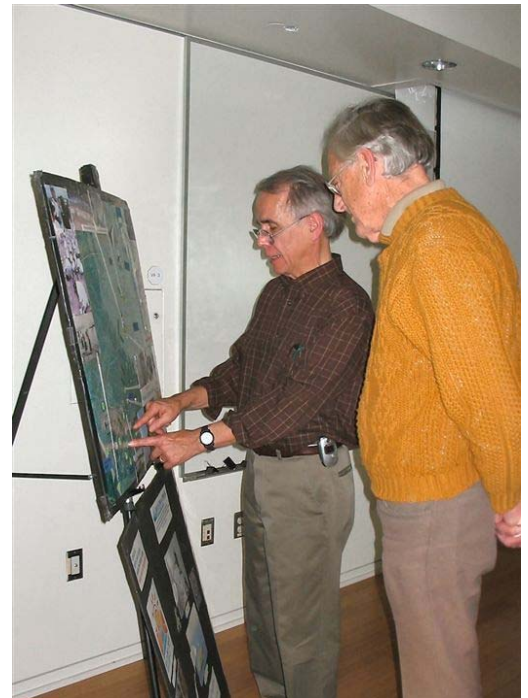
In these newsletters, we keep our readers informed of interesting projects to improve Ballona Creek's watershed and other watersheds, as well as related problems and impediments. What's a watershed? It's the land area in which rain or other water runoff drains into a single creek, river or other body of water.

Unlike recent editions, this newsletter focuses on what Ballona Creek Renaissance (BCR) has been doing toward its mission. For years we've been asked to provide or assist in events such as lectures, plantings and tours in the general vicinity of Ballona Creek, but now many of these requests come from further afield. Inside, you can read about a BCR presentation at a school in the very northeastern part of the watershed near Silver Lake, and about a day-long tour we created for Rededa High School students, who came over the hill from the Los Angeles River watershed.

On page 5, we note the startling appearance of two steelhead trout in the creek, and on page 6 we provide some updated information about measures to deal with the scourges of plastic bags and Styrofoam.

In another significant matter along Ballona Creek, some creekside residents just west of Sawtelle Blvd requested closure of the bikepath access gate in their small Los Angeles neighborhood. On pages 6-7, we discuss the various aspects of this contentious issue from the points of view of both residents and bikepath users. BCR has participated in meetings to try to resolve the problems in a manner that addresses the concerns of all.

Most exciting to those of us within BCR is our growth plan. As an all-volunteer organization we've accomplished much and become well known, but we can do a lot more with an augmented, growth-oriented board of directors and professional staff. On page 4 we describe our plans to increase our capacity to handle more of the watershed's challenges and opportunities, including bigger projects. We hope that many of our friends will want to help us on this journey.



Jim Lamm explains watershed concepts to an audience member at the Playa Vista Library presentation (see pg. 5)

Bringing the Message to Students

A necessary condition for improving our waters is education, teaching people how watersheds work and how they are impacted by our everyday actions. Starting young is even better, as the photos and information make a bigger impact on children not yet hardened by thoughtless acts. This spring, BCR led or participated in three events for students.

On the Watershed's Eastern Edge

On March 4, BCR brought its watershed message to Lycee International-Los Angeles, a French-American school in the Los Feliz/Silverlake area of Los Angeles. At the invitation of Director Deborah Thornburg, a four-person BCR team met with two separate groups of about 25 6th through 10th graders.

BCR Board Members Lucy Blake-Elahi, Mim Shapiro, and June Walden joined President Jim Lamm in leading lively interactive sessions about the flora, fauna, people and places of the watershed. In his introduction, Jim commented on the intergenerational experience to come—the BCR team offering experience, skills, and desire for noticeable progress in the near term, while the students represent new energy and ideas

As a retired Los Angeles teacher and current wetlands docent, June introduced the students to Ballona Creek and the large area that drains to the creek—its watershed. She and the students talked about the life of the watershed past and present—people, plants, birds, mammals, fish, and insects. Lucy, a professional artist and educator, helped the students visualize the watershed and its functions with a 3-D foldout watershed model that she had created, showing the flow of water and the things it can carry with it (see photo).

Long-time community activist Mim briefly related the story about how concerned community members and environmental groups helped save a prime Baldwin Hills site overlooking Ballona Creek from becoming an upscale gated residential development. On that land purchased by the State, the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook State Park is now under construction.

Jim wrapped up the session with a slide show and discussion, starting with aerial views of the watershed. As they saw where we were meeting in a Google Earth view of the Lycee campus, the students learned they were sitting directly above Sa-

catela Creek, now confined to a pipe as it heads for Ballona Creek and the ocean. One student announced that a friend in the Hancock Park area has a stream flowing behind her back yard. Jim showed how that stream might be restored, at least in short stretches, and explained that there is a lot of interest in “daylighting” other streams in the watershed that



June Walden (left) and Lucy Blake-Elahi explain watershed flow in Lucy's 3-D model.

are now buried or enclosed in pipes. The slide images and discussion progressed downstream along Ballona Creek to the wetlands and ocean. In concluding this enjoyable and educational experience, Jim encouraged the students to continue to discover Ballona and to explore possible “green” careers.

BCR Hosts Reseda High School Students

At the invitation of TreePeople's Service Learning Coordinator Julie Ann Taylor, BCR organized and co-hosted a May 28 Ballona field trip for about 90 Reseda High School students. Jim developed a mini-watershed tour connecting the Baldwin Hills, Ballona Creek, and the wetlands.

Early that morning, BCR's Jim Lamm and June Walden carpoled to the San Fernando Valley high school, which adjoins the Los Angeles River. With science teacher Astrid Hernandez, geometry teacher Antonio Galicia, and their students, they boarded two busses. As they crested Sepulveda Pass, they noted that they had left the Los Angeles River Watershed and entered the Ballona Creek Watershed.

At the first stop, Del Rey Lagoon with snowy egrets foraging in the mudflats at low tide, they talked about the network of dunes, lagoons, wetlands and creek, past and present. In two groups led by June and Friend of the Creek Lynn Bossone, they walked upstream along the Ballona Creek levee and along the edge of the dunes to get a sense of the flora and fauna of the Ballona ecosystem and how they relate to one another, the creek, and the watershed.

Next stop on the tour was the Freshwater Marsh, along Jefferson Blvd near Lincoln Blvd., where they were joined by Dr. Edith Reid, Marsh Manager, and LA Audubon's Eleanor Osgood. This constructed wetland provides native plant habitat for many birds and helps naturally clean dry-weather runoff before re-directing it into Ballona Creek.

Back on the busses, the groups visited Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area at La Cienega Boulevard, stopping at Burke Roche Point atop the East Ridge for sack lunches, some free time and a fine view to downtown LA and the watershed around us. Park Manager Shawn McAdory welcomed the students to the park, describing its oil field origins and the former reservoir whose waters rushed through the adjacent neighborhood to Ballona Creek during a 1963 dam break. He also told the students about the various trails and recreation features, the connections with local high schools and groups, and the evolving "One Big Park". LA Audubon's Eleanor Osgood then rounded out the picture, touching on the natural features and creatures of the park and the efforts to restore native habitat.

BCR appreciates the efforts of all who helped make the field trip possible, including TreePeople/ Generation Earth (under whose auspices the trip occurred), Friends of Ballona Wetlands (and Kelly Rose), Audubon Society-LA Chapter (and Garry George), LA County Parks and Recreation Dept. (and Russ Guiney), and the Baldwin Hills Conservancy (and David McNeill).

Starting this fall, TreePeople will open its grounds to an excellent watershed education tour, to help all of us to better understand our impact on our watershed and the ocean and simple things we can do to live more sustainably.

Interested in a tailor-made Ballona Creek or Watershed field trip or tour on foot, bicycle, or bus? We also offer informative slideshow presentations See Page 1 for contact information.

County Earth Day Planting

LA County Public Works held its annual Earth Day planting April 24 on the south bank of the creek just east of Sepulveda Blvd. Students from Farragut Elementary School in Culver City, located next to the creek about a half-mile upstream, participated- a third-grade class taught by Nancy Morgan and a fourth-grade class under teacher Ann Fredal.



A Public Works team had earlier taught the students about watersheds, the original state of the creek, the Native Americans who lived by it, the Spanish settlers, the damage wrought by civilization and concrete, and the value of native plants.

The event began with brief, student-oriented remarks by Karly Katona of Supervisor Yvonne Burke's office; Dean Efstathiou, Acting Director of County Public Works; and Jim Lamm, who reminded the students of the history of the creek and the significance of their planting work. BCR's June Walden, Mim Shapiro and Lynn Bossone; Larry Ebner of the Culver City Garden Club, and Public Works employees helped students dig holes in the very hard dirt and showed them planting techniques.

The roughly 240 plants included Desert encelia, "Monkey Flower", Coyote bush, Deergass and California Sagebrush. County staff and volunteers also planted California Sycamore, Western Redbud and Toyon trees. An irrigation system had been installed prior to the planting. Once established, these plants should survive with little or no supplemental water.

Campos Tacos, La Dolce Vita, Big Tomy's, Ayalas, Sorrento Italian Market, and Trader Joe's donated snacks and beverages for the students and volunteers.

Growing BCR

Originally founded as the Ballona Creek Mural Project, BCR's initial goal was to help beautify the drab concrete channel through various art projects. Our first project was a mural created in 1997 by Culver City Middle School students under the guidance of three professional artists. (This mural, located just west of Overland Avenue, is slated for renovation.)

Since then, our projects have expanded far beyond artwork and aesthetics to include environmental, educational, ecological and recreational goals. And we're becoming involved not just near the creek channel but also throughout (and sometimes beyond) the 127-square-mile Ballona Creek watershed. We've partnered with schools, other organizations and public agencies on projects, and these exciting opportunities are increasing in scope and number. We look forward to a wealth of work and getting more and more of our supporters involved.

But we've reached a limit of what we can achieve in our current all-volunteer form. As our program grows, we must operate in a more businesslike fash-

ion and increase our capabilities. To start, we plan to expand and strengthen our board with a goal of hiring professional staff.

This is a huge leap that will require help from our friends and, of course, lots of money. We expect to hire a professional consultant to guide us, but he or she will only *guide* us, not do that actual work. For that we'll need the assistance and wisdom of our board and advisory council members and our many friends and supporters. If you'd like to participate in this process, please contact Jim Lamm (see page 1). There are plenty of short-term and longer-term tasks. Just ask us! We'll try to find something that fits in with your interests and available time.

If your time is limited and you're already overcommitted, please consider increasing your financial support. Our donation form is on the back, and we'll be conducting a fundraising campaign in the next few months. Good community support is vital as we work with all of you toward a cleaner, greener, and more attractive creek and watershed.

BCR Provides a Service for a Creekside Community Garden

Our April 2003 newsletter described a community garden created by volunteers on a vacant, trash-infested piece of County-owned land straddling Centinela Creek (which flows into Ballona Creek), at the intersection of Mesmer and Beatrice Avenues in the Del Rey neighborhood. Lovingly maintained by volunteers with County permission, it's a mature garden of about 10,000 square feet with paths, benches and many flowering and foliage plants.

However, the County now insists that the Garden volunteers and organizers carry insurance protecting the County against lawsuits from any unfortunate event occurring there as a result of gardening activities. Since the volunteers were not an incorporated group, they could not purchase insurance at a reasonable cost.

For years, BCR has had an informal relationship with the Del Rey Homeowners and Neighbors Association, and so The Garden leaders, Charlotte De-meo and Glenn and Lyndell Martin, approached BCR to see if we could help. We could and did. Since BCR's mission is to foster activities which improve the environment and the watershed, assisting in such community projects is a natural activity for us. We drew up a written Memorandum of Under-



Dedication plaque to the community spirit and volunteers.

standing acknowledging The Garden as a BCR-sponsored activity. Our status as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization enabled us to procure the needed insurance at a reasonable cost, satisfying the requirements of the County. The County has now issued a permit allowing the Garden volunteers to resume work parties for garden maintenance. This simple example shows how BCR works with groups and organizations throughout the watershed.

Steelhead Trout in Ballona Creek!

We kid you not! Just days after the mailing of our February newsletter, with its page 4 blurb about steelhead trout in Malibu Creek, two of them swam up into Ballona Creek. On March 13 a student spotted them under the pedestrian bridge between Overland Ave and Sepulveda Blvd, more than 4 miles upstream. Steve Williams of the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains, who took the photo, estimated the slender, silvery fish at about 15" and 20" long. The fish may have been searching for a place to spawn, but since the creek bottom is all concrete this far from the ocean, they were out of luck.



In Honor of Earth Day

April 22 is Earth Day--every year since 1970. Many environmental "Earth Day" activities take place each year all over the world on or around April 22. Again this year, Earth Day season kept BCR volunteers very active. Here's a brief summary:

On Saturday, March 29, BCR president Jim Lamm gave a well-received PowerPoint slide presentation about Ballona Creek and its watershed at Playa Vista Branch Library, 6400 Playa Vista Drive, Los Angeles . (See photo, page 1) Friends of Ballona Wetlands' Kelly Rose and Santa Monica College Marine Biology and Zoology Professor Ed Tarvyd followed Jim with presentations focused on the Ballona Wetlands and coast. BCR's month-long library lobby exhibit accompanied the program and a related exhibit of Friends' wetlands photos and student projects from the Otis College of Art and Design. Librarian Susan Oppenheimer, who arranged the program and exhibits, was pleased with the excellent turnout and looks forward to more related programs.

BCR also helped with outreach for a Sierra Club hike in the Baldwin Hills earlier that day with State Senator Mark Ridley-Thomas. BCR's Jim and Cathi Lamm were among the 100 participants who enjoyed walking through the spring green along the natural habitat of the trail above La Brea Avenue.

On Saturday, April 19, at the South LA Earth Day Fest '08, Baldwin Hills Crenshaw Plaza, BCR shared

a booth with Assembly Speaker Karen Bass' staff and hosted the Urban Ecology Film Pavilion. Features included *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore's award-winning global warming film, and *The 11th Hour*, featuring Leonardo DiCaprio accompanied by images and information about significant global environmental challenges and what each of us can do to make a difference. Antioch University-LA's Don Strauss and Sierra Club's and UCLA's David Haake, MD, led discussions after the showings. CA Greenworks' Mike Meador, the event producer, invited BCR's participation to help South LA better understand its connection to the watershed and how we can all work together for a better future.

On Sunday, April 27, BCR set up its booth at Star Eco Station Children's Earth Day 2008, on Pearson Street at Jefferson Boulevard, Culver City. Booth staff provided information about the plastic trash problem, bike path issues and past or pending projects, while our June Walden, a wetlands docent, retired teacher, and creekside resident, led visitors through a gate for a tour of the creek itself.

On May 17, with a \$500 Park Enhancement Program grant from City of Culver City, the ubiquitous June Walden and several of her neighbors refurbished the plants from the April 2004 Earth Day planting at the pedestrian bridge between Overland Ave. and Sepulveda Blvd.

Legislative Action on Plastic Trash

Many jurisdictions are now passing laws to reduce the terrible problems caused by discarded plastic bags.

On February 27, the Santa Monica City Council voted unanimously to draft a precedent-setting ordinance forbidding distribution of all single-use plastic shopping bags within city limits. The Council will also consider fees on single-use paper bags, which, although they do biodegrade, cause significant environmental effects when produced. In May, Malibu followed suit with a plastic bag ban giving supermarkets, pharmacies and City facilities 6 months to comply, smaller retailers up to a year. Manhattan Beach enacted a similar ban on July 1, and on July 22 LA City approved a conditional ban, depending on state legislation. Even China will impose fees on bags.

Heal the Bay continues to promote two bills now in the California legislature for statewide limits on plastic bags (AB2058) and reduction of "derelict" (lost or abandoned) fishing gear (SB899). BCR has written letters of support to our legislators. For more information, visit Heal the Bay's website at <http://www.healthebay.org/> or our June and October, 2007, newsletters. The County Supervisors have partnered with Heal the Bay to support AB2058.

LA County Supervisors also attacked another type of plastic trash by directing staff to draft legislation phasing out the use of expanded polystyrene (EPS, commonly known as Styrofoam) food packaging containers at County facilities and at events permitted or sponsored by the County. After each significant rain, fragments of polystyrene cups and food containers are flushed from streets into storm drains, then into Ballona Creek (see photo) and finally to the ocean. Birds, fish and other marine animals eat these fragments, which resemble food.



Homeowners Demand Closure of Bikepath Gate

This spring, two simultaneous problems arose concerning the safety of people using the Ballona Creek bikepath for recreation or commuting and of homeowners living near one of the access points. Without intending to either alarm anyone or minimize concerns, we'll try to put the issues in perspective.

The first problem concerns three separate incidents in which a jogger and some cyclists were roughed up or hit by rocks thrown by youths loitering around underpasses. No one was injured, but one individual's ipod was taken and another sensed that he had been stung with some kind of mild taser-like instrument.

Over the years, events of this kind have happened, some of them more serious, and they represent the sort of thing that can happen in any relatively isolated location, whether it's a parking structure, the alley behind a store, or even an empty beach on a cloudy day. BCR recommends that bikepath users continue to enjoy the bikepath for walking, jogging or cycling but exercise common sense: travel with companions if possi-

ble, and be alert to what lies ahead. And if you see or are the victim of an attack or harassment, however mild, report it to Culver City Police Department (for incidents east of Sepulveda Blvd) or LA Police (west of Sepulveda). Reporting does help.

Perhaps most important to realize is that the more people actively use the bikepath for recreation or commuting, the less likely such events become.

The gate closure was demanded by some homeowners living near the bikepath on the north side of the creek, just west of Sawtelle Blvd. They have vehemently complained of robberies and drug dealing in that location and asserted that the open gate to the bikepath at Purdue Avenue facilitates crime because criminals allegedly emerge from the bikepath, commit crimes or buy drugs from someone in a waiting car, and then escape down the bikepath again. They have also complained that the LA Police Department has done nothing to address the problems and therefore they want that gate closed.

This demand raises a host of related issues, and several public meetings have been held, with more to come. At a meeting at Councilmember Bill Rosendahl's field office on April 3, a few angry neighborhood residents stated their positions very strongly. Speaking in favor of keeping the gate open were other neighbors and many cyclists and pedestrians who use the bikepath. One of their main points is that closing gates presents a danger to bikepath users because it traps them on the bikepath and prevents them from escaping in case of an emergency, such as an accident or a crime in progress. It may also just cause the alleged criminal activities to move to the next open gate instead of ceasing.



View of Purdue Ave. gate, homes beyond and two bikepath users.

Also speaking in favor of keeping the gate open were BCR's Jim Lamm and Bobbi Gold, Otella Wruck of Friends of Ballona Wetlands, and Jessica Hall, former Ballona Creek Watershed Coordinator. They pointed out that the creek is a valuable public resource as a recreational facility and an important corridor for many bicycle commuters, for which access should be increased, not reduced. Indeed, some of the access gates are being developed into attractive rest areas with educational signage to encourage more use. As Jim said, "We've tried to avoid pitting bike path users against the neighbors. We just want to see their issues addressed in ways that don't reduce bikepath safety."

Years ago, two other gates were closed at the request of nearby residents: at Beloit Avenue, just a few blocks east of Sawtelle, and at Jackson Ave., in Culver City between Duquesne and Overland Aves.

Initially, LA Police Department favored closing the gate for lack of sufficient funding for other deterrent measures, such as increased patrolling or surveillance cameras. However, it now appears that such funds might be found through other city agencies, such as the Del Rey Neighborhood Council, and the Police have indicated a willingness to explore other options. In a June 3 letter, LAPD Police Chief William Bratton recommended a 90-day trial closure to determine what effect that has on the alleged crime and to consider other alternatives.

On July 9, a majority of the Los Angeles City Council five-member Transportation Committee (Wendy Greuel, Tom LaBonge, Bill Rosendahl, Richard Alarcon, and Bernard Parks) voted in favor of the 90-day trial closure. Some observers felt that the decision was governed more by politics than by reason and evidence. The matter will now go before the full Council. For more information, contact Jim Kennedy, Field Deputy to Councilman Bill Rosendahl, at (310) 568-8772 or Jim.Kennedy@lacity.org.

Mark your Calendars!

August 23-24: Visit BCR's booth at Fiesta La Ballona at Veterans Park in Culver City. On the web, go to <http://www.fiestalaballona.org>.

September 20: BCR's Ballona Creek Cleanup Volunteer Registration Site next to the Culver City Julian Dixon Library, 4975 Overland Ave., Culver City. The library lobby will feature a BCR display all September.

BCR President Jim Lamm Featured in Westside Publication

The 2008 *neighbor to neighbor Homeowner's Resource Handbook-Westside* includes a page about Jim and his comments on Ballona Creek, watershed challenges, and hope. Free copies are available at Livingreen, 10000 Culver Blvd., Culver City 90232. The full interview also is available online at <http://neighbor2neighbor.net>.

Editor: Bobbi Gold

This newsletter reflects and celebrates the diversity of the people and activities of the watershed and beyond, without necessarily implying specific endorsement by BCR and its Board of Directors or sponsors. La Ballona Creek Renaissance Program is a 501(c)(3) non-profit 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 1068, Culver City, CA 90232. For address corrections, additions or deletions, please call (310) 837-3661 or email secretary@ballonacreek.org.



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Address correction requested

JULY 2008 NEWSLETTER

BALLONA CREEK RENAISSANCE invites you to become a Friend of Ballona Creek!

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