

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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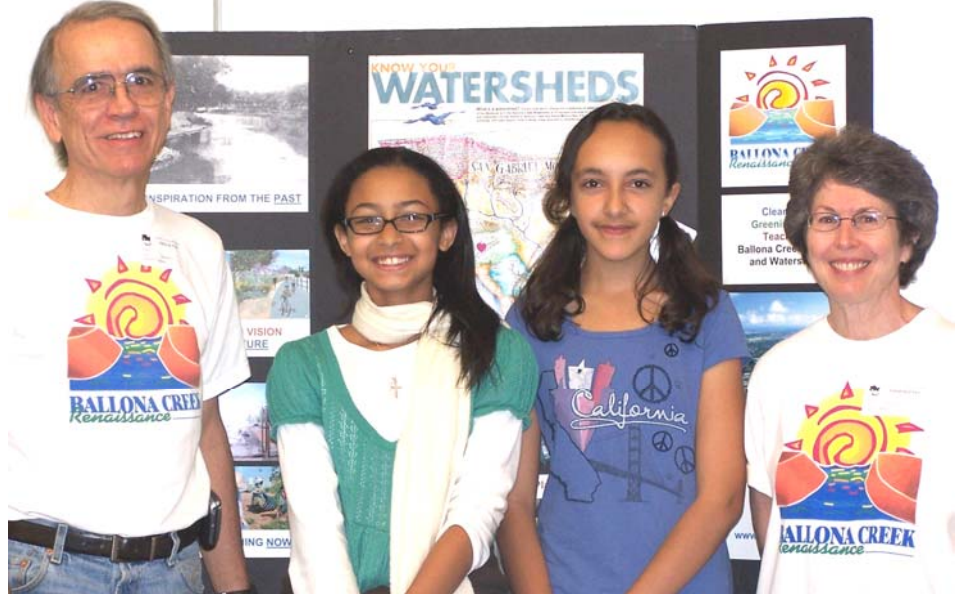
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Culver City Middle School Student Ecology Club

By Jim Lamm

This is one of two articles in this issue about local school programs to encourage environmental awareness and activism among younger students.

In October, BCR was happy to hear from Culver City Middle School teacher Leslie McVay that students had formed an "Eco" Club. On November 21, President Jim Lamm and Boardmember Irene Reingold, both school neighbors, were welcomed at the club's lunchtime meeting by about 40 enthusiastic students, co-founders Kennedy and Eliana, and Ms. McVay.



Jim Lamm and Irene Reingold with Eco Club co-founders Kennedy (left) and Eliana, both seventh graders. (Photo by Leslie McVey)

Even before the meeting started, the students showed Irene and Jim a "No Styro!" petition, for which they had collected over 900 signatures, asking the School Board and Superintendent to ban Styrofoam from the school lunchroom and campus and the entire school district.

With a BCR display board as a backdrop, Jim and Irene introduced themselves, talking about BCR's and their personal connections with the school. Growing up in Culver City, Irene even attended the middle school and its two adjacent campuses, Farragut Elementary and Culver High, while Jim's wife Cathi taught Home Arts at the middle school and collaborated with the science teachers and BCR in creek-related education.

Then Jim led an active group dialog about the extensive Westside area or watershed that drains to Ballona Creek and past the school to the ocean.

They talked about both problems and solutions and simple steps that each of us can begin to take. Plastic trash--which plagues our neighborhoods, creek and ocean--was on everyone's mind. Pulling from his pockets colorful bits of trash he had picked up on his walk to the meeting, Jim commented on its attractiveness to birds and fish and on the enormous amounts of plastic that fill the ocean and threaten the health of the planet. He also talked about three different ways to carry drinking water, pointing out examples in the room. He suggested that we can save money and help the environment and our health by moving from disposable plastic bottles to reusable recycled plastic bottles or--better yet--to reusable stainless steel bottles that don't contain harmful chemicals.

Jim also suggested potential future BCR-related opportunities for the club. These include participation in the re-creation of the nearby *Ballona* mural in the

Spring, creation of a creekside native plant learning garden on the campus, and BCR sponsorship of a club project. Potential synergy with the Marina Del Rey Middle School downstream and its new Marine Science Academy (see next article) also was noted.

Before and after the group dialog, Irene enjoyed lively conversations with students and teachers about the club and related activities. With four committees already functioning (arts, public relations, collections, and fund raising/events), the club is ready to make a difference. At the end of their all-too-short time with the club, Irene and Jim shared a renewed sense of hope inspired by the youthful energy, enthusiasm and competence.

On December 9 Eliana and Kennedy presented the petition to the very impressed School Board, which instructed staff to return to the board with recommendations that would apply to the entire district.

Marina del Rey Middle School Marine Science Academy

If you grew up near a beach, you may remember digging in wet sand to find sand crabs, those one-inch crustaceans that frantically tried to bury themselves, tickling your palm with their churning legs.

Sand crabs are currently the research topic of the Marine Science Academy at Marina del Rey Middle School, an exciting program which opened just this school year after years of planning. Coordinated by teacher Leticia Escajeda, the three-year program began with two classes of sixth graders, who will continue on in seventh and eighth grade as incoming sixth graders sign up.



Ms. Escajeda briefs the students before digging starts.

The research is both academic and hands-on. The students have day-long field trips to the beach in

Playa del Rey to dig up the sand crabs and record observations in a scientific manner. Your editor observed the November 7 event, led by Ms. Escajeda and teachers Terry Seekins and Tee Ung. The 23 students walked along Ballona Creek bikepath from school to the beach, 3 miles each way, which takes about an hour going and somewhat longer going



Stephanie works a cylinder into the sand to collect a sample that may contain sandcrabs.

back, getting some physical exercise in the bargain. (The Physical Education department recently received funds to buy 75 bicycles, which will make the trip faster and easier.)

At the beach, lifeguard Brian Reynolds briefed the students about ocean and atmospheric conditions—water and air temperatures, rip currents (none that day), and natural dune building processes. Next, Dr. John Dorsey, Professor of Natural Science at Loyola Marymount University, described some of the shore birds (who were also hunting sand crabs) and marine animals often seen at that area, such as harmless leopard sharks.



Trace and Jay dump the sand into a strainer bucket.

Ms. Escajeda reminded the students of the procedures to be followed, including not letting the waves sweep away any equipment, and the work began. Using ropes and pins, they laid out a rectangular grid in which to search for the sand crabs. Using cylinders with handles, they extracted a quantity of sand, dumped it into strainer buckets and poured water over it to wash away the sand while retaining any sand crabs and shells. They recorded their observations (size, gender(!) and eggs, if any) on data sheets. Captives were detained until the end of the

field trip to avoid catching and counting the same crabs twice.

On this field trip, they captured 10 crabs. On two previous trips, students found 25 on one trip but only a single crab on the other. One goal of this program is not only to employ the mechanics of the process but also to learn scientific methods and develop an inquiring mind. Why the variation in numbers? Is it seasonal, related to weather or the two-year life cycle of sand crabs? Does the crab colony move up and down the shore?

The data collected by the students is more than academic. The National Oceanographic and Atmosphere Administration (NOAA, which also issues weather forecasts) is investigating parasite infections of sand crabs causing die-offs further north among sea otters and shore birds that feed on sand crabs. The students' data is sent to NOAA.

"The students are having wonderful new experiences," said Ms. Escajeda. "Even though they live so close, many of them have never been to the beach. Some of them have never been on a bicycle, let alone a bike path. It will be great to see the faces of those kids when they are trained on the new bikes and are riding all the way to the beach!"



Jennifer tends the sand crabs until they are released at the end of the field trip.

More about the Academy. This program has educational benefits about Ballona Creek as well. In class and in their travels along the bikepath between school and the field trip site, students learn about the problems of urban runoff and how it affects the ocean and shore animals. Thus, it imparts environmental learning at an age when students absorb easily. They in turn bring the information home and try to convince family members to adopt environment-friendly practices.

Other topics to be studied during the school year will include beach erosion, classifying organisms at the tide pools at Abalone Cove in Palos Verdes, the impact of trash and other contamination on the beach, and water quality testing in Ballona Creek, depending on available funding. In September, students participated in Coastal Clean Up Day with their families, picking up about 50 pounds of trash along Playa del Rey Beach.

These middle school students will also serve as ambassadors of the marine environment by teaching students at Playa del Rey Elementary School how to collect sand crab data and why the little creatures are important. They hope to raise funds for an overnight trip to Catalina or the Aquarium of the Pacific, which the school district cannot fund because of the state budget crisis.

The Academy includes regular core classes such as English and Math which are structured to include relevant science topics and skills. Students thus learn that different subjects are actually connected, not isolated islands of knowledge.

Staff training. Day-to-day leadership of the Academy program is by an assistant principal and the coordinator. Staff training and program planning is through the Centers for Ocean Sciences Education Excellence (COSEE) West, which is supported by the National Science Foundation and includes staff from marine science faculty at UCLA and USC, the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, Aquarium of the Pacific, Cabrillo Marine Aquarium, California Science Center, and Santa Monica Pier Aquarium. Loyola Marymount University staff and graduate students and local environmental organizations will also participate in student education.

Ms. Escajeda is currently working with UCLA and USC to plan another marine science seminar for teachers. "We conducted a week long seminar in June and were very happy with the number of teachers that participated during their vacation."

For more information on the program, to donate or to find out how to determine the gender of sand crabs, call Leticia Escajeda at (310) 578-2751 or e-mail her at lescajed@lausd.net.

TDMLs: Coordinated Efforts to Clean Creek Waters

By Paul Herzog

The 127-square-mile Ballona Creek Watershed contains seven jurisdictions: LA County plus the cities of Los Angeles, Culver City, West Hollywood, Beverly Hills, and parts of Inglewood and Santa Monica. Polluted water from all of them drain into Ballona Creek.

In the late 1990s, a lawsuit by Heal the Bay and Santa Monica Baykeeper resulted in a court order to clean it up. Thus began a decades-long process. The first stage was to determine the existing levels of various types of pollutants (such as trash, bacteria, metals, hazardous chemicals) by laboratory analysis of water samples from the creek. The next stage was to set maximum levels of each pollutant which would be allowed, and to gradually decrease these limits over years. These limits are known as Total Maximum Daily Loads, or TMDLs. All the jurisdictions are responsible for adhering to the limits.

The third phase is implementation, in which practical methods, projects and practices must be put in place

to achieve the required reductions. On November 6, the Watershed Protection Division of the City of Los Angeles convened the first of several stakeholder workshops to begin this phase. BCR and several other non-profit organizations also participated. Implementation plans will be developed over the next two years and will include both physical projects to filter pollutants out of runoff and practices and educational programs to keep pollutants from getting into the runoff in the first place. The "Rain Gardens" proposed by Santa Monica Baykeeper (see page 6) are an example of a simple filtering project.

BCR President Jim Lamm is Chair of the Outreach and Education Committee of the Ballona Creek Watershed Task Force and welcomes your participation in crafting recommendations for the Implementation Plan. For more questions or comments to the LA City Watershed Protection Division, contact Huub Cox, Project Manager (Hubertus.Cox@lacity.org or 213-485-3984).

Milton Street Linear Greenway

Our October, 2007 newsletter mentioned the acquisition by the State of California of a narrow strip of land between the Ballona Creek bikepath and Milton Street, behind Marina del Rey Middle School, just west of Centinela Avenue. The parcel is roughly 1000 feet long and mostly 40-45 feet wide, totaling about 47,000 square feet or 1.2 acres. Plans are being developed to turn it into a linear greenway for quiet, passive recreation-- walking, contemplating, and observing the creek and its bird population-- and to incorporate a winding bike path.

During the summer, the Mountains and Recreation Conservation Authority (MRCA) and the consultant, SWA Consulting, held three public meetings to receive community input and guidance on the project. Initially, some neighborhood residents strongly opposed a new "park" because of problems stemming from public use of the school's athletic field. Upon realizing that the proposed use would not permit the activities causing those problems, the residents generally supported the final park design concept.

The proposed design includes an observation platform extending slightly over the creek bank, meandering walking paths, benches, and small fields of native vegetation. The current straight bikepath would weave gently through the park. There may also be a small demonstration water quality project.

The agency which acquired the property on behalf of the state is the Baldwin Hills Regional Conservation Authority, operating under a Joint Powers Agreement between the County of Los Angeles and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. Grant funds to complete

this important creekside acquisition came from Los Angeles County Proposition A Park Bond funds (50%) and Baldwin Hills Conservancy Proposition 40 Park Bond funds (50%). (Memorize that. It'll be on the final exam.)

The MRCA will apply for other grants to fund the construction. The new greenway will complement the Marine Science Academy at the Middle School.



Above: the currently vacant Milton Street parcel, looking west from the Centinela Avenue entrance park. To the left are the creek and the bikepath. To the right are Milton Street and a corner of the Marina del Rey Middle School athletic field.

Below: an artist's conception of the proposed creek overlook section.



Rain Gardens

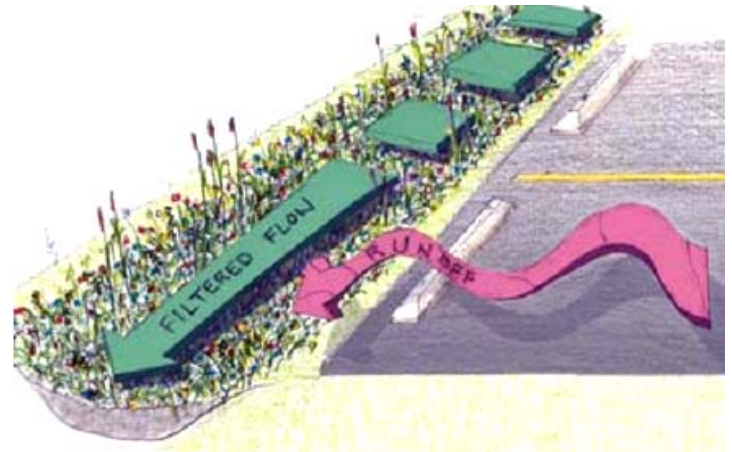
Santa Monica Baykeeper, a non-profit environmental organization, has proposed building, in partnership with Culver City, a set of four "rain gardens" along Ballona Creek as demonstration projects to clean runoff before it enters the creek.

The concept is simple: direct runoff into an area of specially prepared soil and other porous materials that will filter out the great majority of various pollutants, including bacteria, phosphorus (a major component of many fertilizers, which cause heavy algae growth in the creek), and toxic metals such as copper, zinc, and lead. Soil is a fine filter to remove contaminants before runoff ultimately enters groundwater or, in this case, the creek and ocean.

All four proposed sites would be on mostly unpaved areas at the top of the south bank of the creek, next to industrial areas along Jefferson Blvd within Culver City limits. Three of the four are near Pearson Street and one near the Culver City trash facility.

Baykeeper has applied for a grant from the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission, a state agency, which has been allocated \$18 million from Proposition 84. Approved by voters in November 2006, Proposition 84 authorized the issuance of \$5 billion in California bonds to fund water, conservation and other projects.

The grant requires that the completed rain gardens be maintained for 25 years. Routine maintenance measures would include periodic weeding, plant replacement and annual replacement of filter screens. As pollutants collect in the rain garden, the porous substrate would become increasingly contaminated, requiring complete replacement after several years.



Baykeeper has offered to take the lead role in the project, preparing the grant application and conducting all the required analysis, report writing, record keeping, design, contracting and construction management necessary to administer the grant. Culver City would provide staff support during the design and construction period utilizing existing staff and likely some routine maintenance.

Baykeeper previously partnered with Culver City to install the CDS filter on the creek next to Overland Avenue. (See our February, 2005 newsletter, available on our website.) To supplement Baykeeper and City efforts, BCR looks forward to facilitating community participation in planting and maintenance.

Such projects would be great benefits around parking lots. In almost all existing parking lots, rain flushes oil and grease, rubber and metal fragments from tires directly into the streets and then into storm drains, flood protection channels and the ocean.

Bikepath Gate Closure Update

Our June issue noted a request by homeowners near the bikepath gate at Purdue Avenue (just west of Sawtelle Blvd) to close it. They perceived that the gate contributed to crime in their neighborhood. The request was strongly opposed by cyclists, joggers, and walkers because the closure could prevent bikepath users from exiting the bikepath in case of an emergency and thus trap them. Others pointed out the importance of keeping public resources open and expanding their use.

Unfortunately, the problem escalated in two assaults and robberies on cyclists on the bikepath in August and October. One rider was sprayed with mace and his backpack taken, the other was beaten, sustained a broken collarbone and had his bicycle taken. Both events occurred on weekday afternoons.

Despite these incidents, the L.A. Police Department and BCR are not sounding an alarm to stay off the bikepath. Instead, LAPD, LA Council District 11, the Del Rey Neighborhood Council, BCR and others are taking proactive steps, including surveillance cameras, increased police patrolling of the bikepath, and removal of graffiti on and near the bikepath. The Purdue Avenue gate and others will remain open.

While we urge caution, looking ahead, and using the bikepath with companions, we stress that staying away only makes the situation worse because it creates isolation. To make the creek and bikepath better and safer, we must increase public use, not reduce it

Recent and Upcoming Events

Summer/fall 2008 - BCR provided creek and watershed information to hundreds of interested visitors at our outreach booths at Culver City's Fiesta la Ballona in August and Marina del Rey Middle School's first Community Green Day October 25.

October-December, 2008- Jim Lamm taught a watershed-focused Urban Ecology class at Antioch University-LA in Culver City, including Baldwin Hills, creek, and wetlands field trips.

December 18, 2008- BCR participated in Heal the Bay's County-wide "Day without a (Disposable) Bag" event. BCR partnered with Culver City and Heal the Bay, distributing free reusable shopping bags at Culver City's Town Plaza and Westfield Fox Hills Mall.

January 14, 2009- Jim Lamm will provide a Ballona Creek and Watershed update at the Sierra Club's West Los Angeles Section meeting at 7:00 pm, in the Uruapan Room, Veterans Memorial Building, 4117 Overland Avenue, Culver City.

January 20, 2009- The next Ballona Creek Watershed Task Force meeting will feature a discussion of wetlands restoration alternatives and brief updates on the Greenway Committee's work and the revised Bay Restoration Plan. Time and place: 1:30-3:30pm, Patacchia Room, Culver City City Hall, 9770 Culver Blvd. (at Duquesne Ave.)

Early 2009- Watch for an e-update and online news about the next *Tour de Ballona*, a fun and informative bike ride along the creek.

Earth Week, April 2009- As part of the Culver City-funded Ballona Creek mural restoration project, mural artist Lori Escalera will direct restoration of the badly deteriorated "Postcards from Ballona" mural next to the library at the Overland Avenue bike path entrance. Originally created in 1997 by artists Lori Escalera, Lucy Blake-Elahi, and Francois Bardol; local students, Culver City A.R.T. Group members, and BCR volunteers, the colorful mural will be repainted as a Culver City/BCR Earth Day project with assistance by student and community volunteers. *If you would like to participate, please email Lori at design.etc@cox.net.* Two other Ballona Creek murals, "Rivers of the World" at Duquesne Avenue and "Day to Night" at Syd Kronenthal Park, will be refreshed.

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 1068, Culver City, CA 90232. For address corrections, additions or deletions, please call (310) 837-3661 or email secretary@ballonacreek.org.

The Meaning of "Ballona"

We're often asked what "La Ballona" means. We don't know for sure. Some speculate that it's a misspelling of the Spanish word "Ballena", for whale. Others suggest that it refers to a town in Spain, and that may be the truth. An article in a Culver City High School alumni newsletter reads as follows:

"1819- the King of Spain, through his military commander in California, Jose de la Guerra y Noriega, granted permission to brothers Felipe and Tomas Talamantes, and brothers Augustin and Ygnacio Machado to graze their cattle on Rancho La Bayona. The Talamantes family traced an ancestor to the town of Bayona (also spelled Baiona) in Spain, which may have been the namesake for the Rancho, later spelled 'Ballona' ".

The article credits the following sources: Mar Vista Historical Society website; *California Place Names: The Origin of Etymology of Current Geographical Names*, by Erwin Gudde, University of California Press, p.25; and Ballona Valley History at this website: <http://www.cheviot hills.org/Ranchos.htm>.

Using the article "La" ("The") with "Ballona" is not necessary, but some use it out of custom. Historical documents show it both ways. We drop it for simplicity.

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To receive occasional email updates about breaking news, volunteer opportunities and events, sign up at www.ballonacreek.org, where you can also let us know if your email address changes.

Creek and Watershed Tours. 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 to contact us.



P.O. Box 1068 Culver City, CA 90232

Address correction requested

JANUARY 2009 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

I would like to volunteer my time I would like to join the board of directors/advisory council

I would like to donate goods, materials or services (such as office or storage space, computer or office equipment, food for special events, printing, etc.)

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