

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)

Visit our website:

www.ballonacreek.org

Contact us:

Ballona Creek Renaissance
PO Box 843
Culver City, CA 90232

Info@ballonacreek.org

Officers and Directors

Amy Rosenstein, President
Bobbi Gold, Vice President and newsletter editor
Deborah Gregory, Secretary
Richard S. Hibbs, Treasurer
Evan Dumas
Lucy Blake-Elahi
Irene Reingold
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Jim Lamm, President Emeritus
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Dino Parks
Marina Curtis Tidwell

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THESE ARE A FEW OF OUR FAVORITE THINGS!

BCR's creek cleanups have gained wide attention as not only good for the environment but also excellent learning opportunities for students. We've received increasing requests to host cleanups for private groups as well as those open to the public. Most of the cleanups are at Centinela Avenue where it crosses over the creek; there, the concrete bottom turns to natural silt, plants grow along the edges of the creek, there are fish and birds, and it looks more like a creek than the concrete storm drain upstream.

Public cleanups we have hosted so far this year include an April event managed in large part by Culver City High School student Evan Dumas and Boy Scout troop 50 of Culver City. This was Evan's Eagle Scout project, and we couldn't be prouder of the scouts' outstanding work. It was a zero-waste event in which no plastic bags were used to gather trash; volunteers used buckets and dumped their collections into regular city black trash bins and blue recycle bins. Trash totaled 706 pounds and recyclables 163 pounds-- all that in three hours from less than a half-mile stretch of the creek! (Evan's now on our Board of Directors. Read more about him and our new officers on page 3.)



LA City Councilmember Mike Bonin speaks to some of the 200 volunteers at our February cleanup.

Other public cleanups included one in February attended by LA City Councilmember Mike Bonin and some of his staff. This event drew about 200 volunteers who hauled out 520 pounds of trash. Of course, we helped out on September 20, Coastal Cleanup Day, at two Culver City sites on the creek at Overland Ave. and Duquesne Avenue.

September 29 was UCLA Freshman Volunteer Day, when new students have a choice of dozens of volunteer opportunities. This year, we hosted about 115 UCLA freshmen and a dozen experienced upperclassmen as leaders at a creek cleanup at Centinela Ave. As with the general public, it was an eye-opener for students who've never seen what debris travels from our streets down our storm drains into the ocean. We hope this experience will encourage some of them to choose careers in improving our environment.

Private cleanups were also scheduled for several private school groups and for employees of Possible, one of our business partners. We're grateful when these groups can help with the expenses of providing equipment and storage for the events, procuring permits from the County to be in the creek and trash disposal services from LA City or Culver City.



Some of the 115 UCLA students at our creek cleanup on UCLA Volunteer Day.

Other educational activities include a classroom lecture about the creek and wetlands, followed by a guided tour of the wetlands. Our partner organization Friends of Ballona Wetlands has assisted in providing the tours.

We've partnered with other organizations and public agencies in restoration of public parklands, such as Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area and the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook. There, invasive non-native plants are pulled out and replaced by natives appropriate to the specific area, providing food and habitat for native wildlife. More such volunteer opportunities will be announced; see our website (www.ballonacreek.org) for dates and locations or to sign up for our "e-news" for email announcements of events.

Another partner is **Walk 'n Rollers**, a program to encourage youth and families to find safe routes to school or the Creek by foot, bike, skates or scooters, not cars. <http://www.walknrollers.org/walk-bike-ballona/>

Finally, we love having an educational booth at Culver City's annual August mega-party, Fiesta la Ballona. Our display includes maps and photos showing both the beauty and the challenges of the creek and wetlands and the watershed, with volunteers eager to answer questions and share information. This year, BCR board-member/artist Lucy Blake Elahi provided materials and stencils for visitors to trace outlines of wetlands birds such as egrets and herons (see photo at left). ■



A young visitor to our Fiesta la Ballona booth shows her tracing of an egret using Lucy Blake-Elahi's stencils.

Jim Lamm's legacy

Sixteen years ago, Jim, an architect working on the Metro Red Line rail and other projects, joined BCR and a month later became president. He may have been at least partly influenced by his wife, Cathi, a Culver City Middle School teacher: her students helped paint BCR's first mural, Postcards from Ballona, just a few steps from the middle school campus. He continued full time work while serving BCR for about a year and a half.

In March, 2000, Jim left his paid professional work to lead BCR. In recent years he also taught some Urban Ecology classes at Antioch University, among other civic responsibilities. He's known especially for his outstanding networking: bringing together the people of many nonprofit organizations, public agencies, schools and community members to work collaboratively on the problems and possibilities of Ballona Creek and its watershed. To paraphrase an old commercial, "Nobody doesn't know Jim Lamm."

Last spring, Jim stepped down as president, leaving a legacy that will be hard to match. He remains on our advisory council as President Emeritus and is still involved in our outreach.



New officers and boardmembers



L. to R.: Evan Dumas; Deborah Gregory, Secretary; Amy Rosenstein, President; Bobbi Gold, Vice-President

Amy Rosenstein moves up from Vice President to President of BCR. Amy continues BCR's tradition of architects as president. Bobbi Gold becomes Vice President, and Deborah Gregory, who joined the board in January, is secretary.

We are most thrilled about our newest board member, **Evan Dumas**, who's in his senior year at Culver City High School. Evan has been biking along the creek since he took off his training wheels. He first approached BCR when he asked to involve his Boy Scout Troop 50 in planning and helping to run BCR's April creek cleanup as his eagle scout project. Evan has also created a club at Culver City High School to promote awareness of the condition of the Creek and its

estuary. We know Evan will be with us for just a short time, as he plans to go away to college next fall, but he's one of our most important ambassadors.

Deborah Gregory takes over the position of secretary from David Valdez, whose family increased by three members since he first came to BCR. Deb grew up with a creek in her back yard and now lives beside the Sepulveda Channel, which feeds into the Ballona Creek. She has many fond memories of hours spent enjoying the water and is proud to be a part of BCR to help spread the word about this great natural resource right in the middle of our large metropolis. Deb is the Director of Design and partner at DIGBAR, an Interior

Design and Architecture firm in Del Rey which incorporates art and sustainability into its projects.

Amy Rosenstein, President. Amy became interested in the environment of Ballona Creek after frequent bicycle rides along the bike path to the beach. Although it's a functioning flood channel, she wondered why the experience could not be more pleasant, as in some other communities. She has a strong interest in bringing nature back to the Creek. She believes that if everyone pitches in a little, a lot can get done. Amy is a practicing architect who has lived in Culver City for over 15 years.

Bobbi Gold, new Vice President and continuing News-

letter Editor, is one of the founding members of BCR, dating back to a meeting in December, 1994. She's been an officer or boardmember ever since, serving previously as secretary and treasurer. She comes from a background of computer programming in the aerospace industry and later in commercial computer applications. Her involvement in Ballona Creek arises from her enjoyment of running and riding her bike along the creek. She had previously been involved in a project with the L.A. Police Dept. to educate bikepath users about safety on the bikepath and was the subject of a photo and story in the LA Times in 1990.

Rich Hibbs, CPA, whom we profiled in our April 2011 issue, remains our treasurer. ■

MILTON STREET PARK

Our January 2009 newsletter described plans for a narrow strip of land between the Ballona Creek bikepath and Milton Street, across from Marina del Rey Middle School (MDRMS), just west of Centinela Avenue. The parcel, roughly 1000 feet long and 40-45 feet wide, totaling about 1.2 acres, was envisioned as a linear greenway for quiet, passive recreation—walking, contemplating, and observing the creek and its wildlife—while maintaining the existing bike path.

In 2007, the Baldwin Hills Regional Conservation Authority, (a partnership between the County of Los Angeles and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy) acquired the property on behalf of the state. 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%).

Construction finally began in August and will take at least eight months. For now, high fences with screens prevent passers-by from watching the progress. The final design looks very different from the original conceptual drawings shown in our 2009 newsletter. An unusual feature is the use of "gabion" walls, loose stones contained inside sturdy rectangular wire baskets instead of being cemented together. Aside from being less costly to construct, gabions have certain advantages, such as the ability to adjust to subsidence without cracking. They're not comfortable seats, but regular wood or metal benches will be provided. (The illustration at the top of the next page shows a gabion wall at the right, with grey and white stones.)



The Milton Street parcel before construction, looking west, with the creek and bikepath on the left and Milton Street and a corner of the Marina del Rey Middle School athletic field on the right

When done, the park will feature California native vegetation, way-finding signage, interpretive displays for public education, a rest area with bike racks for bike path users, pedestrian pathways, a new public access point with decorative gateway, stairs and ADA-access ramp, an outdoor classroom for students at MDRMS, overlooks, seating, fencing, a drinking fountain, and an elevated shade structure for bird watching.

Cleaning rain runoff. Currently, all rain runoff flows untreated into the storm drains located at the East and West ends of Milton St. and directly into the Creek. The

Watch the stunning video about Ballona Creek and BCR by professional videographer Blake Hottle on our home page: www.ballonacreek.org.



Above: an example of a Vegetated Stormwater Curb Extension (VSCE)

Left: artist's conception of the new Milton Street Park. Note gabion wall at right side of photo.

project will add a sidewalk on the south side of the street, install "Vegetated Stormwater Curb Extensions" (VSCEs) to both sides of Milton Street, and plant native trees and a variety of shrubs. VSCEs are planted areas that extend into the parking lane and have openings in the concrete curb for rain runoff to enter (see photo above right). The water percolates down into the soil, removing pollutants such as trash and oil, and is eventually routed to the creek. This will improve water quality in Ballona Creek and the Pacific Ocean.

Of course, it's just an infinitesimally tiny portion of the total drainage into the creek, but small projects inspire more and larger projects.

Construction will cost \$1.4 million for the park, funded by the Baldwin Hills Conservancy, State Coastal Conservancy, and LA County Proposition A money. The rain treatment project costs of \$500,000 will come from the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission. ■

PARK TO PLAYA (P2P) TRAIL: IMPROVEMENTS AND CONNECTIONS CONTINUE

Quick summary: It's a 14-mile public trail through the Baldwin Hills from east to west, then down to Ballona Creek and out to the sea at Playa del Rey along the creek bikepath. (See map pg. 6.) The Ballona Creek section of the trail has been complete for many years, although it continues to be enhanced with amenities like attractive entrance parks, benches, drinking fountains, interpretive signs and other educational elements.

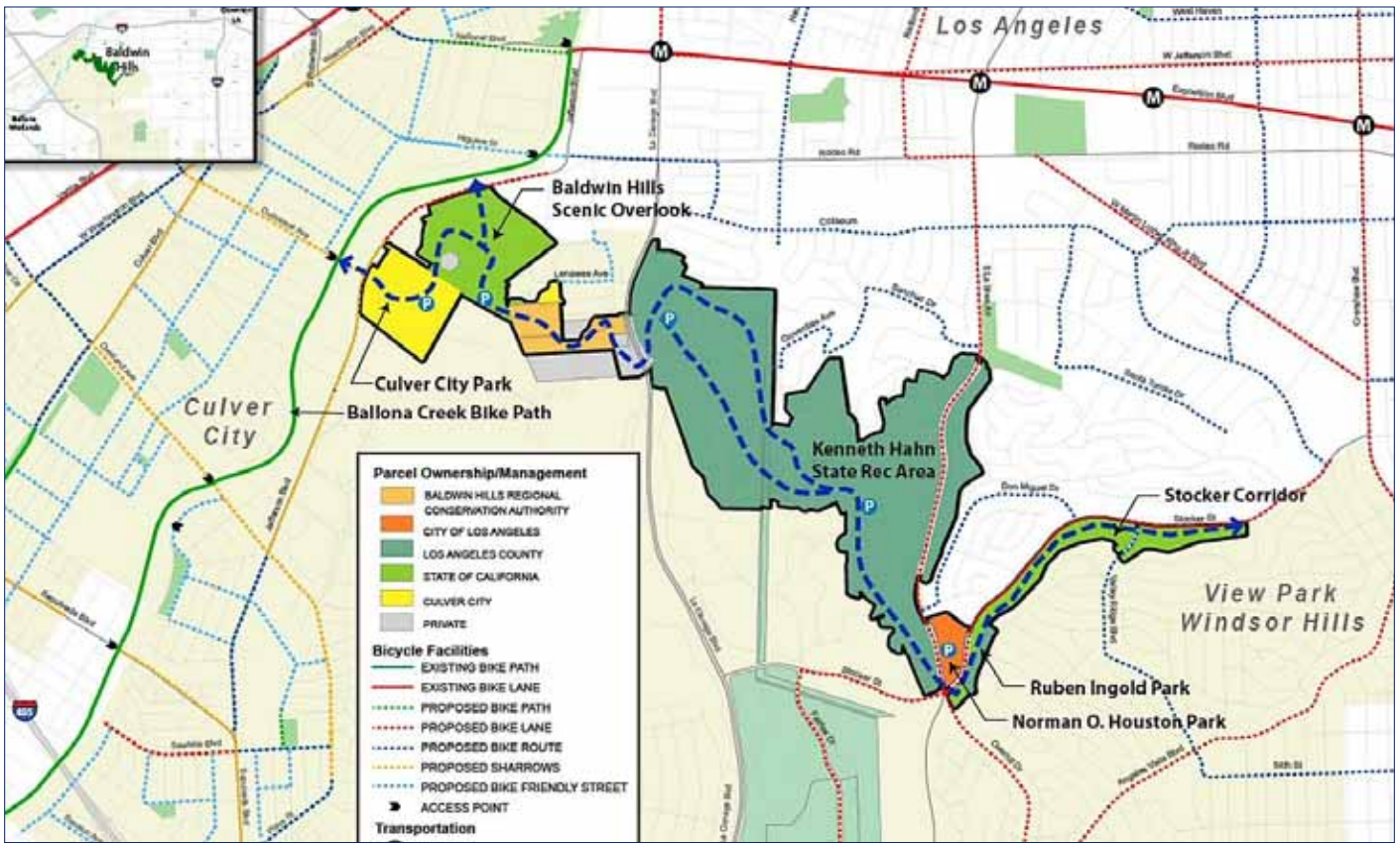
The portion through the Baldwin Hills is also evolving as missing links are completed and restoration work continues. The largest piece, Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area, opened in 1983. Among its many areas is the now green, tree-filled location of the reservoir that broke in December, 1963, destroying many homes and killing five people in the community below.

Other pieces that have been acquired by public agencies and added to the trail are the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook (a State Park), a trail along Stocker Street at the east end of the hills, Norman O. Houston Park (L.A. City), Reuben Ingold Park (L.A. County), a small interpretive nature center (L.A. County; not yet developed),

and Culver City Park (Culver City baseball facilities). The "Eastern Gateway" entrance to Kenneth Hahn SRA from the La Brea Avenue side at Don Lorenzo Drive makes access from the east easier.

Connecting the parts is in progress. A trail through the oil fields and across La Cienega Blvd will connect the Scenic Overlook with Kenneth Hahn SRA; its alignment is not yet settled, pending resolution of privacy and noise concerns of residents of adjacent homes. The trail along Stocker Street exists but is narrow and uneven with only two benches; it will be developed with a broader path, more benches, signs, and other amenities. Reuben Ingold park sits on top of a steep bluff and is not accessible from Stocker Street trail, but some day it will be. Crossing the "Five Points" intersection of La Brea Ave, Stocker Street and Overhill Drive safely on foot is a challenge (in fact, for drivers, too, because left turns are prohibited in some directions).

But some good walks and hikes are already available, at the Scenic Overlook and on 5 miles of trails in Kenneth Hahn SRA (the visitor center has trail maps).



Restoration projects. A large part of the long-term work is restoring native landscape and habitat, which was degraded by invasive plants, concrete storm drain channels, and of course oil field operations around the edges of the parks.

The non-profit organization North East Trees has been engaged in several projects in recent years. One project planted 1,500 native trees along the eastern side of Kenneth Hahn SRA, helping to offset the emissions of carbon

from the adjacent oilfields and heavy traffic on nearby freeways and major surface streets. Another replaced over 1,000 square feet of a concrete storm drain along La Brea Ave with a natural stream-bed bio-swale that drains into an infiltration basin. Stormwater now flows over native soil and through new native plantings where it's cleaned as it infiltrates into the ground instead of into a storm drain to the creek. The upper part of the original concrete storm drain was broken into sections and used with river rock to build walls for the upper part of the streambed. See photo below.



Previously, two non-profit organizations, in partnership with the Baldwin Hills Conservancy and the Council for Watershed Health, led a 2 ½ year Habitat Restoration Project to remove invasive plants and restore native vegetation in Kenneth Hahn and the Scenic Overlook. Many volunteers dug and planted. (See the article and photos in our Spring 2012 issue, available on our website.) Recently, Los Angeles Audubon Society, joined by LA Unified School District and California State Parks, received a grant of \$40,000 from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for a similar project to recruit 500 volunteers to remove non-native vegetation and plant 1,662 native plants and 80 trees. ■

Pump all the water out of the creek, clean it and return it to the creek??

The City of Los Angeles plans to transform a decommissioned sewage overflow treatment facility located in Culver City into a water cleaning facility. It will install a rubber dam to divert water from the creek, treat it to remove trash, bacteria, heavy metals and oil and grease, use some of the cleaned water for irrigation and return the rest to the creek. The project will be able to handle all normal dry-weather flow and some of the additional flow during rain.

This project will serve 85 square miles of the watershed (65%). LA City will receive a \$2.5 million grant from the State's Clean Beaches Initiative Grant. LA will partner with other watershed agencies (Culver City, West Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Inglewood, LA County) to move towards permitting and pre-design phase. No start date has been announced. ■



Location of creek water cleaning project in Culver City.

HELP! HELP!

No, we're not in imminent danger, but every organization needs some good volunteers. Most of our volunteer opportunities don't require special skills or experience. Above all, we need people who believe in what we're doing and are eager to tell the world. Here are a few examples:

Setting up and breaking down our booth and equipment at creek cleanups. We have a lot of equipment that we keep in a storage facility. On cleanup day it has to be brought to the site and set up; after the cleanup is over, some of it has to be cleaned, and all of it needs to be returned to the storage locker.

Fundraising. Every organization needs some money, too. You don't have to ask your friends and family members, but there really are a lot of businesses that believe in our mission and would be willing to give if

someone like you just asked. We'll help you plan an approach. (A donation form for you is on the back page, or you could use Paypal on our website.)

Keeping our website updated. At first there will be some extra instruction on how to do this, but mostly you'd need just a basic familiarity with some word processor program.

Planning public programs. We're eager to tell people what we do, so maybe someone like you can help us find groups who want to hear us. Or plan a program by a knowledgeable person for whom we can sponsor a public talk on a subject related to what we do.

If you think you might have some time available on a somewhat regular basis, please contact us at info@ballonacreek.org.

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. Unattributed photos are the property of BCR.



P.O. Box 843 Culver City, CA 90232

Address correction requested

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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

Other _____

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

I'd like a tote bag for my donation of \$50 or more, **OR**

I'd like a T-shirt for my donation of \$50 or more (circle size: S M L XL)



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