

# Altadena Foothills

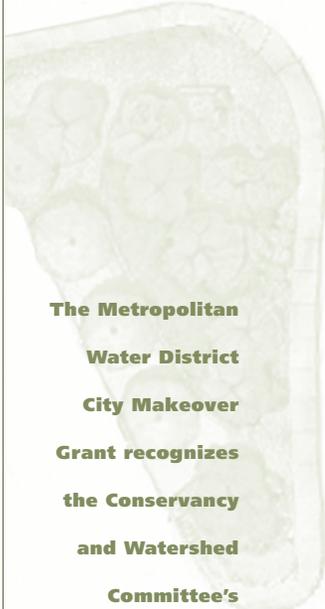
[www.altadenafoothills.org](http://www.altadenafoothills.org)

# C O N S E R V A T O R

Newsletter of the Altadena Foothills Conservancy

Number 9 January 2006

## Conservancy Awarded \$20,000 Grant



**The Metropolitan  
Water District  
City Makeover  
Grant recognizes  
the Conservancy  
and Watershed  
Committee's  
Water-Wise  
Design for a  
local Pocket  
Park**

**THE ALTADENA FOOTHILLS CONSERVANCY**, in conjunction with Watershed Committee, pro bono designer Mark Goldschmidt for Altadena Heritage, Supervisor Michael Antonovich, Los Angeles County Department of Public Works, City of Pasadena, Foothill Municipal Water District, Arroyo Seco Foundation, Mountain View Cemetery, Theodore Payne Foundation, and other partners, is developing an oak woodland pocket park on a vacant county right-of-way. The park will create a piece of upland habitat on the urban Altadena/Pasadena border.

From construction through realization, the park's partners will demonstrate to the community how to use native and water-wise plantings and recycled materials to create a California sublime landscape. As a mini-watershed itself, it will show how the watershed functions. It will also reflect Altadena/Pasadena's historical and natural heritage and act as an informal gateway between the two communities. People living in nearby Spanish and Craftsman style bungalows around the park will gain tremendous amenity.

Located on the southwest corner of Woodbury Road and Marengo Avenue, the 8,000 square foot, gently sloping triangle of gravel was created in 1965 when Marengo was realigned by the county. The

land has remained unimproved for 40 years. Although often perceived to be Pasadena, it is actually in the unincorporated community of Altadena; the city begins 500 feet south of Woodbury. Neighbors living on "Old Marengo," a cul de sac created by the realignment, have planted three small trees on the otherwise empty patch. Its irregular shape and size make it impractical for other uses, but perfect for a small park. It is accessible to the public, including those with disabilities, has a bus stop, nearby street parking, and is lighted by overhead street lights.

**O**ur concept is to turn this barren triangle into an oak woodland "mini-watershed" that internally drains and demonstrates use of native and other water-wise plantings. Hardscape elements include arroyo boulders, recycled concrete retaining walls, and permeable paving. Extensive use of mulch, along with existing decomposed granite soil, will check erosion and keep moisture and rain on the land and out of storm drains — facilitating recharge of the Raymond Basin. Low retaining walls will serve as informal shaded seating areas. The park is big enough for gatherings of 20 to 30 people.

Seasonal flowering shrubs, wildflowers, native bunch grasses, and perennials will create year-long interest for gardeners. Oak trees, scented herbs such as

native salvias, butterfly-attracting flowers, and hummingbird-attracting lobelias will create habitat in the park which is designed for extremely low maintenance.

**W**e think commuters and pedestrians will be surprised, refreshed, and inspired by the beauty of this authentic California landscape. We anticipate the small space will inspire big ideas about creating beauty with native and water-wise plantings. Its scale is akin to what many home owners have to work with, connecting gardeners with ways to create their own sublime California outdoor space. Signage will describe the plantings and the historical significance of land at the border of Pasadena and Woodbury Ranch, which predated Altadena.

The Conservancy plans to break ground in 2006. In December, Public Works officials approved the conceptual plan and agreed on technical specifications provided by the Conservancy. The next step will be to submit working drawings for approval. The County will then issue a construction permit. Look for more information about this park in the new year. Questions regarding this project should be addressed to board member Rick Carron.

*The past six months have flown by. Since starting my new job as Executive Director of the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council, I have been consumed with learning a new field (all things water related) and a new discipline (directing a nonprofit). Much of what I am learning is rubbing off on my volunteer work with the Conservancy, and that is a good thing.*

*The Conservancy has been working mostly on two projects during the past six months: the pocket park on Marengo and Woodbury and the watershed education program.*

*Work on the pocket park has been guided and goaded by our very capable Rick Carron, contract manager extraordinaire. As you may have experienced yourself, working with the county on any permit is not easy. We are trying to do something different, and that makes the permit process orders of magnitude more difficult than usual. Rick's patience and persistence are paying off, and we hope to be able to break ground on the pocket park in 2006.*

*Our watershed education program has been focused on getting the film finished and on trying to find funding for the curriculum component. Michele Zack has been working hard with our film student, Sally Levi, and also with Pasadena Unified School District (PUSD). I am grateful for Michele, who puts in plenty of volunteer time for the Conservancy even though she is also our paid consultant. We continue to find and apply for grants, but in this highly competitive world with not enough grant money to go around, we haven't yet found our grant. Currently we are working with PUSD on a state grant to use a program called Adopt a Watershed in the schools.*

*At the same time, we have been working behind the scenes on some land activities. Those activities have not yet come to fruition, however, so I have to keep mum until we have an agreement signed. You will be hearing more in 2006, I hope, as we finish the film and pocket park, and sign one or more agreements to purchase open space land.*

*This November we were saddened to hear of the passing of Ray Considine. Ray had volunteered to emcee our Fifth Anniversary Celebration in May, but fell ill the day of the party. In the short time I knew Ray, I learned that he was a remarkable man with a generosity of spirit that was inspiring. Ray's passing leaves a hole in the world that won't easily be filled.*

*Volunteers are the glue that holds our society together, and we gain so much from our volunteer work. I know that all of you are generous people who give of yourselves in so many ways. What did you do in 2005 that made a difference in your life and others? Who are you grateful for? Whose life made the most impact on yours in 2005? In 2005, about 65.4 million people, or 28.8 percent of the population, volunteered at some time during the year.*

*Best wishes for a happy and generous New Year!  
Nancy L. C. Steele*

## **Who Needs Water Anyway? or, Why Does Altadena Have a Watershed Committee?**

*By Nancy L. C. Steele*

In 2004, Altadenan and Town Council member Michele Zack started up a Watershed Education Committee for Altadena. Michele formed this committee after attending a six-class course called "Watershed U." What she learned inspired her to want to work with others to help educate the public on conservation and other watershed issues. Begun under the auspices of the Town Council, the group now functions independently.

### **What is a watershed and why does it need a committee?**

We all live in a watershed, and understanding what that means is an important part of environmental literacy. Where does the water go when it hits the ground? If you live east of a line that runs through Rubio Highlands, the water runs to Rubio Creek, which drains to the Rio Hondo. The Rio Hondo watershed drains to the Los Angeles River near Whittier Narrows.

If you live to the west of the Rubio Highlands, you are in the Millard Creek watershed, which drains to Arroyo Seco, and from there to the Los Angeles River. The Arroyo Seco joins the River underneath the freeway interchange north of downtown – where the 110, 5 and 2 freeways come together.

In both cases, your water flows to the ocean. Thus, if you throw trash into the street, or dump extra pesticides on your flowers, it all eventually enters the ocean.

There is another part to this story, however, that complicates things a bit. What about the water that seeps into the ground? It goes into an underground aquifer, the Raymond Basin. Is that a good thing? Yes! Studies show that even water that falls onto an urban landscape is purified by the filter of the earth by the time it gets to the aquifer.

How is this relevant to us? You might be interested to know that Altadena imports, on average, about 50% of its drinking water from a combination of the Colorado River and the San Francisco Bay-Delta. The rest comes from local surface (Millard Creek) and ground water (Raymond Basin). For comparison, the level of imported water used by our neighbors is: South Pasadena 100%, La Cañada 80%, and Pasadena 63%. Pasadena also uses water from the Raymond Basin.

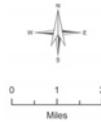
You still might be asking why you should care about water. If you pay your water bill, won't the water keep flowing?

I won't say it's a crisis – you probably don't want to hear about another environmental crisis – but experts are worried about our water supply. The fish populations of the Bay-Delta are crashing, probably from a combination of too much water being taken for us in the south and too much pesticide inflow from agriculture in the Delta. Our local water supplies are increasingly contaminated, and fish in our local ocean are often unsafe to eat.

Parts of the Raymond Basin have been contaminated by pollutants deposited by the Jet Propulsion Laboratory decades ago, and local water companies have to treat the water before it is drinkable. This increases the cost and decreases the amount available. Our water supply from the Colorado River is also in danger. Droughts in the West have reduced the flow, leading to a situation where the states with rights to the water are fighting over less and less water.

So the water agencies are trying to figure out how to increase our local water supplies. We in Altadena are in a better situation than some communities, but even so we need to reduce our water use and keep the water that flows to the ocean cleaner so it can be reused. We also need to get used to the idea of “showers to flowers,” as they say in San Diego, or recycling treated water for use in landscaping.

*Rio Hondo and Arroyo Seco Watersheds, Los Angeles County. Map created by the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council, 2005.*



### **What is the Watershed Committee doing?**

The goal of most watershed education programs is to increase awareness about these issues. Teaching people how to incorporate native and drought tolerant plants into landscaping is an important goal since perhaps half of all water is used outside. In addition, the more water people let infiltrate into the ground on their properties (instead of entering the storm drain system), the more local water becomes available.

The Watershed Committee has been a prime mover in two watershed programs since its inception in Spring 2004. The committee is making things happen and raising community awareness in Altadena. The successful Take Care of Your Piece of the Watershed Homeowners' Workshop in November 2004 focused on landscaping with natives. The workshop was attended by 60 people and co-sponsored by the Altadena Town Council, Altadena Foothills Conservancy, Arroyo Seco Foundation, County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works, Foothill Municipal Water District, Metropolitan Water District, Pasadena Department of Water and Power, and the Theodore Payne Foundation.

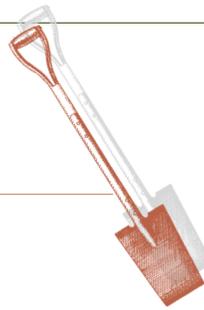
Following this success, the committee put forward the idea to create a “water-wise” pocket park on a small



piece of land at the intersection of Woodbury and Marengo. The goal is to establish a “mini-watershed” that uses native plants and captures water that falls onsite and seeps into the ground instead of running off. The Conservancy stepped in to apply for a Metropolitan Water District 2005 City Makeover grant, which we were awarded at \$20,000 (see cover article). This project is due for construction in 2006, although we are all being challenged by the Los Angeles County permitting process.

If you'd like to be a part of the Watershed Committee, please contact Michele Zack, Committee Chair, at <http://altadenawatershed.org>. Other key members include Nancy Steele, president of Altadena Foothills Conservancy and Executive Director of the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council; John Zoraster, engineer of large-scale water projects in Southern California; Jeff Chapman, Watershed Coordinator for Arroyo Seco Foundation; and Susanna Dadd, artist and plantswoman specializing in native and drought tolerant plants.

# Land & Trails Update



## Altadena Trails

By Robert Staehle  
Chair Natural Resources Committee

What good are our beautiful foothills if people cannot get into them to enjoy them? Nearly everyone enjoys the views afforded by our foothills and the water they help supply to us. But to get the most out of our wild open space, one really must get into it, and the best way to do that is on trails.

Many miles of trails cross Altadena's foothills, with most going into the National Forest and up in elevation (sometimes steeply!). Every weekend hundreds of people hike, bike, ride horses, stroll, watch birds, walk their dogs, or otherwise get into Altadena's foothills using the few trails and access points we have. Before outside settlers arrived, that's how all the Tongva (or Gabrielino) Indians got around, some by routes we still use today. Over the last three decades, some long-used trails and access points have been lost, often because trail users didn't take action when a public thoroughfare was cut off by storm damage, fences, gates, or building.

**A**ltadena Foothills Conservancy has focused on conserving land in its natural state, and the parcels we have protected have trails across them. Indeed, these trails in part motivated users and funding organizations to provide the money to purchase the land from willing private sellers. Without this protection, these parcels would have had structures and fences erected, diverting or blocking existing trails.

Other Altadena organizations have an even stronger focus on trails, and have attracted considerable support to maintain existing trails and reopen those that have been blocked. Individual property owners in many cases

have been extremely helpful and cooperative, suggesting trail routings across their land and working with local groups and county government. For nearly the duration of its existence, the Angeles National Forest has accepted, and now decidedly encourages and trains, volunteer groups to help with trail maintenance. The County Department of Parks and Recreation has recently begun encouraging volunteers to make up for budget shortfalls using the very people who enjoy trails the most. On many weekends a year, one can find trail crews in or near Altadena doing a variety of work, most at little or no taxpayer expense. Employer-sponsored, equestrian, bicycle, and historic interest groups, plus a few ambitious individuals, round out the reservoir of well-trained trail workers who benefit our entire community.

**D**uring the past few years, some situations have become contentious, as a few property owners have cut off public access across their property. This is nothing new, and in many ways began in this country with the availability of barbed wire which some cattlemen used to fence off better grazing ground. La Cañada Flintridge has experienced similar episodes as housing expands into the San Gabriel and Verdugo Mountains. Because the problem is not new, a whole body of law has built up around cases going back to the 19th century. In short, the laws in general favor historic public thoroughfares and keeping them open across otherwise private property. Absent this solution, huge tracks would have quickly become "land-locked," affording access only to those who control small parcels on their periphery. Based on these laws, some

groups and individuals, including Save the Altadena Trails (STAT), Los Angeles County government, and the state agency Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, after failing to find amicable solutions with a few landowners, have sought legal remedy in the courts. Two lawsuits to protect trails have been decided in favor of public access. Both trails are above El Prieto Canyon: one provides access at the end of paved El Prieto and the other provides access to the Owen Brown Gravesite.

Our Conservancy works exclusively with willing landowners, but we are obviously aware of these

court cases. We are proud of our role in preserving public access to our foothills through land conservation. It is unfortunate that not all access issues can be resolved amicably, although many have been. It is up to the courts to decide matters that are brought to litigation. If we are able to serve our role well, through education that gains land-



*A Humboldt Lily (Lilium humboldtii) in Millard Canyon, supplying nectar to a pale swallowtail butterfly (Papilio eurymedon).*

owner cooperation and through donations or purchase of easements and property, we can minimize the need for people to go to court. We fully understand and support the right to seek legal recourse, but we think most people would rather be enjoying the outdoors.

**E**xperience in other parts of the country, and with our neighbor La Cañada Flintridge, has shown that public trails increase property values, people's satisfaction, their health, and their children's education. It is no wonder that people are willing to fight for this and to pay for it, with everything from volunteer labor, to land and easement donations, to outright purchase. The national Rails-to-Trails Conservancy has helped localities install thousands of miles of trails. The Finger Lakes Trail has been established from scattered, unconnected segments in the 1970s to a continuous path across over 400 miles of rural New York state. Experience has shown that crime does not follow trails; has anyone seen a thug carrying a big-screen TV down a footpath frequented by health- and nature-minded community members?

We believe one of the most positive developments in Altadena was in 2003 when a county official in the Chief Administrators Office asked local community members to establish a trail advisory group. After well-advertised and well-attended community meetings, the Altadena Crest Trails Restoration Working Group (ACTRWG) was established. With no budget, no official legal standing, and not even letterhead, this all-volunteer group continues under its Steering Committee, with open debate and on-the-ground work that has brought new trail segments to Altadena, cooperation with land-owners, and a credible plan to restore ...you guessed it...the Altadena Crest Trail, continuously approximately 13 miles from Arroyo Seco to Eaton Canyon. Who is on the Steering Committee? Anyone who attends their open monthly meetings (see [www.altadenatrails.org](http://www.altadenatrails.org)). If you want to help out, you can too.



*A group of visitors gather for a presentation during the Trail Day celebration.*

### **Altadena Crest Trail Day**

On October 22, the ACTRWG sponsored a Trail Day celebration to commemorate newly identified routes on the ACT. Nearly 100 trails enthusiasts of all ages participated in activities that included several hikes of varying length, a mountain bike ride and an equestrian ride, all converging on the Zane Grey trailhead on East Loma Alta Drive. Nearby residents welcomed and thanked the ACTRWG for our work restoring and promoting the trails. Representatives of the Los Angeles County Parks Trail Crew, La Cañada Flintridge Trails Council, Rose Bowl Riders, Pasadena Chapter of Sierra Club, and Save the Altadena Trails came to celebrate the progress made this past year, repairing many miles of the Altadena Crest Trail, refurbishing and show-casing several long forgotten trailheads, and blazing and recording new mapping data on proposed trail segments. Thousands of neighbors have been re-introduced to the wonders that lie right in their own backyards.

### **Oaks Planted, Brush Cleared**

*by Robert Staehle  
Chaney Trail Project Area Leader*

With the start of the rainy season, we have planted ten new oak trees (Coast Live Oak, or *Quercus agrifolia*) on the Conservancy's Andrea Wilson Triangle along the west side of Chaney Trail Road.

Thank you to all who helped clear brush and plant oaks before and after Thanksgiving: Jimmy Cajina, Tim and Bonnie Callahan, Susan Dimotakis,

Sameer Etman, Kelly Kimball, Cece Koenig, Michelle Markman, Bill and Matt Morse, Hien Nguyen, Max Parish, Lori Paul, Barbara Rowe, Peter Schroeder, Kris Topaz, and especially Scott Wilson of Northeast Trees. From teens to seniors and the rest of us in between, all did a superb job, and many enjoyed the refreshments courtesy of Lori and the Conservancy.

We also hauled up a substantial amount of junk. Joe Dean accepted the smaller pieces to be placed with his trash, and he provided water for the oaks. Several in the neighborhood hauled the disemboweled sofa and other junk that unknown people dropped on the land. Thanks go to the unknown benefactor who hauled away the cut brush stacked along the road; maybe a county crew, or ?

Ten oak saplings were donated by Northeast Trees, and brought by Scott Wilson and Jimmy Cajina, who helped to plant them. Six other small oaks were discovered while looking for places to plant the larger ones, so we know the soil and conditions are good for them. The new ones are protected with mesh gopher guards; the existing ones will have to fend for themselves. I scattered a variety of Theodore Payne Foundation's (in Sunland) low-growing (and therefore less fire danger) native wildflower seeds on the east-facing bank we can see from the road. With luck, the birds won't get them all, and we'll see some new blooms in a few months.

Thanks again friends and neighbors.



**T**o all the individuals and businesses  
who gave their generous support  
to AFC in 2005

Thank  
You

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Mr. and Mrs. Robert Allen  
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Altadena Historical Society  
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# Sightings



LONNIE FEHR

**Ringtail Cats** (*Bassariscus astutus*) are rare and seldom seen even when known to be around. We had heard of sightings in Santa Anita Canyon, but this is the first confirmed sighting in Altadena.

The Millard Canyon Campground host heard a commotion and got this photo. These animals have a bushy raccoon-like tail, big highly directional ears, and large eyes adapted to the night. Their body is about a foot long and they are related to raccoons and bears. They eat insects, small rodents, birds, snakes, lizards, carrion, and available fruits. Check out <http://www.desertusa.com/mag01/mar/papr/ringt.html>.



LORI PAUL

**Humboldt Lillies** (*Lilium humboldtii*) locally rare, bloom in El Prieto Canyon. These spectacular flowers are about 5 inches across, appearing in June more or less, aided by streamside moisture.



LORI PAUL

**Chinese Houses** (*Collinsia heterophylla*) are common in the Altadena foothills with stalks of pale lavender flowers. This one is along El Prieto Creek, in the kind of habitat they prefer under mature oak trees.

## Donating to AFC

Most of you send us a check when you want to make a donation. We love checks! Here are some other ways you can advance the goal of preserving open space lands in Altadena:

**Charge It** — If you have an American Express card, you can charge your donation to AFC. Go to: <http://home3.americanexpress.home3.americanexpress.com/cards/charities/donateonline.asp>, click on the link to "Donate Now," enter Altadena Foothills Conservancy in the nonprofit name line to search, then follow the directions for donating. AFC will receive slightly less than the amount you've donated, as the nonprofit that processes the donation, JustGive, takes about 2.5% to cover processing, so please keep that in mind when you make your donation.

**Donate Appreciated Assets** — Appreciated assets, such as real estate, stocks, bonds, or securities, can be donated to AFC and you will receive a tax benefit.

**Donate Your Car** — AFC has now received two donations from Cars 4 Causes because Friends donated their cars in our name. Call 1-800-766-CARE (1-800-766-2273) or visit <http://www.cars4causes.net> for info.

**Leave a Legacy** — You can make a future gift to AFC by naming AFC in your will or living trust or listing AFC as a beneficiary of a retirement account or life insurance policy. You should consult your attorney for the exact language, or contact AFC for assistance. If you make one of these arrangements, let us know so that we can thank you today.

The Altadena Foothills Conservancy is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization; all donations are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. Altadena Foothills Conservancy, P.O. Box 3, Altadena, CA 91003-0003, Tel: 626-798-3235

### Contributions to Altadena Foothills Conservancy

Please renew your membership as a Friend of the Altadena Foothills Conservancy or become a new Friend.

- I am renewing       I am a new Friend
- \$10    \$30    \$50    \$100    Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Please contact me about a larger gift to AFC.

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Thank you for your support.

# Project Report



## **Watershed Education Film Nears Completion**

Last year the Altadena Foothills Conservancy embarked on an innovative environmental educational film project. Many of our members along with major donors Doris Pankow, Altadena Heritage, Supervisor Michael Antonovich, Dorn Platz, and the Altadena Historical Society, had the vision to support it. "Eaton's Water" will tell the story of early water development in our foothills — it is a dramatic film told from the point of view of Benjamin and Alice Eaton, early pioneers who made settlement of the area possible.

Art Center College of Design student filmmaker Sally Levi promises to deliver the finished product early in 2006. So far we have a film trailer that you can view online at <http://ultimatewasteoftime.com/EATONTrailer.html>. You will need Windows Media Player and a fast connection to view the trailer.

We are working with Pasadena Unified School District to integrate the film into 6th grade science, 8th grade history, and 11th grade Earth science classes. We've met with Superintendent Dr. Percy Clark and Felicity Swerdlow (in charge of secondary programs), and treated the entire school board to a viewing of the trailer at the October 11, 2005 meeting. Everyone is enthusiastic about the project, and now we are looking for funding to work with teachers in pairing the film with grade-appropriate curriculum and California Standards.

Please help us get this important film into the schools to ensure that it reaches its full potential for youth environmental education.

For more information please contact Nancy Steele at 626-429-5404, or e-mail: [nsteele@altadenafoothills.org](mailto:nsteele@altadenafoothills.org); or Michele Zack, e-mail: [michelez@sbcglobal.net](mailto:michelez@sbcglobal.net).

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Newsletter of the  
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