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Mount Diablo continues to benefit from the recession and a buyer’s market. “Save Mount Diablo has just purchased 7.4 acre ‘Marsh Creek-V’ for $125,000, our most recent purchase on Marsh Creek Road and crossed by Marsh Creek,” said Ron Brown, SMD’s executive director. The property is located east of Clayton and adjacent to the Marsh Creek Springs event facility, just downstream from our MC-II and – IV properties. MC-V is especially rich in biodiversity. Part of the reason is that it’s a volcanic dome with unusual geology.

“We were able to make a purchase deal at a very low price and in near record time,” said Brown. “This is the sixth 5 or 10 acre parcel Save Mount Diablo has acquired in the past year for $125,000 or less.”

Marsh Creek
At its simplest the property corner is crossed by Marsh Creek at the mouth of the Dark Canyon segment of Marsh Creek Road. More importantly it is adjacent to a large box culvert where the creek crosses underneath the road, a key wildlife connection. One of a series of unusually steep knolls near the northeast corner of Mount Diablo State Park, it’s one property away from two other SMD parcels and also rises to another large property protected with a scenic easement. The property’s section of the creek is lined with mature sycamores, oaks and willows. It is habitat for the threatened California red-legged frog and is also used by a wide array of wildlife.

All told, in the upper and middle stretches of Marsh Creek (area upstream of Marsh Creek reservoir in Brentwood), SMD has recently protected more than a mile of creek in small parcels.

(continued on page 6)
We all know about the serious budget issues for the state and for our State Park System. We are now faced with the closure of nearly one third of our state parks. As we continue our mission to preserve, defend and restore Mount Diablo, and look for ways to solve the long term funding needs for State parks, we also continue to help Mt. Diablo State Park resolve its immediate operational problems. This year SMD paid for routine maintenance on two septic systems to keep restrooms open. We are currently developing plans to repair the dangerous conditions that exist on Mt. Diablo Scenic Road and restore the historic beacon on the Summit museum.

When Art Bonwell and Mary Bowerman founded SMD in 1971 they thought that their effort of preserving the mountain could be accomplished in 5 years mainly with State funding. Well, here we are - 40 years later and we are busier than ever. Together with our allies we have protected more than 100,000 acres of natural lands. Recently the important wildlife (and future recreational) corridor from Black Diamond Mines to the State Park was permanently protected (see article on page 10). But 80,000 acres of natural lands are still privately owned and threatened by development in places such as the Tassajara Hills and Doolan Canyon (see pages 10 and 3). Our job is not done – we continue to face complex challenges in our continued effort to reassemble the Diablo wilderness that has been so fragmented over the past 200 years.

SMD continues to acquire land from willing land owners and to get involved in public policy issues affecting urban growth and land conservation, at times through aggressive community organizing and political advocacy. We are successful in our efforts because of the relationships we have built. We are honored to have a wide array of sponsors, partners and supporters like you. As we continue our efforts together, let’s remember our collective responsibilities for protecting and healing this earth.

Now that we are about to enter our 41st year, let’s keep in mind the promise of what might be, the beauty in the world, the wonders of nature, the complexity of this amazing landscape and what it represents for ourselves and for future generations. We do this work because we have a duty to leave the planet in a better condition for our children than when we got it from our parents.

**From the Executive Director:**

**Diablo Watch** is printed on recycled paper with soy based ink.

### 2011 Mountain Star Awards

Mountain Star Awards recognize individuals and organizations whose contributions have been significant in helping Save Mount Diablo’s land preservation programs. The 2011 Mountain Star Awards are sponsored by Dave and Dana Dornsife. Save Mount Diablo thanks them for their continued support.

This year’s Mountain Star Award recipients are:

- **Award for Science and Discovery**
  - David Loeb of Bay Nature Institute, *Mountain Star Media Award*
  - Doug Burr, Phil O’Loane, and Sally Scholl of People Opposed to Measure W Breaking San Ramon’s Urban Growth Boundary 2010, *Mountain Star Leadership Award*

Congratulations to our 2011 Mountain Star Award winners. Their dedication and pioneering spirits help to ensure that people and wildlife can enjoy all of Mount Diablo and its foothills for future generations.

Read about their inspiring feats at SaveMountDiablo.org under About SMD.
The Tassajara Valley and hills are sensually sublime but from road level you might not notice, since you’re probably focused on traffic, or barns and ranchette houses. From Highway 580 looking north, the hills seem almost featureless where they’re not marked by East Dublin development or a patchwork of vineyards closer to Livermore.

You need to look down from ridges above, watch the shadows lengthening near sunset, or get deep into the spring green hills to understand the area’s grassland beauty, its wetlands and steep knolls. Even if the area weren’t beautiful, however, Save Mount Diablo would still defend it as an agricultural buffer and transition to nearby parks.

What few maps show is that public park lands have been spreading, framing the Tassajara region along ridgelines on three sides of a rectangle roughly five by eight miles-on the north from Mount Diablo to Los Vaqueros, on the east along Morgan Territory Road, and on the west down Tassajara Ridge, past Hidden Valley Open Space, across the county line and into Dublin.

Meanwhile, at the south end of the region along Highway 580, Dublin has preserved some land as a condition of its East Dublin Specific Plan, and wildlife agencies required that one of the East Dublin developers preserve 530 acres of the 838 acre Brown Ranch just to the north. Dublin and Livermore have also had a Memorandum of Understanding for years that there would be a greenbelt between the two cities in the Doolan Canyon area. Livermore has made significant steps to honor the agreement. Dublin recently took the first step toward breaking it.

For some time Save Mount Diablo has been urging the East Bay Regional Park District to create a Tassajara Hills park. The real opportunity came in 2008 when the District’s Measure WW bond was approved.

The measure includes acquisition funding for expanding existing parks throughout the East Bay but it also mapped out new park proposals, including six additional parks around Mount Diablo.

One of the new parks is known as “Doolan Canyon-Tassajara Hills” and acquisition is just beginning. As parks are created around Diablo, SMD works to expand, connect and defend them.

In October the Park District made its first acquisition for the new park, the 640-acre Schmitz property at the north end of Doolan Canyon Road, and adjacent on the north to the Brown Ranch. Lands south of the mountain and close to freeways are considerably more expensive than to the north but the City of Livermore committed $2 million to the $6.4 million price tag, $2 million came from Altamont Landfill mitigation funds, and the remaining $2.4 million from the District and Measure WW.

The Schmitz property is spectacular. It has almost no trees but includes dramatic land forms and significant wetlands including a 10-15 acre pond, depending on the season.

The bad news is that Dublin, which will take years to digest thousands of unbuilt homes southwest of the new park in its East Dublin Specific Plan, is considering still further expansion. In December Dublin approved a “General Plan Amendment Study” request by Pacific Union Homes for 1,990 senior residential units on 1,450 acres adjacent to the new park’s southern boundary and stretching almost two miles toward Highway 580. Ironically the developers included small parcels along Doolan Canyon Road in their proposal which they don’t own, some of whose owners object.

They’re calling the massive proposed development “Dublin Preserve.” Livermore has an Urban Growth Boundary, Dublin has one on its western boundary but not on the eastside; it will need approval from the Alameda County Local Agency Formation Commission to add the land to its city limits. The process is just getting started but SMD and our allies will be monitoring the “Dublin Preserve” project and defending the new park.

Doolan Canyon’s Schmitz Parcel - Guided Tour Only

From the Airway exit on Hwy 580 you can travel north and west and follow Doolan Road through the proposed project area, to the Preserve boundary. Please respect that Schmitz will not be open to the public for some time. Although the property has been protected, the acquisition is just the first step. Others include cleanup, construction of facilities, and park planning necessary to protect sensitive resources and to provide ranger staffing. These are difficult steps in a bad economy. We hope to schedule special tours next Spring.

Check our hike schedule online at www.SaveMountDiablo.org
Staff and several members of SMD’s land committee visited the property in early summer. Its northern exposure along the road is steep, lush, and includes a lot of poison oak. In just a few minutes several rare plants were located. One surprise was that there are large rock outcroppings and slopes of smaller rocks, many of them pink, layered, with shiny light and dark crystals, which we recognized as a form of rhyolite or dacite, igneous rock with a high silica content.

Volcanic Dome

The most common igneous rocks on Mount Diablo are old ocean crust formed as much as 165 million years ago deep out at sea. These included parts of Diablo’s main peaks. Also present are pillow basalts formed at underwater eruptions along a mid-ocean ridge. These pieces of igneous rock were carried to North America and added to the continent by the movement of tectonic plates.

Marsh Creek-V is different. Diablo Valley College geology professors Jason Mayfield and Jean Hetherington helped us to understand it. At the northeast corner of Mount Diablo State Park, near the intersection of Marsh Creek and Morgan Territory Roads, eighteen spots have been mapped so far, by other geologists, of high silica igneous rock visible in mound or dome-like surface exposures, within a four mile northwest-southeast band, a mile and a half wide. All or part of eleven of the eighteen spots are on protected land—at Chaparral Spring, and Clayton Ranch for example—but most of them aren’t yet accessible to the public. Once you’ve focused on their characteristic shape—unusually steep knolls—they’re easier to pick out.

Complex Geology = Complex Soils = Rich Botany

Vegetation on Marsh Creek-V is diverse due to its conical topography which exposes the parcel to a variety of aspects. The north slope is draped in a shroud of full shade as is much of Dark Canyon to the east. The multi-layered understory of this side of the property comprises an upper canopy of California bay laurel, interior live oak, and coast live oak. The mid-story canopy smells of sweet western hop tree blossoms but is also armed with an abundance of poison oak for those who dare to tread—if the property’s 45+ degree slopes, rising from 550’ to 870’, aren’t enough to discourage you. Other shrub species occupying this level of the canopy are coffee berry, our native blackberry, snowberry, and hollyleaf redberry. The woodland floor is abundantly populated with mosses and fern species such as wood fern, maidenhair fern, goldback fern, and licorice fern.

On the exposed western slope the dense canopy cover gives way and herbaceous species, such as monkeyflower and some of our wonderful native grasses including blue wildrye, California fescue, and smallflower melic grass, bask in the sunlight. On the eastern side of the dome, slopes are gentler in character allowing blue oaks to replace live oaks and begin creating the savannah we are accustomed to on this side of the mountain, accented with scattered buckeyes.

Tallest manzanita?

The most interesting plant species seen at this property are a group of manzanitas at the summit. They may be among the tallest anywhere, at 25-30 feet in size. Though manzanitas can be a difficult genus of shrubs to identify, as they are notoriously promiscuous and hybridize easily, these large specimens, based on the leaf shape and lack of a basal burl, have been identified as Contra Costa manzanita (Arctostaphylos manzanita subsp. Laevigata). Although we had been hoping for Bowerman manzanita, an endemic species recognized by some, named for our co-founder, Dr. Mary Bowerman, the Contra Costa manzanita is rare, local and impressive in size.

Read the full article about Marsh Creek-V at www.SaveMountDiablo.org

Hike a Volcanic Dome

Marsh Creek-V is steep with little parking and lots of poison oak. Visit a similar dome using our self-guided hike on p. 5.
Volcanoes in Clayton?
Self-Guided Hike to Volcanic Domes and Beautiful Perkins Canyon

**Trailhead:** West side Morgan Territory Rd., a half mile south of Marsh Creek Rd., just past the mercury mine tailing pond (across from 2727 MTR) **Trails:** Ray Morgan Road, Perkins Creek **Trail Distance:** 2 miles RT plus side trips **Elevation Gain/Loss:** 305’ minimum **Time:** 1-3 hours **Notes:** Great evening hike, no facilities, sun sets early below North Peak, creeks flow later, mosquitoes and ticks during the wet season and avoidable poison oak.

Unless you’re an equestrian or live in Morgan Territory, chances are you’ve never visited Perkins Canyon, at the northeast corner of Mount Diablo State Park. On maps trails seem short and confusing and it’s not clear where to park.

You’ve been missing out. Trail loops are short but fascinating, there’s great history and geology, diverse wildlife and spring wildflowers, two historic rock dams, one of the most beautiful creeks in the State Park—and an easily accessible volcanic dome. It’s one of 18 nearby tertiary volcanic extrusions, magma veins which reached the surface (plug domes) or were exposed by erosion (plug necks). Save Mount Diablo has just purchased one a mile to the east but this one is more accessible (see Marsh Creek-V article, p. 1, for information about the new property and the area’s fascinating geology).

The Perkins Canyon area, named for Solomon David and Susan Perkins who lived there 1859-69, was added to the State Park in 1976, at the same time as SMD’s first land purchase north of the old mercury mine pond. Other parcels were added in 1982. It includes the old Gabriel-Hinks property (as in the old Hink’s department store in Berkeley). Mercury was first mined nearby in 1863.

At the start, you’re literally at the base of North Peak, with views of the strangely steep volcanic dome (more like the top of a mushroom than a cone) directly south, darker green and just below the ridge of the Oak Hill Lane area, left of the collection of power line towers. The landscape is rolling tarweed grassland with beautiful Harvest brodeia and large oaks—you can hear ground squirrels, quail, scrub jays and acorn woodpeckers—transitioning a few hundred feet west into steep, lush vegetation on the slopes rising to North Peak and further south at Perkins Creek and the dome. Highland and Morgan Territory Ridges are visible to the south, and the Dark Canyon part of Marsh Creek to the east—if you look carefully you can pick out more domes, including Marsh Creek-V.

The hike is simple and almost line-of-sight: Stay on the Ray Morgan fire road closest to paved Morgan Territory Rd. as it turns past other fire roads—you can even take a narrow path to stay closer to the paved road (Ray Morgan was a local fire chief and descendant of Morgan Territory settler Jeremiah Morgan). You’ll immediately pick your way across Dunn Creek, an often wet area draining from the old mercury mine, then cross Perkins Creek, and eventually begin rising. When you do, the dome is on your right. You’ll pass into gray pine woodland; just before thick chamise chaparral, or scrub, you can leave the trail and climb (right) to the top of the dome if you wish. The sandy soils alert you to the decomposed volcanic dacite, which is high in silica.

Back on the Ray Morgan Road climbing south, below the high tension power lines the single track Perkins Creek Trail (you’ll soon reach the park boundary if you miss it) drops right with views into the upper gorge, the trail lined into summer with white mariposa lilies and the yellow flowers of Brewer’s dwarf flax, down to the creek which has cut a nearly vertical slope on the west side of the dome. As interesting as the dome is, however, the creek is more so with rocks from the dome mixed with more colorful ones from the main peaks. Cascades are shaded by water loving trees—sycamores, big leaf maple, etc., and there are interesting plants in the flood plain like pitcher sage. Upstream the main channel begins climbing steeply, crossing the private Diablo Bowmen archery club parcel to SMD’s Viera-North Peak property where steep canyons contribute more water, then on to Prospectors Gap between Diablo’s main peaks.

If you follow the trail downstream, you’ll pass two historic rock dams, then back to the start. Or you can return on a higher loop closer to North Peak such as the Diablo Mine Trail—red chert soil and vegetation even more thick with fens, grape vines, clematis, endemic Mount Diablo globe lilies, and poison oak—which passes two dead end roads up to the PG&E towers and more expansive views.

Visit our Hikes web page for guided, self-guided and audible guided hikes.
Saving Thomas Home Ranch

was stretching south. It surged when Camp Stoneman was built during World War II, then one tract after another was subdivided, rising up “Railroad” toward increasingly congested Kirker Pass. The Thomas family loved their land and resisted the outsiders who wanted a piece of it.

“Save Mount Diablo recently won an estate court auction to purchase the 145-acre Thomas “Home Ranch” for $1,376,500,” said Ron Brown, SMD’s executive director. “The other bidder was almost certainly a developer. This is the second time that SMD has saved the property. Working with the Thomas family we also stopped its development in the late 1990s. A number of family members have thanked us recently for making sure the property will finally be preserved for good, but we can only do it with the continued support of our donors.”

The Big Picture

Also known as “Thomas North,” the Home Ranch is being acquired at the same time that East Bay Regional Park District is purchasing the 160-acre “Thomas Central” and 852-acre “Thomas South,” and a few months after their purchase of the 798-acre Barron property, another Thomas property and the final gap between Mount Diablo State Park and Black Diamond Mines. (See Barron & Thomas, page 10). Although those properties are bigger, they are also more rugged and remote. The Home Ranch was far more developable, threatened and expensive.

It was a close call. The park district was interested in purchasing the property but a variety of problems, including developer competition, timing, and technical issues related to funding threatened to get in the way. SMD stepped in to help.

“The park district is very grateful for Save Mount Diablo’s role in protecting this strategic property at the mouth of Nortonville Canyon,” said Nancy Wenninger, Assistant General Manager/Land Division for the district. “We were very interested in this acquisition but we weren’t going to be able to complete the purchase. Save Mount Diablo’s ability to move quickly and be flexible really made the deal happen. The property is important by itself, but it will also help preserve open space further up the canyon and includes an important trail connection which will help make the final link between Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve and Concord Naval Weapons Station. Over the years SMD has been one of the district’s most valuable allies and has helped us achieve success many times. We have a great partnership.”

Thomas is gateway to beautiful Nortonville Canyon and Kirker Pass. Above it a rugged open space corridor stretches from Black Diamond north toward Suisun Bay. Its protection decreases development threats to the canyon and pass area. It’s a critical recreational connection, historically important, and biologically rich.

“Thomas’ location is very strategic in terms of its relationship to the Urban Limit Line, Pittsburg, Kirker Pass and the entrance to Nortonville Canyon and the resources there,” said Malcolm Sproul, SMD’s President. “It’s the northwestern most extension of the San Joaquin Valley, with similar habitat and environmental conditions. There was even a confirmed San Joaquin kit fox sighting at the far end of the canyon in the early 1990s.”

“Thomas is one of the best examples of the importance of our organization,” said Brown. “It underscores our flexibility and ability to step in and acquire an important piece of land. This is why we exist—we can act quickly when others may not be able to.”

At our 30th anniversary in 2001 SMD awarded the Thomas family a Mountain Star Stewardship Award for their care of their property for more than 130 years: “The family has resisted Pittsburg’s efforts to annex and develop their ranch lands. Without their commitment to their land, the scenic Black Diamond foothills of Mount Diablo would have long since been paved over.”

The Auction

Thomas North (the Home Ranch), Central, and South were jointly owned by eighteen different family members, some owning as much as 1/6th, some as little as 1/90th. Over the years SMD made overtures. As time passed fewer family members were interested in cattle ranching but the family couldn’t come to agreement on what to do with the land. The family’s matriarch, Gloria Thomas, now 83, began suffering from Alzheimer’s and moved to a convalescent home. Ultimately a court-appointed receiver decided that sale of the land was necessary to resolve conflicting claims, including those for Gloria’s medical care. The receiver approached the East Bay Regional Park District, an appraisal was conducted, and agreement was reached about sale of the three parts of the Thomas property.

At the final court hearing a snag developed. Even though it was the receiver who had approached the park district, the attorney for one family member argued that the court should have marketed the properties and needed to conduct an “overbid” auction to see whether there were other interested buyers. The auction was held two weeks later. Only the park district bid on the first two properties, Thomas South including Kreiger Peak south of Black Diamond and Thomas South including the slopes above Nortonville Canyon. Both were purchased by the district at the appraised value.

When the Home Ranch, the 145 acres including Gloria Thomas’ house, was placed up for bid, a broker representing a private party made a bid of $917,000, higher than the park district board’s approval. The auction was delayed for two more weeks for park district staff to confer with the district’s board.

It’s difficult for public agencies to acquire land for more than the appraised value. It’s a questionable use of public funding and would also disqualify the district.
from using East Contra Costa County Habitat Conservancy funds which were to provide 90 percent of the purchase price.

As a private buyer, Save Mount Diablo is less constrained. After significant discussion, SMD’s board decided the property was too important to our conservation objectives to lose without a fight. The board consciously chose to bid higher even though part of our investment might not be reimbursed when we eventually transfer the property to a park agency. We set a maximum bid and hoped that our involvement would find the other bidder unprepared.

SMD has fought Pittsburg development projects many times over the years. On the chance that a developer was the private bidder and might be especially motivated by our involvement, we sent a representative to the auction who couldn’t be connected with us. Twice the other bidder had to get approval by phone to continue and eventually dropped out. SMD’s next bid of $1,376,500 won the auction. Eventually we will transfer the property to the East Bay Regional Park District.

You Can Make a Difference

We saved the Thomas Ranch in just a few days, and had to pay the purchase price in cash. Funding was provided by SMD’s Mary Bowerman Fund - your donations at work. We are also in the process of purchasing several other properties and are making offers on several more. We are only able to move quickly because of your generosity.

Resources, Recreation, and Corridors

The Home Ranch has flat, easily developable areas surrounded by steep hills and crossed by two deeply incised tributaries of Kirker Creek (See the map on page 10). The creeks thread two major canyons that converge on the property and a third canyon drops onto it as well, from Keller Landfill protected open space. The topography and creeks guarantee that the property is both a

major wildlife corridor connection and will also be a major regional trail connection from Black Diamond Mines and Nortonville along the creeks, down into Pittsburg and across Kirker Pass Road. We are just beginning resource analysis, but despite two hundred years of cattle grazing the steep hills and creek banks support large stands of native grass and there are several locally rare plants including Jepsons coyote thistle (Eryngium jepsonii).

The 145.5 acre property is made up of three parcels. 54.5 mostly flat acres wedged between Kirker Pass and Nortonville Roads include the original 1880s house and more recent barns, an oasis surrounded by large fruit, nut and other trees—pomegranates, figs, walnut, elderberry, and huge pepper trees.

You can easily cross Nortonville Road to a 10.5 acre area dominated by Kirker Creek, sinuous and lined with big oaks, willows and cottonwoods and with a fire road leading north to the location of the proposed Buchanan Bypass, in a steep sandstone striped canyon. The trees attract many bird species, including rare loggerhead shrikes. The highly endangered San Joaquin kit fox was confirmed in Nortonville Canyon in 1992 and has been seen in the regional preserve more recently. The property has to be at the very northwestern edge of its range.

The largest parcel, 80.5 acres, is west of Kirker Pass Road and crosses Kirker Creek at the 280 ft. elevation before rising to the property’s highest elevation of 850 feet. It includes an 8-foot high cattle tunnel which crosses underneath Kirker Pass Road as does a smaller culvert. In addition to its use by cattle and wildlife, it will allow a major regional trail connection.

For a long time Nortonville Road was a public right of way up to the coal mining town now within the regional preserve, but for years it’s been too remote for a public entrance to the park. SMD’s strategic purchase moves us much closer to a new park entrance near Kirker Pass Road, serving Pittsburg and area residents.

Visit the Thomas Home Ranch

Kirker Pass Road crosses the Home Ranch between the mile and half mile mark south of the Pittsburg city limits, and if you turn on to Nortonville Road the property is easily seen on both sides as well. Thomas Home Ranch will not be open to the public for some time.

Save Mount Diablo will lead guided tours on the property on Saturday, November 12th and December 3rd.

Read the full article about Thomas Home Ranch and hikes at www.SaveMountDiablo.org.

Saving Thomas Twice

We first met Gloria Thomas in 1996 at the little farm house where she lived on Nortonville Road. Her grandparents homesteaded there in 1869 and she was born in the house in 1928. Less than five feet tall, Gloria is slender, feisty and loved to walk in the hills to look at wildflowers.

She’d invited us over because Pittsburg had proposed expanding the city by 25%, stretching south to overlook Clayton. Its “Southeast Hills Annexation” was a proposal by the Southport Land & Commercial Company to add 2,745 acres for at least 1,549 houses. The three and a half mile long project would have stretched from the city limits on Railroad Ave./Kirker Pass Rd., through Gloria’s property and into the hills west of Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve. Most importantly, the plan would have broken the county Urban Limit Line for the first time ever. The city relied on one of the worst Environmental Impact Reports (EIR) we’ve ever reviewed...

Read the full article to learn more at www.SaveMountDiablo.org under Land, Acquisition, Thomas
Four Days Diablo
April 27-30 2011

Twenty-two adventurers joined us for a posh 30 mile trek on the Diablo Trail. Staff set up camp, chefs prepared gourmet dinners, and naturalists intrigued all.

(Clockwise) Veteran Four Dayer Danna Pierce marvels at the mountain; hikers approach the first day’s lunch stop; Rogers Ridge view of the Diablo peaks; everyone enjoys an after-dinner campfire while “Blue Eyed Grass” strings and vocals set the mood; Prima Ristorante’s plates always please; the whole group gives the “Diablo wave” on Old Finley Road at the mouth of Jackass Canyon.

Doolan Canyon
Spring and Summer 2011

Hikers joined us for the first guided tours of East Bay Regional Park District’s new Doolan Canyon-Tassajara Hills Regional Preserve south of Mount Diablo.

(Clockwise) Environmental leaders from SMD, Greenbelt Alliance, the Tri-Valley Conservancy, Friends of the Vineyards, Sierra Club and the California Native Plant Society tour the new preserve as well as proposed development lower in Doolan Canyon; the property includes a large 10-acre pond; Malcolm Sproul, Dick Schneider; Seth Adams interprets the preserve and development threat; rare Yerba mansa (Animopsis californica) in flower.
Bio Blitz
May 14-15, 2011

Experts surveyed as many species as possible in 24 hours on 2 square miles of private Ginochio cattle ranch, near SMD’s Wright Canyon on Diablo’s east side.

Results over 24 hours: 305 species, over 50 of them rare. (Clockwise from left) A night snake (Hypsiglena torquata) in Curry Canyon; a Mariposa lily; participants split up to focus on different resources; this bobcat was photographed at dawn by a camera trap; a Clam shrimp in the palm of a hand; Malcolm Sproul, SMD’s Board President (and a principle at participating biotic consulting firm, LSA Associates), netting amphibians.

Dry Creek Trail Project
Summer 2011

Matt Dami wanted a challenge for his Eagle Scout project so he coordinated construction of a volunteer built trail at SMD’s Dry Creek property.

(Clockwise) Matt Dami instructing his loyal friends turned volunteers; the high school students are trained in use of different trail building tools; the trail builders work their way up the slopes digging out large rocks; the group celebrates completing the trail after three days of hard work; a well earned pizza; Rake array.

Photos on these pages by: Beryl Anderson, Scott Hein, David Ogden, George Phillips and Jerry Roe.
Incredible Barron and Thomas
EBRPD Completes Mount Diablo to Black Diamond Corridor

The 145 acre Thomas “Home Ranch” was the most threatened of a group of Thomas properties recently protected, but not the only one. In March, East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) purchased the 798-acre Barron property (Maxine Barron was a Thomas before her marriage) for $2.95 million. At the same time that SMD acquired the Home Ranch (aka “Thomas North”) EBRPD also acquired 160 acre “Thomas Central” on the slopes above Nortonville Canyon, for $624,000, and 852-acre “Thomas South” including Kreiger Peak south of Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve, for $3.77 million. In just six months a total of 1,955 acres has been protected around Black Diamond Mines for $8.72 million—more than three square miles.

Those three square miles include amazing resources, spectacular views and incredible recreational opportunities but they’re just the most recent in a series of dramatic acquisitions that have finally closed the gap between Mount Diablo State Park and Black Diamond Mines, a total of 4,500 acres in twelve years—seven square miles—which have expanded Black Diamond to 10,600 acres. Another corridor is near completion as well, and more quickly. These and other recent purchases also leave a total gap of less than a mile between Black Diamond Mines and the Concord Naval Weapons Station.

“The Thomas and Barron lands are some of the most beautiful property the Regional Park District has acquired in the past ten years,” said Nancy Wenninger, Assistant General Manager/Land Division for EBRPD, who led the negotiations to purchase them.

The heroes are the Thomas family; the East Bay Regional Park District; the East Contra Costa County Habitat Conservancy, which has provided much of the funding over the past three years; and you—the public’s support for East Bay Regional Park District’s Measure WW bond, which has provided matching funds.

Mt. Diablo to Black Diamond Mines

Two years ago Save Mount Diablo transferred our 333-acre Chaparral Spring property east of Clayton to EBRPD. It had been the beginning of an effort to bridge the two and a half mile gap between Mount Diablo State Park and Black Diamond Mines in an open space corridor and, 18 years after we first defended Chaparral Spring from three development proposals, the corridor was nearing completion.

In March 2011, the connection between the two parks was made, with the purchase of the 798-acre Barron property. There were some detours along the way.

What we couldn’t tell you, although we’ve announced parcels as they were acquired, is how close we were getting. See details in the sidebar.

Maxine Barron

All of these acquisitions were from willing sellers. There were two choices to bridge the final quarter mile gap. Owners of a smaller property and the most direct route weren’t interested in selling. Then Maxine Barron passed away in November 2009. Her six children offered to sell EBRPD her 798-acre property (#11). Maxine was a member of the Thomas family whose ancestors moved to Contra Costa County in 1867 to work in the coal mines and then later acquired nearby ranchland properties.

According to her daughter, Reesa Vogt, “The property meant a lot to my mother. She inherited it from her cousins Will and Warren Abrams in 1971 or ’72 and Wayne Thomas, my uncle, grazed it. It’s really pretty, you have good views, and you can see parts of the Bay and Clayton. She loved going up there. None of us wanted to see it developed and all of us liked the idea of it being preserved.”

The purchase was completed in March for $2.95 million. Besides unifying the two major parks, Barron’s protection leaves just a half mile gap to the east near Deer Valley Road to complete a proposed looping extension of the Diablo Trail, creating the 60-70 mile Diablo Grand Loop. Nancy Wenninger of the East Bay Regional Park District was quoted in the August 3rd Contra Costa Times: “Imagine a 40 mile route that will take people not only south through Black Diamond and into Mount Diablo, but would allow them to do a tour to Morgan Territory and Round Valley Preserve near Brentwood.”

“Barron is key in making the connection work between Black Diamond Mines and Mount Diablo State Park. It’s spectacularly beautiful,” said Wenninger. Barron drains to the east, creek tributaries joining in Oil Canyon which crosses the northern part of the property before continuing through Lentzner and into older parts of Black Diamond Mines near Stewartville and Star Mine. Upper Irish Canyon bisects the southwestern area just a half mile upstream of SMD’s Irish Canyon property. Barron’s two parcels are moderately to steeply sloping; on either side of Oil Canyon, steep hill-sides rise to a maximum elevation of 1,668 feet. Oak woodland, chaparral and hardwoods cover about 40 percent of the property, with the rest made up of open grassland and scattered trees.
Thomas Central and South

The Thomas family was described in the Thomas “Home Ranch” article and in future newsletters we’ll tell you more about their history. Simultaneously with Save Mount Diablo’s purchase of the Home Ranch and at the same auction, East Bay Regional Park District purchased 160 acre Thomas Central on the slopes above Nortonville Canyon, for $624,000, and 852-acre Thomas South including Krieger Peak south of Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve, for $3.77 million. Both properties are remote and rugged, and Thomas Central had access issues; as a result they both had considerably lower per acre values.

Thomas Central is sublime; the property is steep and rugged, rising to 1,030 feet. Except for a handful of trees it’s made up entirely of grassland and includes two ponds and segments of three tributaries of Kirker Creek. Like the Home Ranch, it’s another half mile by half mile square. Its southwest corner almost touches Nortonville Road but the slope is so steep few will attempt to access it from there. Its eastern boundary reaches Black Diamond Mines northwest corner. A much more interesting hike, though still moderately steep, will start at the Black Diamond Mines headquarters at Sydney Flat. The property is directly west of the northern half of the Lougheed Loop Trail, and if you climb a half mile to the ridge west of Sydney Flat and drop another half mile into the next drainage, you reach its boundary. Two ridgelines cross the property diagonally with a well defined valley and a single fire road between them. The property supports raptors, and there are undoubtedly California red-legged frog and tiger salamander in its ponds. Little botanic review has yet been undertaken.

By contrast, 852-acre Thomas South is well known to us, 1.25 miles wide by 1.5 miles long, sandwiched between Barron and SMD’s former Irish Canyon property. East of Clayton on the south side of Black Diamond Mines, it’s crossed by three parallel ridges and twice as high as Thomas Central. It’s strip with dense woodland, grassland and exposed rock strata along 1905-foot Krieger Peak, with incredible views in all directions. Dropping into Irish Canyon, there’s oak savannah and more grassland on an unnamed central ridge a little further south, then more dense woodland, rising onto Keller Ridge with chapparral overlooking Marsh Creek Road. Thomas South has a well defined set of looped fire roads which will provide dramatic new recreational opportunities. As with Thomas Central, little biotic review has yet been undertaken, but resources on neighboring properties are well known. Its biodiversity will be very high.

A book could be written about the Barron and Thomas properties but frankly, no one’s written it yet because, other than the Thomas family, very few people have ever visited these properties. They are literally unknown territory and we are just beginning to explore them. Suffice it to say, they are an open space fantasy land, big enough and rugged enough that it will take years to get to know them.

According to Reesa Vogt in a recent Contra Costa Times article, her mother, aunts and uncles didn’t want the land developed, so selling it for public open space was “what had to be done…Our family can continue to go see the property and walk around, but so can everyone else. They can see how beautiful and peaceful it is—a little slice of heaven.”

Barron and Thomas

No Public Access Yet

Please respect that Barron and Thomas will not be open to the public for some time. Although the properties have been protected and the corridor connection completed, acquisition is just the first step.

Check our hike schedule at www.savemountdiablo.org for more info about hikes this spring.

Connecting Parks

When we began, there was a trail between Mount Diablo State Park and Black Diamond Mines but its southern end is in downtown Clayton, not the best route for wildlife. Chaparral Spring (Map Point #1), acquired in 1994, was the first step in a true open space corridor.

Step by step, in 1999 the first third of 1,031 acre Clayton Ranch was acquired (#2), the second in 2000 (#3) and the final third in 2001 (#4), all by the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD). SMD held off a development project there for over a decade and helped develop funding. One and three-quarter miles of the 2.5 mile corridor had been purchased. In 2002, 80-acre Rumelt-Brown (#5) was purchased by EBRPD and the gap was split in two. EBRPD purchased 320-acre Lentzner (#6) in 2005 and the gap shrunk to a quarter mile.

Meanwhile, in 2007 SMD bought 320-acre Irish Canyon (#7) closer to the existing recreational trail. In 2008 we transferred Chaparral Spring, the first purchase in the corridor, to EBRPD (#8). Irish Canyon had been a gamble but with East Contra Costa County Habitat Conservancy funding, EBRPD picked up adjacent 461-acre Ang/Eastern (#9) in 2010, connecting both parcels to Black Diamond Mines, Clayton Open Space, and to the original recreational trail. Late last year, with a partial reimbursement grant from the Habitat Conservancy, we transferred Irish Canyon to EBRPD (#10), however SMD will continue to manage the property for some years. Adding Barron (#11) and Thomas (#13) made the connection.
The review concludes that the project would violate policies that prevent urban development outside the County’s Urban Limit Line, conflict with agricultural preservation policies, and thwart other land use and transportation policies. It also finds the project’s traffic impacts could violate legal settlements in the 1992 Dougherty Valley Case.

This version of the development proposal threatens to convert 771 acres of agricultural land into a mixture of 187 single- and multi-family homes – outside of the Contra Costa County Urban Limit Line. If approved, this would be the first major subdivision outside the ULL since it was adopted in 1990.

As the project name suggests, the developer Samir Kawar (FL Land, LLC) and his development consultant Tom Koch are trying to cast this urban development as agriculture. They claim they’ll preserve open space and protect agricultural land uses by establishing olive orchards on portions of the residential lots and encumbering those lots with restrictions that force future owners to keep the olive trees. However, there is no way to ensure these olive orchard ranchettes are actually farmed much less maintained. In fact their project would break urban limit line protections and open the flood gates for development speculation outside of the line.

The re-mapping of county supervisorial districts may ultimately have an impact on approval or rejection of this proposal. Previously Supervisor Mary Piepho from Discovery Bay represented the San Ramon Valley and the Tassajara area where “New Farm” would be located. Now the area is split between Piepho and Supervisor Gayle Uilkema of Lafayette, literally at the western boundary of “New Farm.”

The current “New Farm” proposal (this is a revised version of a plan that first surfaced in 2007) would divide the land into 177 single-family lots and 10 multi-family units. The proposal also includes a cemetery and mortuary facilities, as well as some land reserved for community purposes such as schools or other community buildings.

An environmental impact report is in preparation. As we did in successfully opposing Brentwood’s Measure F a year ago (also proposed by Koch), and San Ramon’s Measure W last fall, both of which would have broken the Urban Limit Line, Save Mount Diablo is committed to defending the Urban Limit Line and the Tassajara Valley. On the bright side, protected lands are expanding in the Tassajara area (see Doolan Canyon, p.. 3). We’ll keep you posted, and we’ll need your help when the project gets to the County Board of Supervisors.
Night Snakes, Screech Owls and Brewers Dwarf Flax
Bio Blitz at Ginochio and Viera-North Peak

The stage was set for an unforgettable twenty four hours on the “morning side of the mountain,” Diablo’s east face. Fifteen hundred acres of breathtaking landscape rising from 800-2300 feet including ten ponds, countless creeks, springs and a secret twenty foot waterfall. The occasion? It was SMD’s Bio Blitz event, held May 20-21, when twenty expert naturalists methodically traversed four spectacular parcels to collect, call, capture and count as many species as possible in one day and night. Data from the event helps establish a baseline snapshot of biodiversity and provides information which helps us better manage sensitive resources.

The event was based at SMD’s Wright Canyon property, which we share with its former owner Dorothy Wright, who has life estate to live on her family’s land. Viera-North Peak, SMD’s 165-acre treasure rising up the slopes of Mount Diablo, was one of the survey areas for the event given its diverse habitat types such as chaparral, oak woodland, grassland, riparian, rock outcrops and serpentine grassland. We were also honored by the opportunity to survey more than two square miles of private land owned by the Ginochio ranching family, rising from Curry Canyon south to Windy Point and north to Prospectors Gap. Very few scientists have ever seen these properties.

Discoveries began immediately. En route to dropping off the first group of scientists we documented four species of raptors in twenty minutes, a juvenile golden eagle, American kestrel, red-tailed hawk and a northern harrier. Turning over logs, a

A night snake has cat-like eyes for obvious reasons; view of Ginochio-North Peak from Ginochio-Windy Point; Brewers Dwarf Flax is just one of the rare plants recorded.

Diablo sunflower and Diablo manzanita. The properties are excellent habitat for California red-legged frogs and Alameda whipsnake, both threatened species. Western pond turtle and kingfishers are found at Wright Canyon. Viburnum ellipticum, a white flowered shrub discovered by SMD co-founder Mary Bowerman below Windy Point in 1933 and known from just a handful of East Bay locations, was confirmed again and in good health.

By coincidence a realtor had contacted us about a new property three days earlier and several of us stopped at it on our way to Bio Blitz. Scientists at the event ID’ed volcanic rock we’d collected there and one knew about rare plants onsite. Twelve days later, because of its biological importance, we signed a contract to purchase the property: Marsh Creek-V (see page 1). It’s a great example of the value of resource evaluations such as Bio Blitz.

A sunny day got chilly as fog divided around Windy Point and filled Curry and Riggs Canyons. One of our most magical experiences took place in an eerie setting along a heavily wooded stream canyon during the dark, foggy night. After playing taped owl calls from a boom box for nearly twenty minutes, a faint response call was heard downstream. As the melodic trill moved closer we became hyper-aware of sound and movement. Time seemed to slow to a stop, then click – as a spotlight illuminated the gnarled branch of a valley oak hanging across the road, faster than the blink of an eye a screech owl glided through our field of vision.

As the event drew to a close Saturday afternoon, John Ginochio discovered what turned out to be the most unusual find of the event, a night snake with elegant copper colored eyes and vertical cat-like pupils. John was elated about his find because, despite having spent his entire life exploring and appreciating wildlife on the mountain, neither he nor anyone else at the event had ever seen this species before in the wild.

A formal biotic survey of the properties would have cost thousands of dollars. Twenty scientists participated in Bio Blitz this year, not a lot especially for such a large rugged area, but 305 species were documented in twenty-four hours. We greatly appreciate the time volunteered by our expert naturalists, permission by Dorothy Wright to base the event at Wright Canyon, and the Ginochio family’s permission to survey their land. It was a treat. These properties’ ecological health is a testament to the care the Wrigths and Ginochos have taken with their land for generations.

If you want to help care for natural lands visit our Stewardship page at SaveMountDiablo.org/Lands_Stewardship.html.
Thank you to the generous individuals and businesses for supporting land preservation with their donations for our annual auction.


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**Antioch:** Mac’s Old House

**Berkeley:** Bay Nature Magazine, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Bette’s Oceanview Diner, Bistro Liaison, Heyday Books, Lawrence Hall of Science, OCSC Sailing, Shattuck Hotel, Shotgun Players, The Marsh

**Books:** Cache Creek Casino Resort
**Castro Valley:** Chouinard Winery
**Concord:** Advanced Elements, CNWS Neighborhood Alliance Steering Committee, Friends of Congressman George Miller, Pacific Coast Carpet

**Danville:** Auburn James Winery, Blackhawk Country Club, Bridges Restaurant, Crow Canyon Country Club, Danville Cigar, Leadership Dynamics, Inc., Lisa Evans Portrait Design, Luna Loca, Pascal French Oven, Piatti Restaurant & Bar, The Organized Woman, Tootsie’s of Danville

**Diablo:** Diablo Country Club
**El Segundo:** BIG 5

**Foresthill:** Somewhere Over The Rainbow Lodge
**Healdsburg:** Hafner Vineyard

**Hercules:** Franklin Canyon Golf

**Lafayette:** Artisan Bistro, Chevalier Restaurant, ECOLunchboxes, Mary Frances Accessories, Postino


**Martinez:** Alhambra Valley Olive Oil Company, Bill’s Ace Hardware, doOGle LinHK & Co., Willows Theatre Company

**Monterey:** Princess Monterey Whale Watching

**Moraga:** Parkmon Vineyards

**Napa:** Domaine Carneros

**Newport Beach:** Fairmont Hotel, Fleming’s Prime Steakhouse

**Oakland:** JC Cellars, Keren Creations

**Orinda:** Orinda Country Club, Salsa with Tomaj

**Pleasanton:** Angel Island TramTours & Catered Events, Christesen’s Tack Room

**Rutherford:** Cakebread Cellars

**San Francisco:** Asian Art Museum, AWAT Productions, Beach Blanket Babylon, California Academy of Sciences, Fairmont Hotel, Patagonia, San Francisco Opera, Scala’s Bistro, SF MOMA

**San Leandro:** Appleby Cleaning & Restoration

**San Ramon:** Advanced Laser & Skin Care, The Bridges Golf Club, The Yoga Company, Zachary’s Chicago Pizza

**Sausalito:** Bay Area Discovery Museum

**Sonoma:** Infinicon Raceway

**St. Helena:** Pride Mountain Vineyards


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To preserve Mount Diablo’s peaks, surrounding foothills, and watersheds through land acquisition and preservation strategies designed to protect the mountain’s natural beauty, biological diversity, and historic and agricultural heritage; enhance our area’s quality of life; and provide recreational opportunities consistent with the protection of natural resources.

Preserve natural lands through acquisition and cooperative efforts.

Defend Mount Diablo and its foothills from threats of development through land use planning and public education.

Restore habitat prior to transfer to a public agency for permanent preservation and public use.

Enjoy Diablo’s parks through events and recreational opportunities.

This is our home. Preserving natural land forever means safeguarding our quality of life, including our air, water, and views. Only half of Mount Diablo has been preserved. The other half of the mountain, over 80,000 acres, is privately owned and still threatened by development. That means risking the loss of wildlife corridors, ecosystems and recreational opportunities.

Trail Adventure, Sunday, November 6, 2011

Find your adventure at Trail Adventure! With a 5k, 10k, Half Marathon and Family Interpretive Hike we’ve got fun for everyone followed by a scrumptious barbecue lunch. The event benefits SMD land programs and is presented by Chevron.

So, the good times come with a good feeling — knowing you are helping to save Mount Diablo for people and wildlife to enjoy for generations! (Like preserving volcanic domes - see page 1.) Register for your adventure today!

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Registration and more information are available at SavemountDiablo.org

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