



The Eye of Diablo: Restoring A Piece of National and Local History

Shortly after World War I, and well before the development of radar, the U.S. Army Air Service and U.S. Post Office searched for equipment that would allow flying at night. Several manufacturers including the Sperry Gyroscope Company jumped into the fray to develop lights for airport runways and bright beacons so pilots could find the airports. By the mid 1920s, a string of beacons provided a guide for pilots from Chicago to Salt Lake City.

The Eye of Diablo

In 1928, the Standard Oil Company of California, now Chevron, saw the need for comparable beacons on the Pacific Coast, and financed the erection of five beacons including one at the summit of Mount Diablo. The company obtained permission from Walter Frick, the owner of the summit; Mt. Diablo State Park existed but the land was still privately owned. Soon a 70 foot steel tower graced the top of our mountain and a 10 million candlepower 36" Sperry beacon was placed on top. The latest technology had an automatic timer to adjust start/stop times for the time of year, and a light bulb changer. A telephone line to the switchboard at Diablo assured that any failure would be immediately reported, and the tower had giant neon letters that blinked "S" and "D" (Standard Diablo) in Morse Code. The switch was first thrown remotely by renowned aviator Charles Lindbergh.

The beacon shone nightly on its tower until about 1939

when it was moved to its current location on top of the specially designed new summit building. Standard Oil paid for the steel and concrete that would support the locally quarried sandstone, and Civilian Conservation Corps workers on Mt. Diablo provided the labor.



Thanks to the hard work of volunteers maintaining the beacon, it shines in the glow of the sunset during the 2008 ceremony. Now the beacon requires full restoration.

Clayton Wordseil

On December 8, 1941, the beacon was turned off after the attack on Pearl Harbor as part of the west coast blackout to decrease targets for further attack. By the end of World War II, radar was standard and the beacon was obsolete. We have no evidence that any maintenance was done from 1941 until local volunteers re-built the controls in preparation for re-lighting on December 7, 1964. The Oakland chapter of the Pearl Harbor survivors arranged for Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz to light the beacon in honor of those who lost their lives at Pearl Harbor. The beacon has been lit every December 7th since.

Sadly, the number of members of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association is dwindling. The Sons and Daughters of Pearl Harbor Survivors now sponsor the event. Save Mount Diablo

became a co-sponsor of the beacon lighting ceremony in 2006.

Retired ranger Burt Bogardus made sure that the beacon functioned each year, but proper care and maintenance have not been done. Thanks to special legislation written by

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Masthead Panorama:

Dragon Oaks 550, Stephen Joseph



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From the Executive Director:



Dear Friend of the Mountain,

This year, we look forward to exciting changes and continued challenges as we protect the Diablo wilderness. One of the challenges we face due to decreased funding for state and regional parks, is instead of transferring our properties to these park agencies within several years, we now hold them much longer or manage them even after we transfer them. As a result, we need to increase our funding to ensure we can acquire critical lands as they become available and manage them into the future. Long-term stewardship issues cause us to adapt how we manage properties and provide public access. We are exploring new programs and collaborations to address these issues.

Our organizational governance is also changing in 2013. After 14 years, Malcolm Sproul has stepped down as our Board President and is succeeded by long-time Board member Scott Hein. From their new roles, they will guide us with their passion for the Diablo wilderness as we tackle the obstacles ahead.

We are honored to have many wonderful supporters—like Malcolm and Scott—and we could not do it without you! We look forward to your increased support as we protect Mt. Diablo’s plants, animals, and recreational opportunities for future generations. Thank you!

From the President:



When Claudia (my wife and fellow board member) and I began volunteering for Save Mount Diablo in the late ‘90s, Malcolm Sproul had recently become Board President, and there were just two full time staff members. Ron Brown had just arrived as our new Executive Director, joining Seth Adams in a small office on Boulevard Way.

While we were initially drawn to Save Mount Diablo because of its focus on land conservation, we quickly came to recognize that this small organization accomplished great things with the limited resources it had.

Over a decade later as I succeed Malcolm as Board President, the organization has grown significantly. Our talented and dedicated staff, amazing volunteers, and generous donors have all helped to expand our capacity and effectiveness greatly over that decade. Today, we face new challenges, but also new opportunities to preserve the Diablo wilderness. I look forward to joining with all of you to meet those challenges and make this an even stronger and more effective organization.

Thanks to Past Board President Malcom Sproul



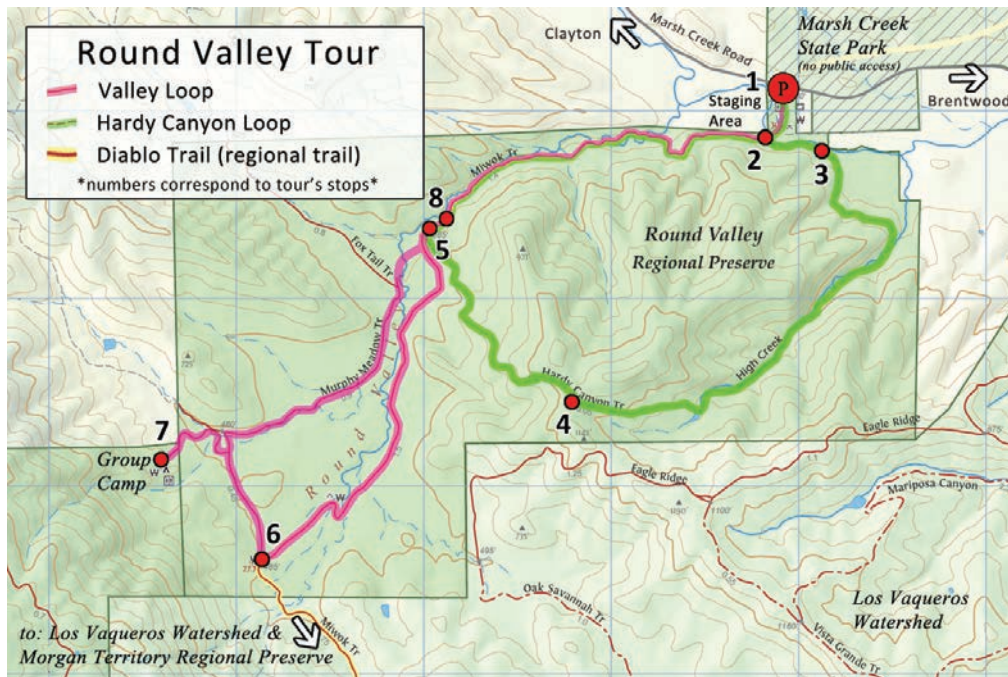
We are fortunate to have talented and dedicated volunteers to assist with our work to preserve, defend and restore the Diablo wilderness. Malcolm served as President of our Board of Directors from 1998 until 2012. An experienced field naturalist and Principal in natural resources management and environmental planning at LSA Associates, he has spent most of his life exploring our local parks and open spaces. These rambles have given him a deep appreciation for the complexity and diversity of our natural resources and the need for their protection. “I was the kid who hiked around the hills and brought back frogs, snakes and lizards. To know that there are kids growing up right now who want to get outdoors and that they have the opportunity, in part because of our work, is really satisfying.”

Malcolm continues to contribute his expertise as a Board Member and as a member of the Land and Nominating Committees. We are grateful for his leadership over more than a decade and his continued support.

See Malcolm’s wildlife article on page 10.

For more information about Malcolm and our board members visit SaveMountDiablo.org

New Audible Guide to Round Valley: Hike and Learn



Photos clockwise from left: A section of our new regional trail map showing two hike routes, a 5 mile loop up Hardy Canyon and a 6 mile hike along Round Valley Creek. Evening shadows cast across Round Valley from the Hardy Canyon Trail.

- Seth Adams, Land Programs Director and source of fascinating information about the natural and human history of the mountain. Adams fought to protect Round Valley in “the dump wars” of the 1980s. In multiple tour segments, he describes Round Valley’s importance for wildlife and recreation, and what he’s learned on frequent visits.

The Series

The Audible Mount Diablo series is produced by Save Mount Diablo, the Mount Diablo Interpretive Association, California State Parks Foundation, and Thomas J. Long Foundation in partnership with Joan Hamilton at Audio Guides to the Outdoors. The series combines lively interviews and music with the rush of wind and the chirps, howls, and growls of wildlife. Music is provided by award-winning guitarist Phil Heywood and photos by Scott Hein, Joe Oliver, and others.

Other titles in the Audible Mount Diablo series are “Introducing Mount Diablo,” “Grand Loop Tour,” “Mary Bowerman Tour,” “Curry Point Tour,” and “Mitchell Canyon,” and “Lime Ridge.” All of these guides are free and can be downloaded from Save Mount Diablo’s website or accessed from the iTunes store.

Download Audible Mount Diablo guides at SaveMountDiablo.org and check out more hikes thanks to our Hike & Thrive partner Kaiser Permanente

by Joan Hamilton, Creator of Audio Guides to the Outdoors



We have just released “Round Valley,” a free audio guide describing the natural and human history of one of the most beautiful publicly owned grasslands in the East Bay. Seventh in the Audible Mount Diablo series, this guide focuses on Round Valley Regional Preserve on the eastern slopes of Mount Diablo.

Round Valley

Known for the abundant prey species that hide in its grass, Round Valley naturally attracts predators, including badgers, kit fox, golden eagles, and mountain lions. It also provides habitat for the Bay Area’s rarest mammal, the San Joaquin kit fox. Among its birds are Central Valley species such as Lewis’s woodpeckers and phainopeplas. Among its plants are dozens of species that fed the Volvon people who lived around here 250 years ago, as well as a rare white larkspur that you’d be unlikely to see outside of the Sierra Nevada.

The audio guide covers these topics and more in a format that can be downloaded to a computer, tablet, or smartphone. Photographs pop up to help identify plants and animals. Eight of the tour’s 15 segments are keyed to specific places in the preserve. Others cover general topics such as ground squirrels, golden eagles, Marsh Creek,

Badgers, kit fox, golden eagles and mountain lions

Round Valley Creek, the Cakebread family, the 1980s dump wars, and how the park won protection a few years later. Each segment is packed with interviews of people who know Round Valley well. They include:

- Brian Kruse, who lives on a ranch just a couple of miles from Round Valley. On the Save Mount Diablo Board, Kruse is in the fourth generation of a family which came to the Bay Area after the Gold Rush. In segments 4.1 and 4.2, he tells the story of his pioneer family and their neighbor Jim Murphy, the reclusive rancher who owned Round Valley before it was purchased for the public.
- Robert Doyle, now general manager of the East Bay Regional Park District. In the 1980s, when the area seemed more likely to become a garbage dump than a park, Doyle teamed up with Kruse and others to convince Jim Murphy to sell the heart of Round Valley to the district. In segments 3, 4.2, and 7, Doyle reminisces about that era, as well as the outstanding work of the preserve’s late supervisor, Roger Epperson.

- Scott Hein, a naturalist, photographer, and President of Save Mount Diablo. Throughout the tour, Hein comments on the birds and other animals you’ll likely see along the way. He also provided many of the photographs that illustrate the tour.

Saving Tassajara: We've Turned a Corner



Left: An aerial view of the Moller Ranch development proposed by Braddock & Logan just beyond the East Dublin development near Brown Ranch. Bottom: Kids enjoying the natural lake on a tour of the new Doolan Canyon Tassajara Hills Regional Preserve.

In the Fall 2009 *Diablo Watch*, we published an article, “Save the Tassajara Valley” and detailed threats to the area south of Mt. Diablo. There have been dramatic changes since then. Some of the biggest threats to the Tassajara area may now disappear.

Tassajara

For twenty-five years we have been defending the beautiful Tassajara Valley and hills, sensual grasslands stretching east of Danville, Blackhawk and San Ramon’s Dougherty Valley, all the way to Arroyo de las Positas north of Dublin and Livermore. Tassajara Valley is an agricultural buffer between protected open spaces in every direction. It also includes high value grazing lands and very sensitive habitat that is home to many rare species. Threaded by Tassajara Creek, the valley drains south down Camino Tassajara Road to Highway 580—past agricultural and open space areas.

Because of nearby freeways and Blackhawk real estate prices, speculators have proposed projects in the Tassajara Valley for decades, even though such development would snarl traffic. The Valley was placed outside the County Urban Limit Line (ULL) in 2000 when the ULL was tightened with the help of residents and environmental groups including Save Mount Diablo. In 2004, we collectively negotiated the

requirements for voter-approved ULLs for the county and every city. As a result, development speculation quieted and agricultural projects expanded. The East Bay Regional Park District began planning for a new park in the area. But storm clouds were gathering.

“New Farm”

In 2007, a proposal was made by developer consultant Tom Koch to break the ULL in two places, just east of Blackhawk and further south, west of Camino Tassajara, on his client Samir Kawar’s land. The 771 acre “New Farm” project was really a “Fake Farm”—186 million-dollar houses and a cemetery on 771 acres—clearly an illegal urban development with urban utilities outside of the ULL, with olive orchard window dressing. If it was approved, the ULL would be worthless.

Simultaneously, local developer Sid Corrie was proposing another cemetery on the two parcels adjacent to “New Farm” on the south and rising west to Tassajara Ridge—two cemeteries on two parallel spur ridges just a few hundred feet apart. We commented on both projects and the recession slowed the progress of the Corrie cemetery.

East Dublin

Meanwhile, across the county line, Livermore and Pleasanton have become much more environmentally friendly, and Sunol is nearly as famous as Bolinas for

fighting development. For years, Dublin was a hold-out, a pro-growth transitional town with many new residents.

Thousands of units of development were approved in the East Dublin Specific Plan with almost no comment by the public. The Specific Plan projects are under construction, stretching to the county line and past Fallon Road, leaving just Doolan Canyon as a buffer between Dublin and Livermore. We weren’t involved in the East Dublin Plan but have been monitoring promised project open space, figuring it could become the anchor for more protected lands. We were soon proven right.

Developer Braddock & Logan preserved 530 acres—nearly three quarters—of the nearby Brown Ranch with a conservation easement. North of the county line and just east of Tassajara Valley, the easement protects creeks and endangered species habitat as mitigation for Braddock & Logan’s Fallon Village part of the East Dublin plan. At the time, they also promised Dublin and wildlife agencies that they would protect the remaining quarter of Brown Ranch—but then applied to Contra Costa County for a subdivision there. We learned of the project (because of CEQA public notice requirements) and responded, and the proposal was tabled.

Adjacent to Brown Ranch, East Bay Regional Park District purchased the 640-acre Schmitz property, as the first parcel of its new Doolan Canyon-Tassajara Hills Regional Preserve. Then a huge 1,500 acre development project, ironically named “Dublin Preserve”, was proposed to the south.

Measure F & Measure W Lose

That Tassajara would also be developed



Scott Hein

George Phillips

was considered certain by many. County Supervisor Mary Piepho led the charge in proposing to study changing the County General Plan to allow “New Farm” and later began meetings with the very pro-growth City of San Ramon to discuss further carving up the valley. Danville, fearing that San Ramon or the County would allow still more development at its eastern border, began considering expanding as well, to create a buffer.

We defeated another Koch proposed ULL challenge in Brentwood in 2010— Measure F – but San Ramon moved ahead with a November ballot campaign to expand its own ULL to include half of Tassajara Valley – Measure W. Once again we and our allies defended the ULL. Residents voted overwhelmingly against Measure W. With those votes, development projects such as “New Farm” began losing momentum.

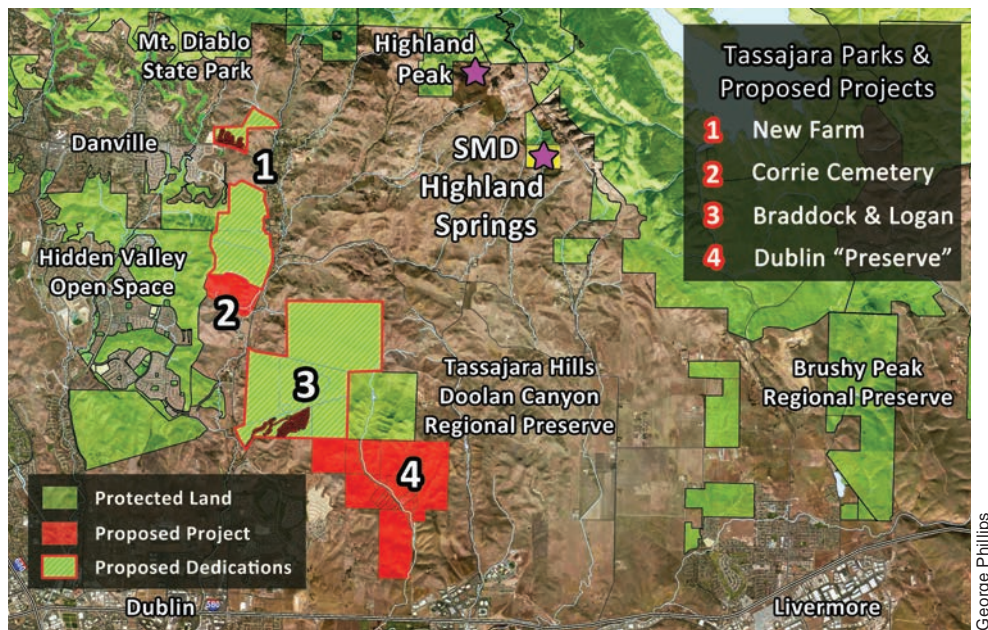
Coalition to Protect Tassajara

Our coalition has worked for six years to protect the ULL and to stop “New Farm.” We have conducted polling, contracted for legal analysis, led hikes, continued media coverage, kept talking to the public and lobbying elected officials. We broadened our support. We helped tighten Measure J Growth Management guidelines, encouraged better Local Agency Formation Commission appointments (LAFCO controls boundaries) and were involved in redistricting of County Supervisor districts. Most recently, we’ve been garnering the support of elected officials in a Support Statement to respect the ULL and Measure J growth management provisions.

San Ramon and Danville

A number of the elected officials involved in these efforts to break ULLs have lost their seats in recent elections. San Ramon

Some of the biggest threats to the Tassajara area may now disappear



George Phillips

changed course and began considering preservation efforts. No longer threatened by San Ramon’s attempts at expansion, Danville is moving ahead with updating its own General Plan, with no attempt to expand east.

A New Proposal

Over the past year, even as the “New Farm” developers’ environmental review remained mired in problems, we started hearing rumors of a possible compromise. Measure J allows minor 30 acre adjustments of the ULL without a vote of the people.

That is what is being proposed. Instead of 186 units, a cemetery and olive orchards fragmenting two parcels totaling 771 acres, the developers are proposing 155 houses on a 30 acre adjustment to the ULL, with the remaining 700+ acres donated to East Bay Regional Park District. The ULL would not be broken. Preserved land would expand the Hidden Valley Open Space corridor north toward Mt. Diablo. The new proposal is called the “Tassajara Park” Project.

Even as the “Tassajara Park” compromise was submitted, another proposal surfaced with dramatic implications for open space. Braddock & Logan proposed changes to one of its East Dublin development phases. In addition to their earlier partial Brown Ranch preservation, they would donate all of Brown Ranch and several other properties to the East Bay Regional Park District—nearly 1,600 acres. Along with 700+ acres preserved at “Tassajara Park”, the Doolan Canyon Regional Preserve would

expand from 640 to nearly 3,000 acres. (The “Dublin Preserve” development project has stalled for now.)

The Devil's in the Details

None of these offers are signed deals yet. Environmental review of “Tassajara Park” will need to be updated and there are many questions. Is 155 units too many? Will this set a precedent for other 30-acre adjustment proposals? The nearby cemetery project is still moving forward. Regional Park operations funding will need to be provided. But we’ve turned a corner, the ULL is no longer being threatened by an illegal project, and preservation efforts in the Tassajara area are spreading. We’ll keep you posted.

by Seth Adams,
Land Programs Director

Stay Informed

You can stay up to date on the latest progresses and challenges in protecting the Tassajara area and the rest of the Diablo wilderness by signing up for our twice monthly e-news. You’ll also hear about how you can help, free hikes and when you can get hands on restoring habitat.

Join our e-news at
SaveMountDiablo.org

California's Environmental Quality Laws Under Attack




The Concord Naval Weapons Station reuse plan area will include 69% parks and open space, walkable communities and access to public transportation thanks to the Community Coalition for a Sustainable Concord which got involved through the CEQA process.

Tassajara Valley; and in siting and improvements in wind power projects.

It is the basis for our improvements to growth management programs of all sorts, and our gateway into all projects and major policies such as General Plans and Specific Plans. Without CEQA we and the public wouldn't even be informed about most of these projects.

Threats

CEQA is now facing its greatest threats in the law's history. Opponents argue that CEQA is responsible for California's economic woes but what they are really trying to accomplish is to weaken the law and decrease the public's involvement. Since this law was adopted, California has experienced at least as much economic boom as bust.

The last two years alone saw several bills modifying CEQA signed into law; as a result, many projects that can expose local communities to a host of environmental and health hazards now have reduced environmental review. More ominously, the past legislative session saw a bill almost make it into law that would have gutted CEQA. A broad-based coalition coalesced to stop that bill but the legislature and the governor have signaled their intent to consider dramatic changes to the law this year. 

Scott Hein

The problem with the California Environmental Quality Act is that very few people know what it does, and it has a long name so it is referred to by its acronym CEQA making it even more obscure. In California it is our most important environmental law.

CEQA, which became law in 1970, is an environmental bill of rights for our state. Its purpose is to foster transparency and integrity in public decision-making, while ensuring development decisions account for their full impacts on our natural and human environments.

CEQA Works

Even though the public supports our environmental laws and their own right to know about projects, CEQA is under attack by corporate interests. They are using the recession as an excuse to gut the law. Save Mount Diablo is part of the "CEQA Works" coalition that hopes to ensure that CEQA is improved, simplified and stream lined, but its intent preserved.

CEQA is the main reason that the public knows when projects are proposed that would have significant effects on the environment, their neighborhoods and cities, and on health and safety. As the CEQA

"environmental review" process takes place both we and the public have an opportunity to learn about the project and get involved. If environmental impacts are serious, environmental impact reports (EIRs) might be required to investigate them. Frequently, shining the light of public scrutiny on projects forces decision makers to make better choices.

Giving Us a Voice

As a result of CEQA, Save Mount Diablo and the public have been able to play an important role in affecting many projects. We, our allies and the public have used CEQA to protect tens of thousands of acres, and to have a meaningful voice in projects on all sides of the mountain.

We utilized CEQA as a tool at Blackhawk; during the creation and expansion of Los Vaqueros reservoir; at the Concord Naval Weapons Station; at Roddy Ranch; to stop garbage dumps at Round Valley and at the center of Black Diamond Mines; to stop the Diablo Foothills Freeway which would have crossed Shell Ridge, three parks and one of the largest cattle ranches in the county; to stop a quarry in Jackass Canyon; to stop 5000 unit developments at Cowell Ranch near Brentwood and in

How to Help

The "CEQA Works" coalition is monitoring legislative proposals, responding and informing the public.

You can help:

- Sign up to support the CEQA online www.ceqaworks.org
- Like CEQA Works on Facebook at www.facebook.com/CEQAWorks

Dorothy Wright: Leaving a Legacy, Preserving History



Courtesy of Dorothy Wright

To Dorothy Wright, Wright Canyon was home for over 50 years before she called Save Mount Diablo in December 1999 and offered to sell the 76-acre property. Her husband Martin had passed away a few months earlier. “I didn’t want our property to go to private owners who wouldn’t care about its history,” she said. “I want it to stay rural and natural.”

Dorothy and Martin operated Curry Creek Park picnic grounds from 1946-1979 on land they bought from Martin’s grandparents. The couple raised their five kids on the property, which rises up near the mouth of Curry Canyon toward Mount Diablo’s North Peak. Blue oak and bay trees line the stream canyon where the threatened Alameda whipsnake makes its home.

Her property was a key parcel for preservation, and she knew it. “I want the public to be able to ride and walk

up to the eastside of the mountain, and my property will allow it. I want Morgan Territory’s rural nature to remain.”

Dorothy wasn’t the only one who wanted to preserve Wright Canyon. Save Mount Diablo’s co-founder Mary Bowerman would visit the Wright property every five or six years for decades before Dorothy contacted Save Mount Diablo.

It takes just this kind of tenacity and vision to preserve land forever. In 2001, the purchase was completed, with a \$590,000 grant from the California Coastal Conservancy and \$50,000 raised from dedicated readers of Gary Bogue, Contra Costa Times columnist.

A life estate enabled Dorothy to live out her life on the property until her passing in October last year. “I realize now what a neat thing it is to have your priorities in something that will last into perpetuity.”

by Beryl Anderson, Communication Manager

Sharing a Culture

Dorothy Wright - Landowner, Entrepreneur, Mother and Preservationist

“When my husband, Martin, came home from World War II, we bought his family’s ranch and re-opened the picnic business. I always wanted to live in the country and Martin loved growing up there. He and his grandfather would drive cattle to Danville on horseback telling stories about outlaws that hid in Mount Diablo’s caves.

“Thanksgivings were at our place, made on the cabin’s wood stove. While the turkey was cooking, we would hike to gather berries and cut a Christmas tree.

When my daughter’s fiancé died, she scattered his ashes under an oak tree with a view of both peaks and the valley. We decided we all wanted our ashes there. It’s called ‘the gathering place’ because that’s where we will gather again.

“From our first season, Mary Bowerman would come down the canyon and ask about our plans. After Martin passed, I called Save Mount Diablo.

“I wanted the property saved with the mountain because it’s part of the mountain. It’s important to me that it be there for people after us. The beauty of the mountain is its remoteness and that it looks over so much of California and that it looks over me. I have a life estate so I can live there as long as I’m able to. I’m not passing on; I’m just hiking up to the gathering place and staying there.”

Above: Martin and Dorothy Wright ran the Curry Canyon Picnic area sharing the beauty of the family’s land east of Mt. Diablo long before Wright Canyon was preserved.

I’m not passing on; I’m just hiking up to the gathering place

Diablo Legacy Circle

Members who are making a difference for future generations, like Dorothy did, by naming Save Mount Diablo in their estate plans.

Anonymous (16)
Barbara Jean Ageno
Hanna Alger
Alan & Helen Appleford
Tracy Achelis & Vincent Sciortino
Kenneth & Linda Back
Burt Bassler
Inga Bennett
Art Bonwell*
Martha Breed & Lyn Diana

Sally Dalton & Peter Gochis
Robin & Peter Frazier
Charla Gabert & David Frane
Charles Philip Gresham
Claudia & Scott Hein
Philip R. Matthews
Laurie & Dick Morrison
Kim & Steve O'Brien
Mrs. H. W. Paul
Nicola Place & Chris Beeson

Robert L. Ryon
Robert Sieben, M.D.
Sandra & Richard Smith
Jeanne Thomas
Meg Beeler & Thomas Robert von Tersch
Carolyn Powell Walking & Walter Douglas Walking

For information regarding Diablo Legacy Circle, please call Julie at (925) 947-3535.

*An astirsk notes amember who passed away

Highland Springs: Our New Property on an Amazing Ridge



Mount Diablo's pyramid peak is prominent when seen from San Francisco and the peninsula, rising above the Oakland Hills. With so many overlapping East Bay ridges and peaks visible you might miss one that's clearly different—a large, high ridge stretching miles to the southeast, above the Livermore Valley, easily topping the Oakland Hills. Yet it's one of the East Bay's most prominent features.

You wouldn't be the only one unfamiliar with Highland Ridge and its peak – very few people are – but with recent open space purchases, that will be

changing. Our newest acquisition, 105 acre Highland Springs, is located on the west face of Highland Ridge, just south of the peak.

From its 1,985 foot elevation, Highland Springs overlooks the beautiful yet threatened Tassajara Valley and the proposed "New Farm" project. Its location, including its high visibility and proximity to the Tassajara Valley, is a preservation priority as are its natural resources. The abundant springs the property is named for are important for wildlife.

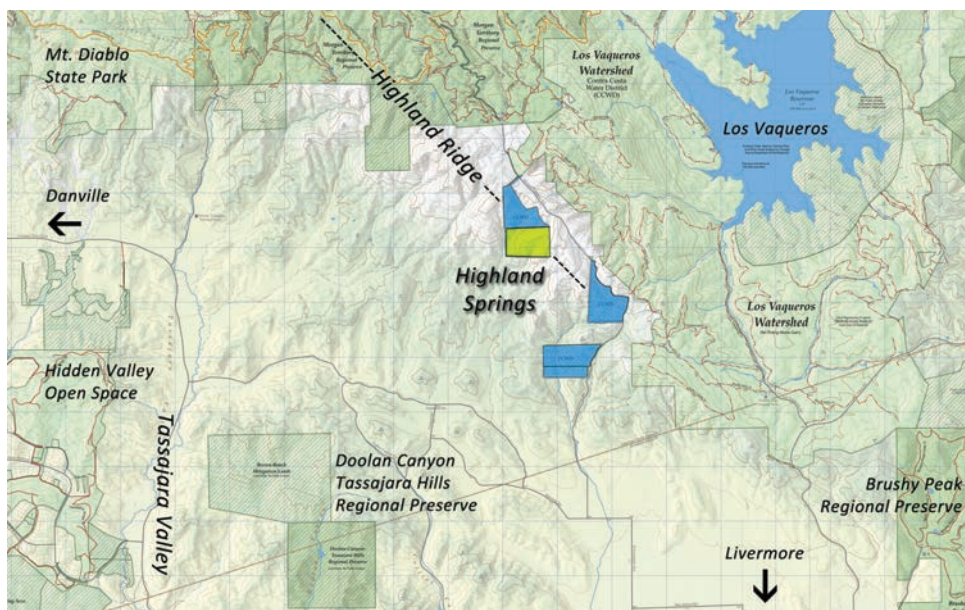
Highland Springs

This is our first property in the Tassajara area

south of Mount Diablo. Highland Springs is carved by two beautiful steep stream canyons on the face of Highland Ridge. The property rises from 1,270 feet to 1,985 feet, just below the ridge's peak between two islands of chaparral. It's visible from as far as San Francisco and the Peninsula.

In addition to the abundance of water, the property has another key element for wildlife. Highland Springs is at the confluence of Highland Ridge and the Blackhills, and its chaparral patches are critical habitat movement corridors for rare species such as the Alameda whipsnake. "The property is near three recently acquired Contra Costa Water District properties preserved as open space which helps to expand existing protected habitat," said Ron Brown, our Executive Director. The area may be equally attractive to development of estate homes as it is to wildlife. "Large houses on nearby knolls demonstrate the threat to the Tassajara and Highland Ridge areas."

The 105-acre property was purchased from Harry and Brigitte Gim for \$495,000. We have begun a survey and inventory



Above: Mt. Diablo's peaks and Highland Ridge, from the right of the mountain, loom large behind Oakland and Berkeley in this aerial view from San Francisco.

Right: Our new Highland Springs property (in yellow) and new preserves by Contra Costa Water District (in blue) sit atop the uncommonly discussed Highland Ridge which has a convergence of ridges and water drainages that make it good habitat.

Left: One of the chaparral patches on Highland Springs that is habitat for the threatened Alameda whipsnake.

George Phillips

Hidden in Plain Sight



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of natural resources and have prepared a management plan for the land. The property will be managed for sensitive species habitat. Grazing, which benefits several rare grassland animal species, will continue.

Highland Ridge

On the north, Highland Ridge begins at 2,112 foot Windy Point, stretches east above Riggs Canyon then rises to the peak before descending toward Livermore. The ridge was probably named for the Highland School District and the Highland School, built in 1882, just north of the county line near the intersection of Highland and Manning roads.

Highland Peak climbs to an elevation of 2,581 feet and is higher than Marin County's Mt. Tamalpais. In fact, other than Diablo's two main peaks and a few associated spots like Mt. Olympia, Highland Peak is the highest spot in the Diablo area.


The ridge divides the Alameda Creek watershed, draining to the South Bay, from Marsh Creek and Los Vaqueros' Kellogg Creek headed north to the Delta. Its massive size supports many springs and creeks although a lot of winter rain clouds have

been wrung out before they get to it. As a result the Livermore Valley has half the precipitation of the Oakland area.

Preservation

Preservation began on Highland Ridge in 1988 when we purchased the 631-acre Morgan Ranch, rising from Riggs Canyon. At the same time the East Bay Regional Park District began expanding Morgan Territory Regional Preserve west toward Mt. Diablo. Developer Shapell Homes of Northern California purchased the peak and in 2001 began donating parcels to the East Bay Regional Park District as mitigation for their Dougherty Valley development.

With Hidden Valley Open Space protected to the west, the Blackhills to the north, the ridgeline of Highland Ridge and Los Vaqueros to the east and most recently Doolan Canyon to the south, the Tassajara region has been almost encircled with preserved land.

See the related "Highland Ridge Wildlife" article on page 10 and read about Tassajara area updates on page 4 for more information. 

by Seth Adams,
Land Programs Director

Hike Highland Springs

We will lead the first guided tour of Highland Springs on Sunday May 19th.

Visit our Hike Calendar at
SaveMountDiablo.org



Scott Hein

Highland Ridge Wildlife



Scott Hein

Highland Springs, our new property, and adjacent portions of Highland Ridge provide valuable local and regional wildlife habitat. This portion of Highland Ridge is particularly important to wildlife because it connects Mt. Diablo with the Altamont Hills and the Diablo Range's extensive wildlands to the south.

Ridgelines are frequently used by larger predators, including coyotes and bobcats as movement corridors and territorial boundaries. It is not unusual to find evidence of their presence concentrated along a ridgeline like Highland. Not only terrestrial species travel along ridgelines. Raptors catch the Ridge's updrafts. In the fall, migrating hawks fly south following the ridge.



Scott Hein

Rare Wildlife

Not far from Highland Springs is one of the more unusual concentrations of wildlife activity in the East Bay. The Altamont Hills are well known for a high number of golden eagles in the winter. The birds hunt the abundant ground squirrels. But where do they roost? One location is on a wooded slope north of our property where up to eight eagles have been observed roosting at once.

Directly south of Highland Springs, at the base of the Ridge was the westernmost verified sighting of the endangered San Joaquin kit fox during a 1996 survey. None have been verified west of the base of the Altamont Hills since.

The federally threatened California red-legged frog is fortunately still present

in the vicinity of our property. The Ridge contains many stock ponds, some of which have been colonized by red-legged frogs. During five years of monitoring three ponds north of Highland Springs, red-legged frogs bred every year in all the ponds. In some years, thousands of juvenile frogs can be seen around their margins in late summer. When these young frogs disperse they find refuge in springs and creeks like those on Highland Springs.

The chaparral stands on our property provide ideal habitat for another East Bay threatened species, the Alameda whipsnake.

This lizard feeding specialist is most often found on south and west facing slopes in chaparral/scrub stands intermixed with rock outcrops and grassland. These are exactly the habitat conditions found on Highland Springs. These chaparral stands likely define the limit of whipsnake distribution in this area.

Abundant Habitats

Highland Springs is also home to a variety of more common wildlife species. Habitat types on the property include grassland, chaparral and woodland. Grassland is the most extensive. A variety of small wildlife inhabit grasslands including western fence lizard, gopher snake, common racer, California kingsnake, grasshopper sparrow, western meadowlark, Botta pocket gopher, California vole and western harvest mouse. The grazed ridgetop grasslands are a preferred location for horned lark, a sparsely distributed nesting species in the East Bay. These smaller wildlife are prey for common predators including American kestrel, white-tailed kite, red-tailed hawk, gray fox, coyote and bobcat which frequent the grasslands. Turkey vultures routinely soar along the Ridge looking for food.

Opposite Page: Top - Highland Springs noted by the red star on Highland Ridge from the Tassajara Valley. The convergence of ridges, creeks and chaparral that make Highland Ridge such good habitat. This Page: Oak woodland habitat on Highland Springs. A white tailed kite. A gray fox.

Chaparral patches on the property's north and south boundaries are part of larger chaparral stands which extend beyond the property. Chaparral provides cover for larger mammals which feed or hunt in the nearby grasslands. Deer hide in the chaparral during the day and move out in the late afternoon or evenings to feed, then return to cover in the early morning. Non-native pigs also exhibit this same pattern although they are more nocturnal and are rarely seen but can be detected by their destructive rooting of springs, ponds, moist grasslands and beneath trees. Small wildlife which reside in the chaparral include western skink, fence lizards, northern pacific rattlesnake, wrentit, blue-gray gnatcatcher, California thrasher and spotted towhee. Less common species which may be found on Highland Springs include coast horned and western whiptail lizards and sage sparrow.

Woodland vegetation grows along the two streams which drain the property. The structural diversity of the trees is especially valuable to birds, supporting a greater variety of species. Woodland dependent birds include Screech owl, Nuttalls woodpecker, ash-throated flycatcher, Hutton's vireo, oak titmouse, house wren, and black-headed grosbeak. Other wildlife found primarily in woodlands include slender salamander, alligator lizard, ring-nicked snake, and broad-footed mole. Larger mammals also find cover in the woodland. 

by Malcolm Sproul,
Naturalist and Board Member



Scott Hein

The Eye of Diablo (continued from page 1)



Cris Benton

Assemblymember Joan Buchanan, Save Mount Diablo has permission to restore the beacon so it can continue to shine well into the future. Save Mount Diablo’s staff has developed an agreement with the Department of Parks and Recreation defining the scope of our project.

Disrepair


The beacon itself is in significant disrepair. Lead-based paint has been peeling for years, and bare metal is exposed to the heat, cold and wind of the summit. Each December, the light needs to be pushed by hand to get it rotating.

Retired engineer Dick Heron is heading a team of talented volunteers and local experts for the renovation. The team has been working for months planning, engaging experts, and coordinating a tight schedule. Volunteer John Stuart has been working diligently on designing new routes for the antenna

cables that run through the beacon’s base. I have been researching proper ways to repaint the beacon. Even the red blinking aircraft obstruction light that is mounted above the beacon will be repaired.

Restoration Plan

Late this spring, a giant crane will lift the 1,500 pound beacon from its long-time perch and it will be taken to a state-approved shop. There is lead and asbestos to remediate, and the front lens has cracked. The bearings at the base of the beacon have never been serviced, and electrical connections and wiring will be renewed or repaired. Finally, a new coat of weather resistant paint will be applied and the shiny beacon will be replaced atop the building once again.

A late summer date is targeted to put the renovated beacon back into place and ready to perform, keeping the memory of our veterans alive. 

by John Gallagher,
Beacon Restoration Volunteer



Beryl Anderson

The Road from Maintaining to Rehabilitating Mount Diablo’s Beacon

by Dick Heron, Volunteer Engineer and Beacon Restoration Project Leader

“Ranger Burt Bogardus had helped keep the Beacon operating since coming to the State Park in 1975. After retirement, Burt remained active in the park and ‘beaconology’. I began helping Burt with maintenance in 2006, heading to the Summit prior to the lighting ceremony to make sure the Beacon was fit to operate. As years went on, more and deeper work was required to keep it operational.

“One year I had to push the Beacon manually for 45 minutes to get it loosened so the drive could keep it going. Rust continues to work on the metal where paint no longer offers protection. The time was right to get serious about rehabilitation of the Beacon.

“Three years later, Assemblymember Buchanan wrote a bill allowing us to work with the Department of Parks and Recreation. This news brought out interested people and companies with offers to help! There was great energy brought by the new volunteers that helped to re-energize us. We still have additional planning to do to assure the Beacon’s historical integrity isn’t compromised before any physical work is done. Our goal is to have a restored beacon for this year’s ceremony.”

Donations can be made to the Beacon Restoration Fund at www.SaveMountDiablo.org

Top: An aerial view of the rusty Beacon looking east with the mountain’s double peaked shadow casting toward the Central Valley. Left: It takes many talents and many volunteers to restore the Beacon. Here are some of the volunteers involved in the project from left to right including Rex Bothell, Jim Hadley, Jerry Farley, Executive Director Ron Brown, Neal Dawson, Dick Heron, Mike Woodring, Burt Bogardus, John Gallagher, John Stuart, Tom Crosby and Greg Daley. Right: The original Standard Diablo Oil tower the Beacon sat atop.



Mike Dillon

Preserve

Defend

Moonlight on the Mountain, September 8, 2012

Our unique anniversary celebration under the light of the moon was complete with nearly 500 guests joining us for an elegant dinner, live music, presentation of the Mountain Star Awards and live and silent auctions next to China Wall.



Melvin and Teri Day pause in front of golden slopes during the silent auction. City Manager Valerie Barone, Concord Mayor Ron Leone and Concord City Councilmember Dan Helix representing honoree City of Concord, Sarah Gilman, Jeremy Madsen, Michael Wright, Jennifer Drayton, Amie Fishman and Roseanne Nieto. Assemblymember Joan Buchanan hands Dave Sargent a resolution for his Mountain Star Award.

Moonlight on the Mountain was supported by our generous sponsors, donors and volunteers



Kirker Creek Cleanup, September 29, 2012

Volunteers from REI joined us to clean up ten cubic yards of debris from a section of Kirker Creek near the mouth of historic Nortonville Canyon in Celebration of National Public Lands Day.



Volunteers worked together to gather and sort debris on a hillside next to Kirker Pass Road to prevent it from getting into Kirker Creek. The dedicated crew of volunteers wave from in front of Thomas Home Ranch's historic barn. With a smile on her face, this volunteer helped haul the ten cubic yards of debris out of the creek canyon by hand to protect the watershed and clear out the wildlife corridor

A section of creek was cleaned thanks to our generous sponsors and volunteers



This project was supported by the Community Watershed Stewardship Grant Program of the Contra Costa Watershed Program, administered by the Watershed Project.



Restore

Enjoy

Mount Diablo Challenge, October 7, 2012

Cyclists rode 11.2 miles from Athenian School in Danville up Southgate Road climbing 3,249 feet in elevation gain to the summit of Mount Diablo using nothing but human power to celebrate the mountain and take in the views.



Christina Rodriguez of Danville led a pack up the 3,249 foot elevation gain. First place finisher John Moskowitz of Benicia celebrated after the final climb up "the Wall" as he crossed the finish line at an impressive 47:08. Our most mature cyclist, Chuck Tyler at 84 and our youngest rider, 8 year old Honor joined us on stage and reminded us the you are only as old as you feel and continuing the activities you love in the great outdoors doesn't hurt either.

We rode to the top thanks to our generous sponsors and volunteers



Trail Adventure, November 4, 2012

Adventurers joined us at Castle Rock Park for Family Hikes with naturalists or 5K, 10K and Half Marathon trail runs to explore the lovely Diablo wilderness in fall and support the protection of more park lands and trails.



The Arangels showed their enthusiasm as they head out on their naturalist led Family Hike through Castle Rock. Dawn Williams, running the 5K, shares a wooded trail and a laugh with 10Kers Allison Cahill and Joseph Rodrigues. These three young naturalists proudly wear their medals near the finish line after completing the Family Hike before enjoying the well earned delicious treats of the barbeque lunch.

We found our adventure on Mount Diablo thanks to our generous sponsors and volunteers



Saving Mount Diablo: Hellos and Goodbyes



Thank You, Charla Gabert

Charla began volunteering with us in 2001 and joined the Board of Directors in 2006. On the Advancement Committee, her dedication helped further our mission to preserve the Diablo wilderness. "I've lived all over the U.S., and having wild land so close to home is unique. I take pride and satisfaction in knowing that I've played

a small part in preserving these lands forever." Although she is leaving the board, we are excited that Charla will continue to assist us with marketing and communications.



Welcome, Ken Dami

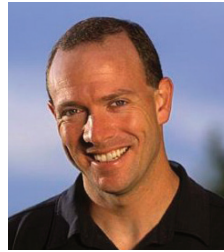
Ken got involved with us when his son constructed a trail on our property for his Eagle Scout project. Ken cares deeply for our community: "I believe in a balance between business development and preservation of our natural resources to sustain a high quality of life." In addition to joining our Board, Ken works for Tesoro

Golden Eagle Refinery. In his spare time, he enjoys backpacking, fishing, cooking, and community service. He and his wife Monica live in the East Bay with their children Matt and Alexandra.



Welcome, Gary Johnson

A 41 year resident of Contra Costa, Gary is an avid cyclist and has practiced law since 1971. He and his wife Sandy live in Mt. Diablo's southern foothills and enjoy its splendor and quietude daily. "I hope to preserve and extend the joys of Mount Diablo for others. I am proud to serve on the Board of Directors, to have the opportunity to influence Save Mount Diablo's continued success, promote our mission and inspire others to a similar vision." Gary has also joined our Land Committee.



Thank You, Dave Husted

A Walnut Creek native, Dave has always loved the outdoors. In addition to serving on the Board of Directors since 2006, he joined the Advancement, Executive and Map Committees. As an avid trail runner, Dave got involved with the Trail Adventure and helped start the Diablo Trails Challenge with a 50k to engage long

distance runners. He also started the family hike series often taking his two young ones. We appreciate Dave's service and look forward to see him blazing new trails on Diablo and beyond.



Welcome, Sue Ohanian

A longtime supporter, Sue has joined our Board. She has been busy over the past two years volunteering for our Advancement Department with everything from coordinating Moonlight donations to organizing artists for paint-outs. An enthusiastic backpacker since childhood, she delights in hiking, botanizing and

birding around the mountain. "I can't think of a charter nearer to my heart than working to preserve Mount Diablo." Sue and her husband Steve have lived in Alamo since 1989.

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Thank you to all of our supporters. Tribute gifts, donations in honor or memory of loved ones, made between July 1st and December 31st, 2012 are listed below. Your generosity preserves, defends and restores the mountain for all of us to enjoy!



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Wild pansy

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Experience the Mountain Your Way



Moonlight on the Mountain

This unique anniversary celebration includes wine tasting, hors d'oeuvres, silent and live auctions, an elegant dinner, live music and the Mountain Star Awards next to the dramatic rocks of China Wall with a spectacular view of Mount Diablo. Saturday, September 7, 2013



Mount Diablo Challenge

One thousand cyclists compete in this timed ride, climbing 3,249 feet in elevation in just 11.2 miles to the summit of Mount Diablo. In addition to coveted shirts for cyclists finishing under an hour, prizes are awarded at the summit with refreshments for all. Sunday, October 6, 2013



Trail Adventure

Find your adventure! Presented by Chevron, this event offers a distance for everyone with a Half-Marathon, 5K, 10K and Family Hike on Diablo's slopes. Runners and hikers receive medals, shirts and lunch at the expo after the race. Sunday, November 3, 2013

Save Mount Diablo's Partner Sponsors



Partner Sponsors support our land preservation programs and receive recognition at all events for one year. Call Emily for info at (925) 947-3535.

Our Mission

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.

What We Do

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.

Why We Care

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 70,000 acres, is privately owned and still threatened by development. That means risking the loss of wildlife corridors, ecosystems and recreational opportunities.