

Foundation Outreach and Collaboration

Foundation outreach and collaboration experiences have shown real value in helping us achieve much more than we could achieve on our own. Collaborations have also been rewarding for our volunteers and partner organizations. Below are some highlights of how the Foundation has been reaching out to families and organizations in our Community.

Public Events

Despite the pandemic, Bill Hunt's oak planting event series for the general public has attracted families and individuals to the open space. These fun events help raise awareness of the WCOS and the WCOSF in the Community and provide an introduction to restoration techniques for beginners. In addition, the total number of trees in the Open Space, the number of Foundation members, and the pool of regular volunteers in our projects have increased.



Bill Hunt directing work in Shell Ridge.
Photo: Kime Smith

Eagle Scout Candidate Projects

Boy Scouts of America's Eagle Candidate projects provide youth an opportunity to demonstrate leadership and provide a valuable service to the Community. Recently we were lucky to have Walnut Creek resident William Anderson accept the challenge of turning a sheet of plywood into nine bird boxes for trees in the North

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William checks the plan to keep work on track.
Photo: Kime Smith

A Giant of Nature Lost

A memory of Brian written by one of his friends, Tom Stienstra of the San Francisco Chronicle follows. [-ed]

A landmark outdoorsman, photographer and conservationist, Brian Murphy of Rossmoor/Walnut Creek, passed away after a six-year battle with skin cancer, reported Hall of Fame skipper Jacqueline Douglas of the Wacky Jacky.

A quote from Keith Olbermann might help put this in perspective. When an athlete's health status was listed as "day to day," Olbermann responded, "Aren't we all?"

I wrote this story about Brian a few years ago for the SF Chronicle. A link to the entire story is at the end:

Barely a month removed from skin cancer surgery, Brian Murphy took to a trail last week for his first post-procedure walk in the sun.

The wildlife photographer, nature lover and fisherman from Walnut Creek noticed movement in the grass ahead along the trail. As he neared, Murphy pulled out a pocket camera. Just 20 feet away, a bobcat was munching on a pocket gopher for lunch. Right then, Murphy affirmed one of his life lessons: Never go anywhere without a camera. "Part of my rehab is being out in nature, and it works," Murphy said. "My legs are tired, but the spirit is returning."

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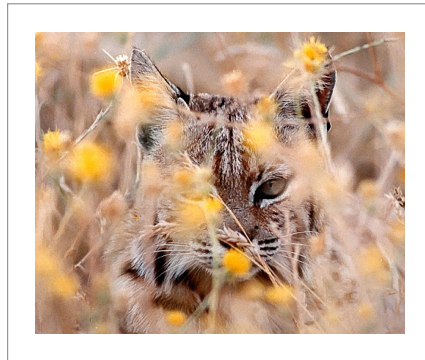
A Giant of Nature Lost

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Murphy is a 25-year field scout who has contributed many sensational wildlife, wildflower and landscape photos that have appeared in The Chronicle. In his career as an engineering technician, he worked for 32 years on capital improvements for the city of Walnut Creek. He is a conservationist who has restored wildlife habitat in the foothills of Mount Diablo, built nesting boxes for wood ducks and miniature condo-style homes for bats, and has crusaded against the use of mice poison in order to protect owls and other raptors that might eat poisoned prey.

Murphy is also an expert salmon fisherman who brings a crew of regulars on trips aboard the Wacky

Jacky out of San Francisco, and who has captured his adventures and amazing sunrises out the Golden Gate with an array of top-tier photos. "My Irish skin has never done well in California sunshine," Murphy said. "In the field, sunscreen tends to get into my eyes and that would make outdoor



Bobcat seen in the open space.
Photo: Brian Murphy

photography difficult, so I didn't wear it much.

"I did not deal with some skin cancer. I didn't think it was a bad cancer. I discovered untreated skin cancer only gets worse and gets into places you think it would not go. It would have been so much simpler to just see the doctor and have it removed in a much less invasive manner." To see my entire profile about Brian, go to <https://www.sfchronicle.com/.../Outdoors-lover-drinks-in...>

*-Tom Stienstra
Outdoor Writer Emeritus for the
San Francisco Chronicle*

On March 3, 2023, Brian Murphy passed away from his illness. A Celebration of Life was held on May 24 at the Hanna Grove Amphitheater, a short distance from one of his Foundation project areas, Quail Gully. He will be missed. [-ed]

Foundation Outreach and Collaboration

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Lime Ridge Area of our Open Space. He led other Scouts in the process, starting with gathering tools and materials, then building the boxes, and finally hanging the boxes in the field. The boxes will add nesting opportunities for secondary cavity-nesting songbirds. All OS users will benefit as the songbird population expands.

Contra Costa Resource Conservation District

Bob Simmons, leader of the Deer Lake restoration Project, often works with community groups to further the restoration work on his project near Deer Lake. One recent example is working with the State of California's Contra Costa Resource Conservation District. The CCRCD is a Special District chartered by the state but

funded and administered locally. Several young workers in the District helped with oak restoration near Deer Lake and gained experience with the methods Bob has been using to foster the growth of oaks in that area.

Walnut Creek Open Space Division

The Foundation continues working with the City's open Space Staff. For example, when a large fallen limb blocked the Lone Oak Trail after a wind storm, Staff and Volunteers from the Foundation worked together to clear it. The resulting brush was not just run through a chipper. Instead, the bulk of the debris was moved about a half-mile to augment several brush piles and to create two new piles for the wildlife to use as shelter. A good synergy: the Foundation provided workforce and experience with brush pile creation for wildlife; Staff provided equipment and the balance of the labor needed. The joint project provided OS visitors with a clear trail and wildlife with improved

habitat. A very satisfying result! Please read the project descriptions in this Newsletter issue for additional details and other examples of how we are making a difference through outreach.



Gary starts a new brush pile.
Photo: Kime Smith

Our Restoration Projects

Fossil Hill Native Plant Restoration

We planted several thousand plugs in our 1.5 acres of new areas two years ago. Still, the January to March drought resulted in only a 60-70% success rate. Nevertheless, that was a vast improvement over the year before when even hand watering couldn't keep young plants alive. The soil two years ago was so dry deep down that any water we applied was wicked away from the young plants.

What was particularly successful last year was our annuals. Small patches of Tidy Tips (*Layia platyglossa*) that we had started the year before produced huge patches of color.

The same was true for Sky Lupine (*Lupinus nanus*). From about 25 plants in 2020-2021, we probably had 500 to 800 plants last year. As always, our Poppies put on a good show, blooming for 4 months. Other good performers were Chinese Houses (*Collinsia heterophylla*), Popcorn Flower (*Plagiobothrys* sp.), annual Sunflowers (*Helianthus annuus*), and our new plantings of Red Thistles (*Cirsium occidentale*). Something we didn't realize when we planted the thistles is that they are a significant plant for Hummingbirds. All our Poppies, Lupines, Tidy Tips, Sunflowers, etc., mean nothing to a Hummingbird. The Thistles also started flowering very early in the season, weeks before other Hummingbird favorites such as Monkeyflower and Penstemon began flowering.

We have cleared areas on the north side of Fossil Hill for planting in 2023-2024. We are also doing some plantings in the rocks at the top of the Ridge. This season, we have 6+ acres under cultivation.

New serious volunteers are asked to try out for 1-6 weeks, after which we require a 1-year commitment of once a week.

— Phil Johnson

Deer Lake Report

In 2021, Deer Lake completely dried out for the first time in my memory. Fortunately, as of August 2022, it had significant water in it. Other than cattle troughs, it is, once again, the only summer water source in Shell Ridge. We have been working to plant and nurture trees at Deer Lake through this drought.

In the past, we planted acorns and buckeye seeds and protected them with cylinder screens and fencing. In the last two years, we changed what we do at Deer Lake.

The first change is that we now place cardboard and wood chips at each planting site as mulch, suppressing the non-native grasses that compete with the young trees for water.

Second, we propagated cuttings from a willow and a cottonwood tree nearby. After the cuttings grew a sufficiently large root ball (one-gallon size), we planted them at Deer Lake. We will be propagating more this fall.

The third adjustment to our methodology is that we are now protecting about 20 volunteers (naturally occurring seedlings) above Deer Lake and in one of the drainages to the lake. In addition to enclosing them, we are pruning them to create a tree growth habit and mulching them. In one situation, we saw nearly 3' of growth in a single year!

Fourth is regular watering in the summer. We deliver one gallon of water to each tree monthly by jug. The success rate has been awe-inspiring. A nearby resident, Oliver Seth, helps me on Fridays when we water about 45 trees in the fenced area around Deer Lake. He takes the empty jugs home, fills them, and returns them to Deer Lake. On Saturdays, I fill a 100-gallon bladder at Borges Ranch and head to Deer Lake in the city's Polaris vehicle. The Walnut Creek branch of the National Charity League volunteers, a group of mothers and daughters, then helps water nearly 150 trees outside the fenced area. The League provides about

ten volunteers who have also helped remove dittrechia ("stinkweed"), an invasive plant, from the area.

For context, I checked a 2019 site survey I performed. It showed fewer than 100 planting sites overall; currently, we are protecting more than 200 locations.

— Bob Simmons

The Making of an Oak Woodland

The Oak Habitat volunteers have a success story. We have produced a healthy oak woodland of over 400 oak seedlings and saplings in North Lime. They range from one to five years old; some are over six feet tall.

It has been a learning process right along. Oak seedlings don't just start themselves in sunny rangelands nowadays. The competition is too great. There was alarm by the US Forest Service that under current climate conditions, oak seedlings would no longer replace mature oak woodlands; grasslands were winning out, so research began. We did our reading of their articles.

We ultimately experimented on each step, starting with the information from published research. We intensified each step: harvested acorns were stored differently, planted as early as winter rains permitted, and weeded early-developing spring/summer weeds. We also experimentally provided wire screen or plastic tree shelters and provided shading using burlap attachments to the screens.

Concurrently, we applied mulch from mature oak woodlands to reestablish mycorrhizal fungi, followed by wood chip covers. We also started watering in late February, earlier than in the past, delivering one gallon per oak setting weekly. That continued all summer.

Voilà! We now have 400 healthy young oaks! Some are five to six feet high. We will continue our process until we judge the trees are ready to function independently. Then, we continue the process in another nearby setting.

— Gary Muerle



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Yes, I want to help protect and preserve Walnut Creek's Open Spaces.

We invite you to join the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation. Memberships and contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowable by law. There are numerous areas where you can help. Interested? Drop us an email at volunteer@wcsof.org, visit our website at www.wcsof.org, or fill out the form below and mail it to WCOSF, Box 309, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0309.

I would like to join the Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation

NAME

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EMAIL (WE NEVER SHARE)

☐ PATRON—\$500 ☐ BENEFACTOR—\$250 ☐ SUSTAINING—\$100 ☐ SPONSOR—\$50 ☐ FAMILY—\$40 ☐ INDIVIDUAL—\$25

I WOULD LIKE TO VOLUNTEER TO: ☐ MAINTAIN OAKS ☐ PLANT NATIVES ☐ CREATE WILDLIFE CORRIDORS ☐ HELP WITH OUTREACH

Walnut Creek Open Space Foundation Newsletter

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