

The Lake Merritt Institute

And CENTER FOR URBAN RUNOFF AND WATERSHED RESEARCH

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ISSUE I

REQUEST FOR VOLUNTEERS: If one of your new year's resolutions was to get out more and help the world, we have the perfect opportunity for you. As mentioned in our December newsletter, rain barrels are a grand marriage of art, water conservation, urban runoff reduction, education and water storage for when the big earthquake hits. The Institute wants to bring them to California, starting with the Bay Area. Needed are folks of all sorts to do the bits and pieces of such a project. including someone to order the barrels, to find display places, to coordinate the artists, to produce an educational handout, to transport them, to obtain and install the downspout kits, to advertise and to oversee sales and shipping. We want people who will work together, have fun and see the colorful fruits of their labor pop up in yards, businesses and parks. Peter the artist is interested; how about you? Call 238-2290 or email us at lmi@netwiz.net to become involved.



WHY NOT TRANSITION THE TREE CUTTING? Last month's City proposals to cut down dozens of Lake Merritt trees, including many of the grand old giants, has started a wave of backlash. Petitions are being circulated, emails are flying back & forth, phones are ringing and even requests for legal documents are being made. While few disagree that truly dangerous trees should be removed (four trees or limbs fell in the recent storm) it seems that the cutting plan goes too far, too fast. Consideration doesn't seem to have been given to nesting squirrels and birds who have no other place to go when their home is removed (its hard to nest in a 12 foot tree). And while its true that grade changes at 12th Street necessitate tree removal, why must the Lake landscape be changed all at once?

Remember, DD funds will be available for at least seven more years, and it would be possible to spread out the tree cutting contracts into phases two and three. So why not leave the big, old trees while smaller, new trees grow up? Such transition cutting would avoid the nude landscape scenario while allowing DD plans to move forward in a phased fashion. As for the trees in the way of a parking lot, why not sacrifice a few car spaces rather than a tree that has been here longer than most of us?

GIS PROGRESS: Although funding for our Glen Echo Creek Watershed Geographical Information System is still lacking, we were awarded ArcView (the industry standard) software from the Environmental Systems Research Institute, with training and a textbook to boot. The Institute has also obtained a DSL line at the office, which makes it possible to download very large files needed for such a system. In addition, important contacts have been made with other GIS users in Oakland, both at the City and with "Urban Releaf" with whom we can collaborate.

Our goal is to have a GIS with an interactive hydrological model linking permeable/impermeable surfaces to urban runoff volume available on line by the end of the 2006. Data from such a system will be valuable in determining where and how to reduce urban runoff, as well as educate people about how to take care of their watershed. The project will begin this month: If you want to be involved, let us know.

The Strong Foundation turned down our request for a 24/7 recording creek flow meter, but we are still seeking funding. For a mere \$7,000, data on how much water flows down the creek into Lake Merritt during floods and dry seasons can be a reality. Given the importance of such information in flood control and designing measure DD channel modifications, you would think planners would want to use real numbers rather than estimates.



CHRISTMAS VANDALISM: Our floating Christmas tree had only been up for a few days when vandals pulled on the electrical cord, bringing the raft to shore. They then be-headed the snowman, stole the deer and yanked off some of the lights. Seems like they were mean as well as stupid. Also stolen was the lighted penguin. With the help of City dock attendants, we re-anchored the raft, replaced the deer & lights and re-lit the tree. We looked for another penguin at the store, but they were nowhere to be found. Penguins are now extinct again at Lake Merritt. Maybe next year. A storm tripped the circuit breaker, but the lights were back on by New Year's Eve.

MEASURE DD WATER QUALITY PROJECTS: Based on recommendations provided by the inter-agency Water Quality Committee, the Oakland City Council last month approved use of measure DD funds for the following projects: \$65,000 for signs to discourage bird feeding (which contributes to water pollution and is not at all healthy for the birds); \$5,000 for a tide valve pilot project (which will determine if tides can be kept out of storm drains where filters might be installed); and \$110,000 for a pilot floating island project (which will determine if such a device is feasible in Lake Merritt and if it offers the chance of improving water quality).

DUCKWEED ... AND MORE DUCKWEED:

Green slime is what one inquisitive person called it. Algae thought others. Such were the reactions to yet another onslaught of duckweed from the 5.5 acre Claremont Country Club pond adjacent to the Rockridge shopping center. Carried down Glen Echo creek when the pond overflows, these tiny plants quickly cover large portions of Lake Merritt. They severely disrupt trash removal and add huge amounts of oxygen using organic matter to our eutrophic lagoon. While this is nothing new, the quantities and frequency of duckweed events seem to be increasing.



The golf club and pond neighbors don't like it either. Superintendent Randal Gai and manager Bill Squires requested a permit for use of sterile fish to eat the stuff, but the state Department of Fish & Game denied it based on the assertion (faulty we believe) that the pond is in the flood plain, and because they don't have enough staff to monitor the project. But volunteers could do that. Unless DFG changes their mind, the club will be faced with the unenviable choices of herbicide, very expensive harvesting or continuing to allow tons of the stuff to wash into Lake Merritt.



With every rainstorm, huge amounts of duckweed flow into Lake Merritt, exacerbating our oxygen problem and making trash removal very difficult.



KEEP OAKLAND BEAUTIFUL PROJECT TO HELP WATER QUALITY: A program of the Oakland Public Works Agency, "Keep Oakland Beautiful" works to do just what their name says, and more. According to Gordon Piper, one of their many projects involves landscaping the front and middle slopes at the Lakeview Elementary School (across from the Grand Lake Theater) where erosion on a steep slope has been dumping mud into the street, the storm drain and thence to Lake Merritt. We welcome this project, both for its beautification and because it will reduce mud and silt in the Lake. And of course, the less silt, the less often there will be the need for multi-million dollar dredging projects.

NEW! A MONTHLY BIRD REPORT – By correspondent Hilary Powers: Winter Birding: Lake Merritt is always an amazing place for birds, but the winter - November to March - is when it really shines. In December, the regular fourth-Wednesday Golden Gate Audubon Society bird walk (meets by the globe cage at 9:30 a.m.) enjoyed a break in the storm and caught good looks at 37 species of birds.

Red Phalaropes (tiny swimming birds, gray and white at this season, with black eyelines) were the highlight for rarity. Other notables included lots of Buffleheads (black and white, with a big white patch on the back of the head) and Canvasbacks (with copper-colored heads and white backs). The most common black-headed ducks you'll see all winter are Scaup, and the little ones with white cheek patches are Goldeneyes.



A Bufflehead Churns The Water

Most of the Egrets (the white herons) were out of sight, but four Great Blue Herons (gray-blue with a bit of rust) were chasing each other around the islands as though they were planning to breed here, and the Black-Crowned Night Herons (like it sounds, with orange eyes and two long white feathers at the back of the head) were practically filling the islands.

Lake Merritt has been a bird sanctuary for more than a hundred years, so it's one of the places where you can get really good looks at birds that usually hide. Come on out and try to find them!



THOUSANDS OF LAKE PICTURES: Want to see a few thousand images of Lake Merritt? Just type in “Lake Merritt” on a Google search, hit “images” and you will see several thousand photos, maps and so forth such as the one below from our Lake Merritt Rowing Club and the duck from <wildflowers-cdrom.com>. Dozens of websites are represented and although many want a fee for use of the photos, some (like the Institute’s) are free. Popular topics are waterfowl, marches and scenery. Also shown are aerial photos, foraminifera from the UC Berkeley site, postcards and maps.

Lake Merritt: A great place to learn rowing; a great sport.

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