

The Lake Merritt Institute

A COMMUNITY BASED, NON-PROFIT CORPORATION

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BAG VICTORY IN SAN JOSE: The following is reprinted (stolen) from the newsletter of Save The Bay, whose work also saves Lake Merritt.

“Save The Bay’s three year effort paid off last month, as the San Jose City Council passed California’s toughest city ban on plastic bags! It is a huge victory as the Bay Area’s most populous city stood up to industry opposition to protect the health of our creeks and the Bay. We built broad support from business and community organizations, and this landmark legislation is a model other cities and counties can also adopt.

San Jose’s ordinance bans plastic bags at all retailers and encourages customers to bring their own bags by also requiring a small charge on each paper bag. Save The Bay’s coalition overcame the plastic industry’s well-funded campaign to stop this ordinance by mobilizing strong support from the community, who recognize the importance of eliminating these flimsy and toxic plastic bags from our environment.

By waging and winning this ambitious campaign to help Bay Area cities reduce Bay trash at the source, Save The Bay is building a regional movement to meet the goal of eradicating all trash flowing to the bay in stormwater runoff by 2022. ...

Learn more about the threat plastic bags pose to the Bay at saveSFbay.org/bay-vs-bag.”



Their article continues: “Save The Bay continues to be the region’s leading advocate for reducing trash pollution in the Bay by working with local cities. At press time, Marin County is poised to pass a countywide bag ban. The Alameda County Waste Management Authority will begin the environmental review process for a bag ordinance and the city of Sunnyvale recently voted to draft their own bag ordinance as well. Hayward passed a

polystyrene ban in October and San Mateo County is not far behind. Save The Bay will continue to support these and other Bay Area cities as they move forward with efforts to stop trash at its source.”

REGIONAL WATER BOARD TOURS LAKE: That group of serious looking folks walking around the Lake on May 19th were not amateurs. They were staff from the Bay Area Regional Water Quality Control Board, the state agency charged with enforcing rules that designed to keep our public waters clean, safe and legal. But first, as shown below, they were treated to presentations about the Lake and Oakland’s creek and watershed programs.

Along the way a storm drain filter got vacuumed, storm drain inlets were examined and Measure DD improvements to the Lake (including some for which they wrote permits) were on display. Included were the green roof over a trash container shed, swales that divert street runoff to nice areas that filter it, and the inlet/outlet channel from which and to which our tides come and go. Eventually, they ended up at the Lake Chalet where liquids other than water were closely examined.

We trust that Board staff were dutifully impressed, and that they will continue to vigorously uphold the rules that protect our impaired little lagoon from the ravages of trash, low oxygen and all else that would defile it.



*Regional Water Quality Staff are intent as they learn about our watershed and Lake.
Note artistic rain barrel at center.*

WITHER THE COUNTY? In June, 2010 a company that makes nets (see January, 2010 *Tidings*) which capture trash in urban runoff sent a proposal to the City of Oakland for 4 nets that could be installed near the mouth of Glen Echo creek where trash from about 2,000 acres drains into Lake Merritt. In January, 2011, concerned about how Alameda County might react to the proposal, the city agreed to ask the county what they thought of it since the County owns the channel in which the nets would be installed. In February the County was asked if they had any comments. But, although the proposal is a year old, there seems to be no response from the county. The County is also supposed to provide the City with data on how often the tide gates are closed so we can keep track of how often bottom oxygen levels are liable to be impaired, but the data has been nowhere to be seen for many months. In fact, a representative from the County typically doesn't attend the City Water Quality meetings any more. Add that to the fact that the county hasn't sampled bacteria in the Lake since 2004 and you wonder if they still love us, or not. But, there is hope. The net company has requested a meeting with the County so perhaps now the ball can begin to roll. Stay tuned.

CLIMATE CORNER: From the National Oceanographic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) website:

“Historic flooding, a record-breaking tornado outbreak and devastating wildfire activity made April 2011 a month of historic climate extremes across much of the United States, according to scientists at NOAA’s National Climatic Data Center (NCDC) in Asheville, N.C. The average U.S. temperature in April was 52.9 degrees F, which is 0.9 degrees F above the long-term (1901-2000) average. April precipitation was 0.7 inches above the long-term average, the 10th wettest April on record. This monthly analysis, based on records dating back to 1895, is part of the suite of climate services NOAA provides.”

And if that is not enough, check out the op/ed summary published by the Washington Post at www.350.org/connections which also mentioned the current drought in Texas - now worse than the dust bowl, megafloods in Pakistan and Australia, massive forest devastation in the western U.S. and Canada, the Russian heat wave that ravaged their wheat crop as well as crop failures in France, Germany and elsewhere. Put ‘em together and whatever you got is not normal.

It would seem that two truths are self evident: Climate change is politically unstoppable (because politicians compromise but carbon dioxide does not) and economically irreversible (you can't refreeze the arctic or the glaciers; you can't cool the ocean).

BIRD COLUMN: Summer Approaching; Ducks Gone.

All the wintering ducks and grebes had left Lake Merritt by the time the May 4th-Wednesday bird walk went looking for them, and there was only one lone lorn American

Coot (black with a white bill) scratching about. On the other hand, Hank the rescue White Pelican had three shining white friends to swim and fish with, and the Double-crested Cormorants (now quite crestless) were still nesting in huge numbers on the islands. Judging by the full-sized youngsters sitting about - recognizable by their bronze feathers and nearly white breasts - the birds on the nests now are probably a second round of breeders.

Over in the park, the Canada Geese were out in force - only two sets of babies, but lots and lots of newly arrived adults here on their annual molt migration. The park's protected lawns are all the attraction they need; it looks like every third goose in Northern California flaps to Lake Merritt and Lakeside Park to shuck and regrow the year's suit of flight feathers. We also saw a flock of Cedar Waxwings (out late in the year for them) and an unusually large number of Oak Titmice (tiny gray birds with perky crests), which was satisfying as they're a threatened species around here these days. The lawns near Children's Fairyland were full of Dark-eyed Juncos (little brown birds with black hoods and two white tail feathers), and an American Robin was building a nest in one of the oak trees. And we were admiring a truly splendid male Nuttall's Woodpecker (black and white ladder back; red crown) when the rain started coming down in earnest, and we headed back through the garden to the parking lot about an hour early.

Only 29 species - but that included White-throated Swifts (otherwise black) circling over the lake and Brewer's Blackbirds (shiny black with gold eyes) on the lawns near El Embarcadero, neither reported on one of these walks in living memory - so all told, rain and all, it was a lovely day at Lake Merritt yet again, where every day is a lovely day....

RECENT SCENES FROM THE LAKE



Oak Ness Monster Observed by Gondola dock.



It took one last look before diving to the briny deep.

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