HAPPY NEW YEAR! The Lake Merritt Institute looks forward to its 24th year working together with YOU to clean our amazing and beautiful LAKE MERRITT. We begin each new year with beautiful Measure DD improvements, an enthusiastic LMI staff and loyal team of volunteers who clean the Lake each Tuesday and Saturday morning and the partnership of the City of Oakland and many local businesses and civic organizations.

Please put volunteering to clean the Lake on your list of New Year’s Resolutions. And it’s always a great time to become a supporting member of LMI. You can join the Lake Merritt Institute, make a donation, or volunteer to clean the lake at our website lakemerrittinstitute.org.

2018 was a challenging year. It brought to a head the crisis of homelessness in our city and the impact of encampments on the park and wildlife refuge. We experienced an air quality emergency caused by climate-change fueled fires, elevated levels of bacteria in the lake, E-Scooter and other heavy dumping issues and the problem of large numbers of hypodermic syringes accumulating behind storm drain barriers at the shoreline. However, in every case, the challenges spurred increased cooperation among City of Oakland, LMI and other civic organizations and local citizens. We wish to acknowledge our Executive Director James Robinson’s leadership and tireless dedication to addressing these challenges. LOVE YOUR LAKE!…….

COME JOIN US on MONDAY January 21st for Oakland’s 17th Annual OAKLAND MARTIN LUTHER KING Jr. DAY of Service!
LMI’s Executive Director James Robinson and our staff and volunteers will provide instruction, protective gear and equipment for the public to clean the lake safely.

To participate, come to the Lake Merritt Boating Center at 568 Bellevue Ave in Lakeshore Park at 9 a.m. – 12 noon on Monday.

“Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve.” – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

LMI Director James Robinson and LMI Staff hosted 155 volunteers, made 3 educational presentations.

LMI in December: 2040 lbs. of trash were removed from the lake in December totaling 24,280 pounds total in 2018.

1.96 inches rain recorded by LMI rain gauge
A Big Thank You to Retiring City Watershed Manager Lesley Estes

The Lake Merritt Institute expresses our heartfelt thanks and best wishes to Lesley Estes, who retired as Watershed and Measure DD Manager in December. Lesley has worked closely with LMI to protect the environmental quality of Lake Merritt over many years. She worked for the City of Oakland in the Public Works Department for 25 years.

According to Jennifer Stern, Environmental Stewardship Analyst in Oakland’s Environmental Services Division, “Lesley Estes built the Watershed and Storm water Program from the ground up. Oakland’s waterways have benefitted immensely from her passion and dedication to protecting, improving and conserving the natural water resources of Oakland.”

Measure DD improvements completed during her tenure as Manager will be a lasting contribution to the health and beauty of Oakland’s environment. The new Watershed and Measure DD Manager will be Kristin Hathaway, another experienced City of Oakland employee. LMI looks forward to working with Ms. Hathaway on the many challenges and opportunities facing Lake Merritt in 2019 and beyond.

THANK YOU TO OUR DECEMBER VOLUNTEERS!

Volunteer groups in December included Community Initiative, Lime Employees, Oakland Tech Science Academy, the Lake Merritt Rowing Club, St Paul’s Episcopal Middle School 6th grade, Piedmont High School, Our U-Clean-It self-organized teams, and the LMI A-TEAM regulars. We appreciate your efforts and community spirit. Great Job!

At left, the Lake Merritt Rowing Club helped LMI remove a waterlogged queen sized mattress from lake.

Dumping of heavy objects in Lake Merritt has increased over the last few years. Removing them takes time and resources that are needed to remove other kinds of trash and maintain our aeration fountains.

At right, a loveseat half-submerged on the far side of a bird island awaits removal. LMI protects the environmental quality of our wildlife refuge. Photo by Steven Summers.
The day after Christmas drew a lively crowd for the 4th-Wednesday Golden Gate Audubon walk – about 35 people, though I kept answering questions and losing count. Most of the lake regulars showed up around the islands – both sorts of scaup, stiff-tailed Ruddy Ducks (not, of course, at all ruddy at this season), Canvasbacks, Canada Geese and Mallards, Common Goldeneyes with their moon-marked faces, and a fair-sized flock of Bufflehead (both black and white males and brown females) swimming and diving in a tight circle, chasing something.... We saw a few Double-crested Cormorants sitting on the floats, but the trees were back to normal for the season (all the nests empty and ignored). Overall populations continued to feel low, especially for the scaup, though all the individuals looked bright-eyed and healthy.

The islands offered lots of Black-crowned Night-Herons of all ages, along with some Snowy Egrets and one Great Blue Heron, and a Great Egret showed up along the far side of the lake. That gave us all the expected herons except for the Green, missing since last September – which wasn’t really a surprise; we haven’t seen one in December since 2016, and in only three other Decembers since 2009.

In the paddock – the area with the fresh water ponds that the park people drain and scrub clean every week or so – the new boss bird is a domestic Swan Goose, fawn-colored and black-beaked and striding around masterfully. The Muscovy Duck flock (madly variegated in plumage but all with gnarled red growths on their heads), now up to eight individuals from the two or three of past months, stayed together, avoiding the Swan Goose despite looking to weigh about as much. Do these domestic birds fly in? Or is it reverse duck-napping? Who knows.... Certainly the chickens living in one of the tent camps were brought in.

The bird of the day was the second burglar-masked Townsend’s Warbler we met along the side of the lake between the playground and El Embarcadero – an area where warblers of any kind rarely appear and are still more rarely seen well as they prefer the tops of thick trees. But this brilliant gold, olive, and black beauty spent many minutes in the lower edge of a sparsely leafed oak, heading back and forth from one little well-lighted branch to another without regard to the breathless crowd standing a few feet away. (The first Townsend’s was a female in one of the New Zealand Tea bushes; similar coloring but everything dimmed down to yellowish and dull olive and brown. She was just as welcome for allowing herself to be seen without inflicting the dreaded warbler neck upon the observers, but didn’t stay around nearly as long.)

In the garden, a couple of Brown Creepers delighted the eye, picking their way up tree trunks and along branches in plain sight and flying down to start over at equally visible spots – except for one, which flew to the back of a nearby trunk and had turned into a black and white Nuttall’s Woodpecker by the time it circled into view. (Yeah, not really – but that’s surely what it looked like! The timing was just right.) We also picked up a California Scrub Jay – which still felt like a novelty, even though this was its ninth month to appear this year — and a speckle-breasted Hermit Thrush, a genuine novelty, as well as the usual Chestnut-backed Chickadees and Oak Titmice and Bushtits. Fox Sparrows scuffled in the leaf mold along with both crowned sparrows and the dust-brown California Towhees (which are basically really big sparrows too).

The ten or so birders who made it to the end of the trip – we ran very long, past 12:30 – without departing for other appointments had the chance to see 48 wild species all told (not everyone sees everything the group finds, alas), which was higher than in the past three Decembers, making it yet another good day at Lake Merritt. (Where, of course, every day is its own sort of good day) ....
***AUDUBON BIRDWALKS AT THE LAKE:*** Join bird expert Hilary Powers any fourth Wednesday of the month for a free “Birdwalk” at the lake. Muster at the geodesic bird cage near the Nature Center at 9:30 a.m. for what are always fascinating introductions to lake birdlife.***

The Tidings Editor Katie Noonan caught the GGA bird walk with Hilary Powers and about 35 others on December 26th. The sun was shining and everyone was getting along. A bongo drummer dimmed his beats as the birders walked by and the birders kept a reasonable distance from the burgeoning homeless camps (with chickens!) and used tents and pails as markers to point out birds. Happy 2019 at Lake Merritt!

On this 4th Wednesday Walk, I learned that Golden Gate Audubon conducted its Annual Christmas Bird Count in Oakland at Lake Merritt and at Arrowhead Marsh on December 18th. The number of species of birds sighted has held steady over the years, but the numbers of individuals of each species has declined, especially for ducks. Called “the tragedy of the common”, dwindling populations of common birds is a concern. Black-crowned Night Heron populations are doing well, but the efforts to lure them back to nesting on the bird islands using decoys and call play-backs did not succeed in the first round. Birds 1: Humans 0.

**Hypodermic Syringe Problem: LMI Board Urges Action**

In December, The Tidings reported on the alarming number of used hypodermic syringes found inside storm drain barriers at Grand and Harrison (notably #56; The Tidings December 2018, see also thecoastodian.org). The story was picked up and spread by local media (see video [here](#). As LMI’s A-Team member Della Mundy said, the 250 used needles reported are an unusual occurrence, probably linked to the first big rains, but any needles in the lake are unacceptable and raise a public health concern for volunteers, wildlife, and others.

The Lake Merritt Institute is asking the public and the City to endorse action to find a solution (see Resolution below).

The used needles arrive at the lake via the City’s storm drain system. Approximately 125 curb inlets lead to the storm drain that flows to outfall #56.

At left, a typical storm drain inlet as seen from the street.
Relatively small, local areas drain into each storm drain inlet. Finding needles can therefore lead to the source of the dumping. The source may be a homeless camp, a needle/syringe exchange program, isolated individuals, or something like a toilet incorrectly connected to a storm drain.

*It is illegal to dispose of used needles into the environment, but the original source of the needles might not be the culpable person or organization. Hypodermic needles are widely and lawfully used by diabetics and others who dispose of them responsibly into sharps containers. Contents of a sharps box they use may be dumped without their knowledge.

Storm drain filters can be installed on curb inlets and would be invisible to passersby. The City of Oakland has tested several types of curb inlet filters including locations near Whole Foods, and along Grand Avenue and found them useful. Recently, LMI supported the City of Oakland Watershed Division in mapping and searching for needles in storm drains near Outfall #56.

Thousands of such curb inlet filters have been installed in the Los Angeles area. Such filters can prevent syringes from entering Lake Merritt.

The LMI Board resolution, passed unanimously, recommends that:

- the City of Oakland install curb inlet filters or similar devices that are effective in keeping syringes out of Lake Merritt at all curb inlets leading to outfall 56.
- Citizens and all agencies involved with the Clean Water Act support the installation of curb inlet filters in the watershed leading to outfall 56 in order to prevent syringes and other trash from entering Lake Merritt.
- The Lake Merritt Institute assist in obtaining funds for the purpose of installing curb inlet filters in

Another important benefit of storm drain filters: Oakland is required to reduce trash entering Lake Merritt to zero by 2022. Curb inlet filters will capture such trash, and promote compliance with the Clean Water Act (see links in References).

Full text of Lake Merritt Institute Board Resolution:

**RESOLUTION: THE LAKE MERRITT SYRINGE PROBLEM**

By: The Lake Merritt Institute Board of Directors

November, 2018

Whereas: Hundreds of used syringes have been found at storm drain outfalls in Lake Merritt.

Whereas: These syringes are concentrated at Grand and Harrison streets, by outfall 56.
Whereas: This problem has been continuing for several years.
Whereas: These syringes are a potential health problem to volunteers, wildlife, and others.
Whereas: These syringes are entering the Lake through storm drains.
Whereas: Approximately 125 curb inlets lead to the storm drain that flows to outfall 56.
Whereas: Filters can be installed on these curb inlets.
Whereas: The City of Oakland has tested several types of curb inlet filters and found them useful.
Whereas: Thousands of such curb inlet filters have been installed in the Los Angeles area.
Whereas: Such filters can prevent syringes from entering Lake Merritt.
Whereas: Syringes found in filtered curb inlets can provide information as to their source.
Whereas: Once found, the source of the syringes can be eliminated.
Whereas: Oakland is required to reduce trash entering Lake Merritt to zero.
Whereas: Curb inlet filters will capture such trash, and promote compliance with the Clean Water Act.

Now be it resolved that:

- The Lake Merritt Institute strongly urges the City of Oakland to install curb inlet filters or similar devices that are effective in keeping syringes out of Lake Merritt at all curb inlets leading to outfall 56.
- The Lake Merritt Institute urges citizens, and all other agencies involved with the Clean Water Act to support the installation of curb inlet filters in the watershed leading to outfall 56 in order to prevent syringes and other trash from entering Lake Merritt.
- The Lake Merritt Institute will assist in obtaining funds for the expressed purpose of installing curb inlet filters in the watershed leading to outfall 56.

**E-Scooter Dumping Update:** E-Scooters continue to be a problem at Lake Merritt. Lake Merritt Institute director James Robinson has meet with the City Department of Transportation and the E-Scooter over the past several months. Lake Merritt’s problem received national and international attention in the L.A. Times and The Guardian. As Dr. Bailey put it, both are “a testament to the power of Lake Merritt in generating concern for the environment.”

A recent meeting of Lake Merritt Advocates focused on the issue of scooters and their effect on the Lakeside Park community and environment. Ryan Russo, Director, Oakland Department of Transportation, addressed the January 10th meeting. A report will follow at lakemerritt.org.

**2019: A RAY OF HOPE** - A Guest Editorial by Dr. Richard Bailey

As shown in this video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLNruOqmnNo&feature=youtu.be) by “The Years Project,” 2018 brought us not only increasingly devastating climate disasters, but also ten signs of progress towards a better future. Actions taken by China, California, New Zealand, Israel, Costa Rica, New York City, Ireland, Xcel Energy, and energy companies that install wind and solar show us that we have the economic and technological means to slow global warming. The question remains; do we care enough to implement the right policies (see example below) and fast enough? (in 12 years).
Sure, we care: But it seems overwhelming. What can one person do? If you live in an apartment, or can’t afford a few thousand bucks for solar panels, don’t have any fossil fuel investments to divest, and can’t afford an electric car, what can you do?

The answer is here. A bi-partisan coalition is introducing legislation in the U.S. Congress this year, and you can lend your voice in support.

This policy puts a fee on fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas. It starts low, and grows over time. It will drive down carbon pollution because energy companies, industries, and consumers will move toward cleaner, cheaper options.

Carbon Dividend: The money collected from the carbon fee is allocated in equal shares every month to the American people to spend as they see fit. Program costs are paid from the fees collected. The government does not keep any of the money from the carbon fee.

Border Adjustment: To protect U.S. manufacturers and jobs, imported goods will be assessed a border carbon adjustment, and goods exported from the United States will receive a refund under this policy.

Regulatory Adjustment: There are not currently any active U.S. regulations on CO₂ emissions. The Senate and House versions of the bill address how any future regulations on greenhouse gas emissions covered by this policy can be handled. The Senate bill calls for an EPA review after 6 years. The House bill prevents new regulations by the EPA on covered emissions, but if emission targets are not being met after 10 years, regulatory authority over these emissions would be restored. Neither bill impacts regulations on any other pollutants, including auto mileage standards, water quality and more.

A damaged climate creates drought, sea level rise, floods, acid oceans, fires, famine, war and refugees.

A healthy climate can provide water, food, clean air, forests, recreation, and a place for our children to live.

The choice is clear. We cannot allow fear of a carbon tax, petty politics, cultural differences, greed, and corruption to dictate what our climate, and our future, will be.
Oakland Teachers and Students Want Climate Literacy Graduation Requirement

Most kids would not want to up the number of requirements they need to check off to move on into the adult world of higher education or work. However, a group of Oakland students and their teachers are passionate about doing just that!

Teachers from the Oakland Education Association (OEA)’s Environmental Justice Caucus have been working with the Oakland Unified’s School Board to implement the Sierra Club Climate Literacy Initiative for Oakland students -- and to provide curriculum and resources for them to achieve that in K12 education. This is a tall order in California’s cash-strapped public school system (see discussion in Bay Nature Dec issue and links in references).

Working with Board Member Jody London, the teachers and students have updated an existing environmental education policy from the 1970’s (remember Earth Day 1970?). Students from Joseph Senn’s AP Environmental Science classes worked directly with OUSD officials to draft a climate literacy policy resolution.

The resolution (which does not include the graduation requirement for technical reasons) will be addressed at the next OUSD School Board meeting on January 23rd. You can see the draft board policy and sign a letter in support if you wish here LETTER.

LMI congratulates the EJC, students and teachers on their environmental advocacy and wishes them well.

Grand Opening of the Rotary Nature Center!

LMI is delighted to report that our longtime partner, The Rotary Nature Center, will reopen soon. Oakland Parks Recreation & Youth Development Supervisor Karis Griffin announced the ‘Grand Re-Opening of the Rotary Nature Center’, Saturday, February 16, 2019, 1:00pm to 3:30pm, at 600 Bellevue Avenue.”

At left: January 5th Adopt-a-Spot Cleanup a.k.a. Weeding in the Rain. This Nature Center is loved!
HAPPY NEW YEAR!

This beautiful photo of the Glen Echo Fountain and the necklace of lights in the background was taken by Lake Merritt Institute director James Robinson on January 1st 2019

REFERENCES

Birds:
Bird conservation –
Golden Gate Audubon
https://www.audubon.org/
Lake Merritt Christmas Counts not in yet
https://www.audubon.org/118th-christmas-bird-count-alphabetical-index-regional-summaries

Used Hypodermic Syringe Runoff Problem:
250 needles found on November 21st
By David DeBolt | ddebolt@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group
PUBLISHED: November 23, 2018 at 1:56 pm | UPDATED: November 30, 2018 at 4:29 pm

Effectiveness of trash nets:
Trash Goals:
Regional Water Quality Agreement (RMP)
See references in The Tidings 10 2017
City of Oakland, Informational Report on Stormwater Trash Load Reduction 4/13/17
Attachment B – Oakland Trash Generation Map (EOA, Inc. Jan. 30th 2014)
https://www.kqed.org/science/1917206/trashy-bay-has-oakland-really-cleaned-up-its-act

E-Scooter Update:
KTVU Interview with LMI Director James Robinson and Della Mundy

Climate Literacy Resolution:
Climate Change Literacy Resolution - Passed by Sierra Club California Regional Conservation Committee, May 1, 2016
Sierra Club California wants all high school students to know the fundamentals of climate literacy, including (1) causes of climate change; (2) its potential for harm; (3) what is required to avoid climate destabilization; (4) actions needed to ensure a livable future; and (5) the key people and institutions involved in implementing those actions.

Oakland’s Climate Literacy Board policy resolution –
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdZ9n3yERXVinDm107ok5EzPMZ2mNqw-N0s6TQSXXpHOm04fw/viewform

A thoughtful discussion: Amanda Machado Dec 28, 2018 in Bay Nature: Can California teach an understanding of the natural world to every K-12 schoolkid in the state?
https://baynature.org/article/schools-outside/