HIDDEN SUPPORT – In essence, support is praise, and praise is good - even if it’s quite subtly placed. At the Broadway Pet Hospital, located in Oakland at the corner of Broadway and 51st St., Doctors of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) Arnold Gutlaizer, Roger Schulze, and Joan Wright, wanted to decorate the large, exposed northern side-wall to their pet hospital with something eye catching. Thus, in 2004 they contacted StefenArt (www.stefenart.com) to develop a unique mural for the site. Stefen came up with a delightfully whimsical design that he titled “Promenade at Lake Merritt”, featuring the hospital’s dog and cat patients all having a great time at the well recognized Lake Merritt Pergola (on the Trestle Glen Arm). Clever is that flying from a pole at the rear of the horse and buggy depicted in the scene is a pendant in support of LMI. Stefen wanted to express gratitude to the volunteers of LMI for their great work. Thank you Broadway Pet Hospital, and thank you Stefen.

THE BIG PICTURE: THE BASIC GEOLOGICAL HISTORY OF SAN FRANCISCO BAY – Geologists have determined that the San Francisco Bay proper is a valley formed by a single, massive block, located between the San Andreas and Hayward faults, which dropped downward during repeated episodes of tectonic movement. Studies of the compositions of core samples taken from deep bay mud deposited on the top of this large block reveal that the bay was probably first flooded about 1 million years ago, and that bay waters have come and gone several times since. As for the San Francisco Bay that we all now know, Geologists believe it is relatively young at only about 10,000 years, a product of today’s “between recent Ice Ages” sea levels. (Continued)
Noteworthy is that today’s Geologists now more correctly refer to our beloved “bay” as the “San Francisco Estuary”. This is because the entire bay complex (including San Pablo Bay, Carquinez Straight, Suisun Bay, and the Delta; and all of the creeks and rivers from the surrounding drainage basins of the coastal ranges) really form a large mixing bowl of fresh water from land and salt water from the sea via the Golden Gate. Thus, scientifically speaking, we don’t really have a salt water bay before us, but what is now referred to as a “large estuarine system”.

The volume of fresh water that currently flows into and through the bay is relatively large. The Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers deliver approximately 40% of all of the precipitation that lands upon our state. Think of run-off from Mt. Shasta and Mt. Lassen (the two most southern live volcanoes of the Cascade range), the Klamath Mountains, the Sierra Nevada (western slopes), Tehachapi Mountains, and the Coastal Ranges (North-Eastern slopes). All of the above constitutes about 90% of the freshwater flow into the bay. The Petaluma, Napa, and other area rivers contribute the approximately 10% remaining. Of note, all of this freshwater is only about 60% of the historic flow due to both northern and southern Californian residential and agricultural diversion (roughly 15% and 85% respectively). Thus, many parts of the bay that have reduced freshwater flows but experience strong tidal incursions, have water that is on average saltier than historic levels. Alternately, the more shallow parts of the bay, typically the south bay, which are being fed with higher volumes of suburban irrigation run-off and purified sanitary sewer outfall, often have critically low levels of salt. Coming up: The Age of Mega-Fauna.

SAN FRANCISCO BAY WATER TRAIL TAKING SHAPE
– Just as with the San Francisco Bay Area Ridge Trail, a 510 mile foot-trail that follows the ridgelines that encircle the 9 counties of the Bay Area, the San Francisco Water Trail will soon provide complete facilities to kayakers and boaters on the bay. The Bay Water Trail is meant to serve as a kind of marine parallel to the popular Ridge Trail, and when completed will offer paddlers and recreational boaters a series of sites around the bay’s shorelines from which to launch boats or haul out, as well as find restrooms and other facilities that will enable longer trips around the Bay. The trail added two new sites last December and is expanding in 2016 to add more, says Ben Botkin, a planner with the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), which leads the Water Trail project. Consulting support is being provided by Kayakers Unlimited, a San Francisco based kayakers club.

For residents of the East Bay, the designated launch and haul-out facility is Oakland’s Tidewater Boating Center, at 4675-A Tidewater Ave. (Take I-880 to High St. Exit towards Alameda). The facility offers parking, restrooms, a loaner boat dolly, picnic tables, benches, and shoreline trail access. The dock itself is a gangway to a floating dock, and thus provides conveniently low freeboard for easier loading.

From the Tidewater Center kayakers are in easy reach of San Leandro Bay, Airport Channel, and open bay waters to the south, and the Tidal Canal (between Oakland and Alameda), Brooklyn Basin, Oakland Estuary, and the open bay waters to the north. Combined with the eventual completion of the much improved Seventh Street Channel to Lake Merritt, kayakers will be able to paddle right into the lake and enjoy the many fine food and beverage offerings found around the shoreline. LOVE YOUR LAKE!
CLIMATE CORNER – Potpourri – Part II: Check out this graphic from the presentation “Tech Solutions” at Bacheesos restaurant across from Lakeside Park. This seaweed proposal comes from the Virgin Earth Challenge to remove carbon from the atmosphere. Could Lake Merritt’s algae be harvested and used to produce bio-methane for fuel, replacing the use of fossil fuels?

Rising Seas Provoke Bi-partisanship: On Feb. 1 of this year, Congressman Ted Deutch (Democrat - Florida) joined with Florida Republican Congressman Carlos Curbelo to form the first bipartisan Climate Solutions Caucus in the House of Representatives! In an era where such cooperation has been the death knell for others, and many have feared to tread, why did this happen? Citizen’s Climate Lobby volunteer Jay Butera knows the answer. “When you actually see salt water flooding the streets of Miami, something changes in you. Suddenly climate change gets very real. I began saying to myself, “Salt water in the streets will trump party politics”. Marco Rubio, maybe you should stop campaigning and find out what is happening in your state.

Oakland does not yet have salt water in the streets, but it is in the cards. It is just a matter of how deep into the deck you look.

WINGS OF HOPE AT LAKE MERRITT – by Hillary Powers - February 24th - the 4th Wednesday earlier in the month than it often falls - saw the cormorant rookery well under way in the island trees. Shining black adult Double-crested Cormorants were displaying their crests (which many of the watchers saw as resembling devil’s horns more than bunny ears) in nest after nest. But not in the very tip-top two nests, presumably the best of the lot since these birds seem to prefer full sun: Those were occupied by Great Blue Herons (one each, with a third looking on), all dipping and raising their heads and fluffing their chest beards and eyeing one another. It’ll be clear by the time you read this if they stayed or not - but it looked like big news almost happening!

Out on the lake, things are also changing toward spring. The Common Goldeneyes (black and white drakes with full-moon shapes on their cheeks; brown and gray ducks) were visibly courting one another, choosing partners so as to stake out territory in a hurry when they hit the northlands. The female Scaup were almost gone, but lots of drakes (black and white with gray backs, solid-color faces and more iridescent color in the dark feathering) still rafted up in the Embarcadero end of the lake and scrounged for snacks by the nature center, and the Ruddy Ducks (photo left) and Eared Grebes showed the first glimmers of breeding plumage. Only one of the crew (Continued)
of mergansers seen in recent months was spotted today, but I don’t know whether the others have moved on or just swum to a different part of the lake.

Across Bellevue in the park, the usual treey birds filled the air with loud and obvious chirping and the branches with much less noticeable flickers of wings: Titmice and Chickadees and Butter-butts, with trills from woodpeckers and patterned beeps from Towhees bringing the total to 41 species. Basically, a glorious summery day at Lake Merritt, which we couldn’t help enjoying even though it would have been better to trudge through pouring rain this month....

LAKE MERRITT LUMBERJACKS – Every winter LMI volunteers are reminded that our “mid-city urban estuary” really is part of a 4,650 acre drainage basin that still includes a number of small pockets of natural forest land – most located in the deep, hidden canyons of the hilly areas of Oakland and Piedmont. The remarkable items that provide the reminders are segments of full-sized logs that are delivered to the lake during heavy rains via the city’s storm sewers – the largest this season having the astounding dimensions of almost 3’ by 10’. Volunteers fully expect such things as grass clippings, leaf matter, plastic bottles, tennis balls, and the like. They do not expect full-sized logs; most water-logged to challenging weights of several hundred pounds and heavily coated in slippery algae.

The photo to the upper left shows a group of young student volunteers at the Glen Echo Arm. They are from Oakland’s St. Paul’s Episcopal School and are part of a marvelous “A-Team” that cleans the lake regularly for LMI on almost every Thursday afternoon of the week. About half of the students had to don waders in order to enter the water and attach a towrope to a large log; about 1-1/2’ by 9’. With students pushing from below and their classmates pulling from above they performed a successful tree removal. Who says city kids no longer have the opportunity to be challenged by meaningful outdoor experiences?

Of course, removing large logs and snags is just part of the problem. The other part is proper disposal. Thanks to a generous donation, LMI was able to purchase a cordless chainsaw for use by staff members assigned to such disposals. The image at left shows the saw being used to cut up a log segment that was well over 3’ in diameter. The electric saw is perfect for working around the shores of an urban estuary where noise reduction is important to those in surrounding residences and offices. Thank you St. Paul’s, thank you to our donor, and thank you LMI.