

# The Lake Merritt Institute

A COMMUNITY BASED, NON-PROFIT CORPORATION

568 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland, CA 94610; 510/238-2290; [lmi@netwiz.net](mailto:lmi@netwiz.net); [lakemerrittinstitute.org](http://lakemerrittinstitute.org)

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“Tidings” is an editorial newsletter. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the City of Oakland.

**OPC NEEDS VOLUNTEERS:** The Oakland Parks Coalition (OPC) was formed in 2003 with the express goal of improving standards of park programming and maintenance. The primary focus now is to bring improvements to conditions in Oakland parks. OPC strives to accomplish this goal with yearly park surveys, an annual report to the City Council on park conditions, an annual work day and an ongoing drive to identify park stewards.

As of now, there are 92 pledged stewards monitoring, surveying and working in 80 parks, plazas and medians. Much is owed to these hard-working individuals who go the extra mile to provide recreational and landscaped spaces with the special care that keeps them healthy and attractive. Details can be found at [www.oaklandparkscoalition.org](http://www.oaklandparkscoalition.org)



Would you like to be a park steward?

Contact OPC at [oaklandparkscoalition@gmail.com](mailto:oaklandparkscoalition@gmail.com)

The parks need YOU.



**RAIN BRINGS TRASH, GATE CLOSURE, STRATIFICATION AND LOW OXYGEN:** More than 2.5 inches of rain were recorded at the Institute rain gauge between February 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, the first significant precipitation of the year. As a member and /or volunteer, you know that rain brings trash to the Lake, but there are other impacts as well. To lower the risk of flooding, Alameda County staff close the gates at the channel during incoming tides whenever there is a 50% or more chance of rain. Although we have no written record of that event, observations at the Lake indicated lower lake levels, evidence that the high tides were kept out. Meanwhile, fresh rain water was accumulating on the surface of the Lake, trapping the saltier water below.

Without inputs of salty tide water and the oxygen that it carries, oxygen in the Lake's bottom layer fall to low and very low levels as decomposition of organic matter slowly uses it up. Such levels are often documented by Oakland High School – Environmental Academy students (a level of 1 part per million was measured last week, but it should be 5 or more to meet water quality regulations). This is why Lake Merritt is on the EPA 303(d) list of water bodies impaired by low oxygen. Increased flushing from the lower outlet and removal of channel bottlenecks will help, but only if the tide gates are not closed. As future bottlenecks are removed, it will behoove the County to review gate closure procedures so that these low oxygen levels are minimized.

**NUMEROUS FISH TRAPS FOUND IN LAKE:** Too many; there were too many. In the last few months, volunteers and city staff have removed dozens of small, wire fish traps designed to catch sculpins, mudskippers, gobies and other small lake fish. Some were hand made; most were store bought. Despite being banned by the state law that established Lake Merritt as a refuge where commercial fishing is prohibited, someone was commercial fishing. Lately though, they seem to have gone away. But if you see a trap in the Lake, pull it out or call the Institute.

**CLIMATE CORNER:** Quotes from “Oil and Honey, The Education of an Unlikely Activist” by Bill McKibben; 2013; ISBN -13: 978-0-8050-9284-4; hardcover, 255 pages:

“By 2009, a decade after Kyoto, the U.S. Senate – then with sixty Democrats - was so scared of Big Oil that it wouldn’t even take a vote on the most modest, tepid climate legislation imaginable.”

“Education needed to yield to action.”

“... a senator said to me, “You need to understand that Big Oil never loses in this town, not ever. Don’t expect them to take this lightly.”

“Unless and until we weaken the industry’s power, UN conferences are no more productive than Senate bills.”

“Consider: It wasn’t just the 2,132 new high temperature marks in June 2012. It was what went with them. Duluth, Minnesota, broke all its old rainfall records, and in an excellent cinematic touch, so much water flooded the city zoo that the seal escaped and swam down Grand Avenue.”

“... the largest fire in New Mexico history torched more than 170,000 acres,” ... “the price of corn and wheat shot through the roof.” ... “Another firestorm near the Boulder campus of the National Center for Atmospheric Research forced the evacuation of the planet’s foremost climate scientists.” ... “An absurd number of catastrophes kept happening at the same time”

“None of this, of course, did anything to slow down the fossil fuel machine” ... “permits for the southern half of the Keystone pipeline had been granted” ... “Shell could start drilling in the Arctic” ... the president “auctioned off seven hundred million tons of Powder River Basin coal for the bargain price of \$1.13 a ton.”

“Simply by changing the albedo of the Greenland ice sheet, Jason calculated, the island now absorbs more extra energy each summer than the U.S. consumes each year”

“I delete most of the death threats and insane assaults, saving only the ones with some particularly baroque twist:

you [REDACTED], Harvard Nazi scumbag moron climatebicile!

You are the ugliest [REDACTED] in the whole rogues gallery.”

“WikiLeaks had shown the oil industry and its front groups dealing with security firms that specialized in trying to “discredit” journalists with every manner of attack, right up to planting fake documents.”... “If a pretty girl shows up at your hotel door, thank her politely and close it in her face.”

“were joined by Julian Bond, the former head of the NAACP. I was handcuffed across from him”

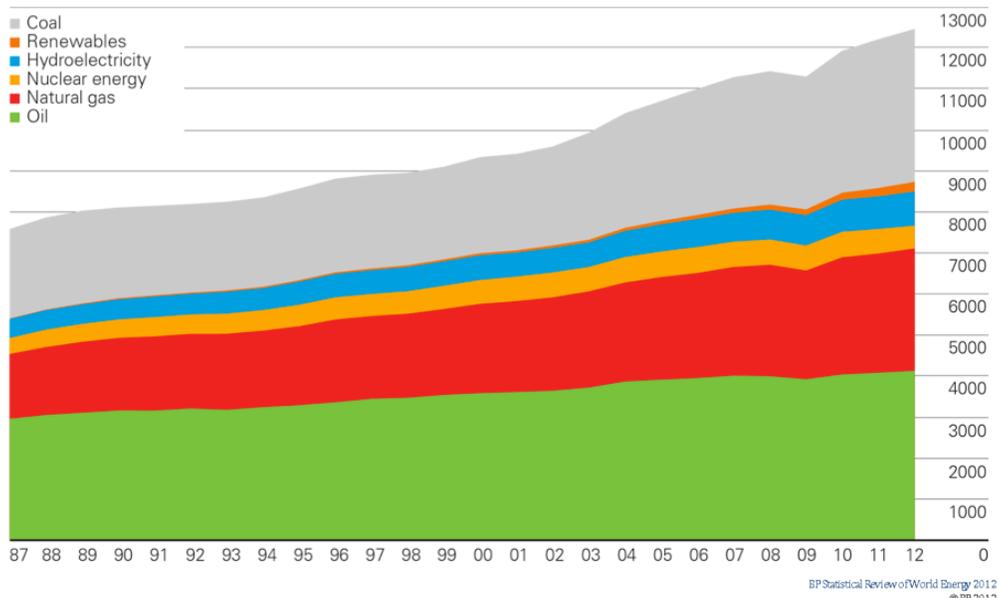
“All I ever wanted to see was a movement of people to stop climate change, and now I’ve seen it,” I said as I

began to talk, “You are the antibodies kicking in, as the planet tries to fight its fever.”

Editor’s note: You really ought to read this book. If it sounds alarmist, consider that to avoid the worst of climate change, the world needs to lower fossil fuel consumption. Yet as shown below, it is steadily rising. That is an alarm bell. For a more detailed discussion of what needs to be done about it, visit James Hansen’s website and read: “Renewable Energy, Nuclear Power and Galileo” at [http://www.columbia.edu/~jeh1/mailings/2014/20140221\\_DraftOpinion.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/~jeh1/mailings/2014/20140221_DraftOpinion.pdf)

## Primary energy world consumption

Million tonnes oil equivalent



### **BIRD COLUMN - Springing in the Rain:**

The February fourth-Wednesday Golden Gate Audubon walk was down to two birders and one leader, braving intermittent light rain for a look at the lake in one of its peak months.

Strangest sight of the day: a White-crowned Sparrow harassing (courting?) a Black Phoebe. First the sparrow plunged straight up at the phoebe, three feet or so, then they both landed on the ground a few feet apart. Then the phoebe took off for the woods across Bellevue flying straight and fast, with the sparrow in hot pursuit! These are little birds of about the same size, similar to House Sparrows, one brown and the other black with a white vest, and they normally ignore each other like rocks. But not this time....

On the lake itself, the species count was as high as ever, setting aside two singleton birds (the Ring-necked Duck and the Redhead) that haven't shown up this year, but the number of individuals seemed low again this month. A lot of Greater and Lesser Scaup (the diving ducks with black heads, gray backs, and white wings) but not the huge rafts of yesteryear; a few grebes of various kinds but not a crowd; and - most amazingly - only two Black-crowned Night Herons, both brown juveniles who apparently didn't get the word when all their kin left for a convention. (One of the birders said numbers were normal Monday and down to zip on Tuesday. Dunno what happened there.) On the other hand, Hank-the-rescue Pelican had two friends, raising hopes that someone will stay with him, and we had a pair of Common Mergansers (both with scarlet beaks; the male white with a bright green head) rather than just the usual female.

The Tufted Duck (black head, black back, white wings) was swimming between the islands and El Embarcadero - always worth a fuss because he shouldn't be here at all; his kin are mostly to be found in northern Europe and Asia. He's not a rare bird on his home range, but here he supports a minor tourist

industry of birders looking to add to their life lists without international travel.

The Double-crested Cormorants were well established in the trees on the islands, with most of the best nest sites taken even though some of the visitors were only barely showing their bunny-ear crests. This is a week or so earlier than in the past two years, when the nests weren't getting serious attention until the first week or so of March and only a few early birds had picked out spots.

We saw some interesting birds in the park across Bellevue, including an Allen's Hummingbird gleaming copper in a rare beam of sun, but mostly the tree birds were out of sight, having the sense to stay out of the rain on this fine damp day at Lake Merritt, where every day is a fine day regardless of the weather....

**ASH TRAY PROJECT:** Cigarette counting students, city staff and volunteers met at the McElroy fountain last month to pick out a site for the first two outdoor ash trays ever to be installed in Lakeside Park. The style chosen will be similar to that shown below, but mounted in a post secured by cement into the ground. Students will maintain them, counting their catch and comparing that to previous data. As of mid-February, installation had started, but was not complete. Stop by this beautiful fountain to see history in the making.



*St. Paul's Students admire the ash tray.*



*City staff discuss installation details.*

## RECENT SCENES FROM THE LAKE



*St. Paul's students clean up.*



*Some idiot dumped a box spring in the Lake!*

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