

# The Lake Merritt Institute

A COMMUNITY BASED, NON-PROFIT CORPORATION

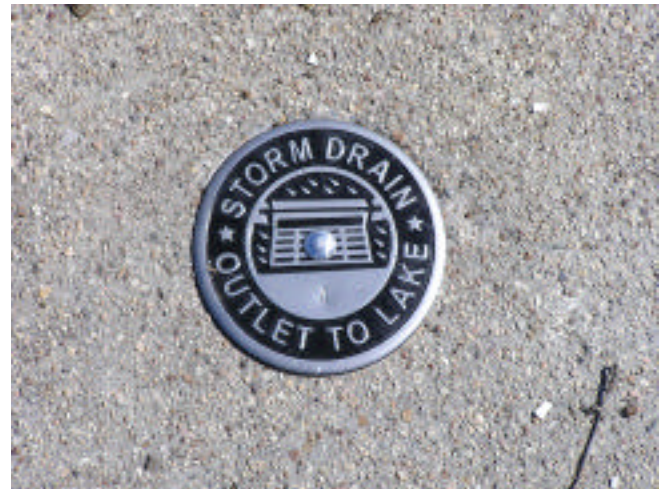
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VOLUME XVI

"TIDINGS" - AUGUST, 2011

ISSUE VIII

**NEW STORM DRAIN OUTLET MARKERS INSTALLED:** Hail to Scott Oliver and his “Once Upon A Time, Happily Ever After” art project under which about 60 storm drain outlet markers have placed along the Lake Merritt shoreline.



*Left: Note outlet pipe near top. Right: Note drain outlet number (4) on marker.*

The project also includes several interpretive signs which will be eventually be installed at strategic locations around the Lake, as well as T-shirts designed by local students and an audio tour (see past issues of “Tidings” for details).

## **CLIMATE CORNER:**

**Western Forests Succumb to Beetles:** About 80 - 90% of the trees on the western side of the park are dead or dying according to a ranger in Rocky Mountain National Park. Indeed, the landscape is blighted. Formerly shaded campsites are now barren, the stumps of cut pine and fir littering the ground. Tall piles of cut trunks in teepee shape surround park buildings and dot the roadsides. You can't leave them up or they will fall and block the pavement or smash roofs. The whole region is a tinderbox, waiting for lightning strikes to ignite the massive fuel load.

The culprits, according to the Park Service, are pine bark beetles. But it is a warming climate and continuing drought that have allowed the beetles to survive over winter and decimate weakened trees. Larger, 80 - 100 year old trees, are the current victims since the beetles cannot yet survive in the bark of younger trees which offer less insulation. But as these trees grow, they too will die.



*Rocky Mountain National Park-West Entrance*



*Beetle burrows beneath the bark*



*Barren Campsite*

Book Review: Tropic of Chaos – Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence. Christian Parenti. 2011. Nation Books. New York. ~282 pages. “From Africa to Asia and Latin America, the era of climate wars has begun. Extreme weather is breeding banditry, humanitarian crisis and state failure.”

Magazine Review: Climate of Denial – Can science and the truth withstand the merchants of poison? Al Gore. Rolling Stone: June 22, 2011. Denialists, like wrestlers, are intent on pulling the wool over our eyes. But why are the referees, and the media, looking the other way?

**CONTRACT RENEWED:** The City has renewed its two year contract with the Institute so that we may continue to remove trash, inspire volunteers, maintain the aeration fountains, provide education about the Lake & urban runoff and provide technical assistance. Most of our funding derives from this contract and we are grateful for this opportunity to assist with the maintenance & improvement of Lake Merritt, our unique estuary of opportunities.

**BIRD COLUMN:** Life in July

July is one of the quiet months at Lake Merritt, but the 4th-Wednesday walk was treated to some unusual sights - including more than a dozen White Pelicans making themselves at home on and among the islands, fly-bys from a Brown Pelican and a Caspian Tern (almost as big as a gull, but slimmer, with black wingtips and a cocktail frank for a beak), and a Green Heron (actually greenish gray with a cinnamon-colored breast) sitting and preening on the front of the nearest island. Three Pied-billed Grebes (the stubby ones with the triangular heads) have returned to the lake, along with two of the white-beaked black American Coots. The Mallards are in eclipse plumage, looking oddly butch without their green head feathers.

The Double-crested Cormorants are still at it on the islands. We saw two of the shiny black adults working on the next clutch of eggs at the top of the tallest tree, and a bronze juvenile soaring like a hawk in rising circles over the field in front of Children's Fairyland - something no one on the walk had ever seen - before heading off toward the bay in the conventional arrow-straight going-somewhere cormorant style. No knowing, of course, but it looked for all the world like the youngster was testing its wings before striking off on its own.

And besides a good look at a Nuttall's Woodpecker (the one with the full ladder back) - always a pleasure but more or less expected - the 30 species we saw included a female Downy Woodpecker (no red on the head; white panel down the middle of the back), which hasn't happened for more than a year. So it was another very good day at Lake Merritt, where every day is a good day....

**RETURN OF THE WIDGEON GRASS:** It has been five years (2006 – 2011) since large amounts of widgeon grass (also known by its scientific name as Ruppia maritima) have grown in Lake Merritt (see photo below). Back in the '80's, it grew so thick during June that boats would get trapped in its thick mats. The City responded by using herbicides, then dredging, and finally by harvesting it. A seed plant (not an algae) it is a favorite food of many forms of waterfowl and provides underwater structure in an otherwise barren environment. Growing up from the bottom, it can reach the surface from the deeper areas of the Lake where it can remain as a tuber during most of the year. Why it has not grown here in recent years is a mystery which we would like to solve, so if you have any answers based on local data, feel free to contact us.



*Widgeon grass has returned after 5 years of absence.*

## **RECENT SCENES FROM THE LAKE**



*Boats: Colorful and fun. Come on down and learn.*



*An Aquatic Environments Harvester Boat.*

*This edition of "Tidings" was published entirely with private funding donated to the Lake Merritt Institute. To contribute to the Institute, use our website or send a check to 568 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland, CA 94610.*