ALL HALE THE NEW STORM DRAIN FILTER: The dastardly deeds of litterbugs in 90 acres above the Nature Center are about to be undone. Oakland’s 5th large-scale storm drain filter is being installed by the City at Bellevue and Perkins, above Lake outfall #2.

Purchased and installed with less than $300,000 of federal economic stimulus money, this filter will capture all trash much smaller than cigarette butts before it flows into Lake Merritt. Cleaning will be accomplished several times a year using the City vacuum truck. Four other filters of the same design have been constructed to protect our Lake, the first one in 1999. Two more such storm drain filters are being evaluated, as are curb inlet filters and (hopefully) nets at the mouth of Glen Echo creek. These endeavors are all aimed at the requirement to eliminate trash from storm drain flows in ten years. Given the financial penalties for not doing so, and the jobs, and the cleaner Lake, the money is well spent.

12TH STREET DAM PROJECT IN JEOPARDY? Eight years after voters approved Measure DD, the key Lake Merritt project promised to them may now be in jeopardy. A contract for replacement of the 12th Street dam is supposed to be awarded this spring, but politics may get in the way. Actually, work was supposed to begin in 2007, but during those good economic times only one bid was received and it was $10 million over budget.

So, after two years of fund raising and work by city staff, 13.3 million in federal funds was awarded to Oakland. Great, let’s build it. The work went back out to bid, several offers were received and staff chose a below-budget winner.
Rescuers aid boaters caught in a tunnel under the 12th Street bridge.

Will this ugly, outdated, unsafe, tidally restrictive, homeless encampment remain, or will the master planned, measure DD replacement be built?

The design is complete; money is available, bids are in; a contractor has been selected; shovels are ready.

But will our City Council send it back to the drawing boards?

But now, at the last minute, some council members have raised objections. Because use of federal funds prohibits a requirement for local hiring, the project does not include the usual Oakland demand that 50% of project funds go to Oakland residents. The feds do require that 30% of the money go to minorities, but the issue of re-bidding the contract to include local hiring has been raised. This would not only result in the loss of federal funds, it would delay the project, waste years of staff efforts and could very well result in higher bids next time when the economy is better.

This project is an integral part of Oakland’s efforts to improve oxygen levels and get Lake Merritt removed from the official EPA list of impaired bodies of water under the Clean Water Act. If not solved, the low oxygen issue could result in severe financial penalties, which would be appropriate given that much of the Lake bottom is sometimes a dead zone.

If this issue stirs your interest, tune into the city website www.oaklandnet.com to stay up to date and express your concerns to council members. As this newsletter was being written, full council approval of the contract had not been granted.

CLIMATE CORNER (dedicated to keeping sea level below Lake Merritt)
Most people have heard that we need to reduce carbon dioxide in our atmosphere to 350 parts per million (ppm). But what were carbon levels in the past? During the last ice age, it was 160 ppm. In 1800, before coal began to be burned during the industrial revolution, it was 280 ppm. In 1960, it had climbed to 315 ppm. Today it is about 388 ppm (plus or minus a few depending on the season) and is now rising at a rate of 2 ppm per year.

How fast is today’s rise compared to natural increases from weathering (the breakdown of rock and soil)? Over a million years, these natural processes increase atmospheric carbon
dioxide levels by 100 ppm. At the current rate of increase from fossil fuels, 100 ppm is being added in just 50 years! In other words, we are now adding carbon dioxide at a rate 10,000 times or more faster than natural processes (Hansen, 2009). Based on the earth’s climate history, these levels can reach 1,000 ppm or more, which eventually results in sea levels 250 feet higher than today. Even at today’s carbon levels, methane (a positive feedback) is being released, arctic ice is rapidly melting, sea levels are rising, subtropical regions are expanding towards the poles and coral reefs are dying from heat and ocean acidification.

The Climate / Balance Graph

Tilt the see saw up and down.

As one end of the pointer indicates carbon dioxide levels at various times, the other end depicts the development (or potential decline) of human civilization.

BIRD COLUMN: Gray but Grand at Lake Merritt

The 4th Wednesday in February was cloudy but (unusually this year) not actually pouring, and the six intrepid Golden Gate Audubon walkers even had a gleam of sun by the end of the morning. The winter resident ducks were out in force, including the Tufted Duck - black head and back, bright white wings, black ponytail really luxuriant this time, not weedy the way it was earlier in the season. (Assuming it's always the same Tufted Duck, of course, which I tend to do - were there more than one, they'd probably hang out together at least some of the time, being birds of a feather and all that.)

A Green Heron - mostly a lovely cinnamon and cream in front - was sitting on rocks edging the island nearest the Nature center, and there was a wet and disgusted-looking Red-tailed Hawk in one of the cormorants' trees and a male Belted Kingfisher (all blue and white; no orange cummerbund) in another.
Both those perches are soon to be untenable for anybody but a Double-crested Cormorant - the water was full of snaky black necks as the flock chased fish around, and a few of the ones drying themselves on the floats had their crests growing in. That's worth a trip to the lake in itself, as the birds wear the crests they're named for only about six or eight weeks a year, and they're really strange-looking: on either side of the head like bunny ears, not fore and aft down the middle. Some have black crests, but some have shining white - just like bunny ears on headbands. Meanwhile, nesting real estate is apt to be very tight this year, with one of the big bare trees down. . . wonder how long the season will last? They were already hot bunking the nests and raising youngsters as late as July.

Last month's Red-necked Grebe seems to have moved on, finally, after spending five or six weeks at the lake, but we saw the rest of the usual grebely suspects - including a Horned Grebe (one of the two kinds of little red-eyed powder puffs) halfway into breeding plumage, with the gold "horns" just visible along either side of the head.

The rescue pelican - an American White Pelican brought down from Oregon to live out his (or her; only another pelican can tell for sure) life on the lake with a crippled wing - is well into breeding state, evidenced by a fin like a 3x5 card toward the end of the beak. This year he already has a friend, apparently one of the birds that spent the summer here last year and if local reports are accurate left late and returned early, but has not started the breeding bump. So the question looms: Do we have a pair? Could we have baby pelicans at the lake? As the year turns....

The goldeneyes have started to leave, but this is still peak season in the park. Go down to the lake and visit our winter guests - it's always a great day at Lake Merritt!

**RECENT SCENES FROM LAKE MERRITT:**

*Observed along the Channel*  
*Still Styrofoam*

_This edition of “Tidings” was published entirely with private funding donated to the Lake Merritt Institute. To contribute to the Institute, contact us at 510-238-2290 or 568 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland, CA 94610._