10TH STREET BOTTLENECK IS DOOMED: Tidal flows to and from Lake Merritt that have been choked by culverts in the channel under 10th Street will soon be unbounded. As part of the Measure DD projects, contractors hired by the City of Oakland have been busy re-routing utilities and preparing to open the channel beneath the bridge. They are making progress but the opening is not to be until September, 2015.

Photo by John Kirkmire

What will this mean for our lagoon? The most important change will be an increase in tidal flushing, which the more astute among you will notice as higher high tides and lower low tides. This will occur about every six hours, which is the tidal cycle on the Pacific coast, except when the tides gates are closed for flood control, which (as we understand it) occurs whenever there is a 50% chance of rain in a weather forecast sent to the County Flood Control District in Hayward. So, 90%+ percent of the time, the Lake will receive more water from the Inner harbor, which is good. It also means the District will have to close one or more of the gates during the “king tides” which occur in early January and early July. If they don’t, walkers by the Lake may be wading for a few hours. And at low tides, there will be more mud flats, which is also good.

Boaters Will Rejoice: And, when the gimpy culverts are replaced by open space, those people in canoes, kayaks etc. will be able to follow the channel all the way to the 7th Street flood control station, viewing Laney College along the way. Note: please do not do so during the migratory bird season when uncommon Barrows Golden Eye ducks are using the channel. They are skittish and are likely to leave.
When construction workers are finished at 10th Street, their eyes will turn to the next project, placement of a bypass channel in the pedestrian tunnel at the flood control station. When that happens, we might well see sea lions in old Merritt lagoon. One can hope.

CLIMATE CORNER: A once-in-a-century winter drought in China in 2010, at the same time as record-breaking heat waves or floods in other key wheat-growing countries (Ukraine, Russia, Canada and Australia) — contributed to global wheat shortages and skyrocketing bread prices in wheat-importing states, which was a trigger for the Arab Spring. John Smith installed a fluorescent light bulb.

In Syria between 2006 and 2010, four consecutive droughts forced over a million people to leave their villages and put 2-3 million people into “extreme poverty,” according to the United Nations. Mary Jones bought a hybrid car.

In Yemen, wells sunk into fossil water (ancient deposits that are not being replenished) must now be drilled a thousand meters deep where formerly, only 40 meters was sufficient. In Taiz, their second largest city and home to more than half a million people, tap water is available on a few days a month. According the Yemen President, the entire nation may run out of water. Mike Brown increased his recycling.

Sea water below the west Antarctic ice shelf melted to a point past the undersea mountain that has been keeping the ice from sliding into the sea, thus exposing the bottom of the ice sheet to melting, and irrevocably committing it to cause sea level rise of several meters. Susan Johnson adjusted her thermostat.

In Pakistan, rainfall is no longer sufficient to grow wheat, so farmers grow opium poppies, because they need only 1/6th the amount of water as wheat. The opium fuels the world drug trade and financially supports the Taliban. Joe Williams insulated his house.

By now you get the picture. Individual actions cannot prevent catastrophic climate change. If you have come to realize this and want to help make an economy wide difference, get behind the movement for a carbon fee with a dividend, which would place a fee on the carbon content of oil, gas and coal at the source (well, mine or port) the total amount of which would be distributed in monthly checks to every household, making it revenue neutral with regard to government spending (the GOP likes that). President Obama spoke in favor of a carbon fee, oil companies are not against it, Fox news even spoke positively about it and the Pope called climate pollution a sin. What are you waiting for? Join at www.citizensclimatelobby.org
WHAT WILL SMOKERS DO WITH THEIR BUTTS IN LAKESIDE PARK? The three month pilot project (approved by Parks director Audree V. Jones-Taylor) whereby three ash trays were installed by the City of Oakland (two at McElroy fountain and one at a nearby bus stop) is coming to a close. Will these cigarette butt receptacles be allowed to remain, or (as demanded by a city staff member) will they be removed because the City thinks it can regulate smoking in the park?

Students at St. Paul’s School have been studying butts around the Lake for over a year and what they found was disturbing. These toxic waste products are ubiquitous around in Lakeside Park and, as our volunteers know, are common IN the Lake where they impart their toxins to the water. During Earth Day and Creek to Bay Day, volunteers for the Institute removed thousands of butts from Lakeside Park. You too can verify the extent of this pollution; just watch the sidewalk as you walk around the Lake, especially near benches.

The students did more than just remove and count. They went back to the same areas on most weeks, and counted the butts in the ash trays vs. on the ground around them. Sadly, there were about four times as many new butts around the trays as in them, so the success at capturing them was limited. But can we do better? Suggestions were made to move the trays to a more visible butt-hot-spot, and to add signage encouraging their use (like a sign from Illinois where flicking them on the ground became a felony,) or the one shown here.

But, if the ash trays are removed, where will smokers (like it or not, they will come) put their butts in Lakeside Park? I think you know the answer. A decision will now be made by the Oakland Office of Parks and Recreation. Receptacles may not get rid of all of them, but they will give people an option, and that will reduce the problem.

ENOUGH ALREADY!

STOP THROWING THINGS IN THE LAKE!

Super Lloyd and Wonderful Wade help remove a six foot long traffic Barrier from the Lake. We returned to the 10th St. construction site.

BIRD COLUMN: Baby Bluebirds in Lakeside Park!
Only one of the dozen or so people who joined the June 4th-Wednesday Golden Gate Audubon walk was still on the trip when the peak bird (birds!) of the day appeared: a clutch of 5 fledgling Western Bluebirds (blue wing and tail primaries, cream-spotted gray head, back, and breast) with their drab blue and fawn mother on the lawn beside the back gate to the garden - the one across from the boathouse. We'd seen bluebirds at the lake in the spring of 2013 but none this year, but clearly that doesn't mean they weren't around!
Elsewhere in the park, the Canada Goose molt migration was in full swing, with cast-off feathers everywhere. When we were beside the dome cage, a group of 60 or 70 geese came running straight at us, flapping their wings (but happily head up and honking instead of head down and hissing); they fled down the far side of the cage and we never figured out what had spooked them. Despite the goose density in that one spot, it looked as though there were fewer geese overall this year - even below the playground where they were thickest, you could see more lawn than geese. Not a lot more, but at least you couldn't have walked across without getting down from a goose....

The Double-crested Cormorant rookery was still in full swing - probably with a second shift of babies, judging by the number of new bronzy fledglings perching on the floats and the islands - and putting the plop of death on the biggest trees and the thornless blackberries under them. At least the birds have abandoned the plane tree beside the playground; earlier in the season, it looked like a few intrepid would-be nesters were going to leave the lake and move across. On the other islands, the new understory growth is getting well established, and there's a bumper crop of elderberries just beginning to come ripe - which bodes well for birding later in the summer.

We also saw two White Pelicans besides Hank-the-rescue-bird, plus a Brown Pelican fishing cheerfully and with some success. And a Caspian Tern flew over, pointing his cocktail-frank beak at the lake, but didn't seem to see anything worth diving after. All told, it was a 31-species day, including one returning American Coot and a party of 3 Pied-billed Grebes, the latter still in their breeding plumage. So never mind that June is a quiet month at the lake, it was a very good day at Lake Merritt, where every day is a good day....

NIGHT HERONS RECOVERED: The black crowned night heron chicks whose nests were cut down by the post office have recovered and most have been released. Thanks to all who supported them. Due to all the publicity, I don’t think we will see that kind of malarkey again. If you see any more violations of the Migratory Bird Act, be sure to contact the local ranger from the CA Department of Fish and Game and the US Fish & Wildlife Service.

RECENT SCENES FROM THE LAKE