

The Lake Merritt Institute

A COMMUNITY BASED, NON-PROFIT CORPORATION

568 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland, CA 94612; 510/238-2290; lmi@netwiz.net; lakemerrittinstitute.org

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This summer, dead man's fingers (a type of algae) is more common in the Lake than our usual, light green summer algae.

THIS IS JUNE: WHERE'S THE ALGAE?

Normally at this time of year, the harvester boat is out there on the water skimming up light green filamentous algae in prodigious quantities. But not this year; there is hardly any algae out there. Why? The answer I think, is that it grew earlier, in April.

As you may recall, our winter was, well, mild to say the least, with little if any rain or runoff. So it is logical to assume that the waters of the Lake were warmer than usual, as also evidenced by the invasion of sea hares (see June issue) and a slight warming of the oceans too. While it was warm enough in April for our species of summer algae to grow, day length was shorter then. So with warmer waters, but with the sun being up there for fewer hours (and lower in the sky – which means more sunlight bounces off the water) our April algae blooms were not excessive. So muted were they that the harvester boat was not even needed, saving the city money, and saving the critters from being caught up in its jaws. But, summer has just begun; and the green stuff along with the harvester may yet appear again.

CLIMATE CORNER: Heat waves in Karachi (1,000 died); a drought in the Caribbean worse than in California (wells are going dry); forest fires popping up all over in Alaska; Environmental Protection Agency predictions of dire financial losses in the United States; the hottest May on record; and so on, and so forth.

Where will it end? What to do? More studies are being published, but climate scientist and evangelist Katherine Hayhoe (one of Time Magazine's 100 most influential women in the United States) reminds us that we have more than enough studies. The Pope's encyclical reminds us that cap and trade – putting a government mandated limit on carbon emissions unless you trade and pay for the right to exceed the limit (although worthy and better than changing light bulbs) "may simply become a ploy which permits maintaining the excessive consumption of some countries and sectors." Note also that cap and trade has not worked in Europe, did not pass in Congress a few years ago, and is not even favored by many environmental groups. And if it can't work in advanced nations, consider how badly it will fail in the third world where

graft and corruption are rampant.

So where does that leave us? Actually, there are several bills in Congress now that provide an answer, which is to put a price on carbon emissions. Economists, many republicans, President Obama and even European oil companies (and some in the U.S.) agree that this must be done. What? A tax on fuel? No way you say.

But wait. What if the tax was levied ONLY at the well, mine or port of entry, and not at the cash register. This means that only large companies like Chevron, Peabody Coal and fracking fanatics would pay up. Sound better? But where would the money go? Pay down the debt, lower taxes, incentives for energy efficiency, the highway trust fund etc. etc. etc. are answers now being heard. But Republicans don't want to give the government money and use it in ways that may control our lives, and they control Congress. This is a very big deal to them. Many, have signed pledges not to raise taxes. BUT, if the money does not go to government programs, and if 100% of it is given back to the American people, it is a fee, not a tax (George Shultz). This concept is called a revenue neutral carbon fee with a 100% dividend. Remember, no money to government.

Would it work? A study by Regional Economic Models Inc. (a non-partisan, well respected company) shows that in 20 years:

- CO2 emissions would be reduced 50 percent below 1990 levels
- Because of the economic stimulus of recycling carbon fee revenue back to households, 2.8 million jobs would be added to the American economy
- Improved air quality would result in 230,000 premature deaths avoided.

And there is better news; about 80% of American families would receive more money back from the dividend than paid out in temporarily increased energy costs. I say temporarily because when energy companies see the increasing price of carbon emissions, they will jump into renewable energy in a big way, and renewable energy is ultimately cheaper (the wind and sun are free). Many such companies are already including a price on carbon in their future budgets. Investments will flow away from fossil fuels and into green energy.



With his encyclical, Pope Francis opens a new phase in the global conversation about how to heal our relationship with the planet.

<http://citizensclimatelobby.org/blog/>

As proposed by the Citizens' Climate Lobby, the fee would begin at a modest \$10 per ton of carbon emissions, and rise by \$10/ton annually. That is much lower than the bill proposed by Senator Whitehouse, and would avoid an initial shock to the economy. So it is a win-win-win-win proposal; a win for the economy, a win for the consumer (a family of four would receive a check for about \$300 EVERY MONTH by 2026); a win for the climate (faster carbon reductions than other proposals); and a win for moderate

Republicans who don't like big government and taxes. If you like this idea, join the Citizens' Climate Lobby. Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come, and the time for this is now. You can be part of it.

WHAT ON EARTH IS A SWALE? It's that landscaped area in the photo below. See those gaps in the curb? They let rain water draining from the parking lot enter the unpaved area, where it is filtered by the soil and soon to be mass of grasses, shrubs and trees. What about the drain in the center? It prevents the whole thing from flooding in the event there is so much rain that it can't soak in all at once.



Runoff is now filtered where contaminants used to flow.

This new swale is part of the construction just completed at the Boating Center: No longer will rain contaminated by this parking lot flow directly into Lake Merritt. This natural area also serves as a buffer between the new wetland at the shoreline, and the parking lot, because cars don't belong right next to wetlands.

BIRD COLUMN: Quiet Beguilement at Lake Merritt

June was unsurprisingly very quiet in the Lake Merritt bird world - only 28 species - but nonetheless full of engaging sights: Green Herons fishing from the island rocks, Double-crested Cormorants and American White Pelicans fishing in flotillas along the lake, Snowy Egrets stalking the shallows looking for finny calories. Up in the trees, a young cormorant spent several minutes tickling a parent's throat pouch before the parent gave in and went head down in the youngster's gullet to regurgitate a late breakfast. Another cormorant flew proudly up out of the lake with a clump of seaweed the size of a softball - to do what? who knows? - and circled around to the trees.

We did have one Pied-billed Grebe back early from the nesting season, still in the species' subdued but elegant breeding plumage: black bib and bright black-striped white bill. The other transients were mostly gone, however, including the usually ubiquitous black American Coots. Even the Canada Geese were - well, not missing, but not as numerous as expected; we saw only a few hundred waddling around, comically naked in the wing-feather department and many tail-less as well.

Over in the park and garden we had most of the usual treats - Chestnut-backed Chickadees (our local endemic species; bread-and-butter here but a target for birders from most other parts of the country) and California Towhees and House Finches (including one who was a very pale salmon gold where most of his fellows are bright crimson) and American Robins. Three kinds of swallows were dipping and skimming over the meadow: Tree and Violet-green and Northern Rough-winged (mostly blue; green with white patches at the rump; brown). The garden had lots of hummingbirds and goldfinches, but we missed out on our usual Bewick's Wren sighting; the workers had a weed-whacker running in the likeliest spot, and none showed up elsewhere.

A pleasant stroll for all, including the handful of welcome guests from the Golden Gate Audubon MeetUp page who were so new to birding they didn't bring binoculars - not nearly the problem on this walk as on many others, as so many of the birds are big and close, and also sit still long enough for clear views through spotting scopes - and so yet another good day at Lake Merritt, where every day is a good day....

FOUNTAIN UPDATE: The boat hoist is operational, and the Embarcadero fountain is up and running (finally). However, the company that sold us the Glen Echo fountain as a salt water unit did not honor the motor warranty because they said it was in a salt water lake! So we said “nuts to you.” We have now purchased (at a cost of \$6,124) a new fountain from a different manufacturer (the one that made the Bandstand fountain). It has arrived, and will be installed in early July (and it will include diode lights!).

The Bandstand fountain has been repaired under warranty at the factory, and shipped back. However, something is still tripping the circuit breaker (gremlins happen). It will be re-inspected and fixed in late June or early July.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE WARRIORS: Word has it that most valued player Stephen Curry and family were seen having dinner at the Lake Chalet. And why not? Someone with his talent and who knows why there is air (to blow up basketballs) is a good obviously a good connoisseur of fine restaurants.

RECENT SCENES FROM THE LAKE



Institute member Kieran shows his newsletters to a pal.



Sea slugs and their egg mass in Lake Merritt.

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