



Lake Merritt Institute

THE TIDINGS

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Fall Issue

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Before & After First Flush Cleanup at Lake Merritt Institute 10/14/25

Fall Brings the First Flush — and Lake Merritt’s First Responders

By Kathleen Nay

It’s the start of the rainy season here in Oakland. With the hottest days of the year behind us, this can feel refreshing. However, it also marks the start of Lake Merritt’s toughest months.

Each year, the first big storm — usually in late October or early November — brings with it what is known as the “first flush.” Rainwater rushes through 62 storm drains from across Oakland’s seven-square-mile watershed, carrying with it months of accumulated leaves, organic matter, and trash. All of it ends up in Lake Merritt.

The impact is immediate. The sudden influx of nutrients fuels a plankton bloom that turns the lake bed murky. Decomposing leaves and litter block the sunlight and deplete oxygen in the lower layer of water. Eddies of styrofoam pellets, plastic packaging, and cigarette butts mingle with less-visible pollutants like oil and paint, further stressing the lake’s plant and wildlife. Because of these ongoing nutrient and pollution loads, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency lists Lake Merritt as an “impaired body of water” under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act.

Lake Merritt Institute (LMI) volunteers are the lake’s first responders, tackling this first flush of trash and debris head-on. But ironically, the wet autumn weather is exactly when we see a seasonal drop in volunteer participation — just when the lake needs our help the most.

For the full article of *The Tidings* in color, visit <https://lakemerrittinstitute.org/tidings>



With that in mind, here are two ways you can step up for Lake Merritt this season:

1. **Join a cleanup with LMI.** Plan a volunteer outing with your colleagues, or join a community cleanup on Tuesdays and Saturdays from 10 am to noon. Rain or shine, volunteers help keep the lake clean and thriving all year long! Dress in warm, water-repellent layers to stay comfortable on cool, wet days. *Register on our website.*
2. **Adopt your local storm drain.** The City of Oakland's [Adopt-A-Drain program](#) empowers residents to become stewards of their own neighborhood storm drains. Volunteers receive guidance on clearing drains safely, scheduling waste pick-ups, and access to maps highlighting high-priority and flood-prone areas. An easy, hyper-local way to take action, clearing your local drain once or twice a week and before rainy weather helps reduce flooding and keeps debris from reaching the lake.

This time of year is a critical period of transition at Lake Merritt. As the rain falls and the water level rises, it's up to every one of us to rise with it.

Learn more about the lake's seasonal ecology by checking out ["A Year In the Life of Lake Merritt"](#) at www.lakemerrittinstitute.org.

(Photo left - Achieve HS students and friends cleanup 10/4/25)

LMI September Impact Report

10,110 gallons of trash removed

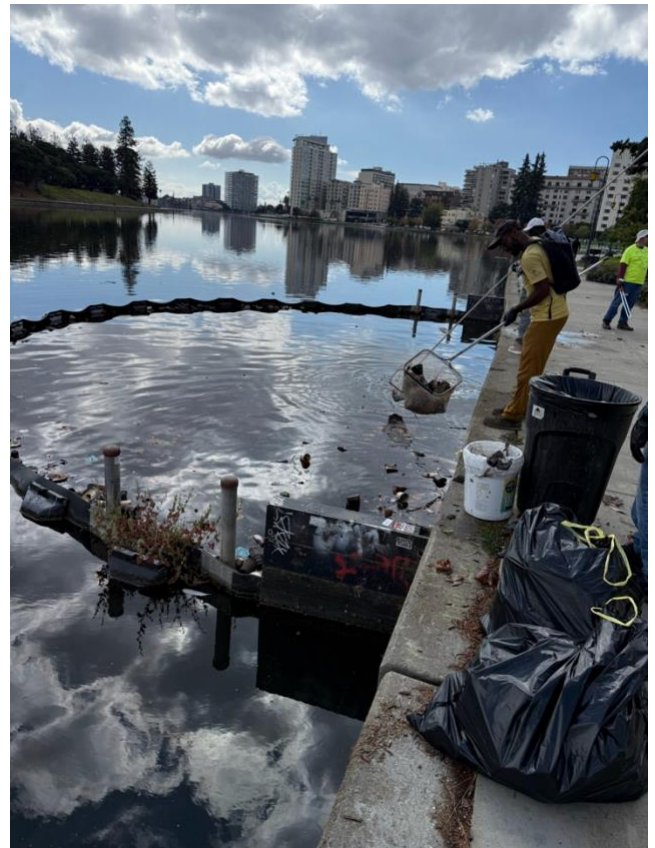
428 volunteer community hours

Community Power

Huge thanks to the amazing groups and individuals who joined our September cleanups and volunteered a total of

428 hours: Weekly A-Team • Mighty Pilates • PG&E Remote Grid Team • Expedia Team • CHP Cadets • Starbucks team • OMI students

(Photo right – Our amazing Tuesday cleanup responders jumped into action after the first rain on October 14, 2025, collecting 72 bags of trash from Lake Merritt!)





9/20/25- Creek to Bay Day volunteers at LMI collected 89 bags

Creek to Bay Day Success!

When a diverse community comes together, we make a huge impact. This year's Creek to Bay Day at Lake Merritt was a huge success with **97 volunteers** who showed up to help care for our lake!

Participants included **CHP Cadets, OMI students, the Oakland Starbucks team, our dedicated Tuesday A-Team,** and many incredible individuals, families, and neighbors. Together, we collected **89 bags of trash,** totaling **2,670 gallons** of debris removed from the lake.

October Brings Rain and Trash

Your support today helps us tackle trash in the lake promptly, especially after a rainy day, from the 62 storm drains flushing into Lake Merritt. Colder weather means lower volunteer turnout and our small but mighty time needs your help to keep up with rainy season. **Donate today!**

Lake Merritt Institute

Donate online: www.lakemerrittinstitute.org

Or mail to: 568 Bellevue Ave, Oakland, CA 94610



THANK YOU TO OUR SEPTEMBER SPONSORS & SUPPORTERS!



Lake Merritt Fall Events

LMI Weekly Cleanup Days

Join the Lake Merritt Institute's public cleanup days every **Tuesday and Saturday at 10am!**

Register on our website: lakemerrittinstitute.org



Lake Merritt Institute

Bird Walks at the Lake

Join Hilary Powers every 4th Wednesday at 9:30am to 12pm by the Boathouse for a free bird walk. Rain or shine! Register at:

goldengatebirdalliance.org

LMI Trivia Corner

Q - How many storm drain outfalls drain into Lake Merritt from the surrounding streets of Oakland?

- a) 1
- b) 12
- c) 34
- d) 62

Answer for last Tidings Trivia

Q - What is a watershed?

A) when my dog shakes herself off after a swim B) where extra water is stored outside

C) land where streams and rivers drain into a larger body of water

For questions and comments please email us at info@lakemerrittinstitute.org.

At Lake Merritt Institute, we would like to acknowledge that Lake Merritt is known as Huchiun, the unceded and ancestral territory of the **Lisjan Ohlone People**. As stewards of this unique wildlife refuge, we encourage our community to join us in continuing to learn more at sogoreate-landtrust.org.

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