



THE TIDINGS

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Summer Issue

"The Tidings" is a publication of the Lake Merritt Institute, and is neither funded by, nor does it represent the opinions of the City of Oakland.

Widgeon Grass Returns to Lake Merritt

By James Robinson

For more than two decades, from the 1980s through 2003, widgeon grass flourished in Lake Merritt each June. However, its abundance declined sharply in 2004 and 2005. Although growth returned in 2006, it remained relatively sparse in the years that followed.

The reason for these fluctuations is still unclear, but they may be linked to reduced rainfall and stormwater runoff during drought years. If this relationship holds true, wetter years could once again promote more abundant growth.



Widgeon grass at Lake Merritt

Widgeon grass is an important part of Lake Merritt's ecosystem. It provides food for waterfowl, stabilizes bottom sediments, improves water quality, and creates valuable habitat for fish and other aquatic organisms. However, when it grows excessively, it can also create challenges by tangling boat propellers, obstructing recreational activities, and crowding out other aquatic plants in shallow, nutrient-rich areas.

This year, we are once again seeing renewed growth of widgeon grass. The Lake Merritt Institute is monitoring its expansion to better understand current conditions and long-term ecological trends.

When vegetation becomes excessive, algae and widgeon grass are removed using aquatic harvester boats contracted by the City of Oakland, helping maintain a healthy balance between ecological health and recreational use of the lake.

Row, Row, Row Your Boat on Lake Merritt This Summer

By Kathleen Nay

Lake Merritt is a summertime joy! What a privilege it is that we get to live, work, and play at this special place. It truly is a hometown destination, where we go to sample from local food trucks, shop the weekend vendors, exercise, dance, have picnics, and more.

Did you know you can have fun not just by the water, but on the water too? There are multiple opportunities for boating, each at different (affordable!) price points and vibes, depending on what you're looking for.

Affordable Rentals at the Lake Merritt Boating Center

One of Oakland's best kept secrets is how easy it is to rent watercraft at the Lake Merritt Boating Center! For under \$25 an hour, you can rent a pedal boat, row boat, canoe, or kayak. Pedal and row boats can accommodate up to three people. Canoes require a minimum of two, and maximum of three people. Kayaks can be rented as either singles or doubles. All of these muscle-powered options are fun ways to get outside and exercise in a way you might not have considered before.

Do you have sailing experience? Bring along your sailing credentials, and you'll have even more options to choose from: rent an El Toro, Sunfish, 14-foot Keelboat, or Catamaran for \$30 or less. If you'd like to learn how to sail, the Boating Center also offers classes.

This is a wonderful, affordable way to experience Lake Merritt and the Oakland Estuary up close. Oakland residents even get a discount. But make sure to bring cash — the Boating Center doesn't accept cards or checks. Visit Wednesdays through Sundays between 11:00 am and 5:00 pm to rent, or call 510-238-2196 for details.

Learn to Row with Lake Merritt Rowing Club

Lake Merritt Rowing Club is a nonprofit dedicated to sharing the joy of rowing with the diverse Bay Area community. Open since 1962, the Club offers a wide range of rowing programs and classes for anyone who wishes to learn, regardless of age or skill level. And here's a fun fact: several US Olympians have trained at the Club, right on Lake Merritt!

Summer rowing experiences are available and cost between \$50 (for "a taste" of rowing) and \$200-250 (for multi-week, individual and team classes). Financial aid is available to those who need it. Yearlong club memberships are also available at a range of price points.

The Club has been a longtime supporter of Lake Merritt Institute, participating in annual cleanups. LMI's very own Paris Organist and board member Josiah Albertsen are both members! If you're looking to build your endurance, athleticism, and a sense of teamwork, the Lake Merritt Rowing Club is the place to do it. Visit www.lakemerrittrowingclub.org for information.



POV kayak photo by Kathleen Nay, taken during a kayak rental from the Lake Merritt Boat House.

Plan a Romantic Date Night with Dolce Vita Gondola

Surprise your sweetheart with a romantic night on the water. Dolce Vita Gondola offers cruises on a real, flat-bottomed Venetian gondola. An experienced gondolier, dressed in traditional black-and-white stripes, will be your navigator. Bring along a bottle of champagne, and as the sun sets and the Necklace of Lights twinkles around you, you'll experience the magic of Lake Merritt in a brand new way.

Gondola cruises depart from Lake Chalet, and are a unique and memorable way to celebrate an engagement, birthday, anniversary, first date — or just because! Cruises for two start at \$175. Festive group cruises and private parties are also available for booking. Visit www.dolcevitagondola.com to book or learn more.

Lake Merritt can be enjoyed in a multitude of ways! How do you like to experience the lake? Let us know on Instagram by tagging us in photos and videos of your recreation and volunteer cleanup activities: [@lakemerrittinsituteorg](https://www.instagram.com/lakemerrittinsituteorg).

SUMMER EVENTS AT LAKE MERRITT

LMI Public Cleanups

Join Lake Merritt Institute volunteers to help keep our beautiful lake clean. Cleanups are held every Tuesday and Saturday at 10 AM. *No cleanups on 7/18 and 7/25.*

Register online at lakemerrittinstitute.org.



LMI @ Friday Nights @ OMCA

July 17, 5–7:30 PM (Free)

In honor of Peruvian and Colombian Independence Day, this Friday Night celebrates with a vibrant performance by Asociación Cultural Kanchis, showcasing Peruvian folkloric dance and honoring the generations who keep these traditions alive. Stop by the Lake Merritt Institute table at the OMCA Garden for fun activities and to learn more about our work.



Bird Walks at Lake Merritt

Join Hilary Powers on the fourth Wednesday of every month for a bird walk at the lake. Register at goldengatebirdalliance.org.



Oakland Municipal Band Concerts @ Lake Merritt Bandstand

Free concerts on July 19, 26, and August 2, 2026, from 1–3 PM. The 35-piece Oakland Municipal Band, conducted by Kaitlin Bove, performs at the bandstand. More info at oaklandmunicipalband.org.



THANK YOU TO OUR SUMMER SPONSORS



Shoutout to Our June Volunteer Groups

Aims College Prep HS

Jetty Extracts

Lake Merritt Rowing Club

LMI A-Team

Lick-Wilmerding HS

Morgan Stanley Oakland

National Health Corps SF

Oakland Tech HS

PG&E Distro-Pro's
Department

PG&E Efficiency
Department

PG&E Gas Systems Planning

Renewal by Andersen of San Francisco

THANK YOU!

LAKE MERRITT INSTITUTE VOLUNTEERS!

- JUNE 2026 -
8,340 GALLONS
OF
TRASH
REMOVED



Help Lake Merritt Institute Get Back to Work

For years, our A-Team volunteers have shown up week after week to keep Lake Merritt clean. This summer, our **Lake Chalet cleanup box** was vandalized over the July 4th weekend, and we're raising funds to quickly repair and restock it so our Tuesday volunteers can continue their work.

As a nonprofit we rely on community contributions to sustain year-round cleanups and water quality advocacy. Every donation makes a difference in keeping Lake Merritt clean, healthy, and thriving for all.

Donate today at www.lakemerrittinstitute.org

For sponsorships, questions, or comments please email us at info@lakemerrittinstitute.org.

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