



# Altadena Foothills

# CONSERVATOR

Newsletter of the Altadena Foothills Conservancy

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## OUR WEB SITE

[www.altadenafoothills.org](http://www.altadenafoothills.org)



## NEXT AFC MEETING

*"Celebrating Altadena's Natural Resources and Organizing for the Future"*

*Thursday, 21 September, 2000*

*7:00 to 9:00 p.m.*

*Altadena Senior Center  
560 E. Mariposa Street  
(west of Lake Avenue, next to the main Altadena Public Library)*

*Come hear an overview of AFC activities and participate in mini-workshops for volunteers in support of AFC projects. Many of you have been asking what you can do to help, in addition to donating funds. At this meeting you will have the opportunity to join a committee or commit to helping on a specific task.*

## What is the Altadena Foothills Conservancy?

Since January, the Altadena Foothills Conservancy (AFC) Board of Directors has been meeting every few weeks, attending seminars and conferences, and making innumerable phone calls just to keep informed with the rapid pace of events and activities affecting the Altadena foothills. We've met with elected and appointed officials, prepared proposals for funding, and wrestled with planning for the future.

### *Who are we and why are we doing this?*

The purpose of AFC is to preserve open space lands, and associated historic structures, in Altadena for ecological, educational, historic, scenic, and recreational opportunities. The AFC has incorporated as a private, nonprofit corporation. We are in the process of obtaining recognition as a tax-exempt educational nonprofit under section 501(c)(3) of the tax code.

### *Can we be more specific?*

The Altadena Foothills Conservancy plans to:

- Educate Altadenans and visitors of all ages about nature, local ecology, and human interactions with the environment
- Promote, establish, restore, and build trails in the Altadena region, including the Altadena Crest Trail
- Acquire and manage conservation easements in the Altadena portion of the San Gabriel Mountains foothill corridor
- Acquire and steward open lands and associated historic structures in Altadena

- Monitor new housing and retail developments for compliance with mitigation measures related to the natural environment.

We estimate that Altadena encompasses several hundred acres in the foothills that are still undeveloped, which form a vital transitional zone between the steep mountains and residential areas. Altadena has the opportunity to preserve this narrow natural corridor above us – in some places it is only a few hundred feet deep – for wildlife, native plants, watershed, scenic vistas, and recreation.

Much of this land is of historic significance; including the Mount Lowe Railway, Henry Huntington's land, the Nightingale Estate, the abolitionist Owen Brown's gravesite, and wildflower fields that the noted botanist Theodore Payne planted and tended. Most of the undeveloped parcels are 20 to 40 acres, all currently in private ownership, but all vulnerable to development. Three priority parcels are now on the market: Rubio Canyon, lower Millard Canyon, and property along Chaney Trail.

The growth of conservancies along the San Gabriel Mountains foothill corridor from San Dimas westward to Altadena is a movement whose time has come. Surveys across America show that 80% of the public supports conservation of our rapidly disappearing wildlands. The recent passage of Propositions 12 and 13 for land and water conservation indicates broad based local support for preserving dwindling open

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space and invaluable watersheds.

Altadena faces unique problems as an unincorporated area of Los Angeles County. This means, for example, that we are not eligible for block grants or funding under Proposition 12 because we are not a city nor do we have a Municipal Advisory Committee. We are served only by the volunteer Altadena Town Council. We must, therefore, beg Los Angeles to send money to our historic community. In addition, Altadena is under the jurisdiction of the state funded Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC), even though Altadena is geographically located in the in the San Gabriel Valley, not in the Santa Monica Mountains. The SMMC has applied its funds and placed its priorities on the urgent open space issues of the Los Angeles west side. Altadena must work harder to get its fair share of SMMC's attention and its funding. To this date, the SMMC has made zero land purchases in the Altadena community.

Thus, one of AFC's major goals is to increase the visibility of Altadena with its rare and beautiful foothills. Nationwide the environmental community thinks only of the Santa Monica Mountains when they think of wild Los Angeles. Many have been willing, in the past, to sacrifice the San Gabriel foothills to development in order to preserve diminishing open space in the Santa Monica Mountains, even though land prices in Altadena are a fraction of the cost of west side land.

The Altadena Foothills Conservancy has organized and formed alliances with ten local conservancies and the private, nonprofit San Gabriel Mountains Regional Conservancy to acknowledge, celebrate, and preserve our community's natural resources and heritage. These are exciting and perhaps perilous times for land conservation in Los Angeles County. We look forward to seeing you at the AFC community meeting in September – you are needed!



INTENSE HOUSING TRACT "BUILD-OUT" THREATENS OUR FOOTHILLS.

### Meet the AFC Board of Directors

- ✿ *Nancy L. C. Steele, D.Env.*, is President. Nancy is a staff air pollution specialist with the California Air Resources Board and has lived in Altadena since 1984.
- ✿ *Lori L. Paul, R.V.T.*, is Vice President. Lori is an outreach coordinator at JPL. She is also a registered veterinary technician in California (specializing in wild-life management) and a former zoo keeper at the Los Angeles Zoo.
- ✿ *Astrid Ellersieck* is our Secretary/Treasurer and Public Relations Director. Astrid is a Realtor with Jim Dickson and has lived in Altadena for over 30 years. She serves on the Altadena Town Council's Land Use Committee and the Altadena Heritage Board.
- ✿ *Dianne Walter* is an at-large Director. Dianne is a city planner for Glendora and has lived in Altadena for over 30 years.
- ✿ *Robert L. Staehle* is an at-large Director. Rob is an engineering manager at JPL and is an avid hiker and bicyclist.

\*Affiliations do not imply endorsement and are for biographical purposes only.

## Highlights

by Nancy Steele

### Progress in the first eight months:

#### December 1999

After about a year of off-and-on discussions, a small group of concerned Altadenans decides to incorporate as a nonprofit organization devoted to preservation of open space land and associated historic structures for educational, ecological, recreational, and scenic purposes. The new Altadena Foothills Conservancy will be mentored by the San Gabriel Mountains Regional Conservancy (SGMRC). AFC consists of residents from Altadena including both long time residents and relative newcomers who care about this unique foothill community.

Immediately potential projects are identified for a meeting with the Trust for Public Lands, organized by the SGMRC. We identify, by parcel number, most of the remaining open space lands in Altadena. Our preliminary survey suggests there are at least 300 acres

of undeveloped land at the urban fringe that are of high enough quality to be worth preserving as natural habitat.

#### January 2000

Wild lands in Altadena are nominated for Significant Ecological Area (SEA) status in Los Angeles County. For incorporation, four initial AFC board members are selected: Astrid Ellersieck, Lori Paul, Nancy Steele, and Dianne Walter.

Pending the successful passage of Propositions 12 and 13, AFC presents projects for consideration to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.

Lori and Dianne, through the generous support of Environment Now, attend the statewide Land Trust conference in Sacramento, California, cosponsored by the Trust for Public Land and the State. During that time, they meet with state Legislators and staff to discuss Altadena's specific needs.

## February 2000

On 3 February, Altadenans fill the Altadena Senior Center to learn about the new Altadena Foothills Conservancy and the growing conservancy movement in the San Gabriel foothills. We invite people to become Friends of the Altadena Foothills Conservancy and are thrilled by the positive response from the community.

Nancy attends the first Board meeting of the new San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy.

Astrid makes a presentation introducing the AFC to the Altadena Town Council, its Land Use Committee, and to Altadena Heritage. All three organizations vote their support and endorsement of AFC's goals.

Rob introduces AFC to the Chaney Trail Neighborhood Preservation Alliance, a foothill homeowners association. The foothill residents are enthusiastic about the opportunity to prevent future La Viña-type tract "build out" of the surrounding foothills.

## March 2000

We meet with State Senator Adam Schiff's aide, Paul Hubler, to discuss placing an Altadena representative on the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy Advisory Committee. Senator Schiff modifies his bill, SB 1455, as we have requested.

AFC submits its Articles of Incorporation to the Secretary of State. We receive our certificate in April 2000.

Nancy tours the Lower Millard Canyon property with a Department of Fish and Game conservation biologist to learn more about the biotic communities and specific wildlife present or likely to be present.

Lori and Rob begin compiling a photographic record of Altadena foothill plant and animal species.

## April 2000

AFC board members meet with Senator Adam Schiff; his aide Paul Hubler; Joe Edmiston, Director of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy; and

Rorie Skei, SMMC deputy director; at Senator Schiff's Pasadena office to discuss preservation projects and subsequently tour Lower Millard Canyon and the Chaney Trail AFC project sites.

Nancy conducts the first AFC Children's Nature Walk in Alzada Canyon. Five children explore the natural environment to learn about native plants and animals.

Nancy speaks on a panel at the All Saints Church's environmental forum held in conjunction with their Earth Day observance, while Dianne staffs a table in the courtyard.

## May 2000

Lori attends the first Land Trust Alliance Pacific conference in Santa Cruz, California (once again with the generous support of Environment Now).

AFC commits to the restoration of the Altadena Crest Trail, a scenic, historic, and delightful local trail which has become fragmented over the years.

Altadena moves one step closer to gaining a voice on the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy Advisory Committee, as SB 1455 passes in the California Senate and moves to the Assembly.

## June 2000

Applications for non-profit status go to the State and the Internal Revenue Service. We expect to hear back within a few months. The non-profit status will be retroactive to our date of incorporation (10 April 2000).

Sadly, the Governor line-item vetoes a proposed appropriation for Lower Millard Canyon, along with most of the other land protection "riders" across the state.

## July 2000

AFC board meets with Supervisor Michael Antonovich's aides in Pasadena (Ollie Blanning) and Los Angeles (Conal McNamara) about the La Viña open space donation, Proposition 12 and 13 funding for AFC, and the Altadena Crest Trail.

## Rubio Canyon Property Profile

by Nancy Steele

24 June 2000. This morning, AFC Board members Rob, Lori, and I went on a hike up Rubio Canyon. We parked at the junction of Rubio Vista and Pleasant Ridge Drives, following the Rubio Right-of-Way Trail, which dates back to 1892. We hike to the old Rubio Pavilion site, but do not walk as far as the incline right-of-way. I hiked that route down from Echo Mountain last February after the commemoration of the 5 February 1900 fire that burned down Echo Mountain House. We mourned the death of the old oak tree that has lived along the trail for over a century and is shown in many historic photos. It is a mystery why it has died so suddenly. Perhaps the infamous Rubio Canyon debris pile has caused some alteration in the water table or environment which has caused this fine old tree to die.

The trail we followed skirts the western side of the 32 acre parcel AFC would like to purchase and preserve. This parcel was part of the famous Mount Lowe Railway, now on the National Register of Historic Places. It is located at the mouth of Rubio Canyon, where a ranch had originally been established by Jesus Rubio, a squatter who began farming there in 1867. In 1880 the land passed to the Woodbury brothers, who were Altadena pioneers. Professor Thaddeus S. C. Lowe purchased the ranch from the Woodburys as part of his right-of-way when he began to build the Mount Lowe Railway in Rubio Canyon.

Professor Lowe used the ranch to grow fresh produce for the resort hotels at Rubio Pavilion, Echo Mountain, and Crystal Springs. Financial reverses caused the railway to go into receivership, and in 1902 Henry Huntington acquired the property as part of his Pacific Electric Railway.

The "improved" portion of the property was used as a Boy Scout Camp (Camp Huntington) for a number of years and then was subdivided for housing in the early 1960's. The unimproved portion, comprising 32.27 acres, which lies to the north of Camp Huntington, remained in Henry Huntington's possession and passed into his trust at his death. It remained there, administered by Security Pacific Bank, for many years. In Spring 1997 an attempt was made by preservationists and Mount Lowe volunteers to have the Huntington heirs donate this parcel to the Big Santa Anita

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Historical Society. This effort stalled for many reasons, as the bank and the trust heirs initially over-valued the property. On 21 January 1998, the 32.27 acre property was purchased by the owner of two adjacent parcels totalling about 9 acres. Subsequent to the January purchase, all three parcels were offered for \$499,000.

Since AFC was formed, this property has been a major priority for purchase. With careful consideration given to the wildly variable cost and relative value of the land, the AFC will pursue conservation easements and direct donation for this important open space. In addition to the historical significance of the parcel, Rubio Canyon Creek is a major tributary of the Rio Hondo River, which delivers water to the Los Angeles River below the spreading grounds. The Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board has established four existing, one potential, and three intermittent beneficial uses. The natural biotic communities include southern oak woodland, coastal sage scrub, chaparral, riparian woodland, and warm freshwater wetlands. Large mammals include black bear, mountain lion, bobcat, mule deer, and coyote. Several locally rare plants exist in the area. The property serves as a central trail head for a number of historic trail systems that serve the east ridge of Rubio Canyon, the canyon itself, and the Mount Lowe Railway Site. Hikers and picnickers are attracted by the year-round creek flow and shady canyon. This is a lovely foothill canyon that deserves to be preserved for the enjoyment of all.

# Calendar

## 11 September, Monday, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Environmental Roundtable. "Environmental Education" with Suzanne Thompson. Padua Hills Theatre, Claremont. Contact: Suzanne Thompson, Claremont Wildlands Conservancy, 909.626.5343 sthompson@pomona.edu

## 21 September, Thursday, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Altadena Foothills Conservancy meeting, "Celebrating Altadena's Natural Resources and Organizing for the Future." Altadena Senior Center, 560 East Mariposa Street (west of Lake Avenue, next to the main Altadena Public Library). Contact: Astrid Ellersieck, Altadena Foothills Conservancy, 626.797.1234

## 2 October, Monday, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Environmental Roundtable. "Collaborative Partnering - Tools, Talents, and Strategies," with Mike Rogers (retired) U.S. Forest Service Supervisor. Contact: San Gabriel Mountains Regional Conservancy [www.sgmrc.org](http://www.sgmrc.org)

### BECOME A FOUNDING FRIEND OF THE ALTADENA FOOTHILLS CONSERVANCY

With a minimum donation of \$10.00, or an amount of your choice: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

- Please contact me regarding the donation or sale of land I own.
- Please contact me regarding the establishment of a conservation easement on land I own.
- Please contact me, I have special skills I would like to contribute to AFC.

*Altadena Foothills Conservancy is in the process of incorporating as a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation under the Internal Revenue Code; contributions are tax deductible.*

For further information call 626.797.1234, or write to the address below.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Fax \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_



ALTADENA FOOTHILLS CONSERVANCY  
WWW.ALTADENAFoothills.ORG  
P.O. BOX 3  
ALTADENA, CALIFORNIA 91003-0003