



Altadena Foothills

www.altadenafoothills.org

CONSERVATOR

Newsletter of the Altadena Foothills Conservancy

Number 3 December 2001

FROM THE PRESIDENT

As you will read elsewhere, the Altadena Foothills Conservancy is close to permanently protecting its first open space. When we first started in 1999, we identified the Chaney Trail Corridor, comprising the open lands along Chaney Trail north from Loma Alta to the Angeles National Forest, as high priority for protection. This land is used for hiking, riding horses and bikes, walking dogs, and scenic driving, by people who assume that the lands north of the Forest Service gate are owned by the Angeles National Forest (ANF) and thus protected. We shortly found out that the land along the road, on both sides, is privately owned up to Sunset Ridge. What a tragedy it would be if houses were bulldozed into the chaparral all the way up to the ridge!

We identified the roughly seven owners of the remaining open space lands in the Chaney Trail Corridor and began sending them literature and talking to them. At the same time, we worked to raise the visibility of this important corridor with both the national organization the Trust for Public Lands (TPL) and the state agency Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC). This work came together last spring when we began talking to the owners of one 15-acre parcel, who had placed the land on the market for almost \$1 million. Shortly after we began that dialog, Jennifer Hranilovich of TPL called us and said they would be interested in protecting some of these land we had been promoting. As you will read in Rob Staehle's article, these efforts have come together recently with the owners signing an option agreement for TPL to purchase their land by December 31, 2001. If TPL exercises the option, and we believe they will, the land will eventually be turned over to the ANF and permanently preserved.

The next step for this parcel is restoration. Because the lower sections fronting on Alzada Road have been cleared annually by disking, the few native plants left besides the massive oaks are some specimen sumac, poison oak, and elderberry bushes. We would like to increase the native plants, suppress the non-native grasses, and at the same time maintain fire safety. It is unlikely that the Forest Service will do this, and so we will work with them on a management plan that fulfills all the legal requirements and restores the land.

After we celebrate our first land preservation, in fact before this deal is closed, we will begin work on our next priority parcel for acquisition. We don't exactly know which one that will be, but we do know it will be in Altadena. We hope you will join us in supporting our efforts.

Nancy Steele, President

Chaney Trail Parcel Optioned for Conservation: Many Hands Make for Light Work

*by Robert L. Staehle
Chair, Natural Resources Committee,
Board Member, and Chaney Trail
Project Area Leader*

UPDATE AT PRESS TIME!
21 NOVEMBER 2001 THE TRUST
FOR PUBLIC LAND APPROVED
PURCHASE OF THE CHANEY
TRAIL PROPERTY!

The aerial survey markers appeared in 1998. We alarmed neighbors discussed them with one another in concerned voices. We thought to ourselves, like Han Solo in Star Wars: "I have a bad feeling about this..." The nearby area adjoining the Angeles National Forest looked indistinguishable from the National Forest itself: chaparral, wildlife, spring flowers, trails, and majestic oaks. We all enjoyed the open space, as did many others who ride, hike, and mountain bike on the portion of the Altadena Crest Trail contained within the private land. But the privately-owned fifteen acres could be sold to a developer, trees cut, many houses built, fences put up, gates erected across the trails, birds, bobcats and wildflowers gone...we became unsettled.

Fast-forward to 2001 October 27th. Thirteen neighbors and friends who enjoy our trails began showing up at 9:00 AM and started chopping, sawing, cutting, and scything away the dry weed stalks, dead undergrowth, and

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Site visit during brush clearance on optioned land. Left to right: residents Marie Slonski and Rob Staehle (back to camera), visitors Dave Myerson/Environment Now and Jennifer Hranilovich/Trust for Public Land, and honorary resident Jennifer Kutner (back to camera).

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flammable laurel sumac on the 15 acres. Were we crazy to be clearing brush from someone else's land? For free? Not really. We were working at the request of Bill West, one of the two owners of the open space we all enjoyed. When he called me, he was preparing to sign an option agreement giving the non-profit Trust for Public Land (TPL) exclusive right to purchase the two parcels totaling fifteen acres at an agreed price, through this December 31st. Bill asked if we were willing to do some brush clearance of a portion of the parcel that the County Agriculture Department inspector had indicated needed further fire abatement.

I agreed right away, on behalf of AFC, as a show of good faith toward Bill and his partner. From June through August, the owners had set aside offers from housing tract developers to give us, AFC, time to work out a tax-advantaged purchase. Bill and his partner had bought the parcels in 1977. AFC believed they deserved a favorable return on their investment, but wanted them to consider a buyer who would conserve the natural and historical values of the property in perpetuity. Their alternative was to sell to a developer, who might destroy much of that value to

build and sell a few luxury homes, hoping to make a quick profit.

Notices to some neighbors and friends, along with a brief report at our October 24th Board meeting, brought thirteen of us together the first Saturday morning, with an additional eight helping over the next week. Two more work sessions the following weekend brought the area into fire compliance. The current owners saved the \$2000 the County said they would be charged to clear the land. AFC and the volunteers gained invaluable goodwill with the owners. In addition, by clearing the land ourselves, we know the job has been done right, including consideration for this coming winter's rains to keep erosion to a minimum. And of course neighboring homes will be safer from the threat of brush fires.

We hope our good faith contribution will seal the deal. TPL and the owners have both signed the option agreement. What is needed now is for TPL to complete the purchase before the option expires at the end of the year. *If* TPL purchases the land, they plan to convey the parcels to the National Forest, which has said it would like to add this land to the adjacent Forest land already owned.

"If" is such a short word, but represents a whole lot of work up front and in the future until the land is protected. What if TPL can't make the purchase? What if the National Forest decides they don't want the land, or don't have enough acquisition funding for it? We are trying to prepare for all reasonably possible eventualities, but right now, the acquisition and conservation appear to be on track.

It is people like you, our contributors and our volunteers (all of us affiliated with AFC are volunteers), who make this possible. If you can help out in person on work parties like the ones October 27th, November 3rd and 4th, drop us a note or send us an email via the Web site. If you can help out financially, please send us a check for as much as you can afford. There is nothing like matching funds from the community to motivate major



Altadena Foothills Conservancy president Nancy Steele made an invited presentation July 2nd at Congressman Adam Schiff's Altadena Town Hall Meeting at the Altadena Senior Center. She outlined the natural values of open space in our foothills, showing slides of some of the plentiful animal and plant life in nearby wild areas. Invited presentations were also made by officials of the Forest Service, Town Council and others. Left to right: Susan Swinson, Angeles National Forest Deputy Supervisor, Ranger Rich Borden, Lori Paul, AFC vice president, Representative Schiff, and Nancy Steele.



Before and After: Calvin Parks shows how to clear brush from under the edge of an oak tree's canopy. Dry brush can form a "fire ladder" that allows a small, quick and relatively safe ground fire to move up into the canopy of a tree, which then presents a greater danger. The dry twigs and sage were bundled and hauled away.

grant-givers to take notice and help protect the Altadena foothills. And if you know of other wild parcels you are passionate about conserving here in the Altadena Foothills, let us know about that, too.

AFC's first priority is to complete this acquisition of these 15 acres in the Chaney Trail Corridor. Next we hope to move quickly on a similar arrangement for 32 acres at the mouth of Rubio Canyon. Lower Millard Canyon is another important parcel that we are working on acquiring. Which of these areas are you passionate about saving?

Finally, if you know or see any of the following people, please thank them for their help with the fire clearance. Brush clearance is not most people's idea of fun, but it's a lot more fun in a group and knowing you are making a difference. Those who helped were: Jocelyn and Tom Borys, Luke Davis,

Jeanette Dillinger, Tim Koch, Joyce Kohl, Jennifer Kutner, Kirk and Nami Olgin, Hank Parks and son Calvin, Lori Paul, Jorge Ramos, Harry Sarkisian, Carla Slepak, John and Marie Slonski, Rob Staehle, Bruce and Nancy Steele, and John Sweeney. We also had two special guests: Jennifer Hranilovich, who is leading this acquisition at TPL by doing her own form of "brush clearance" wading through legal paperwork; and David Myerson of Environment Now, the organization that has given AFC several small grants and helped get our networking started. It was great that Jennifer made a site visit while we were clearing the land. Seeing so many volunteers in the neighborhood out there working made her feel good about her dedication and hard work on this acquisition.

The aerial survey markers are gone now, and this wonderful open land and its wild residents are one step closer to permanent protection.

Project Status

by Nancy Steele

Chaney Trail Corridor

In addition to the 15 acres discussed elsewhere in this newsletter, AFC has been talking to the owner of a 40-acre parcel adjacent to Sunset Ridge. The owner is planning to donate her parcel to a land conservancy, and Nancy has sent her information about her options. In our most recent conversation, the owner said she is not yet ready to dispose of the parcels. She has told us she will likely either donate to AFC or the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.

Rubio Canyon

Paul Ayers, a Glendale attorney and Mt. Lowe Railway buff, recently settled a lawsuit he had filed against the new owner of the Rubio Canyon property back in May regarding trail easements. The settlement agreement stipulates that the owner, Sameer Etman, would protect four trails on the property by either filing a tentative

tract map showing open trails for public passage or recording trail easements by October 15, 2002. AFC hopes to acquire the land by that time, thus doubly ensuring that the land and trails will be protected.

Lower Millard Canyon and Upland Properties

Lower Millard Canyon has still not been funded for acquisition by the SMMC, although it is a high priority for them. The October meeting of the SMMC Board included a field trip to Lower Millard and Chaney Trail properties. Afterwards, SMMC Board members were heard exclaiming about the beauty of the canyon. Let's hope that interest translates into some action!

We have gotten nowhere with the Owen Brown gravesite as it seems the owner is not interested in selling. She has not returned our phone calls.

AFC Board of Directors

Nancy L. C. Steele, D.Env., President
Lori L. Paul, R.V.T., Vice President
Astrid Eilersieck, Secretary/Treasurer and Publicist
Nami Olgin, Treasurer
Robert L. Staehle, at-large Director
Carla Slepak, at-large Director

New Board Members

Nami Olgin lives in the Chaney Trail area of Altadena. Nami works as a public educator at an environmental consulting firm specializing in waste prevention. Nami chairs the AFC Finance committee.

Carla Slepak resides in southeast Altadena and is an industrial hygienist working for Cal/OSHA. Carla also founded the nonprofit Women's Environmental Council, Los Angeles Chapter. Carla chairs the AFC Fundraising committee.

Dianne Walter recently resigned her position as Director.

Newsletter design and layout,
Adriane Jach

Volunteer Opportunities

Fundraising

Chaired by Carla Slepak

The Fundraising Committee was established to focus on raising money for two purposes: general ongoing expenses, ranging from postage and mail box rental to insurance and taxes, and capital outlays for purchasing properties. The former expenses have been met so far through direct mail appeals and donations by Friends of the Altadena Foothills Conservancy. The committee is pursuing funding both from private Foundations and from individuals.

Natural Resources Committee

Chaired by Rob Staehle

The Natural Resources Committee was set up to identify and document the natural and historic resources of the open space lands in Altadena, and to help determine property boundaries. We are always asked to list the natural resources on our project parcels to justify their need for protection. This com-

mittee will be responsible for developing and maintaining lists of species, documenting existing plants and animals throughout the year, acquiring maps and aerial views, and ultimately monitoring the health and ecosystems of project parcels. One of the committee's projects is to support inclusion of the foothills region, including the foothills in Altadena, in the Los Angeles County Significant Ecological Area (SEA) revision.

Finance Committee

Chaired by Nami Olgin

The Finance Committee is responsible for developing the financial statements for Board review and approval, and proposing a budget for Board approval. The Finance Committee is still developing and finding the necessary expertise to accurately reflect the finances of the AFC. A volunteer or pro-bono accountant experienced in non-profit accounting would be helpful to provide guidance.

SUPPORTING LAND PRESERVATION

Anyone who starts an organization like this quickly comes to an abrupt realization. You have to ask for money to pay the bills.

Well, you have been sending us money to support land conservation in Altadena, whenever we've asked for it, but in the last seven or eight months we haven't asked many people. And we've found that if you don't ask, very few will send you money. So I'm asking. Please renew your support to AFC. The work we do requires two things: volunteers and money. We welcome you to join us by volunteering, and we are always grateful for the money that keeps us going.

Nancy Steele, President

ALTADENA FOOTHILLS CONSERVANCY'S 2001 ANNUAL CONTRIBUTION DRIVE

I would like to renew my commitment/ or /become a new Friend of the Altadena Foothills Conservancy:

\$10 \$30 \$50 Other _____

Mail with your check to:
Altadena Foothills Conservancy
P.O. Box 3
Altadena, CA 91003-0003

Thank you for your support.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone(s) _____

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