



Annual Report 2020-2021

Friends of the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park

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The Friends of the Wilderness Park is a grassroots organization that works with the City of Claremont to help preserve the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park as an environmental resource, manage the park for passive recreation, and minimize the impact of park attendance on surrounding residential neighborhoods.

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Jim Pinter-Lucke, Chair and Signage Working Group leader

Charlie Gale, Second Saturday Water Coordinator

Nancy Hamlett, Treasurer and Invasive Plant Working Group leader

Meg Mathies, Communications and Secretary

Vicki Salazar, Volunteer Coordinator

Greg Glass



Cover Photo: Shane Uhl gets his Friends T-shirt for picking up trash on the trails during the pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

Mission and History

The Friends of the Wilderness Park is a volunteer support group that was formed as a result of the *Master Plan for the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park* (Section IP 2.1 of the *Implementation Plan*). As described in that document, it was envisioned that the Friends would “assist with recruiting volunteers for various projects, engage with visitors on the trail to promote positive compliance with rules and trail courtesies, discuss issues of concern, share observations, and report to and coordinate with staff.”

The Friends was constituted in its present form in Spring 2018. In normal times, the Leadership Team meets monthly at the Alexander Hughes Community Center. Fred Cervantes, Parks & Sports Coordinator, serves as the City’s liaison to the Friends and has attended the Leadership Team meetings. The Friends have several working groups concerned with specific aspects of the Park, as detailed below.



Purpose of this report

The *Implementation Plan* states that “In order to ensure the C&HS Commission is informed of CHWP issues, the ‘Friends’ will provide an Annual Report and Recommendations on user experience and park culture to the Parks, Hillside, and Utility Committee as well as the Community and Human Services Commission.” This report is submitted in response to that charge.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES

Another year disrupted...

External events once again limited the Friends' activities this year:

- Because of pandemic restrictions, the Friends have been unable to hold "Second Saturday" programs or any other group activity in the Park this year.
- The Park was closed for 62.5 days during the 2021-2022 fiscal year:
 - The nearby Ranch 2 Fire, Bobcat Fire, and San Dimas Fire – resulted in 26 days of Park closures in July, August, September, and November.
 - The Park was closed an additional 29 days because of Red Flag Warnings (19 days) and Heat Advisories (10 days) issued by the National Weather Service.
 - Seven and a half days of closure were for road maintenance and other causes.

The Friends were able to continue to make progress in a few areas:

- Signage Guidelines for the CHWP were approved by the Community and Human Services Commission.
- Some documenting and mapping of invasive plant species continued in the Park.
- Documentation of Park flora and fauna in our iNaturalist project continued apace.
- The Friends began working with the City and Claremont Wildlands Conservancy to design and carry out Park user surveys.
- We continued our blog and website and added 25 people to our email list.



Smoke from the Bobcat Fire, September 7, 2020.

SPECIFIC PROJECTS

Volunteers are currently engaged in four different areas:

(1) Park signage policies, leader Jim Pinter-Lucke

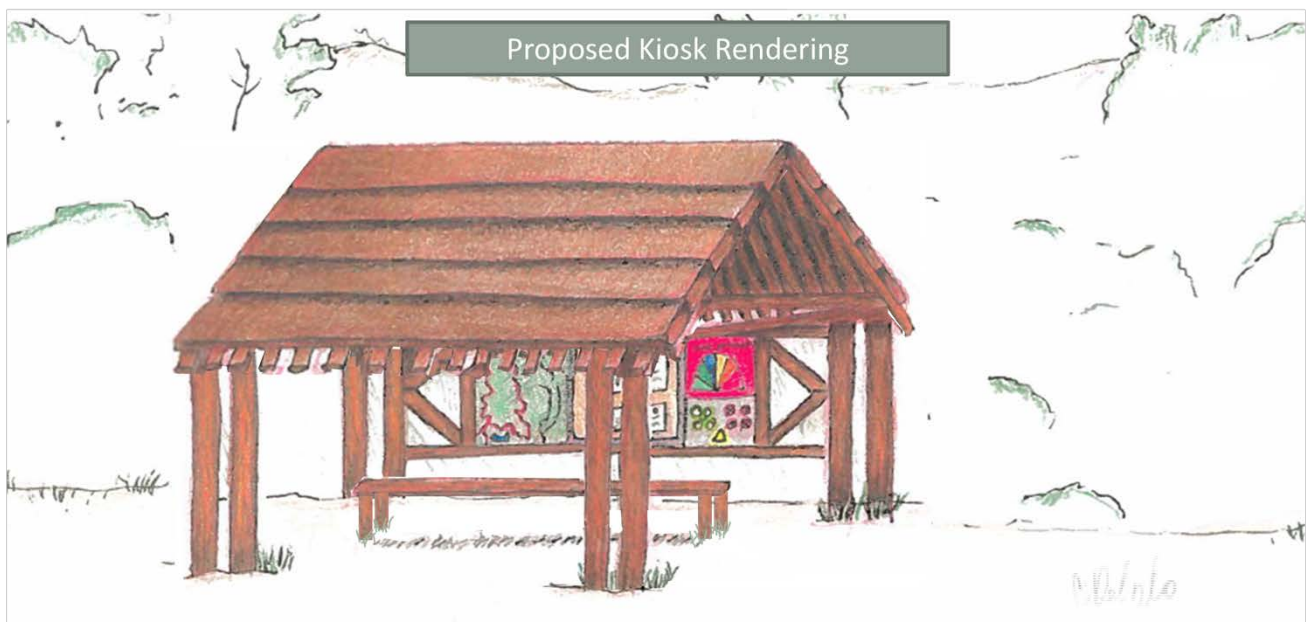
Guidelines for signage in the Wilderness Park were approved by the Parks, Hillsides, and Utilities Committee and the Community and Human Services Commission.

Key elements of the guidelines include:

- A covered kiosk at the North Mills entrance containing a map-based sign and information about park hours and regulations
- Map-based/informational signs at all major access points.
- Uniform directional signs at trail junctions
- Mileage markers; useful as location indicators in cases of emergency

The Guidelines provide for implementation in phases, as funding becomes available.

Currently, work is in progress on the kiosk at the main entrance, mile markers are being updated to better assist emergency personnel, and we hope soon to be working on directional signs with funds that are included in the City's current CalFire grant.



(2) Invasive species management, leader Nancy Hamlett

“Invasive plant species degrade native habitat and displace native plants and wildlife, increase wildfire potential; increase slope erosion potential; and degrade recreational opportunities. Therefore, invasive plant species control and management are important components to preserving the integrity of CHWP’s native habitat.”

– Master Plan for the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park, Section 3.5.1, p 3-19

The Invasive Plant Working Group (IPWG), whose 14 members have extensive experience working with both native and invasive plants, is focusing on (1) identifying and mapping invasive plant species in the Park and (2) developing an Invasive Plant Management Plan.

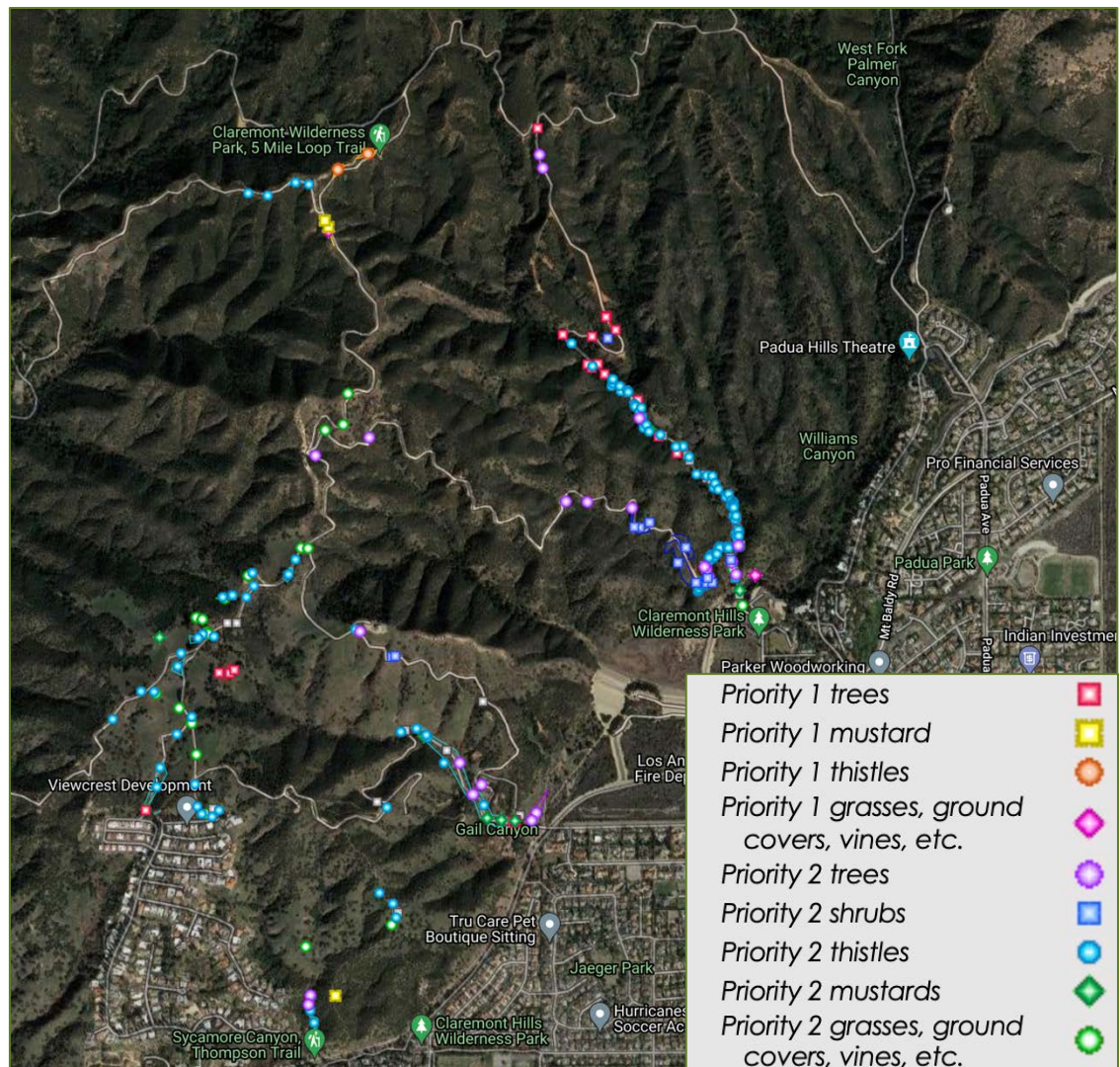
Progress this year includes:

- *Mapping and identifying invasive plants in the Wilderness Park*
 - This year we have documented 3 additional invasive plant species for a total of 51 (22 listed in the *Master Plan* and 29 others identified by the Friends).
 - During the past year, we have continued some mapping of invasive plants in the Park, concentrating on previously undetected species and those that are high priority for control . We have now mapped most of the Park, with the exceptions of Evey and Palmer Canyons.



Acacia baileyana (Cootamundra Wattle)
One of the newly documented invasive plant species.

- *Development of an Invasive Species Management Plan*
 - Our draft plan has established priorities for removal:
 - **Priority 1:** Highly invasive but feasible to control.
 - **Priority 2:** Less invasive than priority 1 species and are feasible to control.
 - **Priority 3:** Invasive but too pervasive to control, except in special circumstances, for example, post-fire management or protection of endangered species or sensitive habitats.
 - **Early detection:** Invasive plant species that have not yet been observed at the Wilderness Park but are emerging threats in the region and may appear in the Park in the near future. If these species are observed, they would be shifted to Priority 1.
 - Work on the Plan and any removal activities have been on hold this year because of COVID-19 restrictions.



(3) Documentation of Park flora and fauna, co-leaders Nancy Hamlett and Vicki Salazar

Effective management of the Park for conservation purposes requires understanding what flora and fauna, especially sensitive or protected species, are present in the Park. As a first step in formally documenting the flora and fauna of the Park, in August 2019 the Friends initiated the “Biota of the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park” community science project on the iNaturalist platform (<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/biota-of-the-claremont-hills-wilderness-park>).



iNaturalist, a joint initiative by the California Academy of Sciences and the National Geographic Society, is an online community that allows naturalists all over the world to connect and share their observations. Users upload a picture (with location) of any wild plant, animal, or fungus, and iNaturalist’s image recognition software and other users help identify it. Our project is set up so that any observations made in the Wilderness Park are automatically added to our project.

We hope that that this project not only helps to document Park flora and fauna, but also helps to create community awareness of local biodiversity and promote a deeper connection to the local environment.

Here are a few project stats from this past year:

- **23** project members (4 new this year)
- **185** contributors (51 new)
- **431** species reported (81 new)
 - **229** plants (41 new)
 - **13** mammals (1 new)
 - **48** birds (10 new)
 - **9** reptiles (1 new)
 - **4** amphibians (1 new)
 - **104** insects (20 new)
 - **10** spiders (3 new)
 - **1** scorpion
 - **14** fungi and lichens (4 new)



Featured Contributor – Scott Marnoy



Scott Marnoy, a physician, life-long naturalist, and Claremont resident is a member of the Biota of the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park Project and a major contributor, having made 104 observations of 82 different species. Here are a few of our favorites:



California Quail



Left: American Black Bear. Right: A Gophersnake with a California Mouse prey.

(4) Park User Surveys

CHWP *Master Plan* states that “in order to ensure that proper implementation efforts are undertaken, it is vital to make sure that the community, staff, and City Council have accurate and current information on the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park number of park users, how often they are using the park, why they are using the park and who the users are. To obtain this detailed information, **user surveys and usage estimates should be performed every two years;**” however, no user surveys have been conducted since 2014 except for a brief one-day survey in 2020.

In December 2020, The Friends reached out to Claremont City Councilmembers Stark and Calacay about the importance of getting a new set of user surveys done for the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park (CHWP). The Friends expressed the importance of having current user surveys for the purposes of park budgeting, resource management and grant-based fundraising. Mayor Stark expressed her deep commitment to having the CHWP continue as a regional resource, serving all of Claremont's surrounding communities – especially those lacking in adequate recreational green space. Current user surveys are critical in demonstrating this regional success. Based on these discussions, a Zoom call was held on March 10, 2021 that was led by City Manager Adam Pirrie to discuss how to execute a new set of CHWP user surveys. A follow-up call was held on June 30, 2021 to more specifically finalize the substance of the survey(s). Representatives from the Friends Leadership Team were present at both of these calls.

The Friends have expressed their willingness and desire to help in the acquisition of volunteers for the user survey gathering process. We look forward to helping move the user survey project forward in Fall 2021/Winter 2022 and using that valuable information to better manage the park and pursue larger fundraising opportunities.



(On hiatus) Second Saturday volunteer program, leader Vicki Salazar

Because of COVID-19 restrictions on group activities in the Park, no Second Saturday programs were held from July 2020 through June 2021.

The second Saturday volunteer program is a collaboration of the Friends of the Wilderness Park, CHWP Rangers, and City Staff. During normal times, on the second Saturday of each month, for four hours Friends' volunteers:

- Answer questions about the Park.
- Provide directions (with a map that visitors can photograph).
- Remind visitors to take adequate water for themselves and their dogs.
- Give water and/or refillable water bottles (or a drink from a dog bowl) to those in need.
- Remind visitors to keep dogs on leashes and not play music out loud.
- Hike the loop, picking up trash and answering questions along the way.

Without the regular Second Saturday program, some Friends did work individually to keep the Park clean by picking up trash on the trails.



RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CITY:

- We recommend that the city work on implementing the revised Park signage as outlined in the approved Guidelines, with the first priority on completing the kiosk for the main entrance, and the next priority being the directional/way-finding signs, which will increase Park safety. The current CalFire grant includes funds that can be used for this signage, and possibly the Friends and the Rangers could help with installation to reduce the total cost.
- We recommend that the City consider how the Park is financed given the increasing number of Park closures. Funds to support the Park are derived from parking fees, and for this reporting year, the Park was closed for 17% of the time, leading to a significant drop in revenue. Wildfires, fire danger, and excessive heat – the reasons for most closures – will only increase as climate change increases, leading to further losses in Park funding.



MANY THANKS TO:

City of Claremont

for providing:

- Our liaison, Fred Cervantes

Friends of the Wilderness Park Leadership Team

for their donations of:

- Domain name, web hosting, and G-Suite renewal
- Zoom license

Those who contributed photographs:

- Nancy Hamlett
- Vicki Salazar
- Scott Marnoy
- Greg Glass
- Meg Mathies
- Charlie Gale

