

Annual Report

July 2021-June 2022



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

Charlie Gale

Nancy Hamlett, Treasurer

Ran Libeskind-Hadas

Meg Mathies, Secretary

Vicki Salazar, Volunteer Coordinator

Cover Photo: Shane Uhl and Chris Lang show off trash they collected at Second Saturday.



Mayor Jennifer Stark with the Friends on Second Saturday, July 2021.

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. Eric Ey, City of Claremont Human Services Supervisor, serves as the City’s liaison to the Friends and attends the Leadership Team meetings. The Friends have several working groups concerned with specific aspects of the Park, as detailed below under “Specific Projects”, pages 5–15.



Purpose of this report

The *Implementation Plan for the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park* (CHWP) states that “In order to ensure the Community & Human Services 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, & Utility Committee as well as the Community & Human Services Commission.” This report is submitted in response to that charge.

THE YEAR AT A GLANCE

A return to near normality and a new project...

- With the end of pandemic restrictions, the Friends resumed “Second Saturday” programs in July 2021.
- The Park was closed for 16.5 days during the 2021-2022 fiscal year:
 - The nearby Antonio Fire led to 2 days of Park closure.
 - The Park was closed an additional 7 days because of Red Flag Warnings.
 - High winds, heavy rain, and resulting maintenance caused 7.5 days of closure.
- The Friends participated in Claremont’s Earth Day Celebration in April 2022.
- We initiated a program of monitoring Monarch butterflies and milkweed in the Park.
- Our iNaturalist project documenting flora and fauna in the Park recruited new members, held a BioBlitz, and nearly doubled the number of observations.
- The Friends continued working with the City and Claremont Wildlands Conservancy to design and carry out Park user surveys.
- Detection and mapping of invasive plant species continued in the Park.
- We continued to work with the City on design of CHWP signage.
- We revised our website, continued our blog, and added 98 people to our email list.



Friends volunteers Meg Mathies and Nancy Hamlett at the Claremont Earth Day Celebration.

SPECIFIC PROJECTS

(1) Second Saturday volunteer program

Leader Vicki Salazar

Once COVID restrictions were lifted, our Second Saturday volunteers returned to the park in July 2021. The Second Saturday Program is a collaboration of the Friends of the Wilderness Park, CHWP Rangers, and City Staff. Community engagement and trail cleanup make these events successful. Volunteers spend 2-4 hours encouraging positive park culture and trail etiquette which includes,

- Answering questions about the park
- Providing directions
- Educating visitors about the biodiversity in the park
- Reminding visitors not to play loud music and to keep dogs on a leash

From July 2021 through June 2022, our volunteers contributed 189 hours of service in the Park during Second Saturday.



Scenes from Second Saturday: Park visitors study the Park Biodiversity posters (L)., and Second Saturday volunteers Brad and Susan Starr (R).

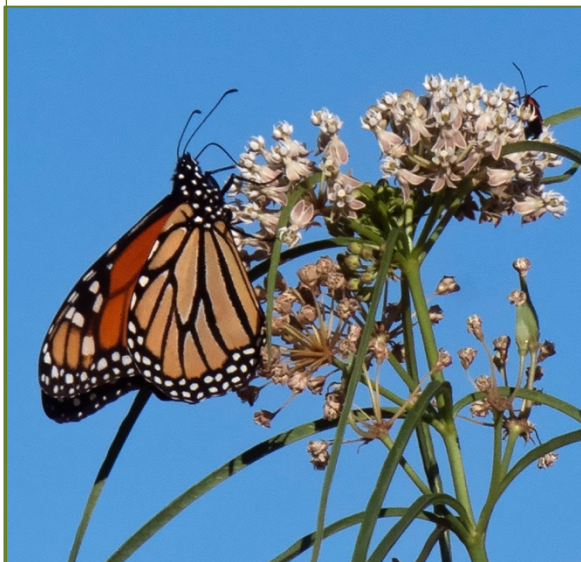
(2) Monarch and milkweed monitoring

Leader Nancy Hamlett

In 2021-2022, the Friends of the Claremont Hills Wilderness Park initiated a program for monitoring milkweed plants and monarch butterflies in the Johnson's Pasture area of the CHWP, using the protocols specified by the Integrated Monarch Monitoring Program (IMMP).

We mapped milkweed plant locations, established a 200 m × 50 m monitoring plot, and commenced monitoring, which includes a site description, monthly milkweed and blooming plant surveys, biweekly adult Monarch surveys, and weekly Monarch larvae and egg surveys.

We find that Monarchs do reproduce in the Park, indicating that the CHWP would be a prime site for Monarch and pollinator habitat improvement if the City wished to undertake such a program.



Clockwise from top left: Volunteer Paul Clarke checks a milkweed plant for Monarch larvae, a Monarch caterpillar, Volunteer Scott Marnoy checks for milkweed within a belt transect, and an adult Monarch nectars on Narrowleaf Milkweed.

(3) Documentation of Park flora and fauna

Project Managers Nancy Hamlett, Vicki Salazar, and Carol Blaney

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>).

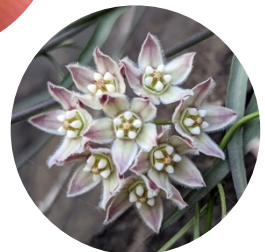


iNaturalist, a joint initiative by the California Academy of Sciences and the National Geographic Society, is an online community that allows naturalists all over the world to connect and share their observations. Users upload a picture (with location) of any wild plant, animal, or fungus, and iNaturalist’s 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 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:

- **39** project members (16 new this year)
- **221** contributors (36 new)
- **540** species reported (161 new)
 - **261** plants (61 new)
 - **13** mammals (1 new)
 - **55** birds (8 new)
 - **8** reptiles
 - **4** amphibians
 - **152** insects (68 new)
 - **15** spiders (6 new)
 - **1** springtail (1 new)
 - **4** mites & ticks (4 new)
 - **18** fungi and lichens (12 new)



A pernicious find ... Black Flies (*Simulium* sp.)



One new find in the Park this year was an insect species we'd rather wasn't there – *Simulium* sp., i.e., black flies. Larvae of these tiny flies (actual size 2-3 mm) develop in running water of all types, from the smallest seepages and streams to the largest rivers and waterfalls. After several months, the larvae metamorphose into adults, which take blood meals from animals and people. A bite from an adult fly appears at first much like a mosquito bite, but then large areas of swelling and redness spread out from the bite. Intense itching persists for several days or longer. Toxins injected during an extended severe attack can cause a general illness called black-fly fever, characterized by headache, fever, nausea, and swollen, painful lymph nodes. Black flies are purported to bite primarily around the eyes and neckline, but the ones in the CHWP seems to have a predilection for elbows and hands.

Adult black flies are out in late spring through early summer, and during this time Park visitors would do well to protect themselves by wearing long sleeves and applying insect repellent (DEET).

Accomplishments this year

- We replaced our hand-drawn project map with a very precise georeferenced park map of the CHWP boundary, ensuring location accuracy for the project. Many thanks to the City of Claremont for providing the KML file. Note that because the boundary changed – notably that Evey Canyon is no longer included – this year’s observation numbers aren’t directly comparable to the ones we reported last year.
- We recruited sixteen new project members this year, including a number of expert naturalists and professional botanists, who have contributed many high-quality observations, located rare species, and helped enormously with identification.
- The number of iNaturalist observations in the Park nearly doubled in the past year – from 1,342 observations through June 30, 2021, to 2,596 observations through June 30, 2022.
- We advertised our project at the Park for California Biodiversity Day on September 11, 2021.
- On April 30, 2022, we held a City Nature Challenge Park BioBlitz, which was a great success. You can read about it [on our blog](#).



Volunteers Vicki Salazar and Diego Tamayo explain the City Nature Challenge CHWP BioBlitz to Park visitors.

Featured Contributor – Carol Blaney

Carol is a retired National Park Service ranger with a great love for wild beings and wild places. One of her joys in life is exploring nature with other people. Since joining our project, Carol had become the leading contributor, having made 326 observations of 264 different species in the Park. Here are a few of our favorites:



Red-tailed Hawk



Carol Blaney



Red-gland Spurge



A tiny bee fly (*Neacretotrichus* sp.)

(4) Park User Surveys

Leader Meg Mathies

The Claremont Hills Wilderness Park Master Plan states: "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 up-to-date information on how many people are using the Park, how often, why, and who Park visitors are. To this end, user surveys and usage estimates should be performed **every two years**".

In fact, the only major survey which has been done was carried out between May 5 and July 18 of 2014 as the Master Plan was being written under the auspices of the consulting company MIG. At that time teams of volunteers gathered both quantitative and qualitative data during 16 different 2-hour periods, at 5 different park entrances, and distributed at different times of day. In addition, a small informal survey was held by the Friends at a Second Saturday event in November of 2019. In 2021, as Park activities were resuming following the pandemic shutdown, a task force comprised of representatives of the Friends of the Wilderness Park, Claremont Wildlands Conservancy, and members of City Staff met twice via Zoom and drafted a set of possible survey questions. In the Spring of 2022 Eric Ey, newly hired Human Services Supervisor, used these questions to design an on-line survey which was run during month of May, 2022.



The survey banner that was placed at Park entrances.

Visitors were greeted by banners at the Park entrances asking them to log on with a QR code which took them to the on-line survey. One advantage of this type of survey is that it can be fine-tuned as the need arises, for example when we realized that many people were waiting to take the survey until later in the day because of poor internet access at the Park, a question about the specific time of their visit was easily added.

Eric Ey presented the results of the survey to the PHU Committee at its June meeting and to the C&HS Commission in July. Serious criticisms of the survey were noted by the Commissioners at both meetings. Chief among these is the fact that people self-selected whether or not to take the survey, so the sample size was very small and non-representative. For example, among the estimated several thousand people visiting the Park during the month of May 2022, only about 500 surveys were submitted, and it appears that the sample was heavily skewed toward greater participation by Claremont residents. In 2014, when in-person surveys were carried out, only 18% of the visitors were from Claremont (91711 zip code) with 82% coming from surrounding communities. In the 2022 survey when visitors self-selected to participate, 52% of the visitors were from 91711, suggesting that Claremont residents care more about the Park and were thus inclined to answer the survey.

It is clear that a reliable survey is not only due but overdue, both for guiding Park management policies and for providing user information in support of grant applications. This will require the help of an outside consultant in designing the survey and analysing the results, which in turn will require an investment of money. We strongly recommend that the City Staff budget for such a survey and that it be conducted as soon as possible.



Survey takers at the Park in 2014.

(5) 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

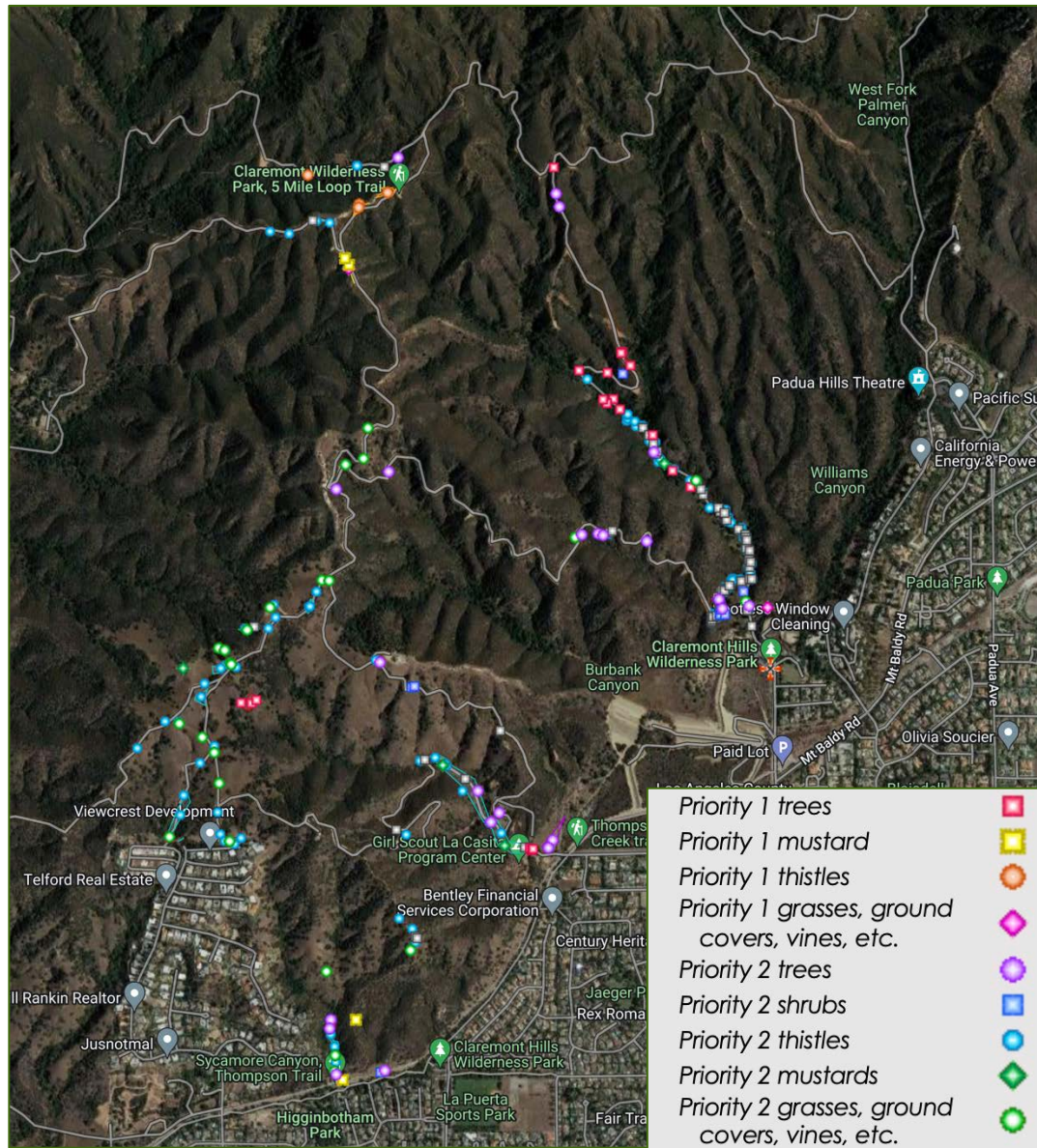
The Invasive Plant Working Group (IPWG), whose 14 members have extensive experience working with both native and invasive plants, is focusing on (1) identifying and mapping invasive plant species in the Park, (2) developing an Invasive Plant Management Plan, and educating visitors about invasive plants.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

- *Mapping and identifying invasive plants in the Wilderness Park*
 - This past year we documented 11 additional invasive plant species for a total of 58 (22 listed in the *Master Plan* and 36 others identified by the Friends).



Pampas Grass (*Cortaderia selloana*)
One of the newly documented invasive plant species.

- During the past year, we 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 (not including Evey and Palmer Canyons).



- *Development of an Invasive Species Management Plan*
 - We have developed a draft plan that includes priorities for removal:
 - **Priority 1:** Highly invasive but feasible to control.
 - **Priority 2:** Less invasive than priority 1 species and 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.
- The plan has been on hold during the pandemic, but we hope to work with the City on finalizing a plan in the coming year.
- *Invasive Species Education*
 - Since 2014, the California Department of Fish & Wildlife has designated the first full week in June as California Invasive Species Action Week (CISAW) to increase public awareness of invasive species issues and promoting public participation in the fight against invasive species.
 - This year, the Friends observed CISAW with a booth at the park entrance with education information about invasive plants in the Wilderness Park.



Park visitors Karen Parfitt and Laura Kotovosky check out our “Most Unwanted” poster and “Bucket O’ Bad Plants” at the California Invasive Species Action Week booth.

(6) Park signage policies

Leader Jim Pinter-Lucke

Since the guidelines for signage in the Wilderness Park were approved by the Parks, Hillside, and Utilities Committee and the Community and Human Services Commission in Fall 2020, the Friends have continued to work with the City on implementing the guidelines, which provide for construction in phases, as funding becomes available.

During the past year, the City installed a new kiosk at the main Park entrance, and the Friends worked with the City on the design of the large sign for the kiosk. We look forward to working with the City on additional signage elements.



Vicki Salazar at the newly constructed entrance kiosk.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CITY:

- Because of the importance in guiding Park management policies and providing user information in support of grant applications, we strongly recommend that the City Staff budget for a Park user survey and that it be conducted as soon as possible.
- We recommend that the city continue to work on implementing the revised Park signage as outlined in the approved Guidelines, with 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. 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, Eric Ey

Friends of the Wilderness Park Leadership Team

for their donations of:

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

Our Photographers:

- Carol Blaney – p7, *Allen's Hummingbird*; p8, *Black flies*; p10, *Red-tailed Hawk*, *Red Gland Spurge*, *Neacreotrichus bee fly*
- Nancy Hamlett – p3, *Sky over hills and oak*; p6, *Monarch butterfly monitoring*; p7, *Plummer's Mariposa Lily*, *Acmon Blue butterfly*; p8, *Black fly bites*, p9, *BioBlitz booth*; p13, *Pampas Grass*; p15, *Invasive species booth visitors*; p17, *Johnson's Pasture hikers*; p18, *Evening shadows*
- Peri Lee – p7, *Hartweg's Climbing Milkweed*
- iNaturalist User "wake-n-blake" – p7, *Southern Pacific Rattlesnake*
- Meg Mathies – p12, *Survey takers*; p16, *New entrance kiosk*
- Glen Morrison – p7, *Beaked Twig Gall*
- Vicki Salazar – Cover; p2, *Friends with Mayor Jen*; p4, *Friends at Earth Day*; p5, *Second Saturday visitors and volunteers*
- John Sun -p10, *Carol Blaney*

