



# San Francisco Tomorrow

Issue 276 *Since 1970, Working to Protect the Urban Environment*

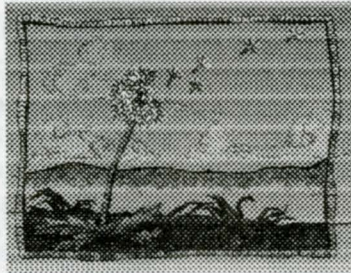
March 2003

## McLaren Park: A Walk on the Wild Side

On one of those great "changeable" mid-March days when you bring your umbrella, tuck a wind-shirt into your jeans and wear your sunscreen just in case, we set off, a little twist of walkers on a narrow windswept trail high above the Bay and the skyline of skyscrapers downtown. Did you miss it? We told you *not* to miss it in SFT's February newsletter, a glorious native plant walk with an intrepid leader, plantsman Jake Sigg.

"This is the first time I've been here," said one seasoned San Francisco environmentalist, awestruck by the vista in front of him and the Persian carpet at his feet. We were barely clear of the parking lot at Visitacion and Mansell Streets and already the flowery display was upon us. Tiny blue lupines, buttercups, and a snapdragon called Johnny Tuck peppered the heavily trodden rock path at our feet. Dogs and humans' footsteps have not eradicated these native plants, just made the ones on the immediate path a little smaller and closer to the ground. The wind also makes these flowers lie low.

"Look at all these native bunch-grass, our California state grass. Jake, "until the Spanish came and Muir's description of his first sight flowery, like a lake of pure and varicolored, "like a rainbow."



grasses, and over here purple needle-The Central Valley was full of it," said brought their herds of cattle." In John of it in 1868, the Valley lay "level and sunshine," grasses and flowers thick

San Francisco has thirty-two native plant areas, most of them on unbuildable steep sites that were left behind by developers. Many were purchased by the City through the Open Space Fund in order to protect the last remnants of the spectacular landscape that dominated the view when the Ohlone were here. Even today, on the steep slopes of McLaren Park, there are over 115 native plant species. "One of them is named footsteps-of-Spring, but I don't see any this year," says Jake.

"What's this little weedy thing?" asked Jennifer Clary. "That's fennel! It will grow huge. Very bad, very invasive," says Jake. Invasive means that an introduced plant (something from Safeway, or another part of the world) escapes someone's garden and lodges in a wild spot, displacing local California native plants.

"What's this African gerbera daisy doing here? It's pushing out the suncups," says one of the walkers. "See? They have the same strategy for survival, pushing back the clumps of grass to get out of the shade and into the sun," says another, learning fast. A non-native that is also invasive, says Jake, "tears a hole in the tightly woven fabric of plant, insect and wildlife communities that depend on the native plant."

The Natural Areas Program, managed by the Rec and Park Department, employs a hardworking crew of gardeners that can't be everywhere at the same time. They depend on an increasing cadre of volunteers. People like this SFT group face into the wind and on their knees pull out fennel, French broom and sheep sorrel, becoming converts to the hardy world of survival.



"Poison oak? Want to avoid it at all cost? Lots of wildlife depend on it for food," says Jake and grabs a bunch of fresh leaves and stuffs them into his mouth. "Not as delicious and tender as miner's lettuce," he said, but an important food plant just the same." What a way to make a point. Don't underestimate any of our native plants. They all have their place.

### Corrections to last month's Transbay Terminal article

The MTC is not a member of the Transbay terminal JPA. The members are San Francisco, AC Transit and Caltrain.

The Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) referred to is actually the CAC for the Transbay Redevelopment Survey Area, which includes Transbay Terminal and the land where the Terminal Separator (the spaghetti connecting the Embarcadero Freeway to the Bay Bridge and I-80) used to be.

### TRANSBAY TERMINAL AND CALTRAIN DOWNTOWN EXTENSION – INFORMATION AND ACTION ITEM

Congress is now working on a major transportation funding bill – the Transportation Equity Act (TEA-3). Many projects in the Bay Area are competing for funding in this bill, but it is essential that Transbay Terminal be given the highest priority in TEA-3 due to its very great importance as a regional transit center and its future statewide importance. **Please contact Congresswoman Pelosi (or other members of Congress) and urge her to fund the Transbay Terminal Project.**

Plans proceed for the Redevelopment Area to be created on the land formerly occupied by the Terminal Separator and related structures around the Terminal. Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill has been selected by the Redevelopment Agency to create the overall design for the prospective Redevelopment Area. The first of several public workshops was held earlier this month to allow public input on the Design for Development, that is expected to be adopted before the end of this year.

To be notified of future meetings and workshops, contact Mike Grisso at the Redevelopment Agency (749-2510). The Citizens Advisory Committee for this area meets monthly; for more information contact Maria Ayerdi.

### Central Freeway Fiesta

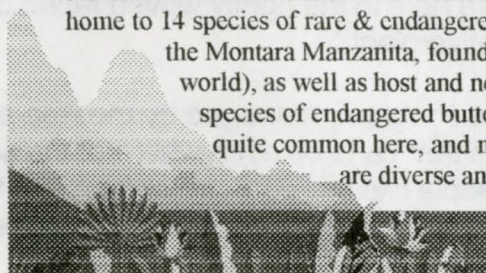
It's been over 13 years since the Loma Prieta Earthquake damaged the Central Freeway. After many years of debate, partial demolition and 3 ballot initiatives, the section of the freeway from Mission to Fell Street will finally be closed for good on March 29th with demolition to begin a few days later. Next year it will be replaced with a beautiful new tree-lined Boulevard along Octavia from Market to Fell Street.

To recognize this historic event, the Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/ Transgender (GLBT) Community Center, SPUR and Transportation for Livable Cities (TLC) is hosting a community celebration on Sunday March 30th. The festivities take place from 1-5 PM beneath the freeway at Market and Octavia Streets. There will be several bands, refreshments and local dignitaries and heroes on hand as well as a model and illustrations of the new Octavia Boulevard and exciting new plans for the Market/Octavia area.

### San Bruno Mountain Hike

Join the Loma Prieta Chapter's Bay Protection Committee for a hike of San Bruno Mountain's Ridge Trail on Sunday, March 30th at 11 am. Julia Bott, long time activist on the Peninsula, will lead the hike. Come enjoy the views and learn more about San Francisco International Airport's plan to fill the Bay. San Bruno Mountain was threatened in the mid-1960s by a plan to expand the airport. That plan was thwarted and the mountain was preserved. Now the Bay is being threatened.

San Bruno Mountain Park stands as a unique open space island in the midst of the Peninsula's urbanization. Located at the north end of the Santa Cruz Mountain range, the Park is home to 14 species of rare & endangered plant life (such as the Montara Manzanita, found nowhere else in the world), as well as host and nectar plants for three species of endangered butterflies. Raptors are quite common here, and mammal populations are diverse and healthy. Spring flowers will be in bloom.



Meet at the east end of the summit parking area. Energetic hikers can start at the main parking lot for an addition to your hike. Carpooling is encouraged - indicate if you can/will carpool in your RSVP. The closest restrooms are at the main parking lot. There is a \$4 entry fee. The hike is an out and back trail of about five miles. The trail is steep and undulating so be sure to wear shoes with a good grip; walking sticks would be helpful. Bring your binoculars and cameras as well as a light lunch and water. We will picnic at the east peak. The weather can change quickly on the Mountain so dress accordingly. Please RSVP to <hike@ProtectOurBay.com>

### Who Sets the Agenda for San Francisco's Public Libraries?



Wanted: a forum where the public can initiate meaningful discussion of plans and programs for our public libraries, including disbursement of the \$106 million bond issue that was intended to build five new branches and renovate 19 more. Why: current library oversight fails to demand appropriate accountability in library spending and library planning

A seminal issue is the library administration's move to turn branch libraries into expensive high tech community centers where books are stepchildren and "best sellers" displace literature. This cries for independent scrutiny under any circumstances -- and all the more so now when economic constraints require across-the-board belt tightening. At the popular Excelsior branch library, close to 2300 books are slated for removal, about 5% of a collection that was already reduced from 61,000 books to 46,000 books between 2001 and 2002. That's a total of 30%, nearly one-third of the book inventory!

A 25% reduction took place at the Marina library in the same period, reducing the number of books to 32,000 -- from 47,000. The Richmond branch took a 24% hit, from 72,000 to 54,000.

Another problem: big cost overruns in land acquisition costs at Mission Bay and other new library sites. The result was a 5% reduction in scope for all work planned under the branch renovation program. Recently, the library failed in its efforts to secure state funding for the Excelsior branch library. Will this result in yet another redistribution of bond resources?

Not surprisingly, the library administration is fighting independent scrutiny. They say their hand-picked, tightly-controlled support groups fill the bill. What they really do is cut the public out of the loop.

In view of the people's devotion to the library, and the importance of libraries in every neighborhood, San Francisco Tomorrow recommends the establishment of an independent Citizens Advisory Committee for public input and debate on all library plans and programs.

### Budget Cuts Hit Our Parks

The fiscal crisis for the City of San Francisco means big changes for our parks. Several proposals for cutting costs and 'generating' revenue are winding their way through the approval process. Among the proposals:

- ◇ The ten member Park Patrol, established in 1874 to "...protect the rights of all by guarding against the misuse of the common property of the few, is to be, not just cut, but totally eliminated. Estimated annual cost savings \$350K.
- ◇ Metered parking is proposed for most of the eastern end of Golden Gate Park, roughly 1,800 spaces. The fees will be up to \$1/hr. and enforced 7 days a week. Estimated annual revenue--\$500K.
- ◇ A proposal to sell permits for all day parking on Kezar Drive and Conservatory East received unanimous approval in committee, even though the 1998 Park Master Plan clearly states that commuter parking in parks is to be discouraged. Rates have not been set, but fees for all day permits in the Kezar lot are to be raised from \$125 to \$155/month.
- ◇ Fees for the Tea Garden, Carousel, latchkey after school program, and many other activities are to be increased.

To the credit of Rec and Park staff, an effort has been made to hold down reservation fees for small and non-profit events, but a proposal to increase fees for gated commercial events is one vote away from final approval by the Board of Supervisors.

Of all the cuts, the most painful involve staffing. No gardening positions are to be removed, but our parks are already suffering from a staffing level 1/3 below what the Rec and Park feels it needs for minimum maintenance. The biggest cuts will be to staff for the recreation centers and swimming pools. As many as 60 full and part-time positions are slated to be cut.

For the second year in a row, large sums will be pulled from the voter approved Open Space Fund to cover general operating expenses. In these times when we particularly need our free public parks, it is sad that they are being asked to pay their way.





## The Precautionary Principle – the New Environmentalism

In January 2003, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) released their 2<sup>nd</sup> assessment of "Americans' Exposure to Environmental Chemicals" -- the Body Burden report. This assessment analyzed the blood and urine of 2500 Americans for 116 chemicals commonly found in the environment, including heavy metals, pesticides, petroleum and plastic by-products. 89 of the 116 chemicals were detected. A similar study by groups such as the Environmental Working Group and Commonweal tested 9 Bay Area volunteers for 210 chemicals, and found that their subjects contained an average of 91 chemicals, 76 of which are known or suspected carcinogens.

This alarming increase of harmful chemicals in our environment and our bodies indicates a fundamental failure in our regulatory framework. In fact, 85% of the synthetic chemicals in use today have not even been tested for their effects on human health. Unknown is the cumulative impact of the interaction of the dozens of chemicals we carry within us. We do *know* rates of cancer, asthma, and autism are increasing.

The Precautionary Principle offers a new way to make decisions that affect our health and our environment. It requires a careful analysis of available alternatives using the best science, and selecting the alternative with the least potential threat to health and natural systems. Good examples of the Precautionary Principle in action can be found in the City's Integrated Pest Management Program, and the pilot Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Program.

In March, the Department of the Environment will introduce a new Environment Code, which will gather all of the City's environmental regulations into one place. The Precautionary Principle will be the organizing and implementing principle of the new Environmental Code. It's the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – let's clean it up! Call your Supervisor to state your support of the Precautionary Principle and the new Environment Code today!!

For more information on the two body burden studies, go to [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or [www.ewg.org](http://www.ewg.org)

## Support SFT in the Battle for San Francisco's Future!

San Francisco Tomorrow works to influence decisions that could make crucial changes to our urban environment. We need the help of SFT members and friends to research issues and speak at public hearings of City commissions and agencies, as well as before the Board of Supervisors. If you can join us, please contact Jennifer Clary at [jenclary@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jenclary@sbcglobal.net).

Some of SFT's current priorities include;

- ① Keeping public transit functional and affordable
- ① Advocating alternatives to filling in 2 miles of San Francisco Bay for airport runways
- ① Supporting the extension of Cal-Train (and high-speed rail) to the Transbay Terminal
- ① Maintaining public scrutiny of the San Francisco PUC as they rebuild our water delivery system and prepare a new Master Plan for San Francisco's wastewater system

**JOIN or RENEW** Check the expiration date on the upper right hand corner of your address label. If it's time to renew, please send your annual dues of \$15, \$25, or \$50 (your choice) to SFT, 41 Sutter Street, #1579, San Francisco 94104-4903



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