



Enjoying the Fruits of Our Labors

by Margaret MacNiven

On a glorious fall day recently, CGF Board Vice President, Matt Burrows, and I set out to enjoy a day of hiking on lands recently acquired by the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority (OSA). We started the day at Blair Ranch, which lies in the foothills a few miles west of Morgan Hill, where we joined a Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) led preview hike of the property. Our hike up the hill through well managed cattle grazing grasslands and majestic stands of blue oaks was rewarded with outstanding vistas extending from the Lick Observatory in the east to Mt. Umunhum and the Santa Cruz range in the west. In a successful cooperative effort, POST transferred the right to purchase the 865-acre Blair Ranch to the OSA, which plans to incorporate the ranch into the adjacent Rancho Cañada del Oro Open Space Preserve, currently a staging area for many multi-use trails extending up into the mountains. The new addition will expand trail and wildlife corridors, which might one day extend from Lexington Reservoir to Mt. Madonna.

We then headed over to another OSA preserve, the 1676-acre



Sierra Vista Open Space Preserve, located in the east foothills above Alum Rock Park in San Jose, for the dedication of five new miles of the Bay Area Ridge Trail through the property. Hiking the new trail is a breathtaking backcountry experience. We descended through open ranchland, past gentle and contently grazing Corriente cattle, and down into oak woodlands before we had to turn around and puff our way back up the hill. The trail at OSA's Sierra Vista is a collaborative effort, made possible thanks to funding partnerships with the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council and the California State Coastal Conservancy.


The OSA, together with their privately funded partners, has given Santa Clara County the wonderful gift of open spaces and nature for all to enjoy. At CGF we do our part for these partnerships by advocating for and protecting sound land use policies, policies that limit urban sprawl and encourage open space protection. As we move into our 50th year as an environmental advocacy organization we are grateful that there are public and private groups that can work together to take advantage of these policies and protect our natural resources in perpetuity. 

Photo by Cait Hutnik



COMMITTEE FOR GREEN FOOTHILLS

A grassroots 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization working to establish and maintain land use policies that protect the environment throughout Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties.

Our mission is to protect the open spaces, farmlands, and natural resources of Santa Clara and San Mateo counties through advocacy, education and grassroots action.

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Growth, gratitude, and celebration are in the air here at CGF as we turn the corner on a new year. This past year we have been very busy with our roles in Advocacy and Education out in the community while inside the organization we have been streamlining positions, adding new staff, welcoming new Board members, and seeing long time colleagues move on to make a difference in new ways—all this as we prepare for CGF's 50th Anniversary in 2012. Yes! We are 50 years in the making and going strong! (See article on back cover for more information.)

Greetings From the Executive Director


Cynthia D'Agosta

I'm very proud of the number of issues we addressed and outcomes we influenced in the name of land preservation this past year. You'll find a summary of this year's efforts in this issue. The list is long, very diverse, and packs a big punch—that is what CGF does. This small organization has delivered consistent vigilance and unrelenting environmental advocacy over the years, and we are looking forward to continuing our role as a leader in the environmental community of the Peninsula and South Bay over the next 50 years.

Some of the recent changes in positions reflect our preparation for the next decade and beyond. Within the last six months, CGF has welcomed on board Paul Davis as Development Director, Alice Kaufman as Legislative Advocate, and Karin Lin as Program Assistant. Together with myself and Advocates Julie Hutcheson and Lennie Roberts, this new team will continue to deliver on CGF's promise of being "local, vocal, and effective."

Of course we couldn't do all of this without your financial support. For 49 years, CGF has been a successful grassroots operation where member contributions provide the basic living expenses for the organization. No fancy large scale corporate funding for us—our members drive what we do. We hope you will continue to support CGF with your gifts and annual giving. As our own Brian Schmidt has said, CGF staff members and directors are motivated and inspired by member support:

"The incredibly high caliber of people involved in this work created the successes we have had in the past and set the stage for the successes we're going to have as we look to the future." (See article "So Much Done...")

So now, with Brian's long tenure on my mind and as I reflect on his litany of successes, I join with my colleagues at CGF and elsewhere to say so long to a friend, an admirable Water District official, a staunch environmentalist, and a fair but determined watchdog of environmental laws. We are saddened to see Brian move on, but wish him all the luck and good fortune he deserves in his new adventures. We know this is not goodbye because we will see him in the field, meet him for the discussions, and continue our advocacy together—just in different seats. 

CGF Advocates Look Back at 2011



Cait Hutnik

Protecting the bay: Redwood City's environmental folly continues unabated. City leaders remain eager to embrace the massive development proposed by international agribusiness giant Cargill that would destroy restorable baylands and increase the population of the city by 30,000. If developed, this low-lying area would need to be protected by huge levees. There is no assured water supply. Already gridlocked traffic on Highway 101 and Woodside Road would be exacerbated by the so-called "Saltworks" project. CGF, along with a growing coalition of environmental, labor, and community groups, is calling upon Cargill and its Arizona-based development partner, DMB, to drop their ill-conceived plans and instead partner with state and federal agencies to restore the area to tidal action.

Defending the coast:

■ CGF stands on the front lines, defending the coast from inappropriate, sprawling development that does not comply with the County's Local Coastal Plan (LCP) and zoning. This past year, CGF has appealed three projects to the Coastal Commission:

■ The controversial Big Wave project in Moss Beach, which proposes a huge industrial and housing development on agricultural soils next to the Pillar Point Marsh. This project is still under review by the Coastal Commission staff, which has informed the Applicant that the project has fundamental inconsistencies with the County's zoning.

■ The Mahon project in Montara where two oversized houses were approved by San Mateo County on only one legal lot, contrary to zoning requirements. The Coastal Commission unanimously denied the project. Mahon sued the Coastal Commission and named CGF and several neighbors as individual defendants. CGF and the neighbors have filed an anti-SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) suit against Mahon.

■ The Arata pumpkin farm, where a giant plastic Godzilla, sword fighting, and commercial entertainment have become the dominant use over

agriculture in the rural coastal zone. CGF's Appeal is still under review by Coastal Commission staff.

Ensuring beach access: In 2008, at popular Martin's Beach, just south of Half Moon Bay, new owners locked the gate and posted signs saying, "Beach Temporarily Closed" and "Do Not Enter." The gate remains closed today and CGF has partnered with Surfrider Foundation and others to urge San Mateo County and the Coastal Commission to enforce California's constitutional protections for public access to the ocean.

Moving beyond roadside herbicides: CGF has been working in concert with coastsiders to encourage the County Public Works Department to mow instead of spraying County roadsides with herbicides. Reducing or eliminating spraying is important because there are many steelhead spawning streams and other sensitive habitats and species that could be impacted by herbicides that drift or wash into streams.

Updating the Local Coastal Plan: For over ten years, San Mateo County has been working on updating the Local Coastal Plan (LCP) for the Midcoast communities of Montara, Moss Beach, El Granada, and Princeton. In April, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors resubmitted the Update to the Coastal Commission, which must determine whether the County's revised policies are consistent with the California Coastal Act. The County is requesting an "up or down" vote on the package of LCP amendments, which means if the Coastal Commission finds a problem with even one policy or zoning provision, it must reject all of the submitted amendments. CGF and coastal environmental activists have supported stronger policies regulating development in the urban midcoast. In the meantime, the existing LCP continues to be the governing set of rules for development.

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Advocating for trails that make sense:

■ Stanford’s required mitigation to build two recreational trails as mitigation for 5 million square feet of campus and housing expansion continues to be hotly debated. With a deadline looming for San Mateo County to accept \$10.2 million to expand the existing sidewalk/trail along Alpine Road between the Portola Valley town limits and the Menlo Park city limits, CGF and many residents of the area are urging the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors to reject the funding unless the trail avoids Stanford Weekend Acres, where many driveways and streets create dangerous conflicts with increased numbers of trail users.

■ On the coast, CGF has worked with County Parks to reduce the width of the proposed “Dardenelle Trail” in the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve in order to preserve sensitive habitats.

Rezoning Stanford Weekend Acres: Residents of the Stanford Weekend Acres area, a small neighborhood between Alpine Road and San Francisco Creek just east of I-280, have become alarmed at recent proposals to subdivide creekside lots and/or build massive houses that would not be in keeping with the rural character of the neighborhood. San Mateo County, responding to residents and CGF’s call for building limitations, has now enacted new interim zoning regulations, giving the community and County Planning a “time out” to craft permanent regulations that will effectively control the size and bulk of houses and ensure that new structures are set back adequately from the creek.



Cait Hutnik

Protecting Mountain View’s Cuesta Annex: CGF worked to protect the natural open space at Cuesta Annex, where a planned relocation of an old building to the property was stopped. We advocated for placing the proposed History Museum in an alternate location—where it would not destroy the historical value and nature of this undeveloped open space.

Proposing alternatives to open space intrusion: In response to Palo Alto’s controversial Measure E (on the ballot this past November) and its plan to undedicate parkland, CGF’s Board struck a carefully considered balance between climate action and park protection by opposing the measure while supporting composting at Palo Alto’s Water Quality Control Plant. Measure E passed, but CGF will continue to press the fact that the compost operation could be built nearby at the existing Water Quality Control Plant, preserving the promised and dedicated parkland.

Creating a new vision for El Camino—the Grand Boulevard: CGF is one of the founding organizations in this

collaboration of San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties, 19 cities, regional agencies, and advocacy groups who have united to improve the performance, safety, and aesthetics of El Camino Real—the King’s Highway. Stretching from Daly City (where it is named Mission Street) to near the Diridon Station in San Jose (where it is named The Alameda), the Grand Boulevard initiative brings together for the first time all interested stakeholders to create and implement a new vision for El Camino as a place for residents to work, live, shop, and play. Santa Clara County’s Valley Transportation Authority has announced plans to create a dedicated bus lane along 10 miles of the corridor.

Collaborating on creek protection: CGF is a founding member of the Santa Clara County Creeks Coalition and last year worked extensively on planning a first ever “Watershed Summit” in South Bay 2012. We have also:

- actively monitored flood and habitat issues in San Francisco Creek which straddles both counties
- continued to carefully guard against potential environmental violations at Lehigh Hanson Quarry in the headwaters of Permanente Creek above Cupertino
- worked with City of San Jose on adoption of appropriate riparian buffer zones
- successfully stopped an inappropriate creekside development proposal in Los Gatos
- collaborated with other groups on protecting the Pillarcitos and Pescadero watersheds in San Mateo County
- worked to protect all streams throughout the two counties we serve.

Working on the Santa Clara County Habitat and Natural Communities Conservation Plan: Over the last six years, CGF has played a leadership role, working with other environmental groups and the County, in the development of this proposal. This Plan will regulate land use on two-thirds of the County (one-half million acres), protecting endangered species and creating disincentives to rural sprawl. Although the plan is not ideal, it will provide funds for the purchase of tens of thousands of acres of habitat over the next 50 years—habitat that would not otherwise be protected.

Creating the best City of San Jose General Plan in years: There have been some huge improvements in the General Plan revision finalized this year, in part thanks to CGF’s diligent oversight. Since the 1970s, CGF has fought San Jose’s plans to sprawl southwards into North Coyote and Mid-Coyote Valley. The big victory in this GP revision was the elimination of Mid-Coyote Valley as an area planned for urban development over the next 30 years. We still seek protections for North Coyote Valley, but count the protection of South Almaden Valley as another major victory. (The latter has been removed from slated development for the first time in decades.) Moreover, our long battle to end developer control over preliminary environmental review has made incremental progress in San Jose, with City Councilmembers starting to take note.

Protecting County Parks Charter funding: Next to the County Habitat Plan, this funding system represents the largest source of monies available for land protection for the next few decades. This guaranteed funding system was a major victory for CGF when originally approved by voters in 1972 and reaffirmed in 2006. Recently, an ill-advised idea by some County Supervisors to divert money from the fund to buy and operate small, urban parks within neighborhoods has threatened this open space-funding source. We continue to work hard to protect its purpose and intent.

Supporting plastic bag bans: The south Bay Area is a national leader in cleaning up our hillsides, creeks, and the ocean by voting to ban plastic bags. CGF successfully advocated for the bans on bags before the Santa Clara County Supervisors and the cities of San Jose and Palo Alto. In addition, a number of cities have banned paper bags lacking recycled content and have required a bag charge, a move likely to replace single use bags with reusable ones. Our streams, listed as “impaired” under the Clean Water Act, will be the beneficiaries.

Keeping an eye on San Jose’s Water Pollution Control Plant expansion: Working with other environmental groups, we ensured that the 1000+ acres of bayside land surrounding the San Jose/Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant expansion were considered for the strictest environmental protection in the ongoing planning process. These lands provide some of the last remaining County habitat for the Burrowing Owl.

Monitoring High Speed Rail impacts: Although some controversial aspects of High Speed Rail have not been part of our work, we are very concerned about farmland destruction in south Santa Clara County. After carefully following HSR developments in South County, last February CGF approved a policy opposing a proposed east of Highway 101 location for the Gilroy High Speed Rail Train Station. Since that time, we have been advocating for the other proposed location—at the existing downtown Gilroy Caltrain station. We are also closely monitoring HSR’s other possible impacts to farming as well as potential impacts to wildlife movement in Coyote Valley and Pacheco Pass.

Creating healthy food systems:

■ San Mateo County Food System Alliance: CGF is one of the founding members of this groundbreaking movement. Founded in 2006, San Mateo is the first Food System Alliance in California. The group has sought to bring together all parts of the food system, including farmers, fishers, environmentalists, and consumers. This is the first Alliance in California to seat both the County’s Agricultural Commissioner and its Public Health Officer. In October, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors issued a Proclamation supporting the Food System Alliance’s work to combat hunger, increase the

health and well-being of all San Mateo residents, preserve and expand local agriculture and sustainable fisheries, and continue their role as a primary source of sustainable food system policy recommendations. There is a great new map of farmers that the FSA has produced. See: www.batchgeo.com/map/ecd04a88c-c2f409402132d2ea812ada5.

■ Santa Clara County Food System Alliance: As an active stakeholder in this relatively new food policy organization, CGF has been helping to shape the Alliance’s charter, vision, and goals to ensure that the preservation of farmland is a priority issue for the group. The Alliance is a collaborative long-term workgroup for Santa Clara County bringing together public, private, and non-profit organizations working in agriculture, health, food justice, and agricultural education to explore ways to create a healthy food system in the region.

Strengthening grassroots collaboration:


■ CGF provided support and advice to an emerging grassroots group in Gilroy as they fought to keep the final phase of a housing project off of the last undeveloped foothill in that city’s northwest quadrant. As Save Our Gilroy Foothills has begun to take an interest in other issues affecting their community, CGF has worked with them to coordinate mutual efforts such as public support for the Habitat Conservation Plan.

■ CGF continues to play a leadership role in bringing together the South Valley Environmental Collaborative, a group of organizations and citizen that share information and assist each other in environmental advocacy for south Santa Clara County.

Increasing our focus on environmental education:

CGF collaborated with other organizations on two major educational events in south Santa Clara County this past year. The first was our four-part South County Investigative Series jointly organized with Greenbelt Alliance. The Series highlighted water, agricultural, and long-term community and regional planning issues. For the second event, the South County Earth Day Celebration, we teamed up with the Morgan Hill Chamber of Commerce Environmental Affairs Council and the County Farm Bureau. The focus was on local farms and food, giving us a forum to highlight our work and the benefits of farmland preservation.

Fighting the Coup de Grâce to Morgan Hill’s Farmland:

The fate of agriculture in Morgan Hill will be decided in the coming year. CGF has been and will continue to vigorously fight a substantial annexation and development proposal in an area known as the Southeast Quadrant, which will destroy much of the remaining prime farmland within the city’s sphere of influence. 

So much done, so much to do, but time to say so long

by Brian Schmidt. Committee for Green Foothills Legislative Advocate, 2003-2011

I spent six summers as a naturalist and tour bus driver at Denali National Park in Alaska before I went off to law school. That was enough time to see Park Superintendents worry about their ability to leave a mark, usually amounting to a new development in the park. The best way you can leave your mark on undeveloped open space, be it here or Alaska, is by not leaving a mark of your presence and letting the place be. Leaving no mark or trace can be very hard work, but also incredibly rewarding.

“Beating back the massive development proposals in rural Coyote Valley could well be the highlight of my eight-plus years at the Committee...”

Committee for Green Foothills has rewarded me with nearly nine years as its Santa Clara County Advocate in the fight NOT to leave a mark on the land of our area. This wonderful and challenging chapter now comes to a close for me as I look for the next step in my career, just as it opens a new chapter for CGF and for my highly qualified replacement, environmental lawyer Alice Kaufman. Please help me in welcoming Alice into the environmental discussion.

The battle in these years against misguided attempts to mark up our County has gone well for CGF and its members and allies – for the most part. Some ridiculous and shameful developments have moved forward: a mall on the east side of Highway 101 in Morgan Hill, monster mansions in the hillsides with abject refusal by cities and the County to limit these palaces, and Stanford renegeing on its trail promises to the broader community. But the broader picture has seen very limited extension of the human footprint on our natural environment.

Our victories are temporary while our defeats are permanent – but not always.

I often used the above phrase to define the challenge faced by those who seek to protect farms, ranches, and natural habitats from sprawl. A victory against one specific proposal to destroy the environment often means only a respite of several years before yet another proposal to destroy the same area comes through. Once an area is developed though, the chance of it being reconverted to farmland or habitat is slight.

The transience of our victories highlight the importance of being vigilant and ready to protect the land, as Committee for Green Foothills has been for the last forty-nine years. That vigilance though, when it succeeds long enough, starts to make victory more than temporary. The pattern that has happened again and again in both San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties is that a misguided sprawl proposal would be put forwarded and defeated. It would come back again and be defeated, and maybe even a third time. And then the developers would finally be willing to sell the land for a fair price to become parkland. In Santa Clara County, it happened most recently with Rancho San Vicente, nearly 1000 acres intended by developers for “executive mansions” until our successful fights in South Almaden Valley and Coyote Valley convinced developers to let the land become a new County Park.

Beating back the massive development proposals in rural Coyote Valley could well be the highlight of my eight-plus years at the Committee, a battle that we fought at the beginning with little hope of winning. The just-approved San Jose General Plan has, for the first time in 40 years, rejected massive expansions into South Almaden Valley and Mid-Coyote Valley up until 2040, the time frame covered by the General Plan. After a certain point, our victories solidify into something more permanent.

The County Habitat Plan, while still incomplete, covers a half million acres of the County to redirect development and provide additional millions of dollars to acquire and protect endangered species habitat. This Plan will become the largest new funding source for land acquisition that has happened since the Mid Peninsula and Santa Clara County Open Space Authorities were born, with CGF’s essential help.

Even in the often-difficult relationship with Stanford, while it fights the slightest legal restraint in the foothills, it has (so far) done very little to harm the habitat in the foothills since the 2000 General Use Permit. While Stanford failed to deliver a legally-adequate Sustainable Development Study, a condition of its 2000 GUP, even the inadequate one acknowledged there would be no need to expand the Academic Growth Boundary into the foothills for the 25-year time period of the study. This added ten more years to the protection found in the 2000 GUP, again bringing us closer to the point where the protection will be perceived as too difficult to overcome. Some long-term victories can become permanent.

Throughout all my time at CGF, working with the people – my fellow staff (most of all Lennie, here long before me and still here as I leave), our fantastic Board Members, and wonderful colleagues and community members – have made this job a pleasure. The incredible high caliber of people involved in this work created the



Brian contemplating Coyote Valley EIR

successes we have had in the past decade and set the stage for the successes we're going to have as we look into the future.

Committee for Green Foothills is the essential group fighting Silicon Valley sprawl.

So where does CGF go from here? Advocates – Lennie, Julie, and Alice - will continue to do what we have been doing so well, protecting the open spaces and natural resources in Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties. Throughout the years, we have also looked beyond our two counties when nearby projects in neighboring counties have also affected us. This last summer, CGF's Board of Directors voted as well to consider, as resources permit, supporting appropriate policies in neighboring San Benito County for their own sake, not just as policies that might affect Santa Clara County. I look forward to watching CGF develop this new policy. Together with its crucial watchdog work on the Peninsula and South Valley, I believe CGF is becoming and has become the essential group fighting Silicon Valley sprawl. That's not all we do by any means, but it forms a bigger portion of what we do than any other major environmental group, and that's the right place to be.

Last year, the Mercury News gave me the privilege of writing an Op-Ed on a concept we've promoted through Committee for Green Foothills, called the Silicon Archipelago. Instead of having Silicon Valley sprawl spread ever onwards from San Jose, the Silicon Archipelago calls for chain of cities as islands, united in a prosper-

ous silicon economy, and surrounded by an ocean of vibrant farms, ranches, and natural habitats. We can promote this vision for the future, and it is already happening with the pull-back of San Jose sprawl proposals that have been on the books for the last forty years.

In CGF's next century, the Silicon Archipelago can do more than spread south from San Jose – it can spread north, recreating a painstaking bit at a time of the agricultural land, natural habitats, and separate urban identities of each of the cities of the Peninsula. I know great things will happen in this area, great things for our local and global environment, and that Committee for Green Foothills will make them happen. **CGF**




From the President

Margaret MacNiven

First of all, I want to thank all of you who joined us for this year's Nature's Inspiration event. It was a huge success in every way—the day was gorgeous, showing off our San Mateo County coast at its finest, the food and drink were plentiful and the “partying” evident, and, most of all, our honoree, Peter Douglas graced us all with his warm and reflective thoughts and his very presence. Our gratitude to all who supported our cause and joined us at this wonderful afternoon. A special thanks to guest speaker John Laird, and Steve Blank and Alison Elliot, our gracious and very hospitable hosts.

Next, I am honored to welcome Clinton Brownley to the CGF Board of Directors. Clinton is an independent policy and analytics

consultant living in Cupertino. He has worked with federal, county, and city organizations, including the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, the County of Santa Clara, and the Town of Los Altos Hills. He is a Planning Commissioner in the City of Cupertino and also serves on several local policy advisory committees, including the Santa Clara Valley Water District's Environmental Advisory Committee and the Valley Transportation Authority's Citizens Advisory Committee. He and his wife enjoy walking through and exploring the region's many beautiful open spaces.

Finally, I would like to ask for your support once again. It is time for our year-end appeal and your gifts are more vital and important than ever as CGF continues to fight the forces that threaten our treasured open spaces every day. 

2012 is CGF's 50th Anniversary - Let's Celebrate !

We invite you to celebrate CGF's 50th Anniversary with us at one or more of the planned events throughout the year. Our organization's history is made up of many great people to whom we will pay tribute and thank this year. If you know of a long-standing member that should be recognized, please email us at

info@greenfoothills.org. Also, if you have a great CGF story, we'd like to hear it and perhaps retell it in a future newsletter or other publication. Our celebration is about you and your stories of people and places touched by CGF over the years. Let's celebrate together!

*Some events are still
being planned; dates
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Be sure to visit our website and watch for “event alert” emails for updates. All CGF events are open to the public; we encourage members to bring a friend or two!

February

Group hike to Wallace Stegner Memorial Bench in honor of his birthday.

March

23rd: Adobe Creek Watershed Bus Tour. Advance online registration required. This is in partnership with the Los Altos History Museum and current exhibit “Shaped by Water”.

April

7th & 15th: Coyote Hills Hikes with CGF and Santa Clara County Open Space Authority.

22nd: Volunteer to help CGF at Earth Day events in south Santa Clara County and at Full Circle Farm in Sunnyvale.

May

19th: Volunteer with CGF team for National River Cleanup Day

June

Farm tour 2012

July/August

Member appreciation event

September

15th: Volunteer with CGF team for Coastal Cleanup Day

21st: Celebrate “park-ing day” in your city

22nd: Watershed Summit

October

50th BIRTHDAY PARTY!

November/December

Devil's Slide tunnel opening