

# Open Spaces

Second Quarter 1998

A newsletter published by the Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy

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## Index:

- [Conservancy Receives \\$29,000 in Grants To Support Education, Stewardship](#)
  - [Population Growth Threatens Open Spaces](#)
  - [Land Stewardship A Team Effort](#)
  - [New Science Education Program Implemented](#)
  - [Stewardship Update](#)
  - [Canyon Preservation Effort Suspended](#)
  - [Borks Receives 1998 Status of Women Award](#)
  - [Children's Contest Caps Nature Center Activities](#)
  - [1998 Conservancy Membership Exceeds 800](#)
  - [Pompeii Worms A Hot Time in the Old House](#)
  - [City of Rancho Palos Verdes Landslide Moratorium Background](#)
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## Conservancy Receives \$29,000 in Grants To Support Education, Stewardship

The Conservancy continues to have a very successful fund-raising quarter and would like to extend our gratitude to the following foundations for their support:

**Las Candalistas** for a \$7,000 grant to continue the 3rd Grade Nature Walk Program. This program, run by Deena Sheridan, began in 1995 thanks to an initial start-up grant from Las Candalistas. The grant will make it possible for us to continue to offer our program to 3rd graders throughout the Peninsula. The program is extremely popular with the children as well as the parents who have participated, and we are excited to continue to offer it. With the help of a couple of new leaders and the new grant money, we are confident that the 1998-99 school year will be another good year for 3rd grade nature walks!

**The State Coastal Conservancy** for a \$12,000 grant to support development of a management plan for the Malaga Canyon area of Palos Verdes Estates. The grant money will be used to undertake a plant inventory of the site. The inventory will serve as the basis for a management plan that the Conservancy and the City of Palos Verdes Estates will be working on together. The goal of this partnership is to foster habitat protection and to enhance use and appreciation of the city's natural assets.

**The Long Beach Trust Fund** for a \$10,000 grant to support our environmental education program in the schools. This grant will help support the Habitat-Based Science Curriculum that we are developing with the Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District. It will also allow us to begin our outreach efforts to other schools in the area. Lomita, Carson, San Pedro, and Long Beach are among the schools that have expressed an interest in learning more about the program. When school starts in the fall, we will start working with these schools to help them incorporate the habitat-based science curriculum into their science programs.

We sincerely thank each of these organizations for their support and look forward to continuing to expand and improve our programs in the upcoming year.

[Back to Top](#)

---

# Population Growth Threatens Open Spaces

By Wendy Millet

**B**y the end of the year 2020, California is expected to grow to more than 47 million people, which is like adding the population of more than four cities the size of Los Angeles to the State's already busy highways, infrastructure, and economy. This growth also puts tremendous pressure on the state's natural areas. Unless funding is provided to protect these areas, many of the State's most critical and valuable areas will be lost to development forever.

## Natural Areas at Risk

These losses would jeopardize California's ability to protect critical natural areas, to sustain our wildlife populations, and to protect the very lands and waters that fundamentally sustain California's economy. California has already lost more than 90% of its historic wetlands and riparian areas—two of the most important types of wildlife habitat.

Natural areas and waterways help filter out pollutants which degrade water quality and provide corridors that enhance flood protection for our communities. These areas are vital to protect water quality, and thus our failure to protect these areas impairs our water system and our communities, and forces many species to the brink of extinction.

## Quality of Life Issue

Additional impacts from loss of open space include loss of the special areas that draw many visitors to California. Natural lands are critical to the quality of life in California and to our multi-billion dollar tourism and recreation industries. Beautiful natural areas also help attract and retain businesses that seek accessible recreational and open space areas for their employees.

Annual appropriations for key land conservation programs were cut by 80% or more between 1988 and 1996. Currently, less than 1/2 of 1% of the state's General Fund is spent to protect California's environment. These funding shortages severely handicap the State's ability to protect the environment and meet growing recreational demands.

One of our State's most important natural resources protection programs involves the acquisition and restoration of wildlife areas by the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB). Between 1988-89 and 1996-97, WCB experienced an 80% reduction in annual acquisition funding.

## Open Space Funding Needed

Now is the time to increase State funding for these vital programs. Delays will only increase costs because of rapidly escalating land prices. Delays also mean that many wildlife areas will be lost to development.

California's current budget surplus provides an opportunity to protect California's threatened natural lands.

Let your elected representatives know how important this open space is to all of us in the Golden State before it's too late. The open space we want to enjoy in 20 years must be preserved now.

[Back to Top](#)

---

## Land Stewardship A Team Effort

**I**n March, the Conservancy submitted a proposal for the development of a management plan for the 160 acre Forrestal property, preserved in 1996, and the 53 acre Shoreline Park property, which was recently transferred to the City of Rancho

Palos Verdes from LA County. The proposal, which is available for review at our home page ([www.pvplc.org](http://www.pvplc.org)), reflects the Conservancy's view that proper management of these important natural areas is a team effort, a joint responsibility of the interested parties: the Conservancy, the City, environmentalists, and local residents.

Each of these entities has its own interests and capabilities.

The City is responsible for coordinating the development of a management plan which is consistent with overall City and regional planning goals and the restrictions of the purchase agreement. The City also has planning and enforcement authorities which are not available to the other parties

Environmentalists bring an understanding of the important natural features which must be protected and enhanced. Environmentalists help assure that maintenance and restoration activities are performed sensitively and in accordance with applicable laws and requirements.

Local residents, through local homeowners' associations, bring eyes and ears of people who see the property on a daily basis and can help assure that it is maintained in a manner acceptable to the community.

The Conservancy brings coordination and day-to-day management skills and resources. For example,

- We have a full-time Land Stewardship Director who coordinates our conservation and restoration activities.
- We have experience-we have an active restoration effort ongoing at the Linden H. Chandler Preserve, begun in 1994 in partnership with the City of Rolling Hills Estates.
- We have initiated a similar planning and restoration effort at our Lunada Canyon Preserve in Rancho Palos Verdes.
- We are currently under contract with the Ocean Trails development to raise 20,000 native plants for habitat restoration.
- In cooperation with the City of Palos Verdes Estates, we have received a grant to develop a management plan for an area in that city (see story on page 1).

Two of our most important skills are our ability to raise funds for stewardship and our involvement of volunteers in our stewardship efforts. These characteristics help assure that costs are minimized. We also see our restoration and maintenance activities as important educational and community involvement opportunities.

We remain ready to discuss our involvement in Forrestal and Shoreline Park restoration and management.

[Back to Top](#)

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## **New Science Education Program Implemented**

**T**his summer the Conservancy, the Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District, and Curt Abdouch, a science education and environmental consultant, developed and implemented a new earth science workshop using the natural environment of the Palos Verdes Peninsula as the learning laboratory/workshop.

The program which Abdouch designed, trains teachers in new science methodologies and, at the same time, familiarizes them with the new California Science Standards. The new State standards, which will take effect this fall, emphasize scientific studies such as those that might occur in the real world and emphasize teaching students to form hypotheses, gather information, conduct experiments, and investigate, test and report hypotheses.

Fourteen intermediate school teachers from the Palos Verdes and Miraleste Intermediate schools participated in the program and took advantage of the opportunity to work with science experts to learn about research and assessment methods, and how to integrate earth, life, physical, and health sciences into their classroom learning plans. The teachers spent the first two days of the five-day workshop in the field collecting data, exploring local habitat, and conducting surveys of slopes, soil, and erosion, just as their students would do if they were on a field trip.

The Conservancy offers a special thanks to Curt Abdouch for putting this project together. We look forward both to

continued partnership efforts with PVPUSD and to continued expansion our efforts to offer quality science/environmental education opportunities to the students and residents of the Peninsula.

[Back to Top](#)

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## Stewardship Update

By Ed Miller

**T**hings are moving along at the Linden H. Chandler preserve this spring. Over 100 native plants, including black sage, purple sage, monkey flower, saw-toothed goldenbush, bush sunflower, willows, deerweed, and some locoweeds, have been planted in the last few months. All of these plants are marked with little colorful flags so that they are easy to see and won't be stepped on.

Normally late spring and summer are not the time to be planting, but we have mulched the seedlings and water them once a week to keep them healthy through the dry summer months. Being hardy native plants, most seem to be doing quite well—except those that occasionally end up as a gopher snack.

Some other fun happenings include the continuing removal of the *Arundo* along the stream. We are cutting it by hand and immediately applying herbicide in the hopes of killing it once and for all. A large milk thistle patch was also cut down and many castor bean seedlings have been pulled, as they seem to keep coming up again and again.

At Lunada Canyon, work on removing the ice plant continues, as well as removal of castor bean trees and seedlings all along the fire access road at Posey Way.

As the only water we can get there comes from the sky, we will be waiting for fall and winter before planting native plants in that area.

[Back to Top](#)

---

## Canyon Preservation Effort Suspended

**E**arlier this year, we were approached by homeowners who wanted help in preserving Silver Spur Canyon, an approximately ten-acre developable canyon in their Rancho Palos Verdes neighborhood. Located behind Ascension Lutheran Church on Silver Spur Road, this canyon has lovely wildflowers and lots of birds and native plants, and is used as part of the education program of the local Silver Spur Elementary School.

The canyon was broken into two parcels, each approximately five acres in size and we were successful in negotiating a transaction with the owners of one of the two parcels.

In May the Conservancy, with the help of local homeowners, went into escrow on the five acre parcel. Local residents pledged a large amount toward the purchase of this area and contributions from our membership added substantially to that total.

In June the Conservancy and local homeowners met to decide whether to proceed with the purchase. At that meeting, we and the homeowners agreed that it was critical that the entire canyon be preserved. Since the second half was recently acquired by a new owner, it was uncertain whether we would be able to reach agreement on its purchase.

Based on this consideration, the homeowners asked that we terminate escrow on the first parcel, which was costing \$78/day to keep active. Consequently, we returned all donations received for the preservation of the canyon. We will continue discussions with both owners and hope that eventually agreements can be reached leading to preservation of the entire area.

We want to thank those of you who contributed for your willingness to assist with this purchase. Opportunities like this are rare, and we were very pleased with the positive input and support we received from our membership as we worked to make this acquisition successful.

[Back to Top](#)

---

## **Borks Receives 1998 Status of Women Award**

**C**onservancy Secretary Shirley Borks received the 1998 "Status of Women" award from the Palos Verdes branch of the American Association of University Women. Borks received the award in recognition of her extensive community service on the Peninsula. Our congratulations to Shirley for this acknowledgment of her excellent and continuing contributions to our community!

[Back to Top](#)

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## **Children's Contest Caps Nature Center Activities**

**A**s part of the Conservancy's 10th Anniversary Celebration, a Children's Nature Contest sponsored by the PVPLC was held in May and June at the George F Canyon Nature Center. Participants were asked to write a paragraph on the importance of open space. Winners were awarded prizes at a ceremony held at the Nature Center on June 7.

Contest winners were:

### **Kindergarten**

Stephanie Takashi  
Scott Spielman  
Kandace Boothe

### **1st Grade**

Robin Francis

### **2nd Grade**

Cze-Ja Tam  
Brian Keenan

### **3rd Grade**

Rachael Kelly  
Carly Francis  
Vivian Mei Long

### **4th Grade**

Brittany Afsa



The Nature Center hosted two summer camps during the summer, one for younger children, 3-5 years of age, with a parent, and one for older children, 6-8 years. Themes for each day included animals and tracking, butterflies and bugs, plants and wildflowers, and birds of the canyon, with a treasure hunt on the last day.

Lectures given in May and June were "Dinosaur Update" exploring the fascinating world of dinosaurs and the importance of new discoveries, and "What Happened and When," a guide through geologic time, discussing fossil evidence, changes in the earth's magnetic field, black holes, earthquakes, mountain building and much more. Both lectures were given by well-known author and scientist Joseph K. Slap. Slap does such a good job with his lectures, and is also very supportive of the Nature Center.

For elementary school-aged children, birthday parties are gaining in popularity. These feature a nature craft, a guided nature walk, and a party favor bag, plus use of the large covered deck and a visit to the Nature Center, with all its hands-on activities. Parents provide food. Watch for the CAP Telethon in September when an extra special birthday party at the Nature Center will be one of the auction items.

A regular monthly guided nature walk for the public is held on the first Saturday of the month at 1:30 in the afternoon.

Future Event - On September 26 a PVPLC Children's Walk will take place along the George F Canyon Nature Trail. Meet at 9:00 am at the trail head, located on PV Drive East just south of the PV Drive North intersection . A free bug box with magnifying lens will be given to every child attending commemorating the Land Conservancy's 10th Anniversary celebration.

New for the fall is a month of science afternoons for children aged 5 to 12. These will be presented by a South Bay group known as "Mad Science". This summer the group ran science summer camps for the City of Rancho Palos Verdes at Hesse Park.

Each Sunday from 1-4 pm during the month of October nature-based science themes will be presented in a fun way at the George F Canyon Nature Center. Plus there will be a special program for Halloween--including creating slime.

By Aileen Bevan

*Aileen Bevan is contract naturalist for the George F Canyon Nature Center. The Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy manages the George F Canyon Nature Center under contract with the City of Rolling Hills Estates.*

*The Nature Center and Trail are located on the southwest corner of Palos Verdes Drive East and Palos Verdes Drive North, opposite the reservoir. The Nature Center is open Saturdays and Sundays from 10 am to 4 pm, and on weekdays by appointment for school groups, Scouts and Brownies, family groups etc. A small fee is charged for guided tours of the canyon. The Nature Trail is open every day from dawn to dusk.*

[Back to Top](#)

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## 1998 Conservancy Membership Exceeds 800

**O**n July 27, membership in the Conservancy exceeded 800 for the first time in our history. This surge in membership is attributed in large measure to response to the color brochure mailed in May.

Over 800 individuals and families have joined or renewed memberships so far in 1998, and nearly 1,000 have donated in the last 12 months.

The largest number of member families, 369 or 45%, reside in Rancho Palos Verdes, with 169 (21%) in Palos Verdes Estates. 90 (11%) reside in Rolling Hills Estates, 40 (5%) in San Pedro, 33 (4%) in Rolling Hills, and 25 (3%) in Torrance.

The remaining 11% come from all over the LA basin and beyond. We even have members in Virginia and Georgia.

Conservancy membership is based on contributions received in each calendar year. Our goal is to top 1,000 memberships in 1998. If you haven't joined or renewed your membership in 1998, do it now and help us set a new record!

[Back to Top](#)

# Pompeii Worms A Hot Time in the Old House

By Joseph K. Slap

**H**abitat temperature is a very important factor in life sustainability and therefore in the evolutionary selected living habitats of organisms. Some living organisms can survive in significantly high or low temperature environments. Thriving in cold, there are the Arctic's polar bears, snowy owls, seals, as well as penguins and other creatures in Antarctica.

Next, preferring heat, are the many tropical creatures. At much higher temperatures, there are the ones which live near deep-sea hydrothermal vents.

When we think of worms, we usually refer mentally to the earthworms that we see in garden and lawn areas. However, there is a worm known as the Pompeii worm, of species *Alvinella pompejana*, which resides near heat vents. Actually, the worm lives in a tube along the outer surface of vent pipes which have formed from metal sulfides in the water.

The worms feed in two ways: sitting at the tube's open end with gills and mouth parts reaching out for nutrition, and roaming about a yard from the tube to seek and ingest edible bacteria which live within that distance.

Temperatures in the home tubes and feeding areas of these worms have been measured by researchers in underwater vessels. While feeding from within the tube, the worm's body length may be exposed to temperatures differing simultaneously, from exposed front to in-tube back end, by a range of 108oF. In tests, brief temperatures of up to 221oF have also been survived by the worm's entire body.

Thus, the Pompeii worm is now believed by many animal researchers to be the animal which is able to withstand the highest concurrent range of temperatures along its body, as well as the most heat-tolerant.

[Back to Top](#)

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*Because of news about potential applications for development within the landslide moratorium area, the City of Rancho Palos Verdes prepared a position paper explaining the background of the moratorium ordinance and the City's legal requirements regarding applications for exclusion from the moratorium. The position paper is provided below in its entirety.*

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## CITY OF RANCHO PALOS VERDES

### LANDSLIDE MORATORIUM BACKGROUND

**June 30, 1998**

News that two property owners plan to apply for exclusions from the City's landslide moratorium area has received considerable attention in the community recently. There are, indeed two such potential applications pending-one on the far east side of the moratorium area and one on the far west side. It is important to note, however, that neither property owner has yet fulfilled all of the requirements for a completed application, although the City believes that both land owners are serious and that it is their intent to move forward in fulfilling the application requirements. But an application for exclusion is simply that -an application only. Approval is not guaranteed.

The City has also received correspondence from some concerned residents urging that development continue to be prohibited in the moratorium area, but the City is required by law to consider seriously any completed application submitted for an exclusion from the moratorium. Failure to follow the established rules for processing such applications could prove costly to the City and the residents of Rancho Palos Verdes and might result in the Courts directing the City to approve an

application. Again, it is important to note that adhering to legal requirements does not equate with approval. It is far too early in the process to make any formal judgment regarding these applications. Nor has any City official made any commitment to approve or disapprove any project.

## **The Application Process**

Because most of the land within the landslide moratorium area is unique, the potential development of these properties is treated differently from other property within the City. Applications for development go through an extra step. The two-step application process is demanding and time-consuming. The Municipal Code sections dealing with the landslide moratorium define the process and information required for a property owner to seek an exclusion from the moratorium. In essence, the process is designed to determine if the land is, or can be made, stable enough to support the contemplated project safely

First, the property owner must file a moratorium exclusion application. This application must include a description of the proposed project with geology reports establishing that the land is either stable or can be stabilized with mitigating measures. An Environmental Impact Report and geology report must also be prepared and submitted and deemed adequate before the application is considered complete. Only then can the matter be set to Public Hearing to hear testimony on the proposed project. Even then, additional information will likely be required before any decision can be made whether or not the data justifies removing the property conditionally from the moratorium and under what conditions, if any, it may be removed.

Second, the process is intended to separate the issues of land stability and the normal land use process. If an action is taken to remove the property conditionally from the landslide moratorium, the proposed development is still not approved. This only allows the property owner to make application for development, similar to any owner with property outside the landslide moratorium. That application must still undergo a rigorous review by the Planning Commission and the City Council on the specifics of the proposed project. This is also a public process and requires public notice and hearings. This does not happen quickly. The entire process may take one or two years, or even longer.

## **History of the Moratorium**

In understanding the purpose of the landslide moratorium ordinance, legal requirements, and the City's review process, some background information may be useful

Essentially, the landslide moratorium is part of what is known as the ancient landslide area. There is geologic evidence that the general area experienced a major landslide at least 10,000 years ago. Often such landslides stabilize themselves, but coastal slides do not readily stabilize themselves because the toe of the landslide can be eroded by wave action. Although reasonably stable for possibly thousands of years, a portion of the area known as the Portuguese Bend landslide began moving again in 1956. Another portion known as the Abalone Cove landslide started moving in 1978.

Landslides can be stabilized and considerable success was achieved in stopping the Abalone Cove landslide through the Abalone Cove Landslide Abatement District (ACLAD), a special district made up of area residents who tax themselves for this purpose. The City's Redevelopment Agency has also worked hard at maintaining the stability of the slide.

The Portuguese Bend landslide, however, is still moving and, after years of slowing down, has begun to accelerate, possibly because of the unusual rainy season.

In 1978, the City adopted the current landslide moratorium, applying it to over 1.5 square miles of land generally known as an ancient landslide area. While the exact boundaries of the ancient landslide were not precisely known at that time (and are still not precisely known), the geologists advising the City believed it was a reasonable area over which to place the building moratorium. Much of the property included within the moratorium had not moved for thousands of years while other portions had moved recently or were still moving.

Since the exact boundaries of stable and unstable properties were not precisely defined, it was assumed that later studies would develop this information and, if warranted, the stable properties could be released from the moratorium. For the moratorium to be legally sustainable, the ordinance had to contain provisions which would allow property owners to demonstrate that their land could be developed without adverse impacts.

It was assumed that as geologists studied the area more would be learned about which areas were stable and which were



unstable. Based on that information, it had always been assumed that some of the property would be found stable and could be removed from the moratorium. Over the past 20 years, much has been learned about the ancient landslide area. Some areas within the moratorium have not moved for thousands of years and tests indicate that some areas are currently stable, or with relatively minor work, can be modified to meet safety factors necessary to allow limited residential development or recreational uses.

Again, when the Moratorium Ordinance was drafted in 1978, it was legally necessary to include language that allowed land owners to show, with all appropriate geologic studies, that some or all of their property was stable. If studies indicate that the land is stable or can be made stable to required safety factors, the City must legally exclude such property from the moratorium. If property within the landslide moratorium cannot be stabilized to the required safety factors, it remains in the moratorium.

Hopefully, this information is helpful in understanding the City's position regarding potential applications for development within the moratorium area. As additional information becomes available, the City will make it available to residents.

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*For the record, the Conservancy has long advocated the preservation of all of the approximately 800 acres of natural open space in the moratorium area. This land, added to the 160-acre Forrestal property preserved in 1996 and the 100-acre Parcel 4 to the west of the moratorium area, would yield approximately 1,000 acres of preserved open space--an area we call the Portuguese Bend Nature Preserve.*

*This would be the largest preserved area in southern LA County and would remain as a living testament to the Peninsula's past--a place where adults and children in years to come may enjoy the experience of sharing a bit of nature. We stand ready as a willing buyer and hope that we will be able to work with the landowners to preserve all or as much as possible of this area.*

[Back to Top](#)