



*Wreath by Dena Van Derveer, featuring coyote bush, Cleveland sage, California grape, dried yarrow, and San Bruno Mountain daisy.*

The California Native Plant Society holds a holiday "Wreath Masters" competition in which CNPS and its partners create wreaths made exclusively with California native plants. Celebrity judging of the entries in six categories will be held online with merriment and frivolity on Friday, December 18, from 6 p.m. – 7 p.m. PT. You can join at: <https://bit.ly/wreathmasters1218>

## A Few Words from Our President

Holiday greetings from the COSF Board of Directors! To say 2020 has been unique doesn't fully capture what we've been living through. And now holiday celebrations like our annual Open Space Holiday Party can't be held. Yet, the trails are still open, and we can celebrate what should be an eventful and safer 2021 with vaccines becoming available.

In this issue of the newsletter you'll find interesting articles on Hollywood history in the Conejo Valley, a profile of a director on our all-volunteer Board, and updates on some of our ongoing programs.

We sincerely hope our efforts have provided some real value and enjoyment to you in the past year. Thanks to the donations we've received we've been able to accomplish much in spite of the pandemic limiting social activities, such as:

- Launching a new, annual scholarship program for two Ventura Co. students going on to college to pursue an environmental studies-related major.
- Helping us inform the public about responsible trail use and providing funds to remove invasive non-native plants from the Conejo Canyons open space. With your future gifts, we can offer even greater support for [COSCA](#) projects.
- COSF produced a Trails Education Days "virtual nature hike" to give CVUSD 4th graders a sense of what they would have experienced had their field trips not been cancelled.
- We continued our increasingly popular Speaker Series with talks on filming in the Conejo Valley, urban-wildlife interactions, and recovering from wildfires. We're planning four more talks for 2021.
- With our \$10,000 pledge to the SaveLACougars campaign, your contributions will benefit the future wildlife corridor bridge at Liberty Canyon and help to safely connect wildlife populations.

The winter holiday season is a time for giving and we hope you will support us with your donation for our annual fundraising campaign. Thanks to your support, COSF has become an increasingly important partner in the community, and we will continue to use gifts wisely to fund improvements to our open space and provide meaningful information to the community. Watch for news and updates at [cosf.org](http://cosf.org).

Happy Holidays and Happy Trails from the all-volunteer COSF Board of Directors!



President, Conejo Open Space Foundation

## We Couldn't Do It Without You

COSCA relies on volunteers to help build and maintain trails, act as extra eyes and ears for the rangers, carry out educational programs and support the open space in many other ways. Please consider volunteering for a program that interests you.

COSF depends on open space supporters for donations that help fund COSCA volunteer programs and so much more. We greatly appreciate your generosity.

[Donate](#)

[Volunteer](#)

## See the Newest Native Plant Video

COSF has been privileged this year to debut links to four wonderful videos that provide a wealth of information about Conejo Valley native plants, thanks to Laura Pasetta, noted local naturalist and owner of Wild Rootz.

To date, Laura's archive has three informative and entertaining videos available: Black elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*); white sage (*Salvia apiana*); and narrowleaf milkweed (*Asclepias fascicularis*) and monarch butterflies. A fourth video—covering prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia oricola*)—just posted. The Wild Rootz' videos, which run less than 10 minutes, spotlight plant identification, indigenous and current uses, and tips on gardening with these native plants.

Coming next month: Our magnificent coast live oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*)! To view Laura's videos, go to: <https://www.wild-rootz.com/cosf>.

## Some Surprising Stats about Our Popular 'Where in the Conejo' Contest

Every two weeks, you get a chance to prove your knowledge of Conejo Valley trails and open space via COSF's "Where in the Conejo" contest. Entrants who correctly identify the mystery photo—usually with trail name, but sometimes by naming flowers or geological features—can win \$25.



*Photo Courtesy of Laura Pasetta*

**The versatile prickly pear cactus is featured in Wild Rootz' fourth video.**

By the numbers, here's how it's been going:

- 30 Number of times the contest has run.
- 394 Total entrants since inception. 132 have entered more than once; one has entered 29 times! (We have 1 three-time winner and 1 two-time winner.)
- 119 Highest number of entries. This was for the first contest, on July 25, 2019, with a photo of Lake Eleanor. 111 got the correct answer. The \$25 gift card winner was chosen at random from those.
- 67% Average percent of correct answers per contest.
- 100% Correct entries for the Sapwi Trails bike park (15 entries) and for the White Horse Canyon Trail (21 entries).
- 1 Fewest correct answers. This one was a twofer, both the trail (Plateau Rim) and geological feature (Scream Rock) had to be identified. There were 19 entries.



**Every contest entrant identified the Sapwi Bike Park correctly.**

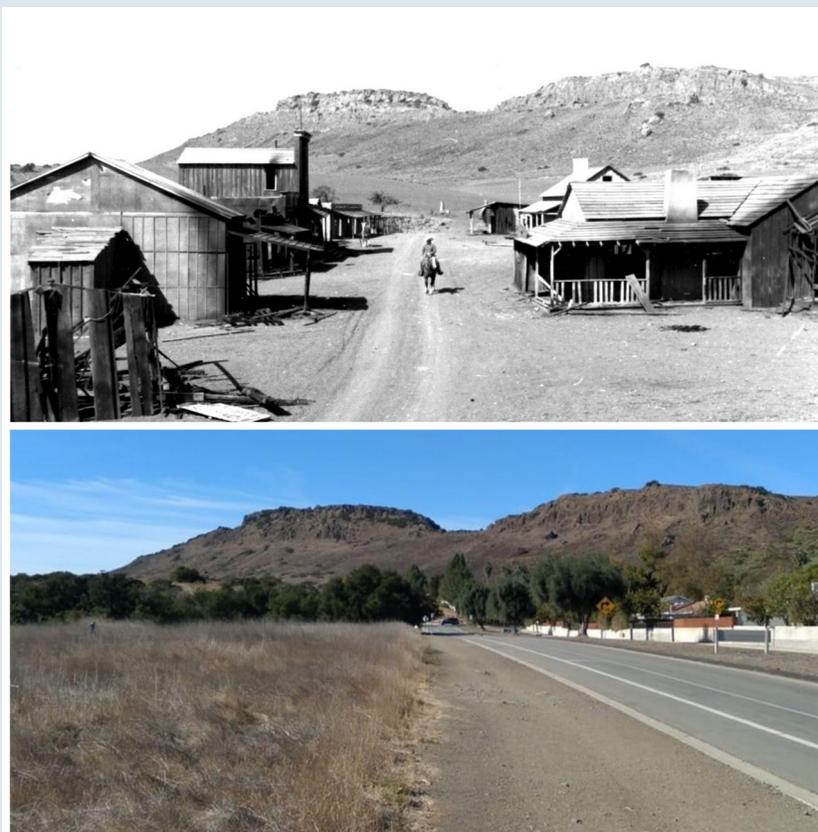
We post each contest on our Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts, as well as emailing interested contestants. If you would like to be added to the “Where” email list, drop a note to [news@cosf.org](mailto:news@cosf.org) to let us know.

## On Set in the Conejo: Janss Western Town

The next time you drive down Avenida de los Arboles to hike Wildwood Park, slow down and imagine it's the late 1800s, and you're on a dirt road running through the middle of an old Western town. On the right are wood-framed homes with covered porches. On the left are horse stables, a saloon, and the general store.

In fact, in the '50s and '60s, Avenida de los Arboles was home to Janss Western Town, which looked just like a Western outpost of the 1880s. Gunsmoke (1955-1975), The Rifleman (1958-1963), Elvis Presley's The Flaming Star (1960), and countless other TV shows and movies were filmed on the road leading into Wildwood. The Western Town finally gave way to suburban development in 1971.

I recently explored the wildly overgrown area about 200 yards before the main parking lot. I was like a forensic investigator searching for evidence of the “town's” existence. I was about to give up when, lo and behold, I found fragments of old wooden structures and painted concrete pieces. The “town” may be gone, but in my imagination it's still there.—Kristine McCardle



**Janss Western Town was built along what is now the entrance to Wildwood.**

***Kristine McCardle** is a Newbury Park-based attorney who practices employment law when she's not scouting her next "Then and Now" adventure.*

## Expert Opinion: Is Full Recovery Possible for Our Open Spaces After Wildfire?

"I've never seen a landscape where so much of the vegetation was so completely consumed," Marti Witter, PhD, said, describing the aftereffects of 2018's Woolsey Fire in the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. Dr. Witter serves as SMMNRA's fire ecologist and was 2020's final guest in 2020 COSF Speaker Series last month. She addressed the historic role of wildfire in our landscape and how fire activity has changed in the last few decades.



**More frequent and intense fires, such as the Woolsey Fire seen above, can lead to permanent degradation of native landscapes.**

Dr. Witter noted that, unlike the 24,000-acre Springs Fire recovery, the 90,000-acre Woolsey Fire "won the lottery in vegetation recovery" thanks to 2019 being a good rain year. The 2013

Springs Fire's regrowth, on the other hand, was hampered by an extended drought. Witter commented that although there is certainly new vegetation in Springs burn areas like Pt. Mugu, some of the former canopy of tall shrubs such as big pod ceanothus and laurel sumac has not returned. That, in turn, changes for the worse the character of the entire environment and what animals it can support.

In the worst-case scenario, what occurs after frequently repeated, intense wildfires is known as "type conversion." It refers to the irreversible degradation of what was native chaparral or oak woodland into landscapes of invasive grasses and weeds like mustard. While this process may look benign because it quickly produces bright green hillsides in the springtime post-fire, these rapid non-native flora choke out natives like sagebrush, sage and buckwheat and stifle tree seedlings and shrub regrowth.

How to prevent it? Dr. Witter pointed out that 99 percent of wildfires start from human activity, whether accidental, intentional, or utilities, so that means that more preventive measures and care could a long way toward protecting our open space from fire. "If you can stop ignition, that's an important strategy," she stated.

To learn more, watch [Witter's talk](#) or view her [slide deck](#).

## Spotlight on...

**Mary Klem**, a passionate runner and hiker, spent 17 years at Amgen in its corporate communications department. Within days of moving to the Conejo Valley in August 2003 with her husband and three young daughters, she discovered the Conejo Valley Open Space trails, which she describes as, "God's gift, and COSF's, COSCA's gift, to Conejo Valley residents." She now leads Corporate Communications for Canadian biotech company Zymeworks.



### **When did you join the COSF board and why?**

I joined in March 2020. My last gig at Amgen was overseeing global plans for the company's 40th anniversary, which Amgen originally set out to celebrate throughout 2020. When I realized 2020 was also a milestone anniversary (25th) for COSF, I proposed to the COSF board that we plan several activities to celebrate the two organizations' anniversaries jointly. The intent was to raise awareness of COSF, the wonderful Conejo Valley network of trails, and volunteer and fundraising opportunities in support of COSF. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, our planned anniversary events were cancelled. But there is always a silver lining, and for me it was an invitation to join the COSF board.

### **Why is open space important to you?**

My favorite thing to do is trail run, and there is a seemingly endless network of trails lining the

Conejo Valley Open Space. My family has lived in several different places over the 17 years we've been in Thousand Oaks/Westlake Village, and every neighborhood we've lived in has offered quick and easy access to multiple trailheads.

### **What do you like to do in the open space?**

Trail run, hike, explore, picnic, escape for fresh air and nature, and to clear my head. Most Sundays, I go to the church of the trail for a prayerful run!

### **What's your favorite Conejo open space? Favorite native animal?**

I haven't met a Conejo Open Space trail I didn't love! Currently, I run the trails in my neighborhood, above Triunfo Park, at least three or four days a week. My favorite animal sighting was a baby mountain lion, on the trail just off of Brookview Avenue in October. At first I thought it was a very large rabbit, but it was chasing rabbits. When I realized it was a cub, I turned and ran the other way, sure that a protective mom was lurking nearby!

### **Is there any "secret" open space that you want people to know about?**

With the exception of Wildwood, most of the trails seem to be well-kept secrets. I typically don't cross paths with more than a few other people when I'm enjoying the Conejo Valley trails.

### **What are your hopes for the future of COSF?**

I'd love to see Amgen and COSF join forces once we are to the other side of the pandemic for belated anniversary celebrations and execute on the plans we made in 2020 for celebrating the organizations' 40th and 25th anniversaries.

## **News In Brief**

- Thousand Oaks Community Development Manager **Mark Towne** will retire at the end of the year. As COSCA Manager, Mark helped establish COSF in 1995. Open space remained a priority throughout his career, and he played a large part in doubling our protected natural lands during that time. Thank you, Mark, for everything you've done for our open space. We'll see you on the trails!
- On January 1, the **California Ecosystems Protection Act of 2020** (formerly known as AB 1788) takes effect, banning the use of second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides (SGARs), specifically brodifacoum, bromadiolone, difenacoum and difethialone. Sponsored by California State Assembly Member Richard Bloom and Senator Henry Stern, the act is good news for wildlife such as bobcats, coyotes, hawks, mountain lions, and owls that suffer unintended rodenticide poisoning via consumption of rodents attracted to bait boxes.
- Expect to hear **more bells** on the trails: COSF and COSCA just replenished the supply of free safety bells for bikers and other trail users with 5,000 bells, splitting the total cost of about \$12,000. Watch for additional bell boxes at trailheads, installed by COSCA rangers.
- Are you **Amazon Smile-ing**? If you purchase from Amazon, you can donate to COSF

without costing yourself a penny. Just designate us as your preferred charity and then shop as usual. To date, the program has generated \$217 million for participating charities in the U.S. To learn more, go to: [cosf.org/support-us/use-amazon-smile/](https://cosf.org/support-us/use-amazon-smile/)

The COSCA Volunteer Corps has many ways for residents to help maintain and preserve the open space that surrounds our beautiful Conejo Valley. By joining with others, we can make sure that the trails, canyons, and ridgelines will be enjoyed by visitors for generations to come. You can read about the specific volunteer opportunities below, and you can submit a request to volunteer, noting your specific interests, [here](#).

- [Adopt-a-Trail Program](#)
- [Trail Watch Program](#)
- [Trail Ambassador Program](#)
- [Trail Work Days](#)
- [Trails Education Days](#)



The Conejo Open Space Foundation was formed in 1995 to promote and maintain the open space and trail system of the Conejo Valley and to educate residents as to their roles as custodians and protectors of the open space and the environment. Our [web site](#) illustrates ongoing Conejo Open Space programs supported by the Foundation that help preserve and protect our precious open space.

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