



Signs of spring are everywhere and there are loads of free and paid hiking options—see our News in Brief for ideas. But please wait for trails to dry out; Board member Bill Miller explains why below. (Photo: Honeybee on arroyo willow.)

A Few Words from Our President

Welcome to Spring, my fellow trail users! I hope you are getting out there and catching the first blooms of wildflowers and enjoying the green hills of our gorgeous trail system. A spectacular time to be out!

Let me take this moment to introduce myself as your new president of the Conejo Open Space Foundation. As an avid hiker and a person who admires the beauty that surrounds us here in the Conejo Valley, I am thrilled to take on this role and ensure we continue to educate our community and support activities that make our

natural spaces so special. I'm also thrilled to welcome another new member to our executive team, **vice president Bill Miller**, who shares his passion for mountain biking and his many business talents with all of us. Welcome, Bill!

As one of my first activities in this new role, I get to share that COSF recently received a City of Thousand Oaks Community Grant to support this year's Speaker Series. We are truly grateful to the City for its recognition of our efforts.

I'm also pleased to let you know that our very own **Elayne Haggan**, a co-founder of COSF, was selected to receive the Lifetime Volunteer Achievement Award under the California Trails and Greenways Award Program. She was nominated by COSCA ranger **Kari Stav**. This is truly an impressive award and, as an all-volunteer board, we are grateful for everything she has done to protect and promote our open spaces. Congratulations, Elayne!

Finally, COSF is always looking for strong board member candidates. If you have a unique skill (great at graphic design? Legal background? Know your way around financials?) and can donate some time, please consider getting involved. It's a rewarding, fun and important role.

See you on the trails!

Tania Garcia

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.

Thank you for your generosity. It makes a difference..

Donate

Volunteer



Audubon Conejo is offering cash grants to help you turn your lawn into a bird-, bee- and wildlife-friendly habitat using native plants.

Audubon Grants Help You Lose the Lawn

***Erik Oberg**, conservation chair for Conejo Audubon, catches us up here on the group's Lawns to Habitat (LTH) grant program. Read on to see if your property is eligible. Oberg himself started as a grant recipient in 2021 (you can see his garden above) and, he says, "I expressed so much enthusiasm for the program that I was recruited by the Board to join Audubon Conejo as the conservation chair."*

The 11-year-old Lawns to Habitat program, which provides both a stipend of \$250 and expert help to homeowners who want to convert their properties to wildlife-friendly habitat, is the brainchild of Audubon member Dee Lyon. In early 2022, she handed over the program to Oberg.

In 2022, Audubon Conejo received 91 LTH applications, by far the largest number ever. A total of 25 grants went to homeowners in Agoura Hills, Camarillo, Newbury Park, Oak Park, Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks, and Westlake Village. Five additional grants provided followup support to previous grant recipients.

Professional landscape designer Laura Bauer and Audubon volunteers David Person and Mary Ann Campbell contributed assistance with site visits and coordinating two rounds of plant deliveries and distributions. By purchasing plants at wholesale, the

grant provides 40 to 50 one-gallon plants, enough to cover approximately 2,000 to 2,500 square feet. In 2022, LTH supplied over 1,800 plants.

For those interested in applying, priority is given to applicants who:

- Own project property adjacent to or within ¼ mile of public parklands or protected open space to promote habitat connectivity;
- Are willing to actively promote and educate the public about the value of native plants and enhancing habitats on private property;
- Participate in a municipal turf replacement program. This can contribute an additional \$3.00 per square foot towards lawn removal
- Expressed financial need.

Applications for 2023 LTH grants open May 1 and close May 30. Please visit Audubon's website to learn more.

And, if you're curious about what a native habitat garden looks like, **join Audubon's upcoming Bird-Friendly Garden Tour on Sunday, April 16**, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. It's free and features 16 beautiful gardens in Ventura County and a bit of western LA County.

Please register by April 7 to receive the list of gardens on the tour!



If you're a native canid, it's okay to leave prints in the mud. But if you're a biker, horseback rider, or hiker, please stay off wet trails!

Rainy Day Trail Etiquette for Us All

Board Vice President Bill Miller is a bicycle-industry veteran, with 35 years of experience ranging from retail to manufacturing, product design and innovation. He now oversees training and development for internal and retail staff at Giant Group USA, in Newbury Park. Here, he shares some thoughts on rainy days.

Spring is the best time of year to enjoy Conejo Valley's open spaces. Whatever your gig is—the flowers, the fresh air, the trail conditions—now is the time to get out there! And speaking of the trail conditions, we've had quite a bit of rain lately and COSCA has closed its trails a number of times in recent weeks. So before you set out, [check the current status](#). (And bookmark the page for future reference.)

We all have a responsibility to be aware of our impact on the trails. As someone lucky enough to have ridden most, if not all, of the trails open for mountain bikes in the Conejo Valley, my experience is that some areas dry out much earlier than others. Knowing if a trail is ready for mountain bikers (or equestrians or hikers) is key.

Here are two simple tips to guide your next adventure:

- First, consider the rule, **"if you leave tracks, turn back."** That means if your bike tires sink into the surface, it's too wet to ride. Is your horse creating a small pit with every step? Are your boots getting heavier and heavier as you accumulate mud? If so, go home.
- And **if it's actually raining, stay home**. Or go bowling, watch a recorded [COSF Speaker Series event](#), whatever. Just don't go out on the trails.

Think about the trail conditions the last time you were out after a spell of rain. Was the tread "chunky?" Were there holes or deep tracks? Those are signs that people were out there too early—don't be that person.

Here are a couple of routes that drain well and can fill the spot when other trails are still drying out:

- [Five Mile](#)
- [Powerline to the 101 Overlook](#)

Think of wet trails as a great opportunity to learn a new trail system and to discover everything that the Conejo open spaces have to offer.

But when the time is right, do go: [There's a lot to see](#). Look for Cooper's hawks and white-tailed kites. The latter raptor is only found on the West Coast and is a unique part of our local ecosystem, feeding mostly on small mammals. You may also spot deer, bobcats, snakes, and other reptiles like the coast horned lizard (found only in California). So, keep your eyes open and, in the case of the horned lizard, look where you step.



Confused about what waste goes in which bin and why? Puzzled about how to dispose of hazmats? Want to help the environment? Hear what our trash experts have to say about doing garbage right at COSF's first speaker event of 2023.

Don't Miss Our 'Trash Talk' on March 29

Please join us via Zoom on Wednesday, March 29, at 7:00 p.m. for **our first 2023 Speaker Series event, "Talkin' Trash: How to Do Your Garbage Right."**

A panel of three experts will discuss the new waste laws and programs enacted to lessen the amount of garbage that goes to landfill. They'll also address the Three Rs: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle as well as how to dispose of hazardous materials. A Q&A with attendees will follow.

Joanie Burns, environment, health, safety and sustainability manager at Amgen, Inc., will moderate the discussion with territory manager **Matt Trouts** of Athens Services and **Philip Hirrel**, an assistant analyst with the City of Thousand Oaks Sustainability Department.

They'll cover topics that include:

- What is and isn't recyclable
- What can and can't be disposed of in curbside bins
- What shouldn't be washed down the drain or flushed
- How to deal with bulky, hazardous and other special waste.

[Please register ASAP because attendance is limited.](#) Although this is a free event, COSF encourages a \$10 donation to support future Speaker Series presentations.



Spotlight on...

Naomi Lin, a graduate of Oak Park High School, was one of COSF's first two recipients of a \$1,000 annual scholarship for high school seniors planning a career focused on environmental stewardship. She is now in her sophomore year (class of 2025) at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). We caught up with her recently to see how she's doing.

What's your major and why did you choose it? I'm majoring in Political Science with a concentration in Comparative Politics on the prelaw track. I chose it because I plan on attending law school with the intent of becoming an environmental lawyer. I am also minoring in Environmental Systems and Society and Labor Studies.

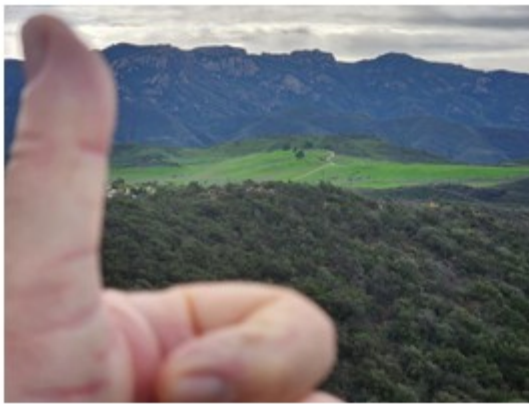
Why is environmental stewardship important to you? This is the #1 most concerning global issue. Environmental issues do not discriminate, and it will inevitably affect us all, so taking care of our planet is really just an investment in yourself.

Last quarter, I had the privilege of taking a Climate Change course with Professor Michael Ross. We studied the IPCC [the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change], the most important climate assessment report to date, and the urgency of achieving net zero by 2050. There was so much throughout the course we covered that I cannot possibly summarize it all here, but at one point, he even explained how climate change was possibly the biggest factor in starting some of our world's greatest wars. It made me realize that environmental stewardship isn't because you love trees a lot, it is quite literally at this point about survival.

What has been your best college experience relevant to environmental stewardship to date? My best experience was taking Environmental Literature and Culture with Professor Ursula Heise in my freshman year. I did a research presentation and created a website documenting the history and facts of the Los Angeles Ballona Wetlands and the importance and controversy of its preservation. These wetlands are literally an entire nature reserve smack dab in the middle of one of the world's largest metropolitan areas, and hardly anyone knows of its existence. After the project, Professor Heise took my group to visit the Ballona wetlands in all its glory, and she was able to name every single bird we came across.

What is your dream job? To go into environmental law or criminal law. If you were to ask what my dream job is if money wasn't an issue, it would be totally different. Maybe an author or a painter.

Any other thoughts or words of wisdom? Recognize that there is a solution to every problem. The amount of stress I have accumulated over trivial matters has probably taken five years off my lifespan.



Challenge: An oak tree

John Noble gave a thumb's up to a distant oak as seen from the Vista del Mar trail. (This still counts as a selfie for contest purposes! [See contest rules on our website.](#)) March's challenge is a trail bench anywhere on COSCA land.



Challenge: Running water

Christine Elowitt included the famous Paradise Falls in her selfie.

News In Brief

Congratulations to our first two winners of the new “You in the Conejo” contest, whose entries you see above: **John Noble** and **Christine Elowitt**. If you would like to be added to the email list for the new contest, [please sign up at our website.](#)

Learn from **Wild Rootz** founder naturalist Laura Pasetta as she leads a range of adventures and classes, including **intro to forest bathing (March 24)**, **wild plant foraging (March 27)** and **wildflower identification (April 15)**. Event prices vary, so [please visit Wild Rootz website](#) for more information and to register.

Have you started the 2023 **Conejo Open Space Challenge** yet? COSCA sponsors this free event to challenge mountain bikers, hikers, trail runners and equestrians to try out 10 less-used trails in the open space. **This year's 12th annual Challenge runs March 1 through May 31, so it's not too late to get started.** If you complete the Challenge, you could win one of many prizes donated by sponsors that include COSF. Email your photos or links to GPS tracks to coschallenge@gmail.com to show you've completed a segment. [Download the list of trails at our website.](#)

Join a free Open Space Appreciation Hike, held monthly on the second Saturday of the month, courtesy of Conejo Parks & Rec! No pre-registration required. Rain, fire, or red-flag alerts cancels. A responsible adult must accompany hikers under 18. For more info call CRPD at (805) 495-2163. This season's hikes will be:

- April 8, **Southwest Ahmanson Ranch/Cheeseboro Cyn.** Moderately strenuous 5.5-mile loop with elevation gain/loss about 1,500 ft. (3.5 hours)
- May 13, **Ahmanson Ranch Ramble.** Moderately strenuous 6.5-mile loop with elevation gain/loss about 1,500 ft. (4 hours).

- June 10 **Los Robles – Spring Canyon to Space Mountain**. Moderately strenuous 5.5-mile loop with elevation gain/loss about 1,000 ft. (3.5 hours).

Have a comment, correction, story idea or other **input for the newsletter**? Let us know! Email us at news@cosf.org



If you would like to have this newsletter emailed to you quarterly, along with other occasional messages about our activities, subscribe here.

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Want to Volunteer? Here's How!

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](#)
- [Bike Bell Box Replenishment](#)
- [Trail Watch Program](#)
- [Trail Ambassador Program](#)
- [Trail Work Days](#)
- [Trails Education Days](#)



help preserve and protect our precious open space.

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

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