



COSF board member Katrina Nolan spotted this bobcat in the Arroyo Conejo, which is slated for clean-up. More on the clean-up and about Katrina below.

## A Few Words from Our President

'Tis the holiday season to be merry! On behalf of the Conejo Open Space Foundation Board and our greater community, **I wish you all a very warm, happy and safe holiday this December.** Thank you for the financial and volunteer support you've provided to our open space this year and for your ongoing commitment in 2024. We are truly grateful for the many individuals I have had the pleasure of meeting this past year and for your positive energy and thoughtful involvement. You are all part of the COSF family and I am humbled by your support.

This December newsletter will be one of our last communications before our Holiday

Giving Campaign ends. If you have not had the chance to contribute yet, I encourage you to consider COSF in your end-of-the-year giving plans. Contributions help with items like our recent water station additions, scholarship awards, and support to the Wallis Annenberg Wildlife Crossing. In addition, your donations help to provide important activities like the week of outdoor education for Conejo fourth graders and lunches for our trail work volunteers.

**[Please consider making a gift today.](#)**

With 2024 around the corner, **it's a time to make the resolution to get out more and enjoy the trails.** Catch a glimpse of a bright blue scrub jay or find a patch of radiant California fuchsia. Take in a sunrise on the Sunrise Trail or picnic with a loved one at the top of Rosewood. Get in a nice run on Los Robles Trail or find relief from the holiday stress with a peaceful mosey along the Lynnmere Trail. However you chose to do it, get out and enjoy our natural open space.

Cheers to a Happy New Year!

***Tania Garcia***

***President, Conejo Open Space Foundation***

P.S. Do you have the time and energy to be a part of our team? Let us know today! If you're interested in serving on the COSF board, please reach out to me at:

**[president@cosf.org](mailto:president@cosf.org)**

## **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**



# COSCA Plans Major Arroyo Conejo Cleanup

Special among COSCA open spaces is the Arroyo Conejo, a waterway which drains almost all of the Conejo Valley in its swift descent to the Santa Rosa Valley, Calleguas Creek and eventually, the Pacific Ocean.

"It's a unique resource. It's among the last of the natural parts of the riparian habitat area in the Conejo Valley, so it's a rare, rare remnant of what was probably a much better habitat a long time ago," COSCA Administrator Brian Stark says.

Unlike many COSCA lands that are set atop broad mesas, volcanic peaks and steep, grassy hills, the Arroyo Conejo stays low—as waterways do—threading its way between parks, neighborhoods, streets and undeveloped ridges. Its watershed is home to scenic canyons, woodlands, cascades and rocky pools.

However, development and invasive species have put a strain on the health of the stream. Channelization, litter and the displacement of native species add to environmental pressures. Because of this, **COSCA has set aside \$50,000 from Woolsey Fire settlement funds to begin a long-term initiative to revitalize the Arroyo Conejo.** COSCA has identified two major area of focus to start: clearing out invasive species and trash.

Two particularly problematic invasive plants they've begun to remove Arundo donax, the giant reed, and Washingtonia robusta, the Mexican fan palm. "It will improve the ecology of the area by allowing more native plants to come in that were previously crowded out," Stark explains. "Invasive species don't support wildlife." Invasive plants, like the Mexican fan palm, can also worsen fire behavior and make the arroyo more susceptible to intense wildfires.

With the first stage of the cleanup efforts underway, COSCA is focusing on 1.8 miles of the creek between Hillcrest Drive and the Rancho Conejo playfields, an upstream portion of the arroyo that COSCA expects will have a preventive effect on litter distribution downstream "Cleaning the whole creek often is beyond our capacity, but committing to this one area and intercepting garbage on its trip downstream will help the whole arroyo," Stark says.—*Sean Crommelin*

COSF is awarding "Team Conejo" shirts to volunteers who participate regularly in COSCA trail work days. Board member Steve Clark is seen modeling one here.



## Volunteers Step Up for Monthly Trail Work Days

The first of COSCA's **new monthly trail work days** was held August 26 at Westlake Village Community Park with about 20 community volunteers. Since then, says COSCA Supervising Ranger Kory Prindle, more than **171 volunteers have participated in the events, logging over 615 hours of service.** The Fall Trail Work Day on October 21 at Wildwood Regional Park drew an additional 90 volunteers, Prindle says.

"The volunteer trail program is off to a great start," says Prindle. "Every month we are pleasantly surprised by how many people are showing up and how much love the community has been giving to the trails in our open spaces." The last trail work day of 2023 will be December 23 at Wildwood Regional Park. Volunteers can register at [CRPD's website](#).

The program will continue in 2024, generally on the third Saturday of the month, focusing on smaller maintenance projects throughout Conejo Open Space properties. COSF is handling event notifications, so please [make sure you're signed up with us](#).

[To log your participation](#) to be eligible for the Team Conejo shirt and other recognition, go to COSF's website.



First and second year scholarship recipients Alessandra Lucchesi, Daniel Conway, Naomi Lin and Molly McNulty in 2022 with COSF's then-president Anne Russell (center). Third year recipients were Avery Henson and Kaelin Carraway.



## COSF Scholarship Program Enters Fourth Year

COSF is looking for Conejo Valley and Greater Ventura County area high-school seniors who plan to pursue an environmental studies-related major at a two- or four-year college or university. **For the fourth year, COSF will award two such college-bound students \$1,000 each in continuing scholarships.**

The scholarships pay out for the students' entire four years of study, as long as they remain full-time students, maintain a grade-point average of 3.0 or higher, and stay with an environmental studies-related major. Each scholarship recipient will receive up to \$4,000 in support from COSF.

A panel comprised of local environmental leaders will choose two recipients from the pool of applicants. They will look for candidates who plan to enter a career directly related to sustainability, ecology, and preserving the natural environment. In addition to environmental studies, **relevant majors include, but are not limited to: ecology; environmental engineering; environmental policy; natural-resources management and conservation; and sustainable agriculture.** The scholarship winners will be announced in April 2024.

The deadline for application, which includes a 500-word essay detailing the applicant's reasons for pursuing a career in environmental studies, a transcript of their academic record, and two letters of recommendation, is February 15, 2024. [Interested seniors are encouraged to apply now.](#)



The California Wildlife Center was one of the returning exhibitors at Native Plantpalooza & Eco Fest in October.

# Plantpalooza Enjoys Second Successful Year

On October 7 COSF hosted its second annual Native Plantpalooza & Eco Fest at Conejo Creek North Park in Thousand Oaks. **The festival's special presentations from Antonio Sanchez and Animal Actors of Hollywood drew appreciative crowds.**

Sanchez, who is nursery manager and restoration volunteer coordinator for the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, shared information about growing milkweed and described the Mission Monarch initiative he has spearheaded. The project's goal is to get more native milkweed (*Asclepias fascicularis*) into home gardens to support the Western monarch butterfly population and to date has given away thousands of seedlings.

Following that, the team from Animal Actors of Hollywood introduced families to native wildlife such as a red-tailed hawk, possum and fox squirrel as well as exotics that included a baby porcupine and a Eurasian eagle-owl.

The free festival's focus is on **native gardening, sustainable living and being a good steward of our public lands.**

New exhibitors COSF welcomed this year were:

- ◆ Acorn Design Studios
- ◆ California American Water
- ◆ Calleguas Municipal Water District
- ◆ Chumash Indian Museum
- ◆ Conejo Open Space Conservation Agency
- ◆ Conejo Valley Botanic Garden
- ◆ Fleet Feet
- ◆ Forest Needle Wellness
- ◆ Millipops plantable lollipops
- ◆ Save My Bees, with beekeeper Byron Levy
- ◆ Southwestern Herpetologists Society
- ◆ Theodore Payne Foundation Nursery
- ◆ Thousand Oaks High School Environmental Club
- ◆ Thousand Oaks Library
- ◆ 350 Conejo

The Calleguas Water District was the premier sponsor of the 2023 event.



## Spotlight on...

**Katrina Nolan** discovered her love for the outdoors early via family camping and boating trips as she was growing up in New England. A passion for exploration inspired a move to California and while studying biology in college, Katrina was captivated by California's diverse plant communities and ecosystems. After college, she pursued a career in biotech in quality and supply chain management. Building on her lifelong interest in California's environment, she currently volunteers at local native plant nurseries and serves as a citizen scientist in the Xerces Society California Bumble Bee Atlas project and Western Monarch Count; she is currently working toward a Master Gardener certification. Katrina has lived in the Conejo Valley with her husband and family for over 30 years.

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

I joined the COSF board in September 2023. I've always felt so lucky to live in this area of beautiful and accessible natural open spaces. I spend a lot of time hiking local trails, so I was



naturally interested in the organizations dedicated to preserving these spaces. When I met the board members and felt their same passion about our open spaces, I just wanted to be a part of it!

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

It's crucial to preserve habitat and corridors for the plants and wildlife from the smallest invertebrates to the apex predators in order to sustain biodiversity. It's also important for communities to have accessible open natural areas so that there are places to rejuvenate, destress, and connect with nature and ourselves.

### **What advice do you have for open space visitors to get the most out of their time?**

There are many guides and articles about local plant communities, wildlife habitats, geology and cultural history. Reading about what makes our local area unique is a great way to enrich one's experience while exploring the area trails. We live in part of the California Floristic Province global biodiversity hot spot; it's wonderful to take that all in.

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

Finding and identifying native plants, observing plant communities and how they grow together or what pollinators and birds visit them, peeking into the micro world of nature (like bryophytes, lichens, flowers) through close-focusing binoculars (they're a game changer!), and trying to spot signs of wildlife. I capture these experiences through nature journaling and photography.

### **What's your favorite Conejo Open Space?**

One of my favorite Conejo Open Space areas is the beautiful riparian woodlands of the Arroyo Conejo. It's wonderful that we have this amazing habitat and creek flowing through the Conejo Valley. I love the many peaceful, lush spots, the majestic oaks, black walnuts and sycamores, and the possibility to glimpse a southwestern pond turtle, deer, bobcat, or many different birds!

### **What are your hopes for the future of the Conejo Open Space?**

My hope is even more people will discover and connect with the beauty and uniqueness of our natural open spaces.

### **Any other thoughts or words of wisdom?**

I can relate to this quote from Albert Einstein, "Look deep into nature and then you will understand everything better."





Conejo Valley Audubon Conservation Chair Erik Oberg shared information about his group's annual grants for converting home yards to supportive native habitat.

## News In Brief

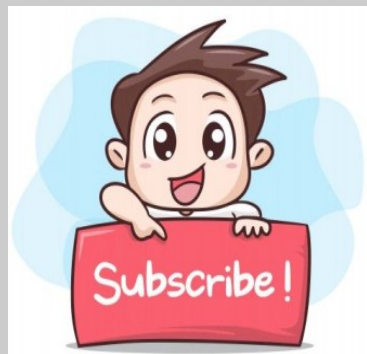
**Erik Oberg**, owner of native-plant landscape design company Acorn Design Studios and chair of the Conejo Valley Audubon Society's Conservation Committee, gave a talk in December about native plant gardening to a group of COSF open space enthusiasts. He shared his "Top 10 Reasons to Go Native," as well as his favorite landscape plants that will thrive now—and in our hotter, drier climate of the future. [You can watch Erik's 20-minute presentation at our website.](#)

**Congratulations to our September and October winners of our “You in the Conejo” selfie contest: Margey Pascual and Christine Elowitt** (again!). We are in the process of inventing a new contest for 2024, so please stay tuned!

**Join a free Open Space Appreciation Hike**, held monthly on the second Saturday, starting at 8:00 a.m., courtesy of Conejo Recreation and Parks! No pre-registration required. Rain, fire, or red-flag alert cancels. A responsible adult must accompany hikers under 18. For more info call CRPD at (805) 495-2163. This season's hikes will be:

- ◆ January 13, **Wildwood – Mesa, Santa Rosa, Mount Clef, CLU, Lower Butte**. Moderately strenuous 6.5-mile loop hike. (4 hours).
- ◆ February 10, **Backbone Trail – Upper Encinal Rd to Zuma Ridge**. Moderate 4.5-mile out-and-back with water crossings. (2.5 hours).
- ◆ March 9, **Liberty Canyon – Phantom, Lookout, Cistern, Century**. Moderately strenuous 5.5-mile "lollipop". (3.5 hours).

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

**Subscribe**

## 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](#) listed 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 Building and Restoration
- ◆ 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.

Follow us on social media



*Copyright © 2023 Conejo Open Space Foundation, All rights reserved.*