

THE CONEJO OPEN SPACE FOUNDATION NEWS

Summer 2024



The winners of the Trails Education Days letter writing contest (see story below): Emerson Kuther, Nicole Fetche, Carolyn Wei, June Crowe and Aaroosh Das with COSCA Supervising Ranger Kory Prindle, CRPD GM Jim Friedl, CRPD Directors Nellie Cusworth, Chuck Huffer, Marissa Buss, George Lange (Chair), and Doug Nickles. The children's letters highlight what they learned and which rangers and volunteers made a special difference for them.

A Few Words from Our President

Greetings, friends!

I hope this newsletter finds all of you in great health and form, ready to get out and enjoy the Conejo Valley open spaces before the heat really gets dialed up.

Looking back over the last quarter, a LOT of exciting things have been happening with COSF. To start with, we attended multiple Earth Day events to spread the word about our open spaces and get people excited about what the Conejo Valley has to offer.

One event that we are grateful to participate in every year is the **Trails Education Days** which is a collaboration between COSF, COSCA, and COSTAC where over 1,000 local fourth grade students learn about our open spaces and their responsible use. See Sean's article below to learn more!

In May, we kicked off the **2024 COSF Speaker Series** with a very informative session with Dr. Julie Morley where she covered all things hummingbird! [Learn more by watching the video.](#)

Lastly, this I am very excited about, at the beginning of June **we awarded two more Environmental Studies Scholarships** to two local students to help further their education and strengthen our connection with the local community. Congratulations to the awardees and you can read more below.

As we look to the coming months, we have a **new Four Seasons photo contest** running from June 1 to August 31. The subject is "A Bee in a Flower." [Sign-up and rules are here.](#) Good luck!

We have also set the date for our popular event, **Plantpalooza! It will be September 28** and the location will be the same as in the past, Conejo Creek Park North. Come down and learn about how you can transform your garden into a native habitat that supports species that exist in our beautiful open spaces.

Of course, I want to personally thank each of you for supporting our vision to inspire the community to preserve our Conejo natural open space, its trail system, cultural heritages and unique ecosystems so they will be protected and enjoyed for generations to come.

[Please consider making a gift today](#) and thank you for Connecting Community & Nature. I'll see you on the trails!

Bill Miller
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

We Couldn't Do It Without You!

[COSF](#) depends on open-space supporters like you for donations that help us fund volunteer programs, education, scholarships, and so much more. COSF is an entirely volunteer nonprofit dedicated to protecting and promoting the Conejo Valley's beautiful open spaces that are owned and managed by COSCA for the benefit of all trail users.

Please consider giving a gift to keep our efforts going. And ask your employer if they will match your contribution!

Thank you for your generosity. It makes a difference.

Donate

Volunteer



The 31st annual Trails Education Days volunteers taught local fourth graders about nature and trail etiquette. Here, Peter Sullivan, Ride On Therapeutic Horsemanship's McKenna Gerrish-Gonsales with Floyd, emcee Dorothy Sullivan, Ride On's Sara Jones with Wembley and Marty Stewart with Mystique. (Photo courtesy Dorothy Sullivan).

Trails Education Days Hosted 1,000+ Kids

For four days in April, a total of **1,053 fourth-graders from 17 schools** all across the Conejo Valley visited the heart of Wildwood Regional Park for Trails Education Days. The intrepid schoolchildren were guided by 29 volunteer hike leaders well-versed in the flora and fauna of Southern California's Conejo Valley.

Hike leaders told the children about the environment around them. The volunteers pointed out flora of dizzying variety. Some students were veterans of the trail system, others were out and about in Wildwood for the first time. Serendipitously overcast skies protected participants from the sun when the sometimes-sparse canopy of oak and willow didn't suffice. Along the trail, there were profusions of flowers, some native, such as California goldfields and hummingbird sage, others less so, like the invasive black mustard.

The kids peeked at the glossy leaves of poison oak, diligently instructed by volunteers to look, but not touch! They saw the diminutive spinous leaves of the coast live oak, the aristocratically styled underside of the western fence lizard—so termed “blue bellies”—and perhaps, if they were lucky, glimpses of red-tailed hawks, coyotes and other creatures that call Wildwood home.

Once the students reached the Nature Center, they attended three workshops: Rangers told them about their careers; Animal Actors of Hollywood introduced them to native animals, some of whom are paid actors, like Cheerio, the California King Snake. Then the The Trail Safety and Courtesy Workshop show began. Help from volunteer mountain bikers, dog walkers—some with leashed pets and some not—and horseback riders, mostly from Ride On Therapeutics, pulled everything together. “We have a skit that we do to show the students how to behave on the trail. But it's with a twist,” explains Dorothy Sullivan, who has been emcee of the Trail Safety and Courtesy Workshop since 2018. “We say to them, ‘we're gonna do everything wrong, and I want you to use your eagle eyes to pick out everything we did wrong.’ Then, we start the skit with the kids yelling, ‘Lights, camera, action!’”

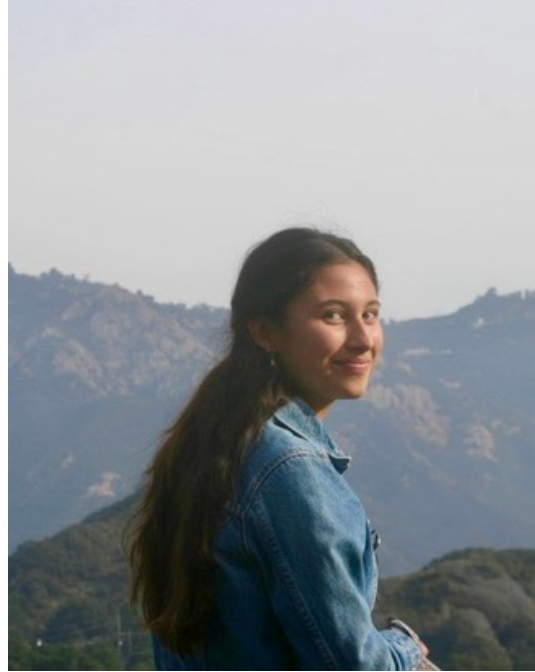
In this trail safety FAQ come to life, the fourth graders are tasked with pinning down the fundamentals of being safe in the open space. How do you approach a horse? How do you handle a dog on the trail? Who has the right of way: mountain bikers or hikers? For some kids, seeing adults make fools of themselves is just what they need to tease out how to do things right. “It's just so much more engaging for the kids. It's a campy skit,” says Sullivan.

Or, as COSF board member Elayne Haggan, one of COSF's founders and an instrumental part of Trails Education Days, puts it, “Reverse psychology is very effective.”

And according to Sullivan, the workshop does have an impact. When the day is done and kids reflect on what they've learned, scores of them every year invariably write about the Trail Safety and Courtesy Workshop. “You strike a chord with every student,” Sullivan says. “When I played a hiker with a dog, my dog actually received letters, like ‘Dear Champ, you were such a good actress. We really believed that you hate the horse.’”—*Sean Crommelin*



Alexandria Paris Williams



Simone Scheuble-Isip

COSF Chooses 2024 Scholarship Winners

Two local high school seniors, **Simone Scheuble-Isip of Thousand Oaks** and **Alexandria Paris Williams of Agoura Hills**, are the recipients of the fourth annual Conejo Open Space Foundation scholarships. The \$1,000 annual scholarships support students pursuing environmental-studies-related majors at two- or four-year colleges or universities. The scholarships, which provide up to \$4,000 per student in total, are awarded by a six-person panel.

Simone Scheuble-Isip, who has always been home-schooled, has an active volunteer history, including a stint at Black Mountain Fire Lookout as the youngest female fire lookout host ever in the San Bernardino Mountains. She also volunteered at the Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve collecting data about snowy plovers. “My eventual goal is to earn a PhD in environmental studies,” Simone wrote in her application essay. “I dream of becoming an environmental science professor, conducting research on preventing climate change and finding solutions to make our earth more sustainable.” In the fall of 2024, Simone will be attending Moorpark College and in fall 2025, transferring to University of California, Santa Cruz.

Alexandria Paris Williams’s goal, she says, is to fight climate change through social policy. “For me, environmentalism is not an identity or passion, it is an imperative,” the Agoura High School graduate wrote. “I have always had an interest in human psychology and now realize how important it is for developing effective climate communication and policy.” As a member of Citizens’ Climate Lobby, Alexandria was able to travel to Washington, D.C., last year, where she met personally with Rep. Julia Brownley, who represents California’s District 26. Alexandria has already started classes at the University of California, Berkeley, studying environmental science and policy.

If you are a high school student interested in [applying for 2025 or beyond, here’s how.](#)



The challenge subject for spring's inaugural Four Seasons photo contest was "a spider web with dew." Rita Pulaski was our winner with this image taken on the Powerline Trail in Newbury Park. Next up, bees! See details below.

Rita is Our Four Seasons Photo Contest Winner

Our new Four Seasons photo contest got off to a great start, with lots of beautiful entries of dew-covered spider webs. **Rita Pulaski was this season's winner** of an eco-friendly COSF t-shirt and a \$25 gift card to a local business.

The contest's summer challenge, which begins now and runs through August 31, is a "bee on a flower." To be eligible, make sure you're on COSCA land when you snap your bee photo. And remember that there are lots of different kinds of native bees—we're not just looking for European honeybees. [Visit our website to see the rest of the rules and to learn out to submit your photos!](#)

Good luck finding your bees!



Spotlight on...

Sean Crommelin works in education for the Oxnard School District, as well as serving as a research assistant, grant writer and editor for two professors at UC Santa Barbara, his alma mater. He's a key contributor to the COSF newsletter and has helped us win a number of grants.

In his spare time, he likes to hike and backpack. He enjoys photography, explaining, "I generally go out with a DSLR in my hand and a vision in my head of a photo I'd like to take, although my favorite pictures are almost always the ones I didn't plan on taking, like unique wildlife encounters, special combinations of clouds and light or views I just plain wasn't expecting to see."

What are your reasons for volunteering with COSF?

At UCSB I worked with faculty and the Isla Vista Recreation and Park District, focusing on grant writing and public relations (including writing a newsletter); I wanted to continue doing work in the community here, volunteer or otherwise.

Why is open space important to you?

I think being out in open space makes me understand the experience of existing more. In a home or an office it's easy to feel like you've been subsumed into little boxes and screens; there're things about modern life that are very atomizing and isolating if you don't make an effort to see more than your work and your immediate surroundings. Going out into the hills reminds me that there's a whole world beyond myself. When I see ridges upon ridges rise up from where I stand atop a promontory, shaped by everything from canyons and streams to plateaus and suburban subdivisions, I think of how I am enmeshed in and connected to everything. I think understanding that is an important part of being a human being and I want everyone to have the opportunity to feel that.

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

Go at different times of the day and year! It's especially gratifying for me to see how a place changes. As the hours in a day go by, you can have overcast mornings burn away into sunny days and spectacular sunsets. As the months in a year go by, grass grows and dries, flowers bloom and fall away with the summer drought, willows, sycamore and valley oak lose their leaves and then bud with the return of spring. If in the past you've put stock in the perspective of people who pretend there are no

seasons in Southern California, I advise that you find a place you've been only once or a few times in a different season, and see how it is now!

What do you like to do in the open space?

Generally I hike and walk in COSCA open space, although I periodically do trail-running.

What's your favorite Conejo open space?

I have a soft spot for Los Padres and Los Robles Open Space.

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

I hope we can continue to rely on a vibrant community of people who put in the time and effort to protect and maintain our open space. The open spaces we have—and the condition we've managed to keep them in—is something very intentional. It's not dumb luck that gave us all these awesome trails. We are all the beneficiaries of people who earned our protected areas through advocacy and dialogue with businesses, developers, the city and the community. We owe it to the future to keep up the work.



Conejo Open Space Challenge grand prize winner Jimmy Chow with COSF President Bill Miller. Chow won a Giant Stance 29 mountain bike worth \$1,400, courtesy of Giant Bicycles at the 13th annual event. (See story below.)

News In Brief

The 13th annual **Conejo Open Space Challenge**, sponsored by COSCA, drew 135 participants this year, with 104 finishing all 10 trails in the Challenge. Those who completed it were eligible for a wealth of prizes provided by COSF, Fleet Feet, JOi Birds, Pedals & Pints, Newbury Park Bike Shop and REI. Giant Bicycles donated the grand prize, seen above. Coordinator Steve Bacharach noted participation was down slightly this year, possibly due to the rainy spring weather, adding, "I'm still happy with how it went." COSCA Analyst Anna Huber says of the event, "We regularly receive positive feedback from participants who are really pleased to learn about trails they hadn't been familiar with. This event does a great job expanding awareness about the extent of our trail system!"

Native Plantpalooza & Eco Fest is returning! Please join us for our third annual free educational event Saturday, September 28, from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at Lakeside, Conejo Creek North Park, in Thousand Oaks. Get your questions answered about water-wise, fire-resistant native-plant gardening, learn how to fight climate change and find tips on living more sustainably—all completely free of charge! Exhibitors will be selling native plants and other garden-related goodies at this family-friendly festival. Plus, if you

donate to support COSF [when you register](#), you will get a free drought-tolerant native plant to take home.

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:

- **July 13, Lang Ranch – Autumn Ridge, Rocky Incline, Albertson Motorway**
Come explore trails at the northern edge and in the heart of scenic Lang Ranch on this moderate 4.5-mile loop hike. (2.5 hours)
- **August 10, Los Robles – Rosewood To Space Mountain**
Moderate 5.5-mile out-and-back hike on a well-maintained switchback trail leads up the hill to Angel Vista . (3.5 hours)
- **September 14, Dos Vientos – El Rincon, Sumac, Las Brisas Loop**
Moderate 4.5-mile loop hike explores several of the neighborhood trails in Dos Vientos. (2.5 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](#).



The Conejo Open Space Foundation (COSF) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation formed in 1995 to promote, support and help maintain the open space and trail system of the Conejo Valley, and to educate visitors as to their roles as custodians and protectors of the open space and the environment. We support and help fund ongoing programs sponsored by the Conejo Open Space Conservation Agency (COSCA)
P.O.Box 2113, Thousand Oaks, CA. 91358

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