

THE CONEJO OPEN SPACE FOUNDATION NEWS

Spring 2026



COSCA's Spring Trail Work Day on the Whole Access and Los Robles Trails in Thousand Oaks drew a crowd of over 50 enthusiastic volunteers. COSF provided lunch and prizes. Thank you to all who volunteered! If you want to join us next time, [sign up for our trail work notifications](#).

A Few Words from Our President

Happy Spring, everyone!

I hope this letter finds you all enjoying the early warm days as we roll into summer. The trails are in great shape and the image above is from COSCA's Spring Trail Work Day on March 21 where we made improvements to the Whole Access Trail and part of the Los Robles Trail. It had been a while since I'd been over there and I forgot how beautiful that area is. Go have a look or find another trail you haven't been on in a while and let me know what you find!

To all of the volunteers and those of you who support our efforts in other ways, we are eternally grateful. Please join us at the next Trail Work Day or see us at one of the events we'll be attending this month and let us thank you personally!

We start off celebrating our environment with events such as Thousand Oaks' Arbor Earth Day, Amgen's 25th Annual Earth Day Fair, and the long-running Trails Education Days. All of these occasions share one thing, besides COSF

being at them, and that is to instill an appreciation for nature and stewardship of the open spaces.

We have a great newsletter for you this month: Read on to learn more about how the outdoors can be an asset for mental health, how you can get involved in an easy and fun way to help naturalists better understand the local bee populations, and to hear from one of my favorite humans, Dorothy Sullivan.

In closing, there have been recent reports of a couple [rattlesnake bites](#) in our parkland—one fatal. Please remember that these creatures are as scared of us as we are of them and if we can let them do their snake things while we do our human things, these sorts of negative interactions will be fewer. [Only step where you can see](#); listen for the rattle (easier to do without earbuds); and keep yourself and your leashed pets on the trail.

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 volunteering with a COSF board committee, [please reach out to me](#).

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



Almost 50,000 Conejo Valley fourth graders have enjoyed a day at Wildwood Regional Park since 1992, thanks to Trails Education Days.

April is Busy Month for COSF with Trails Education Days, Earth Month Events

Between April 20 and 23, Conejo Open Space Trails Education Days will mark its 35th year of hosting Conejo Valley Unified School District fourth graders for a half day of learning about nature, trails, and stewardship. To date, COSF has funded and coordinated the annual environmental program for nearly 50,000 kids; last year 1,080 attended.

The event is held at Wildwood Regional Park and draws on a large pool of volunteers, including COSF board members, who lead hikes with the children, put on a "Trail Safety & Courtesy" skit, and help out the students at the Nature Center.

COSF will also be participating in the **annual Arbor Earth Day Celebration on April 18**. Sponsored by the City of Thousand Oaks, the festival is held at the Thousand Oaks Community Center from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. It's an opportunity to meet environmentally minded community groups (like us!) and pick up information and swag.

And we'll be tabling at **Amgen's annual Earth Day employee festival on April 22**, so if you're an Amgenite, look for us there and stop by the booth!



Irene Rowland (center), a certified forest therapy guide, took Speaker Series attendees on a virtual exploration of forest bathing.

First Speaker Tackles "Close to Nature" Theme

On March 4, Irene Rowland was the first presenter of 2026 in COSF's popular quarterly Speaker Series. In **"Forest Bathing and Healing Landscapes: A Guide to Mindful Nature Connection"** she explored why immersion in nature is essential to our mental and physical wellbeing. Rowland is a certified forest therapy guide and founder of Forest Needle Wellness.

An expert in the Japanese practice of shinrin-yoku—"forest bathing"—Rowland explained that the objective of shinrin-yoku's immersive experience is to "bathe" all five senses in the landscape, thus calming the mind and central nervous system. "There's so much stimulation in our current environment it can be overwhelming," says Rowland.

The benefits of a regular practice, Rowland notes, include lower blood pressure and cortisol ("stress hormone") levels, decreased systemic inflammation and, of course, improved mood. In addition to being a certified forest therapy guide, Rowland is an Asian Medicine practitioner. She is a licensed acupuncturist as well.

This year's Speaker Series theme is "Close to Nature" and is focusing on the connection between nature and mental wellbeing. (See listing below for the May 6 offering.)

If you missed Rowland's talk or any of our other Speaker Series presentations or would like to watch them again, please visit and subscribe to our [YouTube channel](#).



One of the 1,630 native bee species in California: a prunus miner bee. Unlike honeybees, native bees often specialize in specific native plants that depend on specialist bee pollination for their continued existence.

Volunteers Sought for Native Bee Project, Conejo Botanic Garden Field Trips

Local citizen scientist **Sherrie Felton** invites you to join her new [Conejo Open Space Native Bee Observation project](#) on [iNaturalist](#). Participating is easy via iNaturalist's free app.

Felton will hold a training workshop on Saturday, May 16, from 8:30 am to 10:00 am at the Lang Ranch Neighborhood Park. The training will be followed by a practice session to learn how to look for and photograph bees. She will then lead a moderate 4 to 5-mile hike to continue looking for bees. Please let [Sherrie](#) know you will be attending or contact her with questions.

"We still have a great deal to learn about native bees," says Felton. "In recent years scientists have come to depend increasingly on contributions from those of us who are not professional taxonomists or researchers. Citizen scientists have already helped to fill in some gaps.

"The species of native bees that live in the Conejo Valley evolved here in close collaboration with the native plants, shrubs, and trees," Felton notes. **"They are among the mighty pollinators that are critical to the ecosystems that make up our open space."**

Even if you can't attend the training, you can use your phone's close-up or macro feature to snap bee photos to upload to iNaturalist. The app will help by suggesting identifications, but just labeling what you saw as a bee species is enough to help experts who review submitted observations.

Botanic Garden Field Trip Helpers Needed

Help teach young students about conservation and the importance of protecting our natural environment by volunteering for the Conejo Valley

Botanic Garden's new field trip program. Designed for first, second, and third grade students, the **field trips will take place on Tuesday mornings from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm.**

During these visits, students will explore nature through hands-on learning activities that will include a guided nature walk, lessons about local habitats, and information about native plants and animals. The children will also investigate plant lifecycles; these experiences will help them develop a deeper understanding of the natural world around them.

Volunteers don't need prior experience—training will be provided. For more information or to get involved, please contact [Nellie Cusworth](#).



Spotlight on...

Dorothy Sullivan, a former COSF board member who is now vice chair of the COSCA Board of Directors. She has also served as a committee member for COSTAC, which is overseen by COSCA. Dorothy has always been an active community volunteer, but as a recent retiree, she's putting in even more time doing trail work and coaching mountain biking. She's a certified mountain bike skills instructor and leads youth summer camps, trail rides, learn-to-ride and skills clinics through CRPD. But one of her favorite and most visible roles has been nearly 20 years of volunteering for the Conejo Open Space Trails Education Days (TEDays). She started out playing the "rude mountain biker" then switched to the "hiker with off-leash dog" in the Trail Safety & Courtesy Workshop skit, which is a show-and-tell drama for TEDays attendees. In 2018, she moved into the skit's emcee role, where she encourages the participating fourth graders to call out the adults' bad behavior. When she's not busy with all those responsibilities, she enjoys hiking the Conejo Valley trails with her dog DJ or road tripping with husband Peter and DJ.

What are your reasons for volunteering for TEDays?

Sharing my passion for the open space with the future stewards of our trails is so important. It still amazes me how many kids experience our trails for the very *first* time during TEDays. We create a fun experience that will hopefully have a lasting impression on the students.

Why is open space important to you?

I've been hiking our local trails since the summer I volunteered at Wildwood Day Camp the year COSCA was formed (1977). I am grateful for the efforts of those who had the vision to ensure preservation of our open space and those who continue to execute the mission, including staff, rangers, and a robust volunteer corps. I never take for granted how fortunate we are to have access to such an amazing trail system.

What advice do you have for visitors—particularly young ones—to get the most out of the open space?

Share the experience with a friend or family member. Take time to stop along the way, look around—up and down—and you might be surprised what wildlife you'll see! Of course, be prepared and please be respectful. With over 150 miles of trails, plenty of adventures await.

What's your favorite memory of TEDays to date?

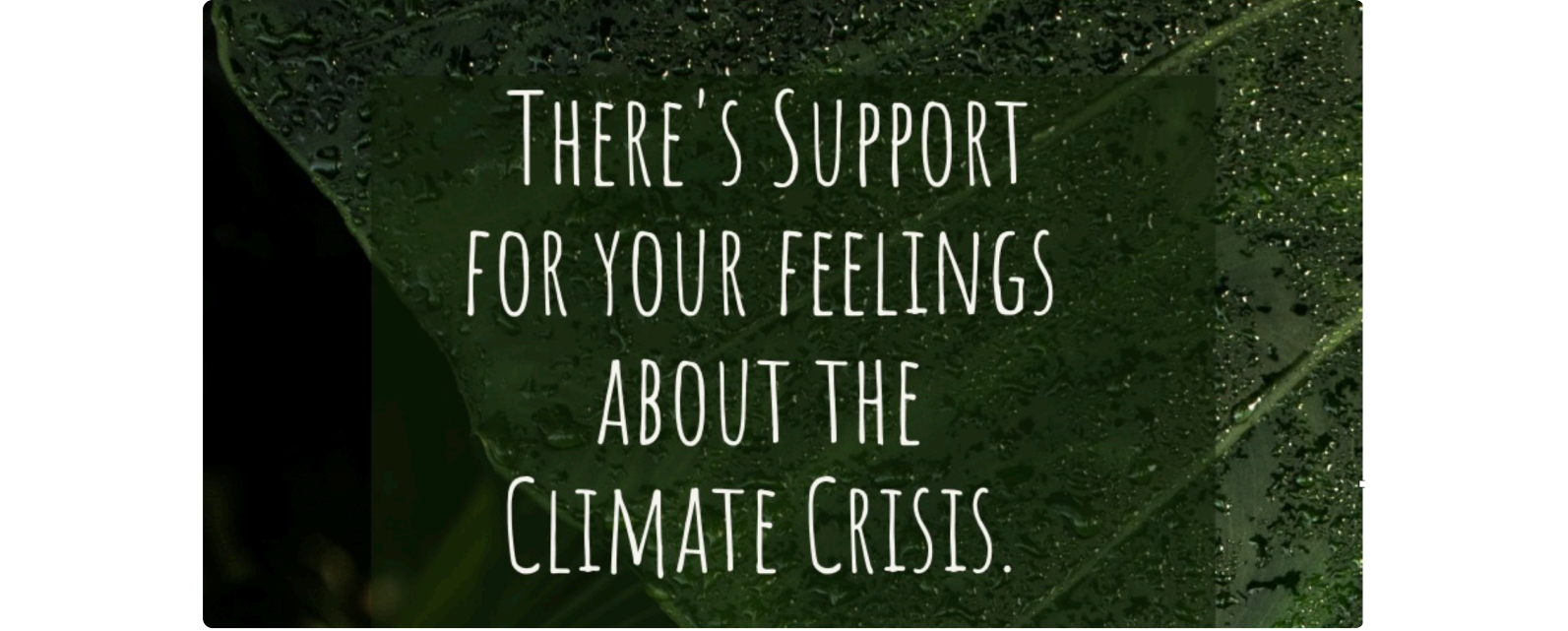
I love how excited the students get during the Trail Safety & Courtesy Workshop when they are tasked with picking out everything our "actors" do wrong! I've had kids recognize me in town after participating and they're still enthusiastic about their experience and want to chat. That's a win in my book.

What are your hopes for the future of the open space?

We have such a great foundation for land management ensuring our open space will continue to thrive. The balance of preservation and recreation is critical. Maintaining conservation and enjoyment is the responsibility of every trail user.

Any other thoughts or words of wisdom for our readers?

Participate! [Become a volunteer](#) at [Trail Work Days](#), [Trail Watch](#), [TEDays](#), and [other open space programs](#). Complete some or all of the [Open Space Challenge](#) (March 1 to May 31 every year). Take a moment when you're on the trail to truly be present in the nature we get to call our backyard.



THERE'S SUPPORT FOR YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT THE CLIMATE CRISIS.

Our next 2026 Speaker Series presentation focusing on nature and mental wellbeing will be May 6. The online event will be an interactive "Climate Café" discussion led by Victoria Clayton, who is member of the Climate Psychology Alliance of North America and a trained Climate Café facilitator. The Climate Café is a nonjudgmental virtual space where you can share your feelings about climate change; the goal is to reduce isolation and build emotional resilience. [Attendance is limited, so please register for this free event ASAP.](#)

News In Brief

Save the date! Native Plantpalooza & Eco Fest is returning October 10 for its fifth year! The free, family event will be held at Conejo Creek North Park Lakeside Pavilion in Thousand Oaks from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm. There will be dozens of eco-themed exhibitors, including native plant vendors, beekeepers, wildlife rehab specialists, and herpetologists. Over 35 exhibitors will have fun, creative activities for children, including microscope explorations, touch-and-talk tables about wildlife, plus coloring and crafts. Exhibitors will also have native plants and other eco-related goodies for sale, as well as plenty of giveaways and swag.

The Conejo Open Space Challenge is still on—don't miss out! To date, 52 people have completed at least one segment and there are two confirmed finishers. Running March 1 to May 31, the Challenge is designed to encourage mountain bikers, hikers, trail runners and equestrians of all ages to try [10 selected trails](#) that may be new to them. Those who complete all 10 and report their accomplishment will be entered into a drawing to win prizes donated by awesome sponsors (like COSF!) at a celebration in early June.

Join a free Open Space Appreciation Hike, held monthly on the second Saturday, starting at **8:00 am sharp**, courtesy of Conejo Recreation and Parks District! No pre-registration required. Rain, fire, or red-flag alert cancels. For more info call CRPD at (805) 495-2163.

This season's hikes will be:

- **April 11, Satwiwa Center, Old Boney and Fossil Trails.** Strenuous 6.5-mile loop hike (4 hours) in Pt. Mugu State Park and Sycamore Canyon. The Old Boney Trail is a sustained ascent. *Take the NPS road off Lynn Rd. across from Via Goleta to the parking lot where trailhead is. Restrooms available.*

- **May 9, Hill Canyon and Lizard Rock.** Moderately strenuous 6-mile lollipop (3.5 hours). Descend through Hawk Cyn to Hill Cyn. Summit Lizard Rock then descend to the new bridge and return to the trailhead through Hawk Cyn. *Trailhead is on Conejo Center Dr. Left turn near north end of Rancho Conejo Rd.*
- **June 13, Sunset Hills, Woodridge, and Long Canyon.** Moderately strenuous 5-mile loop (3 hours) visits Bard Lake and drops down into Simi Valley, before returning via Lang Ranch. *From the 23 freeway, go east on Sunset Hills Blvd to just past Ocean Bluff Ave. Free street parking.*

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)
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