

THE CONEJO OPEN SPACE FOUNDATION NEWS

Summer 2026



This year's Conejo Open Space Challenge attracted 145 participants, with 130 completing the 10 designated trails. Congratulations to all! We hope you'll be back for the 2027 Challenge, which runs March 1 to May 31 next year. Meet the man who makes it all happen in our Q&A below!

A Few Words from Our President

Well, here we are, it's June already; the brush is drying out and the open spaces have turned from vibrant green to a dusty brown. I am reminded of how fragile those landscapes are and how easily they can be damaged. Please stay on marked trails with respect for the flora and fauna you will encounter on your adventure.

What a last quarter we had at the Conejo Open Space Foundation! We kicked off with a busy April by attending both the Thousand Oaks Arbor Earth Day event and Amgen's Earth Day, as well as hosting four days of the **35th Trail Education Days**. May brought the **second Speaker Series event** where we explored our emotions surrounding climate change. We also supported COSCA' annual spring trail work day at Wildwood Regional Park.

In early June, we did something we haven't done since 2019 and that was to host an **in-person Speaker Series event**, where COSF director John Noble and Dana Stangel from Teranga Ranch covered the hot topic of living with rattlesnakes. Two days later, we celebrated the **Conejo Open Space Challenge** finishers with tacos and prizes. Well done, all!

It's been a lot and all of us at the Conejo Open Space Foundation are truly grateful for all of you who have engaged with us and are very thankful to all our donors who support these efforts.

But we aren't done yet!

I'd like to wrap up with a congratulatory note to our 2026 COSF

Environmental Studies Scholarship Awardees: [Anna Bronk and Tyler Limcaco](#), both graduates of Westlake High School. We wish them the best in their studies! If you, or a family member, are in eastern Ventura County and are a high school senior, I encourage you to read more about the COSF Environmental Scholarship and [start the application process for 2027](#).

Run by an all-volunteer board, the Conejo Open Space Foundation could not exist without your support and donations. I hope all of you can get out and enjoy these very special spaces that surround us. Have a great time, be safe, and stay hydrated!

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



Enjoy a morning outdoors at Conejo Creek North Park with fellow native plant enthusiasts this fall. We'll have live music and a beer garden.

Fifth Annual Plantpalooza to Bring Native Plants, Fire Safety Info and Fun on October 10

Save the date! Native Plantpalooza & Eco Fest is returning October 10 for its fifth year! So far, exhibitors we're welcoming back include:

- Byron's Bees
- Cal American Water
- California Wildlife Center
- Dana Brynn Jewelry
- National Wildlife Federation/Annenberg Wildlife Crossing
- Thousand Oaks Acorn Company
- Wild Birds Unlimited

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. And this year we're planning a beer garden.

Exhibitors will have fun, creative activities for children, including microscope explorations, touch-and-talk tables about wildlife, plus coloring and crafts. There will also be lots of native plants and other eco-related goodies for sale, as well as plenty of giveaways and swag. **October is the best time for planting** in the Conejo Valley, so plan ahead to give your garden a glow-up with new native plants!



Teranga Ranch executive director Dana Stangel, seen here with a king snake, joined COSF board member John Noble for a special live Speaker Series event June 3 about safe co-existence with rattlesnakes.

Special Speaker Series Event Addresses Rattlesnake Safety in the Open Space

Dana Stangel, executive director of Teranga Ranch, and John Noble, Conejo Open Space Foundation board member and rattlesnake relocater, addressed an enthusiastic and inquisitive crowd of about 80 people June 3. During **“Living with Rattlesnakes: What Ventura County Residents Need to Know”** the pair focused on dispelling myths, explaining typical rattlesnake behaviors, exploring the impacts of climate change on snakes, and how open space visitors can enjoy the trails safely.

The Southern Pacific rattlesnake (the only species of rattlesnake found in Ventura County) has made headlines this spring due to encounters with hikers and bikers that resulted in bites—two of them fatal. Stangel and Noble

discussed how the unseasonably warm spring weather spurred the same response from rattlesnakes and humans alike—get out and enjoy the trails!

With spring weather trending warmer each year, these **early season snake sightings are likely to continue**, so knowing how to co-exist with snakes is critical. Taking simple steps like staying on the trail, keeping pets leashed, avoiding nighttime walks after hot days, and giving snakes plenty of space to move away can all go a long way toward avoiding a negative encounter.

For those neighbors with homes that back onto open space, taking steps such as removing wood and rock piles, keeping water sources like pet bowls inside, and discouraging rodents by cleaning up birdseed, fallen fruit, and pet food can make your yard less appealing to rattlesnakes. If a rattlesnake does find its way into your yard, contact a relocater who can remove the snake safely to an appropriate location.

Ultimately, **rattlesnakes play a pivotal role in our local ecosystem** by controlling rodent populations and serving as food for other species such as raptors and king snakes.

To sign for Teranga Ranch's newsletter, please visit their [website](#).

[Find a free relocater near you](#).

If you missed the event with Stangel and Noble or any of our other Speaker Series presentations, please visit and subscribe to our [YouTube channel](#).

—Jessica Minucci



Native wildlife, such as this bumble bee, depend on native plant species for food and shelter. Ecosystem restoration is critical for their survival.

COSCA Studying How to Restore Native Habitat

You may have spotted one of COSCA's marked test plots at Lang Ranch, Rancho Potrero or Wildwood. Installed last September, these cordoned-off areas are part of an effort to **evaluate a habitat restoration method for**

grassland areas that only uses fertilizer and mulch to promote the return of native plant species, such as the deerweed seen above.

COSCA analyst Anna Huber is overseeing the project and explains that after rangers mow the plot and remove the debris, she takes soil samples to be evaluated for their nutrient levels. Unfortunately, says Huber, the levels typically are no longer adequate to support native plant species but do support invasive non-native species, that is, weeds.

In addition to low nutrient levels, the soil often contains allelochemicals produced by the weeds. Allelochemicals are compounds that influence the growth of other plant species, often negatively. COSCA has found allelochemicals from the weeds are suppressing the ability of native plants such as needle grass, fiddleneck, lupines, and wild hyacinth to thrive.

Many weed seeds from past seasons are still present in the soil. To address this, rangers will use string trimmers (weed whackers) strategically to cut weeds before they can set seed. By removing weed thatch, applying fertilizer, and preventing the formation of seeds, Huber hopes to give native plants the opportunity to grow again. She will check nutrient levels again in September.

"The plots are a slow work in progress," Huber says. "Ideally, we'll see that the reduction of weed species and their allelochemicals will facilitate germination of native species whose seed has been lying dormant in the soil." **COSCA plans continued monitoring so that the potential of this restoration method can be evaluated for application to larger areas.**



Spotlight on...

Steve Bacharach (seen here at Bard Lake) has been the coordinator for the Conejo Open Space Challenge for the last 14 years. That's on top of serving as chairman of the Conejo Open Space Trail Action Committee (COSTAC) and being coordinator of the COSCA Trail Watch program. All that COSCA-related volunteer work comes on top of Steve's 29-year career as a

high school math teacher, the last 25 of which have been spent at Agoura High School. He has also taught geology at Moorpark College since 2019. Outside of his many hours devoted to volunteering for COSTAC, the Challenge and COSCA, he mountain bikes, swims, hikes, reads, watches soccer, and spends time with his family and friends.

What are your reasons for volunteering as event coordinator for the Challenge?

Former Thousand Oaks resident Dave Malwitz created it loosely based on the Strava-powered Santa Monica Mountains Trails Challenge created by Bryant Likes. Dave ran it the first year then moved to Carlsbad. I was asked to take over and I did.

And what does being coordinator mean?

I organize the selection of the 10 trails, the creation of the digital flier, the securing of sponsors and prizes, the advertising for the event, checking off trail completions by participants, managing the raffle event at the end. I get a lot of help!

Do you do the Challenge every year yourself?

I missed a few years when I was more focused on training for ultra-runs and I tended to just focus on trails by my house. Usually, I complete it all by the middle of March.

Have you hiked every COSCA Trail? Is there any “secret” or underused open space that you think people should know about?

Each time I think I might have, one of the ones we pick for the Challenge is new to me! But I’m certainly getting very close. I wouldn’t say there are specific “secret” spots; that would be different for everyone. However, for non-residents coming to Thousand Oaks to enjoy the open space, there’s so much more than Wildwood.

Why is open space important to you?

It’s where I try to feel disconnected from the things that aren’t important to me and connected to the things that are.

What’s your favorite Conejo open space?

Lang Ranch. I access it a half mile from my front door and it’s never crowded.

What would you say is the highlight of your time as the Challenge's event coordinator?

My favorite thing to hear at the raffle or see in an email is how the Challenge brings people together, such as a grandmother, mother, and daughter doing all the 10 trails. Afterward, they have enjoyed the shared experience so much that they email me to ask for lists of trails from past years so they can continue spending time together, doing something they love with people they love. To be a part of providing the opportunity is a privilege that I’m proud to be a part of.



Xan Ashton of Scout Troop 127 (Agoura) brought his Eagle Scout project to Wildwood Regional Park, where he and his team replaced and improved signage. Says COSCA Ranger Nick Ferrari, "Xan is a natural leader and a very strong communicator. We had a really good time." And, as a special bonus, Xan donated his leftover funds, \$1,452, to COSF! Thank you, Xan, for your gifts to the open space!

News In Brief

Congratulations to our Spring "Four Seasons" photo contest winner Marilyn Wells for her image of the challenge subject: Sunlight shining through trees. **For our Summer contest**, the challenge subject is **animal tracks in the Conejo open space**. Deadline for entry is August 31, 2026. [Please visit our website for details on how to enter.](#) The winner receives an earth-friendly COSF t-shirt and a gift card to a local business.

The **35th annual Trail Education Days ran April 20-23** and drew 1,000+ Conejo Valley United School District students to Wildwood Regional Park over the course of four days. Five students were selected as winners for their outstanding essays about the experience. They are:

Tamjid Ahmed (Westlake Hills)

Chelsea Feng and Avery McKay (Lang Ranch Elementary)
Isla Fox-Hudak and Chloe Imel (Wildwood Elementary)

Congratulations to the winners, their teachers, and families on this recognition! **The 2027 dates for Trail Education Days are April 19-22, so [please email us](#) if you'd like to volunteer!**

The monthly COSCA trailwork day is suspended until September, when the weather will be more conducive. To all you enthusiastic trail work volunteers, please enjoy your summer vacation. Special thanks to the 64 people who joined us March 21 on Spring Trail Work Day to improve the Whole Access and Los Robles Trails. See you in September!

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:

- **July 11, "South Central" Dos Vientos Lollipop.** Moderate 4.5-mile hike (3 hours) covering flatter sections of the Dos Vientos Open Space area including the Wendy, Ranch Overlook, Palomino, Lupine, and Grasshopper trails. *Free parking in the dirt lot at Wendy and Potrero Rds.*
- **August 8, Albertson Motorway, Alapay, Meadow Vista.** Moderate 4.5-mile loop via Albertson Motorway to Alapay and then Meadow Vista (2.5 hours). *Follow Lang Ranch Pkwy for about 1 mile to its eastern end. Trailhead is on right.*
- **September 12, Los Robles West to Angel Vista.** Moderate 6-mile out and back hike starting at Wendy and Potrero Rds. to Los Robles Tr. and then Angel Vista. (3.5 hours). *Free parking in the dirt lot at Wendy and Potrero Rds.*

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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