FROM THE DIRECTOR

Above: Executive Director Tom Maloney with Reba the guard dog. Reba watches over the goats day and night, keeping the coyotes and other predators at bay. She blends in well with her herd. Can you find Reba in the bottom right photo?

If you have recently driven down Santa Ana Road, you may have noticed a small herd of goats grazing the fields at OVLC’s Ventura River Steelhead Preserve. The goats are owned by Elysian Grazing and are volunteering here to help knock back the build-up of non-native thatch in the fields.

For generations the fields at the Ventura River Steelhead Preserve were heavily grazed by cattle that impacted the soil and led to an abundance of non-native weeds. Luckily, goats are opportunistic browsers, and are happy to munch away at just about anything—even the pokey plants like yellow star thistle! Despite the degraded condition of the fields, in just a couple of months the goats have brought some notable improvements. In pastures where the goats have gobbled up the thatch and spent their days munching, we have noticed a small herd of goats grazing the fields at OVLC’s Ventura River Steelhead Preserve. The goats are owned by Elysian Grazing and are volunteering here to help knock back the build-up of non-native thatch in the fields.

Native California grasslands support extraordinary plant biodiversity and thankfulness, those seeds can persist in the soil for decades. Unfortunately, the “golden hills of California” are now usually dominated by non-native Mediterranean grasses. We are optimistic that the removal of all that thatch through well-managed grazing will give some of the natives a chance to germinate. Also, as the threat of catastrophic wildfires continues to increase, communities throughout California are increasing the use of livestock to manage wildland fire fuel loads. With thoughtful management, livestock can help achieve multiple resource benefits for the land beyond just reducing the build-up of non-native vegetation.

The Ojai Fire Safe Council is promoting a community supported grazing program to enhance the creation of wildland buffers at a much greater scale. In addition to Elysian Grazing, another company has also recently opened its doors in Ojai—Shepherdess Land & Livestock. So, landowners in Ojai can now use adorable 4-legged, self-propelled mowers instead of two-stroke engines to reduce their wildland fuels!

WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS!

Bill Brothers
A retired business owner and former teacher with over 45 years dedicated to animal welfare advocacy, Bill studied International Development at Cornell University. He maintains a summer home and forest land in the Fingerlakes region of upstate New York. He put conservation and trail easements on land he owned in the Colorado Rockies and is a strong advocate for permanent preservation of land for climate protection and recreation. Bill is an active hiker and volunteer, helping to build and maintain our Ojai trail system.

Lu Setnicka
Lu Setnicka, a 30+ year resident of Ojai and the former Global Director of HR for Patagonia, runs her own human resources (HR) and organizational development consulting firm, Setnicka Consulting. In addition, Lu serves as adjunct faculty in the MBA programs at both CSUCI and Gonzaga University, and is an Executive/Leadership/Career Coach with FromWithIn Coaching. Lu is also currently on the Board of Directors of Johnny’s Selected Seeds and served 6 years on the Board of Directors for the outdoor industry’s Camber Outdoors. Before Patagonia, Lu spent fifteen years working for the National Park Service in parks throughout North America. Today, Lu focuses her time hiking many of OVLC’s trails, enjoying fly fishing trips in the Pacific Northwest, and spending time with her family.

Sarah Sheshunoff
Though originally from San Diego, Sarah lived in Alaska for twelve years before moving to Ojai. An attorney by training, Sarah has clerked for both the Superior and Appellate Courts of Alaska and has practiced criminal defense for seven years. She, her husband, and two boys moved to Ojai so they could be in a small mountainous town yet also be closer to family. Sarah has been involved in her children’s school, many local non-profits, and helped start and organize the Mountainfilm on Tour festival in Ojai as a fundraiser for OVLC. In her free time, she loves to hike, run, camp, and be outdoors as much as possible.

STAFF

Tom Maloney Executive Director
Tania Parker Deputy Director
Brendan Taylor Director of Field Programs
Dan Pizano Operations Director
Xena Grossman Development Associate
Nathan Wickstrom Communications and Outreach Manager
Catalyn Barrera Restoration Program Manager
Linda Wilkin Land Steward
Kevin McLeod Field Crew Supervisor
Mayra Diaz Restoration Specialist
Nicoles Kabey Restoration Specialist
Ron Singer Nursery Manager

Mission: OVLC protects and restores the open space, wildlife habitat, watersheds, and views of the Ojai Valley for current and future generations.

STAY CONNECTED WITH THE OVLC: OVLC.ORG
FIND US ON FACEBOOK & INSTAGRAM

OVLC: Ojai Valley Land Conservancy
Protecting your views, trails, water, and wildlife.

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IN MEMORIAL OF

Allan Jacobs from Ross & Patty Atkinson
Anne Fosty from Karen Back
Barbara G. Sunderland from Julie Lovejoy & Antoinette Pinna
Chris Hilgers from Nutmeg’s Ojai House
Cookie Miley Missing Cookie’s humor and comments. Thinking of you. Sending love from Kitty & Johnny Johnstun from Marit & Dan Reid Bill Miley Dan Miley Terry Trustt Bjornstedt
Douglas Theriault from Theriault & Ken Eros
Dr. Henry Stoutz from April Theriault & Ken Douglas Theriault
Terry Truitt Bjornstedt
Dan Miley from Kitty & Johnny

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

John G. Bee from Anthony Avildsen
from Sally Carless
Jim Cambianica from Karen Courington & Helayne’s legacy and love.
Helayne Codon White from Kristen & Gordon
Dr. Henry Stoutz from April Theriault & Ken Douglas Theriault
Terry Truitt Bjornstedt
Dan Miley
from Kitty & Johnny

IN HONOR OF

Allie Goldman from The Stanley and Joyce Black Family Foundation
Andrew Cornish from Shelley Cornish
Ashley Tyrell Happy Birthday Ashley! from Ashley Tyrell
Jonathan Turner Jen Lord
Garth Garrett Amanda Kelley
Bert Carter Happy Birthday! Happy Hiking! Love, David & Kit
from Alice Barnwell
Daren Magee aka Real Fun, Wow! “Life In Flight” continuing to keep our valley beautiful!
from BANDITS Bandanas
Fiona Hutton & Associates To assist funding the protection of Ojai Wildlife. from Ganghoo Clark
The Horn Family from Burgess Coker
Helan, Hope, Ella, Payton, Violet A Christmas donation has been made in your honor. from Cecile James
Janelle & Evan Sharp Merry Christmas to you both! from Leslie Burns
Karina Tienhaara from Lucy & Peter Read
Marnie In honor of you getting out! from Quinn Morgan
Nick & Jean Fleming from William Fleming
Rikki Horne Happy Pally Rikki! Hope the beautiful area of Ojai thrives for centuries to come! xoxo Leah Koch
Ronald & Helayne White from Helayne White Survivors Trust
Runners For Public Lands from Leigh Scarben
Samantha & Nathan Merry Christmas! Hope you both have an amazing holiday of doing nothing! from Kathryn Duncan
Scott Nelson Happy Birthday Scott from Matt & Kristan
Sonni Sharp We love you already! May you grow up with plenty of gorgeous open spaces to explore and love and lots of nature bringing you so much joy and wonder! from Kristal Burdon
Steve Weed Happy Birthday Steve! from Pamela Landau
Tania Parker from Britanny Sanders & Robert Poldor

100 HOUR MILESTONE VOLUNTEERS

Bill Brothers Elizabeth Watson Lynette Cervantes Mark Silbernagel Pat Dexter Phillip Bradley
*Volunteer hours since 10/1/2018

If you have ever wanted to go for a relatively short, but intense hike or bike with stellar views right in Ojai, you’ve probably gone on the Luci’s Foothill–Fox Canyon Trail loop on Valley View Preserve. This local adventure can get your heart racing as you climb up 600-feet of elevation on the 2.5–mile loop. You are rewarded with unobstructed views of the valley, and for the eagle-eyed among us, you can spot the post office tower down Signal Street. Many locals can access this loop easily, often by walking from town, and that accessibility is one of the best features about this loop. Unfortunately, it is also leaving Luci’s Trail hammered.

Lately, the iconic switchbacks on the hillside with the water tank are being short-cut and a new trail is forming, following the ridge Luci’s Trail meanders up. These shortcuts erode the steep hillside, make the actual trail less enjoyable, prevent the growth of native plants, and are a general maintenance headache.

Before the 2017 Thomas Fire scorched the hillside on Valley View Preserve, short-cutting Luci’s Trail wasn’t really feasible; chaparral vegetation alongside the switchbacks served as a natural barrier to keep people on the trail. At first, maintaining the actual trail and encouraging trail users back onto the trail was onerous but manageable. However, going from one crisis to another has exacerbated the problem.

With Covid-19, more people hit the trails—especially easily accessible ones—and those added rubber soles and tire treads act like water and erode the trail further. Not only do we have more people on Luci’s Trail, but they are (very understandably) stepping off of the actual trail tread to keep distance from other trail users.

The time has come to stop the erosion, protect the trail, and heal the hillside. We have started to work with a small number of volunteers who hike and bike this trail, to address the problems. We are focusing on the hillside with the water tank, just off of Shelf Road.

Before and after footage of the recent work done on Luci’s Trail. Photos by Brady Vondraska.

FROM THE FIELD
Road the rest of the trail will remain unchanged. It’s going to be a process to repair what’s taken three years to degrade, but the very first step happened this February when local Eagle Scout Troop 504 closed and repaired the shortcuts. Using native material, the shortcuts were disguised and replanted. Next, we will reroute sections of the trail which have been damaged due to drainage issues on a narrow ridge. Not only will the trail be rerouted to protect degraded land, but the damaged areas will be replanted and given time to breathe and regrow.

So, keep an eye out this year for activity on the hillside, and when it’s safe for groups to gather, we hope you’ll join us in our trail work efforts because we love to have volunteers help! When it’s all said and done we’re confident you’ll love the new route because it will be more sustainable, less hard on the land, and still get your heart rate up!

Local Eagle Scout Troop 504, led by Brady Vandrinka, was joined by family, friends, and the community to repair shortcuts on the iconic Luci’s Trail switchbacks.

VOLUNTEER PROFILE

Next time you are out on the Ojai Meadows Preserve, you might see Betsy Watson armed with a bag and her PikStik. Back in April, Betsy noticed that a lot more people were coming to the preserve for a beautiful respite from lockdown, and with them, the amount of litter was increasing. She took it upon herself to “leave it better than she found it” and now always brings a PikStik, aka trash grabber, when she visits the preserve. The Ojai Meadows Preserve is a lot cleaner because of her and her positive influence. A few people have told her they are going to start picking up trash too, and many people often stop to thank her. The objects she finds most frequently are: masks, cups, straw wrappers, wipes, bottle caps, cigarette butts, and bags of dog waste. The most unusual item? An expired passport! What will you find?

Thank you, Renee Mandala, for letting us know about all the wonderful work that Betsy has been doing. If you know someone who’s volunteering to keep the preserves safer for everyone, please share their story with us: info@ovlc.org.

NOTICE: RICE CANYON GATES

The cows are coming! Starting in early March, cattle will be grazing on the US Forest Service land in Rice Canyon, and the bovines wanted us to remind everyone to please close the Rice Canyon Trail gates when you go through them—even if the gate is open when you get to it. Keeping the gates closed helps keep the cattle off of the preserve and near their “Cows Only” water tank. Thank you!

If you see suspicious activity at one of our preserves, please call the police or report it to: OVLC Land Steward, Linda Wilkin: (805) 212-0445

RESTORATION

OJAI MEADOWS PRESERVE BURN AREAS

The Ventura County Fire Department believes that each of these fires was intentionally started, and is investigating further. Hidden game cameras, which normally provide insight into the wildlife occupying the preserve (like the deer photo above), have unfortunately not helped us identify the arsonist(s).

The Ventura County Resource Conservation District (VCRCD) awarded OVLC a grant to purchase plants, seeds, and mulch to assist in the recovery of the burn scars. Volunteers and staff spread native seed consisting of annual forbs and bunchgrasses and replanted a variety of shrubs in the burned areas. A total of one acre was restored at three separate locations. OVLC is grateful for the financial assistance received from the VCRCD and for the volunteers who came out to help restore the burn areas.

While the intensity and consequences of these fires were minimal, the flames could have done a lot more damage considering how close the burn areas are to the eucalyptus grove and nearby neighborhoods.

If you see suspicious activity at one of our preserves, please call the police or report it to: OVLC Land Steward, Linda Wilkin: (805) 212-0445

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 2-11: Native Plant Sale
June 5-6: Rattlesnake Avoidance Training for Dogs
July: RunNation
WESTERN BLUEBIRD:

Have you noticed all of the beautiful bluebirds flying around the Ojai Meadows Preserve? The Western Bluebird (Sialia mexicana) is one of our local residents that we are lucky to have year-round here in Ojai. This stunning bird can typically be seen perching on top of shrubs, power lines and fence wires throughout the Ojai Meadows Preserve, and flying down to snag insects from the grass. This species of bird also exhibits what scientists call sexual dimorphism, which simply means that male individuals look different than females. Males present with bright blue feathers and a striking rusty chest while females are much duller and grayish. See if you can spot these differences the next time you hit the trails!

JOIN OUR NEW ADOPTER PROGRAM!

Much like the broader society, our volunteer program has been stop-and-go since the pandemic began. For most of last spring and summer, we did not have volunteer crews working on trails. We had a small window in the fall when we were able to host volunteer events, but then a new Covid-19 surge shut us down again prior to the holidays. Here we sit, in February, with our volunteer programs mainly all on hold.

The inability to host volunteer groups hampered our larger volunteer projects like building the Allan Jacobs Trail Bridge, but we did have some help. In the spring, when the trails were getting overgrown, as they normally do following the rainy season, we equipped some of our more experienced individual volunteers with supplies to stay on top of trail clearance. These volunteers were critical in maintaining a baseline level of care for our highly popular trail system and they confirmed something we at the OVLC have been considering for a while: we need a Volunteer Adopter Program.

We’re very excited to announce that with funding from the Ojai Women’s Fund we are starting our Volunteer Adopter Program. This will help us maintain our 27 miles of trails and our oak woodland restoration sites. Individuals will be able to take on responsibility for a section of trail on our various preserves (Trail Adopters) or several oak restoration circles on the Ventura River Preserve (Restoration Adopters).

Anyone who is interested in volunteering can join and we’ll provide the training and tools that are required to be a Volunteer Adopter. Using the Ojai Women’s Fund grant, we have purchased tools that can easily be borrowed, plus, volunteers will have access to an instructional handbook and videos (and post-pandemic, in-person training), and you will be able to volunteer on the schedule that works best for you. Trail Adopters will help brush the trail and keep the corridor open, while also maintaining drains and trail signs, and act as eyes-on-the-ground to help OVLC staff identify larger problems and prioritize needed trail work. Restoration Adopters will tend oak circles by weeding invasive plants and monitoring the growth of the oaks to help our Field Crew stay on top of this vast on-going project.

The OVLC has always been sustained by our volunteers, both in the field and in the office. Without volunteers, our ability to build and maintain our trails, or even get out this newsletter you’re reading, would not be possible. That’s why we love our volunteers, and it’s also why we are constantly thinking of new opportunities to allow more people to be engaged in caring for our community’s natural areas. Providing more engagement opportunities was why we first thought of creating this Volunteer Adopter Program, but when the pandemic hit, it crystalized the need for a more flexible volunteer program that allows for more autonomy and independence on the part of volunteers. Plus, with all of the added use of the preserves during the pandemic, the need for trail maintenance is paramount. This Volunteer Adopter Program will be crucial in helping to achieve our stewardship goals through the rest of this pandemic and beyond.

IT’S UNBELEAFABLE!

The Ojai fritillary (Fritillaria ojaiensis) can be found along the Central Coast of California, in counties such as Ventura, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Monterey. However, despite its wide range, it is an incredibly rare plant. This perennial herb grows well on rocky slopes and river basins in partial shade so you might be able to find it under some large shrubs or trees! It grows from a bulb underground, and the first thing to grow out of the bulb is a flat, green leaf. From there a tall and erect stem grows (it can grow up to two feet) and little cup-shaped flowers start to develop. The flowers contain six petals and are greenish-yellow to purple with purple spotting. Unfortunately, because of road maintenance and recreational activities this plant is considered threatened and very uncommon. So, if you are lucky and happen to find one of these on your next hiking adventures please don’t pick them. Take pictures and admire the beauty and charm of the rare Ojai fritillary!
Protecting your views, trails, water, and wildlife. The Ojai Valley Land Conservancy

By making the OVLC a beneficiary of your will, trust, retirement plan, life insurance policy, or financial accounts, is a simple way to support the OVLC in the future while retaining control.

Just by including the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy in your estate plans, you ensure your values will be passed on after you. The real beneficiary, of course, is Ojai.

The Ojai Valley Land Conservancy

A bequest

is a simple way to support the OVLC in the future while retaining control of your assets during your lifetime. By making the OVLC a beneficiary of your will, trust, retirement plan, life insurance policy, or financial accounts, you ensure your values will be passed on after you.

The real beneficiary, of course, is Ojai.

WELCOME NEW DONORS!

Alessia Gooden       Daniella Noble & Matthew Myerhoff
Alessia Medley -      Kate Wilson
Chubby Squirrel Bake  Karl Laughman
c Co.
Amanda Clark         Kelly Hefner
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Anne Landfield       Lynn Duenas
Ashley Ferrie        Maher Zaidi
Audrey Bueno         Malinda Keever
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Charitable Fund      Nathaniel Cox
Chuck Manzel         Neil & Gina Lekage
Claudia Kopkowski    Nicole Kaeby
Cody & Reid Carolin  Pamela & Richard
Couch Guitarstraps   Smith

WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST WILD ABOUT OJAI PARTNER!

As a Wild about Ojai Partner, Holly Woolson, owner of Tire Swing Studio, is donating 1% of her sales to the OVLC to support the health and well-being of our community through the preservation of our wildlands for generations to come.

TIRE SWING STUDIO

Wandering Ojai, Poetry & Photographs, is Holly’s first collection of poetry. The local author, artist, and educator provides a glimpse into Ojai, a place that has inspired travelers and spiritual seekers for generations. With poems in the simple Japanese tanka form alongside beautiful photographs, the collection captures the sensual experience of walking through the streets and surrounding hills of our iconic Southern California town.

Visit OVLC’s online store to purchase a copy today!

COMPANY GIFT MATCHES

- Wild About Ojai

Thank you for increasing your impact!

From: 10/30/20-2/22/21

Adobe Inc.
Autodesk Foundation
Boston Scientific
Chevron Humankind
Microsoft
Microsoft
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Patagonia

Thank you for increasing your impact!
More than just your pretty views...

From almost anywhere in Ojai, you can look out at the undeveloped hillsides and know you are home. In addition to conserving Ojai’s scenic backdrop, the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy’s protection and restoration of land has a myriad of benefits that go beyond beauty. The diverse and rich habitats that thrive in these open spaces provide essential ecosystem services that increase our resilience to a changing climate.

Donate to the OVLC today to protect the land we love and create a more resilient Ojai.

OVLC.ORG/DONATE