A DOG’S LIFE

Canines and their best friends romp in our Regional Parks

IN THIS ISSUE: HELP MOTHER NATURE P. 3 | RIDE THE RAILS P. 4 | VIEW WILDLIFE CLOSE UP P. 18

INSIDE:
EBRPD COPES WITH CLIMATE CHANGE
What’s New at the Foundation?

Celebrating our successes, setting even higher goals

Thanks to the generous support of Donors, Members and volunteers, 2015 marked the fifth year of consecutive growth for the Regional Parks Foundation, and together we raised $1,706,763—30 percent over goal!

The Foundation is proud of its growth and recognizes our potential to have an even bigger role in raising funds for the Park District through its core priorities of youth development, environmental stewardship, community engagement, health, wellness, safety and universal access. The goal for 2016 is to raise $1,550,000, but we hope to hit at least $1.8 million.

“We know true growth happens not only through the generosity of the community, but through listening to feedback from Donors and Members to see how we can improve, how we can make it easier, how we can be more effective. 2015 was our year of continuous improvement—starting with the first-ever Member survey,” says Carol Johnson, RPF executive director.

More than 1,300 Members participated in an electronic survey to give feedback on the membership program. As a result, efforts are now underway to streamline the membership options and make them easier to purchase in parks and through select third-party retailers. In addition, we’ve planned special Member events, such as a preview hike of Vargas Plateau.

In other news, the Foundation has realized its vacant position, upgraded its staff expertise with the additions of a membership officer and development director, and has recruited several distinguished board members to expand our reach in the community. “Building community partnerships is key to our future growth,” says Johnson, “and we are thrilled to have expanded the board with such highly skilled Members.”

GET INVOLVED!
Want to help Mother Nature?

Environmental stewardship is a core initiative of the Regional Parks Foundation. The Foundation provides funding and volunteers for habitat preservation and restoration, as well as conservation projects to reduce water consumption and promote clean energy and “leave no trace” practices. Last year, more than 18,700 volunteers contributed 151,084 hours of service to the Park District to help with a variety of activities from habitat protection with wildlife biologist Dave “Doc Quack” Riensche, to Earth Day events, to Coastal Cleanup days.

By volunteering with the Park District, you can make a big impact on your community with a small amount of effort. Volunteering can also be a lot of fun!

Corporate employee volunteerism is also encouraged. Contact Raj Hajela at 510-544-2218 for more information about corporate volunteering.
TRAILHEAD

On this page: The Ardenwood Historic Farm boasts a collection of 17 historic wooden cars and operates trains for public rides on 1.5 miles of track.

2016  Summer  2016

Society for the Preservation of Carter Railroad Resources

The mission of the train club at Ardenwood Historic Farm in Fremont is specific: Its 200 or so members are dedicated to preserving the railroad equipment of the Carter Brothers shop in nearby Newark, which supplied the Southern Pacific Coast Railroad. In the 1880s, that narrow-gauge line ran through Alameda and Santa Clara counties before climbing the mountains to Santa Cruz.

The group operates the Railroad Museum, works on restoring its collection of 17 historic wooden cars, and operates trains for public rides on 1.5 miles of track through farm fields and eucalyptus groves. Until last year, draft horses pulled the train cars, but a shortage of horse ranches in the area has led to using diesel and steam engines. For special events, club members don period costumes and tell stories of the railroad days. Club President John Stutz especially enjoys the connection the train has made with the community. He says, “There are people bringing children who came as children themselves.”

Operates Thursdays, Fridays and Sundays from April to November; train rides included with paid admission to the farm; www.spcrr.org.

Golden Gate Live Steamers

From the Redwood Valley Railway in Tilden Park, you can spot smaller trains and tracks down the hill. These belong to the Golden Gate Live Steamers, a group of about 250 train enthusiasts dedicated to keeping steam alive, which began in Victor Shattock’s Fruitvale basement in 1936. Members use the facility to work on their own locomotives as well as to maintain a public train.

The public train is a narrow-gauge locomotive at 2.5-scale, and its passenger cars are outfitted with wheels made to handle the disproportionate weight. Guests ride single-file as the train chugs slowly through the redwoods, as well as its own miniature cities with casinos, saloons and water towers. Enthusiastic young riders ask many questions about how things work, says group secretary Christopher Smith. “It’s awesome to see kids think like that—in an age of technology.”

Operates Sundays year-round, weather permitting; donations requested; www.goldengatels.org.

Golden State Model Railroad Museum

Visitors can listen to the Southern Pacific train whistle blow as it rounds a grassy curve or watch a mini Union Pacific cruise through the Livermore station as it traverses the 10,000-square-foot museum located across from the park entrance of Miller/Knox Regional Shoreline in Richmond. The exquisitely detailed model train layouts—in three different scales—feature settings and stations from Northern and Central California rumbling over visitors’ heads and alongside. Golden State runs freight and passenger trains from the steam-engine era up to modern diesels. The displays are built and operated by the East Bay Model Engineers Society, which was founded in 1933 and is one of the oldest model clubs in the country.

Operates Sundays with trains running from April to December; $3 per person, ages 2 and up; www.gsmrm.org.

HIDDEN TREASURES

All Aboard!

Journey back in time on EBRPD’s historic trains—all operated by independent groups

Become a Regional Parks Foundation member and enjoy free admission on non-event days. Go to www.RegionalParksFoundation.org for info.

Train lovers of all ages enjoy the intricate track layouts at Golden State Model Railroad Museum.

Redwood Valley Railway

As steam engines began disappearing in the late 1940s—replaced by the faster and cheaper diesel models—Western Pacific Railroad mechanical engineer and track inspector Erich Thomsen decided to practice the same as a hobby, creating a miniature railroad on his parents’ Mountain View farm. At that time, Tilden Regional Park was being developed in Berkeley, and Thomsen’s train was recruited as an attraction. It started running in 1952.

Ellen Thomsen, Erich’s daughter, now oversees the Redwood Valley Railway, which was moved and expanded in 1971. It runs 1.25 miles through dense redwoods. Sitting two by two in tiny open-air and covered cars, families delight in traversing two trestles, going through a tunnel and waving to people waiting in line, before the train makes its last loop on the 12-minute ride.

Operates weekends year-round and weekdays during summer months; $3 per person, ages 2 and up; www.redwoodvalleyrailway.com.

The locomotive on the Golden Gate Live Steamers’ public train was built at 2.5-scale.
Warmer weather. Drier air. Drought. Heavy storms. A rising sea level and changing shoreline. The effects of climate change are evident throughout California, including in EBRPD. “We get reports from our park supervisors about increased flooding when it rains,” says Brian Holt, principal planner, Advanced Planning. “The drought is attributable to climate change, and we’ve seen impacts with toxic algae blooms, loss of tree species and lower ponds.”

So strategies—from habitat protection to greenhouse gas reduction—are being enacted. “Climate change has affected every aspect of the Park District’s operations,” Holt says. “For example—the Breuner Marsh restoration [recently renamed Dotson Family Marsh] comprising 60 acres of habitat restoration included sea level rise projections in its design and planning.”

EBRPD works with government agencies, nonprofits, consultants and the public to help the parks thrive, taking steps to help slow climate change, such as reducing its carbon footprint. As Holt says, “We’re partnering with different entities in the region to see how we can work together.”

Winter rains are helping to restore Park District grasses and ponds. But even a robust El Niño in 2016 isn’t likely to erase the effects of California’s current drought, according to the Association of California Water Agencies.

The Park District’s multipronged efforts aim to protect shoreline communities and lakes while helping plants and wildlife thrive.

Is El Niño enough?

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Good Algae Gone Bad

One unfortunate result of climate change is toxic blue-green algae, first spotted in the Park District in 2014. Scientists aren’t sure what exactly causes algae to become toxic, but it’s believed to be linked to warmer temperatures, low water levels and an abundance of nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen.

Toxic blue-green algae has surfaced in lakes and rivers throughout the United States, including the Great Lakes, Ohio River and Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. In the East Bay Regional Park District, toxic algae has appeared at Lakes Chabot, Temescal, Anza, and Del Valle and Quarry Lakes. In some cases, the Park District treats the algae with an environmentally safe algaecide and in other cases lets the algae run its course naturally.

“Public health and safety is our top priority,” said Hal MacLean, the District’s water management supervisor. “We monitor our lakes very closely, and our decisions are based on protecting the public—as well as pets and wildlife—as best we can.”

Toxic algae can be harmful to humans and animals, in some cases leading to rashes and gastrointestinal disorders, but it can be fatal to dogs. The Park District has installed signs at impacted lakes throughout the District warning pet owners to keep their dogs out of the water. The Park District regularly monitors the waters, closing lakes when necessary, and shares its data with regulatory agencies. The hope is that by working together, scientists can discover what’s causing the algae to turn toxic, how best to treat affected waterways and how to prevent future blooms.

The Oakland-Berkeley hills’ dry, windy climate and hilly geography have made them prone to wildfires throughout history, and with climate change prompting drought, the area has grown only more vulnerable.

To reduce wildfire risk, the Park District is carefully removing eucalyptus trees, which are non-native and especially dangerous in fires.

“Eucalyptus grow densely, producing lots of fuel for fires, so we want to thin that out,” explains Dan McCormick, fire chief at the Park District. Dead eucalyptus trees and limbs, for example, added significant dry fuel for the 1991 Oakland hills fire.

Diseased and dying trees, as well as saplings, are the District’s top priority for removal.

The effort is part of the Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Resource Management Plan, adopted by the Park District’s board in 2010. It identifies over 100 treatment areas—mostly small, forested plots within parklands—as fire hazards, based on specific criteria.

“Each treatment area gets a customized prescription,” says Jessica Sheppard, resource analyst in the stewardship division. “We’ve come at them creatively. In areas where we haven’t wanted to use heavy equipment, we’ve used pack mules. On one steep hillside with a nice native habitat, our contractor used a crane to raise downed trees up to the roadway. In another area, we used a helicopter to lift them so they wouldn’t be dragged along the ground.”

The Park District solicited extensive public feedback while developing the program, and environmental surveys are posted online.

With the eucalyptus thinned, native grasses, shrubs and oaks are expected to return, and forests should become more biologically diverse and healthier. They’ll also be safer, as native woodlands and grasslands do not pose the wildfire risk of a dense, towering eucalyptus forest.

This fire prevention program is not without controversy, with special interest groups taking opposing sides: Some want all the eucalyptus removed while others hope to preserve the trees.

“Regardless of your position on the eucalyptus, this plan will make the East Bay hills safer, healthier for wildlife and more aesthetically pleasing for park visitors,” McCormick says.

STAYING SAFE

To stay safe in the water, follow these tips:

- Wash off before and after swimming in natural waters.
- Avoid swimming in waters that have foam, scum or algae mats.
- If you swallow water near an algae bloom and experience stomach cramps, vomiting, diarrhea and fever, contact your physician. If your pet was exposed, contact your vet.
- At home, use phosphorus-free household cleaning products. Phosphorus in the environment is a nutrient for algae.

“The Park District is adding fuel breaks—gaps between eucalyptus trees—to limit the intensity of any wildfires that might occur.”

—DAN MCCORMICK
FIRE CHIEF AT THE PARK DISTRICT

Staying a Step Ahead of Wildfires

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Even the hardest plants have a tough time during extreme dry spells. “Some of our known drought-resistant species like oaks are starting to dry out and die, and they shouldn’t because they’re not at their natural life span,” says Dania Stoneham, park unit manager. “That’s an eye-opener.”

So in the fall of 2014, the Park District created a drought committee to reduce its water usage. “We’re trying to use plant species that are more drought-tolerant,” Stoneham says. “The benefits of native plants is that they’re born to grow in this environment, so they shouldn’t need supplemental watering.”

The committee is also making irrigation systems more efficient. “We made a spreadsheet of different irrigation systems that needed to be modified, and we’re looking at ways to reduce our lawn footprint,” says Stoneham. The project is in its early stages, but the Park District has already reduced its water usage by 34 percent and replaced lawns with drought-tolerant plants across the District.

A Smarter Shade of Green

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Tips for Local Gardeners—including you!

While the Park District does its part to plant more native, drought-resistant vegetation, you can do the same in your own yard and garden. The East Bay has various microclimates, so it’s important to know which plants thrive where you live.

Natural redwood forest habitats are characterized by fog and moisture. “Much of the moisture uptake to the plants is accomplished through the leaves, not through the roots,” explains Bart O’Brien, botanic garden manager at the Park District. “Some principal plants are the western sword fern [Polystichum munitum], thimbleberry [Rubus parviflorus] and the inside-out flower [Vancouveria].”

On the north side of the local slopes are chaparral and scrub environments, with shallow soil and full sun. “The plants often have small, fragrant leaves, like manzanitas and coastal sagebrush,” O’Brien says. “There are also California wild lilacs.”

In grassland environments—with heavier soils, often in full sun—native bunch grasses and other California native grasses thrive, as do many showy wildflowers like California poppies and Calochortus or mariposa lilies.

So when planting, remember that native varieties are a great choice: “They’re adapted to the local climate,” O’Brien says. “Also, they’re beautiful plants.”

Going Off the Grid

Soon, nearly every energy user in the Park District—from administrative offices, to visitor centers, to water-pumping facilities for lagoons and pools—will be powered by the sun.

One of the District’s key sustainability goals is offsetting traditional electricity usage with alternative energy, and solar power is ideal. “The sun shines and the electricity flows,” says Jeff Rasmussen, assistant finance officer at the Park District. “There are no moving parts, and it’s a relatively proven technology.”

But before going solar, the District identified opportunities for reducing its energy usage. “Energy-efficiency programs have about a three- to seven-year return on investment, whereas for solar, the return on investment takes 10 to 15 years,” Rasmussen explains. “We didn’t need to build solar panels in all parks. So we hired a consultant, and they did an assessment of about 800 energy-efficiency projects to do districtwide.”

That done, a 1.2-megawatt solar project is being designed for Shadow Cliffs that will offset electricity use throughout the entire Park District. To avoid disrupting natural parkland, the solar panels will all be built on three carport structures. In addition, the project includes three plug-in stations for electric vehicles, to further encourage alternative energy use.

The payoff for these efforts will be significant. Says Rasmussen: “We’re going to offset about 96 percent of our electricity bill for the entire parks system.”

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Four-legged fun is easy to come by in East Bay Regional Parks

It’s the weekend at Point Isabel Regional Shoreline, and dogs of every stripe—and spot—frolick in the sunshine. One handsome four-legged fellow even sports a camera mounted on a harness, recording his afternoon visit for posterity. It’s no surprise that people and their pups flock to this scenic waterfront park. After all, where else can your dog socialize with scores of other canines, take a dip in the bay and even get a bath when the fun is over?

On these pages: Exploring the wonders of Point Isabel, from paw to paw

AMBASSADOR BIGGES

Every dog who visits our parks is special, but none are quite like Bigges (above). Bigges—who earned his name by being the largest in his litter—retrieves plastic bottles and other trash off the trails and brings them to his human companion for recycling. “He’s a remarkable dog,” says Bigges’ owner, Diane Petersen of Hayward. “But he doesn’t just pick up garbage. He’s great with kids, dogs and other park visitors. He’s just a great ambassador on the trails.”

Petersen trained Bigges to chew on plastic bottles when he was a puppy as a way to discourage him from chewing shoes and furniture. One day when they were hiking at Mission Peak Regional Preserve, Bigges spontaneously collected a few plastic bottles, and a tradition was born. Now he collects trash every time he goes for a walk.

The Park District Board honored Bigges with a proclamation in March, with Board President Doug Siden saying Bigges was a great example of environmental responsibility. So if you see Bigges on the trail, give him a pat and help him pick up trash!
meeting with the Park District to convert Point Isabel to an off-leash dog park.” PIDO evolved out of that early advocacy group and now boasts more than 5,000 members.

“The rangers are very supportive,” says John Gross, PIDO vice chairperson. “They empty the garbage cans, clean the bathrooms and do minor repairs.” The rangers have also stopped using herbicides at the request of park users. Instead, volunteers get together for monthly weed pulls, says Gross, ridding the park of foxtails and other noxious plants. PIDO organizes monthly cleanups, too.

In addition to the work parties, PIDO holds three special events each year. May is the Dunk-a-Dog Derby at the skate park. A few days later, the Madison Avenue Doggie 5K Run/Walk takes place. The group’s signature event is Barktoberfest, a month-long celebration of dogs and their human companions. “November is the perfect month,” says Gross. “The weather is still nice and we have a lot of Halloween excitement.”

Located at the western end of Central Avenue in Richmond, Point Isabel gets more than a million visitors a year, says Scott Possin, regional supervisor of Miller Knox Regional Shoreline. And that’s counting just the humans. The rules allow folks to bring up to three dogs at a time. (Professional dog walkers can bring up to six, but they need to get a permit from the Park District.) Still, there’s plenty of room for everyone. The 43-acre park has miles of paved walking paths; access to the water; and large, grassy swaths. Dogs can romp off leash in all but a protected marsh area as long as they’re under voice control of their person. A few other rules: no harassing of birds at any time, leashes required in the parking lot and no aggressive dogs. Picking up doggie waste is a must, too.

Despite the profusion of pups, the atmosphere is decidedly laid-back. “It’s amazing how many dogs are here—big and small—and yet there are so few problems,” observes Jerry Yukic, a longtime member of Point Isabel Dog Owners & Friends (PIDO) who brings her companion, Ducty, to the park every day.

Besides exercising their pets, owners enjoy Point Isabel for the camaraderie. “The social aspect is as important as the dog walking,” says Yukic. Park regulars have formed strong bonds, and there’s always the opportunity to meet new kindred spirits on the trails. “It’s amazing how many dogs are here—big and small—and yet there are so few problems,” observes Jerry Yukic, a longtime member of Point Isabel Dog Owners & Friends (PIDO) who brings her companion, Ducty, to the park every day.

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Enjoying a cold, locally brewed craft beer and exploring the great outdoors have to rank pretty high up on a list of top summer activities for East Bay denizens. Which is why a collaboration between Drake’s Brewing Company and East Bay Regional Park District makes perfect sense, says Amanda Cowles, Drake’s events outreach coordinator. The popular San Leandro brewery has always been active in supporting charitable causes but was looking to step up its philanthropic efforts in the form of a special summer release beer, with a percentage of the proceeds donated to a local nonprofit. The only question: Which nonprofit would that be?

“We’re a superactive bunch at Drake’s—we love going to the parks. We’re very environmentally conscious at the brewery and do our best to conserve resources and manage our waste appropriately,” Cowles says. “So as far as aligning with the core values of who we are and what we like to do and support, we knew that we loved recreation and what we loved parks—that was something we could all rally around. And that led us to the East Bay Regional Park District.”

The brewery then reached out to the Regional Parks Foundation, and the rest is hoppy history. This summer will see the inaugural release of Drake’s Kick Back IPA. Proceeds from every bottle popped and draft poured of this juicy, light-bodied and refreshing beer will help support trail restoration projects at East Bay Regional Parks.

The plan is to throw a release party at Drake’s monthly First Friday event in June or in San Leandro, as well as hold a second event, likely a group trail cleanup followed by a barbecue, toward the end of the IPA’s release run in September. While a final tally is still very much unknown, the two organizations hope to raise $10,000 by the form of a special summer release beer, with a percentage of the proceeds donated to a local nonprofit. The only question: Which nonprofit would that be?

For many, estate planning is a daunting task that is preferably avoided. But the Regional Parks Foundation can help. We offer free estate planning seminars, and many park visitors and Regional Parks Foundation supporters have chosen to remember the Foundation in their bequests. It’s a chance to leave a legacy to be remembered and to make a difference to a cause that matters most to you.

Each year, the Foundation receives many bequests to support the East Bay Regional Parks. The range and types of gifts are as varied as the park members who leave them. They include cash, stocks, real estate, IRAs, charitable trusts and more, all supporting important work to preserve open space, maintain trails, and keep the parks beautiful and accessible for future generations.

Dr. Norma Solarz is a longtime Oakland resident, recently retired from her 30-plus-year career as a dentist, providing care for underserved members of the community at La Clinica de la Raza, a community health clinic.

“Oakland is an urban city, with real urban problems, and the parks offer a close place to get away for a little while,” she says. “The parks have been a real gift in my life. I have gone when I’m happy, when I’m sad, when I’m not well and when I need to heal. I’m very fortunate to have access to these special places, and my legacy gift is my chance to give back and make sure others have the access I have had.” Solarz is incredibly grateful that those who came before her had the foresight to set money aside to protect open space and develop parklands. Now it’s her turn to continue that legacy, she says.

“I would have been happy if my gift was anonymous,” she says, “but if sharing my story inspires others or helps people learn ways they can have a lasting impact on the parks, I’m all for it.”

For more information on how you can make a legacy gift or attend a free estate planning seminar, visit www.regionalparksfoundation.org/planlegacgy or call 510-544-2212.
WHAT'S UP

Cajun/Zydeco Festival
If it’s August, then it’s time for the Cajun/Zydeco Festival, bringing the best of Louisiana sounds (and flavors) to Ardenwood Historic Farm in Fremont. This year’s event will be held Saturday, Aug. 13, from 10 a.m.–7 p.m. Drake’s beer sales at Lake Chabot fest and Concerts at the Cove (see below) will also benefit RPF. www.RegionalParksFoundation.org/skipback

Lake Chabot 50th Anniversary Celebration Festival and Fishing Derby Kick-Off
This day of family fun includes a marina fishing derby with prizes (starting at 7 a.m.); paddled boat races, fishing clinics and kids’ fishing area; lake tours; nature hikes; entertainment; barbecue and more. Saturday June 4, 9 a.m.–3 p.m., Lake Chabot Regional Park in Castro Valley. Free.

Concerts at the Cove
Enjoy the sounds of summer as the annual concert series returns to Crab Cove at Crown Memorial Beach, Alameda. Bring a picnic dinner, or purchase treats from vendors on-site at the free, family friendly event. Check the website at www.ebparks.org for this year’s lineup. Fridays, June 10, July 8 and Aug. 12; concert 5:30–7:30 p.m., preceded by a family activity at 4:30 p.m.

Independence Day
Brush up on your seed-spitting and pie-eating skills, and you just might go home with a coveted blue ribbon from the old-fashioned Independence Day celebration at Ardenwood Historic Farm in Fremont. Celebrate America’s 240th birthday with live music, games and contests all day July 4, 10 a.m.–4 p.m. $10/adults, $8/seniors, $5 children (ages 4–17); under age 4, free.

CANDID CAMERA
We’re able to capture some amazing creatures on film through the use of remote cameras and the quick-witted camera work of EBRPD staff members and the public who happen upon wildlife in the field.

SNAPS
With its 120,000 acres of open space, the Park District provides habitat to thousands of wild animals, from the tiny, endangered salt marsh harvest mouse to the largest mountain lion.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR
Bring family and friends to those highlighted EBRPD programs and activities—perfect for nature- and fun-lovers of all ages. To view complete listings of EBRPD events, visit www.ebparks.org/activities.

SPECIAL EVENTS
Enjoy Drake’s, Help the Parks
Sales from Drake’s special summer release beer will benefit the Regional Parks Foundation. Inaugural release party is at Drake’s Brewery, 1933 Davis St., San Leandro. June 3, 4–8 p.m. Drake’s beer sales at Lake Chabot fest and Concerts at the Cove (see below) will also benefit RPF. www.RegionalParksFoundation.org/skipback

Lake Chabot 50th Anniversary Celebration Festival and Fishing Derby Kick-Off
This day of family fun includes a marina fishing derby with prizes (starting at 7 a.m.); paddled boat races, fishing clinics and kids’ fishing area; lake tours; nature hikes; entertainment; barbecue and more. Saturday June 4, 9 a.m.–3 p.m., Lake Chabot Regional Park in Castro Valley. Free.

Concerts at the Cove
Enjoy the sounds of summer as the annual concert series returns to Crab Cove at Crown Memorial Beach, Alameda. Bring a picnic dinner, or purchase treats from vendors on-site at the free, family-friendly event. Check the website at www.ebparks.org for this year’s lineup. Fridays, June 10, July 8 and Aug. 12; concert 5:30–7:30 p.m., preceded by a family activity at 4:30 p.m.

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Leave a legacy with a gift that will preserve your regional parks and protect open space for future generations!

Call 510-544-2212 to learn more, and sign up to attend one of our free estate planning seminars.

www.regionalparksfoundation.org/plannedgiving