

TPA *Journal*
Journal of the Torrey Pines Association

Fall 2009

If the trees could speak

Karin H. Wilson

Vol. 5, No. 4

A Walk on the Wild Side (of the Lagoon)

Come down off the tree-topped bluffs to where the wetlands await

By Patricia Masters

For a real change of pace and a 4-mile workout, try a hike along Los Peñasquitos Lagoon's Marsh Trail. Here novel vistas of the lagoon, encounters with rare birds, leaping fish, and mysterious wind caves will keep you stopping in your tracks again and again. Each season provides its own discoveries—crowds of Purple Shore Crabs in winter, migrating flocks of waterfowl in Fall and Spring, a strolling coyote in Summer—and any time of year you will find a soothing solitude on this little-known path along the south side of the lagoon.

The lagoon's quiet waters and rich marshlands are the last piece of the puzzle in this newsletter's year-long look (four issues) at the Reserve's northern Extension during its 35th anniversary year. The lagoon visually joins the Extension to the high bluff of the main Reserve. It also is subject to the Extension area's storm runoff and is part of a vital wildlife corridor.

Although the southern edge of the lagoon skirts the highway just across from the South Beach parking lot and entrance kiosk, the scenic attractions here are seldom viewed by a park visitor. That, I soon hoped to prove, is a shame.

My recent hike started from the South Beach parking lot, where I crossed Coast Highway near the Reserve entrance. When you go, use the highway's center island to walk south to the trailhead that drops down from the highway on the lagoon side. The only marker is a "no bicycle" sign, but the trail is well-defined.

You first come to a raised terrace that gives a panoramic view across the lagoon and its tidal channels. Check for Great Blue Herons and Egrets fishing at the channel edges. Wave at the Coaster as it clatters by. Admire the graceful arches of the lower bridge at the lagoon mouth—

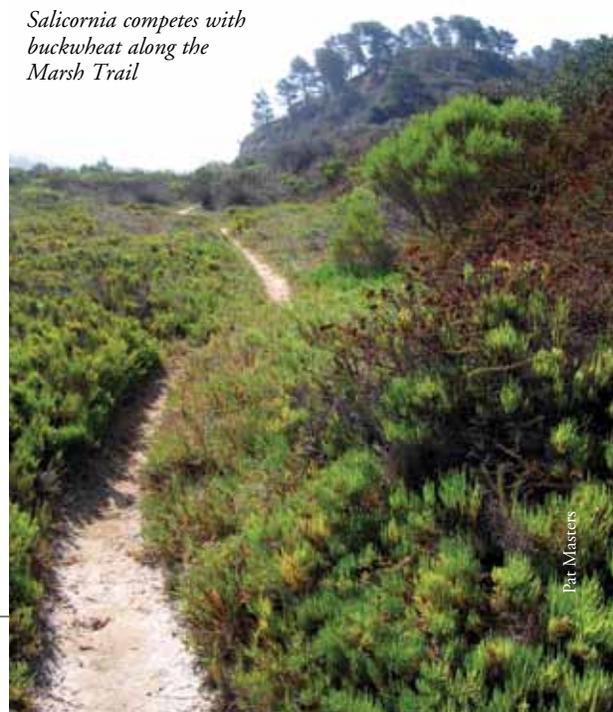
a design that has improved tidal flow compared to the previous bridge's forest of pilings.

Now that 90 percent of San Diego County's natural coastal wetlands have been eradicated, you are enjoying a rare habitat indeed! Revel in the lush greenery of the salt marsh—primarily a verdant carpet of pickleweed (*Salicornia depressa*), a succulent well adapted to saltwater that grows throughout the western basin of Los Peñasquitos Lagoon. Pickleweed's jointed stems store excess salt in their segments, which turn red in autumn, then break off, ridding the plant of the salt. Found throughout the western marsh flats, it cannot tolerate prolonged submersion or freshwater conditions.

Telegraph weed (*Heterotheca grandiflora*), abundant and flowering even at the end of sum-

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Salicornia competes with buckwheat along the Marsh Trail



Pat Masters

past

present

future



President's Message

It's been a wild last few months. Shall we count the ways?

Normally this space is reserved for some kind of sage essay and/or update on a single subject. Frankly, I and your TPA Counselors feel pulled in so many directions by recent news and activities that it's better to do a checklist of what's going on so that you, our members, can feel more up-to-date. Here goes:

• **We had a party...** The opposite page tells the story of our neighborhood gathering in pictures. You can tell by the smiles that a good time was had by all.



Herb Knufken

• **We're saving a house...** We got the good news from the Ellen Browning Scripps Foundation this summer that it had made a major donation of \$20,000 to TPA, earmarked to not only help stabilize several maintenance issues at the Guy Fleming Residence in the park, but also to inspire others to support the park in this time of state budget crisis. Work began in early October and in total should top \$30,000 worth of repairs, most paid by the Scripps grant, the rest by your membership dollars.

• **We're fixing some leaks...** The Lodge roof needs repairs. TPA has been asked to fund over \$3,000 in roofing maintenance this fall.

• **We're printing some maps...** Many of you park regulars don't need a trail map, but the visitors do. We've been asked to fund the printing of another 30,000 or so maps that will not only heighten the pleasure of a visitor's experience, but also help them be aware of park regulations—fulfilling our TPA mission "to protect and preserve."

• **We're "weeding"...** The volunteer effort to eradicate ice plant along the margin of the

lagoon where it skirts Carmel Valley Road is almost complete. TPA is often asked to fund the cost of the dumpsters involved.



• **We're in the news...** We've been called frequently by TV news crews and print reporters to represent TPA positions on the various exigencies of the Governor's threat to close many state parks. And what are those positions? 1. Our Reserve cannot be closed:

It—and the people who use it—must be protected by trained state personnel. 2. Our Reserve is an incredibly valuable environmental, educational and recreational resource that should not be a pawn in a budget crisis where the state parks' total budget is nothing more than the proverbial flea on an elephant's back. 3. State parks contribute billions beyond their payrolls and expenses to the state's economy in terms of tourism and other supporting commerce.

At press time, the governor had announced that no wholesale closures will take place: but there will probably be big cutbacks in services and hours. We're ready to help, as we always have, whatever the outcome..

—Peter Jensen
tpajournal@san.rr.com

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One Earth Recycling
4627 Carmel Mountain Road
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behind Vons
11 AM to 6 PM daily

**Ask them to credit
the TPA account**

Your donation benefits Torrey Pines State
Natural Reserve!

TPA Journal

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Your comments and articles are welcome.

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TPA Board meetings: last Thursday of every month at 6:30 p.m. at the Lodge.

Cover photo: American Bittern



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Remembering when the bulldozers went away...

Members and neighbors gathered to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the Extension's salvation

On a beautiful, breezy Saturday in late August of 1978, the patios of Del Mar Heights Elementary School came alive as Torrey Pines Association and Docent Society members hosted a "birthday party" marking the successful conclusion of the Extension's fundraising campaign many years ago. Dignitaries presented proclamations, children stared wide-eyed at equally wide-eyed wildlife, neighbors old (and young!) reunited, and a good time was had by all. 🦉



PHOTOS BY HERB KNUFKEN

An open-air auditorium and covered breezeways at Del Mar Heights Elementary School provided the perfect venue to celebrate the Extension's 35th year of park status. Children at the school have long experienced the Extension's natural wonders via nature hikes...and some even walk to school via its trails



Robert Horstmann



Why state parks need professionals...

In the midst of all the hoopla about possible park closures this Fall, our Reserve's staff continued to go about the business of quietly and professionally protecting and preserving the park...

In one instance, a small fire roared up the east side of a bluff wall toward the Lodge. Quick action by Ranger Mike Winterton, off-duty state lifeguard and peace officer Ed Vodzaska (that's him holding the hose), and maintenance staff saved the day. In another, a local helicopter company airlifted a wrecked car out of an inaccessible location in deep chaparral with the assistance on the ground of park personnel. Once again, mission(s) accomplished.



Blake Morgan



Ed Vodzaska



By the Numbers

- 95-square-mile watershed drained by Carmel, Los Peñasquitos, and Carroll Creeks

636 acre lagoon with...

- 385 acres of salt marsh
- 33 acres of tidal channels
- 212 acres of shrub-scrub and riparian forest
- 89 species of birds
- 40 species of mammals, reptiles, insects, crustaceans, mollusks
- 16 species of threatened or endangered plants in the watershed
- 15 species of threatened or endangered animals in the watershed

Top inset: Bee hive in a wind cave
Lower inset: Green Heron

Timeline for Los Peñasquitos Lagoon

1769 Deep water estuary discovered by Spanish explorers

1889 Map shows marsh up Carmel Valley and Sorrento Valley and railroad following Carmel Valley Road

1925 Railroad embankment built through middle of lagoon, severely restricting tidal flows

1937 Highway 1 built along the beach, constraining the lagoon mouth. The lagoon experiences closures

1970 State reclassifies lagoon below 20-ft elevation as Los Peñasquitos Marsh Natural Preserve

1983 Los Peñasquitos Lagoon Foundation formed

1984 Los Peñasquitos Lagoon Enhancement Plan and Program certified



A Walk on the Wild Side (of the Lagoon)

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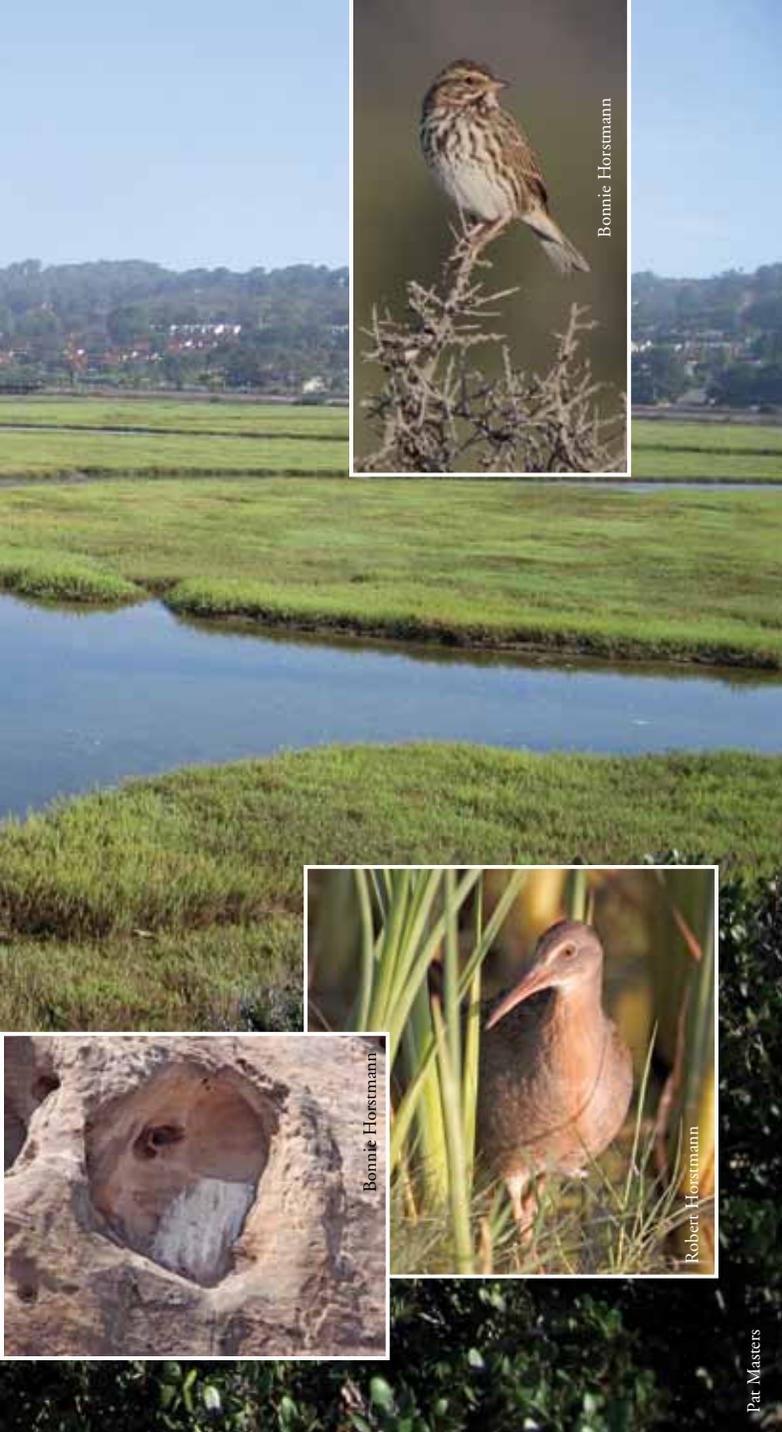
mer, hugs the trail and adds a splash of yellow with its aster-like blooms. Unwelcome invaders, sweet fennel and iceplant, also thrive around the margins of the lagoon. On the dead branches atop a lemonadeberry, an American Kestrel picks apart its breakfast kill.

Coming to a muddy patch in the trail, raccoon tracks tell of a nocturnal predator prowling in search of crabs and other small prey. Nearby is a Sea Lavender with delicate sprays of tiny lavender flowers, another native of the marsh.

Look north across the lagoon ... the ramparts

of Red Ridge rise out of the hillside vegetation and structures like a gothic cathedral. Instead of crucifixes, though, the ridge is crowned by utility poles—perhaps a statement to our modern dependence on a different Source of power. At any rate, the poles are less sacrilegious than the houses and condos that would have covered it had the Extension not been saved from development!

Continuing on, the trail brings us to a southern ridge jutting into the lagoon with Torrey pines silhouetted along its crest. Thick stands of lemonadeberry mingle with buckwheat—its rusty red seed clusters contrast with bright green pickle-



Bonnie Horstmann



Robert Horstmann



Bonnie Horstmann

Pat Masters



Pat Masters

*Birds: Belding's Savannah Sparrow (top) and Light-Footed Clapper Rail (lower), endangered birds of the salt marsh
Lower inset: Raptor's roost in another wind cave*

1962-1972 when the City discharged between 500,000 to a million gallons a day of sewage effluent into the lagoon. Sewage overflows remained a problem into the 1980s, and the new pumping station near Sorrento Valley Road is designed to prevent spills.

Rounding the next turn, above and south of the trail stand wind-carved sandstone cliffs where updrafts attract big raptors. I count three Red-tailed Hawks soaring above the cliff

and a Red Shouldered Hawk uttering its whistling screams. With electric blue wing flashes, Scrub Jays dart over the brush.

If you look closely at the wind caves, you will discover a perch used by owls or ravens—its interior shelf highlighted by a cataract of white droppings washing the wall beneath it. That perch has been a favorite hangout for a long, long time!

Suddenly an amazing pattern strikes your eyes. Another wind cave at four o'clock from the owl's perch initially looks like a dark cavity. But glowing out of the shadows is a symmetrical series of pale loops and dreadlocks hanging from a blackened background. Can you imagine the heart of

weed lining the trail. This ridge marks a transition from the saltwater habitat of the western lagoon to the freshwater-dominated plant communities of the eastern arm. We pass through a thicket of willow and shade-loving plants to emerge next to a creek channel lined by Spiny Rush, fennel, and ragweed. The *plop plop* of several grey fish leave spreading ripple patterns on the murky surface of the channel. The fish are surprisingly large—12-18 inches in length—and totally oblivious to the passing Coaster train here where the trail makes its closest approach to the railroad berm. Beware the poison oak adorning the right side of the trail!

Now we come upon four vertically set timbers marking the end of a road. This area was the location of sewage treatment ponds from

Resources

California Coastal Conservancy—a non-regulatory agency created in 1976 to protect remaining wetlands by providing technical assistance and funding to local governments and nonprofit organizations. www.scc.ca.gov/

Los Peñasquitos Lagoon Foundation—a nonprofit organization founded in 1983 to restore the lagoon through monitoring its health, coordinating lagoon mouth openings, and constructing sediment retention basins. Contact: Mike Hastings, Executive Director, Box 940, Cardiff by the Sea, CA 92007; (760) 436-593; (760) 271-0574 cell; (760) 454-2453 fax

Los Peñasquitos Lagoon and its Watershed – a beautiful film by Jim Karnik in collaboration with the LPLFoundation. www.field-notes.com/LPLInfo.html

Trans-County Trail (also known as the San Diego Sea-to-Sea Trail and the Pines to Spines Trail) is an initiative to develop an interconnected 140-mile trail system from the Pacific Ocean (at Los Peñasquitos Lagoon) to the Salton Sea. www.seatoseatrail.org



Raccoon imprints

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What You Can Do to Restore the Lagoon

- Reduce outdoor water use
- Landscape with drought-tolerant plants
- Minimize hardscape in your garden
- Install swales and other water-retention devices
- Never dump pesticides, chemicals, motor oil
- Think about backyard wildlife when pruning and clearing brush
- Support local conservation organizations like the Lagoon Foundation or TPA
- Let your representatives know you support conservation efforts
- Encourage nature education in schools
- Volunteer!



A Walk on the Wild Side

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a bee hive? Fully exposed—the secret haunt of the bees!

More awaits. The final segment of the Marsh Trail brings you to Big Torrey, a magnificent specimen that offers shade and the sweet aroma of warm pine needles to refresh you after a hot hike. Its spreading branches frame a pretty vista of the Portofino Wildlife Corridor and Red Ridge.

But look more closely—a coyote has dined on this carpet of needles and the only parts of the rabbit that remain are the feet and the bones and teeth. From this point on, the trail is littered with coyote scat even after the trail joins the old asphalt road.

Soon you pass a pipe gate with a sign explaining the unique species of the marsh and how you can prevent polluted runoff. Uphill to the right is a sediment basin designed to capture runoff-driven sediment from entering the lagoon. Below to the left are native plant revegetation plots. Sycamores shade the ranger's residence, and an adjacent orchard thrives in the rich alluvial soils. If you continue along the road, you reach a locked gate at Flintkote Avenue.

But if you turn back into the wild side, you may be lucky enough to see a coyote slowly ambling under the sun. And beyond, the call of the quail. ✂

Wet ... and Why

Wetlands form in bays and river valleys where saltwater meets freshwater. During the last glacial period 20,000 years ago, stream valleys cut deeply when sea level stood over 400 feet below present. As climate warmed, melting glaciers caused sea level to rise, flooding the coastal valleys. San Diego County originally had 16 tidally-influenced coastal wetlands but most have been destroyed by development or excess sedimentation caused by agriculture and urbanization in the watersheds. Los Peñasquitos Lagoon is considered to be an impaired wetland due to excessive sedimentation and year-round freshwater flows. Tidal flushing of the lagoon has been diminished by filling for road and railroad construction as well as from flood-borne sediments. As a result, there is insufficient tidal scouring to remove cobbles and sand from the mouth of the lagoon, which frequently closes to tidal exchange. If the mouth closes during summer and fall, when freshwater input is minimal, impounded seawater becomes hypersaline through evaporation, and die-offs occur. If the mouth closes during fall and winter, when freshwater input is typically the greatest, the system becomes fresh or brackish, stressing the native salt marsh species and favoring expansion of cattail and other riparian plants. ✂



Your Donations at Work in the Preserve

Where wetlands meet civilization, invasive plants compete with native vegetation. Parks Environmental Scientist Darren Smith is leading the battle to restore two areas in the Marsh Preserve: along Carmel Valley Road (CVR) and at the end of Flintkote on the southeast corner. With dedicated staff, lots of volunteers, and funding from TPA, LPL Foundation, Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project, La Jolla Village Garden Club, and State Parks (Prop 84 Bonds), both projects are nearing maintenance stage. Follow the CVR progress on the map—total project area is 2.8 acres with weeded and replanted 1.5 acres in green. Half of the pink 1.3 acres is weeded but not planted yet. Darren hopes to finish weeding by October and planting by early winter. To maintain the natives, block-long segments are available for adoption. Contact Carol Martin <richard.martin101@att.net>. Upcoming “Light at the End of the Tunnel” volunteer days are November 7 and 21, December 5 and 19. Join the fun!



Tales from the Extension

...of wildfire in Elephant Trunks, pentagrams, and shotgun blasts...to name a few

By Bob Wohl

Now and then as I wandered the trails and off-the-path ravines of the Reserve Extension over nearly two decades of ranger work, I came across unusual people and strange goings on—even portentous signs of late-night rituals. Usually when hikers and joggers go “over there” to the Extension, the experience is one of solitude and peace. They see no one. But there are some exceptions, and in my career I saw more than a few.

Once I was dispatched for a fire near the bulging sandstone forms called Elephant Trunks. Several boys had cut out a fort in the dense chaparral brush—the perfect hideaway in which to learn to smoke cigarettes. Striking a match, they lit the matchbook instead, panicked, dropped it into dry weeds, and fled when flames shot up around them.

Only Naturalist Hank Nicol was on duty with me. We arrived with several shovels and McLeods (wildland firefighting tools), and scurried to the site. We watched as flames swept up into two beautiful Torreys and decided that without water we could only contain the blaze by raking dry needles into the fire so it wouldn't spread beyond the blazing pines. Soon we heard fire truck sirens, but we watched firefighters wave their arms in frustration from Nogales, the Mar Scenic driveway, and Durango while trying to detect a road for their trucks' entry. One big red truck did try to reconnoiter the downhill remains of Mar Scenic's old fractured asphalt drive, got mired in loose sand, and was later towed out. In despair, they eventually set out on foot toward our location.

In the meantime, Hank and I had jumped for joy when a dozen or more young boys from the neighborhood descended on us, climbed up the sandstone “trunks,” grabbed our extra tools, and rallied our fatigued efforts. They vigorously fought off the fire and

helped save the Extension (they also revealed the story behind the fire's origins).

There were other times when I came across strips of white muslin painted blood red, with scattered food remains, broken bottles, burnt candles, and signs of a midnight ritual. It turned out to be a fraternity initiation from UCSD.

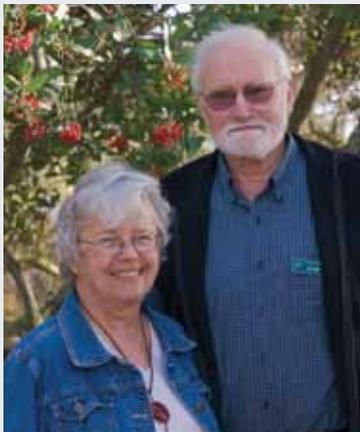
On other occasions we found rocks laid out in a pentagram pattern, with deer hooves, cats' paws, and the blackened remains of a ceremonial bonfire. Neighbors told us they'd heard ominous chanting. Satanists at play?

I also responded to a call reporting shotgun blasts emanating from somewhere along Via Grimaldi or Via Latina. I pulled up and residents all pointed nervously at one house. *Knock knock*. An older man came out and sheepishly admitted that he “couldn't take it any more!” A hillock with a “Tarzan” rope swing was becoming the midnight haunt of local teenagers, and the screams, laughter, and even campfires were keeping him up nightly, so...he decided

enough was enough, and since the nautical rope ascended 50 feet up into the majestic Torrey pine, and he wasn't going to climb up and untie it, and he was mad as hell, then maybe he could shoot the rope down. Four shotgun blasts later, the rope remained. I commiserated with him, but asked him to cease and issued him a citation.

Today the Extension is still at the back door of many neighboring houses, and some strange things are bound to spill over into the nearly 200 acres. Yet there is no more peaceful place in the Reserve to be alone with nature, and most of the surprises hikers come across today are pleasant. ✂

Robert Wohl is the former Supervising Ranger at Torrey Pines State Reserve, 1980 to 1999, and is a member of the TPA Board of Counselors.



Giving the Gift that Lasts a Lifetime

When TPA Life Members Carol and Stu Smith started thinking about Christmas gifts for their two adult children last year, they wanted something of value and meaning. Both Carol and Stu are active members of the Torrey Pines Docent Society and spend many

hours here in the Reserve. So it was a logical connection to think about sharing this rare and beautiful place with their children. The Smiths' donation of \$1,000 enabled them to present their son and daughter each a TPA Life Membership. What a caring

and enduring gift! And one that gives the Torrey Pines experience to people you love.

If you are looking for that special gift this holiday, please consider a TPA Life Membership for your favorite person.

By mail: mail your check and information to Membership Chair Mike Gonzalez Jr., Torrey Pines Association, P.O. Box 345, La Jolla, CA 92038.

Online: go to www.torreypines.org and click “Donate Now.” On the donation page, choose a membership level, click “on behalf of.” In the Dedication Acknowledgement window, enter contact information for your recipient including name, address, telephone number, email, and a short message. Click “Send Dedication Acknowledgment.” Finally, complete the online form with your own contact and billing information. It's that easy to give a lifetime of enjoyment at Torrey Pines! ✂



Karin H. Wilson

TPA Journal

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Torrey Pines Association
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Who we are...
www.torreypines.org

The Torrey Pines Association was founded in 1950 to encourage public interest in, and support for, the preservation of the rare Torrey pine trees and their native habitat at Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve.

Since then it has played an active role in:

- achieving State Reserve/Preserve status
- assisting in the acquisition of additional acres of native trees
- funding educational exhibits
- publishing informational and educational materials
- managing memorial funds
- renovating the Fleming house for use as an on-site ranger's residence
- monitoring the overall welfare of the site

We invite you to join with us in our ongoing efforts to preserve and protect the rare Torrey pines and their scenic refuge by becoming a member. Please visit our web site or contact us by mail for more information on membership levels.

We also encourage contributions to the Torrey Pines Reserve Endowment Fund. Donations will help protect and preserve the Reserve—a lasting legacy! Contact endow@torreypines.org.



Mike Hastings



Unblocking the mouth of the lagoon to allow tidal exchange is made possible one or more times a year via funding from the Los Peñasquitos Lagoon Foundation

“Los Peñasquitos Lagoon: From Waters to Wildlife”

Attend our Third Annual TPA Symposium As a vital link between the watershed and the ocean, Los Peñasquitos Lagoon is counted among the 10 percent of natural coastal wetlands remaining in San Diego County. This rare and threatened habitat, now designated *Los Peñasquitos Marsh Natural Preserve* as part of *Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve*, enjoys the protection of numerous agencies. What is the current status of the Preserve? Learn about the upstream watershed, sedimentation and lagoon mouth openings, plant communities, restoration, and wildlife tracking.

December 5, 2009, 9:00 am-12:00 noon

Sumner Auditorium
Scripps Institution of Oceanography
La Jolla, California

FREE ADMISSION TO ALL

We invite TPA members to bring friends and family. Please share this notice with others!

For more information and directions to the conference site: www.torreypines.org