

Re: Keeping nature in Siesta Valley

Subject: Re: Keeping nature in Siesta Valley
From: David ACKERLY
Date: 7/16/19, 6:39 PM
To: Eric Neville, "Bruce G. Baldwin"
CC: Kim Kersh, Michele Hammond, Marguerite Young

Hi Eric

Thanks for your email. I'm adding Bruce Baldwin at the herbarium who may have more to add. (I am interested in this broad topic, but the herbarium does not fall under my administration).

Best
David

David Ackerly
Dean, College of Natural Resources
University Hall, CNR Dean's Office # 3100
2199 Addison St., Room 747
University of California
Berkeley CA 94720-3100

<http://nature.berkeley.edu/>

On Tue, Jul 16, 2019 at 6:02 PM Eric Neville wrote:

Dear Dean Ackerly,

Consequent to yesterday's site visit, which looks to have effectively brought this matter to a close, I wanted to follow up on the matter of invoking the name of the University of California.

In the course of discussion in the field, it became clear to me that no one at UC Berkeley is aware and endorsing of the planting program undertaken in Siesta Valley, that the University's name was falsely cited in support. CNPS member Glen Shneider actually offered that his planting approach has never been done before, and as I pressed for who at UC Berkeley supports it, under the evident duress of impending exposure, EBMUD Manager Scott Hill covered with a fig leaf by citing confidential consultation involving CNPS, with Schneider referencing 'people high up in the Herbarium'. The idea that academic support for restoration methodology is confidential information is, of course, preposterous. However, it had also become clear to me that CNPS member Schneider has the presumptive support of Manager Hill, and my isolated position at the leading edge of concern re the planting has limited traction, so making an issue of University involvement would carry nothing. In his defense, I think restricted access to watershed land has provided Manager Hill with limited practice in answering to the public as to land management practices. If there's any thought that

someone at the Herbarium really is aware and endorsing of the planting program, then the Herbarium's own Kim Kersh would seem a logical point of contact for inquiry, though I don't find further pursuit warranted under the circumstances.

I do, though, find it appropriate at this juncture to remind ourselves of the United States' sordid history of invoking government secrecy to avoid embarrassment for political reasons, with recent cases abounding, and moreover there being many examples of danger in conditioning the populace to readily accept secrecy, such the Hemisphere Project, the Iran-Contra Affair, and Operation CHAOS. Perhaps for those involved in the planting project, that's a discussion for another occasion.

Respectfully,
Eric Neville

Date: 2019-07-12 16:30:04
From: Hill, Scott
To: Eric Neville
CC: Marguerite Young, Mark Silva,
California Native Plant Society <cnps@cnps.org>,
David Ackerly, Laura Acosta, Kim Kersh, Michele Hammond,
Matthew Graul, Ric Santora, Glen Schneider, Cynthia Adkisson
Subject: RE: Keeping nature in Siesta Valley

Dear Mr. Neville,

Thank you for acknowledging receipt of the project related documents. This information was not intended to be all inclusive, the scope of the CNPS report is the Skyline Trail trailside plantings between water Tank gate and Steam Trains gate. That is the focus area of our visit on Monday the 15th.

The other plantings you've noted were all done outside the trail corridor, primarily along the Barberry Ridge area, southeast of the water Tank. These are outside the scope of Monday's site visit, and since they are off-trail, to avoid adversely affecting sensitive biological resources this information is not available to the public, as per EBMUD policy.

The Baby blue eyes (*Nemophila menziesii*) you noted were field transplants from within the project area - four seedlings. As to public documentation of this species on EBMUD Watershed in Siesta Valley area, Dianne Lake and Chris Thayer have a record on Calflora of a population on Eureka Peak, on EBMUD land (attached screenshot).

I hope this clears up the questions you've raised.

Best,

Scott

Scott Hill
Manager of Watershed & Recreation
East Bay Municipal Utility District

-----Original Message-----

From: Eric Neville
Sent: Wednesday, July 10, 2019 10:46 AM
To: Hill, Scott
Cc: Young, Marguerite; Silva, Mark; California Native Plant Society;
David Ackerly; Acosta, Laura; Kim Kersh; Michele Hammond; Matthew Graul;
Ric Santora; Glen Schneider; Cynthia Adkisson
Subject: Re: Keeping nature in Siesta Valley

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Dear Manager Hill,

Thank you for passing along the various materials.

Just from my cursory examination, please note significant missing data.

The map does not reflect planting along the ridge, southeast of the water tank, including that of baby blue eyes (*Nemophila menziesii*), which were brought in from outside the project area.

This species is also missing from the plant list (four plants, as I recall), along with an unknown number of other plants.

For example, just from what I can scrape together, the list indicates that in the first half of 2018, 25 plants were planted, comprising 2 grasses and a lupine. However the Skyline Report for January 10, titled "Winter Planting", documents planting along the ridge (contrary to the map), of thistle, phacelia, and chia (contrary to the list), and the report refers to having 600 plant starts:
<https://www.skylinegardens.org/winter-planting-2018>

The report for January 31, which is apparently at least one report that is missing from the online listing, records that "on Sunday, ten of us planted 18 acorn groups and over 100 other plants."

A report from later in the year documents the seeding of another 600 starts:

<https://www.skylinegardens.org/sowing-seeds-2018>

Again, these disparities appear just in scratching the surface.

I am concerned that the map and list do not accurately reflect reality.

Respectfully,
Eric Neville

Date: 2019-07-09 15:59:53
From: Hill, Scott
To: Eric Neville, Michele Hammond, Glen Schneider,
Adkisson1, Mark Silva,
CC:
Subject: FW: Info packet for Skyline Trail site visit, July 15, 2pm

Dear July 15 site visitors,

We are looking forward to a productive site visit to view planting sites on the Skyline Trail on Watershed land. Cynthia Adkisson will be joining us as part the Skyline Gardens project.

Attached, please find Glen's cover letter, "Skyline Trail plantings – background, map, and species list July 9 2019." This contains an overview of Ecological Restoration; notes on the local area; methods; a map of trailside planting sites; notes on each site; and, a list of species and numbers planted at each site.

This cover letter refers to these attachments:

1. What is Ecological Restoration? (Society for Ecological Restoration - SER)
2. Notes on the High Ridge Volcanic Zone:
 - 2 A. Geologic cross section Berk hills
 - 2 B. Characteristics of soils in Berkeley Hills
 - 2 C. Contra Costa County, Mean Seasonal Isohyets (rainfall)
3. Bringing Back the Bush, by Jean Bradley, page 26
4. Map of Skyline Trail Plantings July, 2019
5. Plant lists for Skyline Trail plantings.pdf

Best to all,

Scott

Scott Hill

Manager of Watershed & Recreation

East Bay Municipal Utility District

Date: 2019-07-05 16:39:48
From: Hill, Scott
To: Eric Neville
CC: Marguerite Young, Mark Silva,
California Native Plant Society <cnps@cnps.org>,
David Ackerly, Laura Acosta, Kim Kersh, Michele Hammond,
Matthew Graul, Ric Santora, Glen Schneider
Subject: RE: Keeping nature in Siesta Valley

>
> Dear Mr. Neville,
>
> I look forward to meeting you on 15 July. Hopefully we'll be able to
> resolve this matter. I will defer to CNPS regarding maps and planting
> locations.

>
> Best,
> Scott
>
> Scott Hill
> Manager of Watershed & Recreation
> East Bay Municipal Utility District

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> -----Original Message-----
> From: Eric Neville
> Sent: Friday, July 05, 2019 4:01 PM
> To: Hill, Scott
> Cc: Young, Marguerite; Silva, Mark; California Native Plant Society;
> David Ackerly; Acosta, Laura; Kim Kersh; Michele Hammond; Matthew
> Graul; Ric Santora; Glen Schneider
> Subject: Re: Keeping nature in Siesta Valley

>
> CAUTION =E2=80=93 This email came from outside of EBMUD. Do not open
> attachments or click on links in suspicious emails.

>
> Dear Mangaer Hill,
>
> I accept the invitation to a site visit. I certainly hope we do share
> the same goals, and I have yet to find anything in the Watershed
> Master Plan to indicate otherwise. The most important thing, this
> being a matter of public policy, is that institutional statements be
> consistent with what is actually happening, and meeting on site would
> seem the fastest way to advance that. We will be joined by EBRPD
> Botanist Michele Hammond.

>
> Please observe that, as noted multiple times already, adding plants
> does not adhere to the Bradley method. Even the summary of the Bradley
> method, most recently provided by EBMUD and attached again here,
> quotes, "We regenerate [native vegetation] by using methods that give
> us the most effective kill of weeds and the most bountiful growth of
> natives; that is, by skilful manual weeding."

>
> Please provide a list and map of the added plant species, so that such
> data can be properly studied prior to valuable time in the field. Any
> plans regarding future planting would be similarly helpful.
> Information on the nursery practices used would also be helpful. I am
> concerned about characterizing the addition of hundreds of plants as
> "limited", but the specific numbers can speak for themselves. Contrary
> to EBMUD assurances, I must note that I personally have witnessed the
> addition of at least one species from outside the project area, as
> complete and accurate planting data will verify for the record. Please
> find attached an illustration of the sort of assessment and data that
> one would expect in accompaniment of a science-based project.
>
> The Watershed Master Plan references a Natural Resources Inventory,
> and provision of a copy would be helpful.
>
> Certainly, answers to the questions asked in my previous email would
> aid productivity of discussion in the field. Particularly, the names
> of the UC Berkeley faculty who are aware and endorsing of the planting
> would be crucial, so that they may be consulted beforehand and their
> notes referenced on site, in case they are unable to join the field
> trip in person.
>
> Respectfully,
> Eric Neville
>
>
>
> Date: 2019-06-14 16:03:00
> From: Hill, Scott
> To: Eric Neville
> CC: Marguerite Young, Mark Silva,
> California Native Plant Society <cnps@cnps.org>
> David Ackerly, Larua Acosta
> Subject: RE: Keeping nature in Siesta Valley
>
> Dear Mr. Neville,
>
> Thanks for your thoughts and concerns about EBMUD watershed
> lands. Mark has told me how much you love and care about the
> Skyline Trail area, and in this, I believe we all share the same
> goals.
>
> EBMUD continues to preserve the natural wildness and enhance the
> biodiversity of the greater Siesta Valley area through active
> management of the botanical resources and careful coordination with
> other resource management programs. The Skyline Gardens Project is
> an all -volunteer restoration project that conducts restoration
> activities in accordance > with EBMUD and CNPS principles. The
> project area is EBMUD Watershed land between Tilden and Sibley
> Parks, with a special focus on the Skyline Trail corridor. The
> Project works collaboratively with District staff to ensure that
> work is conducted in an appropriate manner, and furthers the goals
> of the EBMUD Watershed Master Plan.
>

> The basic restoration approach is to remove invasive plants and
> encourage natural increase of native plants, starting with areas of
> high native diversity and working outward into areas more heavily
> colonized by invasives. The Project has done limited plantings in
> two situations.
> In areas where the trail bed was reconstructed and bare ground was
> exposed, we have re-vegetated with field divisions and seedlings of
> local native species, all collected within the project area. In
> select cases, the project seeks to increase populations of locally
> rare and significant native species to sustainable numbers and
> locations. This is done by direct seeding or planting small
> seedlings of select species, using only locally collected seeds
> from the project area.
>
> To allay your concerns about introduced species, we can assure you
> that the Project has not at any time introduced any plant species,
> native or exotic, from outside the project area. All work is done
> consistent with "best practices" for habitat restoration, of which
> the Bradley Method is the primary tool used for the restoration
> work. For your reference, I have included a one page summary of the
> Bradley Method.
>
> My hope is that we can build some trust and understanding with you
> around this important project. To that end, I would propose that
> myself, Mark, and CNPS project leaders meet with you soon, on site.
> We would inspect together the trailside restoration activities and
> do our best to answer any questions and concerns you have about
> Project goals, methods, species, numbers, and exact locations.
> If this is good with you, could you let us know best times to meet?
>
> Hopefully,
>
> Scott Hill, etc.
>
> Scott Hill
> Manager of Watershed & Recreation
> East Bay Municipal Utility District
>

-----Original Message----- > From: Eric Neville
Sent: Friday, June 07, 2019 12:41 PM
To: Hill, Scott
Cc: Young, Marguerite; Silva, Mark; California
Native Plant Society; David Ackerly
Subject: Re: Keeping nature in Siesta Valley
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emails.

Dear Manager Hill,

I am distressed that EBMUD's statements on this matter seem not to align with the facts. EBMUD is representing that its addition of plants to Siesta Valley adheres to the Bradley method of

restoration; moreover, it represents that UC Berkeley faculty are aware of and endorse EBMUD's interpretation and action in this regard.

However, the addition of plants is absolutely not consistent with the Bradley method. As Joan Bradley herself wrote, "We do not propagate or buy costly native plants, dig holes for them, stake and water them, then tend them until they are established. Our native plants look after themselves." Please note that her book, "Bringing back the bush: the Bradley method of bush regeneration", is publicly accessible at the bioscience library at UC Berkeley, and is a short, easy read. The essence of the method is to restore by weeding alone – careful, restrained, patient weeding – because the native flora have a regenerative vitality of their own, which should be minimally disturbed.

Meanwhile, the public requires accurate and reliable information about its public agencies. Today, we might be talking about the water company, but tomorrow we might be talking about the fire department, the Federal Reserve, or food safety. We all spend most of our time on the public side of public agencies. If we, the public, do not have accurate and reliable information about the operation of our public agencies, we cannot effect public oversight, for ourselves, or for those who will come after us.

I am disturbed that EBMUD has added plants to the most botanically diverse parts of the remarkably well-preserved Siesta Valley, counter to logic. I am further concerned that its methods there are not anchored in best practices, not supported by science. EBMUD needs to be clear and honest, not least with itself, about what has happened and how, lest history repeat.

I therefore ask the following questions, on behalf of the public.

Who at UC Berkeley is aware and endorsing of the planting in Siesta Valley? Who interprets planting as being part of the Bradley method? On what basis?

Exactly how many plants have been added already? Of which species, planted where?

EBMUD states that it plans to both "preserve natural wildness" and "enhance the biodiversity" in Siesta Valley. These goals seem to conflict. How does EBMUD define these terms? How will it pursue both simultaneously? How will it prioritize?

For the plants added, how will their growth, propagation, and impact be monitored and tracked in the years to come, to assess their relation to the ecosystem and whether they meet goals to "enhance", and particularly goals to "preserve"?

How will EBMUD handle decisions to add plants in the future? What standards and criteria will be used? Who will be consulted?

Respectfully,
Eric Neville

Date: 2019-05-31 16:28:26
From: Hill, Scott
To: Eric Neville
CC: Marguerite Young, Mark Silva,
California Native Plant Society <cnps@cnps.org>
Subject: RE: Keeping nature in Siesta Valley

Dear Mr. Neville,

Thanks again for your thoughts and questions about the skyline Gardens Project.

Currently, the restoration at Skyline Gardens is being done consistent with the Bradley Method, an established restoration methodology.

Staff from UC Berkeley and students have been consulted and are actively participating in the Skyline Gardens Project.

Long term goals for Skyline Gardens are to preserve the natural wildness, enhance the biodiversity, maintain an effective fuel break, while providing safe access trail for equestrians and hikers.

Best,

Scott Hill
Manager of Watershed & Recreation
East Bay Municipal Utility District

-----Original Message-----

From: Eric Neville
Sent: Thursday, May 30, 2019 12:55 PM
To: Hill, Scott
Cc: Young, Marguerite; Silva, Mark; California Native Plant Society
Subject: Re: Keeping nature in Siesta Valley
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>

> Dear Manager Hill:

>

> Thank you for the invitation. I am already quite acquainted with
> the Skyline Gardens project, as well as Glen Schneider who runs
> it. He has invested a remarkable amount of energy into the area.
> However, I write as a member of the public and EBMUD constituent,
> concerned about the recent addition of hundreds of plants to
> Siesta Valley, including locally new species, well beyond
> established restoration methodology, as I said. I certainly have
> no interest in getting into some sort of popularity contest with
> a heretofore successful public-engagement project; I do, though,
> feel compelled to address what we will be passing down to the

> next generations via our management of lands held in public
> trust, as I labored to relate in my previous letter.
>
> Regarding Siesta Valley, has EBMUD engaged perspective from the
> extensive local community of biology experts, such as from UC Berkeley?
> For comparison, I have never seen planting on the same scale in
> Huckleberry Botanic Regional Preserve, which is also a
> distinguished local gem of biodiversity, and which also involves
> a member from the California Native Plant Society.
>
> From a restoration perspective, there are very few spots around
> that were so fortunate to escape humanity's "better" intents from
> the past as were the west slopes of Siesta Valley and
> Huckleberry, and it makes sense to protect those as unadulterated
> benchmarks of what local nature can be, to guide restoration in
> less-fortunate places. I believe Mr.
> Schneider has described finding even more plant species in Siesta
> Valley than have been found in Huckleberry. Does EBMUD plan to
> continue adding locally new species to Siesta Valley? Does EBMUD
> have a long-term plan for the area, specifying goals and methods?
>
> Respectfully,
> Eric Neville
>
>
>

Date: 2019-05-28 09:45:26
From: Hill, Scott
To: Eric Neville
CC:
Subject: Keeping nature in Siesta Valley

Dear Mr. Neville,
Thank you for contacting our Board of Directors
to express your concerns over the Skyline Gardens Project.
Alex Coate, our General Manager, asked me to reply.

The Skyline Gardens Project is a combination botanical survey
and restoration project in the Skyline Trail area of the
Oakland-Berkeley Hills. It is a goal of the East Bay Municipal
Utility District (District) to maintain and enhance the
biological resource values on District lands. One objective
identified in the East Bay Watershed Management Plan to help
achieve this goal is to maintain, protect, enhance, and where
feasible restore plant and animal communities, populations, and
species. Our Board members support the District's biodiversity
and ecological management goals and the Skyline Gardens
Project's ongoing restoration efforts.

In closing, I encourage you to volunteer and participate in the
Skyline Gardens Project, and engage in the interactive
opportunity to share your knowledge and passion of the
natural environment on this important restoration project.

Sincerely,

Scott Hill

Manager of Watershed & Recreation
East Bay Municipal Utility District

Date: 2019-05-24 06:04:15
From: Eric Neville
To: Marguerite Young, Lesa R. McIntosh, John A. Coleman
Andy Katz, Doug Linney, William B. Patterson, Frank Mellon
CC:
Subject: Keeping nature in Siesta Valley

Dear Director Young and EBMUD Board of Directors:

I was relieved to hear that EBMUD has decided to curtail a project of planting in Siesta Valley, though only after installation of hundreds of plants and the introduction of locally new species, particularly along the Bay Area Ridge Trail.

My primary concern is the loss of nature, including the benefit the public gets in discovering a world bigger than what's hammered down, in discovering that our world is something not yet fully known nor fully controlled. That insight, including that each of us has agency in this world, is integral to the process of developing a citizenry who take responsibility: from clean water, to public funding, to civic oversight boards, to climate stability.

Ironically, I believe that the program that became planting started with taking responsibility in such a fashion. But we humans can become a bit enamored of our abilities to reshape the world. We can also easily lose track of what the world looks like to others. It's called the "curse of knowledge". It's not malicious, but it can have unintended consequences.

And unintended consequences from people who meant the best, using terms like "taming" and "putting to good use", is what reshaped so much of the natural world around us in the past, and left us today with only a few places such as the west slope of Siesta Valley, with the remarkable biodiversity that it has, giving us a rare window on how a local environment predominantly reshaped to our preferences would look instead without human intervention.

Gardening such an area removes the chance to discover nature. Where once seeing a plant in a particular place was a clue to the soil, water, and propagation by which which nature governs itself, instead one wonders if it's just where someone thought they knew better than nature. This is particularly tragic in an area that's such a fortuitous

vestige of native biota.

I do remain concerned that EBMUD is still considering adding locally new plants by scattering seeds. For such a superlatively biodiverse area, doing so is bringing coals to Newcastle, at best. Many other areas in the region would benefit much more from such efforts.

I am also apprehensive that representations of adherence to established restoration methods, such as developed by the Bradley sisters, were belied by undertaking planting, which is not accepted practice thereof.

If EBMUD does wish to add more plants to the west slope of Siesta Valley, particularly along the Ridge Trail, including locally new plants – effectively creating a trail-side botanical garden – then I think such projects should be duly considered, and not pursued by singular impulse.

It seems a little odd to feel myself a strong advocate for not doing. Perhaps we're unfamiliar with not-doing as a cause, in our society. But when it comes to nature's health and beauty, a light hand is best, and restraint a worthy cause.

Respectfully,
Eric Neville