

Dear Mr. Neville,

Thanks for your thoughts and questions about Upper Siesta Valley. I assume you are wondering about the Skyline Gardens Project, which is a project of East Bay CNPS, of which I am the Chair of Restoration Projects. Skyline Gardens Project is a combination botanical survey and restoration project in collaboration with EBMUD Watershed on Watershed land in the Skyline trail area between Tilden Steam Trains and Hwy 24. It is an ongoing, long-term project. I've attached the project Welcome Letter for more background. It is an all-volunteer effort led by naturalist Glen Schneider.

This is a restoration project, not a landscaping project. Besides the botanical survey, the overall project goals are to preserve and restore the natural, wild biodiversity of the area, establish a low-fuel native plant fuelbreak, maintain a safe and biologically rich Skyline Trail bed, and insure sustainable populations of the many rare and unusual plants in the area. The basic approach is the Bradley method, which works outward from strong native populations, removing invasives in adjacent areas to be filled by natives through natural increase. This is the approach we have used at Huckleberry Preserve, and now very successfully at Skyline Gardens. Since you asked about Bradley, I've attached a short summary of the method.

At Skyline Gardens, we spend nearly all of our project time removing invasive species that threaten the natives and keeping the fuelbreak area free from combustible invasives. These invasives include Italian, Star, and Milk Thistles; Poison Hemlock; Rose Clover and several species of invasive grass such as Wild Oats and Bromes. We have spent over 25 workdays alone removing Scattergrass (*Ehrharta*) from the ridgeline areas to protect Siesta Valley proper.

You may have noticed colored sticks, flags, or small wire cages along the trail area and perhaps that gives the impression of landscaping. The vast majority of these mark native plant populations so volunteers can be careful of them when we weed.

You may have also noticed extensive rebuilding of the Skyline Trail 'trail bed' in the area – steps, fencing, switchbacks, and even an armored crossing. Over the past two years, the project has worked closely with EBMUD, the Contra Costa Trail Dogs, the Berkeley Pathwanderers and the Bay Area Ridge Trail to improve degraded trail sections between the Tilden Steam Trains and Four Corners. For erosion control and to better define the trail bed (and keep rogue bikes from going off trail and damaging the plants), the project has used fencing, old logs and native plant revegetation in areas of trail construction. Those plantings were done with locally gathered natives – either transplants or plant starts.

In a few cases, the project seeks to increase populations of select rare and unusual plants to more sustainable numbers and locations. This we do either by direct seeding or planting out small seedlings, which we grow ourselves. In this, we apply

the 'best practices' of habitat restoration, namely using only locally sourced and collected seeds from the immediate Watershed area.

Species we hope to increase to sustainable levels in the area include Fleshy Lupine, native red Cobweb Thistle, Chia, Squirrel-tail Grass, Wire Lettuce, and some of the native clovers. We sow seeds in the dry season. We set out seedlings in the rainy season, with one shot of water to settle in the soil around the roots. These we also mark with colored sticks, flags, or temporarily with plant tubes. After that, once sown or planted, these seeds and starts are on their own and any increase in their numbers in those test spots will come only from natural increase by their own seed dispersal.

We want to assure you that our efforts are done with great love and care, with the ultimate goals of restoring this amazing area to natural wildness and sustainable biodiversity, while maintaining an effective native plant fuelbreak and a safe trail for hikers and horse riders.

Sincerely,

Janet Gawthrop, etc.