

# San Elijo Hills HOA

## **Some of our new plants:**

Carmel Creeper  
Ceanothus

Pacific Mist  
Manzanita

Carmel Sur  
Manzanita

Dwarf Coyote  
Bush

Sunset Manzanita

Franciscana  
Manzanita

Lemonadeberry

Concha  
Ceanothus

## **Our News:**

Why Natives 2

Slope Report 3

Slope Economics 6

*From California Native Plant Society*

Reduce Fire Risk 4

Replace Iceplant 5

## **What's Happening to Our Slopes?**

Some of you have commented on the condition of our slopes. There are many brown areas where the old ground cover is dying off and you would like the HOA to increase the watering. Unfortunately, one of our ground cover varieties has been on the slopes for over 20 years and has reached the end of its life span. Adding more water will not revive it. We need to replant. **But we also need to cut back on our water usage since continued substantial increases in the cost of water is almost a certainty – for example from 2012 to 2013 our water bill increased by 30%!**

The Board believes we need to plan for our long term water needs given the severe drought and the ever increasing costs of water. We need to prepare for using a lot less water in the event mandatory water restrictions are instituted in the future (**It's worthy of mention that the neighboring water district, Santa Fe Irrigation, is voting on water restrictions later this month**). So any replanting we do now has to be compatible with our long term goal of reducing water use. The only way to reduce our water use and return our slopes to green is by replanting with drought tolerant native plants. (See article "Why Native Plants")

The Board would like you to know that we have been working on this very important issue for years. We have researched and consulted with several water districts and plant consultants on the best way to reduce our water dependency while maintaining attractive slopes. We have concluded that replanting with plants that use up to 70% less water than our current plants is the only way to accomplish our long term goal of water reduction and plant replacement.

Since we have approximately 11 acres of slope, we cannot afford to replant all the slopes at the same time. Hiring an outside professional to replant would cost us in the ballpark of \$50,000 an acre. To make it affordable, our solution is to replant up to 400 plants on 1/4 to 1/3 acre of slope every 6 to 8 weeks using our existing landscape contractor. That means we have to pull the regular crew off slope detail for a couple days to prepare and replant each slope. But our most significant savings is coming from the help we are getting from John Frank and a couple of Board members who donate many hours each week to help keep this project affordable. Their help and support means we have more money to replant faster.

We know you would love to see instant green. But unfortunately we will not see immediate results. It will be years before all slopes have been replanted. And it may take a couple years for these plants to become fully established. But once they do, we may have to water them only in the summer months and then only once every other week. That's a HUGE reduction in our water dependency.

If you have questions, concerns or suggestions, please come to our monthly meeting at the Santa Fe Country Club on the last Wednesday of every month. The agenda is always posted a few days in advance. We look forward to seeing you.

Thank you.

## Why Natives

By Morgan Vondrak



*A truly magnificent ground cover, 'Carmel Sur' is a gorgeous, flat (3-6" high) Manzanita that is evergreen and just luscious on slopes.*

*evergreen, drought tolerant, fire resistant, climate appropriate reduce maintenance, and save money.\**



*This versatile, low-growing evergreen lilac, Carmel Creeper Ceanothus, will reach 6'+ while staying under 2' in height. Glossy green leaves and light blue blossoms characterize this groundcover. It is ideal for mass plantings on slopes.*

For many people those two words conjure up an image of prickly beige colored gardens, full of scrubby little mounds of sparsely planted perennials with a few boulders thrown in and maybe a dry stream for good measure. While there are indeed a number of "native" (and not native) landscapes that do fit that image, these gardens are more the victim of poor design choices and lack of maintenance than they are of being "native". Certainly there are a good number of native plants that do look rather scrubby and unattractive for a fair portion of the year, but for every scrubby and unattractive native plant there is an equally lovely alternative that will stay green and healthy all year round. Additionally, appropriate maintenance and minimal supplemental watering can make the difference between a green and lush native landscape and a brown scrubby patch of wilderness.

Truly the benefits of a well-designed and maintained native landscape using appropriate plant materials well outweigh those of traditional landscape plantings that have taken a toll on our resources for so long. The most important of these benefits relates to water savings. Traditional landscapes account for up to 70% of our potable water use in Southern California regions. With our current drought status and the amount of energy and resources it takes to pump our water to us from northern regions, this practice is no longer just unsustainable, it is now simply unacceptable. Mature native landscapes have been shown to reduce water use from up to 70% down to 20-30% which means a savings of at least half of the water currently used on traditional landscapes. This means that for areas such as the slope areas abutting the lagoon and other large common areas found at San Elijo Hills, native plantings are simply the most appropriate choice for saving water and other resources.

Additionally, for communities that share property lines with open space areas, native plantings along those interface areas create a buffer which allows communities and homeowners to be good stewards to our remaining natural areas. Plants like Iceplant, Acacia, and other invasive species that are commonly used to plant slope areas can and do invade native open space areas. They push out native species creating habitat loss and according to the California Invasive Plant Council: "invasive species are the second-greatest threat to endangered species, after habitat destruction". By installing appropriate native species in these interface areas we are protecting our remaining wilderness areas and practicing good stewardship of our environment.

By designing thoughtfully laid out landscapes using the appropriate native plant materials for our communities we can create common areas that are evergreen, drought tolerant, fire resistant, climate appropriate, reduce resource consumption, reduce maintenance, and save money. Which begs the question...why not natives?

*Morgan has provided San Elijo Hills HOA on sight consultation on plant selection, plant placement and plant maintenance. She is Owner/Designer of Argia Designs. Argia Designs provides residential and commercial landscape design and consultation services specializing in sustainable landscape design. Designer Morgan Vondrak has over 10 years of experience working with California native plants and has completed sustainable landscape design certification through the G3 group of Los Angeles.*

# Slopes Report

By John Frank

## Board Members

Fred Dawn  
Stu Erwin  
Teri Melese  
Donna Mancuso  
Mark Flather  
Sarah Devereux  
Al Benner

## Address

San Elijo Hills HOA  
P.O. Box 232  
Solana Beach, CA 92075

## Business Office

Landmark Business Services  
263 S. Highway 101  
Solana Beach, CA 92075  
858-481-5809  
rgwatts@sbcglobal.net

## Web Site

<http://sanelijohills1.org>

Starting late last year we decided to change our watering schedule and cycle times. The reason for this change was both due to water costs and what we are being told to expect regarding the availability of water in the very near future. Our schedule change was working well until late March when we had three days of unexpected 100 degree weather.

We have had a number of homeowners who have asked about the condition of the ground cover on our slopes. Due to our self-imposed water cutbacks and the unusual hot weather, much of the older Disneyland Ice Plant is dying off. The newer Rosea Iceplant is recovering and is greening up.

Metropolitan Water District has already imposed mandatory water restrictions in most of the districts they directly serve. If Olivenhain Water District allows us, we will continue to water more frequently for the next 2 months. If we are told to cut back, we have no choice but to water as we are told.

We have had several meetings with Olivenhain Water District Management as well as a meeting with the Joint Powers Authority. The purpose of these meetings was to see what we could do about bringing in reclaimed water to our slopes. Unfortunately it appears to be cost prohibitive for us to bring in reclaimed water to the majority of our association. Our two neighboring associations are both fortunate to be directly adjacent to the main reclaimed water pipeline. This enabled them to hookup to said line without undue expense. In order for us to enjoy the use of reclaimed water we would have to pay to install a main water line from corner of Highland and Sun Valley all the way down Highland to Santa Victoria, then up Santa Victoria to the corner of Santa Victoria and Santa Petra Dr. The costs to install water service lines in the street are in the neighborhood of approximately one million dollars a mile. We are continuing to look at possibly converting one of our Highland slopes to a nearby source of reclaimed water.

In order for us to have a viable ground cover we believe that our only alternative is to convert many of our slopes to a native plant ground cover. This will allow us to have stable slopes that require very minimal water (once the native plants are established). We are planting some native ground cover in select areas. Through experimentation (along with expert advice) we should end up with ground cover that is both hardy as well as pleasing in appearance.

# California Native Plant Society

## **Advice about Landscaping the Fire Zone in San Diego**

Homeowners who live adjacent to open space often ask about plants appropriate for landscaping to reduce fire risk. Answering this question is not simple, although some jurisdictions nevertheless provide lists of preferred plant species based on vague, often unsubstantiated criteria. Typically, these lists focus on non-native varieties common in the landscape trade and under-represent natives. Many lists recommend invasive nonnative plants that may out-compete native plants.

Many homeowners live near open space with a vigorous native plant community, but don't know the identity of many of the plants they are asked to manage for fire safety. Because of the variety of microclimates in San Diego, it's better to choose plants adapted to your location rather than replace a healthy plant community with a generic list of plants that may not grow well in your location. For this reason, fire-safe criteria should be based on general plant characteristics, instead of particular plant species.

Matthew Etlinger's Master's thesis, "Fire Performance of Landscape Plants" (1997, U.C. Berkeley), examined the peak heat release rate (correlated with flame height and radiant heat output) of six common landscape plants at different moisture contents. Etlinger found that moisture content was the main determinant of the heat released per mass of foliage. He concluded that the two most important characteristics of fire resistant plants are high leaf moisture content throughout the fire season and minimal accumulation of dead material.

High moisture content can be maintained in two ways: •

- Choose plants with thick evergreen leaves, such as lemonadeberry (*Rhus integrifolia*), laurel sumac (*Malosma laurina*), or scrub oak (*Quercus beberidifolia*) (to name a few – there are many others) that maintain their moisture even when drying winds are present.
- Provide supplemental irrigation as needed to keep the plants healthy. In the City of San Diego, Zone 1 (30 feet from the structure) should be irrigated, but in Zone 2 (30-100 ft. from the structure), permanent irrigation is not allowed since it encourages growth of weeds. Nevertheless, occasional overhead sprinkling is useful during times of prolonged drought to prevent plant mortality. The City recommends that Zone 2 vegetation be thinned and all dead material be removed.

For more information see:

- City of San Diego Fire Safety and Brush Management Guide [www.sandiego.gov/fireandems/inspections/brush.shtml](http://www.sandiego.gov/fireandems/inspections/brush.shtml) •
- Information for San Diego at our chapter website, including "Fire, Chaparral, and Survival in Southern California" (for sale at our chapter meetings); [www.cnpsd.org/fire/index.html](http://www.cnpsd.org/fire/index.html), Please avoid invasive non-native plants in your landscaping. For a guide on how to avoid problem plants, please refer to the Southern California Don't Plant a Pest brochure and the San Diego County Invasive and Ornamental Plant Guide, available at [www.cnpsd.org/invasives.html](http://www.cnpsd.org/invasives.html),

Thank you for managing for fire safety while preserving the integrity and beauty of native plant communities.



*Dedicated to the preservation of California native flora*

# California Native Plant Society

## **How To Restore An Iceplant-Covered Hillside In San Diego**

### **Situation**

Years ago, freeway iceplant (*Carpobrotus edulis*) was touted as the perfect solution for fire safety. Planted on hillsides of thousands of homes in San Diego, it has since crawled off the original site and into neighboring Open Space parks, endangering unique plants by smothering them. Iceplant provides little habitat value compared to the plant community that it is replacing. Compared to the native shrubs, iceplant has very shallow roots that do not hold soil well; close inspection often reveals gullies underneath the twisted mat of vines. After rain, iceplant engorges with water, substantially increasing its weight. As a result, iceplant can cause the deterioration of steep hillsides by encouraging slumping – potentially endangering the house above.

### **Solution**

Replace your iceplant with well-chosen native plants.

### **PROCEDURE:**

First, remove the iceplant. Then add native container plants, leaving the dead iceplant to act as mulch while the container plants become established. Keep an eye out for volunteers of native plants, which may return once the iceplant is removed.

#### **1. Remove the Iceplant:**

Because of its shallow roots, iceplant can be easily pulled, piled up and left to dry out (which will take several months). If erosion on a steep hillside is a concern, iceplant can be killed in place by spraying with 2% (final concentration) of Roundup. Choose a low-wind day. Check the label for precise directions on use. The active ingredient, glyphosate, is essentially non-toxic to humans and other animals – its target is an enzyme specific to plants; it does not bioaccumulate and it breaks down over time. It binds tightly to soil particles and is therefore unlikely to wash from the site. Roundup will not kill seeds, but it will kill desirable plants, which may be covered while one sprays. It will take several weeks for sprayed plants to start yellowing. A good schedule to follow is: treat in the spring or summer, then plant or sow seed in the late fall.

#### **2. Plant container plants**

First, decide what plants are appropriate, figure out where to get them, and then plant them.

#### ***Appropriate Plants:***

First, there may be a viable native seed bank, so keep an eye out for volunteers of native plants, which will return once the shade by the iceplant is removed. Next, choose plants based on the habitat type that originally existed on your hillside. If possible, find a nearby area with native vegetation, and study the slopes that have the orientation as yours (for example, south-facing or north-facing). The native plants growing there are the ones that will be successful on your hillside with the least maintenance.

The city of San Diego publishes two pamphlets that deal with appropriate native plants, appropriate brush management and fire safety. Call 619-533-4444 or download from:

[www.ci.san-diego.ca.us/fireandems/inspections/brush.shtml](http://www.ci.san-diego.ca.us/fireandems/inspections/brush.shtml)

- Environmentally Sensitive Erosion Control for Canyons and Hillsides
- Fire Safety and Brush Management Guide



*Dedicated to the preservation of California native flora*

# FROM YOUR HOA

# IMPORTANT INFORMATION

# PLEASE

# READ

## **The Economics of Replanting Our Slopes**

The HOA generates approximately \$150,000 to \$160,000 per year from Slope Assessments, Dues, Interest Income and Fees.

On average total expenses track closely to this amount with slope care and maintenance accounting for about 85% of our expenses.

During our fiscal year 2013 our water costs went from \$36,000 to \$47,000; a 30% increase. That same year our expenses exceeded our costs by \$3,000. We immediately started to more closely monitor and reduce our water use. Due to our additional water conservation efforts we were able to reduce water costs fairly significantly this past year giving us a little more of a cushion.

With the ever increasing cost of water and the lingering question about access to water in the future due to the drought we are focused on the long term plan of converting our slopes to native landscaping to reduce our water dependency as much as possible.

Ideally, we'd like to accelerate the conversion process as quickly as possible but due to our limited financial resources it will take several years to complete the process.

**The PC&R's of our Association limit us to increasing our dues by 7% per year.** We've been very sensitive to increasing dues and have only done so sparingly over the last several years. We have some cash reserves which we are using wisely for this project while insuring we keep enough cash on hand for contingencies.

**If we wanted to generate enough additional revenue to *more quickly* carry out the conversion, the only other alternative would be a special assessment, which requires a 2/3's vote of our members. In our experience it's been difficult if not nearly impossible to get enough interest in the community to attract that many favorable votes for any reason let alone a special assessment.**

Therefore, we're going to forge on with the conversion as rapidly as our finances allow. This will result in our slopes looking less than ideal during this process but to secure the long-term beauty of our community and to keep the HOA financially viable we believe this is the best approach.