

Notes and Talking Points:
Los Gatos Creek Tour w/ Committee for Green Foothills
L. Ames, 10/13/12

The Committee for Green Foothills organized a Watershed Tour for Oct. 13, 2012. The tour was by bus, starting at Forbes Mill in Los Gatos, with stops at Lexington Reservoir, Vasona Park, the Campbell Percolation Ponds, and the Los Gatos Creek Urban Stream Restoration Project near Meridian, and thence back to Forbes Mill

I was asked to provide commentary for the bus ride. The following are my talking points, organized by segments.

1→2 (Forbes Mill to Lexington Reservoir)

Introduction

- I am a physicist at local aerospace company
- avid bicyclist, living in Willow Glen
- involved w/ creeks, trails, parks, habitats, community and urban planning for >30 yrs.
- Goal today is to entertain and inform you about all things Los Gatos Creek.
- see hand-out. Note: Google maps w/ bike route overlay and terrain enabled.

The Creek

- 24 miles long, with trail roughly half the length
- from Loma Prieta (3,806') to Confluence Point (HP Pavilion Arena, downtown SJ: ~90')
- thence another 12 miles as part of Guadalupe River, flowing to Bay at Alviso
- LG flows thru Williams Res., Lake Elzman, Lexington Res, and Vasona Lake.
- State Assemblymember Jim Beall is advocating the purchase of 8,000 acres from SJ Water Co. by MidPen, Santa Clara Co. Parks & POST: extend trail to old-growth redwood forest and mountain lakes.

Climate

- San José gets ~15"/year
- Los Gatos gets 26.45"/yr
- Wrights Station (near summit) gets 46.1"/yr

Railroad

- once was rail from SF to Santa Cruz,
- first built in 1880 as narrow-gauge;
- upgraded to std. gauge ~1907: used to provide the redwood needed to rebuild SF after the earthquake.
- abandoned after washout Feb. 1940.
- short segment of track remains in LG's Main St. plaza
- much of trail from Los Gatos to Vasona Dam is along old railroad bed

- some of the old bridge foundations remain: once considered them for alternate trail alignment.
- in the movie “After the Thin Man” (1936), can see Santa Cruz listed on train schedule.
- several mile-long tunnels: closed off; used for data storage(?)

Lexington Dam & Hwy 17

- built around 1951
- flooded the town of Alma, home to Allan and Malcolm Loughead, founders of Alco Hydro-Aeroplane Company, precursor to the modern Lockheed-Martin.
- Old Santa Cruz Rd. (formerly the old El Camino Real of 1791) went along the canyon
- Hwy 17 built in 1935; realigned in the early 50’s for the dam. The 1935 road still visible as part of the LG Crk Trail (just before the dam).

Highway 17 follows the route of the early Spanish road between Mission Santa Clara and Mission Santa Cruz, which was established on September 25, 1791 by Franciscan Father Fermín Lasuén. This road through the Santa Cruz Mountains was originally an early Indian trail that was improved by mission neophytes in 1791. The route through Los Gatos and Campbell followed much of what is now known as Winchester Boulevard.

- 1990: CalTrans upgrade of Hwy 17 to freeway and the Bear Creek interchange:
 - bike access from Los Gatos Creek Trail to Montevina Rd or Old Santa Cruz Hwy: California Street and Highway Code, now numbered as section 888:

"888. The department [CalTrans] shall not construct a state highway as a freeway that will result in the severance or destruction of an existing major route for nonmotorized transportation traffic and light motorcycles, unless it provides a reasonable, safe, and convenient alternate route or such a route exists."

[Story]

- Jim Beall’s father, Jim Beall Sr., grew up in area of what’s now Lexington Res.
- in the 1930’s, he and friend Don Hebard (see below) got summer job picking plums on orchard up in the hills
- when finished, went to get paid, only to be told the owner had left town: they never got paid.
- owner had gone off to London on a book tour: John Steinbeck promoting “the Grapes of Wrath”.
- Jim and Don called their adventure “the Prunes of Wrath” (!).
- (Steinbeck lived in Monte Serreno, but was bothered by his fans, so he retreated to his farm up in the mountains.)

2→3 (Lexington to Vasona)

Regional Trail System

- Don Weden, IGC Trails & Pathways Cmte, ~30 years ago
- wagon wheel: Bay Area Ridge Trail as rim, SF Bay Trail as hub, Los Gatos (and Guadalupe, Coyote, Penitencia, Stevens Creek, ...) as spokes
- plus DeAnza trail

Vasona Park

- crown jewel of Santa Clara County Park System
- system also has remote parks (Uvas Canyon, Mt. Madona, Grant Ranch, ...) with hiking and camping
- system has other urban parks: Hellyer, Ed Levin, Alviso Marina, Penitencia, Santa Teresa, ...
- on-going discussion: should future County Parks be more remote and rural, or more urban and accessible? (Don't want to get into the business of building and maintaining totlots and pocket-parks: that's the realm of cities and towns...)
- Co. Parks also coordinates with cities and towns on the regional trails, including the Los Gatos.

3→4 (Vasona to Campbell)

Fantasy of Lights

- nighttime drive-thru of Vasona; November 23 – December 31. \$10(?)

Trail Plans?

- the trail now loops around the western side of the lake and dead-ends near the dam.
- there's some discussion about possibly extending the trail past the dam and back across the creek:
 - loop
 - keep thru bicyclists on western shores, away from picnic area and playgrounds.

Los Gatos Creek Streamside Park Cmte

- founded 1975 by Don Hebard (godfather of the Los Gatos Creek Trail, Campbell resident since 1957; died 9/25/09) and Co. Supervisor Rod Diridon.
- Officially a County Committee, staffed by Co. Parks & Rec. (Debbie Turpen), but we had an unusual charter: we were free to correspond to anyone (e.g., town councils of Campbell, Los Gatos & SJ; CalTrans; SCVWD as well as Co. Parks&Rec.)
- met monthly in basement of Campbell City Hall (employee's lounge)
- members:
 - Jim Sugai (Los Gatos);
 - Chris Svensson (before: Charlotte Teichner; later: me) for San Jose;
 - Bill Hoeft for SCVWD;
 - Margaret Shafer for South Bay Striders;
 - Libby Lucas (streams & creeks advocate);
 - Artemas Ginzton (InterGov'tal Cmte Trails & Pathways),
 - plus various guests (e.g., staff to Supervisors, SCVWD Boardmembers, organizers of other trail systems).
- held ribbon-cutting ceremonies for each segment: great way to raise awareness of elected officials.

4→5 (Campbell to Meridian Ave.)

Dry Creek

- 1886: Los Gatos Creek floods and cuts a new channel. The old creek bed now used as a road: Dry Creek Road.
- channel forms the Amphitheater in Willow Street Park
- LG Crk returns to original channel about 1 block east of Meridian, at Twin Brook Dr.

Los Gatos Creek Trail Master Plan (1985)

- block grant from Nancy Ianni
- chair: Virginia Holtz
- called for trail to Meridian, plus Lincoln to downtown SJ: gap in middle because not allowed to seek easements from private landowners
- called for linear park between Leigh and Meridian

5 (at the trail entrance/kiosk at St. Elizabeth and Stokes)

Los Gatos Creek Urban Stream Restoration Project 1993)

- by 1992, Master Planned trail project began to lose steam and to collect dust on the shelf, so we in the neighborhood undertook a project of our own “to spur the city on.”
- 1993: applied for (and won) a \$66,500 grant from the Calif. Dept. of Water Resources (DWR) (plus \$500 from CA Trails & Greenways Found.)
- County Parks & Rec. served as financial co-sponsor: assist with funding and billing.
- goal: to use native plantings to reduce overbank erosion.
- land owned by SCVWD: willing to allow planting so long as they didn’t lose its benefit as “mitigation site”
- 2-1/2 years of negotiations w/ City, County, SCVWD, DWR, Calif. Dept. of Fish & Game, and US Corps of Engineering: statewide precedence set for “advanced mitigation”
- plantings: Dec ’95 – Apr ’96. Then-Co.Sup. Jim Beall very supportive, w/ family, planted many trees.
- contract to Our City Forest to do plantings for an additional year.
- total: 200 volunteers, 1,000 native trees and shrubs planted, buried irrigation line w/ solar-powered computerized drip-irrigation system, plus a kiosk to house it.
- used as “exemplar” for city’s Riparian Corridor Setback Policy
- inspired SCVWD Board to change its charter to include “land stewardship”.
- reinvigorated city to continue development of LG Crk Trail and other urban stream trail systems.
- improved the habitat: steelhead and meter-long salmon have been spotted in the creek here and even further upstream
- enlivened and involved the community

5→1 (return to Forbes Mill)

Continuation

- trail exists from Lonus (near Lincoln), under I-280, past the former DelMonte cannery, up to San Carlos (beneath the bridge by the downtown OSH).
- plans exist to extend to Confluence Point (by HP Pavilion Arena)
- LG Crk in a culvert at Bird/Park: community is pushing City to “daylight” the creek as part of stadium development plans: “Free the Los Gatos Creek!”
- GreenPrint 2009 update includes language about studying a connection between Meridian and Lincoln
- Also: Three Creeks Trail planned to connect LG Crk Trail, Guadalupe River Trail, and Coyote Creek Trail: Willow Glen to Kelley Park. Land already half-bought; community is busy lobbying developers and elected officials for easements and funding for remainder. Have negotiated a bridge overcrossing of rail lines as part of High Speed Rail plans.

Riparian Corridor Setback Policy

- see back of hand-out
- “Guidelines” on how close developers can build near to the creeks
 - closer → more units → more profits
 - further → more room for nature and for recreational trails
- Recent General Plan Update (“Envision 2040”) calls for strengthening and codification.
- Still an on-going battle: community involvement and support are critical!

stay involved!

- press city of SJ to fund trail connection study
- press all for 3 Crks Trail
- tell Jim Beall you support his efforts to extend the trail up to the redwoods and mountain lakes.
- push back against projects that adversely impact riparian corridor
- participate in stream clean-ups and habitat plantings/restorations
- enjoy the creek!

References:

County of Santa Clara Historic Context Statement

http://www.sccgov.org/sites/planning/Plans%20-%20Programs/Historic%20Preservation/Heritage%20Resource%20Inventory/Documents/Historic_Context_FEB2012.pdf

Willow Glen timeline:

http://www.mercurynews.com/ci_7483222

<http://www.wmsb.net/loughead-lockheed.html>

Allan & Malcolm Loughead (Lockheed): brothers living in Alma, Santa Cruz Mountains, 1903

Southern Pacific's train to Santa Cruz: narrow-gauge 1880; std track 1907 - 2/26/1940:

http://www.rattenne.com/nrhs/santacruz/Santa_Cruz_line.htm