



OAK LEAVES

A PUBLICATION OF THE LOS OSOS / MORRO BAY CHAPTER OF SMALL WILDERNESS AREA PRESERVATION
P.O. BOX 6442, LOS OSOS, CALIFORNIA 93412-6442 ❖ (805) 546-1199 ❖ APRIL / MAY 1999

Boardwalk Is Underway

*By Jan DiLeo
County Parks Planner / Elfin Forest Project Coordinator*

On February 3rd, the Boardwalk Project archaeologist, botanist and snail specialist held an orientation meeting with the California Conservation Corps (CCC) construction team, members of SWAP, and County Parks staff at the Elfin Forest. The purpose of the orientation was to make sure the CCC crew is aware of the sensitive resources within the Forest. As trail construction occurs, the botanist (V. L. Holland), the archaeologist (John Parker), and the snail specialist (Ed Reeves) will stay ahead of the CCC construction team, indicating any habitat or cultural resources that must be avoided.

The CCC crew began construction of the Elfin Forest Boardwalk on February 9. Construction is currently occurring along the Ridge Trail west of 16th Street. So far, the boardwalk is in place from the 16th Street entrance to the Ridge Trail where the main boardwalk loop begins. The CCC is hoping to complete 100 feet of boardwalk a day, with construction ending in late May or early June, 1999.

To make construction easier, a storage shed and portable toilet have been placed at the end of 16th Street. These facilities will be removed as soon as construction is completed. Thanks to all the neighbors who have provided encouraging words and coffee to the CCC crew.

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Special May 3 Meeting

The SWAP Board of Directors has scheduled a special general meeting at 7:30 p.m. on Monday, May 3, at the Church of the Nazarene, 1480 Santa Ysabel Avenue, Los Osos.

The primary purpose of the meeting will be to approve a revision of the bylaws for the Los Osos/Morro Bay Chapter, and to elect candidates for the Board of Directors. In addition, representatives from the County Parks Department and the California Conservation Corps will be present to talk about the progress of the Elfin Forest Boardwalk, and answer questions.

Because the revised bylaws require that all members of the Board of Directors be elected as Directors (who elect officers later), all four members of the current Board will have to run for re-election. Additional nominees will be presented, and nominations will be accepted from the floor.

For more information, please phone the chapter voicemail, 546-1199, and your call will be returned.



At right, a CCC crew works on one stage of the Elfin Forest Boardwalk

Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival Pays Off A Loan

A report by Jerry Deitz, Bird Festival Treasurer

The Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival has been a success for the past three years. SWAP was one of the initial supporters of this event. The others were Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce, Natural History Association/Museum, Morro Coast Audubon Society, and Friends of the Estuary. Each organization contributed \$200 in interim funds to launch the endeavor.

Since the Morro Bay area is on a specific migratory path, is the winter home for many bird species, and there was a need to stimulate birding during the winter months, it seemed natural to hold a winter bird festival in this area. With help from government agencies, environmental organizations and area businesses, the first festival was held in January, 1997 during the Martin Luther King Birthday weekend. Visitors enjoyed birding on land (including the Elfin Forest), in the Bay, and on the ocean. Over 200 species of birds can be found in San Luis Obispo County during the winter.

In the following festivals, birders have come from as far away as Washington, Arkansas, Maine, Massachusetts and Florida. The Bird Festival has become a permanent institution with sufficient funds to support future festivals. Therefore, it was my pleasure recently to return the \$200 "loan" made by SWAP to start the Festival rolling. The other organizations who helped fund the first festival have similarly been repaid.

The Winter Bird Festival in 2000 will again be held over the Martin Luther King Birthday weekend. Any members of SWAP who would like to join the Festival Steering Committee in planning or participating may phone 772-4656 or 528-7136.

A Way to Remember Someone

Would you like to dedicate an Elfin Forest bench to a family member or close friend? Wood benches that will be located along the Elfin Forest Boardwalk are available for purchase. Bench orders include a plaque with information regarding the family member or friend.

Depending on the bench style, the entire package (bench and plaque) has a price range from \$200 to \$400. Contact Jan Di Leo at 781-4089 for more information.



Book Review

Spirit of the Valley, An Ecological Mythology of an Oak Savanna

by Baxter Trautman

(Black Mountain Press; 1998. 166 pp. \$12.95 pbk)

A review by M. A. Martin

Spirit of the Valley, An Ecological Mythology of an Oak Savanna by Baxter Trautman is an entertaining day's journey into the surprising relationships between ancient mythology and the environs of our central coast. Scratching your head? Wondering how one can possibly relate something as esoteric as Greek myth with the mighty oak trees of San Luis Obispo County? Trautman makes it not only an easy transition, but also a plausible one.

He begins by expanding on the neo science of Biophilia (the theory that humans are genetically drawn to other living organisms in a symbiosis of evolution) with the eyes of a poet and the heart of a preservationist. His writing style is part John Muir, part Thoreau, and part Forest Service.

With contagious glee, Trautman imbues the magnificent California oak with the trappings of mythological royalty. Oak trees, possibly because of their innate conductivity, have been since pre-history associated with lightning. Oaks and lightning, therefore, were the ritual partners of such forceful deities as Zeus, Jupiter, and Thor.

Trautman offers similar nuggets of ancient lore that he then skillfully applies to other inhabitants of the central coast. Upon marveling at a pair of band-tailed pigeons, he relates the myth of the goddesses Astarte, Aphrodite, and Venus whose shrines all worshipped the dove as a symbol of true love. He waxes poetic on how the Muses turned nine obnoxious sisters into magpies and wonders why the yellow billed magpie exists here in central California and nowhere else in the world. He tells of woodpeckers being used as diviners and of Greeks listening to the rustle of oak leaves to hear news from Zeus.

Trautman also makes it clear that everything in life is connected. He posits that we in San Luis Obispo County today are connected by the simple act of seed migration to the Mesopotamia of some 2000 years ago; that we are connected to the Spanish explorers who imported cattle to our grasslands; and that we are connected to the kit foxes and ground squirrels and titmice and all other flora and fauna by an "elastic but unbreakable leash" of behaviors and responses.

Spirit of the Valley is a loving ode to what is most precious on our central coast.

Note: Madeline Martin is a recent arrival on the Central Coast; she is a writer and lives in San Luis Obispo.



Meet Our County Parks Planner

An Interview by Yolanda Waddell



Jan DiLeo

Jeannette (Jan) DiLeo has a highly responsible job in the County Department of Parks and Recreation — she is the County Parks Planner. More importantly for SWAP, she is the Elfin Forest Projects Coordinator. On a recent sunny winter day, I had the pleasure of interviewing her over lunch. I learned the following: The Parks Planner obtains project funding and has project plans prepared for a given project. Sources of funds are usually state

or federal grants, facility fees, and/or impact fees. Next the Planner must obtain permits (from the Coastal Commission for instance), coordinate environmental reviews, and maintain contact with other agencies.

In the case of the Elfin Forest, Jan has coordinated the planning and now the building, of the Boardwalk. She brought together representatives from SWAP, the California Conservation Corps (who are doing the building), the boardwalk architects, County Parks staff, and a representative from the County Environmental Planning Dept., to meet and agree on procedures for building the boardwalk while protecting the Elfin Forest's sensitive habitats. She has also made sure that all state and federal requirements are met, and that "the agencies are happy." She believes that it is important to build trust.

Jan has lived in San Luis Obispo since 1990, when she moved from Santa Barbara where she did land use planning. Before she came to work full time for County Parks, she put together the Open Space Element for the City of San Luis Obispo which defined the city's Greenbelt. In 1993, she started her own business as a consultant, and among other things put together the Cambria Parks Recreation and Open Space Master Plan for the Cambria Community Services District.

I asked Jan how she became interested in environmental planning. She replied that she was born in a small desert community in Southern California and then, when she was a teenager, her family moved to Los Angeles. She

was bothered by the smog and congestion and, since it was the 1970s, she became an activist, working with Common Cause. In college she received a B.A. in Environmental Studies; she planned to be a specialist in Environmental Impact Reviews (EIRs), but then her interest turned to urban planning, and she went on for her M.A. in Urban Planning with an environmental emphasis.

Asked what are the greatest threats to the Elfin Forest at this time, Jan replied that the creation of many side trails by Forest visitors is very damaging, as is the impact of domestic animals and invasive plants such as Veldt grass. Future projects will probably include the removal of most of the "ad hoc" trails; encouraging visitors to keep their dogs on a leash; weed control; and creating areas for public access while maintaining most of the Elfin Forest as a wilderness to protect wildlife corridors and threatened plant species.

Jan is happy to answer questions and receive comments about the Boardwalk and other aspects of the Elfin Forest. She can be reached at the County Parks office, 781-4089 or by e-mail at jdileo@co.slo.ca.us.

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Where To Call, Where To Write

If you have questions about SWAP activities or want to volunteer, please call our phone message service at 546-1199.



A recorded message will have information about the Third Saturday Walks and other current events.



If you have questions, concerns or comments about anything that's happening in the Elfin Forest, call or write:

Pete Jenny, SLO County Parks Facilities Manager,
1087 Santa Rosa Street, SLO, CA 93408, (805) 781-5930.

Los Osos/Morro Bay Chapter Bylaws Revised

By Bob McDougle, Treasurer and Acting Chair

After three meetings, with much discussion and thought, the SWAP Board has produced a revised and updated set of bylaws which we hope will improve the functioning of our organization.

There were many editorial changes and additions to clarify statements and remove unnecessary language. The more significant changes are as follows:

1. Members whose dues are in arrears will no longer receive the newsletter.
2. The method of electing officers and board members (Directors) is changed. In the past, officers were elected by the membership. The officers then appointed coordinators (committee chair-persons) who then automatically became members of the Board of Directors. The result was a con-

tinually changing Board of Directors as changes were made in committee leadership.

The method now proposed is that the members of the Board (Directors) are elected by the membership. Officers are appointed from within the board by vote of the Board of Directors. Committee chair-persons are appointed by the Board Chair-person with the approval of the Board of Directors. This process permits easy changes to committee assignments while maintaining a stable Board of Directors. The Board is to consist of not fewer than six nor more than ten Directors.

3. The duty and authority of each officer and committee chair-person has been redefined in the bylaws.

4. In elections, members unable to attend may request absentee ballots.

THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU

To the following

new and renewing members, and donors

Jo-Ann Youngner, Martha & Stan Autrey,
Les & Rosemary Bowker, Christine Lancellotti,
Carolyn Boomer, Ann Calhoun, Marie Campagna,
Allen & Susan Minkert, Willa Butts,
Max & Helen Sichert, Jose & Ruth Sansaricq,
Mildred & Arleigh Schwab, Thomas Hadjiyane,
Ereign Hutchinson, Dianna Minnix,
Mary J. Harrison, Diana Casey, Marilyn Rodacker,
Louise Daniel, Harry & Lurlie Edgecomb, Gordon Black,
Keith and Beth Wimer, Jay and Yolanda Waddell,
John and Betty Daugherty, Sylvia Rosenberg,
William (Bill) Bouton, Ruby Avelar,
Phyllis Foulstone, Ronald Rasmussen

We have scheduled a General Meeting on May 3rd (see related article) for examination and approval by SWAP members of the revised bylaws, and election of a slate of nominees to the Board of Directors. Because of the new method of electing the Board of Directors, all four current members of the Board will have to run for re-election if they wish, and two to six more nominees will be added to the slate. Any member who wishes to read the revised bylaws before the meeting may obtain a copy by phoning the chapter voicemail number, 546-1199; a copy will be mailed to the member promptly.

SWAP BOARD MEETINGS

The SWAP Board of Directors meets on the second Monday of each month at 7 p.m. (note change - previously 6 p.m.). Board meetings will be held at the NEP Office, 3rd and El Moro Streets in Baywood Park on Monday, April 12, and Monday, June 14.

There will be a General Meeting at the Nazarene Church on Monday, May 3. (See related item in this issue.)

All Board meetings are open to the public.

april 12

june 14



OAK LEAVES

Oak Leaves is published six times per year beginning in February.

Acting Editor is Yolanda Waddell; layout is by Katy Budge.

Contributors to this issue:

Jerry Deitz, Jan DiLeo, Madeline Martin,
Bob McDougle, Marla Morrissey,
and Dirk and Bonnie Walters.

Printed at Hay Printing, Morro Bay on recycled paper.
Labeled and mailed at Achievement House.

Deadline for copy to Oak Leaves is the 2nd Monday before the month of issue. If possible, all copy should be submitted on disk, preferably in Microsoft Word.

THIRD SATURDAY WALKS

April 17— 9:30 a.m.

Wildflowers are at their peak in the Elfin Forest during April. Join Mary Coffeen, author of *Central Coast Wildflowers*, for a joyous exploration through the forest's dune scrub, chaparral and groves to find and identify the blooms of its native plants.

May 15 — 9:30 a.m.

Get a different view of the Elfin Forest through the lens of your camera on a walk especially for camera bugs of all ages and levels of experience. A local photographer will provide pointers on composition and lighting, as well as how to solve problems of high contrast lighting and dense foliage. Wildflowers will provide an opportunity for close-up photography. A SWAP docent will also be along to identify plants and birds.

June 19 — 9:30 a.m.

Tour the Elfin Forest's "plant neighborhoods" with biologist Steve Mueller. Learn how plants both compete with other species, yet are dependent on them as well. Steve will also talk about ways the Chumash used many of the plants for food, building and clothing materials, and medicine.

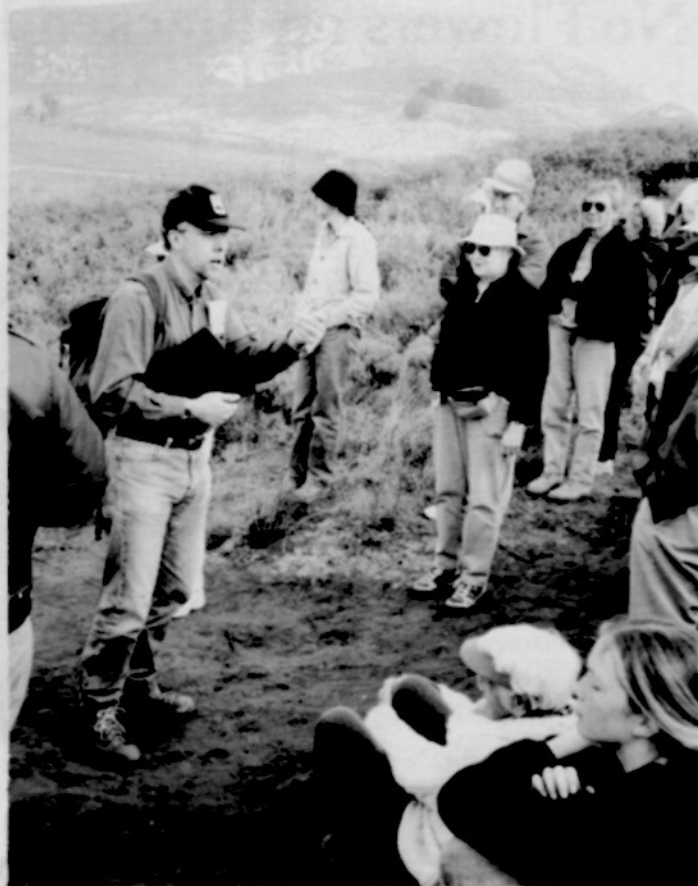
Walks in the Elfin Forest begin at the north end of 15th Street off Santa Ysabel in Los Osos. Wear comfortable shoes, long sleeves and pants to avoid poison oak and mosquitoes.

Please park carefully, avoiding driveways and mailboxes.

We ask that you not bring dogs or other pets.

The easy paced walks last 1-1/2 to 2 hours.

For more information call (805) 528-4540 evenings.



Above, Historian Robert Pavlik led a literary stroll through the Elfin Forest in February which drew over 40 rapt listeners. In other SWAP Walk news ... Dennis Sheridan wasn't able to lead a Fungus Foray as he usually does in January, because there was no rain; the ever-resourceful biologist turned it into a walk about the many species of lichen which live in the Elfin Forest.

Earth Day Bucket Brigade Alert

By Yolanda Waddell

On Saturday, April 24 from 9:00 a.m. to noon, SWAP has been asked to provide a watering crew for the Land Conservancy/NEP Veldt grass Project adjacent to the Elfin Forest along South Bay Boulevard. No, we won't be watering Veldt grass; by that time the Veldt grass will be gone, and 1600 native plants will be in the ground, thirstily awaiting us.

In the February/March issue of *Oakleaves*, Mark Skinner of the Land Conservancy explained that Veldt grass has spread to vast tracts of coastal dune scrub along the Central Coast. In fact, it has invaded the Elfin Forest to the extent that Bert Wilson of Las Pilitas Nursery estimates the grass will destroy the dune scrub areas of the Elfin Forest in five years or less. The 1-acre pilot project along South Bay Boulevard will include mowing and herbicide application to the Veldt grass and Iceplant growing with the grass; and then mulching with wood chips and planting a variety of native plants. All this will have been done by April 24th, and that is where SWAP volunteers enter the picture.

Volunteers for the watering project will park and meet at the easternmost end of Santa Ysabel at 9:00 a.m. From there we'll walk to the Elfin Forest end of 17th Street. Please don't park on 17th Street, as there is insufficient space in that block. Bring work gloves, water to drink, a bucket, a shovel, and plenty of energy. Do wear a hat, sturdy shoes, jeans and long sleeves for protection from the sun and scratchy plants. It is possible that some volunteers will be carrying wood chips for mulch instead of water, and some of the volunteers will be walking up and down a fairly steep slope to do the watering. If you would like to be part of this pioneer project, call our Bucket Brigade leader at 528-5465.



No Flowers on Bracken Fern, But Easy to Identify

By Dirk Walters, Ph.D.

The plant pictured in this newsletter does not produce flowers. It is the fern commonly known as bracken fern. The scientific name is *Pteridium aquilinum* in most current floras, but in the past, it was known as *Pteris aquilina*. Bracken fern is the only common fern in the Elfin Forest. It is found primarily around and under oak trees and in clearings within the dune scrub. It is most common on the north-facing slope. Bracken is fairly easy to recognize. First it is large; it can reach over 3 feet tall. Its very divided leaf blade is triangular in shape and is borne on a long fibrous green to tan stalk or petiole. Any large compound leaf can be called a frond.

The change in scientific name is probably due to a careful examination of the development of this species' reproductive structures. No fern produces seeds, only microscopic, single-celled resting structures called spores. These spores are produced in small structures called sporangia. In most plants these sporangia are relatively large and either embedded in or attached directly to the surface. In our common ferns, the

sporangia are stalked and clustered into groups called sori (plural) or into a sorus (singular).

These sori are always borne on the underside of the fern leaf but they may be arranged in one of two ways. They can be borne in discreet patches near the center of the blade segment or in a continuous band along the entire margin of a segment. Bracken fern has sori of the second type (see the drawing). A flap of tissue called an indusium sometimes protects a developing sorus. In bracken, the indusium is primarily the down-

Bracken fern is found on every habitable continent and nearly all the larger oceanic islands. That is, it has a nearly cosmopolitan distribution. It is the fern with the widest known distribution on Earth. In most areas, the indigenous people have found uses for it. The most widespread use is a potherb with a use similar to asparagus. It would be gathered when it was still very young and tender, when the curled leaf tips, typical of young fern fronds, are still visible.



Drawing by Bonnie K. Walters

turned leaf margin, although it also has a second indusium that arises from the leaf margin. It is this second indusium that induced botanists to change the genus name from *Pteris* to *Pteridium*. The change from *aquilina* to *aquilinum* results from Latin grammar rules which require an adjective to agree with its noun in number and gender.

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Bracken Fern continued on page 7

State Park and Open Space Bonds in the Hopper

Here's a heads-up on four State Park and Open Space Bonds which are making their way through the State Legislature. All four of the bonds are actually "shopping lists" to provide funding for agencies such as the Coastal Conservancy (which uses the money to buy land), the California Conservation Corps, and the Department of Fish and Game; agricultural conservation; specific large area projects such as the Santa Monica Mountains, Lake Tahoe, the San Joaquin River Parkway; and smaller local area projects.

The Bonds, titled "Watershed, Wildlife and Parks Improvement Bond Act of 2000," are for varying amounts from \$849.5 million to \$1.5 billion. They are number AB 18 (by Assemblyman Fred Keeley); SB 74 (By Senator Kevin Murray; SB 2 co-authored by Senator Wesley Chesboro and Senator Jack O'Connell) and SB 57 by Senator Tom Hayden.

MEGA encourages Oak Leaves readers to learn more about these bonds and contact Governor Davis and your representatives in the State Legislature if you support them. For more information, call MEGA at 528-5708.

Bracken Fern *continued from page 6*

There are also records of several tribes of North American native people using the plant as treatment for tapeworms. Cattle and horses that eat large quantities of this fern get very sick and, if not treated, die. The poisonous substance is probably Thiainase. This enzyme breaks down Thiamin and this leads to acute Vitamin B deficiency. Thiainase is not readily broken down by the body and can be passed on to calves (also possibly to humans) through a cow's milk. Recent studies have also suggested that another substance found in ferns, known as Skikimic Acid, is carcinogenic and mutagenic.

How can we reconcile the two paragraphs above? Donald Kirk, in his *Wild Edible Plants of the Western United States*, indicates that only older fronds are poisonous to people, and then only in very large quantities. I suspect this is also true for cattle and horses. Bracken fern increases when moist pastures are heavily grazed. This is because cattle and horses do not eat it until there is nothing else left in the pasture to eat. By this time, the fronds are old, tough and contain a collection of nasty chemicals. A 1970 book entitled *The Weeds of California* calls bracken fern a troublesome weed of pastures, meadows and recent clearings which contaminates hundreds of acres of range land in the Coast Ranges of California. From a human perspective, it is hard to label this plant good or bad. Maybe the problem lies in trying to judge another species in the first place.

MEGA Buys 14 Acres

By Marla Morrissey

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) and the Morro Estuary Greenbelt Alliance (MEGA) are announcing their first purchase of rare coastal dune habitat adjacent to the Morro Bay State Park. It is the first parcel to be acquired in the Los Osos greenbelt effort and is considered a critical parcel in its future success. The acquisition by TPL is the first of two purchases which will protect a total of 14 acres of the Los Osos dune ecosystem. The California Department of Parks and Recreation will be the recipient once TPL has finalized the entire purchase.

The property, which is adjacent to land purchased in the late 70s by SWAP (now part of Morro Bay State Park), is home to several endangered and threatened species. The protection of this globally imperiled ecosystem also protects the open space that surrounds the community of Los Osos and a major Chumash village site which is on the property. It also provides potential for the Los Osos Middle School, which is across the street from the site, to expand the school's environmental outreach programs.

MEGA exists to empower co-operation between local, state, and federal agencies. A loose-knit alliance has been formed, called "Partners for the Conservation of Los Osos Coastal Dunes." It includes U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, California Coastal Conservancy, California Fish and Game, the Wildlife Conservation Board, California State Parks, and Trust For Public Land. The 14-acre purchase is the result of work done by this coalition. MEGA is particularly grateful to the owner of the property who has been willing to work with TPL.

MEGA greatly appreciates the proactive, co-operative work of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect species and restore habitat in this area. TPL, a nonprofit land conservation organization headquartered in San Francisco, is partnering with MEGA to negotiate option agreements with several local landowners. The California Coastal Conservancy is also very active in another portion of the Greenbelt. BLM was the first agency to commit potential funds to acquisitions here; and MEGA has assisted in all the grant writing endeavors with the "Partners."

Substantial political support has come from Congresswoman Capps, Senator O'Connell, and former Assemblyman Bordonaro. The people from all of these groups are committed to the protection of biodiversity and appropriate public access. For more information or to volunteer help, MEGA can be reached at 528-5708 or by e-mail at SaveDunes@aol.com.

Extra Walk for Native Plant Lovers

For those who missed John Nowak's native plant walk in March, or those who just can't get enough of native plants, Dave Chipping of CNPS and MEGA will lead a special walk on Sunday, May 9 at 3:00 p.m. in the Elfin Forest. Dave will host an information sharing adventure into the possibilities of identifying, growing, and maintaining native plants found in the Coastal Dune Scrub for backyard landscaping. Learn about creating gardening corridors through our community using the plants which have always lived here. Meet at the north end of 15th Street in Los Osos. For information, call 528-5708.

**RENEW YOUR COMMITMENT
TO THE ELFIN FOREST TODAY!**

Welcome to our new members and thank you to renewing members for your very important continuing support. Please check your address label on the front of this newsletter for your RENEWAL DUE DATE. To renew, fill in the membership form at the right and send it to our ever-grateful Treasurer along with your check. Please renew your membership BEFORE it expires so we don't have to send a reminder letter. You are an important partner in helping to preserve and maintain the Elfin Forest for future generations. The first \$12 of your donation (Member) goes into our general fund, and anything above that is placed in a special fund to be used for revegetation, weed abatement and other necessary projects in the Elfin Forest.

**SWAP Membership
Renewals Wanted!**

MEMBERSHIP FORM

- Member \$12 Defender \$100
 Steward \$25 Champion \$250
 Protector \$50 Life Member \$1000

I want to help, please call me!

Have you renewed your membership on time? Check out the label on this newsletter for your renewal due date.

EVERY membership counts!!

Make checks payable to SWAP,

Mail to Small Wilderness Area Preservation, P.O. Box 6442, Los Osos, CA 93412 - 6442

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Production and mailing costs for this newsletter have been underwritten by a grant from Pacific Gas and Electric Company.