



the griffith reporter

the newsletter of friends of griffith park/spring 2011



Why do they need friends?

Griffith Park is a place where urban children can enjoy their first encounters with the wild and learn to live in harmony with nature...it is home to native animals and plants that have managed to persevere despite urban encroachment... it is L.A.'s largest historic landmark where the people and forces that have shaped our region have left their imprint...it is the largest urban wilderness area within an American city, offering a chance to decompress and experience the joys of outdoor recreation. But for all of this, it is a fragile place that needs support and advocacy if it is to survive and thrive. Turn the page to find about the issues and opportunities facing Griffith Park and why now, more than ever, it needs friends.



Attempt to Sideline the New Enlightened Draft of a Master Plan for Griffith Park

After three years of public meetings, the Working Group, a panel of citizens appointed to write a new Master Plan for Griffith Park, submitted a Draft emphasizing the Park's preservation as L.A.'s great urban wilderness and a place of free access and recreation. The Draft replaces the Melendrez Plan released in mid-2005 that was widely rejected by the public for its proposals to urbanize and commercialize the Park.

Now the Working Group Draft has been returned to the panel redlined with changes that dilute and sometimes reverse its recommendations. On the cover, the words Master Plan are deleted and replaced with a new title, Vision Plan, representing a sea change in the document's authority and function. This is necessary, officials say, to avoid triggering an expensive Environmental Impact Report (EIR) "costing hundreds of thousands of dollars" which the City cannot afford.

Yet, only a few pages into the redlined document, these belying words are inserted: "*A Master Plan for Griffith Park would be expected to follow the Vision Plan for the Park... and also contain specific projects for the Park...*" This suggests that after the Vision Plan is put to bed and the Working Group retired, the City is poised to find funding to hire consultants to create a real Master Plan for Griffith Park, one recommending capital development – which will trigger an expensive EIR costing six-figures.

The City routinely approves community plans, design review plans, and specific plans without a full EIR. They receive Mitigated Negative Declarations (MND) because a full EIR is not triggered unless there are impacts considered significant enough that they can not be remedied by mitigation. A current example is the City's Bicycle Plan which includes substantial recommendations for citywide capital improvements. Even some construction projects such as the LA Zoo's multi-million dollar renovation of its parking lot in Griffith Park received a MND. We submit that the Working Group's Draft, which is heavy on open space preservation and light on construction projects, does not require a full EIR.

Throughout the open process that resulted in the the new Working Group Draft, the panel and public were told by the Department of Recreation & Parks that due to the nature of the recommendations being made, the final document would not need an EIR. A simple California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) checklist would do. What's more, the only time an EIR is necessary is when a project proposed within this type of plan is ready to move to the design and construction phase – and even then, only if the environmental impacts of that project are considered significant.

Although the Working Group's New Draft is not above fact-checking by Rec & Parks before being put out for public review, officials should not resort to bureaucratic manipulations to change the document's identity and core recommendations. We are nearing the finish line of a community process, during which more than 12,000 public comments were filed and taken into account. Hitting the reset button and claiming that the Master Plan is not a Master Plan at all, does not serve the community or Griffith Park.

Compare the documents yourself. Both the Working Group's Draft of a New Master Plan for Griffith Park and the version redlined by the City are posted at www.friendsofgriffithpark.org

UCLA Bobcat Study Finds Wild Cats and More in Griffith Park

FOR NATIVE BOBCATS, GRIFFITH PARK is an island of natural habitat that allows these beautiful and elusive creatures to continue to exist in our congested metropolis. With urbanization posing a threat to wild cats worldwide, it is vital that steps be taken to ensure the continued survival of the Park's population.

Since 1996, National Park Service (NPS) biologists have been studying bobcats in the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA). In September, 2010, NPS collaborator Laurel Klein extended the study to Griffith Park as part of her UCLA Ph.D. dissertation research. Klein's research aims to assess the effects of urban development on disease susceptibility in bobcats in urban areas around Los Angeles. This study involves capturing bobcats, collecting blood samples, and tagging and releasing individuals at the site of capture. Blood samples will be used for genetic analysis, disease surveys, anticoagulant rat poison exposure testing, and basic veterinary diagnostic assessments.

Seven bobcats have been captured in GP, and three have also been radio-collared, allowing researchers to track and record data on the bobcats' movements. All of the captures have appeared healthy, though blood and anticoagulant exposure screening results are pending. Across Southern California, more than 80% of bobcats tested for anticoagulants have been positive. Thus, we expect that bobcats in GP are also exposed to these prevalent poisons. These GP bobcats also appeared to be free of mange, an ectoparasitic disease that has devastated bobcat populations in other parts of SMMNRA, though results on a disease survey test to assess subclinical infection are also pending.

Friends of Griffith Park is pleased to have contributed financial support to this research and encourages park-users and neighbors to adopt practices that will help ensure bobcats continuing survival in Griffith Park. Your personal choices can make a difference.

Off-leash dogs are a continuing threat to bobcats and their young and to other wild creatures in Griffith Park. By obeying the



Left: a Griffith Park bobcat looks boldly into the camera. Right: in the course of bobcat research, carnivores such as raccoons or coyotes can be detained temporarily. This grey fox caught and released at Mt. Lee provides the first photographic evidence of a species whose presence in Griffith Park had been confirmed previously by tracks.

law and walking dogs on leash in the Park, pet owners prevent injury to its native animals and help them survive.

Park neighbors concerned about rodent control, can avoid sickening and killing bobcats and other animals, both domesticated and wild, by using alternatives to rat poisons. They can:

- Encourage natural predators by providing boxes and perches for owls (go to www.hungryowl.org for more information);
- Rodent-proof their residences and other built structures by sealing holes and removing plant debris and trash from premises;
- Use tried-and-true mechanical rat traps: traditional wood snap-traps are inexpensive and readily available in the hardware aisle.

Friends of Griffith Park looks forward to the ultimate findings of Klein's research and will continue to publish updates on her exciting work as information develops. Also see www.urban-carnivores.com



Sparse leaves and tall stems make White Pincushion *Chaenactis artemisiifolia* easy to spot. Below: Rare CNPS Category I species, Hubby's Phacelia, *Phacelia hubbyi*, occurs at two Park locations.



Just Released: Griffith Park Natural History Survey's 'Rare Plants of Griffith Park'

WITH ITS DIVERSE TERRAIN, deep valleys, ridgelines, and even natural spring-fed drainages, Griffith Park boasts multiple vegetative habitats. Of the nearly 300 native flora species in the Park, some are precious simply because of their limited occurrence and distribution. Beginning early in 2010, Griffith Park Natural History Survey (GPNHS) piloted a Rare Plant Survey focused on official "special-status" species, designated by California Native Plant Society (CNPS) as Category 1 taxa. However, with a large professional and volunteer effort in place and a perfect year for long blooming periods, the survey expanded to include other "targeted" species, such as plants which are not rare, but have very limited local and regional presence.

The project was managed by Cooper Ecological Monitoring and was funded in significant part through the efforts of Friends of Griffith Park. FoGP was also successful recruiting volunteers for the many hours spent methodically searching for wildflowers. Distributions of targeted flora species were mapped for all 40 grid sections in the park, and in only 7 grids were no targeted species documented. Occurrences of targeted species ranged from less than 10 plants in a 5 x 5 foot area (Slender mariposa lily) to wide spread occurrence for others.

In summary, important populations of rare plants were found park-wide, with no regions of the park that could be declared unimportant to rare plants. Also, several new species, most presenting as single populations or single plants were documented for the Park.

Find more information on Park species and other topics at www.friendsofgriffithpark.org

KCET's Blistering Documentary: Billboards in City Parks

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT LOS ANGELES, billboard capital of the United States, had begun the process to reduce urban blight, along comes the City's Recreation and Parks Commissioner with an attempt to move the billboards into City parks! A recent segment on KCET's "SoCal Connected" exposed this plan to turn L.A.'s public parks into cash registers by renting park spaces, roofs, bench seats, walls and other available park space for signage.

The "SoCal Connected" segment "Show Me the Money" which originally aired on February 10th, featured extensive interviews with Barry Sanders, as President of the Los Angeles Recreation and Parks Commission. Sanders is also Chairman of the Los Angeles Parks Foundation, a non-profit entity that can take in tax-deductible "donations." He is an attorney, retired from the law firm of Latham & Watkins. Latham & Watkins has done and continues to advise and provide legal services to the City of Los Angeles in many capacities.

KCET has produced a clear-cut exposé of Sanders' conflict of interest – the hidden dual roles he has as both Recreation and Parks Commission President and L.A. Parks Foundation President. The feature segment illuminates how Sanders worked hand-in-hand with the law firm of Latham & Watkins attempting to create policies benefiting commercial interests. These policies target and exploit children, as well as violate the City's billboard ordinance. The segment aired by KCET relied on interviews, City documents and correspondences obtained under the California Public Records Act.



Billboards coming soon to a park near you

When Sanders initially floated the idea at the Recreation and Parks Commission, Deputy City Attorney Arletta Brimsey warned the Commission that these signs – to be situated in City parks – pose a clear violation of City Law. Brimsey informed the Commission these signs depicting movies are prohibited in City parks. She further elaborated that "you are sending a message to sign companies and corporate sponsors that for a price, it's okay to violate City law."

Sanders, however, refusing to take "illegal" for an answer, asked Brimsey to "advise us how to make it legal." After counseling Brimsey that her role was not to police the Commission, Sanders led the Commission in the approval of the \$57,000 deal. The Commission record reflects that the Los Angeles Parks Foundation would be receiving \$57,000 from Warner Brothers and then paying "up to \$42,636" to the Department of Recreation and Parks. The Los Angeles Parks Foundation would carve out total administrative fees of 27%.

KCET obtained copies of e-mails to/from the City Attorney's Office and the law office of Latham & Watkins. According to one e-mail correspondence, Latham & Watkins "wants to help" stop efforts to ban commercial signage in City parks. The solution proposed by Latham & Watkins, was to declare the commercial signage to be "Government Speech."

According to Sanders, the signage in question is "just artwork." He said that "parks are exempt from the sign ordinance" because such signs "are protected government speech." Furthermore, according to Sanders, there are "no constraints on what the government can say."

The beneficiaries of these behind-the-scenes efforts to carve out an exception to City policy happen to be commercial interests who enter into partnerships, also called "alliances" with the Los Angeles Parks Foundation. According to the Foundation's literature, for established rates, an "alliance" (further explained as a "sponsorship only and tax-deductible") with the Foundation includes the following benefits:

- Maximum exposure and name recognition at some of the busiest and most recognizable parks in the Los Angeles area;
- A unique way to educate your audience about merchandise and technology;
- Direct access to an influential and enthusiastic audience targeting broad demographics;
- Opportunities to display, distribute and introduce your products and services (to be determined);
- Alliance with the non-profit Los Angeles Parks Foundation and its beneficiaries;
- Inclusion in special events, extensive marketing materials, website and social marketing.

The Los Angeles Parks Foundation openly markets to corporations with the use of their website, which graphically shows where various signage opportunities are available at numerous City parks. Even a rate sheet is available online.

The Warner Brothers Yogi Bear deal has been dropped, as it did not receive approval by the City Council, due to Councilmember Paul Koretz' questioning how it had quietly been carried forward by the Commission, despite the City Attorney's objection. Time ran out since the Warner Brothers project was time sensitive; they needed the signs in place *BEFORE* the release of their Yogi Bear movie, not after!

If you have a child, you are already aware of the importance of engaging your child in commercial-free creative play. In the formative stages of children's lives, values are being shaped that will last a lifetime. Research tells us that creative play is the basis for learning, critical thinking, self-regulation, problem solving, and creativity.

With television and computers more than ever present in a child's life, experts have declared there is systemic crisis for normal child development. The American Academy of Pediatrics, for example, recommends no "screen time" for children under age 2 and no more than two hours a day of screen time for older children, to reduce the influence of commercials.

The influence of commercial marketing on our country's children is profound. One of the best ways to encourage creative play is in a nearby park, in open space, with nature. However, if the play-space is plastered with commercials, the whole point of going to the park is lost.

KCET, having a rich history of meeting the educational needs of children, deserves much credit for bringing the urge to "sell our parks" to light.

Reflections on Griffith Park's Second Anniversary as a City Landmark

Two years ago, on March 27th, Griffith Park was dedicated as L.A.'s largest and, perhaps, most beloved landmark. It's a good time to reflect on the Park's sometimes bumpy history and the reasons why public support is needed if it is to be preserved.

On Christmas Day 1896, Colonel Griffith J. Griffith presented Griffith Park to the people of Los Angeles. As an immigrant-made-good, he knew what it was like to be poor and hemmed in. He envisioned a park that would be an antidote to the city, a "resort" for the plain people, open and free.

For the next 110 years Griffith Park was a green escape for Angelenos who found recreation, rest, adventure, and breathing room there. But while park-goers grasped the meaning and worth of their great public park, too often City fathers perceived it as raw land to be exploited for commercial benefit.

In March of 1898, just 15 months after Griffith gave his land to make a great City park, he visited his former ranch and saw evidence of misuse. Venerable oaks were being chopped down

Griffith Observatory and at times resorting to legal action when the Park became the expedient answer to dilemmas linked to growth.

A postwar veterans housing development was built in the Park only to be demolished eight years later. One freeway and then another bulldozed through. Garbage came to the Park in the form of a landfill and in a last-minute reversal and movement of corpses, a swath of wilderness meant to join the Park became a cemetery instead. Smaller hurts accompanied the big ones. Master Plan drafts proposing massive development were floated in 1968 and 2005 and met with widespread dismay. The 1968 Draft re-emerged in 1978 as an enlightened Master Plan. The 2005 Draft remains a source of contention. The urge to exploit the Park and the desire to protect it seem locked in eternal battle.

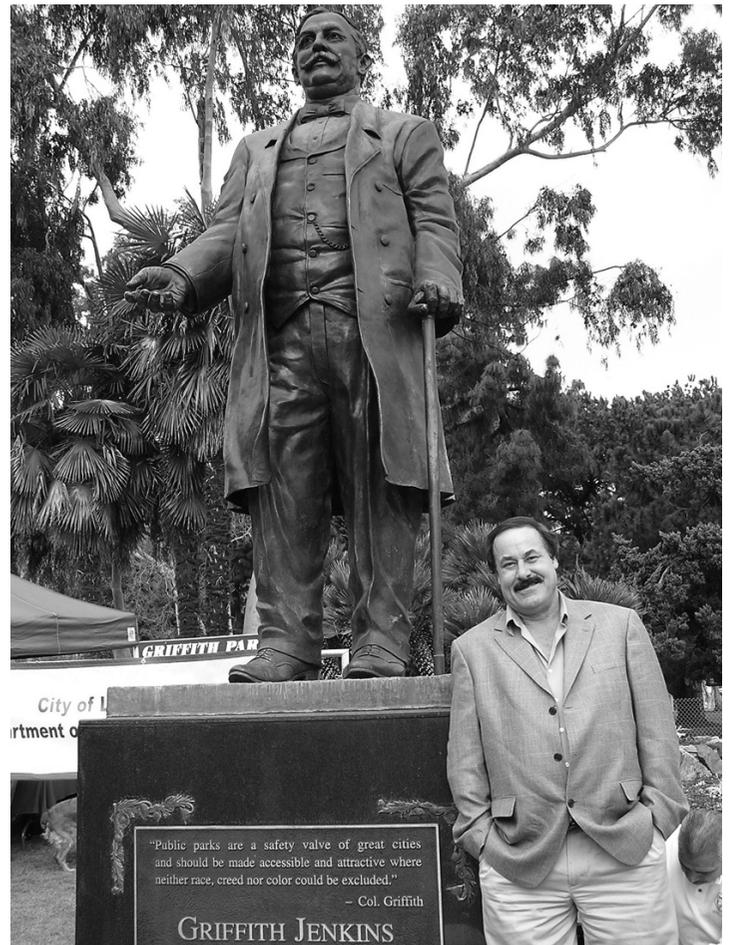
Then in 2008, the Griffith J. Griffith Charitable Trust, led by Colonel Griffith's great-great-grandson Van Griffith, stepped in to *[story continues on back page]*

Left to right: Park benefactor Colonel Griffith J. Griffith; Griffith Observatory; An early family outing in the Park. Below, left: Fern Dell debuted in 1914 and was expanded in the 30s by WPA/CCC workers. Below, right: The striking resemblance between Van Griffith, who led the landmark push, and his great-great-grandfather whose statue welcomes visitors to Griffith Park, was evident at the March 27, 2009 ceremony dedicating the Park as L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument No. 942.



by vandals and hunters were drawing beads on native mammals and birds. Although he protested these ravages, they would soon be eclipsed by for-profit abuse. In 1902, he complained that prime areas of the Park were being leased for private gain, sand and gravel were being mined and removed from its river frontage, and trees were being felled and sold for firewood. In 1911, Colonel Griffith wrote a book entitled *Parks, Boulevards and Playgrounds*, in which he reminded the City of his intent in giving Griffith Park to Los Angeles. He took the City to task for making money off the Park by exploiting its assets and reiterated his belief that the Park should be a place where families struggling to make ends meet could escape urban pressures and enjoy the healing power of "open space, rustic and available to all."

After Colonel Griffith's death in 1919, his descendants kept a hand in, completing the Griffith-endowed Greek Theatre and



BETWEEN FRIENDS

Are Park Rangers Our Most Endangered Species?

Certified law enforcement officers who respond to fires, code infractions, medical incidents and accidents, working closely with the LAPD, Office of Public Safety (OPS) and the Fire Department, Park Rangers respond not only to incidents, they are proactive in preventing them. Over the years, Griffith Park advocates have strongly supported the retention of these public officers in familiar khaki uniforms who contribute so much to the quality of the park-going experience. Now, once again, these essential public employees appear to be at risk and the public should be concerned.

Five years ago, the elimination of Park Rangers was proposed as a part of L.A.'s Consolidation of Security Services that created the Office of Public Safety.* Regional park advocates' response to the City was clear: consolidate if you will, but leave the Park Rangers alone. Advocates reminded the City that its Rangers perform a host of services that would be lost in the consolidation and voiced the concern that the newly created OPS officers would be absorbed, sooner than later, into the chronically short-handed LAPD.

After protracted advocacy, the Park Ranger Division was retained, a move whose wisdom was validated by a major fire in Griffith Park in 2007 that menaced facilities and nearby homes and destroyed more than 800 of its acres. The Rangers' knowledge of the Park's terrain helped the LAFD get to the flames faster. Trained firefighters themselves, the Rangers stayed to battle the blaze and in its aftermath, administered to the post-fire needs of recreationists, neighbors and the Park's ecosystems.

The value to the Park and community that was demonstrated then prolonged their reprieve, but now the Rangers' ranks are growing dangerously thin. Changes in their deployment, responsibilities, elimination of key aspects of their safety and patrol functions, diminishment of their numbers, and suspension of the Chief Park Ranger position threaten their longterm viability. As this is written only 22 positions are filled, meaning that the service and security they represent is on the decline. What's more, 45% of the Rangers do not have Peace Officer status, placing limits on their law enforcement capabilities, such as the ability to arrest. Of equal concern, the City's new budget cycle is just beginning. The Park Rangers are at risk of new cuts; the conversion of OPS officers into LAPD is on the table. Should this take place, who will keep our parks secure? Friends of Griffith Park is committed to advocating for the permanent, vibrant presence of Park Rangers in Griffith Park and all our City's regional parks.

If you would like to help lobby the City on this vital issue, send a message on the "contact us" page at www.friendsofgriffithpark.org

Just Released: Forest Lawn Hollywood Hills Master Plan Draft Environmental Impact Report

The 40-Year Master Plan to develop the balance of Forest Lawn's Griffith Park-contiguous site for mortuary purposes is on the horizon. Currently, a large amount of its parcel is forested with plant communities indigenous to Griffith Park and the Santa Monica Mountains and inhabited by the animal species they shelter. Friends of Griffith Park is evaluating the Draft EIR that has just been released to determine whether comments filed during the scoping stage on potential impacts on Griffith Park's recreational viewsheds, natural watersheds, species, wildlife corridors, sound and light pollution have been taken into account. Forest Lawn's EIR is three-pronged in that it will be reviewed by L.A.'s Planning Department, CA Fish and Game and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Comments on the DEIR can be made by organizations and individuals and must be filed by March 28, 2010.

If you wish to file a comment on the plan, you can link to it from www.friendsofgriffithpark.org or go directly to the City's web site: www.cityplanning.lacity.org

*The Office of Public Safety provides security for all municipal buildings, libraries, and the zoo and responds to complaints in parks.

FoGP Files Response to Massive NBC Universal Draft Environmental Impact Report

The NBC Universal Evolution project promises to deliver "43,000 jobs, transit solutions, and 2 billion dollars of economic activity to the area," according to its brochures which have been widely distributed to the communities surrounding Griffith Park. Yet, the rest of the story isn't told in those colorful mailers.

The very brief comment period for the proposed project's Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) – 39,000 pages long – ended on Feb 4, 2011. Among the many responses filed with the City Planning Department was Friends of Griffith Park's 5-page letter discussing impacts on Griffith Park.

Chief among our concerns were two conspicuous omissions in the DEIR. The area the 39,000 page document dealt with stopped short of its neighbor, Griffith Park—clearly an environmentally sensitive place. And although landmarks near the project site were listed and discussed, Griffith Park, the City's largest Historic-Cultural Landmark, was not considered.

NBC Universal's proposal is immense, a 391-acre development with office space and 2,938 residences. To accommodate the new traffic spawned by this high-density commercial/residential area, they plan to widen Forest Lawn Drive to 4 lanes. This could have serious negative impacts on Griffith Park, since Forest Lawn Drive not only delivers traffic to the 5 Freeway, it also feeds directly into and through Griffith Park. "Quality of experience" is an attribute park users expect above and beyond what they experience in non-park settings. Currently, the 2-lane Forest Lawn Drive leading to the park delivers elevated rush hour traffic. The possibility of a 4-lane road cutting through the park is inconceivable. Besides diminished peace and tranquility, the safety of park users – runners, hikers, bicyclists, and picnickers – would be compromised. Wildlife would suffer increased mortality rates: the Forest Lawn Drive stretch is already recognized as a high kill-rate road, witnessed by the recent death of a bobcat there.

To read the full text of the letter filed by Friends of Griffith Park which includes in-depth comment on the loss of biological resources, wildlife corridors and more, visit www.friendsofgriffithpark.org

Mapping Wildlife Corridors Up Next For Griffith Park Natural History Survey

Corridors between habitat areas are considered critical for mammals. They allow species to maintain genetic health and provide movement routes to remedy population imbalances. Movement corridors only work when they offer safe passage with low mortality risk and if they are situated where animals will venture. Since the area surrounding Griffith Park is largely urbanized, there are many barriers and "choke points" which largely deter animals from moving from the park to the Santa Monica Mountains westward or the Verdugo Mountains to the north. The spots where passage is possible are key to the viability of Griffith Park as it becomes increasingly isolated from other large habitat areas.

The aim of the next Griffith Park Natural History Survey project is to evaluate some of the potential movement corridors in an effort to understand choke points and barriers. The results could provide information critical in the conservation of park mammals, the target species being mule deer, coyote, bobcat and gray fox.

Automatic cameras are being installed at various choke points. There is particular interest in the Cahuenga Pass area where drainages and blocks of relatively undisturbed habitat may funnel animals to and across busy roads and the freeway. The importance of the Los Angeles River in relation to animal movement is also a subject previously never studied. This is all new territory in the better understanding of Griffith Park's nature.

To see previous studies on the wildlife and flora of Griffith Park, visit www.friendsofgriffithpark.org and follow the link to the Griffith Park Natural History Survey web site.

Join the Friends of Griffith Park

FOR OVER A CENTURY, GRIFFITH PARK has been L.A.'s great urban wilderness where we come to connect with our natural heritage. Friends of Griffith Park is a non-profit charitable group that promotes the enlightened stewardship of Griffith Park so it can survive and thrive for another hundred years. Although some attractions in Griffith Park have organized groups supporting their missions, until now, no one has worked to promote and sustain the whole of the Park. Friends of Griffith Park seeks to conserve Griffith Park's essence – its irreplaceable environment and the history it enfolds.

Currently, reductions in funding, maintenance and staffing can be seen in the Park's deteriorating landscapes and historic features. Pressures are rising to reposition the Park as a revenue source, opening the door to commercial developments that encroach on its free and open character. Unless we act now, Griffith Park will cease to be the natural escape from urban pressures that Colonel Griffith envisioned when he donated the Park to the people 115 years ago. Join Friends of Griffith Park and you can help:

- Preserve Griffith Park's open landscapes, ecosystems and Urban Wilderness features;
- Safeguard Griffith Park's integrity as L.A.'s largest landmark and work to restore its historic fabric;
- Support the preservation of open space and free use of the park;
- Oppose identity-changing development and commercialization;
- Ensure that planning and decision making are open, accountable and made in partnership with the public;



Griffith Park is the largest urban wilderness area within the limits of an American city. With over 4,300 acres of native terrain, including several miles of the Los Angeles River, it affords myriad opportunities for outdoor leisure and enjoyment and a chance to decompress and experience the beauty and tranquility of the natural world.

- Promote knowledge about the Park's natural heritage and human history;
- Provide grants and engage in fundraising for the Park's study and preservation;

By joining Friends of Griffith Park you help preserve this living resource for future generations to enjoy. As a Friend you will receive on a regular basis:

- The Friends of Griffith Park newsletter with news of issues and events affecting the Park and its users;
- Invitations to free-to-member lectures and programs, guided hikes and other activities;
- Invitations to volunteer opportunities in the Park;
- The satisfaction of knowing that you have helped to preserve and sustain the natural heart of our city.

Complete and return this form with your payment or join online at www.friendsofgriffithpark

Please enroll me as a member

at the following level: \$20 Friend \$50 Caretaker \$100 Guardian \$250 Steward \$500 Benefactor Above: \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

E-mail _____

Phone (for questions regarding your enrollment only) _____

I would like to give a gift membership. Please acknowledge it as a gift from:

(Please enclose name, postal address, and email address of recipient(s) on a separate sheet of paper. Be sure to indicate the membership level you are giving.)

I am enclosing a check made out to *Friends of Griffith Park* in the amount of \$ _____

Please charge the amount of \$ _____ to my: MasterCard Visa Discover Amex

Cardholder Name _____

Card Number _____ Expiration Date _____

Billing Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____



Please mail this form to:
Friends of Griffith Park P.O. Box 27573 Los Angeles, CA 90027-0573

Friends of Griffith Park is a charitable nonprofit corporation. As such, your donation is tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

Zoo Pressured to Introduce Parking Fees to Griffith Park

IN OUR PUBLIC TRANSIT-DEPRIVED METROPOLIS, charging to park in a regional or community park is tantamount to an admission fee. Currently, the Greater Los Angeles Zoo, a rent-free tenant of Griffith Park, is being pressured to introduce paid parking to the lot that serves its visitors, as well as non-Zoo recreationists and, on occasion, the Autry Museum.

Protests have been lodged by several groups, including the Sierra Club and the Griffith J. Griffith Charitable Trust. They point out that this is a regressive step that will rebound on non-Zoo visitors and violate the spirit of Colonel Griffith's stipulation that access to Griffith Park be free.

The reason cited to justify the fee – increasing revenue for the Zoo – does not quite convince. Not only will the major expense of installing and staffing a fee-collection system negate the projected return, the recent report that Zoo receipts are running ahead of plan, suggests that the Zoo should not be asked to take this step at all. Even if deriving more revenue from its operations is a reasonable goal, a minimal increase in ticket price will achieve this efficiently, without increasing the facility's overhead. It will do this without penalizing other park users and setting the disturbing precedent that people should pay to use public parks.

The implications for freeway traffic present an additional problem for the general public. On weekends, northbound motorists on the 5 to 134 freeway transition are already mired

in the congestion caused by exiting traffic inching towards the Zoo lot. Adding a fee collection system to this mix would saddle freeway drivers with more delay and turn the 5 into its own kind of parking lot. So why is the Zoo being pressured to take this unwieldy step? Park watchers agree that a vigorous outcry would greet any proposal to levy parking fees in Griffith Park broached through the usual channels. But while the Zoo is in the Park it is not a park. It is its own City department with a discrete staff and commission, and is not administered by the Department of Recreation & Parks. By quietly first establishing a controversial policy at the Zoo, the City can delay public scrutiny and discussion until it is a done deal. And once parking fees are established at one site, the precedent can be cited to roll out paid parking everywhere in Griffith Park – as well as in other parks – whose layouts make it feasible. Even in quirky park properties, fees can still be levied. Parking meters can be expeditiously installed almost anywhere.

In exchange for a quick infusion of cash, the City is currently debating transferring municipal parking lots built and operated with public funds into private hands. Privatizing City parking meters, which has happened in other cities, has also been mentioned. This raises additional concerns about the wisdom of initiating paid parking at the Zoo and in our parks. Exactly who will benefit? Certainly not the recession-whipped families and individuals who rely on City parks for free leisure and recreation. This is regressive policy during the best of times—and even more so in a recession.

Read more about this issue at friendsofgriffithpark.org

Reflections *[continued from page 5]*

protect the Park, applying to have it declared a City landmark. Alone among previous candidates for this status, Griffith Park met and exceeded all four criteria. It reflects the community's broad cultural, political, economic, and social history; it is identified with historic figures; it contains inherently valuable architectural styles; it is a significant Cultural Landscape; and it includes notable works by builders, designers and architects of genius. To top it off, the Park is unique on a national level for its sheer quantity of natural terrain that preserves for posterity rare eco-systems – some dating from the pre-European era – within the limits of a modern metropolis. More than 50 civic and community organizations lined up to support the Trust's application, and on January 27, 2009, the City Council voted unanimously to name Griffith Park L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument Number 942.

If honored, landmark status can be a meaningful tool for preservation. The transparency it requires – public notification of intent to demolish or build – can serve as a shield from the makeover syndrome and other problems that have long plagued the Park. The City's fiscal crisis is the latest threat, fueling siren calls for privatization and tempting officials to violate Colonel Griffith's fundamental stipulation that the Park be free. *Friends of Griffith Park* is committed to working with supporters and preservationists alike to insist that the City uphold Griffith Park's landmark designation, its unique natural legacy and historic fabric.

Friends of Griffith Park Sponsors Special Inner City Outing on Griffith Park's Landmark Birthday

CHANNELING THE SPIRIT OF COLONEL GRIFFITH J. GRIFFITH, Friends of Griffith Park is teaming up with the Inner City Outings Committee (ICO) and the Griffith Park Section (GPS) of the Sierra Club to sponsor a fun-filled youth event on March 27th celebrating the second anniversary of Griffith Park's designation as a City of Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument.

Working with inner city organizations, the ICO Committee exposes young people to outdoor experiences and helps them learn about the wonders of the natural world.

Participating youth will enjoy hiking in the Park and will receive on-site information about its native flora and fauna,—including its wildflowers, which should be spectacular thanks to this season's above-normal rainfall. Kids will also learn about the reasons behind Griffith Park's designation as a city landmark. Talks will be given about the history of the Park from Spanish land grant days to the present, and participants will experience first-hand the natural heart of our City and learn about the important role it plays in our past and present.

Friends of Griffith Park is underwriting private bus transportation to the Park along with beverages and box lunches. GPS will lead the hike.

Colonel Griffith would agree that this is a wonderful way to celebrate the Park's second anniversary as a landmark!

Visit friendsofgriffithpark.org for more on these and other topics. If you're not a member, you'll find information there on how to join Friends of Griffith Park. Please spread the word!

