

Media Release, Thursday, September 15, 2011

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Title: Marsh Creek -V: Save Mount Diablo Protects a Volcanic Dome and Possibly the Tallest Manzanita

Images: please follow this link to a selection of hi-res images with captions and credits included in the file names. <https://www.yousendit.com/download/bHIDb3BOWkjtUUYzZUE9PQ>

Mount Diablo continues to benefit from the buyer's market. Save Mount Diablo, the East Bay non-profit grassroots organization, has just purchased a 7.4 acre volcanic dome for \$125,000, calling it Marsh Creek-V. "This is our most recent purchase on Marsh Creek Road crossed by Marsh Creek," said Ron Brown, Save Mount Diablo's Executive Director. The property is located east of Clayton and adjacent to the Marsh Creek Springs event facility, just downstream from two of the non-profit's other properties. Marsh Creek-V is especially rich in biodiversity according to their recent findings including what may be the world's tallest manzanita. Part of the reason for this richness is that the property is a rare volcanic dome with unusual geology.

The exquisite habitat is one of several preservations made possible for Save Mount Diablo by the current market, "We were able to make a purchase deal at a very low price and in near record time," said Brown. "This is the sixth 5-10 acre parcel Save Mount Diablo has acquired in the past year for \$125,000 or less."

Marsh Creek

The property corner is crossed by Marsh Creek, a major water source for wildlife in Contra Costa County as well as rare species habitat for the threatened California red-legged frog. More importantly, it is adjacent to a large box culvert where the creek crosses underneath the road, making it a key connection to allow wildlife to pass through avoiding the road. One of a series of unusually steep knolls near the northeast corner of Mount Diablo State Park, it's one property away from two more Save Mount Diablo parcels and also rises to another large property protected with a scenic easement.

In the upper and middle stretches of Marsh Creek (the area upstream of Marsh Creek reservoir in Brentwood), Save Mount Diablo has recently protected more than a mile of the creek in small parcels.

Staff and several members of Save Mount Diablo's land committee visited the property to survey its habitat. In addition to mature sycamores, oaks and willows, several rare plants and seemingly out of place rocks were located in just a few minutes.

Volcanic Plug or Dome?

According to Diablo Valley College geology professors Jason Mayfield and Jean Hetherington, the most common igneous rocks on Mount Diablo are old ocean crust formed as much as 165 million years ago deep out at sea. These included parts of Diablo's main peaks. Also present are pillow basalts formed at underwater eruptions along a mid-ocean ridge. These pieces of igneous rock were carried to North America and added to the continent by the movement of tectonic plates.

Needless to say, Marsh Creek-V is different. At the northeast corner of Mount Diablo State Park, eighteen spots have been mapped so far, by other geologists, of high silica igneous rock visible in mound or dome-like surface exposures, within a four mile northwest-southeast band, a mile and a half wide.

All or part of eleven of the eighteen spots are on protected land—at Chaparral Spring, and Clayton Ranch for example—but most of them aren't yet accessible to the public.

Complex Geology = Complex Soils = Rich Botany

Vegetation on Marsh Creek-V is diverse due to its conical topography, comprised of 45+ degree slopes rising from 550 feet to 870 feet, which exposes the parcel to a variety of aspects.

The most interesting plant species seen at this property are a group of manzanitas at the summit. They may be among the tallest anywhere, at 25-30 feet in size. Though manzanitas can be a difficult genus of shrubs to identify, as they hybridize easily, there are only a few possible species these large specimens could be, based on the leaf shape and lack of a basal burl. In this region a manzanita with these characteristics could be identified as big berry manzanita (*Manzanita glauca*) or Contra Costa manzanita (*Arctostaphylos manzanita* subsp. *Laevigata*). Yet there is still another possibility, though not one presently recognized by manzanita experts.

Writing in *The Four Seasons* (Vol. 5, No. 4, 1978), James Roof described a new manzanita from Contra Costa County. Called Bowerman manzanita (*Arctostaphylos bowermaniae*), it was named after Dr. Mary Bowerman, Save Mount Diablo's co-founder. He characterized this species as being endemic to Contra Costa County occupying ridge tops or north-facing slopes between 400 to 800 feet in elevation, in grassland or thinly distributed oaks and buckeyes, confined in the Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve—more than three miles from Marsh Creek-V in 1978. He postulated that *A. bowermaniae* was of hybrid origin between Contra Costa manzanita and big berry manzanita, but current manzanita taxonomists believe that *A. bowermaniae* is a relict ancestor that evolved into the more common Contra Costa manzanita we know today.

Hike a Volcanic Dome

You can visit a similar volcanic dome nearby using Save Mount Diablo's self-guiding hike to Lower Perkins Canyon. Save Mount Diablo will lead short hikes there on September 17th and October 8th. Check their hike schedule at www.SaveMountDiablo.org for more info.

More Information

Marsh Creek – V: http://www.savemountdiablo.org/lands_acquisition_MC-V.html

Save Mount Diablo: <http://www.savemountdiablo.org>

Save Mount Diablo Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Save-Mount-Diablo/124006360954010>

Geology: Diablo Valley College Professors Jason Mayfield 925-685-1230 ext 2549 and Jean Hetherington 925-685-1230 ext 2462

Summary

Who: Save Mount Diablo, non-profit organization in Walnut Creek, CA

What: Marsh Creek-V – 7.4 acres of volcanic dome

Where: In the Marsh Creek corridor near Mount Diablo State Park

When: Saturday, September 10, 2011

Why: Marsh Creek-V's unusual geologic composition and therefore unique shape allow for rich biodiversity including a potentially the tallest Manzanita anywhere. Marsh Creek-V is located near current parklands, important for connecting parks, and most importantly has a portion of Marsh Creek running through it. Marsh Creek is vital for wildlife that use it for habitat, water and a corridor to other lands.

How: With the buyer's market, non-profit status and dedicated community support from members, volunteers, and donors, Save Mount Diablo is able to act quickly to purchase lands to preserve and restore natural habitat to then turn over to a park agency for public access.

Save Mount Diablo is a non-profit 501(c)(3) conservation organization, which has been preserving lands on and around Mount Diablo and educating the public to the mountain's natural values since 1971. Preserved lands have increased from 6,788 acres in one park to more than 100,000 acres in 40 parks and preserves. Save Mount Diablo continues to preserve, defend and restore the remainder of the mountain for people and wildlife to enjoy. Contact: Save Mount Diablo, telephone: (925) 947-3535, fax: (925) 947-0642, 1901 Olympic Blvd., Suite 320, Walnut Creek, CA 94596; www.SaveMountDiablo.org

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