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Save Mount Diablo is Firing Up Opportunities

Images: Link to download hi-res images with caption and credit information in the file names:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ktm50qsvvkacl8w/-TRlbdX0tr>

Seldom seen wildflowers are blossoming at the trunks of charred chaparral in a lovely symbol of life's cycle. There are silver linings, so to speak, to last year's Morgan Fire according to Save Mount Diablo. The largest fire on Mount Diablo in more than three decades has provided some interesting opportunities. In addition to the potential for a phenomenal wildflower season with a little more rain, we have the opportunity to see things we haven't before. Some of which could be once in a lifetime. Such as fire followers. Fire followers are species that follow a fire, either literally travelling to or growing in the location of a recent fire. These unique species require an element of the fire-heat, smoke, ash or access to sunlight- in order to repopulate. The mountain is already recovering itself after the blazes and Save Mount Diablo is poised to learn from the process.

The non-profit that works to protect the Diablo wilderness for people and wildlife to enjoy was co-founded by botanist Dr. Mary Bowerman who wrote the book on Mount Diablo's plants. After the Morgan Fire, Save Mount Diablo realized this was a chance to learn more about Mount Diablo and continue the spirit of Dr. Bowerman. The organization has provided its first ever research grants to local researchers to study the phenomena of the mountain over the next three years as it regenerates after the fire. They've already started a pilot program with three projects including how the fire affects wild bees.

"Wildlife of all kinds rely on the nourishment and shelter provided by flowering plants and the bees that pollinate them. It is also clear that many wild bee species are in decline, primarily due to habitat loss." explained grant researcher, Dr. Gordon W. Frankie of the Department of Environmental Science, Policy and Management at U.C. Berkeley. The Morgan Fire contributed to more habitat loss for wild bees but plants are already recovering. Dr. Frankie's study also hopes to look at "bee attractive" plants to see which native plants act as bee magnets. Uncommon fire following wildflowers such as Fremont's zigadene are already covering burn area slopes in blooms. Because the last major fire on Mount Diablo was in 1977, many relationships like these have never been studied until now.

Save Mount Diablo is holding its annual BioBlitz. It's a 24 hour period during which experts and naturalists identify as many species in a given area as they can. This year's location will include a portion of the Morgan Fire burn area. "This will be our most important BioBlitz we've put together because of the ecosystem effects of the Morgan Fire. Post-fire ecosystems are wonderful natural laboratories for capturing short-term changes in biodiversity. We also have the chance to record species never seen on the mountain," said Botanist Heath Bartosh, Save Mount Diablo Board Member and Chair of their Bowerman Science program. "Not only will we see rare and unusual fire-following annual plants for the next two years but we'll also be able to see areas of the mountain typically covered by impenetrable chaparral."

The rest of us can enjoy seeing the regeneration by joining Bartosh as he leads a hike "Fantastic Fire Followers" through the burn area, some of which is not open to the public, on May 3rd. Reservations are required to (925) 947-3535. More information is available at SaveMountDiablo.org

Summary:

WHAT – Save Mount Diablo is hoping to learn from Mount Diablo’s natural recovery process after the 2013 Morgan Fire.

WHO – Save Mount Diablo, a non-profit that works to protect the Diablo wilderness for people and wildlife to enjoy, was co-founded by my botanist Dr. Mary Bowerman who wrote the book on Mount Diablo’s plants.

WHERE – Research is being conducted in the burn area including Mount Diablo State Park and some of Save Mount Diablo’s protected lands on Mount Diablo from the Morgan Fire.

WHEN – The mountain is already regenerating from the Morgan Fire. Save Mount Diablo has awarded three pilot grants to begin research over a three year period to study how the mountain’s ecology recovers after the fire. Save Mount Diablo’s BioBlitz will take place this week, April 11th and 12th, as experts and naturalists identify as many species in the burn area as they can in 24 hours. Botanist Heath Bartosh, Save Mount Diablo Board Member and Chair of the grant program, will be leading a “Fantastic Fire Followers” hike through the burn area, some of which is not open to the public, on May 3rd. Reservations are required to (925) 947-3535. More information is available at SaveMountDiablo.org

WHY - After the Morgan Fire, Save Mount Diablo realized this was a chance to learn more about Mount Diablo and continue the spirit of Dr. Bowerman. We have the opportunity to see things we haven’t before. Some of which could be once in a lifetime. Such as fire followers. Fire followers are species that follow a fire, either literally travelling to or growing in the location of a recent fire. These unique species require an element of the fire-heat, smoke, and ash- in order to repopulate.

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 110,000 acres in more than 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 ###