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## Wagner Ranch Nature Area committee discusses future use at inaugural meeting

By Sora O'Doherty

The excitement in the room was palpable Sept. 14 as a group of teachers, scientists, administrators and members of the public who are part of the Orinda Union School District Wagner Ranch Nature Area Committee held its inaugural meeting to explore how to make the nature area accessible to more students, and to more of the general public, while preserving it as a place of natural beauty for future generations. One of the first opportunities this year to explore the nature area will be at the Eighth Annual Orinda Olive Festival presented by the Friends of the Wagner Ranch Nature Area from 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Oct. 1. The event is free, and includes olive oil tastings, nature arts and crafts, food and music, cooking demos, docent tours of the historic ranch, pond and garden activities, as well as turtles and goats.

Ex officio members of the committee are Chair Carol Brown, OUSD vice president; Jason Kaune, OUSD president; David Schrag, director of curriculum; and Stuart House, director of facilities. Other members include Bill Hudson, Friends of the Wagner Ranch Nature Area; Craig Strang, Lawrence Hall of Science; Sue Boudreau, teacher at Orinda Intermediate School; Marta Wallace, teacher at Del Rey; Liliana Spindler, garden aid at Wagner Ranch; and Linnea Burnett, teacher at Wagner Ranch and parent. Although Jason Kaune was not at the meeting, Superintendent Carolyn Seaton quietly observed the proceedings. Schrag agreed to take the position as secretary and Hudson agreed to be vice chair.

Schrag showed a short film and gave a presentation on next generation science standards, which emphasize the use of authentic phenomena and problems, and Strang talked about the work he is doing at Lawrence Hall of Science and for the state of California, and specifically about the BEETLES program (Better Environmental Education, Teaching, Learning & Expertise Sharing) and the importance of outdoor science and learning. Brown asked everyone present to share their wildest dreams for the nature area.

Most wanted to open the area to students in Orinda as well as to those in less well resourced districts like Richmond and Oakland, and to adults and seniors. There was an awareness of the need to balance wide accessibility (including making the site compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act) and taking precautions to assure protection of the site. House said for sure the site needed bathrooms and ADA-compliant pathways, and recommended consultation with a landscape architect.

Words heard repeatedly included continuity and history, citizen science projects, stewardship of the land, and balanced use.

Jim Strickler, an OUSD substitute teacher, liked the idea of deep science taught through experience. Involving the children in the process he said, creates the future "us." Sarah Butler, former OUSD board member with a degree in environmental planning, said she had worked for the national parks and focused on preservation versus capacity. Marta Wallace said that protecting the land while using it is doable, and cited Yosemite's crowd control as an excellent example.

The committee agreed to meet monthly. The next meeting will be from 4 to 6 p.m. Oct. 17 in Room 4 at Wagner Ranch Elementary School. The meetings is open to the public.

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