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## Local lifelong conservationist receives awards

By Diane Claytor



Moraga's Malcolm Sproul, lifelong conservationist, at the 320-acre Irish Canyon. Photo Scott Hein

In a world where statistics indicate that the typical person changes jobs an average of 12 times during his or her career and moves from one home to another more than 11 times in his or her lifetime, Malcolm Sproul is somewhat of an enigma. He has lived in the East Bay his entire life, been married to his high school sweetheart for 46 years, owned his Moraga home for almost 35 years, and has worked at LSA Associates, an environmental consulting firm, since 1979.

Earlier this year, Sproul was honored for his 27 years as a board member (and two-time president) of Save Mount Diablo, a nonprofit organization focused on preserving lands on and around the mountain as well as educating the public on its natural values. He received its highest form of recognition - the Mountain Saver Award - for his "lifelong dedication to preserving open space, his stellar contributions to wildlife conservation, and his fierce love of the mountain." Seth Adams, Save Mount Diablo Land Conservation Director, acknowledges that this award was

"long overdue," noting that Sproul "has played a key role in a vast expansion of protected land and is a model of truth and integrity."

According to Adams, Sproul's "knowledge, expertise, and leadership have been a major force in spearheading conservation efforts in the East Bay region and have had a lasting impact on the health and sustainability of local wildlife habitat and preserved lands."

If that award wasn't enough, Sproul, a lifelong conservationist, was honored this month by Diablo Magazine, who called its five Threads of Hope honorees "local heroes who go above and beyond to make a difference." Sproul, the magazine noted, "has left an indelible stamp on the natural landscape of the East Bay."

Sproul explains that he has "literally" been interested in the natural world his entire life. "I think I was born with it," he states definitively. "It feels as though I've always just gravitated to the outside environment." Growing up in El Cerrito, Sproul continues, there was lots of open space where a kid could wander. "I was the kid who hiked around the hills and brought back frogs and snakes and lizards and caterpillars, the kid who loved the outdoors," he recalls.

His introduction to Mount Diablo as a young Boy Scout furthered his love of nature and gave him a deep appreciation of the mountain's natural resources. This, coupled with the annual summer trip to the family cabin in the Sierras built by his grandparents in 1928, enhanced his passion and dedication to the environment.

Sproul has a master's degree in environmental planning/landscape architecture from the University of California, Berkeley; while there, he conducted research on the effect of suburbanization on bird populations. After describing his research, Sproul was asked if he's a birdwatcher. "I'm not a birdwatcher. I'm a birder," he declared, stating that he's much more serious about birds. "I have, scattered around our house, a pair of binoculars at just about every window so if I see something, I don't have to go running from room to room searching for them." This is in addition to the numerous bird feeders he has placed around his yard.

Sproul is a leading expert on predatory birds. He has led trips for the Golden Gate Audubon Society and, in keeping with both his passion and his staying power, Sproul has been involved in the National Audubon Society's annual Christmas Bird Count since the mid-1970s. Enthusiasm for this yearly event is evident in Sproul's voice as he describes the hours spent watching and counting the wide variety of species seen in one day.

Surprisingly, Sproul says that both shopping centers in Moraga are great places to find certain bird species that may be harder to find in other locations. He also commented on something many Lamorinda residents deal with - the increase in the turkey population. "When I started doing the bird count, there were no turkeys around. Now they're everywhere." Unfortunately, this long-running (since 1900) wildlife census, designed to assess the health of bird populations and help guide conservation actions, is canceled in the Lamorinda area this year because of COVID-19.

In keeping with his belief in public service and the need to find ways to contribute to his community, Sproul has been active in the Preserve Lamorinda Open Space group, working to preserve scenic hillsides and

ridgelines as well as protecting local open space from overdevelopment.

He worked with Moraga on aspects of planting when the new West Commons Park was being developed and advised the town on exotic species removal from the Mulholland Ridge Open Space.

Save Mount Diablo's Adams perhaps described Sproul best when nominating him for Diablo Magazine's Threads of Hope award: "Malcolm is a student of and lives up to the ideals of John Muir - he treasures living things . he understands that everything in the universe is connected . he is a citizen activist of the highest caliber. His commitment to working tirelessly with local conservation organizations is an inspiration."

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[back](#)

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