



Published June 5th, 2024

Letters to the editor

Wagner Ranch Nature Area

I want to tell you about a very beautiful woodland that is enriched by streams, ponds and wildlife. For twenty years Native People of our region, led by Cherokee Elder, Chester Miner, gathered for the Fall Olive Festival and the Spring Earth Day Festival to drum, sing, dance and bless the land. Since the late 1970's more than 15,000 children have been immersed in Native American Studies taught by Naturalist Toris Jaeger.

The Wagner Ranch Nature Area is an important site for Ohlone People and the historic home and ranch of California's first Surveyor General, Theodore Wagner. For years the Orinda Historical Society and the city landmarks committee proposed to list the Wagner home as an historical site. However, to date the OUSD has declined to restrict the use of its property in any way.

It is distressing to report that for the past 15 months, the Wagner Ranch Nature Area has been closed due to hazards such as trees felled by the 2023 storms. Facilitated by Assembly Person, Rebecca Bauer-Kahan, in September 2023 the District was awarded a grant of \$1.5M from the State to mitigate the hazards. Despite pleas from Orinda citizens and students, the District still has not decided if it will accept the grant. A student at Miramonte High School started a Change.org petition - Save the Wagner Ranch Nature Area - which received hundreds of signatures in the first few days and has more than 1000 to date. Paper petitions are also circulating in the community. Hundreds of signatures were turned into the District at its May 6th School Board Meeting.

The delay in accepting these funds for repairing the Nature Area remains a mystery to most Orinda citizens, who support the reopening and protection of this historically and ecologically unique treasure for students and the community. If not accepted by mid-June, the \$1.5M goes back to the State's general fund. Please help encourage the Orinda school board trustees to accept the grant, complete the hazard mitigation work, and re-open the Nature Area! Also, please sign the petition at www.change.org/save-the-wagner-ranch-nature-area.

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