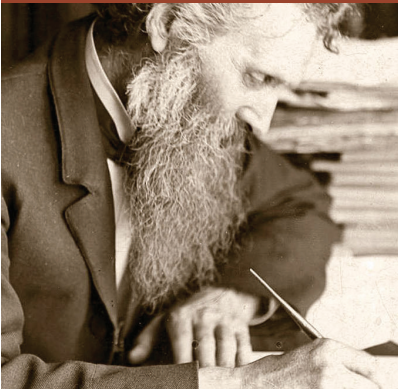




The View

I only went out for a walk and found that going out was really going in.

- John Muir



The mission of the John Muir Association is to celebrate the life, share the vision, and preserve the legacy of John Muir through education, preservation, advocacy and stewardship, in partnership with the National Park Service at the John Muir National Historic Site.

City of Martinez Adds Alhambra Hills Open Space after Years of Gentle Advocacy

Jamie Fox interviewed by Carlos Olin Montalvo

The City of Martinez officially opened the Alhambra Hills Open Space on February 1, 2025, thanks to years of advocacy by volunteers, and residents. The 297-acre space, previously partly owned by John Muir in 1885, is the tallest ridgeline in the city.

The Measure F Bond, passed by voters in 2022, protected the oak-lined grasslands for all future generations. The site offers 360-degree views of Briones Regional Park, John Muir Historic Site, Mt. Wanda, and more. After bond issuance, property acquisition, fencing improvements, signage installation, new parking access agreement, new fire fuel reduction grazing agreement, and other necessities, the Open Space is now available for public use.

The story of Alhambra Hills Open Space dates back to the 1980s when it was zoned for residential development. In the 1990s, developers planned to build 220 homes. After a market slowdown, the project was paused and re-applied in 2006. Concerns about the endangered Alameda whipsnake led to a reduced project size of 109 homes and offsite land for habitat mitigation.

John Muir Association board member Jamie Fox got involved in 2010, attending City Council meetings where the project was opposed. Despite objections, the City Council approved the development. “Why are they removing all the big heritage oak trees?” wondered Jamie. “The reality is this is the tallest ridgeline in the City, and it has oak trees on the top. It was a horrible thing that felt like there was no hope. I was just really stubborn.”

Jamie started a change.org petition, “Save Alhambra Hills Open Space,” supported by 350 friends. He sought proof that John Muir owned the hill and found an 1894 map showing Muir’s ownership. Robert Hanna, Muir’s

(continued on page 3)



Come to Birthday–Earth Day on Saturday, April 26, 2025

Celebrate John Muir and this National Park located in your backyard. How lucky you are!

There will be vendors with activities for kids, information, music, bagpipers, presentation of Conservation Awards, birthday cake for Muir, silent auction, tours of the house and the grave site! The park is open from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. Admission is free. Enjoy Muir’s orchard!



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is the official philanthropic part-
ner of the John Muir National
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Printed on 100% post-
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The President's Corner

By Mark Thomson, JMA President



NPS PHOTOS, LUTHER BAILEY

The Martinez community was instrumental in saving the Muir house and property—let's continue our support for this great asset for Martinez and the country.

Let's start out with the good news. The John Muir Birthday–Earth Day will be held as scheduled, on Saturday, April 26th. The plans are in place for a great event for this year. Come to the Muir House and support our great National Historic Site. It's not every city that has their own National Park site.

Now some not so good news. We have had to cancel the John Muir Mountain Day Camp for the year. After discussions with the NPS and The New Leaf Collective, it became clear that the resources needed to hold the camp this year were just not available. We plan to resume camp next year. It was a great disappointment to have to make this decision.

The John Muir Historical Site is going through some unprecedented challenges. Staffing has been cut and it appears more reductions are on the way. Funding at the site has been scaled back significantly. As I write this column, the NPS has announced that the site will be open to the public for only five days a week—Tuesday through Saturday.

I am making a special appeal to all of you to stand by our park during these difficult times. The rangers and staff appreciate the support and visitor counts do matter. Come to the John Muir Birthday–Earth Day event to show your support. Drop by the house when it is open, because your very presence is helpful. Volunteers are needed now more than ever.

The Muir House is a bit different than many of the other NPS historical sites. The Martinez community was instrumental in saving the house and property while continuing to help it grow over the years. Local citizens worked hard to keep this part of Martinez's legacy alive. Let's continue our support for this great asset for Martinez and the country.

I am hoping that I have a more upbeat column for our fall newsletter.

City Adds Alhambra Hills Open Space *(continued from page 1)*

great-great-grandson, helped promote the petition, which garnered 3,000 signatures in two weeks, prompting serious council discussions. The City hired a negotiator, but progress was slow. The developer suggested a \$20 million bond measure be put to vote in a special election.

Jamie and volunteers (including other JMA Board Members Jamie Menasco and Mark Thomson) worked tirelessly to spread the word at farmers' markets, while hiking, and at other events. They distributed photos of the hillside to residents, creating a connection. Initially, the measure lost by 12 votes, but mail-in ballots ultimately secured 68.8% support.

"This was a significant achievement," said Jamie. "It's one of the most expensive acquisitions in the Bay Area, funded by a property tax of \$79 annually per resident of Martinez. The people stepped up to save the historic ridgeline."

The fire trails in the Open Space total about five

miles and follow the ridgeline. Jamie has been hiking the area for 12 years and continues to find new spots. "It's nearly 300 acres, bigger than you think," he noted.

Jamie emphasized kindness and perseverance in advocacy. "The secret to success is being nice to everyone, especially at council meetings," he said. Volunteers played a crucial role, often showing up when needed most.

Looking forward, Jamie hopes the John Muir Association can continue to host the annual John Muir Birthday–Earth Day event, which was foundational to gaining grassroots support, and also focus on permanent initiatives like conservation efforts, trail maintenance, and installing a bronze statue of Muir along the ridgeline, gifted by Sierra College professor Dick Hilton. "You only get out what you put in," he said. "Without the dedicated volunteers, this wouldn't have been possible."

"All this was going to be bulldozed," Jamie proclaims. "All these ridgeline trees. I think what helped save it was the expensive topography to build roads and get water. This is the calling of our generation—to try to save the ridgeline. All the flat valley farmland is gone. Once you build it, it's gone. There's 360-degree views. If you had a street here in the middle of the neighborhood, you wouldn't know you were on a hill. The magic would've been gone. Look at these ridgetop oak trees. They're huge. They get the morning sun and the afternoon sun."

Once the city decided it would manage the Open Space, they consulted with the John Muir Land Trust to tell them what they should do. It took 8 months and had a bunch of to-dos, like gates, staging area, and a grazing agreement. The City Council and residents were disappointed because the initial report said things like no dogs and no bikes. So at council meetings, Jamie and others fought against those.

"Over the last three years we've opened it up to people, dogs (on leash), equestrians, and bikes. The first report wanted to put a new staging area down on the Reliez Valley Road side. That's going to be millions of dollars, that's never going to happen. Plus no one wants to drive over here. We have the Bethany Baptist Church, it has 58 parking spots. Maybe we can work out an agreement with them? I literally went there on a Sunday, walked up to the very nice Pastor, got his number, gave it to the City, and six months later they are using the Church parking lot. They are going to pave it for them. So gentle advocacy like that gets it done. Everyone else had 100 other things they are worried about. This was my one cause and it still barely feels real that we pulled off a miracle."



Jamie Fox and Carlos Olin Montalvo on Alhambra Hills hike. Photo by Carlos Olin Montalvo



“The Tree Ride”

By John Muir

Selectively excerpted from an essay that Muir titled “Wind-storm in the Forests of the Yuba.” First published in Scribner’s Monthly and reprinted many times, it represents the first time that Muir consciously chose to make himself the subject of his writing.

One of the most beautiful and exhilarating storms I ever enjoyed in the Sierra occurred in December, 1874, when I happened to be exploring one of the tributary valleys of the Yuba River...when the storm began to sound, I lost no time in pushing out into the woods to enjoy it. For on such occasions, Nature has always something to show us...

Delicious sunshine came pouring over the hills, lighting the tops of the pines, and setting free a stream of summery fragrance that contrasted strangely with the wild tones of the storm...I



THE WILD MUIR

Twenty-two of John Muir’s Greatest Adventures

SELECTED AND INTRODUCED BY LEE STETSON

Excerpted from The Wild Muir: Twenty-two of John Muir’s Greatest Adventures, selected and introduced by Lee Stetson; Yosemite Conservancy, 1994, pp. 109–116.

heard trees falling for hours at the rate of one every two or three minutes...Nature was holding a high festival, and every fiber of the most rigid giants thrilled with glad excitement...

I gained the summit of the highest ridge in the neighborhood; and then it occurred to me that it would be a fine

thing to climb one of the trees to obtain a wider outlook and get my ear close to the Aeolian music of topmost needles...

After cautiously casting about, I made a choice of the tallest of a group of Douglas Spruces, that were growing close together like a tuft of grass...Being accustomed to climb trees in making botanical studies, I experienced no difficulty in reaching the top of this one, and never before did I enjoy so noble an exhilaration of motion. The slender tops fairly flapped and swished in the passionate torrent, bending and swirling backward and forward, round and round, tracing indescribable combinations of vertical and horizontal curves, while I clung with muscles firm braced, like a bobolink on a reed...

In its widest sweeps my tree-top described an arc of twenty to thirty degrees...This was the winter season, the colors were remarkably beautiful...The sounds of the storm corresponded gloriously with this wild exuberance of light and motion...I kept my lofty perch for hours, frequently closing my eyes to enjoy the music by itself, or to feast quietly on the delicious fragrance that was streaming past...

We all travel the milky way together, trees and men...When the storm began to abate, I dismounted and sauntered down through the calming woods...The storm-tones died away, and turning toward the east I beheld the countless hosts of the forests hushed and tranquil, towering above one another on the slopes of the hills... The setting sun filled them with amber light, and seemed to say, while they listened, “My peace I give unto you.”

Dive into History

Discover John Muir's Home Life with National Park Service Ranger Andrew Marker

Interview by Carlos Olin Montalvo

Last year, National Park Service Ranger Andrew “Andy” Marker captivated audiences with his riveting talk on John Muir’s conservation legacy at the Veterans Memorial Building in downtown Martinez. This year, he’s back by popular demand, offering an exclusive glimpse into the personal life and home of John Muir in Martinez. Don’t miss this chance to journey back in time and learn about the family man behind the legend—open to the public and bound to inspire nature enthusiasts and history buffs alike.

“If you tour with a ranger, they don’t talk much about his home life, and to be quite honest, it’s hard to find out about his home life,” said Andy.

“He didn’t write about it in his journals. He only has about a year and a half of journal writing and it doesn’t talk much about life on the ranch. We gained some of those details from his letters to his daughters and letters back and forth to his wife while traveling. We learn about him from that standpoint. We’ll be talking about what Muir was doing on the ranch.”

To preview his upcoming public speaking event, we interviewed Andy to get an early glimpse into Muir’s life in Martinez and Andy’s plans for this special occasion.

What types of home life topics will you discuss?

Some people in Martinez didn’t think Muir was a good husband and father because he was travelling so much. In my talk we will try to dispel that myth by sharing his family correspondence with the audience. I thought it could be interesting to talk about life on the ranch and life without Alhambra Avenue and the freeway, what life was like for Muir as well as his family living on a 2,600-acre ranch.

Today it takes four hours to Yosemite and that’s the place he loved. How did he get back and forth from Yosemite? How did he have that work life balance of having to be on the ranch and providing financial well-being for his family?



Ranger Andy Marker on steps of the Muir House. He’ll be at the Veterans Memorial Building in Martinez on April 6 from 11 am to 1 pm. Photo by Carlos Olin Montalvo

Will your presentation be interactive?

We’ll do a Q&A. I’ll have family photographs. I’m hoping to interview some family members to talk about their family recollections. Through these interviews I am hoping to realize a better understanding of the man, not just the public persona.

How would Muir travel between Martinez and Yosemite?

Later on in life he took a train. The year the train came from here by transfer you could get closer to Yosemite. He probably would have traveled by horse, carriage or wagon to get there. His first time in 1868, he took a ferry from San Francisco to Oakland (he didn’t like San Francisco), and walked toward Gilroy to Pacheco Pass, and across Pacheco Pass. He writes most of a book about it. He was mostly in the Valley for two weeks. He didn’t stay there long because—I don’t think he had a lot of money. I’m sure he was thinking about, how am I going to support myself?

He would typically spend spring, summer and fall in Yosemite and then come back to San Francisco in winter and board in someone’s house to pay rent for just a room.

(continued on next page)



2024 John Muir Conservation Awardees

By Jamie Fox

Each year, the John Muir Association (JMA) solicits nominees for its Conservation Awards. Winners will be recognized at the Birthday–Earth Day Celebration.

New Leaf Collaborative

New Leaf Collaborative (“NLC”), a nonprofit organization incorporated in 2014, provides hands-on learning and leadership opportunities in science, nature, and environmental literacy to inspire curiosity and connection in the Martinez community. As a longtime partner to the City of Martinez, New Leaf has been integral to develop and implement the award-winning and collaborative School Recycling Program with the Martinez Unified School District. They also operate environmental education programs including “Eco-Kids” Workshops, Community Garden, and Science Workshops.

Through the School Recycling Program, NLC conducts eco-literacy lessons in four elementary schools. These hands-on science and environmental learning activities are designed for students to receive the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to a sustainable future. In 2024, NLC provided eco-literacy lessons to 1,805 students.

Sai Sahana Manikandan

Sai is an aspiring environmentalist with the main aim of raising awareness about single-use plastic pollution. Sai is an active member of the Emirates Environmental Group (EEG), and ambassador to many organizations such as:

Students for the Earth Ambassador, UAE
Plastic Pollution Coalition Ambassador,
Washington, DC

Plastic Soup Foundation, the Netherlands
Earth Day Network—My Future My Voice
Ambassador, India

When Sai Sahana visited different cities and towns in her home country, she was shocked to see heaps of plastic and wastage being littered all over the places. She started to wonder, if this was the status of one city, then if we consider all the countries in the world, what would be the amount of plastic waste being littered? At the Drop It Youth First Campaign launch, she saw a movie, “A Plastic Ocean.” That was an eye opener to the problem of plastic pollution and how marine species ingest plastic and then, in turn, we ingest them. Plastic pollution is an important global issue. She wants to change the world’s attitude towards plastic within a generation.

She is working along with her sibling on a PEPC campaign to inform the importance of following the 6Rs—reduce, reuse, recycle, repair, rethink and refuse. She organizes and attends beach clean-up and desert clean-up campaigns. Sai Sahana’s campaign has reached nearly 5,000 people in her school and community.

Forestr.org

Forestr.org (ForestR) is dedicated to promoting environmental stewardship through three core initiatives: Cleaning, Greening, and Gleaning. These programs work in harmony to restore ecosystems, improve community spaces, and reduce waste while tackling food insecurity.

ForestR actively removes litter from highways, streets, and waterways through the CLEAN program. By collecting waste, they prevent pollutants from entering the local ecosystem, otherwise harming wildlife, and

Ranger Andy Marker *(continued from page 5)*

He would make a little money writing articles for gazettes or newspapers, or magazines like The Century Magazine. Americans were craving articles, especially people in the city. There were a few photographs but they were expensive. Drawings would be good enough.

Did he ever sell his art and have sources of income?

He did some great sketching but I don’t think he sold any of that. He might have used that for an article but it wasn’t a source of income. He would get about \$50 for each ar-

ticle. Not bad for the day. I guess that would cover rent for a month but it was not a lot of money.

But don’t feel badly for him. When he passed away, his estate was worth \$250,000. In today’s dollars that’s about \$10 million. He did all right. Living in Martinez with his wife and daughter paid for all his travels. He went to Alaska seven times. He went to every continent but Antarctica. Those trips weren’t cheap. This really was his home base. In one way it was close to San Francisco, so he was close to meeting people in the city.

The View

contaminating storm drains. Collaborating with Caltrans, ForestR has led extensive highway litter cleanups along the 580, 880, and 680 freeways, improving roadside safety and reducing pollution.

ForestR's GREEN program enhances urban environments by creating pocket parks and planting native trees and plants. These initiatives transform underutilized urban spaces into vibrant green areas. ForestR has created and revitalized six community pocket parks since 2018.

Through their GLEAN program, ForestR volunteers rescue surplus fruit from backyards, farms, and markets, redirecting it to local food banks and community organizations. Since 2021, the organization has rescued over 230,000 pounds of fruit.

Tim Platt and Sherida Bush

Tim Platt and Sherida Bush have been active in the preservation of open space in Martinez since the mid-1980s. Both were heavily involved with preservation of the Franklin Hills, formation of the John Muir Land Trust, preservation of the Alhambra Hills Open Space, and efforts to create the new Pine Meadow Park and Measure I—Martinez Open Space and Parkland Protection Initiative.

Tim has many significant accomplishments. Some of the more recent are the strong role he played in the creation

of the Pine Meadow Park and the protection of parks and open space through Measure I. He was also instrumental in protecting the waterfront from housing development when the updated Martinez General Plan was adopted.

Sherida has been a major factor in open space preservation for over 35 years. She often took on the role of providing support to numerous organizations through her editing and writing skills and stalwart volunteering. As a member of the Parks and Recreation Commission, Sherida led the development of the Park System Master Plan which became the basis for the \$30M bond issue that allowed for the refurbishing of every park in Martinez. She was responsible for writing the Martinez Tree Ordinance which resulted in the first tree ordinance for Martinez. Sherida is a past member of the John Muir Association Board and still involved as a volunteer for BDED.

Both Tim and Sherida were core members of the Friends of Franklin Hills, John Muir Land Trust, Alhambra Hills Open Space Committee, Thousand Friends of Martinez, Friends of Pine Meadow and Martinez Open Space Committee.

EVENTS

April 6, 2025, Sunday

11:00 am – 1:00 pm

Lecture by Ranger Andy Marker: "Muir and Martinez"

Co-sponsored by the John Muir Association and the Martinez Historical Society

Veterans Memorial Building, 930 Ward Street, Martinez

Admission is free. Light refreshments will be served.

April 26th, 2025, Saturday

10:00 am – 4:00 pm

Birthday—Earth Day

John Muir Historic Site, 4202 Alhambra Avenue, Martinez

Admission is free. There will be many educational booths, activities for kids and adults, music, bagpipers, birthday cake, food for purchase, John Muir Storyteller, and more.

May 3, 2025, Saturday

Pacheco Marsh Grand Opening

After decades of planning, restoration, and the generous support of the John Muir Land Trust community, the grand opening is finally here! Go to <http://jmlt.org> for more information.

May 4, 2025, Sunday

10:00 am – 5:00 pm

The native garden at the John Muir Historic Site is part of the **Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour**, at the **John Muir Historic Site, 4202 Alhambra Avenue, Martinez**. Admission is free, however donations to Bringing Back the Natives are appreciated.

5-4-3-2-1

Mindfulness Practice

By Nicole Sylvester

THIS SIMPLE PRACTICE helps ground you in the present moment by engaging your senses, calming the nervous system, and reducing stress. By shifting focus to physical sensations, it pulls attention away from racing thoughts, promoting a sense of safety and relaxation.

HOW TO DO IT

See: Name 5 things you can see around you.

Hear: Identify 4 sounds you can hear, near or far.

Feel: Notice 3 sensations on your body (e.g., warmth, texture, breath).

Smell: Recognize 2 scents in your environment (or take a deep breath).

Taste: Acknowledge 1 taste in your mouth or sip water mindfully.

Take a deep breath. Notice how present and calm you feel.



P.O. Box 2433
Martinez, CA 94553



NPS STAFF PHOTO

Volunteer at the John Muir National Historic Site

Your passion for parks can make a difference!

A volunteer's primary responsibilities
will be to:

- Orient visitors to the site
- Assist with day-to-day operations
- Share history of the Visitor Center and
Historic Muir House

Go to **<https://volunteer.gov>**
You will have to create a login.gov account
to search for openings—or stop by the John
Muir Historic Site Visitor Center and discuss
opportunities with a ranger.