

**Agencies should act to protect impaired homeless people from coming storms.
All lives really do matter.**

This email was sent to the Berkeley Climate Action list-serve and to the Berkeley and Albany City Councils, relevant commissions, and UC Berkeley Environmental Health and Safety on Nov. 2.

F5C has received a number of favorable comments from citizens, but no response or action that we know from any of Albany, Berkeley, or UC Berkeley, despite many lengthy and detailed emails on conditions we consider threats to homeless people as well as the environment. Three years after Friends of Five Creeks discovered that all these agencies had forgotten about a half-million dollars reserved for maintenance, there still is no effective plan for who is responsible.

With no claim as a humanitarian or expert, and no criticism of the many folks striving to help the homeless in a hobbled and strangled "system," I want to urge those concerned about dealing with climate change and its effects to take some small steps to protect the lost souls of our society.

For many years, Friends of Five Creeks, which I head, has worked with reasonable success to get whatever authority existed to prevent camping in cul-de-sacs where the flash-flood-like rise of urban creeks in storms could endanger someone passed out, intoxicated, or deranged. Examples include narrow, fenced strips of land above Adams on Cerrito Creek and above Second on Codornices.

Currently, the ever-increasing reclamation of public open space -- think Albany Bulb, East Bay Parks/Eastshore Park lands along the waterfront, CalTrans strips -- has washed a concentration of seriously disabled and addicted people to a strip of cheek-to-jowl trash and tents on Eighth Street between Harrison and Codornices Creek, at the Albany-Berkeley border. These include people who are incontinent, use a walker, speak in "word salad," at times for hours groan in tents or scream curses, and are seriously addicted or deeply delusional. Last week, one creekside tent burned, and two of our volunteers called 911 for a man passed out in the creek bed.

Shortly after we strongly urged it, Berkeley in early October offered these folks housing (few accepted), cleaned up the trash, and gave out clean new tents, safety spaced. (Remember the fires at Oakland's Wood Street.) Be careful what you wish: All such efforts are sporadic. The spaces immediately began to fill in. Fire and sanitation hazards are almost as bad as before, and several people moved down to the dry creek.

Now we get back to climate change. We will have more drought and stronger storms. In paved cities, urban creeks confined to narrow channels can rise with flash-flood-like intensity, becoming that would topple and trap healthy adults. For the first time in memory, long stretches of lower Codornices Creek have gone dry for the past two late summers. A year ago, the big, sudden October atmospheric river washed out a deeply disgusting, smelly camp that for months had paved the once-beautiful meadow at 9th Street with layers of rotting garbage, clothes, and worse.

This year, for weeks we strongly reminded everyone responsible -- UC Berkeley (which owns most of the land), Albany, and Berkeley -- to get camps out of the creek bed and off low banks and flood plains. (You will see some of this in agenda packets for city councils and commissions.)

But as rain became all but certain yesterday morning (Nov. 1), it was local architect David Arkin and his colleagues (with offices overlooking the creek), who carefully moved the tent and belongings inside up onto UC Berkeley land. Yesterday afternoon, the tent was still there, protected under a tarp. Another vulnerable camp, that has moved gradually closer to the creek, remains on UC Berkeley land a bit upstream.

Regardless of beliefs about personal responsibility, the tide of addiction, and the like, I hope we can agree on not just leaving impaired people to die. Another way to look at this is that common-sense public health and safety restrictions apply for everyone. Or perhaps we sane, hardworking, taxpaying citizens who threaten civilization by belching out greenhouse gases should not throw too many stones.

Full disclosure: Friends of Five Creeks has strong conflicts of interest in this, and our hands are not clean. As we worked to create attractive oases of urban nature for people and wildlife including on Codornices Creek, Cerrito Creek, the mouth of Strawberry Creek, the Ohlone Greenway/West Street path, and the North Basin Strip of what is now Eastshore State Park, we also were part of squeezing our society's growing flotsam of mentally ill and addicted lost souls out of these previous refuges. The current concentration of disturbed campers on Codornices is doing major damage to our area's only trout stream and more than 25 years of effort by thousands of volunteers. Various individuals destroy all creekside vegetation under tents and trash, draw rats to mounds of garbage, defecate and pollute, destroy benches and other small improvements including erosion controls, compulsively paint things, or pull up and cut strawberries, grapevines, and other natives that volunteers may not be able to re-establish due to climate change. In much of the area where we have worked so hard for many years, we can no longer bring groups of volunteers, much less host walks or other events.

Still, folks, let's not let people die.

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