
Codornices Creek issue: Conditions near 8th Street (COB Ref. 941238 and others)

14 messages

Friends of Five Creeks <f5creeks@gmail.com>

Mon, Oct 3, 2022 at 7:42 AM

To: Customer Service <customerservice@cityofberkeley.info>, Berkeley Mayor's Office <mayor@cityofberkeley.info>, mayor@albanyca.org, All Council <council@cityofberkeley.info>, citycouncil <citycouncil@albanyca.org>, City Clerk <clerk@cityofberkeley.info>, Anne Hsu <ahsu@albanyca.org>, PROSC@albanyca.org, Tim Pine <tpine@berkeley.edu>, Thomas Williams <thomwilliams@berkeley.edu>, "Radu, Peter" <pradu@cityofberkeley.info>, "Garland, Liam" <lgarland@cityofberkeley.info>, Mark Hurley <mhurley@albanyca.org>, Razzu Engen <REngen@albanyca.org>, Margot Cunningham <MCunningham@albanyca.org>, Sid Schoenfeld <sSchoenfeld@albanyca.org>, "Skramstad, Mary" <MSkramstad@cityofberkeley.info>, Jeff Bond <jbond@albanyca.org>

To: Referral for Codornices Creek issue from City of Berkeley Customer Service
cc: City of Berkeley Mayor, Council, staff members dealing with homeless and environmental issues
City of Albany Mayor, Council, staff

This report deals with **conditions on Codornices Creek that appear to stem from the growing number of seriously disturbed people** camping on and near 8th Street between Harrison and University Village in Albany.

Seeing the deterioration of these people first hand, we continue to urge striving for broad and effective solutions. This long report, concluding with some recommendations, is being distributed widely. It also follows up on multiple COB Customer Service reports from July, August, and September, including Friends of Five Creeks reports grouped as 941238, as well as 956584 (from Stephanie Antalocy), a 9/09 report from Sheryl Drinkwater, and others I have been told about.

- **Current approaches are ineffective and wasteful.** Over and over, camps are allowed to mushroom only to be removed at great cost later. A recent example is the south bank creekside camp just above Sixth, first reported on August 20, and reported repeatedly by various people after that. Police finally removed it on Sept. 27 -- because of a tent fire.

By then, a compound fenced off about 40' of creek with extensive "infrastructure" of wood supports, tent, tarp walls, carts, trash and belongings, and its own slop bucket. *See photos at the end of this email.* All vegetation had been destroyed. Removing and cleaning all this must have cost thousands.

This was not the only waste. Three days after the removal, on Sept. 30, our interns installed erosion-control matting to try to keep sediment from the bare soil from washing to the pool just downstream at Sixth Street -- one of the few, and possibly the only, place where trout survive in the "restored" creek below San Pablo Avenue. It was the third such effort here -- only this time planting seems ineffectual due to drought.

This was just one examples of tent compounds mushrooming, being removed at great cost and effort, and often returning. Others include tent cities along the edges of Berkeley's soccer fields on Fifth; the trash-paved meadow at 9th Street, now fenced to allow vegetation to return; and 8th Street itself, where campers were removed at great cost in early spring only to return in April.

It also goes without saying that others cannot enjoy this creek, where so much effort and money have gone into creating peaceful and rich nature. Parents at University Village and the sports fields must feel some unease.

- **Current approaches are shameful and inhumane.** Our experience installing the erosion-control cloth shows how this area is Berkeley's and Albany's de-facto open-air insane asylum. As we worked, a shirtless man on the north (Albany) bank approached and began speaking to us in Spanish. I repeatedly apologized, in English and my poor Spanish, for my inability to understand. He did not seem to register what was said, and continued for some time. We finished a short time later and took our tools to Sixth Street, where a person with hard hat, broom, spade, and large trash container (from University Village's trash shelters) seemed to be

trying to scrape or sweep into the trout pool. (Fortunately, there was little dirt.) This person did not respond to hellos from two people, or a friendly and polite query about who they were working for.

We could not leave an intern there alone to wait for a ride, so we went upstream near 8th (where I needed a photo). Along the way, we passed someone intently painting tiny patterns on the graffitied Post Office wall (this was not the ordinary graffiti artist). This is not to mention the dishevelled "regular" with bags who seemed to be waiting for us to leave, the increasingly addicted and disturbed man with the white van at 8th Street (I believe someone else recently reported his deterioration), or the woman with the closest tent who takes marking flags and breaks trees, shrubs, and vines (including the beautiful wild grapes), piling them at the portable toilet. I believe she, too, thinks she is beautifying or cleaning. But she threw something at one of our board members, who tried nicely to say that stirring the mud with a brush was not good for trout.

Then there are the large objects dragged to the creek -- steel cabinet, bathtub, hot-water tank -- must be removed, and the man who paints rocks or railings with whatever paint he acquires. Recently, I took his photo to message his mother, and was able to talk him out of the gallon can he was carrying. I have not seen the incontinent man who uses a walker recently -- perhaps he accepted help.

These are not bad people -- note how many probably think they are helping. But they appear to see a world significantly disconnected from what most of us see. We could think of them as lost souls. They get a weekly shower van and mobile clinic, portable toilets on block corners, handouts of clothes and food, and I think weekly trash pickup from trash-choked tents so close together than a fire could be deadly (as we have seen in Oakland). This appears to be drawing more seriously disabled people, without solving problems.

I am not disparaging the tireless efforts of those working with these folks, and on the creek, on many levels. I am deeply ashamed that our society has come to this heartless state. **F5C has no answers, but here are some possible steps:**

- **Berkeley should seriously explore engaging Downtown Streets Team** or a similar agency that could be an ongoing presence bringing order and help and some basic safety rules, such as space between tents. F5C has already asked to be part of any such discussions, which should also involve sports teams and businesses.
- **Berkeley should redouble efforts to find a permanent campsite** or other shelter, perhaps the only legal remedy and a more likely way to get help for those who need it. **Albany and other small cities should stop shirking their responsibilities** -- creating low-income housing is not enough, but it would at least be a start.
- **Albany should keep its promise of a stakeholders' meeting** or other means of bringing stakeholders together so that they can exchange ideas with each other and the three responsible agencies -- Albany, Berkeley, and UC Berkeley. **The triumvirate supposedly making decisions** should have public agendas and minutes reporting decisions from its closed meetings.

Thank you for considering this long report.

Below: The camp on Codornices above Sixth Street -- a short photo history echoing many others.



Aug 19: Camp above Sixth



Aug 22: Tarp and crate walls begin expansion



Sept. 22: Camp has become large compound.



Sept. 27: Bare bank left when camp removed.

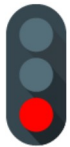


Sept. 30: Installing erosion control at creek edge.

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