

Out of the Ashes

A Story of Loss, Renewal, and Friendship

Nature Friends Los Angeles



This narrative was assembled by Jim Angus,
President of Nature Friends Los Angeles from 2022 to 2026
and Founding President of the Nature Friends Los Angeles Foundation.

It chronicles nearly a year of recovery, rebuilding,
and community effort following the Los Angeles fires of January, 2025.

December 15, 2025

Out of the Ashes

A Story of Loss, Renewal, and Friendship

Nature Friends Los Angeles

This narrative is drawn from the emails, newsletters, volunteer updates, personal recollections, and internal messages that members received in the months following the Los Angeles Fires of January 2025. It reflects the reality we lived through—the shock of losing our historic clubhouse, the storms that followed, the long season of mud and debris, the gradual return of community life, and the hope that slowly took root again. Written in my own voice, as President of both the Nature Friends Los Angeles Club and the Nature Friends Los Angeles Foundation, this account aims to place that experience in context and to share the fuller picture of what sustained the community through this long arc of loss and recovery.

Before the Fire: A Last Celebration

In December 2024, just weeks before the Eaton Fire, the clubhouse was alive in a way that now feels almost unreal. That winter, we held something new—our first Christmas night market, a kind of alpine-inspired Dezemberfest that filled the terraces with lights, music, and the smell of gingerbread. Members set up tables to sell handmade crafts and holiday gifts. Children played games under the oaks. A Krampus made his rounds, more mischievous than frightening, and



HEIDI DISPLAYS HER CRAFTS



JIM AND MARK (THAT'S ME ON THE LEFT)



DESSERTS

live bands carried the evening forward with laughter, dancing, and the familiar warmth that defined our little community on the hillside.



KITCHEN DUTY



SEAN



BIERGARTEN



100 YEAR OLD CHALET

Inside the chalet, the rooms glowed. Members decorated the cafeteria with garlands and lights, and near the entrance—on a wall lined with historic photographs—hung a cherished image of the clubhouse as it looked around 1925. Two stories then, before the third was added, framed by the young trees and early stonework of founders who had carried every beam and tile up the mountain by hand. The photo had become a beloved artifact, a reminder of where we came from and how much could be built through patience, labor, and shared purpose.

That wall of photographs was one of many threads tying present celebrations to a century of history. The chalet held our archives too: shelves of newsletters, handwritten

minutes in German, trail logs, pamphlets from early outings, maps, membership ledgers, and countless small fragments of a community that had endured for more than a hundred years. Some of these materials survived only because volunteers had undertaken a scanning project a decade earlier, digitizing fragile documents so that the record would not fade with time. Those digital files would later become essential. But most of the physical archives—thousands of pages, artifacts, and irreplaceable ephemera—still lived inside the chalet that December night.

Looking back, that evening now feels like a moment caught in time, a tiny illuminated scene inside a Christmas snow globe, held still for just a breath before the world shifted around it. The chalet was whole. Its history still rested safely on its shelves. Music poured from the open doors, lights reflected off the walls and the terraces were filled with conversation and the sense of belonging that is so difficult to articulate but unmistakable when you feel it.



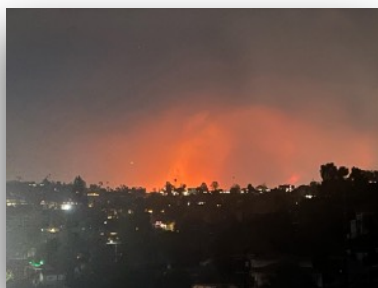
CHALET DECEMBER 2024

No one imagined that only weeks later, the building would be gone—along with the archives, the photographs on the walls, and the small, irreplaceable traces of those who came before us. The Dezemberfest celebration became our final gathering in the intact chalet, a brilliant last chapter before the fire rewrote everything that followed.

The Fire

On a winter night in January 2025, the Eaton Fire swept through the San Gabriel foothills with astonishing speed. It began as a distant glow on the ridge line — something that at first looked like a brush fire that would be contained — and then, pushed by wind and drought-hardened chaparral, it dropped toward the neighborhoods below. Within hours, mandatory evacuations swept through Altadena and parts of Pasadena. Friends called in quick succession: We're evacuating — can we come?

That night, two households arrived at our home in nearby Eagle Rock, pets in tow. Zak, our Director of Operations, showed up with his cat; another family from Pasadena followed soon after. My own house lay just outside the predicted fire path, so we did what neighbors and



EATON FIRE FROM OUR HOME IN EAGLE ROCK



Nature Friends members have always done — we made room, we waited together, and we watched.

From our windows, the San Gabriel Mountains glowed an eerie, unnatural orange. At times it looked like the fire was cresting straight toward the Los Angeles Basin. The flames rose, dipped, and flared again, consuming ridge after ridge. Even from miles away, the heat shimmer was visible. It was surreal — watching familiar

foothills burn while knowing our clubhouse sat somewhere behind that wall of fire.

By morning, the news had worsened. Altadena had burned through the night, and the fire had pushed into Sierra Madre. Evacuation maps were confusing, and reports were mixed — some saying our property was gone, others unsure. Then, late that morning, a neighbor who had not evacuated sent us a series of photos. Against all expectations, the chalet still stood — at least in part. The façade and the lower floor were intact, and firefighters were on-site, aiming streams of water at the windows and balconies in an effort to save what they could.

For a brief, fragile moment, hope took hold. If the façade survived, perhaps the rest had too. Perhaps the stonework and timber framing — built by immigrant hands more than a century ago — had endured the night.

But the narrowness of the canyon, and the steep slope above the building, imposed limits. The firefighters on scene realized that if the upper floors collapsed, they themselves could be trapped with no safe escape route. The structure was already unstable, and the fire had weakened it further. For their own safety, they had to withdraw.



FIGHTING THE FLAMES



THE EATON FIRE CLAIMS THE NATURE FRIENDS LOS ANGELES HISTORIC CLUBHOUSE

By that time, the winds driving the fire had died. The surrounding neighborhood was spared.

The chalet burned completely.

Yet even in that loss, we learned what had been saved. The firefighters had used their final moments on-site to soak the nearby house and our dormitory — the only structures on the property to survive. Their quick action prevented the fire from spreading into the upper terraces and spared the dormitory we would later repurpose as temporary lodging and meeting space.



BRUCE AND HEIDI LOOK SADLY AT THE REMAINS OF THE CHALET

When the last embers cooled, the devastation was stark. Only the lower concrete floors and fragments of the façade remained. The terraces were



THE DORM & TOOL ROOM SURVIVE

covered with ash. Oak trees along the hillside stood as skeletal silhouettes, their canopies burned. The chaparral — normally thick, green, and rooted — had burned down to exposed, unstable soil. The birds were gone. Even the familiar scent of chaparral and earth had been replaced by the raw smell of smoke and ash.

Then the rains came.



STEPS LEADING UP TO THE DORM, A NEARBY CAR AND THE STREET LEADING UP TO THE BIERGARTEN

Only days after the fire, winter storms began rolling in. Without vegetation to hold the soil, the burned slopes liquefied. Mudslides poured down the hillside, filling stairways, burying terraces, and blocking the access road, Yucca Trail. The county imposed rolling closures as conditions shifted hour by hour. For a time, no one could enter the property except emergency personnel and inspectors.

The chalet was gone. The land was unstable. And yet, even then, the first threads of resolve were already in motion.

The First Messages to Members



RUINS OF THE CHALET

The first communications we sent to members conveyed the shock we felt. It was difficult even to describe the transformation of a place so many of us had known for decades. The familiar hillside, once framed by oaks and featuring a Bavarian styled chalet, now appeared in photographs as a scarred, unfamiliar landscape.

But those early updates also carried a sense of resolve. The message was simple: the clubhouse was gone, yet the spirit that built it remained. Rebuilding would be possible, even if it was hard to imagine what that would look like in the early weeks.

During this period, no one was permitted onsite except for emergency personnel and inspectors. Our first task was to understand the extent of the damage and to navigate the official restrictions that followed. These messages explained the uncertainty of the weeks ahead and laid out the first steps toward recovery, even if those steps were modest and slow.

News from Naturfreunde Internationale

Not long after the first wave of member messages, something unexpected and deeply moving happened. In March 2025, we received word through Naturfreunde Schweiz that the story of the loss of our chalet had reached beyond Los Angeles and into the wider international Nature Friends community. We learned that a Swiss member, moved by what had happened, was exploring the possibility of offering meaningful support for the rebuilding effort. Around the same time, Naturfreunde Internationale signaled its early commitment, pledging approximately €1,585 (about USD 1,802) as an initial expression of international solidarity.

At that stage, nothing was certain. The outreach came with thoughtful and practical questions: Could we provide photographs of the chalet before the fire and of the damage afterward? Could we describe our plans for rebuilding? Could we confirm that insurance would not simply cover the loss? These questions were relayed with care, and we began assembling what was needed — images, explanations, and a clear statement that wildfire insurance had not been an option and that rebuilding would depend heavily on donations and volunteer labor.

For those of us still in the early phase of shock and damage assessment, this news from Switzerland — and from Naturfreunde Internationale — was a beacon. It was the first time we truly felt that support might come not only from our own membership, but from the wider international family of Nature Friends. Even before any funds were received, the knowledge that help was being considered, and that an early commitment had already been made, gave us a profound sense of being seen and accompanied during a very uncertain time.

The First Return: Mud and Silence

When volunteers were finally allowed back onto the property, the scene that greeted them was startling. The terraces had become platforms of mud. Footpaths were buried under heavy, wet soil. The once lively grounds, which had echoed with music, laughter, and conversation, were quiet except for the sound of shovels cutting into wet earth.



MEMBERS CLEARING MUD AND RUBBLE FROM THE ROAD AND PROPERTY



CIVILIAN WORKERS HELP CLEAR THE ROAD & BIERGARTEN



MEMBERS HELP CLEAR THE ROAD

The first workdays were small. Only a handful of members could access the property at once due to safety constraints. They cleared mud one shovel-load at a time, scraping the biergarten floor free and restoring the shapes of paths and gathering places. The mud had flowed in layers, sometimes several feet at a time, each rain adding a new sheet over the last.

These early days were foundational to the rest of the recovery. Nothing could be rebuilt, planned, or even imagined until the earth was moved and the land was once again visible. Members worked with steady determination, often in cold weather, sometimes in rain, and occasionally in unexpected bursts of sunlight that broke through the clouds.

The work was not glamorous. It consisted of digging, hauling, slipping, lifting, and clearing. Yet this was the moment when the future of the property began to take shape again, not through grand gestures but through steady hands.

The Pavilion and the March Gathering

As winter wore on and the worst of the mud was finally behind us, another challenge appeared on the horizon — not geological, but organizational. Each year, the three California branches of Nature Friends meet for the annual corporate gathering, rotating responsibility between San Francisco, Oakland, and Los Angeles. In 2025, the rotation fell to us. The meeting was scheduled for March 23, only weeks after the fire, the mudflows, and the long series of road closures.

From the outside, it seemed obvious that the gathering should be moved. The corporation gently suggested shifting the meeting to another branch; no one expected Nature Friends Los Angeles to host anything so soon after such a devastating loss. But for us, the question was not merely logistical. It was symbolic. If we relinquished our place in the rotation, it would signal — intentionally or not — that our operations had collapsed. I felt strongly that we needed to demonstrate the opposite: that we were still functioning, still able to gather, still standing. The phrase that guided us was simple: continuity of operations.

To do that, we needed a place to meet.

Our solution was both practical and deeply rooted in the club's volunteer spirit. On the highest terrace along Yucca Trail — a flat space once used for camping — with Darrell Goodwin's help, we decided to erect a covered pavilion, something we could build quickly but would also serve future needs. We purchased a pre-manufactured kit, hauled the components up the road, and assembled it the way Nature Friends projects so often come together: with borrowed tools,



PROPOSED BUILDING SITE



FINISHED PAVILION

willing hands, and a sense of determination.

Piece by piece, the structure took shape — posts lifted into position, beams braced against the winter wind, panels screwed into place as volunteers balanced on ladders and improvised scaffolding. When the roof finally went up, it felt like more than shade or shelter. It felt like a declaration that life at the club was still moving forward.

On March 23, the corporate delegates arrived to find a functioning meeting space overlooking the damaged—but showing signs of rebirth—property. The rains held off. People gathered beneath the new roof, sitting on folding chairs, breaking bread, listening to reports. It was not the clubhouse we had lost, but it served its purpose. For one day, the property once again hosted the leaders of the Nature Friends movement in California, just as it had for generations.

Our plan is to add temporary walls and modest improvements so the pavilion can serve as an interim space for meetings, workshops, and even small celebrations until the chalet could be rebuilt. It was, in many ways, the first “new building” after the fire — a placeholder for hope.



THE DORM

At the same time, we turned our attention to the dormitory above the terraces. The building consists of three rooms: two small suites and a central common room that had long been filled with extra bunk beds. With the clubhouse gone, we needed a modest, comfortable space for meetings, small retreats, and longer member stays, both for morale and for revenue. So we removed the old bunks, added a tiny kitchen, a table, and chairs, and reshaped the common room into a flexible gathering space. We also updated our policies to allow longer stays in the two suites, creating a small but steady source of income to help support the recovery.

But recovery is seldom a straight line. Only days after the March meeting, heavy rains returned. The primary debris basin above our property — already filled with material from earlier storms — reached capacity. To prevent overflow into the canyon, the city constructed a second, smaller debris dam directly below it. The new barrier did its job, but it also blocked access to the pavilion that had so recently hosted the corporate meeting.



KITCHEN AND MEETING SPACE

Worse, the burned hillside above remained unstable. The skeletal remains of century plants, loosened by gravity and soaked ground, began breaking free and tumbling downslope. Several struck the pavilion, damaging its supports and knocking parts of the structure out of alignment. By early April, we were forced to close it for safety until the slope could be stabilized and the structure repaired.

It was a discouraging setback, just as momentum was beginning to build. Still, the pavilion's brief moment of service mattered. It allowed us to keep our place in the statewide rotation. It showed the other branches that we were still capable of hosting. And it reminded our own members — many of whom had not been onsite since the fire — that Nature Friends Los Angeles was still alive and working toward the future.

In that way, even damaged and temporarily closed, the pavilion became part of the story of resilience: a structure built by volunteers, used when we needed it most, and waiting now to be restored when the hillside is ready.

Community Support and Personal Appeals



SISTERS OF PERPETUAL INDULGENCE

Nature Friends Los Angeles has long been a home for people who did not always find belonging elsewhere. For decades, the club has offered space, safety, and community to marginalized groups, including LGBTQ+ members who helped shape its culture and sustain it through many chapters of its history.

In the months following the fire, two LGBTQ+ organizations—each learning independently of our situation—stepped forward with donations of \$1,000. The first

gift came from the California B&B Corps and arrived at a particularly precarious moment, before our IRS determination letter had been issued and while we were still navigating how contributions could be formally received. That donation was nevertheless deposited and became one of the earliest tangible expressions of outside support. More recently, a second \$1,000 contribution was made by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, whose generosity carried both practical and symbolic meaning.



CALIFORNIA
B & B CORPS



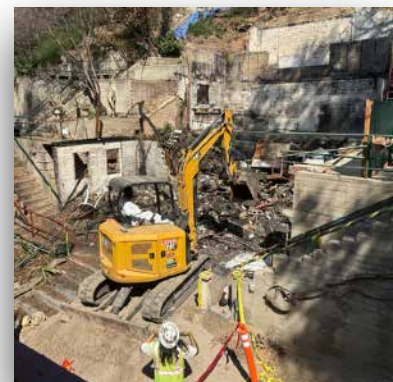
FACEBOOK FUNDRAISER

At the same time, I made a more personal appeal. Framed as a birthday fundraiser on Facebook, it reached friends and family who knew me but were less familiar with Nature Friends Los Angeles or its history. That appeal raised \$1,195, adding early momentum and helping to bridge the period between the immediate aftermath of the fire and the more formal fundraising efforts that followed.

Debris Removal and the Long Wait

A major turning point came when Los Angeles County granted us a special exception allowing the Army Corps of Engineers to treat the debris from our burned clubhouse as eligible for official fire cleanup. Under normal rules, only residential structures qualify. But after review, the county acknowledged the scale of loss and safety risk on our site, and the Corps arrived soon after.

Large machinery began removing fire debris, peeling back layers of charred material and revealing the raw structure beneath. What had seemed like a monumental task for volunteers was accomplished in a matter of days once the heavy equipment arrived. The savings were immense — over fifty thousand dollars of work completed at no direct cost to the club.



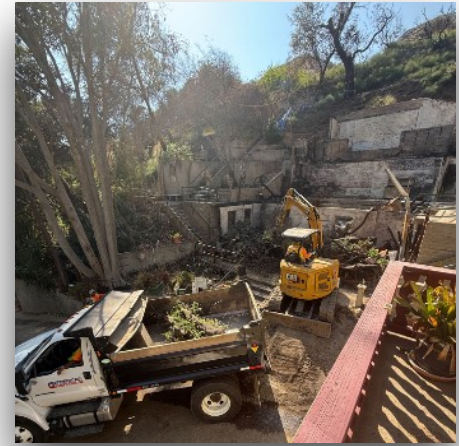
ARMY CORPS REMOVES DEBRIS

As the debris disappeared, the shape of the future became clearer. The exposed concrete pads, now fully visible, provided the first real sense of what might be rebuilt.

Yet even as the debris disappeared, the property could not simply be reopened. The county maintained strict access rules due to unstable slopes and the ongoing risk of slides. Our members grew accustomed to a new rhythm of



DEBRIS CLEARANCE COMPLETED



ARMY CORP AT WORK

communication: one week, a message announcing access for essential work; another week, a notice that storms had closed the canyon again. What might have been a straightforward cleanup stretched into a season of waiting, inspection, and re-inspection.

This period taught us patience. Progress could be seen on the ground, but it moved through official channels at its own pace. We

recognized early on that rebuilding would be a slow process, and that returning to a point where we could hold paid events was critical—without that income, the club would not be able to meet its ongoing expenses.

It was during this waiting, standing before the fire-scarred foundations, that a shift occurred. At one point, Zak, Darrel, and I found ourselves looking at the cleared pads and thinking the same thing: this could be a stage. In that moment, the gap between destruction and possibility began to close, and the idea of a future performance space first took hold.

The Birth of the Foundation

As the mud was being cleared and debris hauled away — and as early conversations with potential donors began — another transformation was taking place, not on the hillside but at kitchen tables, in late-night discussions, and eventually in an airport terminal. It became clear that rebuilding the chalet would require more than volunteer labor and member dues. As a 501(c)(7) social club, we could accept contributions only from members. Any major support from abroad, risked being treated by the IRS as “non-member revenue,” which could threaten our status.

To rebuild, we needed another tool — one built for charitable purposes. And so the idea of a separate 501(c)(3) foundation took shape.



We moved quickly. We drafted bylaws, defined a mission centered on restoration and public benefit, and prepared first the state and then the IRS applications. I remember finishing the final edits at the San Francisco airport on a three-hour layover — typing between announcements, reviewing attachments, and double-checking every detail before hitting “submit.” On April 5, 2025, the application entered federal review.

For months we waited. While volunteers cleared mud, restored drainage, and cut brush, we hoped the IRS would approve the Foundation before year’s end. The stakes were higher than most realized. We were already corresponding with Swiss Naturefriends about the potential donor moved by our loss, but without a 501(c)(3), we could not safely accept a major international gift. The Foundation wasn’t a formality — it was the bridge that made such generosity possible.

On August 5, 2025, approval arrived. Nature Friends Los Angeles Foundation became an officially recognized 501(c)(3) charity. It felt symbolic: a new beginning, stamped by the federal government, arriving just as the land itself was beginning to heal.

This milestone opened the door to the wider world. For the first time, we could accept tax-deductible donations from the public, from partner organizations, and from supporters overseas. It offered transparency, credibility, and a structure capable of sustaining a true rebuilding effort.

It also intertwined my own story with our recovery. Earlier that spring, I had written to our Swiss colleagues about the devastation we faced — the firestorm, the mudflows, the volunteers digging through meter-deep earth, the temporary pavilion built then washed out. I mentioned that I would soon travel to Switzerland for the first time, eager to see the country that shaped so much of the Naturefriends movement. I shared photographs and early plans — a conversation that now feels like the first span of a bridge built from both sides.

The approval didn’t just give us legal standing. It gave us momentum and confidence at a moment when nothing else felt steady.

The Hillside and its Restoration

With the debris cleared and the terraces emerging again, attention shifted to the steep hillside above the chalet. The fire had stripped it bare. What had once been chaparral and oak trees was now loose soil, scattered ash, and exposed roots. Each storm carved new channels in the slope, sending fresh layers of mud onto the terraces and walkways. If the land was going to recover, it would be because volunteers made it so.

A dedicated group of members began what became one of the most sustained efforts of the entire year: restoring the hillside with native vegetation. They cleared gullies, opened blocked channels, and rebuilt



A WORKER STABILIZES THE SLOPE



JEFF PLANTS NATIVES

informal drainage paths by hand. They removed fallen limbs, cut away dead brush, and packed out debris. Then, slowly and deliberately, they started planting.

Dozens of native species went into the ground — plants chosen not only for their beauty but for their ability to hold soil, anchor steep ground, and knit a damaged slope back together. Volunteers watered them by hand, sometimes hauling water up from the lower terraces, sometimes hiking up with jugs in backpacks during the driest weeks.



NATIVE PLANTS FORM TRANSFORM THE PROPERTY INTO A RECOGNIZED BOTANICAL GARDEN

The hillside responded. First in small patches of green, then in broader sweeps of growth that held through the next rains. What began as emergency erosion control became something larger — an intentional restoration project rooted in native ecology and the long-term health of the land.

And here, the fire offered an unexpected silver lining. For decades, thick chaparral had slowly grown over old footpaths and scenic routes built by earlier generations. After the fire cleared



that overgrowth, I discovered fragments of those trails again — stone edging hidden beneath brush, a hand built fountain stamped with “NF”, old stair cuts carved into the slope, faint lines where people once walked. With the hillside open, we were able to restore several of these lost paths, reconnecting views and routes that had not been accessible in years.

As the slope recovered, the idea

VOLUNTEERS (JIM & MARK) RESTORE TRAILS

emerged to formalize what volunteers were already creating. With careful documentation and clear goals for conservation and education, we applied for recognition as an official botanical garden, focused on native plants of the San Gabriel foothills. In November 2025, that application was approved.

This designation marked a turning point. The hillside was no longer only a reminder of the fire. It had become a living landscape — a place to learn from, care for, and protect. And it demonstrated something essential about the recovery as a whole: when the work could not be done by machines or contractors, the hands and dedication of volunteers carried it forward.

Life Begins to Return

By summer, enough progress had been made for limited member gatherings to resume. Paths were mostly clear, terraces were visible again, and the land felt safe enough for cautious use. Small hikes set out from the property again. Informal social visits took place on weekends. Even the return of birds and insects added to the sense that the land was healing along with the community.

Volunteers continued to work on debris, brush, and long-term stabilization, but the tone began to shift. The property was no longer only a disaster site. It was becoming a home again.

The return of small gatherings also rekindled something essential in our culture: the habit of volunteering together. Zak, the Club's Director of Operations established volunteer groups — some focused on clearing brush, others on repairing handrails or improving drainage, others on organizing meals for those working on the hill. People brought tools, gloves, and food to share, and often a few stories about the old chalet. In some ways, it felt like a return to the early decades of the club, when everything was built by hand because that was the only way forward.



THE GROUNDS RECOVER FROM THE FLAMES

These workdays weren't just practical. They were healing. They brought back the feeling that the land belonged to everyone, and that everyone belonged to the land.

When Help Arrived from Abroad

Amid this shift toward planning and rebuilding, the conversations with Naturfreunde Schweiz continued. The Swiss team kept us informed as they worked with the donor and his assistant, answering questions, clarifying tax and transfer issues, and ensuring that everything was structured properly. There were delays and long stretches of silence, moments when we wondered whether the gift might quietly disappear into the uncertainties of paperwork and life.

Then, at last, word arrived: the donation had been received by the Swiss team. Soon afterward, we learned that the funds — 50,000 CHF — would be wired to the Nature Friends Los Angeles Foundation to be held specifically for rebuilding.

When the transfer finally reached our account, it felt like a door opening. The amount itself was transformative, but so was what it represented: trust from afar, solidarity from within the international Naturefriends family, and a tangible sign that the dream of a new chalet was not just ours alone.

When California Pulled Together

Even as we worked through the long cleanup and navigated the complexities of forming a charitable foundation, another kind of rebuilding was underway — one that had nothing to do with mud, debris, or construction. It had to do with people. The three California branches of Nature Friends had always shared history, values, and the occasional joint event, but the fire created a moment that tested whether those bonds were real.



In the early months after the loss of the chalet, our club faced immediate financial strain. We had already paid our annual corporate dues and insurance-related fees for the year, at a time when we had suddenly lost our primary facility and much of our earned income. The work of clearing the property, stabilizing the hillside, and keeping the organization alive put pressure on every part of our budget. We needed help — not someday, but right then.

What followed was one of the quiet triumphs of this story. Under an agreement called the “Emergency Solidarity and Support – FY2025” memorandum, the other branches and the corporate board came together around a simple premise: the loss of the Los Angeles chalet was not just a local problem. It was a loss for all Nature Friends in California.

The support came in two parts. First, there was a one-time solidarity grant to the Nature Friends Los Angeles Foundation — roughly twenty thousand dollars dedicated to put towards the rebuilding effort. Second, there was a waiver and refund of corporate dues and related fees that Los Angeles had already paid for recent years — another sum close to twenty

thousand dollars once everything was tallied and returned.

By the time the final checks were issued and the accounting was complete on August 25, 2025, the total impact was clear: together, the branches and the corporate structure had freed up on the order of forty thousand dollars for our recovery. For organizations with their own obligations and long-term needs, this was not a symbolic gesture. It was a substantial sacrifice made in the spirit of solidarity.

Behind the numbers were people: branch leaders who debated, voted, and followed through; treasurers who moved money where it was needed most; and members who understood that the survival of the Los Angeles club mattered beyond regional differences. What could have been a purely bureaucratic process instead felt like a collective decision to stand together.

This support did something no spreadsheet can capture. It stabilized our finances at a moment when every dollar counted. It showed our



RAILING OVER STAGE

own members that we were not carrying the burden alone. And it sent a quiet but powerful signal — to future donors, to our European friends, and to ourselves — that the broader Nature Friends family was willing to back words with action.

That same spirit continued to express itself in more personal and local ways. We owe particular gratitude to the Oakland House, which, even after making its initial donation, organized a silent auction that raised an additional \$7,743.60 for the Los Angeles recovery. More recently, a member of the Los Angeles branch pledged \$25,000 to be used as a matching gift, helping to amplify future contributions. Alongside these larger commitments, there were also numerous smaller local donations, ranging from \$10 to \$500, each reflecting individual acts of care and confidence in what we were trying to rebuild.

Taken together, these gestures reinforced something essential. They reminded us that the work ahead rested not only on plans and permits, but on relationships built over time. That sense of unity became one of the most important foundations we carried into the next chapter — just as the possibility of international help from Switzerland began to emerge.

Building the Stage and Preparing to Reopen for Events

As summer turned to fall, volunteers constructed a stage on the original foundations of the chalet. It was simple — a platform of wood, beams, steps and rails — but it offered space and the first opportunity to host a major event since the fire.



A NEW SPACE RISES FROM THE ASHES - THE STAGE AND TERRACE SEATING AREAS

The stage and railings emerged much like earlier projects at the club: designed, cut, and assembled by Darrell Goodwin and members who saw a need and decided to meet it. Boards were carried up by hand. Joists were lifted into place with enthusiasm more reminiscent of a barn-raising than a modern construction site. When the final boards were

nailed, it was not just a stage; it was a sign that the land was ready to welcome music and celebration again.

The First Major Event: Oktoberfest

When Oktoberfest arrived in October 2025, the mood was unlike any in recent memory. It was not the same as years past; it was smaller, quieter, and more reflective. Yet it marked a turning point. The property was alive again.

Guests sat on benches overlooking the cleared terraces. Musicians played on the stage that had survived the fire. Dancers moved across the new deck literally built over the ashes of the chalet. The smell of grilled food mixed with the chaparral-scented air. People who had not visited since the fire stood quietly for long moments, taking in the changes — the absence of the chalet, the presence of the deck, the resilience of the community that had returned.



GERMAN PERFORMANCE GROUP



THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHALET COME ALIVE



MEMBER SUPPLIED POTLUCK MEAL



GERMAN PERFORMANCE GROUP

It was a day of gratitude — not for what had been lost, but for what remained. Curiously, several new visitors, there for the first time, asked where the burned building had once stood. We took that as an compliment. What stood in its place felt coherent and alive, not as a replacement, but as something that allowed the site to continue doing what it had always done: bring people together.

At the same time, we were clear-eyed about what lay ahead. What we had built was sustaining, but temporary. The chalet we lost would rise again, though likely years from now, and only after the long work of raising at least half a million dollars. For the moment, out of the ashes had come something just as important — a renewed commitment, a shared direction, and a place from which to imagine the future while we did the patient work of getting there.

Planning for What Comes Next

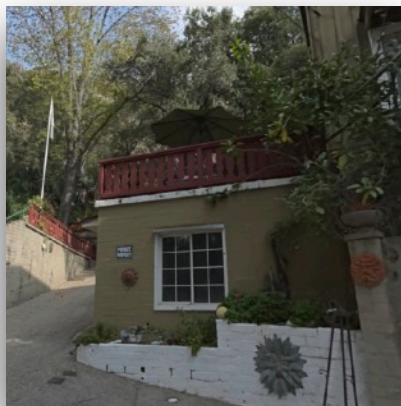
By the time the first Oktoberfest after the fire took place, we had reached an important

transition point. The immediate work of survival — clearing mud, stabilizing slopes, restoring access, and navigating permits — had given way to a new set of questions. The site was active again. People were gathering. Events were returning. Now we had to decide how to move forward in a way that was both realistic and faithful to the place we had lost.

From the outset, we understood that rebuilding the chalet would not be immediate. The scale of the project, the complexity of hillside construction, and the requirements of modern safety codes meant that this would be a multi-year effort. At the same time, California law provides an important framework for recovery after natural disasters. Structures that were legally built but would not meet today's zoning or setback rules are generally allowed to be rebuilt following catastrophic loss. While we will still be required to comply with sensible modern upgrades — particularly related to safety, accessibility, and fire protection — this framework allows us to rebuild something closely aligned with the original chalet, rather than being forced into an entirely different footprint or use.

That understanding shaped our strategy. Rather than waiting for a distant future moment when the entire chalet could be reconstructed at once, we focused first on ensuring that the property itself could function, breathe, and support community life in the meantime. Nature Friends Los Angeles has always been sustained by use. Music, celebrations, hikes, weddings, and shared meals are not add-ons; they are how the place stays alive. Without restoring that rhythm, the risk was not just financial, but cultural.

This led to a deliberate sequence of improvements. The stage built on the original foundations of the chalet transformed what might have remained a visual reminder of loss into an active gathering space. Temporary kitchen and bar facilities followed — simple, adaptable structures that made it possible to host events and welcome guests back to the terraces. These were never intended as permanent substitutes for the chalet, but as practical bridges between what was lost and what will one day return.



TOOL ROOM

Other essential elements are still in progress. Permanent water and power must be restored to the event areas, and restroom facilities that meet modern standards are being completed. One small piece of good fortune was that the tool room survived the fire; it will be adapted to serve as our permanent restroom facility. Once these systems are fully in place, the site will be capable of supporting regular rentals and member events even before a new chalet rises on the original foundations. Throughout this work, our guiding principle has remained consistent: every improvement should honor the past while strengthening the club's long-term independence and resilience.

The hillside itself is inseparable from this vision. We did not want the fire to be the first story visitors encountered when they arrived. Considerable effort has gone into removing physical traces of damage, stabilizing disturbed areas, and replanting the slope with native species. In November 2025, the property received official recognition as a botanical garden focused on native plants — a designation that reflects both the work of volunteers and a long-term commitment to conservation, education, and stewardship of the land.

All of this work — restoring infrastructure, creating interim gathering spaces, healing the hillside, and resuming events — is unfolding alongside the longer process of planning the rebuilt chalet itself. That future building will take time, careful design, and sustained effort. But

it will not rise in isolation. When it does, it will stand on a site that never stopped being used, cared for, or imagined forward.

What has already changed is something just as important. We are no longer standing at the edge of a burned foundation wondering whether the story is over. The terraces once again hold music, laughter, and conversation. The land feels alive. And from that living place, we are preparing — patiently and deliberately — for what comes next.



NATURE FRIENDS AT NIGHT

Your Place in This Story

Support arrived during one of the most uncertain periods of this journey — after the mud was cleared, but before the path forward was fully defined. The work on the hillside was ongoing. The future was still taking shape. At that moment, generosity from many directions helped steady us and reminded us that this place still mattered.

That support did more than provide financial assistance. It brought encouragement. It sent a clear message that the story of Nature Friends Los Angeles had not been forgotten. It reassured our members that they were not carrying the weight of recovery alone.

Crucially, those contributions were directed to the Nature Friends Los Angeles Foundation, where they could be protected and dedicated specifically to rebuilding and long-term public benefit — not day-to-day operations. That distinction mattered. It allowed the Club to focus on restoring activity, hosting events, and becoming self-sustaining again, while the Foundation could proceed deliberately with fundraising, planning, and the expansion of programs that serve the broader community.

This separation of roles reflects the strategy described throughout this narrative: restoring life to the site so the Club can stand on its own feet again, while the Foundation works steadily toward the longer horizon — rebuilding the chalet and strengthening the public mission that will carry this place forward for generations.

We are standing on a foundation built by many hands and hearts — members, neighbors, sister branches, international friends, and supporters who believed in us during a difficult year. Each contribution, large or small, became part of the momentum that carried us from crisis into recovery and from recovery into purpose.

When the new clubhouse rises, it will do so not as the result of a single act of generosity, but as the outcome of a shared commitment — local and international — to preserve a place rooted in community, inclusion, and connection to the land.

With gratitude,

Jim Angus
President, Nature Friends Los Angeles Foundation and Tourist Club
December 16, 2025