

PEOPLE

Last Watch over Crystal Springs

When Gayle Ciardi looks out at the 23,000 acres of the Crystal Springs Reservoir watershed, a lifetime of memories come to mind. There's the dark stand of cypress that her mother dubbed the Enchanted Forest, and the historic house where she grew up hearing stories about this protected landscape from her father and grandfather.

Ciardi knows this land as few others do. Born Gayle Bottimore, she is the fourth generation of her family to watch over San Francisco's water supply. In the 1880s, her great-great-uncle took a job caring for the land and keeping the dams of the Spring Valley Water Company. Her grandfather became a watershed keeper in 1910, and saw the company purchased by the City of San Francisco in 1930. His son, Ephe "Chuck" Bottimore, followed in his father's footsteps. Ciardi herself was raised on the shores of Upper Crystal Springs Reservoir, and spent her childhood

riding shotgun with her father as he patrolled for trespassers. She never told her parents she was applying, determined to land the job on her own merit, knowledge, and perseverance.

In 1982, Ciardi realized her dream and was hired as a watershed keeper in the Alameda watershed in Sunol. As the first woman to serve as a watershed keeper for the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) in the Bay Area, she met a wall of male hostility. "Some of the older guys, the ones in the trades, were horrible. They wouldn't talk to me at all during the day. They'd say, 'You're a woman in a man's job, and there's men with families that need this job'. And when 4 p.m. comes, it's 'Hey, baby, how about I buy you a beer?'" Ciardi says. "I used to cry in the car coming home."

After three years of constant hazing, Ciardi triumphed in the end. "One of the auto mechanics, one of the old geezers, says, 'we've pulled



Ciardi and "Sparkie" on early horse patrol with an East Bay Regional Parks district ranger in the late 1980s.

every trick on you, everything we could to get rid of you, but it didn't work. You know this job and you do it damn well. From now on, you're one of us."

Having grown up bucking wood and lifting hay bales, Ciardi was strong and capable. She conducted patrols on horseback and assisted local cattle ranchers with roundups. She fixed fences, removed victims of gang shootings and drownings, and battled wildfires until firefighters arrived. She chased trespassers at night, and confronted rifle-toting poachers with more outrage than fear. "I'd go, 'what

is the matter with you?' And I'd take their guns," Ciardi says. "Why I didn't get shot I don't know."

After eight years in the East Bay, Ciardi transferred to the Peninsula, eventually moving to the south Crystal Springs cottage where her grandfather lived before her. The Civil War-era house has rooms with original silk wallpaper and views of bald eagles soaring over the reservoir.

From this vantage point, Ciardi has experienced a lifetime of change. Where once she evicted trespassing anglers, she now keeps her eyes peeled for illegal marijuana growing operations. She has witnessed sudden oak death syndrome decimate the forest, an invasion of wild turkeys, the resurgence of mountain lions and a waning interest in nature among local children. "I used to catch kids out here with their gunnysacks looking for snakes or wanting to fish. They were really out here appreciating nature. Then the Internet came, and all the kids are now playing video games. It makes me sad."

She has also seen the duties of her job change to include less security and dam-tending and more serving as an ambassador of the watershed. It's a role in which Ciardi has excelled, says watershed manager Joe Naras. "Gayle can see the good in anybody. She can see how to reach them, particularly among people who might have other notions about the restrictions or the way our land is managed, and she can turn a bad situation into a good one."

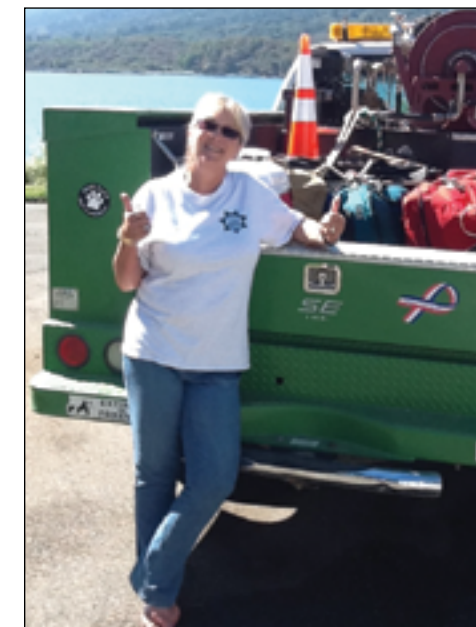
Jim Avant, Peninsula watershed keeper supervisor, recalls a perfect example of how Ciardi defused a potentially ugly standoff. "We chased a bunch of dirt bikers one day on the watershed — there were probably six keepers involved in trying to catch them. They kept running into one of us and turning around and going in another direction. Then they ran into Gayle, and she says, 'Gig's up, boys!' They're like, we give up. Here's somebody we can turn ourselves into. Gayle's combination of charm and authority saved the day."

Now, after 32 years as "the eyes and the ears of the watershed," Ciardi is retiring this February. Her departure spells the end of an era for those charged with keeping the water supply of the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission safe and clean.

"She's a good employee and a good friend. We'll definitely have a hard time filling her shoes," Naras says.

"To give up my truck keys will be horrible," Ciardi says, "but it's time." Luckily, her husband, SFPUC forester Guido Ciardi, who she met on the job, will continue to work on the landscape she loves so much. And although the couple will be moving off the watershed, they have no current plans to go farther than Half Moon Bay.

"I've put my heart and soul into this job, but it's time for the young ones to come in; the job has evolved. It was just a feeling it was time to go," Ciardi says. "I have been so blessed to work with all the people I've worked with—even those guys who made it so tough for me at the beginning. This has been the best job ever." **KW**



Ciardi sets off from Crystal Springs to help fight the Yosemite Rim Fire of 2013.

OUTSIDE THE BOX

TO BOLDLY GO WHERE NO MAGAZINE IS GOING ANYMORE... PAPER!

You are holding your first 2014 issue of *Estuary News* magazine. We hope you find it as readable and informative as ever. As you remember, we skipped the August issue to regroup and find new funding. Meanwhile the October issue was dedicated to summarizing 20 years of progress implementing the San Francisco Estuary Partnership's Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan, and the December issue to summarizing the presentations at the 2013 State of the Estuary Conference (online issue only). Both issues provide an unprecedented digest of the state of our efforts to steward, protect, and restore San Francisco Bay and its watershed.

ENERGIZED...

We are delighted to have these major new partners and funders for the next two years, and thank them for their foresight and generosity:

Delta Stewardship Council, Regional Monitoring Program, San Francisco Estuary Institute, and the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission

We also appreciate those who helped last year with small grants, donations and subscriptions: Alameda County Fish & Game Commission, California Coastal Conservancy, ESA Associates, NOAA-NMFS, San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission, and many of our readers like you.

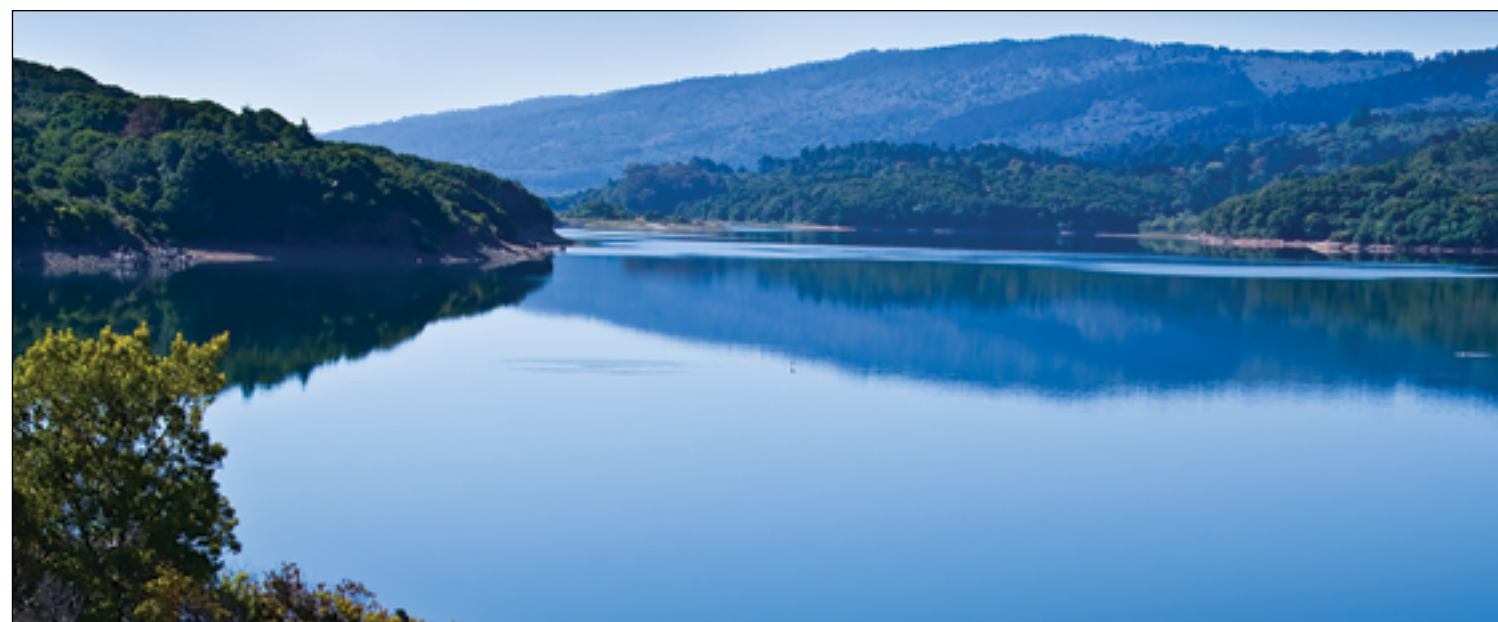
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NEXT GENERATION...

In 2014, we plan to publish four paper magazines with PDF versions, coming out in the months of March, June, September, and December. Meanwhile, we are striving to make the magazine more effective, reach a larger audience, collaborate with other Bay-Delta agencies and organizations, and intensify our links to web-based information. If you know of any entities that might give us grant funds to make these much-needed upgrades, or who would share their mailing lists with us, please contact the editor. We also welcome story ideas, photos, interns, and new board members. Engage!

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Crystal Springs Reservoir, visible from Highway 280, is part of a complex system of dams, reservoirs, pipelines, and tunnels that funnel snowmelt collected in Hetch Hetchy Reservoir near Yosemite into San Francisco via a largely gravity-fed system. In the Bay region, the system's facilities and lands encompass 59,000 acres under the stewardship of the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission. Twenty watershed keepers patrol these landscapes to protect them from fire, trespassers, and other threats to the purity and safety of the water supply of 2.6 million customers around the Bay Area.