

Grant Report – Summer 2015 Conservation Crews in San Mateo County Parks



OVERVIEW

This summer, youth from San Mateo County were out in force addressing conservation needs in local parks and gaining valuable work experience, thanks to your support. The Conservation Crews in San Mateo County Parks is a comprehensive program for low-income youth that combines workforce readiness, community service, and environmental education with opportunities to experience local wildland parks. Through the program, crew members ages 15-18 receive valuable skills training, career counseling, adult mentorship and financial literacy support in addition to academic and experiential opportunities that together enhance job readiness post-high school. The 2015 summer season was our seventh for a partnership among the San Mateo County Department of Parks, Student Conservation Association (SCA), and San Mateo County Parks Foundation that serves youth and the parks. We are pleased to highlight successes that would not have been possible without your support.

POPULATION SERVED

We exceeded our goals by serving a total of 21 youth in San Mateo County Parks this summer. Youth were recruited from Daly City, Redwood City, East Palo Alto and Menlo Park, working with high schools with high populations of low-income students and workforce development agencies. Eighty-two percent of crew members indicated they came from low-income families. Demographics were 79% Latino, 12% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 3% Caucasian. All members were between 15-18 years of age.



PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN THE PARKS

One crew was the traditional model of a nine-member crew on a five-week-long assignment in San Mateo County Parks. This crew, focused on north county parks, worked on projects that had been long deferred by rangers waiting for more people power before tackling. For example, projects at the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve in Moss Beach helped improve water quality of the offshore Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary, including building a new staircase to access the beach to reduce erosion and a split-rail fence to protect restored habitat areas. Projects were also completed in Junipero Serra, San Pedro Valley, and Quarry parks.

Two crews of six worked on four-week assignments as part of a new initiative to engage youth to inventory the natural resources of the 20 San Mateo County Parks. These teams – one in north county, one in south county - learned to use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology using iPads and ARC GIS-Collector software. Team members hiked through five parks mapping trails, signs, tread and drainage conditions, culverts, points of interest, and illegal trails. The data gathered will become part of a new natural resources database and strategy to better plan park improvement projects and conservation needs for threatened



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and endangered species. The teams hiked a total of 55 miles, mapping 14 trailheads, 200 trail signs, 870 drainages, 71 trail intersections, 13 vegetation restoration sites, and 300 trail maintenance needs! After this summer's pilot, a year-round program will continue to help County Parks complete its inventory.

The magic of this program is the involvement of SCA which recruits, selects and orients motivated crew members; hires and trains youth-oriented crew leaders with experience in the conservation field; and provides a range of hands-on experience combined with outdoor and academic learning opportunities. Each crew is led by two SCA-trained adult crew leaders. The projects at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve help illustrate how this program supports the youth's skill development. To complete these multi-day projects, participants must learn how to safely use a variety of hand tools, they must understand the needs of the project and its physical lay out, they must learn to communicate effectively with their crew leader and with each other, and must be persistent to contribute their labor over several days to see the project through – all skills needed in our workforce today!



OUTCOMES

Outcome goals established by the program partners are that 90% of crew members would report feeling they were more “job ready” as a result of the program and 100% would report being more aware of San Mateo County's environmental issues. The program is carefully evaluated using member surveys, compilations of work outputs, and evaluations by program partners. Crew members fill out pre- and post-program evaluations, using a tool created by SCA in partnership with the Search Institute of Minneapolis — a leader in youth development — to measure the impact of the program on youth.

The evaluations for this season indicated the program continues to achieve these outcomes and that participants show the most positive growth in the areas of having a “conservation mindset” and “commitment, career development, and interpersonal skill development.” After the program, participants were more likely to say that:

- They think about how their actions affect nature
- They notice the natural environment around them
- They could name at least three different types of “green” or “conservation” jobs
- They better understood what it takes to be a successful employee
- They were interested in exploring conservation careers
- They would try new things, even if they were outside their comfort zone
- They enjoy hearing ideas different from their own
- When they make a decision, they think about the consequences it may have for their future

An important lesson learned this year was how to work with the workforce agencies to recruit and select participants. We learned that youth working with these agencies are not necessarily outdoor conservation work and SCA needs to be more involved in the in the selection process to ensure potential members understand the nature of the work, and to support a positive team dynamic. We were pleased a number of youth who joined through a workforce agency were happy to discover the outdoor conservation world and related green careers.

PROGRAM INCOME AND EXPENSES

Total program expenses were \$97,824. The San Mateo County Parks Foundation raised \$57,500 from community supporters towards this expense, and passed through 100% of funds raised to support the Conservation Crews program. Support was generously provided by these foundations and area businesses:

- Atkinson Foundation
- Bear Gulch Foundation
- Boston Private Bank and Trust
- Committee for Green Foothills
- Eucalyptus Foundation
- Palo Alto Medical Foundation
- SanDisk Community Sharing Program
- Wells Fargo Foundation
- Many individual donors to the Foundation

Additional support came from Measure A half-cent sales tax administered by San Mateo County for the GIS equipment and SCA's cost-share of crew members' salaries and program management expenses. San Mateo County Parks also provided in-kind contributions including park rangers' time plus project supplies and tools.

Thank you for your support of this win-win program that benefits youth and our local County Parks!