

## **FOLD's First Coastal Cleanup Day**

Sunshine, a beautiful view, and a chance to make a difference. On September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Friends of the LAX Dunes (FOLD) co-hosted with The Bay Foundation (TBF) our first Coastal Cleanup Day at the LAX Dunes. Coastal Cleanup Day is the State's largest volunteer event through which different organizations (such as FOLD), have the opportunity to lead volunteers in restoring the environment. Overlooking the Pacific Ocean, the LAX Dunes is a 300-acre site, located in Playa Del Rey, that is home to the beautiful and delicate federally endangered El Segundo Blue Butterfly, and other rare plant, animal, and insect species.

I was excited to see that we had an amazing turnout! It was clear from the start that all 60 of our volunteers were eager and determined to make as big of a difference as possible. Collectively, we filled a total of 128 bags of non-native plants weighing in at a grand total of 2,001 pounds; together, we literally pulled a ton of invasive plants. Despite this being our first year co-hosting a Coastal Cleanup Day at the LAX Dunes, local businesses, restaurants, and most importantly our FOLD volunteers successfully did their part in making our community a better place. Sponsorship from Starbucks and Chipotle dedicated to this annual event provided coffee and food for our hard-working volunteers, and we even got to raffle off some of Patagonia's latest fall gear (really generous!). Special thanks to Rod Abbott and Karina Johnston, FOLD co-directors and representatives of The Bay Foundation, as well as their staff, for all of their help in coordinating the event.



I created FOLD in November 2014 as part of my Girl Scout Gold Award project to restore the LAX Dunes. The Girl Scout Gold Award is the highest award that a Girl Scout can earn, and as part of the project I organized 3 volunteer days, got corporate sponsors and created social media accounts and flyers to make the community aware of the events. My vision for FOLD

was an organization that was dedicated to the ongoing restoration of the LAX Dunes and a part of the community. We host monthly volunteer days including large events, such as Big Sunday and the Coastal Cleanup Day, and have had more than 200 volunteers and almost

600 volunteers hours. Other groups have joined our efforts including Girl Scout and Boy Scout troops, the Playa Venice Sunrise Rotary Club, Verizon, Southern California Gas Company and DirecTV. I'm so proud to see what we've accomplished and how much we've grown as an organization. I certainly didn't picture this when I started FOLD last year.

Although this might have been our first time participating in Coastal Cleanup Day at the LAX Dunes, it is most definitely not our last. FOLD faces a daunting task of trying to remove as many non-native and invasive plant species as quickly and effectively as possible to make room for new plants to grow. With the LAX Dunes covering such a large area, we need as many hands as possible to help. We invite you to join us at the LAX Dunes every first Saturday of the month, excluding holiday weekends, to participate in one of our volunteer events. For more information, visit us at [www.FriendsOfTheLAXDunes.org](http://www.FriendsOfTheLAXDunes.org).

*- Ayanna Neal*