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THE LAX DUNES

Restoring Our Natural Environment

By Madeline Keider

Trash and pollution affect natural habitats from the mountains to the sea. Similarly, invasive vegetation deprives animals of their preferred habitats, limiting their health and growth. To help reverse this negative trend at the LAX Dunes, The Bay Foundation (TBF) along with Friends of the LAX Dunes (FOLD) and community volunteers are making valiant efforts to restore and protect the Dunes' valuable resources, including threatened species.

The groups' joint efforts are currently spent working on 48 of the Dunes' 300-plus acre expanse, the largest remaining representation of coastal dune community in Southern California. The LAX Dunes encompass the area between the western edge of the Los Angeles International Airport and the Pacific Ocean, and are home to over 900 species, some of which are incredibly rare, including the federally endangered El Segundo Blue Butterfly.

Founded by Ayanna Neal in 2014 as part of a Girl Scout service project, FOLD is a collaboration of community organizations, corporate sponsors, and passionate individuals who are working together to promote the LAX Adopt-a-Dune program. The program allows community members to adopt an area of the Dunes and care for their section by volunteering 3-4 times a year to remove invasive plants and trash that are harming the vulnerable resources in that area.

TBF, a local nonprofit working to protect and restore Santa Monica Bay, not only organizes and educates volunteers, but conducts studies as part of its efforts. Loyola Marymount University student and civil engineering major Valeria Ceja, interning for TBF this past summer, focused on mapping and vegetation classification of the Dunes. She writes that her

work "consisted of using surveying equipment to map the current physical state of the Dunes and analyze the percent cover of native and invasive plants species." She plans to use her experience to encourage youth in her home community to engage and participate in restoration events.

As part of the regular volunteer days led jointly by TBF and FOLD, local organizations regularly take the initiative to volunteer and make an impact, including Girl and Boy Scout troops, United Airlines, CA Native Plant Society, and various high school groups. Employees of the Santa Monica Patagonia store have volunteered hundreds of hours to help preserve the Dunes.

"We are excited to be doing field work because it is a huge job and without the help of volunteers the work cannot get done," says Kara McNally, Floor Lead at Patagonia Santa Monica, "We are so happy to get our hands dirty to help preserve land that is right in our backyard."

The efforts of extinguishing the invasive plants are making a noticeable difference. The invasive plants that terrorize the LAX Dunes are not just significant to this location but are threatening species throughout fragile California ecosystems. Every person and every action make a difference.

FOLD and TBF host a restoration event the first Saturday of every month from 9 am to 12 pm and the LAX Dunes has been the site for TBF's Coastal Cleanup Day activities for the last two years. With these events and programs in place, incredible progress is being made removing invasive plants that in turn allows native vegetation and animals to thrive.

To volunteer: www.santamonicabay.org



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