

Riparian Habitat Restoration Project Plants Trees and Builds Community

It's Saturday, an unseasonably warm 65 degrees in January, and not a cloud in the sky. So why are high school students from Fremont spending the day shoveling dirt and planting trees?

"Because I love gardening. And this is a really cool project," said Kennedy High School Senior Adnan.

Adnan joined about 20 other volunteers, mostly from Irvington High School, at the Sabercat Creek Riparian Habitat Restoration Project's first workday. The goal of the project is to plant native species in an area of Fremont known as Sabercat Creek near Becado Place, a tranquil, wooded area that is home to a creek, deer, trees and plants that have been significantly impacted by the fruition of non-native plants such as English ivy, Himalayan blackberry, and non-native elm trees. These non-native invasive plants do not provide significant habitat for wildlife and grow in an "out of control" manner, taking over space and crowding out the natural vegetation. Invasive vines, such as English ivy, can create dangerous situations, especially in urban natural areas, by climbing trees and adding weight to limbs and reducing air flow around the tree's trunk, which make the trees more susceptible to canopy failure, wind stress and disease. English ivy can also take over and then grow out of yards, damaging buildings and fences in the process.

The project is a partnership between BART, the Alameda County Resource Conservation District (ACRCD), and the City of Fremont and fulfills the Riparian Habitat Restoration requirements associated with the BART Warm Springs Extension Project. The project is administered by the ACRCD and funded by BART.

In all, the project will plant more than 400 plants at this location over four Saturday workdays. Project Coordinator Leslie Koenig said the group expects to plant a number of native species, including elderberry, native oaks, buckeyes, coffeeberries and toyon among others.

Another volunteer, Ananda, explained that this project is important because "People keep destroying stuff and this is my way of undoing some of that and restoring natural spaces." Other volunteers were busy fashioning wire fences around the new plants and trees to protect them from the deer that call this area home.

But for many of the students, the work being done on this project relates directly to coursework in progress. Many of the volunteers learned new terms and practices in environmental education, such as "DriWATER": a "goop-like" nutrient and water-packed substance that is placed next to the new plants. The DriWATER allows the plant to be hydrated and nurtured over a few months without the need for additional water.

Scott Lewis is the Service Coordinator for Irvington High School and helps students to complete service hours as part of their graduation requirements. He says that tying this new knowledge to classroom work and implementing it lead to greater meaning and understanding for the students. "This makes community service, service learning. So the kids can contribute to their community while reinforcing concepts being learned in their academic courses at school," Lewis said.

To find out more about the project or to volunteer for the next workday, contact Leslie Koenig at (925) 371-0154 ext. 115 or Leslie.Koenig@ca.nacdn.net.