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Fire Prevention Action: Santa Monica Mountains

TreePeople, along with partner Mountains Restoration Trust, leads a series of volunteer events to restore the ecosystem of the Santa Monica Mountains to proactively prevent the likelihood of devastating wildfires

Why This Is Needed: Ecological restoration work is one of the most effective methods for preventing intense wildfires and protecting neighborhoods in the wildland-urban interface of Southern California, a region afflicted by some of the most catastrophic wildfires in U.S. history. With fires breaking out throughout the West this summer, the ecosystem restoration work being led by TreePeople helps reduce the frequency and severity of wildfires in our local Santa Monica Mountains.



How Restoration Helps: “To protect the Santa Monica Mountains against devastating wildfires, we have to keep our native plants healthy and thriving and remove invasive non-native species such as annual grasses,” says TreePeople Wildland Restoration Manager Cody Chappel. “The spread of highly flammable non-native species increases the frequency and severity of wildfire that in turn diminishes the native ecosystem further. Even though we think of the chaparral and coastal sage as being a “fire ecology,” without human impacts these ecosystems can go a hundred years or more without burning. The frequent fires we have now feed more fires, and the way to turn it around is to restore the native ecosystem.”

Restoring the ecosystem by planting and caring for native trees and plants in the Santa Monica Mountains helps to slow water evaporation and retain soil moisture. In addition, as trees and plants transpire, they increase atmospheric moisture. These are essential ecological services during the dry fire season that protect everyone who lives in the area.

Native plants and trees neither burn as quickly nor as severely as invasive nonnative species, and native plant communities such as chaparral and perennial grasslands regenerate quickly after a fire thanks to their deep roots systems. These deep root systems keep soil from eroding after a fire, and hence the chance of a landslide or water pollution from sediment is much lower when an ecosystem has a healthy, diverse community of native species.

Who Benefits: Within the areas surrounding the Santa Monica Mountains—from the Hollywood Hills in Los Angeles to Point Mugu in Ventura County—over half a million people reside and are directly impacted by fire danger in the Santa Monica Mountains. In addition, over 1,000 plant and 5,500 animal species inhabit the area. Since the Santa Monica Mountains

provide vital air and water quality to Los Angeles, improving the ecosystem through restoration benefits everyone's health.

Plan of Action: Throughout the dry summer fire season, TreePeople hosts volunteer ecological restoration events most weekends in Calabasas, Topanga, and Agoura Hills led by TreePeople's Brian Rekart and Cody Chappel. TreePeople has been leading these events with Mountains Restoration Trust, a partnership that began in 2008. In 2011, TreePeople and Mountains Restoration Trust planted 331 trees and 3001 plants and cared for 2230 trees and 4932 plants. On most projects our teams have anywhere from 15-150 volunteers that range from preschool age children to seniors, and come from corporations, university organizations, religious groups, etc. At these events, the teams remove invasive plants to increase the diversity of the native plants in the area, plant native vegetation, and care for native plants. All of these efforts will increase the native plant population and hence lower the frequency and intensity of wildfire. Persons interested in registering for one of the events online should go to: <https://www.treepeople.org/user/register/new?destination=node%2F945840&collapse=1>

About TreePeople

TreePeople is an environmental nonprofit that unites the power of trees, people and technology to grow a sustainable future for Los Angeles. Simply put, our work is about helping nature heal our cities. We have been inspiring, engaging and supporting people to take personal responsibility for the urban environment since the 1970s.

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