

San Fernando High Students Help Take Care of the Forest

Thursday, 24 January 2013 06:56 - Last Updated Thursday, 24 January 2013 07:02



PHOTO COURTESY

Nearly 60 San Fernando High School (SFHS) students bundled up in sweaters and jackets to protect against the incessant wind and cold, and burning with desire to help the environment, recently spent a day learning about the outdoors and giving a hand to the forest.

Two buses packed with students from an environmental science class, as well as members of SFHS science club, headed up to the Angeles National Forest near Canyon Country on Jan. 17 where, under the direction of the school's Green Cities lead teacher Jenny Bower and U.S. Forest Service Botanist Katie Vinzant, removed an invasive plant that infringes on California's natural flora.

"It's pretty simple but hard work because you have to dig down to get to the root," said 15-year-old Enrique Molina, president of the SFHS Science Club, in describing the removal of Spanish Broom – a type of brush native to the Mediterranean whose stems and fibers are used to make baskets, mats and paper, but wreaks havoc on California's plants.



PHOTO COURTESY

"It takes away water from native plants, which can hurt them and some of the animals that live out here," said Molina, amidst strong winds that often made it hard to do the work.

The trip was sponsored by San Gabriel Mountain Forever (SGMF), a partnership of local business owners, residents, faith and community leaders, recreation and conservation groups that have united to protect wilderness and wild and scenic rivers in the San Gabriel Mountains.

The San Gabriel Mountains are the iconic landmark of the Angeles National Forest. It is Southern California's most accessible and popular "backyard" for millions who visit its clear and cold rivers, and its tranquil and panoramic vistas. The Angeles National Forest is also an irreplaceable natural resource that gives Los Angeles County more than 70 percent of its open space, and provides the region with drinking water and clean air.

The idea for the project came from fellow San Fernando High student Lisa Garcia, a 17-year-old senior who recently graduated from the SGMF Leadership Academy, a six-month volunteer training program that focuses on civic engagement, community organizing, and project management.

Each graduate works on a project to support the San Gabriel Mountains at the end of the course, according to SGMF spokeswoman Annette Kondo. "Some do hikes, clean ups along the rivers, everybody does something different," Kondo said. "Lisa's project is wonderful because we're doing something to improve the forest."

Garcia, who is also part of Pacoima Beautiful, a community agency that works on environmental and beautification projects in the Pacoima area, felt the same way.

"It's really good. We got a lot of people out here and the National Forest provided the tools," she said.

For Garcia, who wants to work on environmental causes, this was also a chance to show fellow students the beauty of the outdoors. "A lot of youth in the San Fernando Valley have never been to the mountains because they don't have transportation or some other things and it's a good idea for them to get to know what they have (close to their homes)," she said.

"I really like the outdoors, nature, exploring new things and that's good for everybody." The project was also good exercise for those involved.

"You have to take out the roots (of Spanish Broom) from the ground. They're really thick and long. We're just digging out as many as we can," Garcia said. Molina enjoyed the chance to get out and do some work for the environment.

"We're happy to learn about the different species and help protect the forest," he said.