

Record Turnout for the Friends of Ballona Wetlands Coastal Cleanup Day Event

The Friends of Ballona Wetlands hosted one of their most heavily attended volunteer events on Saturday, September 25th, as part of California's Coastal Cleanup Day.

Volunteers, including groups from over fifteen local organizations, spread out into multiple teams to pick up solid trash along the Ballona Creek, parallel to the Ballona Wetlands, and along the berm and in the saltwater marsh. The Friends had work parties continue a year-long effort to remove the highly invasive acacia bushes in the north dunes area, as well as weeds and clover from a section of the east dunes.

Along Ballona Creek, volunteers collected the usual piles of solid trash that is not biodegradable, like styrofoam, plastic bottles and wrappers, and – most unfortunately – dog poo. Dog owners love the privilege of walking their dog along the south berm adjacent to the Ballona Wetlands, and some of them leave their dog's droppings behind. All fecal matter – no matter what their source – means more bacteria in the creek, and the increased likelihood of causing harm to plant, animal, and human life.

Friends actually had so many volunteers that for the first time they sent a cleanup party over Pacific Avenue Bridge onto the north berm side of the Creek to pick up solid trash. Meanwhile, those who wanted to get into the dirt were pulling up non-native weeds in the Wetlands, and using hand tools to remove the acacia bushes.

Volunteers as part of the “weed brigade” in the south dunes area were busy pulling sweet smelling clover, planted from bygone years when cattle and horses grazed the upland areas. In areas nearby, where weeds and non-native grasses were pulled in recent years by Friends docents and volunteers, the native heliotrope was coming back, as well as buckwheat and lupine.

The weather for Coastal Cleanup Day is usually bright and sunny, so Friends made sure there were shaded areas for volunteers to sit and rest and have a snack and a drink before resuming activity in the hot sun. The local restaurant Café Milan and Starbucks offered coffee, Yum Yum donuts in Playa del Rey and Randy's Donuts in Inglewood donated scrumptious donuts to carbo-load on, the local Whole Foods gave healthy snack bars, Chloe Lahner donated coffee creamer, soy milk and tangerines – and the Friends provided water to keep everyone hydrated.

Marina Deb Ris, artist extraordinaire, dazzled everyone with new trash works of art, and brought back last year's favorites – the Cheetos/Fritos bag tablecloth and the hypodermic needle adorned mannequin complete with face mask and stuffed headdress doggy toy. The new mannequin sported a flashy row of colorful lighters and white plastic silverware. Jack in the Box was advertising on a pedestal, but not how the founder would have probably intended. The Styrofoam ball heads of Jack

don't biodegrade, and unfortunately, are often times mistaken by wildlife as something edible.

It would be funny if it wasn't so sad, so much of our discarded trash ends up along our beaches and wetlands. One volunteer commented out at the Creek that at first glance it didn't look so bad, until he got down in the rocks and found a surprisingly large number of trash items.

Local Representative Maxine Waters was not able to stop by to wish the Friends well, due to delays in her busy schedule on the way to the airport, however, her District Director, Blanca Jimenez, not only came to see the work being done but also pitched in to help.

With a little help from a ladder one crew climb over the chain link fence and got into an area that hasn't been cleaned up in years. Volunteers from SONY Pictures Entertainment LINKS program had a swell time removing non-native plants. For those who were tired from weeding or collecting solid trash, members from a local girl scout troop taught others how to make a granary basket out of willow branches in the Tongva village.

This year the non-profit group added a free raffle at the end of the event giving multiple recipients the opportunity to select a small token of the Friends' appreciation for all their hard work.

Friends of Ballona Wetlands, which has participated in most of the Coastal Cleanup Days started by Heal the Bay back in 1989, had a record turnout this year – topping over 325 volunteers in the Wetlands – with crew. Docents with the Friends, some of them with the organization for over fifteen years, assisted well-trained team leaders and carefully guiding volunteers to their workstations, making sure their footprint was light. The results very rewarding. A huge dumpster was filled with over 100 bags of solid man-made trash and a ton of non-native plants. Some volunteer leaders were so inspired they vowed to come back with friends and students and family to continue the work on future scheduled habitat restoration days with the Friends.

Volunteers from the following organizations participated, their teamwork and friendly spirit made the Friends Coastal Cleanup Day event a huge success!

BDO, Boeing, Boy Scouts, Buckley High School, Friends of Ballona Wetlands Docents, Gay for Good, Girl Scouts, The Inn at Playa Del Rey, LMU Ignatians Service Organization, LMU Mesa, Los Angeles Audubon Society, Otis College of Art and Design: Rise Above Plastics Class, Santa Clarita High School, SCVI Charter School for International Learning, Santa Monica College Sustainable Works, SONY Pictures Entertainment, Southern California Edison, St. Bernard's High School.

Every time trash and non-native plants are cleared out of our wetlands there are opportunities for native plants and animals to thrive. The Friends of Ballona

Wetlands mission is to champion the restoration and protection of the Ballona Wetlands, involving and educating the public as advocates and stewards.

www.ballonafriends.org

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