

Sonoma County Youth Ecology Program Begins Today

Two hundred local youth begin summer jobs clearing invasive plants and cleaning trails at Spring Lake Regional Park.

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More than 200 young people ages 14 through 24 are beginning summer jobs today by removing invasive plants and clearing trails at a Santa Rosa park.

They are employed through the Sonoma County Youth Ecology Corps, which tackles ecosystem restoration projects including restoring wetlands and open spaces, planting native shrubs and trees, and building trails.

"This program gets young people off the streets and provides employment to a population that has been hit hard by the current economic downturn," said Fourth District Sonoma County Supervisor Mike McGuire.

"Not only that, but they are becoming stewards of their community," McGuire continued.

The Sonoma County Youth Ecology Corps was created in 2009 with funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. It is a partnership that includes the county's Workforce Investment Board, Human Services Department, Water Agency, Office of Education and the nonprofit New Ways to Work, Sonoma County Water Agency spokeswoman Ann DuBay said.

This year's \$1.9 million in funding is derived from funds from the Workforce Investment Act, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, the Sonoma County Water Agency, the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District and Kaiser Permanente.

Entry-level workers will earn \$8 an hour, while older workers will earn \$10 an hour and will be able to use power tools, DuBay said.

"These young people do work that wouldn't otherwise be done," Sonoma County Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Shirlee Zane said in a statement.

McGuire and Zane attended the noontime event that was part of today's kick-off program at the Oak Knolls picnic grounds, at Spring Lake Regional Park in Santa Rosa.

Training and orientation for the eight-week summer jobs program began Monday.

Six nonprofit agencies hire and train the youth and distribute paychecks. The summer job program ends July 26 with a Youth Opportunities Fair at the Finley Center in Santa Rosa.

By Bay City News Service