

Community, Politicians, Media Invited to Meet Youth in Summer Jobs Program

About 18 people, ages 14-21, many of whom are considered at-risk, are working their first jobs this summer, restoring Rohnert Park's network of creek trails. Similar programs are going on throughout Sonoma County.

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By Angela Hart

The public and members of the media are invited to meet community leaders and work crews from the Youth Ecology Corps, a summer jobs program and partnership between local nonprofits and the Sonoma County Water Agency.

The event is this upcoming Monday, July 25, 10 a.m. at Five Creek, just off of Elaine Court.

The program, aimed at giving young people and at-risk youth paid summer jobs, and teaching them about the environment, this year received a record number of applicants — 90 people applied for 25 jobs in Rohnert Park. That's a story that was played out in six other cities countywide.

"We weren't expecting this many people to apply; it was an incredibly competitive process," said Jim Gattis, the executive director of Sonoma County Youth and Adult Development, the Rohnert Park nonprofit working with the water agency. "This really gives kids an opportunity to earn money during off-school months, and it helps them stay out of trouble."

Project organizers, including SCAYD and the Sonoma County Water Agency, said so far, six weeks into the eight-week program, crews working throughout the county have removed thousands of invasive plants and trash from creeks in Santa Rosa, Rohnert Park and Petaluma, reducing flood risks and enhancing visibility for creek trail users.

"Crews have enhanced the new River Keeper Park in Guerneville, built garden boxes at the Windsor Community Garden and have trimmed overgrown foliage and cleaned trails at Maxwell Regional Park in Sonoma, along with many other projects throughout the county," organizers said in a news release.

"Most of these young people will receive their first paycheck through this program," said Supervisor Efrén Carrillo. "This is their initial taste of the work world, and our goal is to provide them with skills that they can use in future jobs."

The community is encouraged to come out Monday to check out what work crews have accomplished so far.

"There will be an opportunity to talk with the crew members and to view improvements to creeks, parks and gardens," organizers said.

For more information contact Jim Gattis at 707-793-9030.