

Youth programs to green up urban spaces



Students with the San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy's Explorers Program which receives funding from the The San Diego Foundation. — *San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy*

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More than two dozen organizations around the county will jointly receive about \$400,300 to expand open space and environmental education in low-income neighborhoods, The San Diego Foundation announced on Monday.

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The projects are expected to impact more than 5,000 youth in communities that lack access to natural outdoor settings. Initiatives include educational programs, park improvements and habitat restoration campaigns.

The Opening the Outdoors program was launched in 2012 after a report commissioned by the foundation found that while 45 percent of the county is green space, many neighborhoods suffered from limited access to those resources.

“The real focus of this effort has been to see what we can do as the region’s community foundation to increase access to green space across the county, with a particular eye toward underserved communities,” said Nicole Hedge, Director of Environment Initiatives at The San Diego Foundation.

“There’s a strong correlation with communities that don’t have access to green space with communities that are low incomes and ethnically diverse,” she added. “We really felt that it’s our role as a community foundation we could help better protect, connect and make the outdoors accessible to all communities in San Diego County.”

The foundation will provide funding to 27 nonprofits and organizations this year, including the Environmental Health Coalition, San Diego Zoo, Outdoor Outreach and San Diego Canyonlands.

The Environmental Health Coalition will receive \$54,000 to expand town National City parks and create a new park in Barrio Logan.

Bringing in \$58,757, Outdoor Outreach, coordinating with the Center on Policy Initiatives, plans to host after-school and weekend programs aimed at preparing youth to become outdoor instructors and advocates for the environment.

The San Diego Zoo will get \$35,577 to work with the Escondido Creek Conservancy and the Escondido Union School District to roll out a program for roughly 800 students that includes a field trip to the Elfin Forest Reserve and an environment education class.

Since 2010, the foundation has helped facilitate the preservation of about 40,000 acres of natural habitat and green space throughout the county.

