

Partnership aimed at healing scorched SB County parks

Neil Nisperos, Staff Writer

Created: 04/25/2009 06:23:51 PM PDT

CHINO HILLS - A few hundred volunteers decided to help out Mother Earth on Saturday by revegetating a small portion of the Chino Hills State Park, which was nearly entirely ravaged by the Freeway complex fire in November.

Volunteers came to the historic Rolling M Ranch inside the park where they gathered picks, shovels, gloves, planters, wooden beams, and, of course, native plant species, for three hours of helping heal the recovering park by planting 150 native plants and rebuilding burn-damaged wooden fences around the area.

The park is green again, though officials say the yellow mustard flowers and thistle that carpet the hillsides of the park after the fire are not the kind of foliage that needs to return to the nature preserve.

Alissa Ing, an environmental scientist with the California State Parks, said wildfires at the park have been more frequent than normal because of human causes. Officials say the more frequent fires have converted most of the native grassland and species into the invasive plants, replacing valuable animal habitat.

“What we’re trying to do logistically is we have to plant and revegetate around the ranch complex all native representatives of what are supposed to grow in the park,” she said.

The event was part of “Reforest California,” a public and private partnership and campaign involving the California State Parks, Stater Bros. Supermarkets, and Coca-Cola, in order to raise funds for reforestation and fire prevent in parks hit hard by wildfires over the past several years. Cuyamaca Rancho State Park near San Diego and Chino Hills State park will be the primary recipients of the campaign’s goal to add one million native trees.

The campaign encourages consumers and private businesses to participate and raise money toward the goal of creating 1,800 acres of newly planted trees. Officials estimate the program could result in seven million dollars in environmental savings each year due to energy conservation and reduced pollution. In addition to reforestation efforts, a fire prevention education program will be implemented in five state parks: Cuyamaca Rancho, Chino Hills, Silverwood Lake, Mount San Jacinto and Palomar Mountain State Parks.

To support their local communities, shoppers at Stater Bros. Supermarkets will have the opportunity to make a \$1 dollar tax-deductible donation to reforestation efforts at checkout or online at www.reforestcalifornia.com. Also, for every \$10 purchase of Coca-Cola products, the company will donate \$1 toward the project.

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The 'Reforest California' campaign in Stater Bros. Supermarkets will run through May 19. "In light of the devastating losses California's state parks have suffered in recent years from forest fires, this program is most welcome," said Ruth Coleman, director of California State Parks. "Coca-Cola and Stater Bros. are handing us a crucial life-line at just the right time, and on behalf of the millions of visitors who love our parklands, we applaud this effort."

Reforest California spokeswoman Meg Aldrich said the goal for the project is to raise more than \$500,000. To date, more than \$350,000 has been collected.