



September 2015

Open Space, Urban Trees and Smokey Bear!

Temperatures sizzled but hundreds turned out to celebrate trees and urban open space at a free family event on Saturday in downtown Los Angeles.

The event at El Pueblo de Los Angeles near Olvera Street was one of 2,200 across the United States to mark the U.S. Forest Service's annual National Public Lands Day on September 26th, the largest single-day effort in the United States on behalf of public lands.

Smokey Bear, the original environmental defender, strolled the plaza surrounded by selfie-seekers who of course wanted a photo with the eco-icon.

The Los Angeles event was organized by the San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority and the U.S. Forest Service along with an alliance of community environmental groups committed to awareness of the outdoors and Southern California's environmental riches.

One of the many event highlights: the Discovery Center's EcoVoices Mime Troupe—a mix of eco-minded mimes, actors, and wandering scholars who create EcoVoices expedition events throughout Los Angeles County-- performed scenes from "A Question of Trees." The piece uses humor, rhyme and imaginative costumes and props to break down the science of trees—leaf structure, photosynthesis and watershed geology-- and illustrate just how essential trees are to our urban ecosystems.

Tree canopies shade 23% of Los Angeles and release oxygen, filter air pollution and reduce air temperature. (Sun-baked concrete and asphalt radiate heat long after the sun sets.)

In the areas most economically stressed and environmentally vulnerable—East Los Angeles, South Los Angeles and the eastern San Fernando Valley the percentage of areas protected by tree canopies drops to only 7%.

Trees are vital to a sustainable urban community. They provide a respite from high-pressured city life--a quiet place to focus, rest our eyes and relax. Trees breathe, we breathe.

EcoVoices has just completed its summer tour of 32 Los Angeles parks, engaging 3,500 young people (and their folks) with environmental education and STEM (science, technology engineering and math) exhibits.

The San Gabriel River Discovery Center is supported by a diverse community alliance committed to the care of the San Gabriel River Watershed and the creation of an accessible gateway to the largest urban forest in the nation--one that makes up 78% of L.A. County's open space, the San Gabriel Mountains.

The Discovery Center Authority is a partnership that includes the Central Basin Municipal Water, the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, the Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District and enjoys support from educators, environmentalists and other community leaders.

Happy Autumn!