

# *EcoHelpers*

An education and restoration program  
of Santa Monica Mountains  
National Recreation Area

Christy Brigham PhD, Restoration Ecologist  
Jack Gillooly, Interpretive Park Ranger



# EcoHelpers

- Background
- Program Mission
- Program Audience
- Program Staff
- Tour
- Accomplishments
- Key Elements
- Challenges
- Vision for the Future



# Background

- Goals of NPS
  - Protect and preserve resources
  - Provide for public enjoyment and education
- Specifically within SMMNRA
  - Many sites with natural resource damage
  - Importance of restoration
  - 35 million people within 1 hour of park
  - Few opportunities for youth to visit park

# EcoHelpers Mission:

*Educate youth in watershed ecology and the impacts of invasive species, while restoring park ecosystems.*

# Program Audience

- High school science students from Los Angeles area
- Diverse participants from wide range of schools including:
  - Magnet
  - Parochial
  - Special Education
- First year: 1500 students
- Second year: 1600 students

# Project Staff



# Quick Program Tour



Before students arrive...



## Field Trip: Learning about ecosystems, watersheds, and steelhead trout.





# Accomplishments

- Restored 5 acres over 2 years
- Planted over 5000 plants
- Reached over 3000 students
- EcoHelpers becoming part of school curriculum - with service learning credit

# Weed Removal



**BEFORE**

**AFTER**

# Progress at Solstice

Before

After



# Before and After



Newly-planted natives are quickly hidden by weeds after a winter rain.



The same area in spring, after a second weeding and new growth.

# The Plot Thickens...



Primary plot, more rain.



***EcoHelpers*** to the rescue.

# A Growing Community...



Looks sparse after a second weeding, but **one year later...**

# Native Greens



# Key Elements for Success

- Engagement and investment of school teachers
- Appropriate sites and facilities
  - Bathrooms
  - Accessibility
  - Work that can be done by students
- Funding
  - Whale Tail grant, Cooperative Conservation Initiative, Challenge Cost Share
- Partners, volunteers, interns
- Starting a similar program

# Future Challenges

- Steady funding
- Site facilities



# A Mountainous Recovery



- Continue program
- Expand to other park sites
- Adapt lessons for new locations
- Engage additional partners

Questions???

