

EDUCATION & INTERPRETATION AND OUTREACH PROGRAMS

The MRCA offers comprehensive educational and interpretive programs throughout the Los Angeles region utilizing Conservancy and MRCA parks as outdoor laboratories and classrooms. Programs include environmental education programs for schools that meet state content standards, and after-school programs for at-risk youth focusing on outdoor leadership and awareness skills. Public programs for seniors, families and small children range from full-moon hikes, to photography classes, to edible plant walks. Youth leadership programs include Junior Rangers for middle school participants, and Ranger Explorers for teens and young adults. MRCA also offers transportation programs that provide the opportunity to visit parks, and training programs for individuals and other park professionals.



Programs are offered at a variety of park sites as well as at local schools. MRCA's educational programming is centered at the Evan Frankel Discovery Center at the Augustus F. Hawkins Natural Park, the William O. Douglas Outdoor Classroom in Franklin Canyon, Temescal Gateway Park, the Los Angeles River Center and Gardens, and the Sonia Thompson Nature Center in Towsley Canyon. Some of the specific programs are:

Recreational Transit Program (RTP)

RTP provides free or low-cost bus transportation to mountain parks and beaches. RTP provides a critical link to Conservancy and MRCA parks, open space and natural areas for thousands of people every year, many of whom have no other way to get there. In 2002-2003, over 40,000 people used the RTP.



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Lotte Melhorn Nature Wagon

The Lotte Melhorn Nature Wagon is a “nature center on wheels” that travels to parks and special events and functions as an outdoor classroom.

Junior Ranger Programs

The Junior Ranger Programs give participating youth the opportunity to learn outdoor skills, and to work closely with park rangers and naturalists who serve as mentors and educators. The Ranger Explorer program is a weekly career and service based program for teens and young adults that offers leadership training. As part of the curriculum, Explorers help administer large group events and emergencies.

After-School Programs

These programs respond to the challenges facing families in urban areas. These programs provide a safe environment and adult supervision, bolster academic achievement, deliver knowledge to prevent risky behavior, and support overall youth development. Horticulture, environmental science classes, and leadership training are only some of the programs offered.

Share and Care School Programs are environmental education programs for school groups. Lessons about natural history, cultural history, and science are tied to state content standards. Programs are held at park sites and can be tailored to meet the needs of each school.



Looking to the Future – Heart-of-the-Park Shuttle Demonstration Project

The Conservancy granted funds to the MRCA for a cooperative agreement with the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA) to develop and implement the National Park Service Heart-of-the-Park Shuttle Demonstration Project. Funding is for the first year of the demonstration project and the subsequent two years depending on available funding resources. The National Park Service is financing the capital improvement needed for 13 shuttle stops and the purchase of five mini buses. August 2004 is the anticipated start date for the program.

The Heart-of-the-Park Shuttle will provide a weekend service traveling in a bi-directional loop around the central part of the SMMNRA. It is the goal of the shuttle project to connect the diverse urban communities in the greater Los Angeles area with popular recreation sites by interfacing with regional transit systems operated by the Metropolitan Transit Authority.

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PARK PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Augustus F. Hawkins Natural Park

Active programming at Augustus F. Hawkins Natural Park is one of the most important reasons for the park's unqualified success. All programs are free. The wide variety of programs provides something for all. Programs include trips to other parks, after-school programs, and special events. The park's community room is both a classroom space and a meeting place for community-based organizations.

Saturday Bus Program

Every Saturday morning a bus takes families from the communities surrounding the park to explore a mountain, canyon, stream, or meadow. Accompanied by a staff naturalist, groups journey to parks in the Santa Monica Mountains to hike, picnic, learn, and have fun.



After-School Classes

After-school classes focus on art, science, gardening, music and other aspects of the natural world. Share and Care School Programs are curriculum-based environmental education programs that include thematic lessons about natural history and science, cultural history, botany, zoology and ecology.

Camping Programs

After learning basic camping skills, local youth travel to the mountains for three-day camping trips. This year's program culminated with a trip to Yosemite National Park. A monthly campfire features storytelling, sing-alongs, and programs led by Junior Rangers.



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Los Angeles River Center and Gardens

The Los Angeles River Center and Gardens (River Center) is the focal point for the greening of the Los Angeles River, and revitalization of local neighborhoods. Several agencies and nonprofit organizations, as well as the MRCA Education and Interpretation Division are based at the River Center, which is located in the Cypress Park neighborhood near Downtown Los Angeles. The River Center's community room provides a popular meeting place for community organizations.

The River Center serves as center for educational activity. The Los Angeles River Visitor Center, located at the River Center, provides self-guided tours about the history and wildlife of the river. The River Garden Park, also located at the River Center, features an artistic interpretation of the Los Angeles River and is the site of many interpretation programs. The River Center has its own Junior Ranger Program, Saturday Bus Program and interpretive programs, as well as a camping program for local youth. Share and Care School Programs offer curriculum-based environmental education that include thematic lessons about natural history and science, cultural history, botany, zoology and ecology.



Temescal Gateway Park

One of the most frequently visited sites in the Santa Monica Mountains is the 141-acre Temescal Gateway Park in Pacific Palisades. Temescal Canyon contains a year-round stream and hosts over 10,000 visitors each year. The park contains the Temescal Canyon Conference and Retreat Center with cabins, dining hall, classrooms, an amphitheater and auditorium as well as trails leading to Topanga State Park.

Earth Adventure Camp

Earth Adventure Camp provides youth the chance to participate in a traditional overnight camp. The camp curriculum is specifically designed for youth who have little experience with the natural world, and offers environmental science and leadership activities. Earth Adventure Day Camp is fee-based and provides a unique educational experience for children at Temescal Gateway Park.

Temescal Canyon Field Science Program

This program is a three-day, two-night environmental education program funded by the Los Angeles Unified

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School District. Traditional outdoor education is combined with the California State Science Framework and immerses students in the natural world.



Franklin Canyon Park

Facilities at Franklin Canyon Park and the William O. Douglas Outdoor Classroom (WODOC) include the Sooky Goldman Nature Center, the Sam Goldman Amphitheater, the Michael and Eugene Rosenfeld Auditorium and the Ranch Area Amphitheater. WODOC was founded in 1980 with the purpose of connecting inner city youth with natural resources. WODOC's Volunteer Naturalist Program allows the public to learn the art of interpretation, lead hikes for school children, and host an array of thematic hikes for the general public. WODOC provides interpretive hikes for all ages and fitness levels throughout the year. Topics range from plants and animals to nearby filming sites. In over twenty years of operation, WODOC has served over 1.8 million people from the greater Los Angeles area and has provided tours of Franklin Canyon Park to school groups (K-12) from Los Angeles.

Sooky Goldman Nature Center

The Sooky Goldman Nature Center contains exhibits about wildlife, geology and history, an interactive water conservation display, and a gallery for local nature artwork.



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Santa Clarita Woodlands Park

The many beautiful canyons and trails of the Santa Clarita Woodlands Park offer wilderness recreational opportunities within a ten-minute drive from the San Fernando Valley. Santa Clarita Woodlands Park encompasses East Canyon, Rice Canyon, Towsley Canyon, and Pico Canyon.

Ed Davis Park in Towsley Canyon includes a ranger station, shady picnic areas, restroom facilities, trails, the Sonia Thompson Nature Center, and a lodge. Campfire programs, docent-led hikes and school programs are provided. In the historic oil town of Mentryville, located in Pico Canyon, docent-led walks lead visitors to the historic one-room schoolhouse, barn, and Superintendent's house.



Ramirez Canyon Park Public Outreach Programs

Two programs at Ramirez Canyon Park, the Senior and Public Outreach Program and the Children's Educational Program, reinforce the Conservancy's mission to provide all residents of Southern California with the chance to experience the wonders of nature. Ramirez Canyon Park is a wonderful retreat with accessible garden paths, picnic areas, a streamside trail and overlook. All of these features can be readily enjoyed by individuals with physical limitations. Both programs at Ramirez Canyon Park bring tremendous joy to their participants. Each program continues to evolve and grow, and is staffed by enthusiastic and committed employees and volunteers.

Visitors that have enjoyed an afternoon of peace in Ramirez Canyon Park include residents of numerous senior homes, the ministers from the Los Angeles Mission on Skid Row, veterans from the V.A. hospital in Westwood, at-risk youths from Compton, residents of various battered women's shelters, and young women from the Esperanza Housing Project. This year, the Senior Program began hosting groups of Alzheimer patients and their families. It is a rare treat for these families to be able to spend time with each other in the safe and serene environment found in Ramirez Canyon Park. With the help of eight volunteers, the Senior Program hosted over 200 visitors.

The primary goal of the Children's Educational Program is to give children and young adults with disabilities a high-quality, interactive educational experience in a fun and safe setting. The program's activities center on

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interactions with various animals. Program goals are to contribute toward positive self-esteem and improved communication and cooperation skills. The Children's Educational Program also provides instruction about the ecology of Ramirez Canyon Park and the Santa Monica Mountains.

