

Rooted For Good

By Chase Stafford

Trees. Whistling with the wind, trees sing a rhythmic melody in the natural world. They provide a rooting foundation for a waterway. Stabilizing the banks, cooling the temperature, and protecting the occupants, without the presence of trees, a river, creek, or stream would not be as strong and resilient.

Not only are trees important to a functioning environment, they also have an undeniable connection with people. Whether it is taking a nap, reading a book, enjoying a nice picnic, or planting a sapling, trees are connected to some of our favorite activities. In addition, trees carry a symbolic meaning in cultures across the globe. Looked upon as the “Tree of Life” in Mediterranean religions or “Standing People” from indigenous cultures, trees are seen for more than just their physical beauty, but for their link to the spiritual connection we have with nature.

For The San Diego River Park Foundation, trees have a special place in our organization. On many of our preserves, oak woodlands are one of the dominant vegetation types. Coast live oaks, black oaks and Englemann oaks are amongst the many who find refuge in the woodlands. Unfortunately, these beautiful oak habitats are under threat. In the mid 2000’s, an invasive beetle called the gold spotted oak borer (GSOB), was introduced in San Diego County and since then has decimated oak tree populations. The larvae of these beetles feed beneath the bark of the oak and damage the growth of the tree by restricting the amount of water and nutrients it receives. Within one to two years of becoming infested, the beetle will completely kill the oak. As this is still an emerging conservation issue countywide and statewide, there is no definite solution yet for the oak destroying beetles. On our Eagle Peak Ranch preserve, the coast live oaks in particular are under threat from GSOB.

This is one reason why SDRPF is planting new generations of trees. It not only addresses the die-off of infested oaks and regenerate the oak woodlands, it also helps to educate kids to the about the importance of trees to our river system and inspire a connection to nature early in their lives. Our December 14 tree planting event at our Boulder Creek Preserve will provide kids and their parents with the opportunity to plant native oaks and learn more about restoration occurring on the preserve. Each of the 200 oak saplings will find a new home at the preserve and help regenerate a woebegone oak woodland. Children of all ages are encouraged to join us on the preserve to participate in a variety of activities. In addition to the tree planting, kids will learn about amphibians and a look at our wildlife camera!



Jenn (SDRPF) assisting a young volunteer with planting a sapling



Nate holding saplings at Eagle Peak Ranch

Nate La Breche, one of our volunteers, has shared with us how early exposure to nature has inspired his volunteerism as an adult. An environmental engineer by trade, Nate has been heavily involved with work in the San Diego River's headwaters and has spent countless hours on our preserves. Finding enjoyment in nature, Nate explains his connection with our preserves, "When I was a kid, my family owned a 17-acre ranch near Columbus, Texas. There was a lot of wildlife and oak trees. The SDRPF's preserves remind me of that ranch." During the oak acorn harvesting period, Nate collected acorns from Eagle Peak Ranch, propagated the acorns into seedlings, and then replanted them on the preserve. This is not something new to Nate. He explains, "I actually did this a few times as a kid. I would collect the acorns of a variety of trees and plant them in pots. Once they germinated, I would plant them in the ground at my family's ranch with the help of my parents. Now that I've graduated and have more free time on the weekends, I decided to do it again. I find it rewarding." Nate plans to continue to planting seedlings and tracking their growth over time. Genuine stewardship!

Adapting to the change is important in any situation, and our education program is doing exactly that. Weaving together education and restoration, our team has joined with students from Montgomery Middle School to grow and cultivate around 200 oaks from acorns to saplings. As we have seen from Nate's story, the moments young children spend with trees can leave an everlasting impact on their lives! As an organization, we are set to provide the same impactful opportunities for the community and future generations to come.

We continually are fundraising to support tree-planting events on our preserves. Not only will these programs help reforest our vulnerable oak woodlands, but it builds meaningful moments in young children's lives! If you are interested in fundraising/donation information, you can find it [here](#).



As for the gold spotted oak borer infestation, The San Diego River Park Foundation is proactively monitoring and managing the oak woodlands on our properties. The more information we gather, the better we can understand its behavior and identify solutions. Anyone who is passionate about mitigating this threat and/or in wants to come out with us to our preserves and get involved with ongoing nursery operation and native plant propagation, we encourage you to join our concerted efforts in GSOB monitoring and restoration programs. For more information, please reach out to Chase Stafford at (chase@sandiegoriver.org).