



Acterra

EcoAdvocate

ACTERRA:
ACTION FOR A SUSTAINABLE EARTH

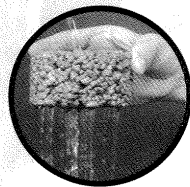
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More information at
www.acterra.org

StepItUP 2007

**Joining Communities Across the Nation to
Take Action Against Climate Change**

BY DEBBIE MYTELS

Since Al Gore's Academy Award winning movie and the latest report of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change, the scales seem to have tipped to eliminate any controversy about the reality of global climate change. The main question remaining for many people is "What can I do?"

It's a good bet that most Acterra members reading this have already done many of the "low hanging fruit" activities such as installing compact fluorescent light bulbs, buying Energy Star appliances, and insulating their homes. Others have started making more expensive changes such as buying a hybrid car or installing solar PV systems. Still others are making lifestyle changes: starting an organic garden, telecommuting, rethinking their use of air travel. For such "deep green" folks, looking at the frightening projections of climate change, the question is "What MORE can I do?"

To kick off our community-based Green@Home project, Acterra is participating in "Step it UP 2007" – a national call to action, initiated by the environmental writer Bill McKibben, asking for people in communities across the country to create events that urge Congress to adopt the goal of "80% reduction of CO₂ emissions by 2050." As McKibben discusses on the website, www.stepitup07.org, California has already adopted this goal with the passage of AB 32

last year, and it's "a solution commensurate to the scale of the problem." While the goal is ambitious, "it is possible," says McKibben.

Our Midpeninsula "Step it UP" rally will be Saturday, April 14, 1 to 3pm at Mitchell Park on East Meadow Dr. in Palo Alto.

Come learn about local climate protection activities and new clean-tech businesses; enjoy singer Nancy Cassidy and children's activities; visit booths with information about energy-saving devices, utility rebates and coupons. Then plan to join Acterra's Green@Home team for an hour, walking a few blocks in a nearby neighborhood to distribute flyers that will offer our free energy-saving program to residents in two pilot areas.

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If you can help with the flyer distribution on April 14 – or if you'd like to be trained for a Green@Home volunteer team to perform scheduled HouseCalls in our two pilot neighborhoods – contact Romie Georgia at (650)962-9876 x316 or romieg@acterra.org.

Debbie Mytels is Associate Director of Acterra.

New Stewardship Program Takes Off

Youth in Nature: Teens as Earth Stewards

BY CLAIRE ELLIOTT

Omar and his friends knelt side by side in the dappled sunshine by Arroyo Ojo de Agua in Redwood City, digging in the muddy soil of the creek bank. A few minutes later they stood up, proudly waving the clump of invasive pampas grass they had just cut out. "The pampas grass hurts!" Omar's friend exclaimed, taking her gloves off and touching the serrated edges of the long leaves. "That was hard work," agreed Nelson. "It feels good to hear that we are doing a good job," said another.

Omar, Nelson, Maribell, Naomi, Ofamooni, and their classmates from Redwood City are taking part in Acterra's newest environmental stewardship program, Youth in Nature.

Youth in Nature connects middle and high school students to the ecology of their neighborhoods by restoring a piece of land on their campus or in their community. Through hands-on activities, the Youth in Nature program teaches young people to become stewards of the land, learning about historic and current land use, natural history, ethnobotany, and restoration ecology.

Thanks to a grant from the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, Acterra's Youth in Nature program has begun by working closely with teachers at three Redwood City schools – Kennedy Middle School, Sequoia High School, and Hoover Elementary School.

"It feels good to hear we are doing a good job!"

At Kennedy Middle School, 7th graders are beginning a relationship with nature at Stulsaft Park, a gem of a park with a rare stretch of relatively natural habitat, including Arroyo Ojo de Agua, a tributary to Redwood Creek. The creek and its riparian habitat will benefit greatly as the Kennedy students remove invasive plants,

plant natives and educate the park neighbors about land stewardship and water pollution prevention.

Young people growing up in today's fast-paced, automated, and urbanized society – especially youth in underserved communities – frequently lack sufficient opportunities to interact in a meaningful way with the natural world. This void, described by Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods*, as "nature deficit disorder," limits young people's horizons, and can lead to a lack of awareness or appreciation of the natural world, as well as a lack of concern about the environment.

This "youth-nature disconnect" is directly related to the ecological crisis that emerges when humans interact carelessly with nature. Even parklands often display signs of destructive human impacts including erosion, water pollution, litter, and invasive plants and animals. These widespread problems contribute not only to unsightly open space, but also to a loss of biodiversity and a reduction in habitat for native species.

Many adult environmentalists today credit a nearby creek in their childhood for providing a nature retreat during their formative years and inspiring their lifelong love and caring for nature. Our children (the environmentalists of the future) unfortunately often do not have similar experiences, and are not necessarily even aware that their neighborhood creeks have been lined with concrete or buried in underground pipes. Kennedy Middle School students are happy to have the opportunity to explore Arroyo Ojo de Agua. Before their first Acterra field trip, many had no idea it was even there!

In addition to the projects at Stulsaft Park, Acterra's Youth in Nature program will take Sequoia High School biology students on field trips to Arastradero Preserve to learn about habitat restoration firsthand with hikes and restoration activities.



Leadership students in Sequoia's Academy program will also recruit fellow students to volunteer to weed, plant and clean up trash on a small nearby tributary to Redwood Creek. (One that miraculously has been spared pipes and concrete!)

"Today at Stulsaft Park I experienced how to respect every living thing here that has movement or not," said Naomi.

At Hoover Elementary School, a strip of blacktop will be removed and 6th grade students will create a "pollinator garden" designed to attract hummingbirds, bees, and butterflies. This stretch of garden will border the local Boys and Girls Club, allowing those children to enjoy this new natural habitat as well.

"We are excited about establishing the Youth in Nature program and enthusiastic about its great potential," says Sheri Lubin, Director of Acterra's Stewardship Program. "Next year we plan to expand our services to additional schools in Redwood City and in other local communities. Our goal is to engage, inspire, and motivate youth to connect meaningfully with nature."

When young people have the opportunity to make a positive impact in restoring a piece of urban landscape to its more natural state, and when they see the benefits – cleaner water, diverse plants, and more birds and other wildlife – they have started down the path toward being better stewards of the land as adults.

"Today at Stulsaft Park I experienced how to respect every living thing here that has movement or not," said Naomi. One of her classmates looked around at the lush greenery of the park and mused, "I want to bring my mother here." 🌱

Claire Elliott is Acterra's Education Coordinator in the Stewardship Program.

