

Restoring Our Habitat: Renewing Our Community

by Students at Contra Costa Middle College High School at Contra Costa College, San Pablo, CA

The Student Leadership Group and the **Contra Costa MCHS** student body are committed to continuing efforts to renew our community. Habitat restoration is our big theme. We are participating in Biology gardens, beach clean-ups, and hosting our own Earth Day in order put the theme to action. In our on-campus biology gardens, we work towards having a functional garden with flowers and fruits. Every weekend, we, along with our peers, water, weed, plant, and care for our plants and garden. With the coastal clean-ups, we walk around the Ocean Beach shore with buckets & trash pickers in hand and scout out garbage like cigarette butts, broken plastics, even some clothing, and certain unmentionables. We usually volunteered to work at the various booths about the earth, nature, and conservation of our resources on Earth Day. This year, because the previous vendor could not sponsor the event, we will be hosting it ourselves and are now in charge of getting many of the organizations and other participants that we think would be perfect for Earth Day. This day was dedicated to educating the local community about our Earth, what we can do to conserve our resources, and why it is important to treat our Earth with respect.



*Rock climbing wall helps raise
Earth Day awareness*

In respect to the local habitat around the Bay Area, the major need in the community is the need to prevent common civilian pollution through emissions (vehicle) and trash in several bodies of water, parks, and reserves. The political standpoint of the environment and our habitat is at a crossroads, with Democrats and Republicans fighting over the state of our environment.

A problem we have in our community is we do not focus on what is best for the community and its members but what is the simplest thing to do while cutting corners. Our area of residence is the San Francisco Bay Area, which, for the most part, contains eco-friendly people. We (the people) choose to help habitats but at times, but are just as ignorant of what needs to be done. If there is an oil spill we would take action but if there are endangered animals due to lack of habitat -- many would ignore that fact. As people, we should choose not to neglect what is staring us in the face. If we worked harder, then we would not have to cringe at the sight of

plastic soda rings around a bird's neck. To add insult to injury, we construct so many buildings and establishments that wildlife crossed into our roads -- the roads that were once theirs. We need to be aware of everything around us and to apply effort to rehabilitate and preserve, as a great society, our nature.

Our community, like most others, is confronted with pollution in our oceans and waters, ruining our human habitats as well as the ocean habitat. Since garbage is carelessly thrown out to the ocean, or on the street, which ends up in the oceans, it has created a garbage problem throughout our community, including San Francisco's Ocean Beach. In addition, the lack of caring for our earth has harmed the world immensely, which is why we have planned our Earth Day event for our community.



Students skillfully toss trash to win eco-friendly plants

As the MCNC group, we had to get permission from SF's Ocean Beach administrators to clean the beach and from the College Grounds and Building representatives in order to hold the Earth Day on our campus. We have gotten the help and resources from Recycle More, the company that had hosted Earth Day for the last 10 years.

Through hosting Earth Day, we will be educating the community so that harmful waste and pollution in our city will be reduced. It is through education that we can negate harmful actions such as throwing plastic away instead of recycling, pouring toxic chemicals down the drain, urging companies to use greener products, and littering instead of throwing away trash. By attending beach clean-ups, we are providing a cleaner environment for the fauna and flora in the area and in the water, decreasing the number of species that become extinct due to pollution, and lessening the risk of humans ingesting high levels of toxins/chemicals. The habitat is also better place to be in. No more will Ocean Beach be a beach with trash polluting its shores and waters, but rather a pristine beach is for the betterment of the people and animals in the area.

Like with many projects there are obstacles that might hold us back. First and foremost, is the economic crisis that our school is currently facing. The funds that we have are minimal and going to the student conference and hosting Earth Day can be very costly. Along with money, the weather is also very hard to deal with. We have our days scheduled for Ocean Beach cleanup days; however, there have been times where we had to cancel due to horrible weather conditions. Getting through these obstacles is difficult but we, as a group, do the best we can.



For our Earth Day project, in addition to our grant, we received assistance from many local/nearby organizations including, Kids for the Bay, The Watershed Project, Urban Creeks Council, West County Wastewater District, Contra Costa College Green Business Program, Neighborhood House of North Richmond, Richmond Sanitary Service and San Francisco Surfrider Foundation. With the help of Claudia Taurean, the Recycle More administrator, we are bringing Earth Day to Contra Costa College.

The work done by students and faculty from MCHS has also contributed to our overall project. We vigorously swam against the current by rescheduling events, spending Saturdays and Sundays working, and by using our tools to do the best we could.

Our project can be sustained over time when we officially adopt Ocean Beach. When adopting the beach we will have the ability to plan clean-ups through the school instead of the Golden Gate National Park Conservatory. We could host clean-ups not only for students at our school but for the communities that surround the area. Our leadership class and our school's biology club would also have an instrumental part in ensuring that the clean-ups continue through their combined efforts with our group. In order to continue hosting Earth Day in the future, we will continue to write grants in order to fund the event and include different agencies related to clean energy, recycling, and habitat restoration.

We expect our legacy will impact how the future students of Middle College positively affect their community's environment by educating and involving them in our project. Our project encompasses collective thinking as well as revisiting and cleaning problem areas such as Ocean Beach and providing a platform for our students and community to learn and take advantage of the ecologically friendly resources offered by local organizations at our upcoming Earth Day.