

Volunteers work to revive Hayward salt pond

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More than two dozen volunteers turned out Saturday to plant new life at the salt ponds within the Eden Landing Ecological Reserve in Hayward.

But one young girl was having a problem with her seedling -- it was breaking apart.

Laura Wainer, the science and restoration projects manager for advocacy organization Save the Bay, said the plant was hardy and encouraged the girl to stick it in the ground, which she did.

"Take as much of that soil," Wainer said, "and get it back in there."

The planting was done on the same day some 19 other volunteer events were occurring throughout Fremont, Hayward and Union City as part of Make a Difference Day, an event begun 20 years ago by USA Weekend Magazine.

But few, if any, of the volunteers who turned out for the planting knew the history of the day. Many of the volunteers were students, some accompanied by a parent, who were fulfilling school volunteer-hour requirements.

Others were single adults, such as Berkeley resident Paul Downs, who saw a sign two weeks ago for the

Don Edwards San Francisco National Wildlife Refuge. Subsequently, he learned about the effort to restore the tidal marshland at Eden Landing.

"You think of this as an urban area, but when you get down here by the Bay, it's open land," said Downs, who works as a management consultant in the public sector. "I love it. I like touching the earth and getting my hands dirty. You don't have to think too much."

Volunteers

wore gloves while handling a trowel and poker that were used to dig into the dirt. Two hundred alkalai heath and salt grass plants held in yellow cylindrical tubes were then carefully planted into the soil and watered. When the plants mature, they will form low bushes known as hammocks.

Few people see the Eden Landing salt ponds, as they are typically closed off to the public and are a 15-minute walk from the Dune Circle Park, where volunteers gathered for an educational lecture before the planting and watering.

Used to harvest salt, the ponds were created through the building of levees that choked off wildlife and plants due to the restriction of tidal flow into the marshes from the Bay. Wainer said the area once looked similar to a moonscape.

Today, the tidal marshes host flocks of birds as well as the brown, gold and red hues of plant life.

The chance to be outdoors and learn about the wildlife in the area brought out volunteer Jean DeWitt and her daughter Jessica, an eighth-grader who attends the School of the Madeleine in Berkeley. Jean DeWitt said they pulled out invasive plants for a separate project two weeks ago.



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"She didn't need anymore service hours," Jean DeWitt said of her daughter, "but we liked it so much, we decided to come out."

Save the Bay, which will celebrate its 50th anniversary next year, advocates for these lands, in part by encouraging the community to help take care of them. Wainer said that similar volunteer events are done throughout area salt ponds about 24 times a month, with volunteer events done at Eden Landing 10 times a month.

"We work in places where big machinery can't actually reach," she said.



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