

Group rolls up sleeves

Conservancy to clean bike trail

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While Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream was a colorblind society, the Antelope Valley Conservancy's dream is "Trails Not Trash."

After a 16-year Lancaster tradition of marking the slain civil rights leader's birthday with a Lancaster Performing Arts Center ceremony, the city's inaugural Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service on Saturday, Jan. 19, will involve hundreds of volunteers working on more than a dozen projects, including planting trees and bushes in parks, painting preschools and tidying up the municipal homeless shelter.

The conservancy will join the effort by cleaning a three-mile stretch of the Sierra Highway bicycle trail. Volunteers should meet at 1 p.m. at the trail head at Avenue J and Sierra Highway.

"Wear sturdy shoes and bring gloves if you have them. The city will provide water and gloves," said Wendy Reed, conservancy president.

Volunteers can sign up for the cleanup at www.avconservancy.org or call (661) 943-9000.

"Trails offer a real economic benefit," Reed said. "There is a very strong correlation between childhood obesity and proximity to a park and availability to outdoor exercise."

Maintaining trails and keeping them looking nice is important, she said. One challenge the Valley faces is litter.

"Littering is incredibly harmful to the environment. We assume people pick it up - there is no way we can pick up all the trash," Reed said. "In L.A., the trash washes into the ocean and pollutes the water. People may not realize this connection."

Reed's solution to the litter problem is: "We have to communicate. Some people just don't think about it. A lot of what it takes is just to tell people," she said.

"If everybody made just a little change, imagine the difference it could make in our

community," Reed said.

Lack of public knowledge of trail policies also poses a few challenges in trail preservation, she said.

"We support multi-use trail systems and support preservation of the trail systems, and specific management procedures for the conservancy have not yet been developed," Reed said.

The conservancy created its Trails Policy Project to address that problem: to develop a trails policy and procedures manual for conservancy lands and easements.

"We assume that trails are something that the public owns. In most cases that's not true; a lot of the time they go through private property," Reed said.

"The key to preserving the trail system is to have easements recorded, and the Trails Policy Project will help people who want to donate easements to know how the trails will be managed."

Establishing trail policies improves public opinion and understanding of trail systems, Reed said. Community groups are also interested in the manual, since government agencies are increasingly relying on them to manage public trails, but they don't know what is expected of them or what guidelines to follow.

The public is invited to participate in the Trails Policy Project because "we want to do our best to make sure that everybody will be satisfied with our management procedures," Reed said.

"We are a collaborative community organization and feel that something such as a trail system deserves a community approach. If you are involved in your community, you are creating the reality of the community. If you are not involved, then only a small segment creates the reality for everybody.

"Our trail cleanup is a very small effort in light of what Martin Luther King Jr. achieved," Reed said.

Yet as King once said, "Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve."

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