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Redondo Beach restoration project is in full bloom

A colorful mix of native shrubs and wildflowers is beginning to take the place of nonnative ice plant on the bluffs. But volunteers are needed to help keep the planting on track.

By Kristin S. Agostoni

Daily Breeze

Slowly but surely, Redondo Beach is bidding farewell to a stubborn tangle of ice plant on its coastal bluffs. Along a 3-acre tract just below The Esplanade, a colorful mix of native shrubs and wildflowers is beginning to claim its place.

Thanks to a \$130,000 grant and the combined manpower of volunteers, the Los Angeles Conservation Corps' SEA Laboratory and a collection of government and nonprofit agencies, the bluffs now sprout California poppies and sunflowers, beach primrose and cacti.

And dune buckwheat is "going gonzo out there," said Ann Dalkey, a Redondo Beach resident who serves as co-chair of the Beach Bluffs Restoration Project -- a regional effort she and others started talking about in August 2001.

"There's just a whole mix of plants," Dalkey said.

But perhaps now more than ever, project officials are appealing to the community to help keep the Redondo Beach pilot project on track.

Today, nonnative ice plant has been removed from the majority of the site, and the planting is roughly 75 percent complete, said Travis Longcore, who chairs the project with Dalkey.

But more vegetation is needed to fill in the "bare spots" and replace plants that have dried up and died along the bluffs. In other spots, the obstinate ice plant has managed to creep back.

Because the grant money dried up as of March 31, organizers are hoping volunteer laborers will continue the planting and pulling out pesky weeds that have sprouted amid the wildflowers. A small corps has been meeting sporadically for the past year or so, but organizers are trying to arrange regular gatherings on the third Saturday of every month.

"We need community stewards to keep an eye out," Longcore said. "It's going to take a couple years for those plants to grow and mature."

The grant money paid for SEA Lab staff members to take an active role at the site, said public programs coordinator Stefanie Miller.

And while the Redondo Beach-based SEA Lab will continue to grow native plants in its nursery and keep staff members involved, she said, other projects are competing for time and resources.

"This is where we really need the volunteers to play a role. Once we get each section to the point of takeoff, (growth) will just fly," Miller said. "We have enough plants. It's people."

The goal of the Beach Bluffs Restoration Project is to bring native plants and wildflowers back to the coastal bluffs along the Santa Monica Bay from Malaga Cove to Ballona Creek. Backers believe their deep roots will do a far better job of stabilizing the bluffs than the ice plant that is abundant along the coastline. Extending the project beyond the 3-acre test area will require more grant money and cooperation from additional cities.

They picked the county-owned land in Redondo Beach for a pilot program and started uprooting the ice plant between Miramar Park and Avenue I in the spring of 2004.

But in the beginning, the project struggled to gain public support.

For many beachgoers, the first introduction came in the form of a fence erected as a gentle reminder not to trample the hillside.

But many complained the structure was unsightly and blocked their view of the coast. As one man told the *Daily Breeze* in May 2004, "Everyone pretty much hates it."

The strong reactions persuaded project officials to conduct a survey, Longcore said. And based on community comment, they decided on the existing short wooden fence.

"So, we got over that," Dalkey said. "It was very satisfying one morning when I was out there, and a couple said, 'Oh, good. They finally got the fence in. That looks so nice.' "

The next step is to install six educational signs that will likely be unveiled in time for Earth Day on April 22.

The placards will carry information about the vegetation, local geography and the

endangered El Segundo blue butterfly, which project officials one day hope to reintroduce along the coast.

For now, however, Dalkey is content to see bumblebees.

As one buzzed across a colorful pocket of poppies and sunflowers in Redondo Beach, she couldn't help but point out that never once did she see a bee take the same interest in ice plant.

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