



SAN DIEGO CHILDREN AND NATURE COLLABORATIVE 2013 Accomplishments

Founded in 2009, the San Diego Children and Nature Collaborative (SDCaN) is a regional collaborative of organizations, individuals and businesses. Our vision is a world in which all children play, learn and grow with nature in their everyday lives. Our mission is to inspire communities to nurture, empower, and engage youth in cultivating their relationship with nature.

This document outlines accomplishments completed from January 1 to December 31, 2013 that were inspired, convened, and/or organized by SDCaN, also known as the Collaborative. In October, the organization became a Program under the San Diego Science Alliance (SDSA).

Goal 1. Increase public awareness of the value of nature and outdoor experiences.

Website. The website (www.sdchildrenandnature.org) was expanded with information about programs and pages for educators, families, and design and health professionals. The site was restructured to use Wordpress, so that leaders have “editor” privileges to manage content.

Community Fairs. Loose Parts Nature Play activities were organized for unstructured play with children and parents at EarthFair in Balboa Park on Sunday, April 21. Family Nature Fun activities were organized with 15 exhibitors at Kids First Fair at Camp Pendleton on April 27. Children were invited to play and construct with bamboo poles, tree cookies, pine cones, twine, sheets, boxes, palm fronts, and other natural materials are provided to inspire forts and teepees and more!

Goal 2. Enhance schools’ ability to connect children to nearby nature

Schoolyard Habitat Workshops. Four workshops were organized, attended by 138 educators, gardeners, parents, and other community members. Presentations featured planning, planting, and using native plants in schoolyards. Workshops were held on June 26 and August 24, 2013 at the Water Conservation Garden, August 5 at the San Diego Botanic Garden, and September 21 at the Girl Scout Program Center in Balboa Park. Workshop cooperators were SDCaN, Master Gardeners of San Diego County, California Native Plant Society, and SDSA, with funds from San Diego Gas & Electric.

Grant for Schoolyard-based Lessons. The project, “Urban Forestry Education: Teachers and Students Choosing Lessons in Nature,” continued, with funds from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. Local curriculum consultants completed three lessons for each grade from K to 5, that are hands-on, require minimal preparation and materials, are taught in the schoolyard, and are based on NGSS. Three nature coordinators provided professional development and support to teachers, in eight schools in Escondido, Santee, and San Diego Unified school districts. Teachers completed pre- and post- surveys to assess the effectiveness of the lessons and support from the nature educators.

Next Generation Science Standards. In cooperation with the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE), workshops for nature educators to learn about the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) were held on September 13 with 21 attendees, and November 22 with 41 attendees. Five additional workshops on nature-based learning in NGSS are scheduled for 2014.

Nature-based Science Educator Workshops. A workshop on Nature-based Inquiry and Learning in After School Settings was offered at the STEMpower conference for not-in-school programs on March 1, sponsored by SDCOE. Six workshops on nature- and outdoor-based technologies formed a “Nature strand” at the San Diego Computer-Using Educators conference on November 2 at California State University-San Marcos. A workshop on “Nature Walks” was held at the Camp Staff Training Day on June 8, sponsored locally by the American Camp Association.

Early Childhood Education. The Nature in Early Childhood working group continued to meet, with early childhood education professionals and nature educators. National experts Robin Moore and Nilda Cosco (North Carolina State University, www.naturalearning.org) attended the February 27 meeting along with 15 local early childhood educators. A proposal was outlined to increase awareness of, planning for, and implementation of nature-based activities and settings in early childhood education centers.

Greater San Diego Science and Engineering Fair. Projects were judged and awards were given on March 21 for five nature-based science projects. Congratulations to:

- Biofiltering in the Bay: Assessing Invasive Species Ability to Improve Water Quality, two high school students at High Tech High
- Human Impact on Tide Pools, eighth grader at Rincon Middle School, Escondido
- Leaf Morphology: Precipitation Capture in the Coastal Sage Scrub Community, eighth grader
- Observing Territorial and Social Interactions of Migratory and Resident Ducks, eighth grader
- Urban Noise: Effects on Lagoon Bird Density and Species Diversity, seventh grader (these three students from Rhoades School in Encinitas)

San Diego Citizen Science. Formed in 2012, the group met on February 4 at the Birch Aquarium, with an overview of Grunion Greeters program; April 23 at the Living Coast Discovery Center, featuring coastal programs; July 18 at the San Diego Zoo Institute for Conservation Research, focused on vegetation monitoring; October 10 at Los Penasquitos Preserve, with the San Diego Tracking Team. Discussions include how citizen science projects are established and how they enhance learning in nature and nature-based learning for STEM. The network’s leaders are from SDCaN, UCSD ScienceBridge program, and Institute for Conservation Research-San Diego Zoo.

Goal 3. Partner with community groups to value, promote and provide opportunities for outdoor experiences.

Family Nature Clubs. More than 1,000 families are part of Family Adventures in Nature (www.FamilyAdventuresinNature.org), helping families get nature back on their calendars with a variety of opportunities each month in the San Diego region. Over 800 opportunities were offered in the past four years, for family nature activities such as hiking, camping and exploring our unique region. Ten active Nearby Nature Clubs now offer weekly, bi-weekly or monthly nature outings. Areas served include Poway, Scripps Ranch, Encinitas, Oceanside, Mira Mesa, East County, Chula Vista, Bonita, and more. Additionally, there is a club specifically for grandparents and their grandkids. A weekly email is sent, listing the upcoming events and adventures. Join (free!) at www.meetup.com/familyadventuresinnature.

Healthy by Nature. Local and national efforts with health systems were featured at the national Children & Nature Network (C&NN) gathering, and opportunities identified for working with health providers in San Diego. A presentation on “Healthier by Nature” was given to Pediatric Leaders at Kaiser Pediatric Medical Group, May 15, 2013, and a pediatrician was recruited to promote nature

prescriptions by health care providers during office visits. Formal cooperation is developing with the Environmental Health Coalition, an organization focused on reducing toxic pollution in underserved communities. Their campaigns include Healthy Kids, which aligns well with Healthy by Nature. SDCaN attended the event to launch the Kids in Parks “Track Trails,” organized by the County of San Diego Park and Recreation, which was held San Elijo Lagoon on September 7.

Gardening. Coordination with the Master Gardeners (MGs) of San Diego County continues. Some MGs are now focused on gardening in youth rehabilitation and detention centers, with plans to train youth to propagate milkweed and other plants for schoolyard habitats. MGs held small workshops for school garden consultants on Gardens for Children with Special Needs, Permaculture, the San Diego Unified School District’s Farm to School Program, and Planning a Schoolyard Habitat. Summer garden tours featured Paul Ecke Central Elementary School in Encinitas, Olivewood Gardens in National City, and Holmes Elementary School in San Diego, all developing natural habitat gardens on their school grounds.

Naturalist Guides. The Birding for Naturalists module was completed by a small committee of the San Diego Naturalists group, and 14 attended the “Train the Trainer” class on January 25, for those interested in instructing this module. Eighty attended the “Birding for Naturalists” classes on March 8 at SD Botanic Garden (SDBG), March 16 at San Diego Natural History Museum, and March 30 at Tijuana Estuary Visitor Center. Sixty attended the Interpretive Skills classes on March 8 at SDBG and April 2 at Tijuana Estuary. Twenty-six attended the “new” Nature Walks with Children class on March 16 at the Museum.

Design. SDCaN landscape architects furthered local investments in Outdoor Play and Learning Environments (OPALE):

- Designed OPALE at Hilltop Child Development Center in Chula Vista
- Helped start Ecological School yard for Loma Portal Elementary School
- Coordinated national American Society of Landscape Architecture webinar series on Children and Nature, with three well-attended seminars: Early Childhood with Robin Moore and Nilda Cosco, North Carolina State University; School Age with the Boston Schoolyard Initiative; and Adolescence and Teens, with Patsy Owens of University of California, Berkeley.
- Gave presentations on OPALE to Head Start Neighborhood Housing Association, October 21; Childhood Obesity Initiative, Early Childhood Domain, October 22; and to California State University Childcare Center Directors, southern California meeting, October 24

Goal 4. Drive change in attitudes, skills and behaviors that lead to positive relationships with nature.

A new initiative, Outdoor Learning Environments (OLE!) was explored at two small meetings. This would bring together various community partners in a “collective impact” approach to enhance nature settings and learning on school campuses.

Goal 5. Promote learning, sharing and networking

Collaborative Partners and Members. Additional Collaborative Partners have been confirmed, bringing the total to 26. Contact lists were reviewed and “cleaned up,” now with 550 members on the list. Separate lists of teachers assembled from sign-in sheets at various workshops. Input from the 55 attendees at the March 14 general meeting were the most important activities for working together (high potential impact, need collaborative approach) were: Annual media campaign about

benefits of nature; Advocacy for nature at school boards and city councils; Nature featured in STEM-science learning; School and school district nature coordinators; and Nature activities in after-school and youth programs. Activities considered most important for the SDCaN organization were: Newsletters or e-blasts with events and information; General meetings with learning workshops; SDCaN established as nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization; and Stakeholders' summit with community leaders.

Meetings. Four general meetings were held:

- March 14, from 4-6 pm, "Happy Nature Hour," at the Birch Aquarium at Scripps
- May 16 from 4-6 pm at Girl Scout program center, "Nature-based Science Learning: Local High School Students, Projects, and Possibilities, included recognition of science fair awardees
- August 5 from 4-6 pm at the San Diego Botanic Garden, focused on schoolyard habitats
- Thursday, November 14, 3-4 pm at San Diego Fairgrounds, following "Lagoon Environmental Education Summit," with discussion of school nature score concept

National Children & Nature Network (C&NN). The annual C&NN Grassroots Gathering was held on September 4-6 in San Diego, attended by 15 locals. Presentations provided inspiration for families, schools and schoolyards, networking, leadership, and more. C&NN and SDCaN co-hosted a "Gala" on Friday evening, September 6, with SDCaN helping to organize the Silent Auction and coordinate volunteers. Net receipts funded 2013 activities.

Goal 6. Build sustainable organization to support mission

Governance. Information was gathered about independent incorporation of SDCaN as a non-profit (501(c)(3)) from conversations with some non-profit experts, law firms and accounting firms. San Diego Science Alliance (SDSA) invited SDCaN to become a nature-based program within SDSA. Advantages of joining SDSA were reviewed, notably that they have a strong reputation with businesses and the educational system; and they will provide administrative infrastructure. The invitation was accepted, and SDCaN joined SDSA in October. Heartfelt appreciation to San Diego Audubon Society for co-founding SDCaN and serving as fiscal sponsor for five years.

Board meetings. Meetings were held on January 9, February 6, March 6, April 10, May 1 and 29, July 10, August 7, September 10, October 2, November 5, and December 3. Board meetings now held the first Tuesday each month, generally in the Audubon conference room.

Grants. The following grants were received and administered by SDSA:

- \$5,000 awarded for Nature Classrooms from San Diego Gas & Electric, and will be focused on Casita Elementary School in Vista
- USDA Forest Service \$27,000 for Technology-enhanced Nature Learning for Middle School Students (with Rincon and Mission middle schools in Escondido)

Contributions. In-kind contributions were appreciated from:

- Adventure 16 for prizes at Military Family Nature Fairs
- Meetings held at Girl Scouts of San Diego-Imperial Council program center in Balboa Park, Mission Trails Regional Park, San Diego Botanic Garden, Birch Aquarium at Scripps, San Diego Audubon Society, and Water Conservation Garden.

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