

Volunteers pull weeds at Point Reyes

Non-native plants targeted for eradication from national seashore area

By JANET FARMER

FOR THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

While many of her fellow students were still sleeping one recent Saturday morning, Erin Brown drove several hours from UC Davis to yank weeds on the beach at Point Reyes.

Brown, 20, was one of about a dozen adults, teens and children who trekked out to the beach near Abbott's Lagoon to dig out European beach grass and ice plant.

They are part of a massive volunteer effort to rid the national seashore of non-native plants that choke out native wildflowers and other beneficial plants.

The Marin Conservation Corps and the National Park Service are sponsoring Saturday clean-up days as part of the ongoing effort.

School groups, Boy Scout troops and other volunteers have worked regularly on the project, but February brought the first of what are to be monthly Saturday work-days, said Jon O'Brien, an organizer with the Marin Conservation Corps.

The project appeals to people with an appreciation of environmental projects, O'Brien said, and it's not unusual for groups to come a distance to participate. In April, he and his co-workers will host college students from Pennsylvania who are traveling to Point Reyes to spend two days digging out weeds on the beach.

For Brown, who discovered the project while browsing the Internet, it was a chance to do something important at a treasured park.

"I'm surprised it's this big of a job. It's huge," said Brown, who is a biology major at UC Davis. "I think every little bit helps, and I'm planning to come back and would like to bring some friends next time."

The park service has identified 800 acres of coastal dunes for the eradication project, said Janice Rodgers, a plant ecologist at Point Reyes. The ice plant and beach grass were once planted deliberately to help keep sand in place by stabilizing the dunes.

Rodgers wasn't sure if the planting was done before or after the area was designated a national seashore. She is certain, however, that the spread is problematic and has hampered the growth of



JEFF KAN LEE / The Press Democrat

Laura Barrett of Richmond, Va., works on a program to eliminate non-native plants from the beach near Abbott's Lagoon at the Point Reyes National Seashore.

native wildflowers and perennial shrubs.

The ice plant and beach grass also have choked out plants that would have served as habitat for the snowy plover, an endangered bird that nests on the beach, O'Brien said.

"People assume if it's a national park, it's protected and pristine and perfect. But this place is infested with two non-native plants. Non-natives are fine, but when they're invasive, they're bad," she said.

The task for volunteers is simple: shovel down into moist sand, loosen the plants and pull them out.

John Iverson and his son, Sam, a student at Cardinal Newman High School, were part of the group working three weeks ago.

Sam, 14, was involved as part of his school's community service requirements. He'd participated in a coastal clean-up once at Doran Beach, which focused on lit-

ter, but this was the first time he'd dug weeds at Point Reyes.

"This is a bit harder than picking up garbage. You get into a rhythm and time passes quickly. I'm not doing it for money, but at least I'm doing something good," said Iverson, who's had paying jobs doing yard work and walking dogs.

"With the information Jon provided, it seems like we're making a difference. We don't have to finish an acre to make a difference," he said.

His dad was agreeable about joining Sam for the workday.

"I could be gardening at home," he said with a laugh.

"I didn't know what we'd be doing would be an overwhelming job. There's so much beach grass. Yeah, we're doing good work but it's tedious," said John Iverson.

For psychologist Rich Busse, who had done volunteer work before, it was his first environmental project.

"What's nice is to be in such a

beautiful setting and help Mother Nature. One of my great pleasures in life is being outdoors," he said.

"It's not really easy work. I've done 2,000 repetitions of this," said Busse, referring to the shoveling action. "But you look at who's gone before and realize it's a group effort. You can get ahead of it and win the battle."

The next Saturday work days are scheduled for March 6 and April 3. Participants should meet at the Bear Valley Visitor Center, 1 Bear Valley Road, at 9 a.m.

Wear layers of comfortable clothes and bring a lunch and water. The group will drive to the lighthouse parking lot, and work in that area removing ice plant until mid-afternoon.

Contact Jon O'Brien at (415) 464-5231 to sign up and for further information.

You can reach Correspondent Janet Farmer at 782-9130 or jhfarmer@comcast.net.

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