

Snapshots

Successes of BLM hazardous fuels projects ...

California

Team Groveland Hits Their Mark

Imagine a team of young people; loaded with dedication and enthusiasm, living and working for the summer in a high risk, wildland-urban interface area with the purpose of helping the local residents reduces their risk of loss due to wildfire. This is exactly what the Student Conservation Association's Fire Education Corps Team Groveland accomplished in the foothill communities north of Yosemite National Park this summer.



Local residents arrived with truckloads of vegetation during the SCA initiated Community Chipper Day.

BLM's Folsom Field Office hosted Team Groveland, consisting of a team leader and five college interns. Their just completed summer placement in Southern Tuolumne and Northern Mariposa counties was a complete success. Their fire education focus was a perfect complement to the area's existing interagency fire management working group known as SWIFT (Southwest Inter-Face Team). The SWIFT group welcomed the Fire Education Corps into their area and showed their support in many ways, from providing office space and equipment to offering living quarters, from making local introductions and providing key contact information to helping delineate priority communities for the team to focus on.



The chipper worked overtime during Community Chipper Day.

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SWIFT's involvement helped the team to exceed BLM's expectations and primary goals for the summer. The goals were creating awareness and educating the local communities about defensible space and wildland fire dangers, conducting home evaluations and providing recommendations to homeowners regarding defensible space around their homes in order to maximize their protection against wildland fire, developing and implementing a fuels reduction project in the local area and providing recommendations on future fire education and prevention efforts.



The "Yellow Shirts" of Team Groveland.

Working in this large rural region of California with its severe fire history and dispersed communities with little or no community organization or events proved to be a challenge that required Team Groveland to become very creative in the strategies they used to contact and interact with community members.

Team members became regulars at local pancake breakfasts, government food giveaways, community picnics, open-air markets, service club meetings and other venues that brought together local citizens. Through the use of displays, literature, presentations, canvassing, and workshops they were able to offer information and advise about creating a more fire safe region. Their hard work to become integrated into the rural communities they were serving paid off. By mid-summer, the team was respectfully and affectionately known simply as "The Yellow Shirts" for their ever-present yellow Student Conservation Association shirts and their regular presence at community gatherings!

The "Yellow Shirts" proved themselves to be a valuable educational resource to the communities. They were invited to conduct 32 home inspections by interested homeowners who wanted recommendations on how to improve their defensible space.

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They coordinated a community chipper project where of vegetation was thinned by local property owners, collected over a weekend, chipped, and then used for local landscaping. The material filled over 60 trucks!

They offered a children's fire safety workshop at the request of a community that had a recent incident involving a minor vegetation fire caused by a local youth playing with a model rocket. They arranged for a local nursery to label fire resistant landscaping plants and developed both an exhibit and informational packet that was available at the store throughout the summer. They worked on a community demonstration project that supplemented the dedicated fire safe efforts of a conscientious homeowner and now serves as a model fire-wise home. They motivated several communities to pursue the formation of local fire safe councils to continue the fire education, awareness and activities after the team members return to college at summers end. They created a brochure to identify funding sources that local groups and individuals can tap into to help with the expenses associated with creating and maintaining fire safe communities. In addition, they found time during their short summer stay to participate in nine public education/outreach events, provide ten presentations to diverse community groups and work several days at Camp Smokey's Fire Prevention Village at the California State Fair.

The success of Team Groveland's short but productive summer cannot be over-stated. They have motivated the communities they served to become more fire safe as well as convinced California BLM to support three additional SCA Fire Education Corp teams in 2003. We are proud of the work Team Groveland accomplished and congratulate the team members on a job well done!

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