

**National Forest Association**  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Children's Forest Visitor Center gets a Facelift**

After opening its doors in May 2001, the Children's Forest Visitor Information Center, located in Running Springs, has hosted thousands of mountain residents as well as visitors to the San Bernardino National Forest. Historically, visitors have come to join local youth volunteers for a guided nature hike, find maps of the local hiking and camping areas, and bring their children to visit the interpretive nature displays. After almost 10 years of visitors, the youth volunteers had a chance this winter to update and modernize the displays at this family-friendly nature center.

Throughout the winter, youth were guided by volunteer coordinator Monica Curiel, a Southern California native and Running Springs resident. "We set the ground rules and the ideas just started flowing," said Monica, "The kids were thinking big and we went from a full-fledged water park to the importance of depicting the flow of water through our watershed to educate our visitors." From that concept, youth volunteers from Crestline, Lake Arrowhead, Running Springs, and Big Bear Valley have created an exceptional mock-up of the Visitor Center.

Slated to reopen May 1, 2010, the volunteers have quite a bit of work to do. After stripping the visitor center walls, youth volunteers have been working hard under the direction of Big Bear local artist, Dee Mundy. Dee has provided these budding artists with general guidelines while youth created the design, mixed paint, and got working.

A full complement of hands-on nature activity materials are still needed to complete the project. Included in the plans are terrariums, interactive animal displays, native people's exhibit, hands-on discovery table, and a rocks and minerals exhibit. "With extremely limited funds, the youth volunteers have been hard at work in their community asking local businesses, homeowners, and neighbors for donations," said Alison Bates, deputy director of the National Forest Association. "The design is to follow a 'green' theme using recycled and sustainable materials for the building."

This facelift of such a local institution designed to foster greater understanding and respect for our national forest will positively impact the local economy and involve more youth volunteers. Cash and in-kind donations are needed to reopen on schedule, escalate the momentum of local youth embracing a leadership role in managing their public lands, and offer an updated unique experience for all families. Checks can be mailed to Children's Forest, P.O. Box 350, Skyforest, CA 92385, Attention: Monica Curiel. The National Forest Association appreciates the continued support and collaboration from the local communities whether it's a check, a donation of needed materials, or individuals' skills and volunteer time in helping to meet its mission.

As the Visitor Center gets closer to completion, it is anticipated that Children's Forest will host more visitors than ever this summer. And, more visitors require more volunteers to join this dynamic summer program. According to BJ Negrete, age 11 of Big Bear City, he enjoys the volunteer program because...“it gets me out of the house into the outdoors, and my mom said it's good for me!” BJ has been involved in the program for over a year now and has volunteered several hundred hours at the Big Bear Discovery Center and the Children's Forest. Best friend William Elbert, 12, of Big Bear Lake chimes in, “It's just fun with my friends!” The National Forest Association is recruiting local youth, ages 11 to 17, to join the Children's Forest youth leadership program.

Youth volunteers will have the opportunity to work at either the Discovery Center or the Children's Forest, depending on their residency. Summer projects will include tree planting, hiking and maintaining forest trails, assisting with arts and crafts, building birdhouses, leading hikes, canoeing on the lake, camping trips, mountain biking, and many more activities.

For more information on the Children's Forest in Running Springs, contact Monica Curiel at (909) 382-2773. For information about volunteering with the Discovery Center Youth program, contact Marco Guzman at (909) 382-2778.

**About the National Forest Association (NFA):**

The NFA, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization and key partner to the U.S. Forest Service, is committed to three initiatives addressing conservation, education and responsible recreation through a year-round portfolio of programming aimed at reaching Southern California's inland urban and mountain communities as well as visitor populations on public lands. Through partnerships and a strong volunteer backbone network, the SBNFA brings communities of people, partners and funding resources to important public lands projects focused on health, stewardship and sustainability. Specifically, the NFA manages an AmeriCorps and Urban Conservation Corps providing workforce development and conservation-related service for urban youth, and grows tomorrow's stewards, today, through youth leadership mentoring. In addition, the gap between forest visitors and nature is bridged through environmental interpretive programming and outdoor recreational programs designed to foster respect and appreciation for their environment and public lands. For more information call (951) 682-7513 or visit [www.nationalforestassociation.org](http://www.nationalforestassociation.org).

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