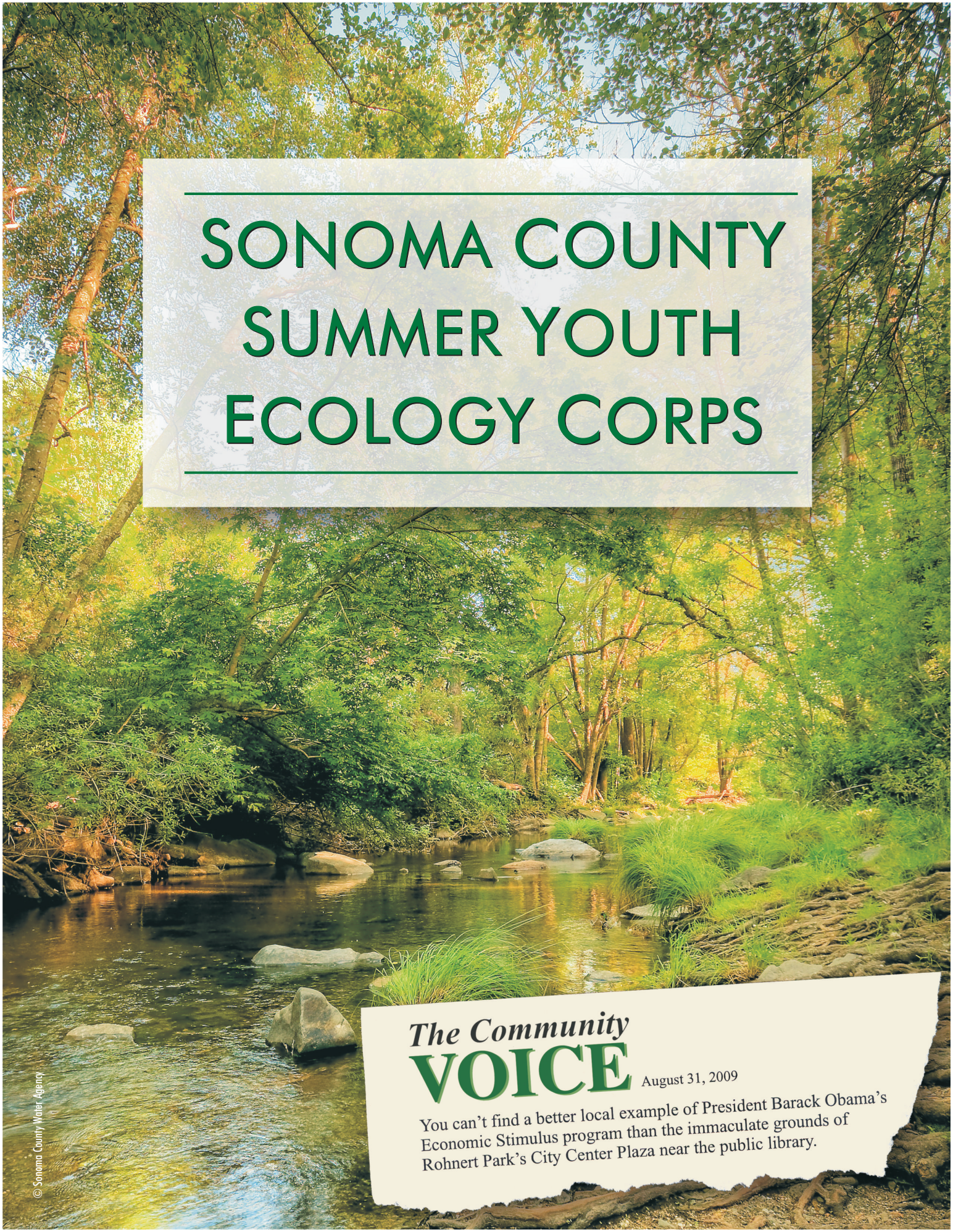
SONOMA COUNTY SUMMER YOUTH ECOLOGY CORPS



The Community **VOICE** August 31, 2009

You can't find a better local example of President Barack Obama's Economic Stimulus program than the immaculate grounds of Rohnert Park's City Center Plaza near the public library.

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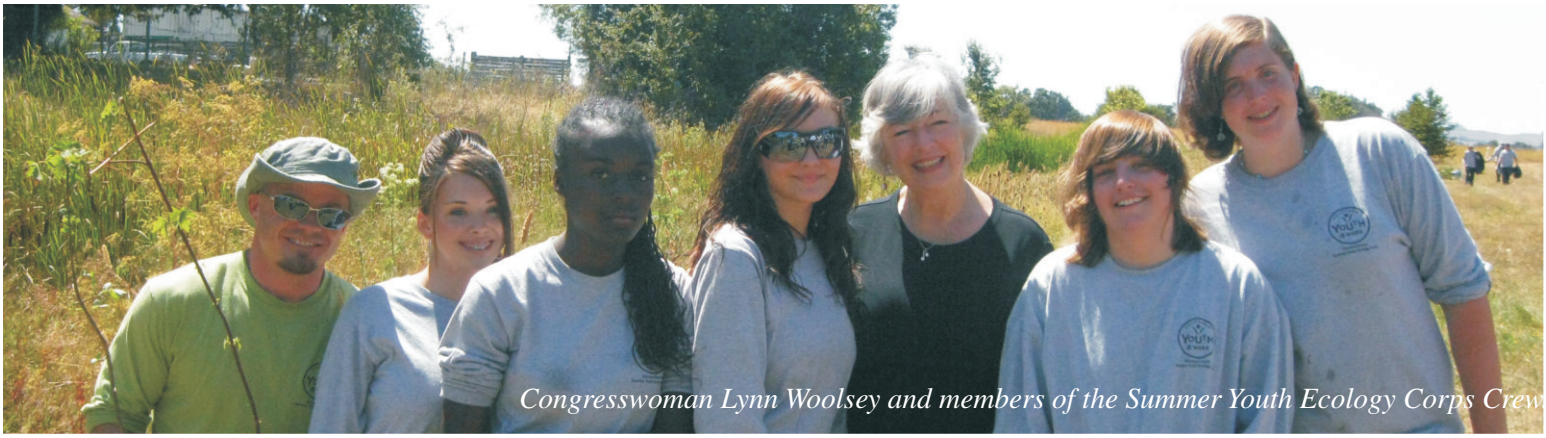


Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey and members of the Summer Youth Ecology Corps Crew

About the Summer Youth Ecology Corps

The unemployment rate for teens and young adults in Sonoma County is soaring, and as many as one in five find themselves both out-of-work and out-of-school. Recognizing the need to connect youth and young adults to summer jobs in Sonoma County, a coalition was built and the 2009 Summer Youth Ecology Corps (SYEC) was launched.

The coalition included the Sonoma County Water Agency, the Workforce Investment Board (WIB), the Sonoma County Human Services Department, the Sonoma County Office of Education, New Ways to Work, over 32 project hosts, and five youth agencies. The coalition leveraged an investment from the Sonoma County Water Agency and $1.2 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding through the U.S. Department of Labor to support the 27 Ecology Crews in the SYEC.

The Summer Youth Ecology Corps:

- Employed more than 300 young people ages 14-24 at project locations with over 32 project hosts throughout the county;
- Taught youth and young adults the skills needed to find and keep permanent employment;
- Restored and enhanced local habitat and streams;
- Provided valuable services to local nonprofits and government agencies;
- Provided employment for 27 crew leaders – primarily young adults and nonprofit agency staff; and
- Included various educational enhancements, including environmental education, Work-Ready Certification, lifetime memberships to an online career assessment, comprehensive Work-Based Learning Plans, and tours of the Sonoma County Water Agency's facilities.

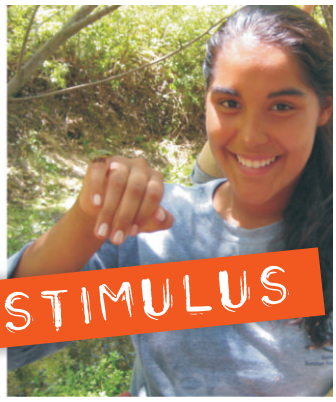
"The Water Agency was planning to support two crews this summer as a pilot project and the additional investment from the ARRA funds allowed us to increase from two to 27 crews. We were able to do work we wouldn't have been able to get done otherwise."

Efren Carrillo, Director
Sonoma County Water Agency and
County of Sonoma Supervisor

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

About the Community Partners

The SYEC would not have been possible without community support. The project hosts donated staff time and materials while local businesses discounted work boots, tools, and other materials. Where possible, all materials were bought at local vendors, which supported the local economy.



About the Youth Agencies

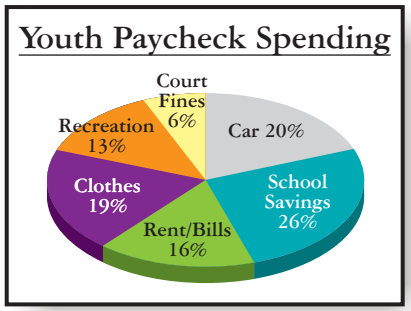
Five youth agencies were chosen through a competitive process to employ, supervise, and train the crew members; implement the educational enhancements; and coordinate the crews for the SYEC.

Petaluma People Services Center · SAY Social Advocates for Youth · West County Community Services · SCAYD Roots Resource Center · The Center for Social and Environmental Stewardship

Results for Youth

Crew members rated the program as "extremely helpful in building their future employability."

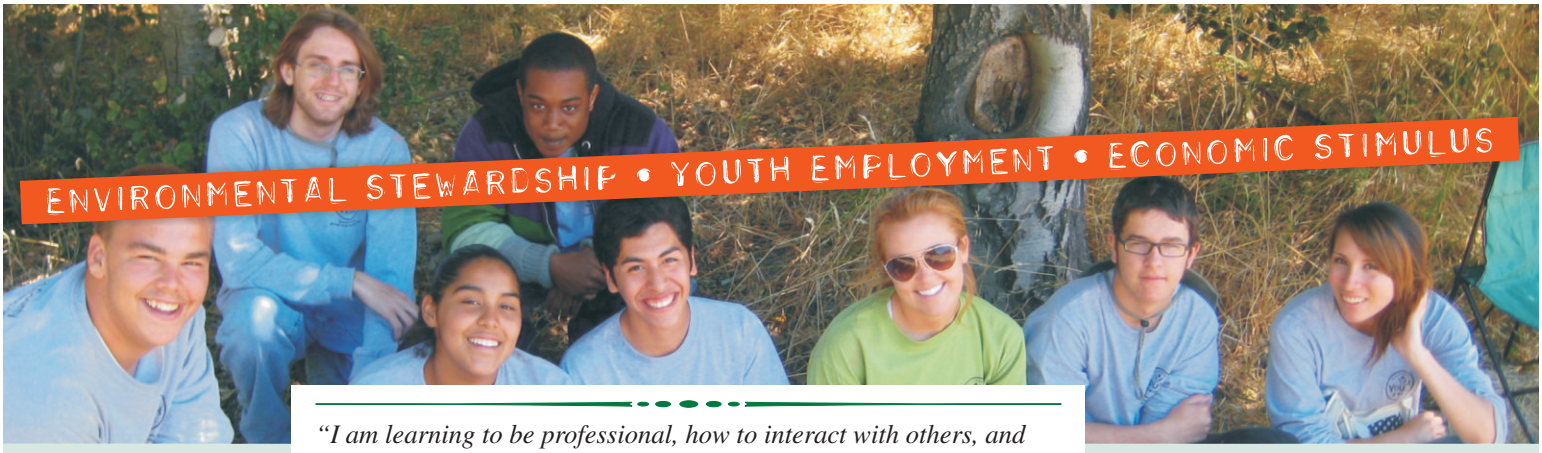
The SYEC gave crew members a positive, productive summer experience. Crew members improved their work-readiness skills and contributed financially to the local economy. The one problem: crew members wanted the SYEC to continue into the late summer and fall.



Benefits for the Community

The SYEC crew members restored 10 miles of creek channels, cleaned up beaches, restored habitats and trails, built an outdoor area for people to gather, grew and distributed food from organic farms, built bird boxes, and completed many other projects.

"Multiple neighbors thanked us for our work and two neighbors brought brownies and fruit to commend us on our work."



"I am learning to be professional, how to interact with others, and stay committed."

"I've learned the importance of being able to communicate and work as a team in order to get things done."

"We see this as a direct impact, jobs that are going straight to the community. We have kids giddy with excitement, once they realize they will cash a paycheck."

Summer Youth Ecology Corps Contributors:

Project Partners

Sonoma County Water Agency
Sonoma County Workforce Investment Board
Sonoma County Human Services Department
Sonoma County Office of Education
New Ways to Work

Youth Agencies

The Center for Social and Environmental Stewardship
Petaluma People Services Center
Social Advocates for Youth
Sonoma County Adult and Youth Development
West County Community Services

Local Businesses

Friedman's Home Improvement
Eraldi's Menswear and Shoes
Santa Rosa Shoes
BWS Distributers
Ben and Jerry's Sonoma Plaza Scoop Shop
Enterprise Rental

"I go home and brag to my parents and my friends about working and having fun, and at the same time I am helping the community."

For more information, contact New Ways to Work, www.newwaystowork.org/syec, 707-824-4000

Project Hosts

County Agencies

Sonoma County Water Agency
Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District
Sonoma County Regional Parks

Cities and Towns

City of Cloverdale
City of Healdsburg
City of Petaluma
City of Rohnert Park
City of Santa Rosa Creek Stewardship Program
Santa Rosa Recreation and Parks
Town of Windsor

Community Organizations

Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Santa Rosa
Chanslor Wildlife, LLC
Cotati Creek Critters & Laguna Foundation
Friends of the Petaluma River
LandPaths
Patchworks Farm
Petaluma Bounty
Russian River Keeper
Sonoma County Family YMCA
Sonoma Ecology Center
Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods