

National Forest Association

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Local Youth Rally to Make National Children's Forest a Place to Explore

Running Springs, CA -- The National Children's Forest Visitor Information Center, located in Running Springs, is undergoing its first facelift since its inaugural opening in 2001. While the Visitor Center remains closed for the past winter season, the changes are underway and preparations are being made to reopen the Center for the 2010 summer season on May 8. Youth and dedicated volunteers are painting, installing discovery elements, and designing information panels to create a space where local visitors, Southern California and national visitors can come and learn about the San Bernardino National Forest.

"We are incredibly proud of the creativity, energy and passion our youth volunteers have committed to the redesign of their Visitor Center," said Alison Bates, deputy director, National Forest Association. "All of the hard work, from youth to adult volunteers, is a testament to the great talent and dedication found in our own community that will make this Visitor Center a home-grown place to explore and learn."

National Children's Forest is a unique 3,400 acre area of forest between Running Springs and Snow Valley Resort. This parcel of land was set aside after the Bear Fire in 1970 and dubbed the National Children's Forest after a program was set up to replant the area with trees bearing the names of children who contributed. Since then, the forest has been managed with the participation, ideas, and inspiration of the youth volunteers, ages 11 - 17. Their contribution includes the creation of a three-quarter mile Interpretive Trail at the top of Keller Peak Road and a 4.5-mile Exploration Trail.

After serving close to 100,000 visitors, the youth leadership team at National Children's Forest decided in a January 2010 planning meeting it was time for a big change; a complete redesign of the Children's Forest Visitor Information Center. Those big ideas translated into an interactive mural depicting life-size creatures and plant life found in the Children's Forest. For the first time, visitors will be able to view up close the wildlife they could not experience in the forest. The mural, rendered and guided by Big Bear artist, Dee Mundy, will boast real elements from the forest. On display will be live animals, touchable animal pelts, a discovery table and an activity table where visitors can work on crafts or learn about archeology.

As a Visitor Center, guests will still find useful maps of the mountains, brochures, and resource books like field guides. Additionally, the Center is a resource for Adventure Passes, information on trails and

campgrounds, and interpretive programs. Special programs and events such as arts and crafts, guided hikes and snowshoeing will also be available on a scheduled basis. A complete schedule can be obtained at www.nationalforestassociation.org.

As “owners” of the program, Children’s Forest youth volunteers will greet all visitors, manage the operations of the Center, work in the greenhouse, plant trees, conduct recycling programs, maintain trails, lead hikes, and take the lead in community events or special projects like the redesign.

More information will be available on the grand re-opening scheduled Saturday, May 8, 2010. However, the youth team is in crunch mode and can use additional volunteer support and in-kind contributions of materials and cash to keep this project on schedule. To join the effort, please contact Monica Curiel, coordinator volunteer and forest restoration, at 909.382.2773.

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About the National Forest Association (NFA):

The National Forest Association, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization and key partner to the U.S. Forest Service, is committed to three initiatives addressing conservation/restoration, environmental education and responsible recreation. Its mission is accomplished through a year-round portfolio of programming aimed at reaching Southern California’s inland urban, mountain communities and visitor populations on public lands. Through partnerships and a strong volunteer backbone network, the NFA brings communities of people, partners and funding resources to important public lands projects focused on health, stewardship and sustainability. Visit www.SBNFA.org.