

Amigos de los Rios: The Emerald Necklace

An Environmental Justice Grant Success Story

Project Overview

Amigos de los Rios, a non-profit organization that works to create vibrant communities in collaboration with local governments, businesses and residents and to bring renewed life to urban neighborhoods, developed local Emerald Necklace Action Teams comprised of residents from five disadvantaged areas within Emerald Necklace Coalition Cities. Community members engaged in a series of Emerald Necklace Action team workshops and events to boost awareness of the link between public health and environmental health. Amigos de los Rios developed culturally relevant workshops and organized outdoor stewardship days to provide proactive ways for community members of all ages to engage in improving their local environment.



The goal of the Action team is to inspire community members to improve basic environmental quality in Emerald Necklace cities and learn about green infrastructure related jobs that can boost the economy and their communities' environmental health.

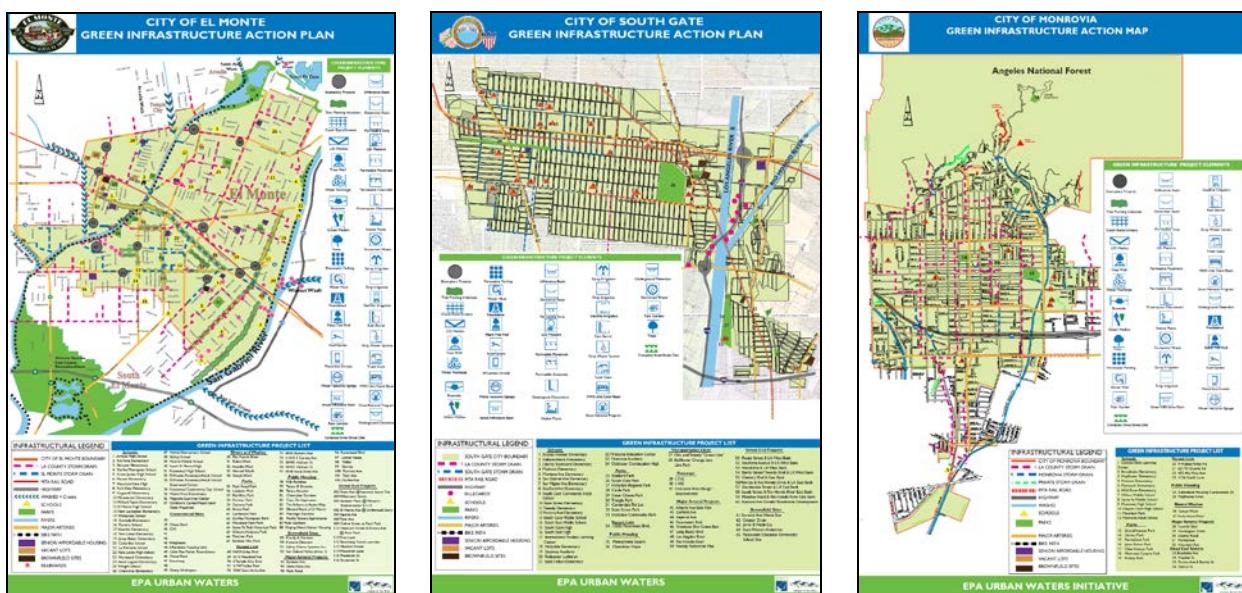
The Community

The communities of focus for this project, funded by a \$25,000 [Environmental Justice Small Grant from EPA](#), were disadvantaged areas within five Emerald Necklace Coalition Cities: El Monte, South El Monte, South Gate, Monrovia, and Downey. The Emerald Necklace ties local environmental justice issues to regionally significant concerns regarding air quality, water quality, urban forestry and greenhouse gas emissions, heat island challenges and public health challenges faced in the Eastside of Los Angeles County.



Project Description

In 2010, Amigos de los Rios completed a comprehensive set of Emerald Necklace Action Team tools including workshop agendas and curricula, and an initial exhibit of posters on the Emerald Necklace, Benefits of Urban Forestry & the Environmental Challenges that the communities face, (with an accompanying community survey). Posters and a Face Book page announcing the Spring Schedule of Emerald Necklace Action Team Events were created to update the community about the three workshops in each Action Team community. The workshops were as follows: 1) Mapping Your Community's Environmental Challenges and Opportunities; 2) Urban Forestry Benefits and Community Forestry Tree Indexing; 3) Green Infrastructure, Job Opportunities, and Projects.



Amigos de los Rios also worked with Coalition member agencies to support expansion of the Emerald Necklace by bringing on a group of school districts. In addition, Amigos de los Rios supported existing city coalition members by providing opportunities for the Action Teams to

engage in the Green Infrastructure process and support agencies in developing greener infrastructure projects regionally



The Results

Amigos de los Rios hosted a culminating summit where action team members from various communities came together and discovered a new part of their watershed within the forest. The regional natural area used to boost awareness of regional resources and focus on how the community can collaborate to protect the watershed, develop and provide stewardship for the Emerald Necklace.

In an effort to support the expansion of the Emerald Necklace Vision Plan, Amigos de los Rios researched grants to include the Gateway Cities and worked with related public agencies to support development of additional multi benefit projects in disadvantaged areas. Amigos de los Rios received a grant from the Strategic Growth Council.

Amigos de los Rios created multi lingual workshop curricula based on the environmental challenges faced by urban communities. The goal of the workshop was to highlight the benefits

of green infrastructure to protect public health and quality of life for urban residents. Full scheduled workshops, and volunteer action days throughout the months of February, March, April, May and June were successful due to the face book page announcing the schedule of ongoing Emerald Necklace Action Team and Stewardship Events. Local Districts helped to engage students, parents, principals, school staff, and community group members at key schools within the communities facing lack of open space and recreation access, and air, water quality, and heat island challenges. There were 27 Emerald Necklace Stewardship days that took place between January 1st and July 31st, over 300 residents participated in these events.

Opening of New Doors

Amigos de los Rios successfully worked with Emerald Coalition member agencies to support expansion of the Emerald Necklace Coalition. As a result of the awareness created by the Action teams, elected officials from the Cities of Downey, South Gate, and Monrovia and the Gateway Authority all voted to sign onto the Emerald Necklace Accord and become members of the Emerald Necklace Coalition. Several other Cities and School Districts have become aware of and interested in joining as they see the tangible benefits of engaging citizens to create Green Infrastructure within their communities.

What's Next for Amigos de los Rios

Amigos de los Rios will continue its efforts to support the Emerald Necklace Action Team as a required movement to protect public and environmental health as well as support workshops and volunteer action days throughout the region.



AMIGOS DE LOS RIOS KEY RESULTS

- 27 Emerald Necklace Stewardship days that took place between January 1st and July 31st: Over 300 residents participated in these events
- Expansion of the Emerald Necklace Coalition and the engagement in the Green Infrastructure process
- Well attended multi lingual workshop curricula based on input gathered in community surveys, which included a poster exhibit on the Emerald Necklace: featuring Environmental Challenges faced by the urban communities and Benefits of Green infrastructure to Protect Public Health and Quality of Life for Urban Residents.

To learn more about the Emerald Necklace, please visit Amigos de los Rios, or contact Claire Robinson, Project Leader, at (626) 676-5027 or claire@amigosdelosrios.org.