

Endangered Species Young Workers Labor To Save Salamander Habitat



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Photos By Bill Lovejoy



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What do 50 formerly-unemployed youths and a rare endangered species of lizard have in common?

For the answer to that question, it's necessary to journey to La Selva Beach's Ellicott Pond, where 50 members of the California Conservation Corps are laboring to save the habitat of the endangered Santa Cruz long-toed salamander.

The Santa Cruz salamander, for those whose memories have dimmed, was the subject of special federal, state and county legislation that set aside both Ellicott Pond and Valencia Lagoon in Rio Del Mar as protected areas. The idea is to safeguard the route taken by the diminutive beasts as they head for their breeding ponds during warm, rainy nights in fall and winter.

Several Cabrillo College students were engaged in a similar effort earlier this year, but the State Department of Fish and Game had grandiose plans for restoring the two areas that went beyond the students' capabilities.

So the CCC, the \$10-million brainchild of Gov. Edmund G. Brown Jr., was tabbed for the task, as part of its mission to protect, develop and enhance California's natural resources.

After being on the job for a few weeks, the CCC workers and the hidden salamanders were visted Tuesday by several state officials, including State Senator Jerry Smith (D-Santa Clara County), who authored the CCC legislation, and wanted to see the practical results of his lawmaking.

After surveying two of the three 10-person crews hard at work digging ditches, building fences, controlling erosion, mulching and re-seeding, Smith admitted, "I'm very impressed. Fish and Game just didn't have the personnel to do this, and this project incorporates everything I had in mind when I wrote the bill. It combines physical work, constructive to and in support of the environment, with teaching of the work ethic. You have to

break a sweat doing this kind of work."

The 18 women and 32 men, all between the ages of 18 and 20, would certainly agree with Smith. "It's good for the soul," said 18-year-old CCC worker Chris Effken. "Most of the crew has realized it needs to be done, and it's nice to put an area back to the way it's supposed to be."

The corps members are cutting down eucalyptus trees and pampas grass that tend to retard the natural chapparal that surrounds the flat (and dry) pond.

LeRoy Chatfield, CCC director, was also in attendance. He noted, "This is one of the more significant projects we're involved in because it deals with protection of an endangered species. That gives it a special quality."

The other special thing, according to Smith, Chatfield and other observers, is the "esprit de corps" exhibited by the CCC workers. "This is giving young people a good feeling and sense about work," enthused Smith. "It will be infectious when they go back home, too."

The three crews, under the direction of Ernie Thompson and project coordinator Eduardo Cuellar, are based at an unused portion of Agnew's State Hospital in Santa Clara. The first crews "spiked out," or camped, on the nearby beach, but currently, the CCC crews are being trucked in and out daily.

Agnew's serves as the base

SC General Plan Panel To Meet

The Santa Cruz City General Plan Committee, the group in charge of designing a new city general plan, will continue its deliberations on three proposals for Santa Cruzes of the future at a meeting Thursday at 7:30 p.m. at the city parks and recreation office, 346 Church St.

The committee will recommend one of its three plans to the city council before the first of the year.

camp for the Santa Cruz, Santa Clara and San Mateo counties area, with the hopes that the workers will be able to help solve both urban and rural problems.

Chatfield reported that the goal is to have 1500 young people enrolled in the program by the end of 1978, spread across eight camps. Currently there are four major bases, located throughout the state.

The salamander crews will have three more weeks of back-breaking labor before moving on to another assignment, but Cuellar promised they would return to finish chores that can't be completed now.

All the state officials encouraged young people to apply for the program by picking up forms at Employment Development Department and Department of Motor Vehicle Offices. The workers are paid \$350 a month to start, with \$90 deducted for room and board. The program is open to any California youth between the ages of 18-20 who has a willingness to

work outdoors and live in a barracks-type situation with other young people.

"We use a random selection process because we have so many applicants," revealed Chatfield. "There are no educational or financial requirements. We have 67 of the 80 Assembly districts represented, with 40 percent of our workers being women, and over 30 percent minorities." Chatfield hopes to get between \$13 and \$14 million from the Legislature for next year's program.

But as CCC worker Wendell

Clemmons noted, "We still haven't seen a salamander yet." Maybe not, but few of the CCC workers seemed willing to trade their jobs of paving the way for the regeneration of the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander.

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