



**Press Release: For Immediate Release**  
**March 8, 2024**

## **CAL FIRE and Partners Celebrate California Arbor Week**

*Community members are encouraged to get out and plant a tree*

**Sacramento, California** – California Department of Forestry & Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and California ReLeaf welcome the support and sponsorship of Edison International and Blue Shield of California to celebrate California Arbor Week, March 7-14, 2024.

This year, Edison International donated \$50,000 to California ReLeaf for California Arbor Week Grants—a community led tree planting grant program offered by California ReLeaf with support from CAL FIRE and the USFS. Blue Shield of California sponsored the Arbor Week Youth Art Contest, coordinated by California ReLeaf in partnership with CAL FIRE. This grant funding will go directly to supporting community urban forestry programs across the state.

“We are thrilled and grateful to work with so many partners to celebrate Arbor Week,” said Cindy Blain, Executive Director of California ReLeaf. “It’s heartening to see how communities come together during Arbor Week and beyond to recognize the value of our urban forests and work collaboratively to plant and care for trees. Arbor Week is a great reminder of the powerful role trees have in building climate resilience, community connection, and improving public health.”

To kick off the statewide celebration of California Arbor Week, a press conference was held at Compton Creek Natural Park, where the 2024 Arbor Week Grant and Youth Art Contest award winners were announced. Also, LA Conservation Corps, a 2024 Arbor Week Grant recipient, highlighted their urban greening project at Compton Creek Natural Park and led a ceremonial tree planting with community partners.

“The LA Conservation Corps opened Compton Creek Natural Park to provide greenspace for the school next door and for the families in the neighborhood,” said Wendy Butts, Chief Executive Officer of LA Conservation Corps. “Arbor Week is the perfect occasion to bring our community together to plant trees that will stand for generations.”

Through Edison International's sponsorship of the 2024 Arbor Week Grant Program, California ReLeaf provided 11 tree-planting grants to nonprofit and community groups in Southern California to combat extreme heat events. Edison International and public health officials recognize that extreme heat events greatly impact population health and that trees are vital in mitigating the urban heat island effect.

"California ReLeaf is at the forefront of creating a greener and healthier California through impactful programs, advocacy, and commitment to trees and community engagement. Edison International is proud to sponsor the Arbor Week tree planting grants for the sixth consecutive year," said Alex Esparza, Principal Manager of Corporate Philanthropy and Community Engagement for Southern California Edison. "Trees play a crucial role in creating healthy communities by purifying the air we breathe, providing sanctuary for wildlife, and nurturing the green spaces where neighbors gather and connect, fostering both physical and mental well-being. We must continue to raise awareness about the impact of climate change on our daily lives and how our collective action in planting trees can make a difference."

Blue Shield of California sponsored the California Arbor Week Youth Poster Contest to help educate and inspire the next generation of tree champions about the importance of growing and protecting our urban forests. This year's theme was "I ❤️ Trees Because..." The annual art contest encourages school children ages 5-12 to think about the many ways trees benefit community health. Contest winners were announced, and their artwork was unveiled during the press conference.

"We can't have healthy people living on an unhealthy planet. Unhealthy air quality is driving more people to seek care than ever before," said Baylis Beard, Director of Sustainability at Blue Shield of California. "Trees are healthcare. Trees purify our air and combat climate change, cool our streets and cities, bring people together, and provide comfort from stress. Our recent nationwide study showed 44% of youth surveyed are struggling with climate anxiety. Blue Shield of California is proud to support the California Arbor Week Youth Artist Contest and efforts to empower our youth to take meaningful action to address the climate crisis."

California Arbor Week has the ongoing support of the USDA Forest Service and CAL FIRE. Both agencies support community tree planting in urban areas of California through grant funding, education, and technical expertise on an ongoing basis.

"Last year, the Forest Service announced the award of \$43.2 million to the state of California and \$102.87 million to cities, counties, non-profits, and schools to support our urban and community forests and people—funding made possible by the Inflation Reduction Act," said Miranda Hutten, Urban and Community Forestry Program Manager for the Pacific Southwest Region of the Forest Service. "This historic investment

recognizes the value of urban forests to build equity, support public health, increase climate resilience, and connect communities. This Arbor Week celebration, we want to acknowledge the partners who support this vision and the people greening our neighborhoods across the region."

"California's urban trees offer shade from heat, purify our air and water, and promote well-being," said CAL FIRE State Urban Forester, Walter Passmore. "Arbor Week celebrates their benefits and encourages tree planting and care so that everyone can access their essential services."

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#### **Media Notes:**

**California Department of Forestry & Fire Protection:** As part of the department's mission, CAL FIRE is charged with protecting California's forests by maintaining the sustainability of the state's natural resources, including both urban and wildland forests. CAL FIRE is encouraging everyone to be a part of California Arbor Week by planting a tree. It's important that you carefully plan before you plant a tree to ensure that your tree is drought-tolerant and properly placed to avoid growing into power lines, buildings, or other infrastructure. Get more planting tips on the CAL FIRE website at [www.fire.ca.gov](http://www.fire.ca.gov).

**The USDA Forest Service** manages 18 national forests in the Pacific Southwest Region, which encompasses over 20 million acres across California, and assists state, and private and Tribal forest landowners in California, Hawaii, and the U.S.-affiliated Pacific Islands. National forests supply 50 percent

of the water in California and form the watershed of most major aqueducts and more than 2,400 reservoirs throughout the state. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

**California ReLeaf** supports grassroots efforts and builds strategic partnerships that protect, enhance, and grow California's urban and community forests. California Arbor Week runs March 7 - 14 each year. For more on all California ReLeaf's statewide urban forest community development program, please visit <http://californiareleaf.org/>

**LA Conservation Corps** is an environmentally focused youth development non-profit organization. By offering paid work experience on green community projects, innovative education & training programs, and barrier removal services, the Corps strives to build resilience in the youth and young adults of Los Angeles and in the neighborhoods they call home. Please visit <https://www.lacorps.org/> to learn more.

**Blue Shield of California:** Blue Shield of California strives to create a healthcare system worthy of its family and friends that is sustainably affordable. Blue Shield of California is a tax paying, nonprofit, independent member of the Blue Shield Association with more than 4.8 million members, over 7,500 employees and more than \$24 billion in annual revenue. Founded in 1939 in San Francisco and now headquartered in Oakland, Blue Shield of California and its affiliates provide health, dental, vision, Medicaid and Medicare healthcare service plans in California. The company has contributed more than \$97 million to Blue Shield of California Foundation in the last three years to have an impact on California communities. For more news about Blue Shield of California, please visit [news.blueshieldca.com](https://news.blueshieldca.com). Or follow us on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), or [Facebook](#).