

TreePeople

2021

IMPACT REPORT

MARCH 2022



Executive Summary

2021 was a year of change, challenge and opportunity not only for TreePeople, but everyone across the city, county and state. We greeted the new year with changes in Washington, D.C. that impacted all Americans, and the arrival of a vaccine less than one year after COVID-19 was declared a pandemic. Nonetheless, this continued to be the headline.

Though early 2021 brought sporadic moments of hope and progress with regards to COVID-19, spikes and high transmission rates of the Delta and Omicron variants deeply impacted opportunities for robust engagement and volunteer events. Fortunately, community engagement is at the core of TreePeople's work and our team of organizers who have spent many hours dedicating time and effort to

establishing deep community connections and trust where they work.

And as a community, we persevered. In the first half of 2021, TreePeople was able to move forward and slowly expand our work on Building Resilience in Los Angeles County across every dimension of our core program areas. By utilizing our online presence and slowly opening our programs to volunteers, we were able to gain momentum in achieving our goals and meeting 2021 with vigilance and compassion. Our primary goals continued to center and support:

1) EQUITY Activating community authentically around fun and viable natural solutions to climate change and resilience by working in TreePeople Bright Spots -Northeast San Fernando Valley, Southeast Los Angeles, South Los Angeles, Santa Monica Mountains and the Angeles National Forest.

2) URBAN GREENING Expanding nature-based urban greening strategies in our Bright Spots that help address the complex issues that leave communities vulnerable to climate change

effects, negative public health outcomes, economic instability, and other disturbances manmade and natural;

3) WILDFIRE Implementing adaptation and mitigation best practices that address our new fire reality and inspire community members in the local mountain forest systems to make the necessary behavior changes to act as stewards of their local lands;

4) CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION (SCHOOLS) Continuing to inspire students, teachers, schools and districts, with a love of nature, an understanding of environmental aggressors and the know-how of accessible climate solutions through our evidence-based environmental education focused programs that include our experiential Eco Tours, School Greening, Outdoor Classrooms, Generation Earth, Teacher Training and Youth Leadership Eco Clubs; (New addition: [Learn At Home](#))

5) POLICY AND RESEARCH Connecting the dots to our other tree and water work through research and policy changes to create an integrated “Green (trees)-Blue (water)-Brown (soils) Urban Infrastructure” for a more climate-resilient future.

We invite you to read more about each of these, and join us in this effort to create transformative change at the community, county and statewide level.



Equity

TreePeople was able to reach out and engage with more local community members, community-based organizations, agencies, leaders and other key stakeholders in low income, environmentally stressed areas of Los Angeles County with the help of our communications team, community organizers, and utilization of online platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and our newly developed online programming.

In 2021, 4,500 volunteers participated in TreePeople events and/or assisted with projects.

Disadvantaged Community Involvement Program (DAC-IP) WaterTalks: Building on the success of 2020, TreePeople continued to help facilitate the Disadvantaged Community Involvement Program (DAC-IP) WaterTalks, which is focused on generating and increasing community involvement in planning a sustainable water future for California through education workshops, conducting LA's largest water equity needs assessment, and involving community in water infrastructure project planning and implementation. TreePeople guides and supports the 12 community-based environmental justice partners implementing the work in 107 underserved communities across LA.

Through this program TreePeople and its partners conducted over 30 community education workshops and listening sessions in state-defined Disadvantaged Communities. TreePeople provided much needed technical assistance to the community-based organizations we work with on this project—demystifying the water infrastructure system so that these organizations are empowered to advocate for



their communities around water quality, water infrastructure, flooding, lack of green space, etc. and drive more resources to addressing water justice issues. They include: Eastyards, Communities for A Better Environment, Promesa Boyle Heights, ActiveSGV, Social Justice Learning Institute, Watts, Blight Patrol, Social Eco Education, Trust South LA, and Mujeres De La Tierra.

In addition, TreePeople worked closely with our indigenous tribal partner Sacred Places Institute (SPI). We supported SPI in hosting a Water Justice training that shared how to be an ally to indigenous tribes and was hosted by top native women working on water issues in the State. The shift to digital meetings was made within weeks of the Safer at Home orders, with TreePeople and partners able to continue community engagement using online tools despite the difficult circumstances.

TreePeople also launched Los Angeles' first ever water equity needs assessment in 2021. Using a number of outreach strategies, TreePeople connected to communities all over Los Angeles County and asked them to **complete surveys** aimed at identifying areas where community-

based water quality projects are needed and what kind would be appropriate. Our teams gathered a record 2,000+ surveys from underserved community members across Los Angeles aimed at helping stakeholders identify pressing needs and challenges that could be addressed through water infrastructure projects. Due to the pandemic we adapted greatly in our organizing methods. We began to employ more organizing through: phone banking, texting, newsletters, social media, showing up to virtual gatherings, doing in person canvassing at food bank lines and on the streets with people experiencing homelessness. We called over 2,000 people, texted over 120,000 and sent newsletters to 40,000.

The Safe, Clean Water Program (SCWP):

established with the passage of Measure W by Los Angeles County voters in 2018, created a comprehensive, regional plan to address how we capture water and how we can reduce our reliance on imported water. The program provides funding for increased stormwater and urban runoff capture, and reduced stormwater and urban runoff pollution. The overarching purpose of these activities is to improve water quality, increase water supply and enhance communities.

Public lecture series: In 2021, we launched a public lecture series called **T.R.E.E Talks**, which we spent the later part of 2020 designing and building the necessary infrastructure. The series focuses on and addresses a variety of environmental issues that impact many communities in Los Angeles and beyond, including wildfires, clean water as a right, shade and urban heat, and the future of parks and open spaces. T.R.E.E. Talks aim to advance discussions to effect equitable solutions at the local, state, and global level.

Our first talk in February 2021 entitled, “*Climate Change from the Streets*” had 550 (265 live) unduplicated views. Angelo Logan from the Campaign Director for the Moving Forward

Network and Co-founder of East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice, Mariana Del Valle Prieto Cervantes a Clean Water and Ocean Advocate at Green Latinos, Dr. Michael Mendez an Assistant professor of environmental policy and planning at the University of California, Irvine, Rev. Mac Shorty who founded the Community Repower Movement, and our CEO Cindy Montañez discussed how environmental protection and improving public health are environmental justice issues and inextricably linked.

Mental Health: TreePeople also began to branch out into the mental health sector, starting to develop what is currently called TreePeople’s Mental Health Program. The program is designed to be twofold: (1) working directly with mental health clinicians towards integrating our tree plantings and access to nature and the outdoors more into clinical work and (2) combining mental health practices and research around the impacts of nature on mental health more directly into TreePeople’s programming, focusing primarily on our urban Bright Spot communities. We also plan to offer forest bath experiences out in the Santa Monica Mountains at our TreePeople Land Trust, formerly known as Mountains Restoration Trust.

Coldwater Canyon Park: And after a year closed to the public due to COVID-19, TreePeople opened our Coldwater Canyon Park to the public during Earth Week. We slowly started offering inclusive, intergenerational **guided park activities** such as 1) On-Site Private Family Tours which are private Eco-tours that include a guided one hour adventure and an optional nature craft activity and 2) Public Moonlight Hikes where the public can explore our trails after dark. Though our goal was to offer more environmentally focused programming and cultural events as restrictions were fully lifted, the resurgence has suspended such activities until state, local and federal guidance indicate resumed operations are safe.

Urban Greening

Our Urban Forestry program supports underserved communities with the inspiration, education, and tools they need to create green neighborhoods and become resilient in the face of climate impacts based on their needs. Throughout the granting period, we continued to connect with our Bright Spot Communities through fruit tree distributions, tree planting, tree care, and educational outreach events, forging local resilience.



With the arrival of Spring 2021 and vaccination rates rising in Los Angeles County, we were able to host more fruit tree distributions, tree planting, tree care, and educational outreach events in our Bright Spots communities found in South Los Angeles, Southeast Los Angeles, and Northeast San Fernando Valley—all of which are frontline communities affected by industrial pollution and food insecurity. Bright Spots activity is ongoing but is strongly guided by multiple safety measures TreePeople has adopted during the pandemic. This includes a requirement that all staff is fully vaccinated.

We planted 1,220 trees in our bright spot communities. In addition, just under 2,000 fruit trees were distributed to residents to plant at home. Planting these trees is beneficial to the local communities because they absorb CO₂ that accelerates climate change while releasing oxygen back into the air and also help cool their neighborhoods with their canopy shade by up to 10°F.

We also began our tree planting and community outreach and education in Watts which is facilitated by State of California's Strategic Growth Council (SGC) Transformative Climate Communities grants. Our work in Watts is part of the larger Watts Rising program, which includes at least \$35M in funding for green infrastructure, affordable housing and public transportation improvements. We also ramped up to begin work in Riverside as part of the Eastside Climate Collaborative, a broad community-based effort with the City of Riverside, community stakeholders and regional partners and includes at least \$30M in funding for green infrastructure, affordable housing and public transportation improvements.

As an example, under the Watts Rising program, TreePeople is partnering with the Watts community to plant and care for at least 700 street trees, distribute at least 500 residential trees, and 112 trees in schools. Street tree planting will prioritize shading of key pedestrian corridors linking the Metro 103rd St. A Line Station with housing developments and other community resources. Tree planting will also be planned and implemented in coordination with the development of the Watts Cultural Crescent Trail, a pathway network leading from the Watts Towers that will feature interpretive signage and community-based art installations. TreePeople's street planting area includes the Watts Cultural Crescent Trail.



Wildfire

In 2021, our work in the mountain forests of Angeles National Forest and Santa Monica Mountains on wildfire restoration and resiliency went well and we exceeded our planting, care, and restoration management goals for the year—planting and caring for over 25,000 trees and plants. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions, TreePeople started 2021 a little behind on projections regarding volunteer engagement and participation. Volunteer events have been limited to groups under 10 people, half the number originally anticipated. Additional training of new Volunteer Supervisors has also been impacted due to social distancing rules.

Angeles National Forest: With help from our volunteer supervisors and Long Beach Conservation Corps, TreePeople continued our work in the Angeles National Forest (ANF). We

spent much of the early part of 2021 maintaining—weeding and watering—the recently planted endangered, native species, *Berberis nevinnii*, at 10 sites in the area around the Copper Fire burn site located in the San Francisquito Canyon. During the first rounds of maintenance, a lot of attention was given to building proper watering basins—berms—to enhance water capture and retention, and facilitate the work of future waterings because of pending expected drought conditions in the summer and fall. The goals of the project are to increase the area’s resiliency and health and to protect the area from future disturbances such as wildfire.

For our Powerhouse Fire Reforestation - Oak Propagation project in the Angeles National Forest, we propagated over 3,500 seedlings in our nursery from the 7,389 acorns we collected in the Fall of 2020 consisting of black oak, coast live oak, interior live oak, blue oak, scrub oak and canyon live oak from the Powerhouse Fire scar area. In total, we planted over 10,000 native trees, shrubs and grasses

in the Angeles National Forest and Santa Monica Mountains, which included restoration plantings in the Powerhouse Fire Burn area. All this work was conducted by staff, interns and volunteers and provided the opportunity for additional training regarding nursery protocols, specific management practices regarding oak germination and propagation, and general information on oak species, their characteristics and benefits.

Santa Monica Mountains: This year in the Santa Monica Mountains, we finished planting the last oak seedling propagated in our nursery in late Spring as part of an almost 4,000 tree planting effort at Paramount Ranch and Cheeseboro Canyon in the Santa Monica Mountains which were destroyed by the Woolsey Fire in 2018.

TreePeople Land Trust: TreePeople Land Trust (TPLT) is an accredited land trust affiliated with TreePeople that protects over 3,000 acres of open space land. Based in Calabasas, TPLT is dedicated to protecting the natural and cultural resources of Southern California through habitat restoration, education, land acquisition, trails, and conservation easements. TPLT recently acquired a new 79-acre property in the central Santa Monica Mountains that will serve as an access point for staff, volunteers, scientists, and, eventually, the public at large, to help steward the La Sierra Preserve and the unique plant and animal species that live there. TPLT is currently in negotiations to preserve an additional 750 acres of land throughout Southern California through the help of dedicated partners and the generosity of the community.

Our trails are getting an update! Thanks to our supporters, TPLT has designed and installed new trails signs for the Cold Creek trail system, located just south of Calabasas and offering the solace of quiet oak woodlands and pristine chaparral within view of the Los Angeles Basin. Trail maintenance is a priority for the Land Trust in 2022 as we continue to offer precious open space trails to the public.



Climate & Environmental Education (Schools)

Eco-Tours: In December of 2020, TreePeople began to offer students and their teachers, who were participating in distance learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a virtual option to enjoy our flagship Eco-Tours program. TreePeople staff joins students and teachers virtually and provides a live, guided adventure through Coldwater Canyon Park, part of the Santa Monica Mountains Recreation Areas and the largest urban park in the nation. The tour includes interactive activities that integrate storytelling, songs, riddles, movement and more, providing a unique interactive experience for students. Students are able to virtually see, hear and feel the natural cycles of a forest to understand how those cycles connect back to their own communities, and how they have been disrupted. Students are encouraged to explore their own neighborhoods through physical activity guided by the educator and to participate in service learning programs.

The program offers:

- Virtual tour through the trails at Coldwater Canyon Park led by a TreePeople educator.
- Funds for underserved schools to get Zoom licenses to participate in the program.
- Three age/grade-appropriate sessions offer synchronous learning at its best and connect with NGSS concepts: Kindergarten and 1st grade: “Wonders of the City Forest,” 2nd-4th grade: “Treasures of the City Forest,” and 5th-6th grade: “Solutions of the City Forest.”
- Fun-filled activities that include interactive displays, hands-on learning, native plant

identification and more.

- Supplemental asynchronous BINGO activity sheet.
- Our Magical City Forest [curriculum](#).

During 2021, TreePeople connected virtually and in person with 1,062 students across 44 classrooms.



Learn At Home: We continued our successful online environmental education programs [Learn At Home with TreePeople \(LAH\)](#). Learn At Home with TreePeople is an interactive multilingual online program aimed to support kids, teachers, parents, and families through engaging content covering a wide range of topics that include the STEM curriculum as well TreePeople’s award-winning Eco Tours in nature. This virtual curriculum addresses the millions who are faced with indefinite, limited access to dynamic education videos and activities. LAH combines elements from our award winning programming and offers them as videos and live zoom lessons - available on smartphones and

computer platforms - to students and adults of all ages in both English and Spanish. Our Learn At Home offerings are promoted and viewed via our newsletter and social media platforms. The content lives on our website [via youtube](#) so people can access past episodes.

Generation Earth: We renewed our contract with the LA County Public Works-funded Generation Earth program. For the past 23 years, TreePeople has worked alongside educators to provide environmental service learning training and providing approximately 15,000 students from Palmdale to Long Beach—all across Los Angeles County—with fun, stem focused environmental learning labs. Our Generation Earth Youth Leadership Coordinator’s support and equip youth with action-based environmental knowledge, tools and guidance tailored to their needs. TreePeople’s effective teacher/student toolkits meet California’s Next Generation Science Standards, building critical skills necessary for future academic attainment, shape long-term career choices, and strengthen resilience in historically environmentally and economically stressed communities.

In 2021, we worked with teachers to engage 10,657 students through 308 classroom projects—virtually and when possible in person—highlighting high-quality, hands-on activities and projects that focus on:

- **Recycling** – An interactive activity that encourages students to identify different waste materials in their home and differentiate what is recyclable.
- **Composting** – A virtual workshop that focuses on how students can compost at home, school and in their community.
- **Native Plants** – A virtual presentation that focuses on why native plants are an essential part of conserving water and restoring a healthy ecosystem in LA County. This interactive presentation familiarizes students with solutions to environmental problems in LA County.

- **Water Pollution and Prevention** – A virtual presentation that explores water pollution and prevention in LA County. Students will learn about water pollution and carrying out water-related projects at home, on their campus and in their community.
- **Waste in the Fashion Industry** – A virtual presentation that explores waste reduction in the fashion industry. Students will learn the difference between synthetic and natural fibers as well as the impact each has on the environment. Students will also be inspired to host community drives and textile recycling events on their campus or in their community.

LAUSD Collaborative: In the 2020-2021 academic year, the Environmental Education Department had the opportunity to engage in a ground-breaking STEM collaborative with the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) in the fall semester bringing our Generation Earth programming into the homes of elementary and middle school youth across the County to connect them to the outdoors. We provided STEM education lessons as part of Expand LA, ensuring students were receiving lessons aligned with the Next-Generation Science Standards (NGSS). In 2021, TreePeople collaborated with over 50 teachers to provide live virtual lessons on Trees, Water and Waste as well as asynchronous curricular content while ensuring the learning was fun, using the outdoors as a conduit for learning. In addition to supporting the critical in-class learning time, Our 13-week 2021 spring semester after **school enrichment program** utilized best practices and models of learning to help youth connect to the environment and their communities, which is especially important after months of virtual instruction that allowed limited time for students to socialize and build relationships with peers and caring adults.

Policy & Research

Our Healthy Soils for Healthy Communities: Our Healthy Soils for Healthy Communities Initiative worked with soil experts from around the world to determine the current status of Los Angeles's urban soil health based on the completed urban soil survey in the County of Los Angeles. From our research, we have put together some materials to share with the public:

- **Final Report.**
- **Website dedicated to the project.**
- **Soil One-pager.**
- **A soil blog** titled “Soil: Brown Infrastructure for Community Resilience”, by Yujuan Chen, (published on Medium).
- **Two abstracts** have been accepted for the 2020 Soil Science Society of America (SSSA) annual conference:
 - Healthy Soils, Healthy Communities: What Does It Mean to “Think Big” When Engaging a City with Its Soils?
 - Understanding the Relationship between People and Soil in Cities: Results from a Behavioral Soil Survey in Los Angeles
- **Los Angeles Soil Toolkit** that we hope to use in our environmental education programs.
- **Spanish Los Angeles Soil Toolkit** that we hope to use in our environmental education programs.
- **Healthy Soils Infographic.**

Los Angeles' Urban Forest Research Project:

Additionally, our team conducted the Planting Resilience: Assessing Vulnerabilities and Benefits of LA's Urban Forest research project. The project has been implementing five distinct but related projects aimed at advancing the state of

knowledge of L.A.'s urban forest as it currently exists, in support of employing approaches to optimize the urban forest's ability to serve as an ally in the existential race to beat climate change. For example, in one project, a thermal sensor network was installed for the empirical data collection component of the study. Participants were recruited via TreePeople's network of contacts, and interested applicants were asked to fill out a **Google Form**. Eight households in southeast Los Angeles neighborhoods were selected from 35 community scientist applicants. In addition, we have moved to a critical phase of GIS analysis after having developed a tiered model/prescription for various infrastructure and policy interventions needed to support canopy equity within the region using select case studies around Los Angeles County. The latest publication to come out of this project is the **Los Angeles Urban Forest Equity Assessment Report**, which found that funding is a critical component in addressing the historically derived, inequitable distribution of the City's urban forest. Further, it put forward the following recommendations to address the City's tree canopy inequities:

- Trees as inclusive infrastructure
- Equitable financing
- Maintenance and co-ownership
- Building multi-generational coalitions
- Reclaiming the Right-Of-Way





Final Thoughts

Despite the ongoing COVID-19 barriers in 2021, we have remained ‘essential workers’ and have not stopped striving to achieve our vision of a resilient Los Angeles. We carried on planting hundreds of trees on barren, hot streets in our most vulnerable communities; and in those same communities safely distributed hundreds of free fruit trees; we joined forces with hundreds of teachers and thousands of students to deliver high-quality environmental education while also helping teachers to cope with distance learning; we successfully organized thousands to engage in Los Angeles’ first ever water equity needs assessment; and we restored acres of wildfire scarred areas even as California went through another devastating year of wildfires.

With the expansion of our virtual infrastructure in 2021 and launch of new online programming such as Virtual Eco-Tours and T.R.E.E. Talks and expansion of our communications strategies across our social media platforms including **Tik Tok**, we have seen many new faces join our movement. From December 2020 to the end of 2021, our engagement on Facebook grew from 1,976 to 7,354 a month while our Instagram followers rose from 21.7K to 25.9K and Youtube from 2350 to 3.17K.

Overall, our programs continue to increase engagement and involvement among local residents, community-based organizations, and agencies—particularly those from frontline communities of color. We worked diligently in the later part of 2021 to strengthen our community engagement and outreach programs by both hiring more individuals from the communities that we serve and identifying and championing allies who can connect us to the appropriate local networks.

We found that by developing our programming around our community-centered model focused on elevating the human capital and resources within the neighborhoods we serve, we can make real improvements in our most vulnerable communities and help nature heal communities. Adopting simple strategies such as authentic partnership building centered on listening first, equity, hiring community members, and providing multilingual and culturally relevant engagement has the ability to deepen resilience.

By continuing in 2021 to advance our own capacity, infrastructure, and programming we have been able to expand our influence thoughtfully and engage with more local community members, community-based organizations, agencies, leaders and other key stakeholders in low income, environmentally stressed areas of Los Angeles County.

In 2022, TreePeople will expand our work with interested individuals, youth, local government and community-based organizations across Los Angeles County and beyond to adopt and replicate our innovative practices in tree planting and care, fire restoration, and adoption of green infrastructure such as stormwater capture, drought tolerant lawn retrofits, and other water-wise practices. Our goal is to unite and inspire individuals, urban leaders, local agencies, youth, and other stakeholders to collaboratively find solutions to the issues that challenge the environmental health and wellbeing of their neighborhoods including (especially) environmental justice concerns and to implement nature-based strategies through a shared vision of a resilient world.

****All Photos in the report were taken by Adam Corey Thomas of TreePeople*

