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**TWELVE GRADUATE FROM USFS AND BACK TO NATIVES RESTORATION  
VOLUNTEER TRAINING PROGRAM**

**IRVINE, Calif., August 4, 2008** – **Back to Natives Restoration**, in a cooperative agreement with the United States Forest Service in the Cleveland National Forest, led a nine month long hands-on training course for restoration volunteers. Twelve individuals graduated from the program. Program participants put in a total of 550.5 hours of volunteer time during the class. Graduates are eligible to lead volunteer groups in the National Forest.

Ecological restoration is a means of sustaining the diversity of life on Earth and reestablishing healthy ecosystems. Successful habitat restoration ensures that native species are protected while non-native species are removed with minimal impact. Nationwide, invasive plants cost us an estimated \$33 billion per year. Invasive plants degrade wildlife habitat – they are the second-greatest threat to endangered species, after habitat destruction.

Participants learned how to remove invasive non-native plant species using tools rather than herbicides. They learned how to keep themselves and others safe in the field, how to manage restoration volunteers, and how to identify native and non-native plants.

“This program represents an amazing amount of cooperation between agencies,” said Back to Natives Director of Restoration Reginald Durant. “Back to Natives worked with the USFS, the County of Orange, and private non-profits like the Audubon Starr Ranch Sanctuary. Attendees hailed from a number of organizations, including the El Dorado Nature Center, the Sierra Club, the Silverado-Modjeska Recreation & Park District, and the Donna O’Neill Land Conservancy. It’s promising to see so many different agencies working together toward a common goal.”

Individuals interested in attending the next series of classes, which begin on September 27, can download a registration form at [www.backtonatives.org/usfs.htm](http://www.backtonatives.org/usfs.htm). Volunteers from all wildland agencies, organizations and non-profits are welcome to participate, and then share their new knowledge and skills with others.

Back to Natives strives to involve the community in the process of ecological restoration and conservation because it believes that a little "ecological enlightenment" and a chance to "get your hands dirty" is the best way to improve relations between people and nature.

About Back to Natives

Back to Natives Restoration, a 501(c)(3) non profit organization, is dedicated to the restoration and conservation of Orange County and California wildlands, through education and restoration programs featuring native plants as a centralizing theme. For more information, please visit [www.backtonatives.org](http://www.backtonatives.org) or call 949-509-4787.

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