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**OC WILD PRESENTS BACK TO NATIVES RESTORATION WITH
LANDSTEWARD OF THE YEAR AWARD**

IRVINE, Calif., August 4, 2008 – **Back to Natives Restoration** was this year’s recipient of the Orange County Wild “Landsteward of the Year” Award. The award was presented to Back to Natives Director of Restoration Reginald Durant by OC Wild representative and USFS Wilderness and Trails Manager Debra Clarke.

“This award affirms Back to Natives’ commitment to restoring Orange County wildlands through service learning and volunteer based habitat restoration programs,” said Durant. “We strive to involve the community in the process of ecological restoration because when people ‘get their hands dirty’ it helps them to see their own connections to and affects on the natural world around them.”

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 non-native 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.

Back to Natives worked with Earth Resource Foundation and community volunteers to restore a portion of Jeronimo Creek in Mission Viejo. Back to Natives is also working with Earthroots Field School on an oak restoration service learning project at Caspers Wilderness Park in San Juan Capistrano. Students from local junior high and high schools will participate in a nine month long service learning project with Back to Natives at Mason Regional Park in Irvine beginning in September. In a cooperative agreement with the USFS in the Cleveland National Forest, Back to Natives provides hands on training for restoration volunteers, who – after a nine month training class – go on to lead volunteers in habitat restoration projects in the National Forest.

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.

About Orange County Wild

Orange County Wild is a coalition of Orange County wilderness land managers and stewards, including state, county and city park systems, and public conservancy groups devoted to educating the public about the importance of preserving, protecting and enhancing wildland resources including forest, park and reserve resources, from the mountains to the Pacific. For more information, please visit www.ocwild.org.

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