



Press Release: For Immediate Release
March 7, 2023

CAL FIRE and Partners Celebrate California Arbor Week with Grants for Tree Planting and Tree Care Educational Events

SACRAMENTO, California – California Department of Forestry & Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), the USDA 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, 2023. This year, \$50,000 in Arbor Week community tree-planting grants were made possible with Edison’s partnership, while Blue Shield is the new sponsor of the Arbor Week Youth Art Contest. Arbor Week Grants will fund 10 projects organized by community groups and nonprofits who are actively working to make their communities greener, healthier, and stronger with urban trees. CAL FIRE and the USFS are not recipients of these grants.

California’s trees matter—especially as we face a changing climate. One way we can build climate-resilient communities is by planting trees. Every tree planted works to pull carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere, clean our air and water, cool our neighborhoods, provide habitat for wildlife, connect communities, and support our health and well-being.

A press conference was held on March 7, 2023, at South Prescott Park in Oakland to honor California Arbor Week and the Arbor Week grantees, as well as to unveil the 2023 Arbor Week Youth Art Contest winners. Following the press conference, a ceremonial Arbor Week tree planting was hosted by local urban forest nonprofit Common Vision with other Oakland community partners.

“We believe that a tree is not just a tree, but a symbol of hope, resilience, and community,” remarked Wanda Stewart, Executive Director of Common Vision. “Our nonprofit and community partners are working tirelessly to bring more green spaces to West Oakland because we understand that a thriving urban environment depends on the health and well-being of its residents. By planting trees and promoting urban greening, we are creating a legacy of sustainability and equity for future generations to enjoy.”

Cindy Blain, Executive Director of California ReLeaf, said, “We are thrilled to work with all these great partners to celebrate California Arbor Week in Oakland. Arbor Week is an annual reminder to pause and celebrate the power of our urban trees and the communities that grow and care for them. Trees are a powerful nature-based solution to fight climate change and make a big difference in improving public health in our cities – and that is worth celebrating!”

California ReLeaf, CAL FIRE, and the USFS welcome the support of Edison International and Blue Shield of California in this important recognition of the value of trees. This year Edison International generously donated \$50,000 for Arbor Week tree planting grants in their region to help combat extreme heat events in Southern California. Edison 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 has the passion and expertise to positively tackle important environmental issues impacting our communities, and Edison International is proud to sponsor the Arbor Week tree planting grants for the fifth consecutive year,” said Alejandro Esparza, Principal Manager of Corporate Philanthropy and Community Engagement for Southern California Edison. “It is important that we continue to raise awareness and address the impacts that climate change has on our daily lives and Arbor Week reminds us that we all can do more to help.”

This year Blue Shield of California is sponsoring the California Arbor Week Youth Poster Contest to help educate and inspire the next generation about the importance of growing and protecting our urban forests. This year’s theme is “Trees Plant a Cooler Future.” The art contest encourages schoolchildren ages 5-12 to think about how trees can help make our communities cooler and healthier. Contest winners were announced, and their artwork was unveiled during the press conference.

“Trees are healthcare,” said Antoinette Mayer, Vice President of Corporate Citizenship at Blue Shield of California. “A robust urban tree canopy improves mental and physical health, combats climate change and pollution, and helps our neighbors build community. But our underserved communities are too often left behind. Blue Shield of California is proud to partner with California ReLeaf to sponsor this year’s California Arbor Week Youth Artist Contest and engage youth in becoming environmental ambassadors to create a more equitable and livable future for all Californians.”

California Arbor Week has the ongoing support of the USFS 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.

“The Forest Service is dedicated to sustaining healthy, resilient forests – from our urban centers to our rural towns,” remarked Deputy Regional Forester Kara Chadwick. “We value the many partnerships of those gathering to commemorate Arbor Day and working across our Region to plant and care for trees that offset carbon emissions, improve community health and wellbeing, and nurture climate-resilient forests for future generations.”

Walter Passmore, CAL FIRE’s State Urban Forester, said, “California’s urban trees provide shelter from extreme heat, clean our air, and water, and soothe our minds and bodies. Trees work every day. Arbor Week is a celebration of all trees do for us and a time to plant or care for trees.”

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Media Notes:

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 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.

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/>

Common Vision: Positioned at the intersection of food, education, and environment, Common Vision (CV) nurtures a more healthy and just society by planting and maintaining fruit tree orchards and school gardens to serve as a foundation for engaged academic learning and environmental conservation. Common Vision create outdoor learning spaces that are essential to growing the whole child, an authentic community, and a healthy planet. For more information, visit <https://www.commonvision.org/>

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 4.7 million members, 7,800 employees, and \$22.9 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 \$192 million to Blue Shield of California Foundation in the last five years to have an impact on California communities.

Edison International: Edison International (NYSE: EIX) is one of the nation's largest electric utility holding companies, providing clean and reliable energy and energy services through its independent companies. Headquartered in Rosemead, California, Edison International is the parent company of Southern California Edison Company, a utility that delivers electricity to 15 million people across Southern, Central and Coastal California. Edison International is also the parent company of Edison Energy LLC, a global energy advisory firm engaged in the business of providing integrated decarbonization and energy solutions to commercial, industrial and institutional customers.