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Volunteers join forces for Earth Week

Community garden, tree planting among activities

Marisa Petrich/Northwest Guardian

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It's great to help out the environment, but this year's Earth Week events at Joint Base Lewis-McChord also helped build community.

People from across the installation came together last week to volunteer a tree planting and work day at the Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation community garden and a cleanup at Solo Point. The events were jointly hosted by JBLM Public Works Directorate and FMWR teams from both Lewis and McChord Field.

"It's a great group of people to be out here," Valerie Elliott, a natural resource planner at Public Works, said of the workers at the community garden on April 19.

Elliott came to help out, but soon she'll have her own garden plot to use for vegetables or anything else she might desire. She lives in a town house, and is looking forward to putting flowers, instead of tomatoes, in her pots at home.

It's an approach that can help both your health and your pocketbook. Vegetables begin losing nutrients as soon as they're picked, sustainability outreach coordinator Miriam Villacian said, so eating them straight from the vine is a huge plus.

"Being able to pick it fresh off and take it home and eat it, it's going to taste a lot better ... it's going to be a lot better for you and it's going to be a lot cheaper," she said.

For Villacian, the community aspect was also key. Getting a plot in a community garden can lead to connections you might not make in your own back yard.

"You have people you can garden with who might share some of your same interests," she said.

Some volunteers discovered common interests, but others were given the chance to discover a whole new place.

"What we found out is a lot of folks don't even know this is here," McChord Field Community Center community activity specialist Colin Brooks said at the Solo Point clean up on April 20.

By participating in the event, Brooks said, many volunteers found a great new spot to enjoy firsthand and gain appreciation for the importance of taking care of it.

Staff Sgt. Michelle Cosgrove, 62nd Airlift Wing, was among them. Originally from Northern California, Cosgrove recently PCS'd back to the West Coast. She spent the afternoon picking up plastic bottles and other trash along the beach.

"I believe community involvement's important, the environment's important," she said. "I'm just trying to do my part."

The contributions are working. Last year's cleanup of the area resulted in a completely full trailer of garbage. This year there were only nine or 10 bags.

"It's kind of nice to see there's less trash here," Brooks said.



Ingrid Barrentine
Senior Airman Michael Lepule, left, and Airman 1st Class Brandon Seeley look for trash along Solo Point April 20.

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In the end, Earth Day is more than just a circled date on the calendar. For many, it's a way of living.

"Earth Day shouldn't be just a day or week out of the year," Elliott said. "It should be something you carry through the rest of the year."

Clean up activities include work day at Solo Point Beach

Spc. Ryan Hallock/28th Public Affairs Detachment

As a true testament of selfless service the Joint Base Lewis-McCord community showed its pride in the environment by cleaning up at Solo Point Beach April 20.

In support of the Family and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation sponsored Earth Day activities, volunteers banded together at the beach to give nature a hand.

The wildlife demanded the trash be removed from its habitat.

"The only way to keep these places beautiful for folks to enjoy is to keep them clean and nice," said Colin Brooks, FMWR community activities specialist. Just minutes away from the Joint Base Lewis-McChord DuPont Gate, this natural treasure of Puget Sound is a place where the community can launch boats, fish and kayak. Ketron Island lay just offshore, providing a dramatic landmark to those unfamiliar to the site.

"The majority of the folks who came to do the clean-up didn't know the beach existed," Brooks said.

The annual cleanup at Solo Point brought more than 40 volunteers to help restore the beach to its natural beauty. Soldiers and Airmen armed with trash bags and litter sticks, spent their afternoon gathering cigarette butts and other trash on the shoreline.

"This year during the cleanup there was a lot less trash," Brooks said. "It's good to see there's an improvement."

The improvement from last year shows the level of respect in the environment that the community has, which has been the ultimate goal, Brooks said.

Clearing the ecosystem of trash is vital for the health of the wildlife living on and offshore at Solo Point.

"The animals surviving here off of this land need a cleaner environment," said Sgt. Glory-Dana Salomon, health care NCO, 66th Military Police Company.

"I did something worthwhile," Salomon said, by stepping up to cut down on pollution during the Earth Day event.

The volunteers paused when the mission was complete, watching the sun illuminate the pristine beach, newly cleared of litter.

More photos from the Earth Week activities *click on the following link:*

Joint Base Lewis-McChord celebrates Earth Week

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