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## **New Nuestro Desierto Program Brings Outdoor Access to the East Coachella Valley** **[Apply NOW](#)**

**COACHELLA, CA (July 25, 2022)** - The Council of Mexican Federations (COFEM) in Coachella announces the new Nuestro Desierto, or “Our Desert”, program to bring increased access to nature and conservation-focused educational opportunities for young people in the Eastern Coachella Valley. Beginning August 20, 2022, Nuestro Desierto will offer opportunities for program participants to receive certification and college credit through the statewide UC California Naturalist program. Programs will be based at the Coachella Library and will include visits to local city parks, day trips to natural areas around the Coachella Valley, and overnight camping at National Parks throughout California.

Nuestro Desierto will be offered in partnership between COFEM, CactusToCloud Institute, the UCR Palm Desert Center, and the UC Agriculture and Natural Resources California Naturalist program. Thanks to grant funding from the California Department of Parks and Recreation, the program will be offered free of charge to participants.

Funding from the Outdoor Equity Program was a highly competitive process, with 384 applications totaling \$167.78 million in requests received by the state. In the end, only 125 applications, totaling \$57 million, were approved. According to California State Parks Director Armando Quintero, “These programs will turn parks into outdoor classrooms, inspiring a new generation of environmental leadership in California.”

The program was developed together with CactusToCloud Institute, a Coachella Valley-based nonprofit working to improve inclusion and climate resilience in desert communities. CactusToCloud will provide continuing support for Nuestro Desierto by assisting with course instruction, developing program materials, and providing natural history expertise for outdoor trips. CactusToCloud will also document the program activities, including photos, videos, and interviews with participants.

Conservation Program Manager, Sendy Hernández Orellana Barrows, shared her excitement for the new project, saying, “growing up, I never knew conservation was a career option, and I am very thankful and proud that I will have the opportunity to help open the conservation door for others in the community.”

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Over the next four years, the program will include 35 activity days in the community for approximately 1,100 participants, and 25 trips to natural areas for approximately 750 participants. Natural area trips will include destinations such as Mount San Jacinto State Park, Boyd Deep Canyon Desert Research Center, Whitewater Preserve and Sand to Snow National Monument, and Channel Islands National Park.

The UC California Naturalist program is designed to introduce Californians to the wonders of our unique ecology, engage the public in the study and stewardship of California's natural communities, and increase community and ecosystem resilience. According to lead instructor Dr. Cameron Barrows, "There's a disconnect between the value and relevance of natural history knowledge in meeting the environmental challenges of the twenty-first century, and opportunities to gain those skills through education and training. The California Naturalist program helps graduates understand their connection to their environment and exposes them to tools such as community science, climate resilience, and communication to be better stewards of the desert." The UCR Palm Desert Center has offered the Desert Sands and Sky Islands California Naturalist course to Coachella Valley residents since 2018 and will also partner with COFEM on the new program.

Ideal applicants for the Nuestro Desierto Program are young adults intending to pursue their education after high school, supplement college coursework, and/or seek early career development. Preference may be given to individuals from low-income or mixed-immigration status households in and near the City of Coachella. Applications are now open, and we will be holding informational sessions online and in person before the program begins. Register for our first online Information Session on Thursday, July 28 at 5 PM to learn more by visiting <https://NuestroDesiertoInfoSession.eventbrite.com>

**Further information:**

COFEM's Conservation Program: <https://www.cofem.org/conservation>

About "Our Desert" with CactusToCloud: <https://www.cactustocloud.org/our-desert>

About UCR Palm Desert programs: <https://palmdesert.ucr.edu/california-naturalists>

About the UC California Naturalist program: [https://calnat.ucanr.edu/About the program](https://calnat.ucanr.edu/About_the_program)

COFEM on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/cofem>

CactusToCloud on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/CactusToCloud>

UCR Palm Desert Center on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/UCRPalmDesert>

UC California Naturalist on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/CANaturalist>

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*About COFEM:*

*The mission of the Council of Mexican Federations in North America (COFEM) is to empower immigrant communities to be full participants in the social, political, economic, and cultural life of the United States and their home country.*

[www.cofem.org](http://www.cofem.org)

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