

# USFS fire hoses in California get a second life



Lisa Ussery, left, with the USFS, assists Sharon Clay, animal keeper for the Turtle Bay Exploration Park in Redding, with a platform bed made using repurposed U.S. Forest Service fire hose. Photo Kerry Greene/USFS

**By Kerry Greene**

On average an estimated 15 tons of waste is generated annually by fire suppression efforts in the northern zone of the U.S. Forest Service's Pacific Southwest Region, which covers as far south as Sacramento to the border with Oregon.

As of 2015 over 13 tons (or 87 percent) of that waste was disposed into landfills each year. In an effort to become a net zero waste facility, per a Forest Service initiative, the North Zone Fire Cache (NZFC), located in Redding conducted a waste audit to find out what kinds of materials were going into the trash.

Audit findings inspired one worker to look for a second life for fire hoses and other materials. Now as part of NZFCs recycling effort, scrap fire hoses are collected by the nonprofit group Hose2Habitat, based out of Maryland. Hose2Habitat connects zoos and animal sanctuaries with donations of materials that can be diverted from landfills and safely used for animal enrichment.

The mission of the U.S. Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands for present and future generations. While the numbers are still being tracked and reported, so far in 2017 the NZFC has diverted a little over 10 tons of material from entering landfills. Almost 9,000 pounds, or 40 percent, of that material was fire hoses.

Hose2Habitat is an American Association of Zoo Keepers conservation partner and, according to its website, the only organization in the world whose mission is to improve the physical and psychological well-being of captive wild animals by providing and enhancing habitat enrichment through the donation of recycled and other materials, free workshops, programs and services. Hose2Habitat, who has been around since 2014, is a 100 percent volunteer-run organization. It serves zoos, sanctuaries research and conservation projects.

The NZFC is one of 14 National Support Caches located throughout the United States with a combined inventory valued at over \$170 million. The role of the Fire Cache is to provide logistical support to all requesting state and federal agencies. Support is primarily directed toward wildland fire suppression activities. Local and interagency efforts are also supported in cases of natural disasters and large projects such as prescribed burning.

In March the Forest Service hosted a Hose2Habitat animal enrichment workshop at the Forest Service's Northern Operations Service Center in Redding. Animal caretakers came

from far and wide to learn from Hose2Habitat volunteers the techniques for creating enrichment items, such as crafting hammocks, cubes, feeders and climbing ladders out of fire hoses. This was the first ever West Coast workshop of this kind.

“The fire hose is just one piece of the puzzle,” said Lisa Ussery, materials handler with NZFC, who has been working hard to find ways to divert materials from the landfill. “The overall vision is to find ways to repurpose or recycle all the materials we have here, once they’ve reached the end of their useful life.”

North Zone employees are currently networking with other fire caches and partners to divert scrap Nomex, plastics, tents, sleeping bags, cargo nets and other materials from the landfill.

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