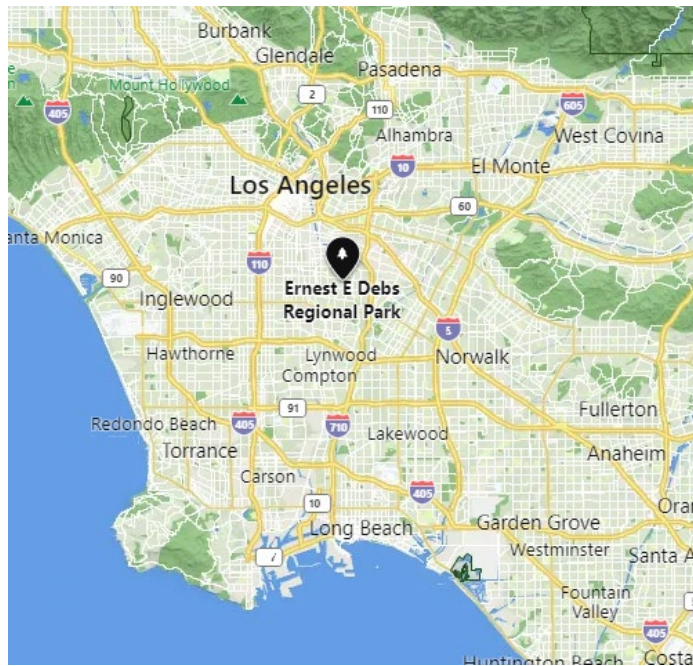




## Using urban forestry to cultivate tribal heritage and cultural identity at the Anahuacalmecac Debs Park Reforestation Project

CAL FIRE supports tribal partners in the expansion and reintegration of tribal land management and cultural practices across California. In 2021, the [Anahuacalmecac International University Preparatory of North America](#) (Anahuacalmecac) – the only indigenous TK-12 school in Los Angeles County – received a State Urban Forest Resilience Grant. Most (90%) Anahuacalmecac students identify as Indigenous. As part of this grant, Anahuacalmecac students, staff, and a diverse range of other partners\* planted 500 native trees at Ernest E. Debs Regional Park (Debs Park). Debs Park is a 300-acre open space nature reserve in northeast Los Angeles and is territory of the Tongva and Gabrielino Shoshone Nations.

CAL FIRE leads the effort to advance the development of sustainable urban and community forests in California. This aids in not only enhancing the health and resiliency of urban trees and the benefits they provide but also creates opportunities for community growth, education, and cultural enhancement through projects such as the Anahuacalmecac Debs Park Reforestation Project.



*CAL FIRE, North East Trees, TreePeople and Native partners and volunteers planting trees at Debs Park on Saturday January 28, 2023.*

The project is cultivating meaningful relationships among 250+ urban Native youth and their cultural identities and heritage by healing the land through nature and land-based traditions. Another goal of the project is to expose urban youth to environmental careers. As of January 2023, almost one thousand Anahuacalmecac students, staff, nonprofit partners, public volunteers, and tribal leaders have cleared designated areas of non-native plant species to prepare the site for native tree planting and long-term maintenance. The native tree species being planted include coast live oak, southern California black walnut, Mexican elderberry, and toyon. The re-introduction and enhanced management of native species at this site will help to make urban forests more resilient to invasive pathogens, pests, and environmental stressors. Indigenous traditional knowledge of the plants, wildlife, medicinal use, and ceremonial activities will be shared with project participants, especially youth.



*Student leaders at Anahuacalmecac learn that relationships to land are immersed in culture and meaning. Photo credit: Yassy Wilkins, U.S. Forest Service*

The Anahuacalmecac Debs Park Reforestation Project is also engaging at-risk communities in the transmission of Indigenous knowledge between elders and youth, to potentially include curriculum development, experiential learning, workforce development, and intergenerational activities around harvesting. Past and revitalized current use of prescribed fire by Native Americans in California will also be discussed.

*\*Anahuacalmecac's project partners include the Gabrielino-Shoshone Nation of Southern California, Audubon Center at Debs Park, City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks, North East Trees, TreePeople, CAL FIRE and the U.S. Forest Service.*

*This State Urban Forest Resilience Grant is administered by CAL FIRE on behalf of the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry Program.*