



Rotary Club of Santa Barbara  
P.O. Box 6268  
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For more than 95 years, the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden (SBBG) has been an extraordinary resource for the Santa Barbara community. Reaching far beyond the borders of its 78 acres of cultivated displays, stands of live oak and riparian woodlands, SBBG's impact has been felt by generations of visitors, students, teachers, professors, researchers and conservationists. One of only 57 gardens accredited by the American Association of Museums as a "living museum", SBBG is open 362 days a year and is visited by more than 100,000 people annually.

Today, SBBG stands at the forefront of the fight for the survival of California's native plants, working tirelessly to fulfill its mission—"to conserve California native plants and habitats for the health and well-being of people and the planet"—now and for generations to come.

### **Connecting Children with Nature**

To help ensure that the next generation forges a connection with the natural world, SBBG has created The Backcountry, an innovative natural play and exploration environment that will offer an immersive, unstructured experience in nature for children and youth. The project has developed an underused 4-acre site located on the south western edge of SBBG's 78-acre property, the last remaining portion of the Garden to be restored after the devastation of the Jesusita Fire. The Backcountry will offer children and youth the opportunity for self-directed discovery that will fuel imagination, inventiveness, problem-solving and creativity, which is often lost in more directive play and educational environments.

Currently under construction, The Backcountry is scheduled to open to the public in June 2022. Designed not as traditional "playground", yet not completely wild, the project will feature natural materials (logs and boulders for climbing, rope ladders and swings, and a willow tunnel) scattered throughout the 4 acres. The project will also include a "Basecamp," featuring composting toilet, benches and tables, where parents and caregivers can relax while children—and imaginations—run free through The Backcountry's natural environs. The Backcountry will have primary appeal for kids aged 5-13, yet siblings of any age will enjoy the space, too.

Through interpretive signage and strategic guidance from "Backcountry Rangers," children will be encouraged to play in nature, discovering opportunities to climb, swing, yell and run as well as quietly sit, contemplate and imagine, in a way that is not directed by anyone but the kids themselves. The project will allow children to author their own experiences of wilderness and become comfortable in a natural setting, with the hope that they will become future stewards of our natural world.

The Backcountry has been designed intentionally to help children and youth forge personal, long-lasting connections with nature through unstructured encounters, discovery and play. By creating a setting where children can discover nature in a near-organic way, we hope these self-directed experiences will foster self-reliance and self-confidence, imagination, problem-solving, collaboration and communication. At the same time, recognizing the maxim that "we protect what we love," we hope these early connections will encourage the next generation to become active stewards of our natural world. Helping kids make that connection with nature is now more important than ever.



According to a University of Michigan study, kids aged 6-17 now spend only four to seven minutes per day in unstructured outdoor play. Between school, sports, and other beneficial, yet highly directed activities, today's busy families often struggle to prioritize exploration and play in the natural world. Further, the spike in the amount of "screen time" may also be a contributing factor in plummeting rates of unstructured outdoor play. With only so many hours in a day, time spent engaging with nature may be losing out to time spent engaging with a cell phone.

And it's not just about finding time. With fewer and fewer conveniently accessible open spaces in our communities, it's often about finding where to foster a child's experience of nature. The Backcountry offers children and youth a safe, stimulating and engaging wildspace to lose—and discover—theirself in nature.

### **In Conclusion**

As an organization that has been grounded in environmental conservation and education for more than 95 years, SBBG recognizes that we currently stand at an inflection point in how we connect our young people with nature and educate them about the critical importance of native species to the survival of our planet. The Backcountry is a crucial resource in making this connection. More information and renderings of some of the project elements are available on our website at <https://www.sbbg.org/the-backcountry>

Currently, SBBG has successfully secured more than 85% of the project's \$4,000,000 budget, which will cover the design, permitting, construction, operation, and maintenance endowment for the Backcountry. To help SBBG complete this important project, we respectfully request that Rotary Club of Santa Barbara consider awarding a grant in the amount of \$10,000. At this time, we have a \$200,000 match on the table, effectively doubling your grant. If funded at this level, SBBG will be honored to recognize this gift with a permanent position on The Backcountry Garden donor wall.

Please feel free to contact me at any time, or with any questions you may have about SBBG and our programs (805.690.1689, [jmcclure@sbbg.org](mailto:jmcclure@sbbg.org)). Thank you for your time and consideration.

With respect and gratitude,

Jenny McClure  
Donor Relations Manager  
Santa Barbara Botanic Garden