

# San Bruno Mountain Conservation Project

By Sasha Clayton



Students in the Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth grades have been clearing away invasive plant species from a patch of land by the Hilldale School sign. This area is part of San Bruno Mountain, and for their Contemporary Issues and Social Action class, students decided to attack a small portion of the problem which is threatening to cause the extinction of butterflies indigenous to San Bruno Mountain.

In October, students were visited by Doug Allshouse, a representative from *Friends of San Bruno Mountain*. He has been working with the group since 1996 to keep the mountain free from development. In 1976 the Mission Blue and San Bruno Elfin butterflies were added to the National Endangered Insects list. Twenty years later the Callippe Silverspot butterfly joined the list. During Mr. Allshouse's presentation, students learned about the geology and history of the invasive species—how plants such as the Blue Gum Eucalyptus tree, English Ivy, and Cape Ivy were brought over by explorers and settlers. These plants thrived here, taking over the native plants that butterflies need in order to survive. These endangered butterflies are host specific, so they can only eat the single plants, endemic to San Bruno Mountain, which are being choked out by the invasive species. In fact, San Bruno Mountain is one of 18 hot spots in the world where a large number of rare species are being encroached upon by urbanization.

Every Friday, students at Hilldale School get out their shovels, wheelbarrows, gloves, and hoes, and continue the arduous task of clearing away the ubiquitous, invasive vines and plants. Students are joined by Mr. Hankin and Mr. Cailipan—*thank you for all your donated time!* The students have secured funds from their Student Council, and thanks to a generous contribution from Mr. Cailipan—*thank you so much!*—they will purchase and plant native plants and flowers in the next couple of weeks.

"I believe that what we are doing is quite exemplary, as we are helping the community, and our actions may inspire others to do the same. In the end, we are not doing this for ourselves; we are doing this for the planet," says Oliver Knitter. Aditi Sheth adds, "I think that the San Bruno Mountain is a huge part of our community, and this is a project that not only benefits our community, but our school as well. It is a great thing to be a part of. Plus, it's a lot of fun!" Max Koval declared, "I feel that I have done something important to help the school by pulling out weeds, and I am also having fun while doing it." Good for you, students, and thank you!