

## PRNS: WE PROTECT, PRESERVE AND PROMOTE NATURAL AREAS FOR ALL

Even During the Pandemic, it is Essential to Keep our Park Areas Available

“Right at the beginning it was mostly skeleton crews. We ended up taking care of purely health and safety. So yeah, we’ve kind of been there since the beginning,” said Adriel Castro, Acting Parks Facilities Supervisor for San José’s Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS) District 1.

Reflecting on his team’s essential role as direct responders to COVID-19, he describes his crews as at first “skeletal” in number, but very human in both heart and ethic. Castro described giving morning instructions to his units outside of their work base before the sun had crested, their breaths no doubt condensing in front of their faces, a testament to their actively pumping hearts and lungs (and the masks they wore).

“We’re lucky here in my area,” Castro continued. “We have a fairly big yard and we’re able to social distance pretty easily”. While many City-employees reacted to the County’s March 17<sup>th</sup> shelter-in-place order with work-from-home arrangements, Castro’s team ventured out each day to make life better for others.

“Obviously people need green spaces. The reality is that a lot of citizens don’t have that space.” Having worked in parks for nearly 20 years, Castro understands the outdoors: “[Nature] is healthy not only for your body, but for your brain as well.”

So that’s why Castro and his diligent staff showed up before the sun rose each day to remove garbage, process debris, and keep San José’s vast park spaces available to its residents to run, stretch, meditate, and be.

The Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services 2020 strategic plan, ActivateSJ, has a vision: Healthy Communities that Inspire Belonging. Mr. Castro, his team, and teams like it across San José have ensured that San José residents can stay mentally and physically healthy as a result of their belonging in parks.

One of the strategic plan’s guiding principles is to protect, preserve, and promote natural areas for all people. Here, Castro pauses, “...preserving nature and ensuring belonging sometimes conflict with each other. When you’re out in the hills...there’s a certain threshold for growth that will happen whether you are there or not. In our parks, we tend to suppress all of that *nature* for a lot of reasons like fire safety.”

PRNS strives to cultivate a park and recreation system that preserves nature, supports wildlife and enhances community well-being. During the month of July, the nation celebrates National Parks and Recreation month. Every day, in communities across the country, the people of parks and recreation are providing essential services and making their communities better places to live, work and play.

For Castro, a park cannot be both 100% natural and 100% safe. It’s his job and that of his team to find the balance, to bring *nature* and *belonging* into harmony with each other. People can’t belong if they don’t feel safe. During a pandemic, in which the number of safe places has eroded, the maintenance staff’s efforts to ensure that feeling in parks is all the more important.

“Before I worked for the parks system, I had this weird notion that robots clean it up – because no one really sees it...Then I came to my happy profession and realized it’s somebody’s hard work. Somebody is getting up early at the crack of dawn...I think that most of my staff wouldn’t have it any other way,” Castro added.

No, it is very much not robots. No matter how skeletal the crew, it is humans, in service of their communities, doing essential work before the sun has had a chance to shine.

#WeAreParksAndRec #WeAreSJ #EssentialServiceToTheCommunity

#### WHAT IS ACTIVATESJ?

The [ActivateSJ Strategic Plan](#) is the City of San José’s Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services’ (PRNS) plan to maintain, improve and expand our facilities, programs and services. The plan guides how we care for and develop a diverse park systems, and an abundance of recreation programs and services for all in San José.