



A Publication of the County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works

Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area

May 2008

Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area (Big T) is a 207-acre parcel of land located in the City of Los Angeles Sunland area (see map on page 4). The site was purchased by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works (LADPW) in 1998 for the purpose of compensating for habitat loss from other LADPW projects.

Big T protects one of the most rapidly-diminishing habitat types found in southern California -willow riparian woodland. The stream and pond-side natural communities are home to many native species that depend on them.

More species of birds nest in willow riparian woodlands than in any other California plant community, and up to twenty-one of these are facing threats of extinction due to habitat loss.

Additionally, up to one-quarter of all California land mammals also depend on riparian habitat.

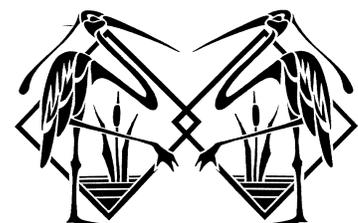
Since July 2007, ECORP Consulting, Inc., has teamed up with the County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works in order to continue to implement the habitat restoration plan at Big T.

Upcoming projects to implement the habitat restoration plan include tasks such as exotic plant and wildlife removal, native plant and animal species restoration, biological monitoring of native species, water quality monitoring, trail maintenance, and community outreach services. You may read more about these projects on page 2. Additionally, the Big T Wash Line Newsletter, which was discontinued in 2005, will resume publishing on a twice-yearly schedule.

Announcements

- The next Community Advisory Committee (CAC) meeting is scheduled for September 25, 2008 from 6:30 to 8:30 pm at Hansen Yard
- Trail Maintenance Day is May 17, 2008

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Works' implementation of the Final Master Mitigation Plan for the Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area has been under way since April 2000. The purpose of this newsletter is to provide an update of ongoing programs and to explain the upcoming enhancement measures that will be implemented on the site in the next few months. Newsletters will be published on a bi-annual basis. The next Big T Wash Line will be published in Spring 2008.





Conserving our Native Species

Fishing out the Predators

Big T has become a home to many species, including some that just don't belong there.

In Summer and Fall 2007, almost two thousand non-native fish and other aquatic species were fished out of the wash and ponds by our biologists, which included a largemouth bass which had eaten a Santa Ana sucker.

Santa Ana suckers are fish that are federally listed as threatened and are only found in southern California. They have become threatened due to loss of habitat and competition caused by the introduction of non-native wildlife species.

It is vitally important to remember that turtles and fish, along with any other pets, should never be released into the wild because they may harm the native species already trying to survive there.

If you have a freshwater aquarium or other aquatic pets, it is likely that they may be able to survive in the temperate waters of our southern California streams and lakes. Besides out-competing the natives, aquarium pets might introduce exotic diseases into the ecosystem, **so please never release your pets in**

the wild! Besides, it's also against the law to transport or relocate fish and other animals in the State of California.

Habitat Restoration

Other conservation projects to look for at the Big T will include tamarisk removal. This invasive plant was introduced from Africa by the end of the 19th century for windbreaks, firewood for steam locomotives, and shade trees. It's a water loving species that is highly salt tolerant and has been known to dry out water sources when established at desert springs. Tamarisk is highly invasive and will exclude native plants such as willows and cottonwoods. Each tamarisk tree may use approximately 200 gallons of water a day, so the removal of tamarisk will allow more water to be available for native plant species.

To help fill voids where exotic plants are removed, native cottonwoods and willows, along with other native riparian plant species, will be replanted between late Winter and Spring 2008. Many of these, including willow, are fast growing and



A largemouth bass captured by fisheries biologists that had just eaten a federal listed as threatened Santa Ana sucker.

should start to green up the Big T in just a few years.

When a Native Species goes awry...

Brown headed cowbirds are a native species known as a 'parasitic breeder,' which have spread throughout the West because they follow human development. This wouldn't be such a bad thing except for the fact that they rely on using other unsuspecting bird species to raise their own young!

Cowbird nestlings dupe the 'adoptive' parents into taking care of them and even manage to push out real chicks and eggs in order to get all the care for themselves.

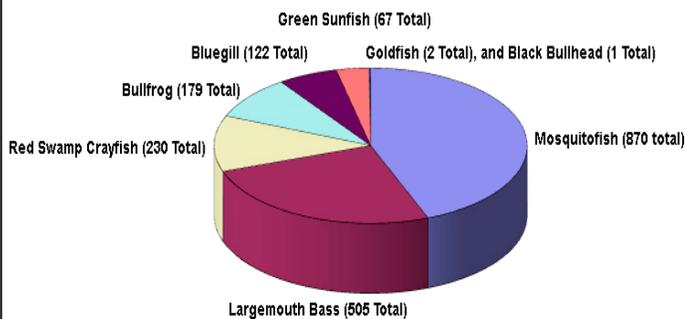
Cowbird parents are also known to take mobster-like revenge on other birds if their eggs are removed from nests. One study found that cowbirds returned to a nest and smashed all of the native birds' eggs after the cowbird eggs were removed. If the cowbird eggs were left in the nest, all of the eggs would hatch and the real nestlings would lose

out to the baby cowbirds.

The only way to effectively control cowbirds is to capture adults during the breeding season. Large cages containing 'bait' cowbirds are used to capture additional cowbirds. The traps contain food and water for the birds and are checked on a daily basis for newly captured birds. Sometimes non-target birds are accidentally trapped but they are quickly released. Any newly trapped cowbirds, which are attracted by the songs of the bait cowbirds, are also removed on a daily basis.

To protect endangered songbirds such as the least Bell's vireo and southwestern willow flycatcher at the Big T, we will be placing cowbird traps in Spring 2008 and checking them on a daily basis. If you see cages at the Big T next Spring, remember that the birds inside may be harmful to local native songbirds if they are released, so please do not disturb them.

2007 Big T Non-Native Fish Removals





Thank You to the Volunteer Stewards of Big T!

Many thanks and credos are owed to volunteers like Andrea and James Gutman and Terry Kaiser for recently clearing logs off the trails; Carol Roper for picking up trash and monitoring trails; and to many others who take it upon themselves to pick up trash and do other things to help protect the natural resources of the Big T. It is through your love of nature that we all benefit!

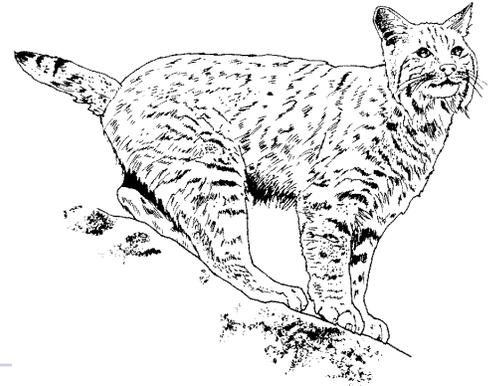
If you would like to help, here are a few simple things you can do for the Big T:

1) If you observe an unsafe situation or problem at Big T, please call the County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works contact number on

the back page (or 911 in an emergency).

- 2) Properly dispose of trash; it's ugly and can harm animals if eaten (be careful with sharp items like glass).
- 3) Don't make rock dams or block the water in the wash; our native fish need running water, not pools, and plenty of stream access to survive!
- 4) Loose dogs may chase and harm wildlife and other people, or even themselves. So please, keep your dog on a leash at the Big T at all times.
- 5) Enjoy your visit, and remember to take nothing but memories, leave nothing but footprints!

"Treat the Earth well: it was not given to you by your parents, it was loaned to you by your children."



Kid's Corner

Backyard Friends

Do you know what shelled animal calls Big T its home? Well, it's the western pond turtle (*Actinemys marmorata pallida*). This cool little turtle likes to eat small fish, frogs, water insects, and plants. During the day, pond turtles like to stretch their legs out on rocks or logs and lay out in the sun to get warm.

Unfortunately, they are being threatened by the red-eared slider turtle, the type of turtle you can buy at the pet store. People have been releasing red-eared sliders into Big T when they don't want them as pets anymore. This is really bad because the southwestern pond turtle has to compete with the red-eared slider for food. The red-eared slider is much bigger and more aggressive than the pond turtle. Big T is one of the few areas in California where the pond turtle can live but their numbers keep getting smaller and smaller.

Work being done at Big T is making life better for the Southwestern Pond Turtle and other native animals.

You can do your part also – **DO NOT release your pets at the Big T.**

WESTERN POND TURTLE

Q: When is a turtle not a turtle nor a tortoise??

A: When it's a terrapin!

The Big T is home to the native southwestern pond turtle. Even though it looks like a tortoise or turtle, it's really a terrapin since it lives in fresh water (unlike turtles which live in the sea and tortoises which live on land).

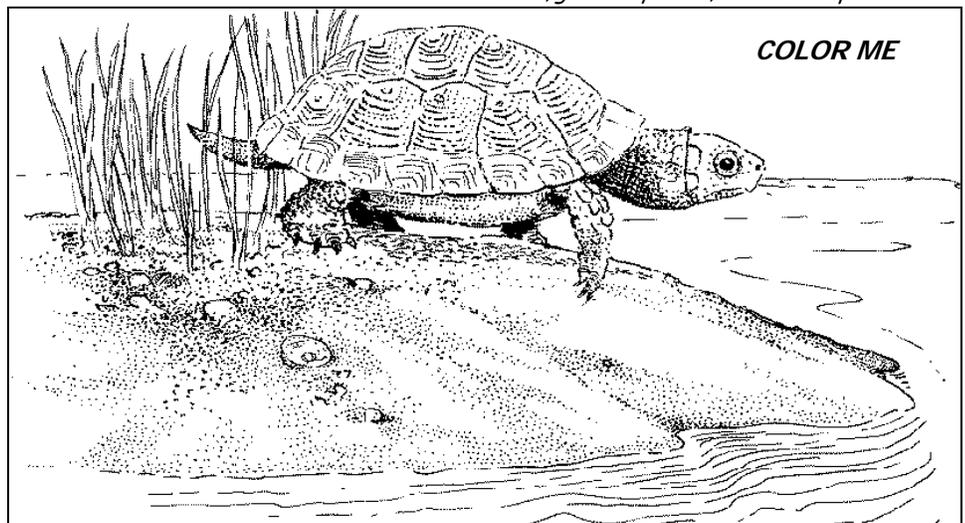
Q: How are you like a pond turtle?

A: Pond turtles eat small fish, insects, bugs, and plants, just about anything they can find. Since they eat both meat and plants, they are omnivores just like you!

Q: Do pond turtles have natural enemies?

A: Yes!

Pond turtle predators include raccoons and coyotes. Young turtles can also be preyed upon by raptors, herons, ravens, weasels, and large fish, and turtle eggs can be eaten by rats, raccoons, ground squirrels, skunks and opossums.





Water Resources Division
County of Los Angeles
Department of Public Works
900 S. Fremont Avenue
Alhambra, CA 91803

Where is the Big T?

Downstream of Big Tujunga Canyon, right in the heart of Sun Valley south of the 210 freeway, you'll find a native riparian (water loving plant) natural area filled with cottonwoods, willows and pools of water that support many native aquatic species. Check out the Big T website for more information at:

<http://dpw.lacounty.gov/wrd/Facilities/>



Emergencies? Incidents? Questions?

- **CALL 911 AND REPORT ANY EMERGENCY (SUCH AS FIRE OR ACCIDENT) RIGHT AWAY**
- Please make a follow-up call to the Department of Public Works as soon as possible (see contact information, below)
- Please **DO NOT** use 911 to report minor annoyances! The Los Angeles Police Department non-emergency number is (877) ASK LAPD or (877) 275-5273.

To report minor incidents, obtain information, or get questions answered during weekday work hours (8:00 a.m. to 5:50 p.m., Monday through Thursday), please contact:

Ms. Belinda Kwan

Water Resources Division
County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works
900 S. Fremont Avenue
Alhambra, CA 91803
Phone: (626) 458-6135
Fax: (626) 979-5436
Email: bkwan@ladpw.org

In the case on an emergency situation (those where 911 is involved) that occurs after work hours or on weekends, please contact Public Works at (626) 458- HELP.