



Big T Wash Line

Fall 2017

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IN THIS ISSUE



Fire Prevention and Safety

• 2 •



Freshwater Cattail Marsh

• 3 •



Animal Corner Northern Raccoon

• 4 •



ABOUT THE BIG TUJUNGA WASH MITIGATION AREA

“Big T” is a parcel of land located in the City of Los Angeles’ Sunland area (see Page 5).

The Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area (Big T) covers an area of approximately 210 acres of sensitive habitat. The site was purchased by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works (LACDPW) in 1998 as compensation for habitat loss in other LACDPW projects.

LACDPW’s implementation of the Master Mitigation Plan for Big T has been underway since April 2000. Big T protects one of the most rapidly diminishing habitat types found in Southern California: willow riparian woodland. Big T is home to several protected species of fish, including the Santa Ana

sucker, Santa Ana speckled dace, and arroyo chub, and contains habitat for sensitive bird species such as the least Bell’s vireo and southwestern willow flycatcher.

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide updates to ongoing programs and to explain upcoming enhancement measures that will be implemented on the site. Newsletters are published on a semi-annual basis (spring and fall).

More information can be found at:

- dpw.lacounty.gov/wrd/projects/BTWMA

Fire Prevention and Safety

According to Smokey the Bear, 60,932 human-caused wildfires burned nearly 4 million acres last year alone!

This past September, the La Tuna Fire in the Verdugo Mountains burned over 7,100 acres, the largest city fire in history, and came dangerously close to burning Big T. If you've been to Big T recently, or live in the area, you have likely seen the now black and desolate foothills of the Verdugo Mountains southwest of the site that will serve as a reminder of the damage wildfires can do for many years to come! According to Smokey the Bear, nearly 9 out of 10 wildfires in the nation are human caused and often preventable.

The threat of fires at Big T is especially concerning during late summer and fall when brush is at its driest and our ever-famous Santa Ana winds are in full force. Even though fires and burning of any kind are not permitted within Big T, there is always the risk of a fire breaking out in or adjacent to Big T. The increased fire risks are due in part to surrounding off-road vehicle activities and traffic accidents that could easily spark a fire. We've included fire prevention steps from the Los Angeles Fire Department and California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection that you can take to help reduce the risk of fire around your home.

Home fire prevention

(1) *30-foot fire resistant space.* Keep flammable materials at least 30 feet away from your home, garages, and sheds. This includes dry vegetation, oily or waxing plants (e.g. eucalyptus trees), organic mulch, dry plant clippings, firewood, and propane tanks.

(2) *Maintain your yard.* Prune low hanging branches so that there is 6-10 feet of space between the tree or shrub canopy and the ground. Maintain lawns by keeping them hydrated and mowed to reduce fuel for a fire. Brown and dead lawns should be mowed to reduce fire intensity.

(3) *Prevent ember and spark entry.* Check your roof, and if necessary fix and replace roof tiles and shingles. Cover eaves and exterior vents with 1/8-inch or smaller metal wire mesh.



In case of a wildfire

(1) *Be prepared to evacuate.* Back your car into the garage with the windows closed and keep the garage door unlocked with the automatic door opener disabled in case of power failure. If possible, keep your medicines and valuables (including important documents, photographs, and emergency contact information) near the door so you can quickly pick them up on your way out. Keep your keys, a flashlight, and portable radio with you at all times, and stay up-to-date with the local news station.

(2) *Close all windows and doors.* Close exterior windows and doors to prevent embers from entering the house. If the house catches fire, closing interior doors can slow the spread of the fire.

(3) *Move furniture.* Avoid furniture catching fire from radiant heat by moving it away from windows and sliding glass doors.

(4) *Turn on all lights.* If there is smoke, lighting will help with visibility. Be sure to have a flashlight on hand in case of power failure.

General wildfire prevention

(1) *Smoking.* If smoking, keep a 3-foot clearing from dry vegetation. Grind out cigarettes in the

dirt or in an ash tray; do not use a stump or log, and never throw smoking materials into brush or leaves or out your window while driving. Smoking on any trail (including the ones at Big T) is never safe because you cannot predict where the ash will land.

(2) *Controlled Burns.* Fires of any kind are never allowed at Big T; however, if you need to conduct a controlled burn on your property or if you are camping at a campground that allows fires, be sure to always supervise the fire until it is completely out. Drown it with water, turn over the ashes with a shovel, drown again, and repeat multiple times. Please check if fires are allowed in your area and if a permit is required. Never burn if it is windy or surrounding vegetation is very dry.

Immediately call 911 if you detect smoke or fire in your area and report the location. If you see a fire on or near the Mitigation Area, please email us at BTWMA@dpw.lacounty.gov after reporting it to authorities so it can be investigated.

For more information see:

- lafd.org/safety/fire-safety
- fire.ca.gov
- fs.fed.us/managing-land/fire

Freshwater Cattail Marsh: A Uniquely Adapted Plant Community

Big T is made up of many different types of plant communities, some of which are specially adapted to unique environmental conditions.

One such community is Freshwater Cattail Marsh which is found along the margins of the ponds within the Big T wash. This plant community is unique in that it occurs in



permanently saturated and often flooded soils of coastal valleys, near river mouths, and around the margins of lakes, ponds, and springs. Plant species found within freshwater cattail marshes primarily consist of cattails and bulrushes which are specially adapted to the saturated soils.

The saturated ponds within the Big T wash exhibit near anaerobic conditions (stinky, sour soil with no oxygen for plant roots to breathe) due to the lack of aeration from the circulation of water. Because of this lack of water circulation,

marsh plants have adapted themselves to acquire oxygen via air pumps; pumping air from their leaves down into their roots and the area around their roots in the mud.

Freshwater cattail marshes also provide foraging and nesting habitat for a large number of wading birds and waterfowl, including some rare species such as the tricolored blackbird. Other birds commonly associated with freshwater cattail marshes include red-winged blackbirds, Virginia rails, and marsh wrens.

Announcements

Report Any Emergencies! If you see something suspicious occurring in the Mitigation Area, call the LA Sheriff's Department dispatch immediately to report it. LACDPW cannot respond to emergencies; however, please notify BTWMA@dpw.lacounty.gov of any incidents reported to law enforcement, and we will gladly follow up. LA Sheriff's Department Dispatch: (800) 834-0064

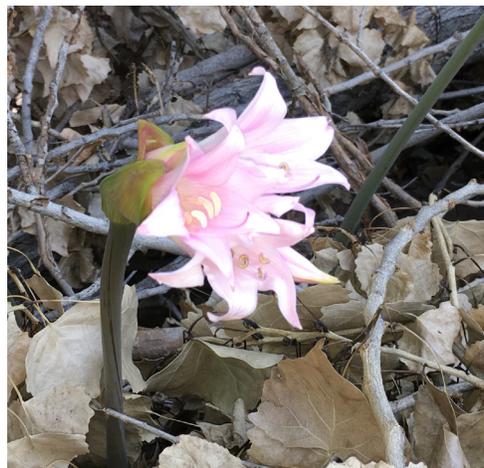
Time to Trim Those Trees!

Late fall is the best time to trim back the trees and shrubs in your yard because the breeding bird season is over! You can safely prune without fear of disturbing birds nesting in your yard. Most birds are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which is a federal law that protects birds, their nests, and their habitat. Violating the law can lead to fines or even jail time! So get busy and trim your trees this fall.

Goodbye Exotics!

It's been a busy year for Big T. So far in 2017, two exotic plant and nine exotic aquatic wildlife removal efforts have been conducted on site. Many exotic plants including castor bean and giant reed were removed during the two exotic plant removal efforts, and weeding was

performed as part of the general upkeep of the existing trails system. Monthly exotic wildlife removal efforts have been conducted at Big T during 2017 to increase habitat quality for the native fishes that call Big T home. Exotic aquatic species such as largemouth bass, bluegill, Mozambique tilapia, red swamp crayfish, and western mosquitofish can negatively impact sensitive native species by competing for resources, predation, and the transmission of harmful pathogens and parasites.



11th Annual Trail Cleanup Day!

Please join us for the 11th Annual Trail Cleanup Day on November 4th, 2017! Come out and give a helping hand by cleaning up litter along Big T's beautiful trails. Meet us at

the Cottonwood entrance (Wentworth St. and Cottonwood Ave.) at 8 am. Water, snacks, and trash bags will be provided. Suggested items to wear or bring: comfortable clothes, gloves, hat, sun block, and bug repellent. *Note: Trail Cleanup Day will be rescheduled for November 5th if there is rain or poor weather.

Wildlife Alert!

An adult male mountain lion known by wildlife biologists as P-41 whose home range was in the Verdugo Mountains was found dead early this October. P-41 was found by residents of the Shadow Hills area just south of Big T who alerted California Department of Fish and Wildlife officials of their findings. At this time, it is still unknown what led to the death of P-41. The recent La Tuna Fire that burned over 7,000 acres in the Verdugo Mountains this past September may be a contributing factor to P-41's ultimate demise.

Habitat loss and fragmentation is the biggest threat to mountain lions, who require large areas of intact habitat for their home range (up to 250 square miles for an adult male), habitat connectivity to facilitate young males finding a new home range, or finding a mate. Wildfires can push wildlife into unburned and urban areas when habitat is destroyed. Be aware of your surroundings and watch for wildlife!

Animal Corner: Northern Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)

Meet North America's favorite masked bandit: the northern raccoon!

If you live in southern California it is likely that you've seen raccoons snooping around your yard in hope that you've left the lid off the trash can again or ducking into a storm drain late at night. Raccoons are a nocturnal species, meaning that a majority of their feeding and foraging activities occur at night. Raccoons can traditionally be found living in a variety of habitats including mountain terrain, stream habitats, and wooded areas. In these areas, raccoons would likely be found living in the hollow parts of trees or an abandoned burrow, emerging at night to forage on some of their favorite food items including frogs, fish, crayfish, slugs, grubs, insects, eggs, fruits, berries, and nuts. The raccoon's omnivorous diet is also one of opportunity. As raccoons have become adapted to living and foraging in and around urban areas, their diets have expanded to include non-traditional food items such as garbage and pet food.

Raccoons are solitary animals, and are generally only seen in a group when a mother is still caring for her kits. Mating can occur anytime between January and June, and 2 to 5 kits are born after an approximately 65-day gestation. Kits will remain with the mother for more than a year before venturing out on their own. In the wild, a raccoon's lifespan is 2-4 years on average, but they may live up

to 20 years in captivity. As cute as they are, raccoons are aggressive fighters, and very few predators exist that are willing to take on a raccoon! Occasionally, a raccoon may fall victim to a coyote, great horned owl, or mountain lion, but diseases, infection, and road mortality pose far greater threats.

Don't Feed Me!

Don't let those cute YouTube videos of people interacting with raccoons fool you! It is important to avoid contact with raccoons, and one of the best ways of doing this is to remove food sources such as pet food, bird feeders, and unsecured trash from around your home. Secure areas around your home that may provide shelter for raccoons such as access to attics, crawl spaces, garages, and sheds.

Raccoons will not hesitate to eat your prized koi fish, so if you have a fish pond take appropriate measures to protect fish from raccoons. Never attempt to handfeed a raccoon! It is unlawful to feed any mammalian predator in the City of Los Angeles, including raccoons (53.06.5 L.A.M.C.), and although they may seem tame, they can inflict a serious bite! Raccoons carry diseases that can be transferred to humans and pets, so take care to avoid raccoon interactions. Raccoons are very clever and opportunistic and will take advantage of any resources humans provide them. Let's work together to discourage wildlife from occupying urban areas and keep wild animals wild!

Disease

Raccoons are peridomestic animals, which means they live in or near areas populated by humans. Raccoons are susceptible to a number of diseases including distemper (rabies), roundworms, and trichinosis. Although there are no documented cases of raccoon distemper in California, the disease is slowly making its way west. Perhaps of more concern in California is the roundworm species, *Baylisascaris procyonis*, that is carried and shed by raccoons. Raccoons are the primary host of this roundworm whose eggs

are passed in the feces of infected individuals. Raccoons contract this roundworm from infected food sources such as rabbits and birds (the intermediate hosts of the roundworm), or by eating the eggs of the roundworm during foraging. Although rare, humans and dogs can contract this roundworm from ingesting soil contaminated with the roundworm's eggs.



Raccoons defecate in communal sites called latrines. Latrines are often placed at the base or fork of a tree or on a raised horizontal surface of a log, stump, or rock. If raccoons frequent the area around your home, you may find latrines in attic spaces, decks and patios, or your garage. There are a number of steps you can take to discourage raccoons from living around your home including removing food sources like pet food and bird feeders, keeping trash receptacles tightly sealed, and eliminating water sources. It is best to avoid latrine materials when possible; however, if latrine clean-up is necessary take appropriate steps to protect yourself, including wearing disposable gloves during clean-up, wearing a dust mask (or respirator if working in a confined space), washing soiled clothing in hot water and detergent, properly disposing of latrine material and contaminated wash water, and washing your hands!!!

Did you Know?

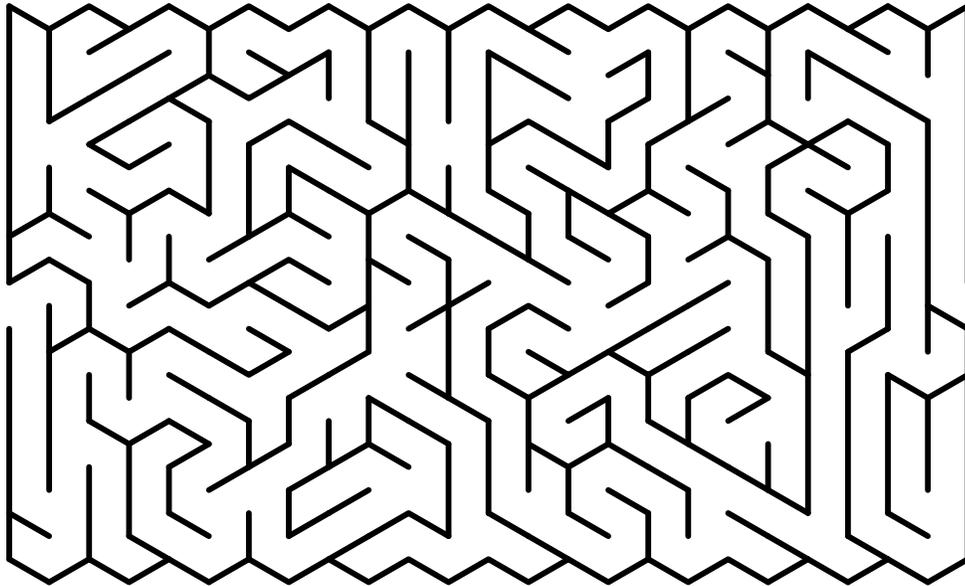
- > Raccoons can reach speeds of 10-15 miles per hour over short distances.
- > Raccoons have been known to remember solutions to tasks and puzzles for up to 3 years.
- > Raccoons are excellent swimmers and can remain in the water for several hours at a time.
- > Raccoons rely heavily on their sense of touch to forage and find meals.
- > Raccoons have a large repertoire of vocalizations including growls, hisses, screams, barks, whines, whimpers, and whistles.

For more information see:

- cdc.gov/parasites/baylisascaris/index.html
- cdc.gov/parasites/baylisascaris/resources/raccoonlatrines.pdf
- laanimalservices.com/about-animals/wildlife/raccoons

KID'S CORNER

Help the raccoon mother reach her kits!



EMERGENCIES? INCIDENTS? QUESTIONS?

CALL 911 TO REPORT ANY EMERGENCY SUCH AS FIRE OR ACCIDENT

- To report minor incidents or regulation infractions contact the Sheriff's Department at 1-800-834-0064. (Please DO NOT use 911.)
- Do not attempt to enforce regulations yourself; please allow law enforcement to handle the situation or incident.
- For emergency follow up or to report minor incidents, obtain information, or get questions answered during weekday work hours (8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday), please contact:

David Belicki, Water Resources Division
 County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works
 900 S. Fremont Avenue
 Alhambra, CA 91803
 Email: BTWMA@dpw.lacounty.gov
 Phone: (626) 458-6327

Where is the Big T Mitigation Area?

Downstream of Big Tujunga Canyon, right in Lake View Terrace and 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:

- dpw.lacounty.gov/wrd/projects/BTWMA

