

# Big T Wash Line

September 2016



A Publication of the  
**County of Los Angeles**  
**Department of Public Works**  
(LACDPW)



## 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: **1 (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.



**Brown-headed cowbirds** — Our trapping efforts for these nest parasites are over for the year. To help our native bird population thrive, we have been trapping and removing these pesky cowbirds at Big T for 14 years! This year we managed to trap over 130 cowbirds.



**Exotics Got-to-Go** — It's been a busy year for Big T. So far in 2016, two exotic plant and four exotic aquatic wildlife removal efforts have been conducted on site. Many exotic plants were removed during the two efforts and weeding was performed as part of the general upkeep of the existing trails system. The frequency of exotic wildlife removal efforts have been increased in 2016 to create a greater benefit for the native fishes at Big T.



**California High Speed Rail Update** — According to the California High Speed Rail, the E2 Alternative, which is proposed to cross through the Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area, is still under consideration. Los Angeles County is planning to submit comments to the California High Speed Rail Authority including the potential impacts to biological resources in the Mitigation Area.

**Wildlife Alert!** A mountain lion was reportedly spotted at Big T earlier this year! Recent nearby fires may have displaced wildlife into the unburned areas. Be aware of your surroundings and watch for wildlife!



## 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 4). Big T covers an area of approximately 210 acres of sensitive habitat. The site was purchased by LACDPW in 1998 for the purpose of compensating for habitat loss for other LACDPW projects.

LACDPW's implementation of the Master Mitigation Plan for the Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area (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 (Santa Ana sucker, Santa Ana speckled dace, arroyo chub) and contains habitat for sensitive bird species (least Bell's vireo, 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

[www.dpw.lacounty.gov/wrd/projects/BTWMA](http://www.dpw.lacounty.gov/wrd/projects/BTWMA)

## 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Trail Cleanup Day!

Please join us for the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Trail Cleanup Day on October 15, 2016! 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 October 22 if there is rain or poor weather.



## Nature After Fire: There's Still Hope!

Have you ever thought about what might happen to plants and wildlife when a wildfire occurs? The vast areas burned by the recent Sand Fire in July of 2016 appear to be dead from a distance and the impression is they can't possibly support animals for a long time. Actually, wildfires can play a critical role in nature by increasing opportunities for plants and animals to



**A small burned area in upland area at Big T. The fire was fairly cool-burning and the area is expected to fully recover on its own.**

repopulate burned areas. Many native plants are adapted to fires and can recover if the fire isn't too hot and if it burns quickly through the area. Unfortunately, most of the recent wildfires in southern California have burned very intensely as a result of the drought and the abundance of very dry vegetation. But don't lose hope! Habitats that have experienced a wildfire always undergo a succession of changes as organisms recolonize the area.

### Plants

A recently burned area is anything but barren. Nutrients that were once bound in woody material are released and are incorporated into the soil when the ash falls on the ground. The bare ground present after the fire will be populated by a large variety of plant species over time through a process called succession. Those that typically show up first are the pioneer species, such as mosses and lichens. These pioneer species are then followed by grasses, annual flowering plants, and small shrubs that are fast-growing and don't require much water to survive. The next stage of succession includes the establishment of larger, perennial shrubs that grow rapidly and provide cover and food resources for even more wildlife species. Depending upon the type of habitat, the next stages in the succession may include the establishment of small trees, followed by larger tree species. The climax community stage of succession is when the plant species within the community achieve an "equilibrium" that will remain the same until conditions change. The most common climax community burned in the Sand Fire was chaparral and ultimately, the burned hills will go through a succession and end up as chaparral again in the future.



**Young plant sprouting**

Plant species that have developed strategies for surviving wildfires tend to be among the first to recolonize. Strategies include obligate resprouters, obligate seeders, and facultative seeders. Obligate resprouters, like toyon, rely on their underground root systems, thick trunks, and branches that have heat resistant buds that resprout after a fire. Obligate seeders, such as



**Burned pinecone. Photo: National Park Service**



California lilac, perish in a fire but they resprout from the seeds buried in the soil or encapsulated in woody fruits. After a fire, facultative seeders, like chamise and manzanita, resprout while seed germination is enhanced by a fire's intense heat. The fire cracks or weakens the seed coat and that allows water to hydrate the seed so it can grow. Other plants, known as fire followers, require fire for germination and without a fire, the seeds can stay dormant in the soil for many years.

### Animals

Most animals immediately respond to a fire by fleeing ahead of the fire or by seeking shelter. Birds and larger mammals are mobile and will attempt to move out of harm's way. Small mammals, amphibians, and reptiles will typically hide in burrows, under debris, or in rock crevices. Unfortunately, not all wildlife will survive a wildfire. Small animals are at the greatest risk because if they do not retreat to a deep burrow, they will become defenseless against deadly temperatures or smoke.

The succession of the plant communities over time in the burned area will result in a progression of the types of wildlife species that eventually move in and use the recovering vegetation in a variety of ways. The new vegetation attracts insects, which provide food for reptiles, amphibians, and insect-eating birds (wrens, swallows, and phoebes). The new vegetation also produces seeds that become food for more insects, seed-eating birds, and mammals that include seeds and plant materials in their diets (mice, woodrats, and kangaroo rats). After smaller wildlife species move in and repopulate in the burned area, they are followed by larger species of wildlife that typically prey upon the smaller species (owls, hawks, foxes, bobcats, and coyotes). As the vegetation fills in it provides more cover, so wildlife will begin to use the area for shelter and nesting. In addition, as the vegetation becomes denser, those wildlife species that originally moved into the burned area and those that prefer to live in areas with less vegetation will move on to other areas. The wildlife species that prefer the dense vegetation will be the ones that eventually continue to use the habitat in the climax community.



**Mule deer  
Photo: USFWS**

To see plant and wildlife succession in action, take the opportunity to visit a newly burned area and look for the small annual plants and the sprouting from the remnants of the burned shrubs. Also, look for evidence of the presence of wildlife, like tracks and trails made by small mammals. You will be very surprised at how quickly the burned area will support plants and show evidence of wildlife use!



**Coyote  
Photo: Don Mitchell**

## Fire Prevention and Safety

According to Smokey the Bear, last year, over 2 million acres burned from human-caused wildfires. Nobody wants to see Big T lumped into that statistic for 2016! Fires are especially a concern at Big T during late summer and fall. Even though fires and burning of any kind are not permitted within Big T, there is always the risk of a fire breaking out on or adjacent to Big T. We've included some fire prevention steps from Los Angeles Fire Department and CA 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/shrub canopy and the ground. Maintain lawns by keeping them hydrated and mowed to reduce fuel for a fire. Brown/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 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](mailto:BTWMA@dpw.lacounty.gov) after reporting it to authorities so it can be investigated.

For more information see:

<http://www.lafd.org/safety/fire-safety>

<http://www.fire.ca.gov>

<http://www.fs.fed.us/managing-land/fire>



## Animal Corner: Opossum

Meet North America's only marsupial: the Virginia opossum!



Opossum with young on back.

Photo: Brian Leatherman

Marsupials, or pouched mammals like koalas and kangaroos, are born prematurely, crawl into their mother's pouch, and then continue to grow and mature in their mother's pouch. Opossums can give birth to around twenty hairless, bee-sized young that crawl to their mother's pouch after a very short gestation period of only 12 days! Inside the pouch, the young opossums nurse and grow for about 100 days. Typically, eight to ten of the babies will survive and grow into juveniles. By two and half months, the young outgrow the pouch and will ride on their mother's back until they can climb and walk for themselves.

Opossums are typically short-lived, with a lifespan of only one to two years. They are not known to be very aggressive, although when confronted by a predator, opossums may growl, hiss, show their full mouth of very sharp teeth, or try to escape. If escape is not an option, opossums will play dead and release a substance that smells like decay from glands near the tail in an attempt to deter the predator. Opossums feed on slugs, insects (including cockroaches!), bird eggs, mice, fruits, grains, dead animals, and dog and cat food left outside! Opossums are unable to store abundant body fat and are more vulnerable to

freezing and starvation if their fat reserves become low. As a result, they must spend a lot of time looking for food.

Opossums are sometimes viewed as pest animals, but they actually can serve as pest control in neighborhoods by eating roaches and even reducing tick populations! Though they may carry hundreds of ticks on their bodies, about 95% of those ticks will die from the opossum's extraordinarily efficient grooming habits. Because they kill so many ticks that try to feed on them, opossums can be considered an ally in the fight against Lyme disease. Other superhero-type feats held by these creatures include immunity to honeybee and scorpion stings, toxins (such as botulism), and rattlesnake venom!

Opossums have been known to prey on rattlesnakes, which may account for their immunity to rattlesnake venom. Talk about one interesting mammal!

Opossums found in the western United States were originally introduced to the west in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, likely as a source of food, as pets, and as novelties. They are now naturalized throughout the west and are quite common. Even though opossums are not native to the west, they do not pose a threat to the environment like many other nonnative or invasive species. Next time you see an opossum in your neighborhood, remember that they're fascinating creatures that are helping to eliminate unwanted bugs like cockroaches and ticks!



Photo: Kim Chandler, WDFW

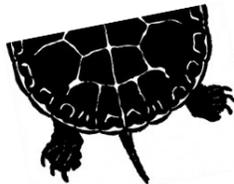


# Big Tujunga Match the Critter!



# Kid's Corner!

Match the body parts of the critters. What critters did you match?



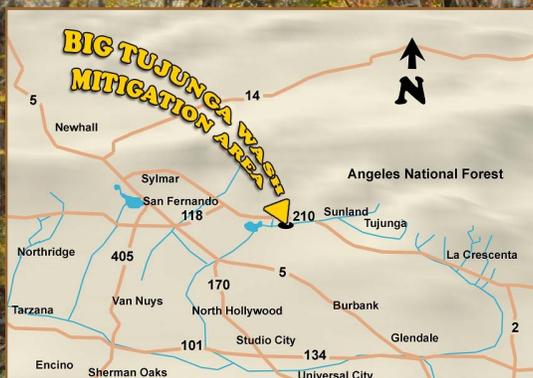
## Image Search

Can you find all of the mountain lions throughout the newsletter?  
How many do you see? *Hint: look on all 4 pages of the newsletter*



## 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: [www.dpw.lacounty.gov/wrd/projects/BTWMA](http://www.dpw.lacounty.gov/wrd/projects/BTWMA)



## 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/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:

**Mayra Cabrera**, Water Resources Division  
County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works  
900 S. Fremont Avenue  
Alhambra, CA 91803  
Email: [BTWMA@dpw.lacounty.gov](mailto:BTWMA@dpw.lacounty.gov)  
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