

December 8, 2021

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Subject: 2021 Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area Community Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Julianna Colwell,

This memo summarizes the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) Meeting held on Wednesday, December 8, 2021, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. via WebEx.

Meeting Minutes

I. Welcome/Introduction/Housekeeping Rules

Attendees:

- Karla Maqueda
- Call-in User 2
- Heather Driscoll (Parks and Recreation)
- Olivia Miseroy (Parks and Recreation)
- Julianna Colwell (Public Works)
- Jordan De Leon (Public Works)
- Paul Morrissey (Chambers Group)
- Jackie Mayfield (Chambers Group)

II. Review of Meeting Agenda

III. Summary of 2020 Eradication Program

1. Brown-headed cowbird trapping

- a. Brown-headed cowbirds (BHCO) are parasitic species that lay their eggs in the nests of songbird species and will often remove or damage the songbird's own eggs.
- b. BHCO trapping occurs between April and July to reduce nest parasitism on songbirds during their prime nesting season.
- c. Fifty-five BHCOs were captured and removed from the Mitigation Area in 2020 (same number removed in 2019) including 28 males, 26 females, and 1 juvenile.
- d. In 2020 Chambers Group confirmed cowbird parasitism on 3 least Bell's vireo (LBVI) nests in the Mitigation Area.

2. Exotic Plant Eradication Program

- a. The main purpose is to remove non-native and invasive plant species from the Mitigation Area, thus increasing resources for native plants to survive and thrive.
- b. Target species included non-native grasses, mustards, white sweetclover, poison hemlock, castor bean, tree tobacco, tree of heaven, umbrella plant, and others.



- c. Exotic plant eradication efforts were conducted monthly between March and December. Only mechanical removal methods continued to be used due to the 2019 ban on some herbicides.
- d. A relatively dry winter resulted in noticeably fewer weeds early in the season as compared to 2019. The late-season rains resulted in the germination of many exotic plants (e.g., mustard species and poison hemlock) that had not been as prevalent earlier in the year.
- e. All viable seed heads on target species were removed and bagged for proper off-site disposal.
- f. Three nesting pairs of the federally endangered LBVI were monitored on in the Mitigation Area in 2020 - the first recorded nests since the monitoring began in the early 2000s. This is likely in part to successful BHCO trapping efforts, restoration efforts, and monitoring requirements.
- g. Crews were not allowed to conduct maintenance inside LBVI avoidance buffers between May and the beginning of September. Updates to LBVI locations were conducted weekly.

3. Exotic Wildlife Removal Program

- a. Exotic wildlife removal efforts are conducted to protect special status fish species including the Santa Ana sucker, the arroyo chub, and the Santa Ana speckled dace.
- b. Efforts to remove exotic, aquatic wildlife were conducted monthly from March to October and December 2020.
- c. 14,146 exotic aquatic individuals were removed from Haines Canyon Creek and the Tujunga Ponds in 2020. Dip-netting, seining, and hand-capture methods were use in the creek while seining, spearfishing, bowfishing, and rod-and-reel methods were used in the ponds.
- d. Species captured included largemouth bass, red swamp crayfish, western mosquitofish, bluegill, green sunfish, common carp, and American bullfrog.
- e. Largemouth bass are voracious predators and can be detrimental to the native fish populations in Haines Canyon Creek. The exclusionary nets between the ponds and creek are critical in keeping largemouth bass and other large, predatory fish out of native fish habitat within the creek.

4. Water Quality Monitoring

- a. Upstream contamination sources can affect the water quality onsite, particularly within Big Tujunga Wash; however, the Tujunga Ponds originate from an underground source and thus, the water quality in the ponds and Haines Canyon Creek is generally very good.
- b. Water quality sampling was conducted on November 2, 2020, at 4 locations within the ponds, Tujunga Wash, and creek. Station 3 in the Tujunga Wash was dry at the time of sampling.

5. Trails Maintenance Program

- a. Trail maintenance is conducted to keep the trails safe and clear for equestrian users and hikers. Maintenance efforts were conducted in May, June, July, September, October, and December.
- b. Trails can become degraded with use. Trail crews work to remove cobble and rock that turns up in the trail over time, and to regrade and delineate the trail boundaries to make the trails more comfortable for horses.
- c. Trail maintenance included the removal of snags, downed trees, and branches; removal of irritating plants such as poison oak and trimming back overgrown vegetation; removal of rock and log dams from the creek; clearing and delineating trails for safe passage; and blocking off unauthorized trails.



- d. Maintenance crews were not allowed to work inside LBVI buffers between May and the beginning of September.
- e. Chambers Group continued to monitor and report incidents in 2020.

6. Public Outreach Program

- a. Four outreach efforts were conducted within at the Mitigation Area in July, August, and October.
- b. Some of the concerns raised by site users interviewed included fire hazards, the height of weeds/vegetation along trails reducing visibility, potential beehive by the creek near bluff, overgrown vegetation by the trails, fallen trees blocking trails, people experiencing homelessness bringing in trash and scaring horses, people leaving large debris in trails that can hurt people and horses, cockleburs sticking to dog's fur, illegal dams, litter, campfires, and people smoking.
- c. All site incidents are recorded and reported to Public Works and/or the appropriate law enforcement agency as appropriate.
- d. The Community Awareness Program includes the biannual *Big T Washline* newsletter and the Community Advisory Committee Meeting that serve to help educate and inform the community about the Mitigation Area.

IV. Current Status of Programs for 2021

1. Brown-headed cowbird trapping

- a. Fifty-four BHCOs were captured and removed from the Mitigation Area in 2021 including 27 males, 27 females, and no juveniles.
- b. The traps were vandalized three times in 2021; 2 male decoys escaped in one instance (the males were re-captured the next day).
- c. Non-target species captured and released included California towhee, red-winged black bird, house finch, and house sparrow.

2. Exotic Plant Eradication Program

- a. Eradication efforts have occurred monthly since March.
- b. Only mechanical weed removal methods were used throughout 2021 as the herbicide ban is still in effect.
- c. Late summer and fall efforts are focused on carefully removing umbrella plant and other water intensive invasive plants from along the banks of Haines Canyon Creek. As creek flows were very low and the much of the western portion of the creek was dry, removing these water intensive invasive species freed up water resources for native plant species and wildlife.

3. Exotic Wildlife Removal Program

- a. Exotic wildlife eradication efforts have occurred monthly
- b. Approximately 6,000 more exotic, aquatic individuals were removed from Haines Canyon Creek and the Tujung Ponds as of November 2021 than in 2020. Red swamp crayfish and largemouth bass made up the majority of the 2021 catch with approximately 68% and 26.5% respectively.
- c. Additional exotic, aquatic species removed included American bullfrog, bluegill, common carp, goldfish, green sunfish, Mozambique tilapia, and western mosquitofish.



d. Western portions of the creek began to dry up in early summer.

4. Trails Maintenance Program

- a. Trail maintenance efforts have occurred in February, June, July, and August so far in 2021. Crews will check for maintenance issues after winter storms to keep trails open and safe.
- b. The maintenance crews have also responded to various site user concerns and incidents including repairing and adding caution tape to wire fencing (for increased visibility), providing support for the removal of a stolen U-Haul truck, and removing a dead animal from Haines Canyon Creek.
- c. In February 2021, Chamber Group monitored the cleanup of several illegal encampments by Ocean Blue.

5. Water Quality Monitoring

- a. Water quality samples were collected on November 2, 2021, and lab results were pending as of the date of the CAC meeting.
- b. Two of the four sampling location were dry; Big Tujunga Creek and Haines Canyon Creek where the creek exits the site.

6. Public Outreach Program

- a. Four Public Outreach events were conducted in the summer and fall of 2021, and a total of eight equestrian users and seven hikers were interviewed.
- b. Concerns raised by site users interviewed included trail maintenance issues (particularly vegetation overgrowth near the pond outlet), branches overhanging trails, dogs disturbing sensitive habitat and seen without a leash, the presence of large objects blocking trails (specifically large rocks/boulders), trash, and illegal encampments.
- c. The group was asked to let the maintenance crews or on-site biologists know about any trail issues so that they can be remedied as soon as possible.
- d. Biologists encountered illegal fishing and a new day-use area (with illegal rock dam) near the Wheatland Avenue site entrance during outreach efforts.

7. Continued Incident Monitoring

- a. Chambers Group continues to monitor and report incidents in 2021. Julianna Colwell with Public Works provided an email address specific to the Mitigation Area to report any incidents or other site issues: btwma@pw.lacounty.gov.

V. Comments, Questions, and Answers

1. The floor was opened to the group for comments and questions.

- a. No comments or questions were raised. Julianna reminded meeting attendees that they could submit questions regarding Mitigation Area any time by emailing btwma@pw.lacounty.gov.
- b. An announcement was made that the 2021 CAC meeting minutes would be sent out to meeting attendees and posted on the Mitigation Area website once available.

If you have any questions regarding this memo, please feel free to reach out to me.

Sincerely,

CHAMBERS GROUP, INC.





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