

Big T Wash Line

September 2013



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



Announcements

- **Report any suspicious activity you see occurring in the Mitigation Area immediately to the LA Sheriff's Department Dispatch.** Please report issues such as loose or aggressive dogs, weapons, vandalism, and anything else that seems suspicious. It is important to report these issues to law enforcement because each time something is reported a record is created, which brings more attention to the issue.

**LA Sheriff's Department
Dispatch: 1-800-834-0064**



- **The Big T Website Has Changed!** Check out the new and improved Big T website at: www.dpw.lacounty.gov/wrd/projects/BTWMA
Please note that the old web address will still work.

- **ATTENTION! TIME TO TRIM THOSE TREES!**
You've waited patiently through the spring and summer and now it's finally time to trim your trees and shrubs! The breeding bird season is officially over and you can safely start pruning without fear of disturbing that hummingbird nest in your hedgerow. Just remember that birds begin breeding again in February, so trim 'em while you can.

- **Water Lettuce Herbicide in the Ponds** – We have recently been having issues with water lettuce, an exotic, fast spreading aquatic plant species, in the Tujunga Ponds. The ponds have been sprayed with a water-soluble herbicide

that should have little to no impact on the people and wildlife at Big T. But just in case, keep your pets (and yourselves) out of the ponds.

- **Trails Cleanup Day** — Please join LACDPW and ECORP Consulting, Inc. for the 9th Annual Trail Cleanup Day on October 5th, 2013. 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: comfortable clothes, gloves, hat, sun block, and bug repellent. *Note: Trails Cleanup Day will be rescheduled for October 12 or 19 if there is rain or poor weather.

- **Brown-headed Cowbird Trapping** — The results are in and this year's brown-headed cowbird trapping was a success! Four traps were placed throughout Big T and surrounding areas and a total of 54 males, 42 females, and 1 juvenile were removed from the area. We trap these parasitic birds to protect our native bird species at Big T. Cowbirds lay their eggs in the nests of native songbirds. As the young cowbirds hatch and grow, they outcompete the native babies in the nest and the native babies usually die because they do not get enough food. Low numbers of brown-headed cowbird juveniles at Big T means our trapping efforts are working and the native baby birds have better chances of survival at Big T!

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

The LACDPW 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

You Are Our Eyes and Ears!

Please help us keep Big T beautiful, functional, and safe for all recreational users! If you see any issues such as rock dams, unauthorized cutting or removal of vegetation, homeless encampments, or problems with the entrance gates, please contact BTWMA@dpw.lacounty.gov to report what you saw. We value your input regarding these incidences!



Councilmember Felipe Fuentes Visits Big T!

Big T received a big-time visitor in August – Los Angeles City Councilmember Felipe Fuentes of Council District 7! The Councilmember is making a great effort at getting to know his new Council District and we are happy to help! The Councilmember and his team toured the site with LACDPW, County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation, and ECORP Consulting on August 22, 2013. LACDPW educated the Councilmember about the history and purpose of the site, and explained the multitude of programs that are conducted each year to maintain Big T as a natural area. While touring through the site, ECORP biologists were able to highlight the unique habitat features and describe all the sensitive species that call Big T home. LACDPW also discussed some of the site security issues including homeless encampments, wildfires, fishing, and rock dams. Councilmember Fuentes was interested to know how he could



help increase protection at Big T.

Overall, as the Chair of the City's Energy and Environment Committee, the Councilmember was impressed with Big T and was happy to see it kept in such a natural state amidst the urban development in Los Angeles County. He was pleased with the County's public outreach efforts and wanted to know how we can engage more young people to these natural areas. Councilmember Fuentes even mentioned that he wanted to bring his daughter out to tour the site one day! All in all, it was a very successful day of show and tell!



Warming up to Forest Fires

Fires can happen year-round, but summer and fall are the most likely times for fires because the temperatures are high, the humidity is low, and the Santa Ana winds start to pick up. While the idea of a fire may be scary, occasional fires can actually be good for the environment.

Many areas benefit from forest fires because these fires get rid of dead and dying trees and make room for young, healthy vegetation. Forest fires are naturally occurring fires that burn an area at a lower temperature. Historically, these fires are usually started by lightning strikes and are considered a natural part of the ecology in many areas of southern California. A wildfire, on the other hand, burns at a much hotter temperature and usually destroys everything in its path. Wildfires are not a natural process to southern California and are usually very devastating to the areas in which they occur.

We know what to do in a fire, but what about all the plants and animals? Animals, like people, know how to get in and out of their "neighborhood" and most will move away from fire. Birds fly, mammals walk or run, and reptiles burrow under logs and rocks or hide in the soil while fires pass. Some animals even use fires to catch a meal! Predators sometimes follow the edge of a fire to catch small animals running away. Birds will circle above and catch insects in the smoke or mice exposed on the ground.

While animals can crawl, run or fly, plants have different strategies to survive a fire. Native plants that are found in fire-prone areas generally have thick, waxy leaves that are difficult to burn, which makes them resistant to forest fires. Many plants have the ability to re-grow from the roots even if the entire plant above ground is burned. Some plants even need forest fires in order to survive! Many trees have seeds that

can't grow until a forest fire cooks and cracks the outside of the hard shell. The ash left by a fire contains nutrients that the new seeds need to grow.

Forest fires (not wildfires) can be important for a healthy environment, but we don't want them near our houses, so it is important to have what firefighters call "defensible space" around your home. Keep a 100-foot area around your house clear of dead plants, dry leaves, or thick vegetation. Check out the following link for more information on keeping your house safe during the fire season: www.readyforwildfire.org/defensible_space.

Here at Big T, there are several recreational activities that are prohibited so we can reduce the chances of a devastating wildfire breaking out. Campfires, smoking, hunting, and shooting guns are all prohibited at Big T because these activities have the potential to create destructive wildfires that threaten the homes and structures adjacent to the site in addition to the plants and wildlife that are found here. 



A firefighter puts out a fire at Big T in 2012.



Cottonwood tree changing color at Big T

In our last newsletter, we talked about how trees are able to survive during the cold winter months. Specifically, we talked about deciduous trees; trees that lose their leaves in winter. Well, in the warm summer season the trees are looking very green and happy. The green color that you see during the spring and summer is created by a pigment called chlorophyll. The green chlorophyll helps plants turn sunlight, water, and air into the sugars and starches that plants need for food. It does this through a complex reaction called photosynthesis. During the warm months of the year, there is plenty of air, water, and especially sunlight for the chlorophyll to work hard all summer making food for the tree. But, as the days get shorter and shorter in autumn, there is less sunlight during the day. The shorter days and reduction in sunlight let the trees know that it's time to start getting ready for the winter season. They stop producing as much food and start conserving their water, so the chlorophyll isn't needed and

slowly disappears from the leaves. As the chlorophyll disappears, so does the green color in the leaves.

When the green disappears we start to see the yellow, orange, and red colors that are left behind in the leaves. Yellow leaves are often seen in birch and cottonwood trees. Red and orange colors are often seen in maple trees



Cottonwood tree in the Summer. Photo courtesy of Eve & George DeLange



Cottonwood tree in the fall. Photo courtesy of pfeiferstudio.com

Dogwood trees have a dark red or even purple color to their leaves in fall. Oaks typically have brown leaves in the autumn and winter. See how many different colors you can find while enjoying the beautiful outdoors this autumn! 🍁

I Found This Baby Animal — What Should I Do?



Baby northern mockingbird. Photo courtesy of Steve Gifford –USFWS

You can find young animals year round. Some animals, like snakes and lizards, are born ready to take care of themselves and venture out into the world. Other animals, like birds and mammals, need their parents to care for them for several weeks and even months after they are born.

During the spring and summer in particular you can find lots of baby animals in parks, zoos, or even in your own backyard.

When they are old enough, baby animals like to go out and explore the world. But don't worry, their parents are usually close by to keep an eye on them. If an animal can move by itself that means they can find their way back to their nest and away from danger. If you can't see their parents nearby, that's okay; they are probably out looking for food for their baby. Stay back from the animal and make sure to take lots of pictures!

But what if the animal clearly needs help? If you find a baby bird that doesn't have any feathers yet, look for their nest. If you find the nest you can put the baby bird back inside. If you can't find the nest you should put the baby bird close by, out of harm's way, and let its parents come back for it. Make sure to stay away from the bird for several hours. Keep your pets away from it, too! If you don't see the mother return after 4 to 6 hours, then you should contact a specialist in wildlife rehabilitation.

If you find an animal that is bleeding, shivering severely, or has been attacked by a cat or dog, there are several steps that can

be taken to help them. Contact a wildlife rehabilitator immediately! They will instruct you about what to do with the animal. If you cannot contact a wildlife professional right away, then place the animal in a warm, dark place such as a cardboard box with a towel inside. Make sure to close up the box so the animal can't jump out and hurt itself and make sure your container has holes for air! Be sure to wear thick gloves (preferably leather) when you place the animal in the container to protect yourself from any bites or scratches. Animals can be stressed when they are hurt and might attack if they feel threatened. Wash your hands after handling the animal to prevent contracting any diseases. After you've made the animal comfortable, try contacting a wildlife rehabilitator again and take it to a wildlife rehabilitation center.



A Mallard mother and chicks. Photo courtesy of Becky Valdez

If you find an animal in need, you can try searching for the nearest wildlife rehabilitator or check the Wildlife Rehab Info Directory website: wildliferehabinfo.org. 🍁

What Do You Mean I Can't Fish Here?

You might have asked yourself from time to time, "Why is fishing not allowed in the beautiful ponds and rippling creeks at Big T?" Good question. One answer to that question is because the waterways at Big T are home to a special group of fishes: the arroyo chub, Santa Ana speckled dace, and Santa Ana Sucker. As you probably already know, all of these fish species are sensitive because of their declining populations and natural habitats. Fishing, though a seemingly harmless activity, has the potential to harm any one of these native fish species through accidental hooking or injury from fisherman walking through the stream and accidentally stepping on the bottom-dwelling fish (such as the Santa Ana sucker).



Santa Ana suckers are federally listed as threatened.

The other answer to that question is because Big T is a preserved natural area and the ponds were originally created as mitigation to offset the impacts created from construction of the 210 freeway. LACDPW owns and manages Big T as a natural area

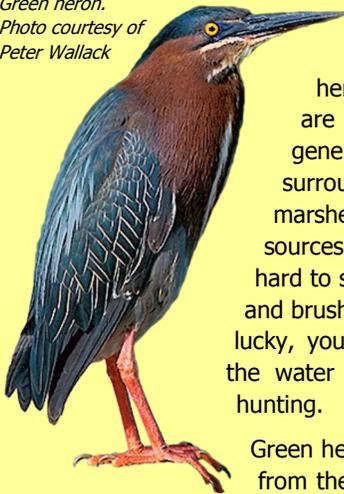
to offset any impacts resulting from LACDPW's other projects in the region. LACDPW has an agreement in place with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). CDFW has the responsibility to make sure that Big T is maintained in a natural state that is suitable for native wildlife and plant species to thrive. Because the primary purpose of Big T is to be a sanctuary for wildlife and plants, many types of recreational activities are restricted at the site. Fewer impacts occur to the plants and wildlife by only allowing passive recreational activities such as hiking, horseback riding, and nature viewing. Additionally, the types of recreational activities that are not allowed at the site are regulated by CDFW and if not adhered to, CDFW may not allow any recreational activities at the site! It is unique to see recreational activities allowed in mitigation banks; therefore, it is our privilege to be able to use Big T in this way. LACDPW takes pride in allowing the public to access Big T and doesn't want that privilege to be taken away, so LACDPW must enforce the terms in their agreements. This ultimately means that fishing cannot be allowed at the site. Feel free to search the internet to find other great fishing locations in the region!



Some native fish can be hard to spot near the rocks like this Santa Ana sucker.

Animal Corner: Green Herons and Black-crowned Night-Herons

Green heron. Photo courtesy of Peter Wallack



Both the green heron (*Butorides virescens*) and the black-crowned night-heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) are small stocky birds that generally live in wooded areas surrounding rivers, streams, ponds, marshes, estuaries, and other water sources. These small herons can be hard to spot through tangles of leaves and brush where they perch. If you get lucky, you may see one foraging near the water or crouching on land while hunting.

Green herons breed over a wide range from the Canadian border to the Gulf of Mexico and west to the Great Plains, western Texas, and southwestern New Mexico. They are dark in color with a green back, a chestnut body, and a grayish green cap that is often raised into a short crest. Their necks are long and thick and can be drawn up against their bodies giving a front-heavy appearance. Green heron's bills are relatively long, straight, and dagger-like, making it easier to hunt fish and amphibians. Occasionally, they will use twigs or insects as bait to lure in their prey.



Adult black-crowned night-heron

Black-crowned night-herons breed across most of the United States, except for from the Appalachian Mountains into Maine and the arid northern plains. These herons have light grayish underparts with a white neck, and a black back and crown (top of head). The genus name *Nycticorax* means "night-raven," which is fitting because black-crowned night-herons are nocturnal foragers. You can catch a peek at these birds very early in the morning or just before sunset. They can sometimes be heard at dusk flying and giving a "quark" call. They have shorter necks and bills and in shallow water they may vibrate their bill in order to attract their prey.

If you keep your ears alert and your eyes open, you may come across one of these magnificent water birds at Big T!



Juvenile black-crowned night-heron. Photo courtesy of USFWS

Q-1: Circle the activities you are allowed to do at Big T and cross off the ones that you are not allowed to do.

- A. Riding Horses
- B. Fishing
- C. Hiking
- D. Camping
- E. Smoke Cigarettes



Q-2: True or False: Trees should be trimmed in the fall and winter.



Q-3: What should you do if you find a baby animal?

- A. Put the animal in a warm dark place if it looks hurt.
- B. Leave it alone if it can move on its own.
- C. Put it back near or in its nest/home if it does not have fur or feathers.
- D. Call a wildlife rehabilitator if it looks hurt.
- E. All of the above.

Q-4: Circle one. This bird is a Black-crowned Night-Heron. Is this an **Adult** or **Juvenile**?



Photo courtesy of USFWS

Big Tujunga Word Scramble

Kid's Corner

1. REGEN EHONR _ _ _ _ _

This animal will use twigs or insects to bait their prey.

2. ETRSOF REFSI _ _ _ _ _

These are naturally occurring, happen mostly in the summer and the fall, and can also be good for the environment.

3. CSUDOEDUI _ _ _ _ _

_____ trees loose their leaves in the winter.

4. IGB NUGAJT _ _ _ _ _

The name of the preserved natural area owned by LACDPW.

5. EPLIEF ETENUFS _ _ _ _ _

Councilmember _____ visited Big T on August 22nd this year.

6. PLCHLOYORL _ _ _ _ _

This gives plants their green color and disappears from some trees in the wintertime.

7. BNIELFEDSE ACSPE _ _ _ _ _

An area around your house that has been cleared of dead plants, dry leaves, or thick vegetation to protect it from fire.

8. CAKLB-WORCNEH HIGNT-RONEH _ _ _ _ _

The genus name of this bird means "night raven"

9. GINISHF _ _ _ _ _

This activity is prohibited at Big T in order to protect the aquatic wildlife.

10. ANSAT AAN KRESCU _ _ _ _ _

A federally listed threatened fish found at Big T.

ANSWERS-Q&A Q-1: A and C, Q-2: True, Q-3: E, Q-4: Adult
 1. Green Heron 2. Forest fires 3. Deciduous
 4. Big Tujunga 5. Felipe Fuentes 6. Chlorophyll 7. Defensible Space 8. Black-Crowned Night-Heron 9. Fishing 10. Santa Ana Sucker



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



Where is 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: 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 to get questions answered, please contact:

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