

May 4, 2023

Jimena Gonzalez, Senior Civil Engineering Assistant
Los Angeles County Public Works
900 South Fremont Avenue
Alhambra, California 91803-1331

Subject: 2023 Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area Community Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Jimena Gonzalez,

The Community Advisory Committee (CAC) Meeting held on Thursday, May 4, 2023, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. via Zoom is summarized in the meeting minutes below.

Meeting Minutes

I. Welcome/Introduction/Housekeeping Rules

Attendees:

- Francisco Rivera (Public Works Graffiti Abatement)
- Lilliana Sanchez
- Ricardo Flores
- Sue Ellen Hussung
- Frances Ronning
- Heather Druscoll (LA County Parks and Recreation)
- Olivia Miseroy (LA County Parks and Recreation)
- Jimena Gonzalez (Public Works)
- Maria Lee (Public Works)
- Paul Morrissey (Chambers Group)
- Jackie Mayfield (Chambers Group)

II. Review of Meeting Agenda

III. Summary of 2022 Eradication Program

1. Brown-headed cowbird trapping

- a. Discussion of brown-headed cowbird (BHCO) life history and their impacts on native songbirds.
- b. Description of BHCO traps and how they function.
- c. In 2022, BHCO trapping occurred between March 31 and June 30 to reduce nest parasitism on songbirds during their prime nesting season.
- d. Thirty BHCOs were captured and removed from the Mitigation Area in 2022 including 8 males, 19 females, and 3 juveniles.
- e. Any non-target species captured were released.
- f. Trap 2 near the Tujunga Ponds was vandalized on June 16, 2022. The slot was smashed, and three male cowbirds were released.



- g. After least Bell's vireo (LBVI) were documented nesting on site in 2020 for the first time since the inception of the Mitigation Area, Trap 2 was moved near the Tujunga Ponds and closer to LBVI habitat in 2021.
- h. All three least Bell's vireo nests documented in 2020 were parasitized by BHCO, and the nests failed.

2. Exotic Plant Eradication Program

- a. Exotic plant eradication efforts were conducted from January through March and September and October.
- b. Brief history of the Exotic Plant Eradication Program.
- c. 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.
- d. In 2019, LA County banned the use of herbicides and only mechanical removal methods have been used since.
- e. Discussion of adaptive weed management and removal methods.
- f. Target species included non-native grasses, mustards, red-stemmed filaree, sourclover, London rocket, poison hemlock, castor bean, tree tobacco, tree of heaven, umbrella plant, and others.
- g. Annual species were hand pulled or cut with weed whippers. Shovels and digging bars were used to remove long-lived annuals and perennials from the root.

3. Exotic Wildlife Removal Program

- a. Efforts to remove exotic, aquatic wildlife were conducted from January through March and from August through October 2022.
- b. Brief life history discussion of largemouth bass. Largemouth bass are the biggest target and one of the biggest threats to native fish at Big T.
- c. 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.
- d. 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.
- e. Discussion of exotic species removal methods. Dip-netting and hand-capture methods were use in the creek and seining and spearfishing, methods were used in the ponds.
- f. 29,393 exotic aquatic individuals were removed from the Tujunga Ponds and Haines Canyon Creek in 2022.
- g. Species captured included American bullfrog, common carp, green sunfish, goldfish, largemouth bass, red swamp crayfish, and western mosquitofish.
- h. Rock dams can create ponds in Haines Canyon Creek that that provide prime habitat for predatory largemouth bass.
- i. Discussion of fish exclusionary screens and their design and function.
- j. Chambers group biologists coordinate with LA County Parks and Recreation to maintain and repair the exclusionary nets, as necessary.



4. 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 January, July, and August 2022.
- b. Discussion of recent flood event. Flood events move sediment and expose cobble and rock in the trails. Cobble and rock in the trails make navigating trails difficult for both horses and hikers.
- c. 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.
- d. Trail issues can cause site users to navigate off-trail into habitat areas. Site users can notify on-site maintenance crews or Public Works of any trail issues so they can be addressed.
- e. Trail maintenance included the removal of snags, downed trees, and branches; removal of irritating plants such as poison oak and trimming back overgrown vegetation; clearing and delineating trails for safe passage; blocking off unauthorized trails; removal of trash and bulky debris; and repairing trail damage due to erosion.
- f. Crew members also look out for and report on illegal encampments and activities that may cause hazardous conditions to the surrounding environment and communities (e.g., chemicals, propane, fires, etc.). Education is the first course of action. If an encampment is vacated, Chambers Group coordinates with Public Works to remove any debris left behind.

5. Public Outreach Program

- a. The Community Awareness Program includes public outreach weekend site visits (not conducted in 2022) the distribution of the biannual *Big T Washline* newsletter (distributed in Fall 2022) and the Community Advisory Committee Meeting that serve to help educate and inform the community about the Mitigation Area.
- b. In a typical summer, Chambers Group is on site during peak-use weekends to interact with the public, survey the public about how they use the Mitigation Area, answer any questions, and hand out educational brochures.
- c. Crew members were still present on-site in 2022 to respond to site user questions and/or concerns and to document any site issue/incidents.
- d. All site incidents are recorded and reported to Public Works and/or the appropriate law enforcement agency as appropriate.
- e. Regular outreach efforts will continue at the Mitigation Area in summer 2023.

IV. Current Status of Programs for 2023

1. Brown-headed cowbird trapping

- a. Four traps (same locations as 2022) were operated between April 1 and 30. Trapping will continue daily through June 30, 2023.
- b. Forty-three BHCOs were captured and removed from the Mitigation Area in April 2023 including 12 males, 31 females, and no juveniles.
- c. So far 2023 has been a big year for female BHCO capture at Big T (far more females captured than males), and the same has been observed for other BHCO trapping programs in the area.



- d. Trap 2 was vandalized once in April. The mesh had been cut and was repaired immediately; however, one male BHCO decoy escaped.
2. Exotic Plant Eradication Program
- a. Eradication efforts have occurred monthly since January 2023.
 - b. A highly wet 2022/2023 rainy season has led to extensive weed germination.
 - c. Early spring efforts focused on removing large fields of mustard species that quickly developed due to winter rain events followed by increased temperatures.
 - d. Only mechanical weed removal methods have been used so far in 2023, and some selective herbicide use may resume later this spring.
3. Exotic Wildlife Removal Program
- a. Exotic wildlife eradication efforts have occurred monthly since January 2023.
 - b. Removal efforts in Haines Canyon Creek are generally avoided during the breeding periods for sensitive fish species unless largemouth bass and red swamp crayfish are observed. If native fish are observed during removal efforts in the creek biologist will move to another area or suspend removal efforts until after breeding season.
 - c. Approximately 181 exotic, aquatic individuals were removed from Tujung Ponds and Haines Canyon Creek as of the end of April 2023. Red swamp crayfish and largemouth bass made up the majority of the 2023 catch so far with approximately 79% and 17% respectively.
 - d. Additional exotic, aquatic species removed included common carp and western mosquitofish.
4. Trails Maintenance Program
- a. Trail maintenance efforts were conducted in January 2023 and will continue throughout 2023, as necessary. Crews regularly check the trails for maintenance issues and respond to any maintenance needs brought to their attention by the public to keep trails open and safe.
 - b. January trail maintenance efforts were focused along the trails near Haines Canyon Creek and along the trails through the western riparian area.
 - c. Crew members swept the site for obstructions, accumulations of cobble, and erosion along the trails caused by winter storms. Crew members also removed a downed tree that was observed obstructing the trail near central Haines Canyon Creek on January 24.
5. Public Outreach Program
- a. Summer Public Outreach efforts were not conducted in 2022; however, these efforts are planned to resume in 2023.
 - b. Public Outreach efforts will be focused on illegal encampments at the west end of the site. Reducing the risk of fire in the Mitigation Area is priority.
 - c. Any campers encountered will be informed that camping is not authorized in the Mitigation Area. Chambers Group will coordinate with Public Works on any issues that may arise regarding illegal encampments.
6. 14th Annual Trail Cleanup Day
- a. The 14th Annual Trail Cleanup Day took place on January 21, 2023.



- b. Eleven volunteers from Public Works, Chambers Group, and community members participated.
- c. A total of 40 bags of trash were collected and removed from various locations throughout the site.
- d. Smaller debris items collected throughout the site included plastic bottles, glass bottles, wrappers, spray paint cans, shoes, batteries, tennis balls, and clothing. Bulky items collected throughout the site included shopping carts, large trash bins, engine oil and antifreeze containers, propane tanks, toilets, chairs, shovels, tires, and road signs.
- e. Items were not cleaned up at any occupied encampments.
- f. The 15th Annual Trail Cleanup Day is planned for fall 2023.

V. Comments, Questions, and Answers

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

Q1, Lilliana Sanchez – “Are you aware of the contamination coming from Little Tujunga Creek? I have been a witness to cars driving alongside the creek and having cookouts on weekends.”

A1, Paul Morrissey (paraphrased) – We are aware of recreational use and OHV use in the washes. Big Tujunga Wash dries up and is not a perennial system that has water year-round. The native fish we are trying to protect are in Haines Canyon Creek, which does connect to the wash when the wash is flowing but is otherwise protected area. Chambers Group is not able to police activities outside of the Mitigation Area but can only report incidents and share them with Public Works and law enforcement, as appropriate. As biologists, we can only observe and report. In addition, Chambers Group also conducts water quality monitoring annually in the fall, to look for evidence of contamination from various sources and compare results to previous years.

Q2, Sue Ellen Hussung – “When you know you’re going into a homeless encampment, can you call in Social Services and the police in advance, so that you’re not so vulnerable?”

A2, Paul Morrissey (paraphrased) – Yes. We try to tread very lightly. We understand that these are people’s belongings, and we will typically have a conversation. If the people are aggressive in any way, we will back out and document it through Public Works and law enforcement. There is a notification process and timelines involved in removing any illegal encampments that Chambers Group, Public Works, and law enforcement follow. So, it’s not something where law enforcement will come in and just remove individuals from the site, there is a process. The best we can do is inform and educate. We will only clean up debris items left behind at any abandoned encampments.

C1, Sue Ellen Hussung – “I don’t envy you. Thank you, this was a very good presentation. I appreciate it.”

Q3, Francisco Rivera – “I’m working with [an organization] removing foxtail grasses and castor bean plants at [name of park] on Angeles Crest Tujunga. Where can I get a list of invasive plants to remove?”

A3, Paul Morrissey (paraphrased) – CalIPC is a website you can look at that has California’s most invasive weed species. They have photos and descriptions of invasive weeds in California. If you don’t get what you need from that website, you can reach out to Public Works, and we can provide a list of some of the species we remove at Big T.

Q4, Sue Ellen Hussung – “How big is your crew on a daily basis?”

A4, Paul Morrissey (paraphrased) – Typically we have a foreman, 2 crew members, and a biologist, but because of the [weed] growth that we’ve had, the rain and the warm conditions, we’ve had as many as 18 crew members out there. Large efforts were conducted early in the season where raptors and sensitive bird species have been known to nest, so that we can avoid those areas during nesting season, if needed. If least Bell’s vireo move in,



we have to establish a 500-foot no-work buffer to protect the species so larger efforts were conducted early on. Typically, we have a crew of four, and for exotic wildlife removal efforts, we have a crew of four to six.

Q5, Sue Ellen Hussung – “When can we look forward to another one of these presentations? I found it very enlightening.”

A5, Paul Morrissey – “We do it once annually. But if you ever want to talk to our crew, we’re out there on a regular basis and we have no problem spending some time and talking about what we’re doing.”

Q6, Sue Ellen Hussung – “Do you have a published schedule? How do we find you?”

A6, Paul Morrissey – “We park off from Cottonwood Avenue and Wentworth, that’s our staging area, and we are typically out there Monday through Friday. Our crew gets there about 6:45 in the morning, we have a tailgate and talk about safety and target species that we’re going after, and then they will be out there from about 7:00 to 2:00.”

Q7, Sue Ellen Hussung – “Would you please put a website or some place you can be reached?”

A7, Jimena Gonzalez (paraphrased) – Yes, I was actually just going to do that, and to follow up to Francisco’s question, I’m putting the email account where you can reach us on the chat and then I will also post the link to our website where you can get more information such as past annual reports, past meeting agendas and meeting minutes, and we also post and send out biannual newsletters. If you would like, I can also add you to our email distribution list, that way you can receive the newsletters directly to your email. If anyone else in the meeting would like to be added please let me know.

2. Several attended requested to be added to the distribution list. They were asked to reach out via email to Public Works, to make sure they get added to the list.
3. Chambers Group and members of LA County Parks and Recreation discussed collaborating on maintenance efforts at the Tujunga Ponds.
4. Closing comments.

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

Sincerely,

CHAMBERS GROUP, INC.



Paul Morrissey
Director of Biology
pmorrissey@chambersgroupinc.com
(949) 261-5414 ext7288

