

**Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area Project
Community Advisory Committee Minutes
Thursday, September 23, 2010 Meeting
At Hansen Yard**

I. Welcome/Introduction

Meeting attendance sign-in sheet attached.

II. Review of Meeting Agenda

Valerie De La Cruz reviewed the meeting agenda. She requested that the group defer the review and discussion of action items from the April 29, 2010 meeting until later in the agenda. Three visitors, including Mr. Boris Nikolof (Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, Parks Bureau), Mr. Chris Mowry (Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation Department), and Ms. Kristi Herrera (Foothill Mounted Patrol), were attending the meeting and they had time constraints. So, Valerie asked that the group first address the items the visitors needed to discuss.

III. Discussion of Information Provided By Visitors

Ms. Kristi Herrera provided some background on how she and her husband became involved with the Foothill Mounted Patrol (Patrol). She stated the Patrol has 45 active members and that they patrol in 3-person teams in the morning and afternoons. Their shifts are approximately 3 hours long. So far, they have had a good response from the public. They are currently in the process of doing additional training for their rangers. Their job is basically to patrol and to report situations they may come across. They do not have enforcement authority and their job is not to tell people what they can and can't do.

Sergeant Boris Nikolof provided some background regarding the Sheriff Department's recent acquisition of patrolling responsibility for the County parks. He stated the Department has 149 parks to patrol on a daily basis. Deputies are assigned to patrol certain areas and the Department's goal is to keep the same Deputies in each area for familiarity purposes. When the Deputies patrol, they are supposed to get out of their vehicles and talk to people while they patrol. Summer is the busy season for patrols. They assign fewer officers to patrols during the winter. At the Big Tujunga Mitigation Area, the Deputies have noted some people drinking alcohol, swimming in the ponds, and barbequing. Terry Kaiser noted that he rode with the Deputies while they were patrolling and they were quick to cite the alcohol drinkers. Sergeant Nikolof stated that horse patrols are the most effective method of patrolling and that the Deputies will enforce the codes on the signs on an as-needed basis. The Sergeant was asked about the fines for infractions of the various codes. He stated he would send the information on the fines (Bail Schedule) to Valerie De La Cruz. Chris Arlington of SHPOA requested that they also be provided to her so she can pass the information along to her group.

Sergeant Nikolof stated that the correct number to call to report issues at the Big Tujunga Mitigation Area is (800) 834-0064. However, if there is an emergency, he stated that the call should be made to 911. Sergeant Nikolof will provide the Big Tujunga grid map to Dispatch.

IV. Discussion of Action Items at the September 23, 2010 Meeting

Action items from the last meeting were reviewed:

- Cutting of Yuccas and protections for this plant species.
 - Greg Benavides (ECORP) provided some life history information about the yuccas, including the fact that the yuccas only bloom once in five years and then the plants die. Historically, the Native Americans utilized the stalks for food and for a soap-like substance they contain. Nowadays, people may be taking them for decorations or they may be using them as the Native Americans did in the past. Greg Benavides will continue to research if there is an ordinance that protects them from being harvested during the blooming season. The September 2010 newsletter included an article that highlighted the yucca.
- Newsletter dispersal.
 - Terry Kaiser requested 30 to 40 copies of the newsletter to distribute to feed and tack stores in the area. Mary Benson stated she could provide a list of schools where the newsletter could be distributed to in order to get the information about the Mitigation Area to the local communities. Chris Arlington stated that she would print out the newsletters from the LACDPW website and she would distribute them at the SHPOA meetings. Terry Kaiser stated he would add the LACDPW link to the ETI website, which has approximately 150 members.
- New Signs
 - Valerie De La Cruz stated that new signs will be fabricated with the new codes in both English and Spanish and they will include the new phone numbers. She stated that each existing sign will be replaced with a set of 4 signs (Examples of the signs were passed out at the meeting). Signs will be posted at the Gibson Ranch entrance, the south and north Wheatland entrances, the Marybell entrance, the powerline easement, and the north entrance to the ponds. The signs will post the hours of operation and will stipulate that visitors are not allowed on the site during rains. [Note – October 15th is the beginning of the storm season and there is still a potential for debris flows from the Station Fire. In addition, Big Tujunga Dam is still under construction so there will be no flood control through the dam this winter. LACDPW is pouring the spillway and the work should be complete in May 2011. This winter, they will be building the control house.]
 - Some concern was raised that the “No Firearms or Weapons” ordinance on the sign does not specify that it includes air rifles and paintball guns. In actuality, the official code does specify air rifles, sling shots, and etc. Chris Stone and Valerie will look into adding the words “air rifles and paintball guns” to the signs.

- A suggestion was made that it would be beneficial to include an article in the next newsletter that explains the restrictions related to weapon use in the Mitigation Area. It would be an opportunity to let people know that all weapons, including paintball guns, standard BB guns, and Airsoft BB guns, are not allowed in the Mitigation Area.
- Tour of the Mitigation Area for the Los Angeles County Supervisor's and City Council personnel.
 - Valerie De La Cruz offered to take Sheriff's Department and Supervisor's personnel on a site visit. It was decided that the best time to do this would be in the spring.
- Electronic File of English/Spanish Public Outreach Flier
 - ECORP provided the electronic file of the public outreach flier to Cindy Rowlan and Valerie De La Cruz.
- Submittal of articles for SHPOA Newsletter.
 - Chris Arlington summarizes Big T Washline newsletter articles and includes them in the SHPOA.
- Attendance of Michael Carpenter at CAC Meetings
 - Mary Benson stated that Michael Carpenter may attend the spring meeting. Mary noted that Michael Carpenter was hosting the Coastal Cleanup Day effort between Foothill Boulevard and the 210 Bridge. Valerie De La Cruz did notify him about the upcoming Big Tujunga Mitigation Area Trails Cleanup Day.
- Prevention of use of trail at end of Cottonwood entrance
 - The group decided the best remedy against the unauthorized trail use would be to keep branches piled up at the uphill and downhill ends of the trail. ECORP will make sure that Natures Image's maintenance crews keep plant materials at these locations to continue to deter the unauthorized use of the trail.
- San Fernando Ranges Poker Rides
 - Terry Kaiser spoke to Bill and Sheila Meers (San Fernando Rangers) about the route of their Poker Rides. They informed him that their rides do not go into the Mitigation Area.
- Ride for the Cure Event
 - LACDPW arranged to have a booth at the Ride for the Cure event.
 - The Event was organized to include various activities on each weekend for a number of months. On September 25, the obstacle/trails trial event was scheduled but there was concern that LACDPW was not contacted regarding an access permit for this event if it was planned to occur in the Mitigation Area. Valerie De La Cruz will check with Dale Gibson regarding this event.
- Attendance by LACDPW at the SHPOA Meeting (October 12, 2010)

- Elektra Kruger will contact Valerie De La Cruz regarding having someone from LACDPW attend the meeting. Chris Arlington and Elektra Kruger requested that whoever attends should provide some background on the Big Tujunga Mitigation Area. In addition, the LACDPW person who attends needs to remind attendees not to release turtles or other pets in the Mitigation Area and that there are populations of native turtles and fish that do reside there. The location of the meeting is: Tierra Del Sol, 9919 Sunland Boulevard. The meeting starts at 7:00 pm and the speakers begin at 7:30 pm.
- Loose Dog Issues
 - Sergeant Nikolof stated that if there are loose dog issues in the Mitigation Area, then contact the Sheriff's Department at 800-934-0064. LACDPW will coordinate with County Animal Control regarding enforcement in the Mitigation Area. Terry Kaiser provided LACDPW with a County Animal Control contact name - Stacey Dancy. County Animal Control can be contacted regarding loose dogs but they may need assistance from the Sheriff's Department to access the Mitigation Area. The Sheriff's Department is willing to assist them but until a procedure is coordinated between LACDPW and County, issues in the Mitigation Area should be reported to the Sheriff's Department.
- ECORP's outreach to Owner of Loose Pitbulls
 - Greg Benavides attempted to talk to the alleged owner of the dogs but he was very unreceptive to any outreach.

New Discussion Items

Horse Carcass Removal

The carcass of the horse that died is mostly deteriorated and Terry Kaiser has arranged for the Sanitation Department to pick it up. It should be removed around the end of the first week of October. Barriers on the trails have been removed and all trails are open.

Poison Oak Trimming

The primary area where poison oak is encroaching on the trail is east of the south Wheatland entrance. ECORP will conduct a reconnaissance of the trails just prior to the next maintenance visit by the landscape contractor (Natures Image) to notify them of the problem areas.

Fire in the Mitigation Area

LACDPW and ECORP were surprised when the CAC members mentioned that there had been a fire in the mitigation area over the Labor Day weekend (approximately 1 acre in size). The location of the fire was just north of the Gibson Ranch, in the riparian habitat area. The CAC members stated that the Fire Department used water-dropping helicopters to extinguish the fire. ECORP's biologist will map the extent of the burn and photograph the conditions where the fire occurred during the next trails monitoring site visit. Any major incidents that occur within the Big Tujunga Mitigation Area should be reported to LACDPW personnel immediately.

Fence Repair/Removal Issues

Valerie De La Cruz stated that they are still working with Flood Maintenance Division to remove the embedded fence on the south side of the ponds.

The Caltrans fence is still down on the north side of the ponds where the vehicle went off of the 210 freeway and crashed into the fence. LACDPW will work with Caltrans and LA. County Parks to have the fence repaired.

The hole located in the fence at the northwest corner of the ponds would be continually cut if this portion of the fence is repaired. In order to avoid continual maintenance issues, the hole will not be repaired.

Homeless Outreach

Mary Benson, Field Deputy for Councilmember Paul Krekorian's office (Second Council District), explained that the Councilman's office would like help in identifying homeless people encampments in the Mitigation Area. She stated that an outreach was conducted in the Big Tujunga Wash on September 23rd to notify the homeless community that the California Coastal Cleanup Day was planned for Saturday, September 25th.

Mary Benson discussed the "Homeless Connect Day" planned for 9:00 am to 2:00 or 3:00 pm on November 1 at 7747 Foothill Boulevard in the community of Tujunga. The purpose of the event is to provide outreach, education, and resources to homeless individuals. Individuals will be interviewed about who they are, what their situation is, and why they have chosen a homeless lifestyle. The goal will be to help them change their situation so they no longer live this lifestyle. Homeless individuals will be transported to the event and they will be provided with a hot meal and a take away packet.

Mary Benson suggested that the October 23rd Trails Maintenance Day event at the Mitigation Area would be a good time to notify homeless individuals about the November 1st "Homeless Connect Day."

Mary Benson mentioned that the Mayor has announced that Rommel Pasqual will be the new Deputy Mayor in charge of the environment. She suggested that LACDPW may be able to partner with that office for River Keeper outreach. Mary Benson will pass the information along to Valerie De La Cruz.

Trails in the Creek

The CAC members mentioned that some equestrians are riding their horses down the middle of the creek between the two crossings located just downstream of the Cottonwood Area. The creek is wide at that location and instead of crossing to the upland side of the creek, the equestrians are riding down through the creek to the next crossing. ECORP's biologist will meet with Terry Kaiser and possibly Chris Mowry, the LA County Parks and Recreation Department's Ranger, to look at the area and determine a method to eliminate this trail use.

IV. Current Status of Programs

1. Exotic Plant Eradication Program

- The Natures Image maintenance crews will be out on the site two more times before the end of the year to remove exotic plants. The trees that were girdled in 2009 will be treated again if necessary. The trees are expected to die in place and it will likely take 10 to 15 years for the trees to deteriorate. Future monitoring will include determining if/when limbs need to be removed or trunks need to be cut. The primary focus will be on the girdled trees that are located near trails. LACDPW discouraged the CAC members from cutting vegetation in the Mitigation Area because unauthorized cutting violates the California Department of Fish and Game permit. If vegetation needs to be removed along the trails, then LACDPW should be notified and ECORP will coordinate with the individuals who report the areas where maintenance needs to occur.

2. Riparian Habitat Restoration

- Planting of additional containers/cuttings will no longer be part of the habitat restoration program. Rather, the expansion of the exotic plant removal program to include the large non-native trees will open up the tree canopy as the trees die and the native plants will be able to fill in under the trees. This will help to create native habitat areas that are more conducive to breeding birds and other wildlife.

3. Exotic Wildlife Removal/Monitoring

- The exotic wildlife removal program is continuing with three more visits planned prior to the end of the year. The focus will continue to be on utilizing different methods to remove various species of exotic wildlife. Nighttime snorkeling has been effective in capturing bullfrogs and non-native fish species. Nets and traps are typically placed in the stream/ponds and left in place for 24 hours. These methods target crayfish, non-native fish, and turtles. Earlier in 2010, a large common snapping turtle was captured in the ponds. In addition, native southwestern pond turtles were also captured. The native turtles were released and the snapping turtle was turned over to the California Turtle and Tortoise Club for adoption.

4. Water Quality Analysis

- The sampling for the annual water quality analysis will be conducted in November 2010.

5. Trail Restoration/Maintenance

- Trails maintenance will continue. One of the focus areas will continue to be the trimming of the poison oak that grows along the water trail.

6. New Public Outreach Activities

- The new outreach activities continue to be successful. There will likely be one or two more outreach visits in September/October.

V. Discuss and Schedule for the Next Trail Maintenance Day

The next Trail Maintenance Day is scheduled on October 23, 2010 from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm. The event will be cancelled if rain is forecasted. Since storm season begins on October 15, the event will not be rescheduled if cancelled due to weather. LACDPW will provide trash bags, gloves, and snacks.

VI. Schedule Next CAC Meeting

The next CAC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 28, 2011 from 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm at Hansen Yard, 10179 Glen Oaks Boulevard, Sun Valley, CA 91352.

VII. Action Items

- Sergeant Nikolof will provide the information on the fines (Bail Schedule) to Valerie De La Cruz of LACDPW. Valerie De La Cruz will distribute the information to ECORP and the members of the CAC.
- Sargeant Nikolof will provide a copy of the Big Tujunga grid map to Dispatch.
- Greg Benavides (ECORP) will do some follow-up research to determine if there is an ordinance that protects the Yuccas from being harvested during the blooming season.
- Valerie De La Cruz will provide Terry Kaiser with 30 to 40 copies of the newsletter to distribute to feed and tack stores in the area.
- Mary Benson will provide a list of schools where the newsletter can be distributed to in order to get the information about the Mitigation Area to the local communities.
- Chris Arlington will print out the newsletters from the LACDPW website and distribute them at the SHPOA meetings.
- Terry Kaiser will add the LACDPW link to the ETI website, which has approximately 150 members, so that the ETI members can view the newsletter and other information about the Mitigation Area.
- Chris Stone and Valerie De La Cruz will look into adding the words "air rifles and paintball guns" to the new signs that will be posted in the Mitigation Area.
- The next Big T Washline newsletter may include an article explaining that all weapons, including paintball and BB guns, are not allowed in the Mitigation Area.
- Valerie De La Cruz will plan for a spring time tour for Los Angeles County Supervisor's and City Council personnel.

- ECORP will make sure that Natures Image's maintenance crews keep plant materials piled at the unauthorized trail at the end of Cottonwood in order to continue to deter the unauthorized use of the trail.
- Valerie De La Cruz will check with Dale Gibson regarding the September 25th "Ride for the Cure" trails trial event that was planned to occur in the Mitigation Area. Use of the Mitigation Area for an event of this type requires a permit from LACDPW.
- Elektra Kruger will contact Valerie De La Cruz regarding having someone from LACDPW attend the SHPOA meeting.
- Valerie De La Cruz will coordinate with County Animal Control regarding enforcement in the Mitigation Area. The contact person at County Animal Control is Stacey Dancy.
- ECORP will conduct a reconnaissance of the trails just prior to the next maintenance visit by the landscape contractor (Natures Image) to notify them of the problem areas, including where the poison oak is growing into the trail.
- ECORP's biologist will map the extent of the burn and photograph the conditions where the fire occurred during the next trails monitoring site visit. This information will be provided to LACDPW and will be included in the 2010 annual report.
- Mary Benson will provide Valerie De La Cruz with information about potential partnering between LACDPW and the new Deputy Mayor's office (Rommel Pasqual, Deputy Mayor in charge of the environment) for River Keeper outreach.
- ECORP's biologist will meet with Terry Kaiser and possibly Chris Mowry, the LA County Parks and Recreation Department's Ranger, to look at the area where equestrians are riding through the creek to determine a method to eliminate this trail use.