

Big T Wash Line

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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).

The Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area (Big T) covers an area of approximately 210 acres of sensitive habitat, encompassing the Big Tujunga Wash and Haines Canyon Creek. The site was purchased by Los Angeles County Public Works in 1998 as compensation for habitat loss for other Public Works projects.

Public Works's implementation of the Master Mitigation Plan for 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. The site is home to several protected species

of fish, including the Santa Ana sucker, Santa Ana speckled dace, and arroyo chub. It also contains habitat for sensitive bird species such as the least Bell's vireo and 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 in the spring and fall.

More information can be found at:
pw.lacounty.gov/wrd/projects/BTWMA



The New Trails

Many visitors to Big T have come to find that three of the Haines Canyon Creek crossings have been closed, and two new trail sections now bypass these crossings.

Many visitors to Big T have come to find that three of the Haines Canyon Creek crossings have been closed. The creation of the new trail sections prompted the closure of two previously authorized trail sections that totaled approximately 1,580 feet in length. The two new trail sections offset the distance of the closed trails, with a combined length of approximately 1,770 feet. The new eastern trail section bypasses the two creek crossings that bookend what many veteran visitors refer to as the “water trail”. The new western trail section bypasses one creek crossing that was located north of the south Wheatland Avenue entrance. Several factors were considered when planning the new trail routes, including coordination with resource agencies such as the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), the proximity of the new trails to the creek, the creation of new vantage points of the surrounding landscape for visitors to enjoy as they navigate through the site, the potential for shade in these areas as the trees continue to regenerate and form canopies, and establishing the routes through areas where habitat disturbance would be minimal. Many may be wondering why rerouting the trails was necessary. Let’s explore the reasoning behind the trail realignment and how the new trail system helps to support Big T and public enjoyment.

It is important to understand the purpose of the mitigation area. The land was purchased as a mitigation area by Los Angeles County in 1998 to offset ecological loss on other Public Works projects. Due to resource agency agreements and permit conditions, Public Works is required to maintain and enhance Big T in perpetuity. Because of these requirements, the area now serves as a habitat preserve for numerous federal and/or state-listed endangered, threatened, or otherwise sensitive wildlife species including southwestern pond turtle (*Actinemys pallida*), coast horned lizard (*Phrynosoma blainvillii*), black-crowned night heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*), great egret (*Ardea alba*), snowy egret (*Egretta thula*),

Cooper’s hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*), California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica*), loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), least Bell’s vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*), southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax trailii extimus*), Santa Ana sucker (*Catostomus sanataanae*), Santa Ana speckled dace (*Rhinichthys osculus*), arroyo chub (*Gila orcutti*), and other native wildlife.

The needs of these species contribute to how this land is restored and maintained, and their mere presence provides visitors peace of mind in knowing that they can enjoy the area for years to come. The trail and creek crossing closures are part of continuing efforts to preserve sensitive species whose existence and ecological contributions are essential to the health of Big T.

Did you know that native fish species spawn in the sandy areas of the creeks? That’s the exact type of habitat where many of the creek crossings were located. Our native fish and their spawning grounds were being trampled by unknowing trail users. Reducing the number of creek crossings decreased the amount of visitor contact in these areas, thus supporting sensitive native fish species. Fewer creek crossings allow native fish to disperse more evenly throughout the creek channel, where previously, they were corralled between crossings. Free movement through the creek allows for new food sources, genetic diversity, nurseries, and shelters from predatory animals, all of which supports the health of the species. Reducing contact with the creek helps minimize the potential spread of harmful bacteria and other pathogens that people and animals carry on their skin or fur; feet, shoes, paws or hooves; or that can be passed by saliva, feces, and urine.

So, what’s so special about these “little fish”, and why won’t any little

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fish do? Functional redundancy, sometimes referred to as functional equivalence, is an ecological term for circumstances in which one species can be substituted by another and fulfill the same role within an ecosystem. Our “little fish” species, the Santa Ana sucker, the arroyo chub, and the Santa Ana speckled dace are specialists in their ecosystem and cannot easily be replaced. In fact, the Santa Ana sucker is such a specialist in its environment that it can only be found in a few



locations in Southern California. In these areas the Santa Ana sucker receive federal and state protection. Big T’s native fish are highly adapted to persisting through seasonal “boom and bust” fluctuations in water levels and seasonal flooding. The exotic fish species introduced into the Tujunga Ponds are not specialists in this environment and are not adapted to the extreme seasonal water fluctuations that Big T experiences. They are opportunists. When waters are calm, small non-native fish migrate upstream from Hansen Dam and downstream

from the Tujunga Ponds (when they are still small enough to slip past fish exclusionary nets). Here they prey on smaller native species. Over time, these predatory exotic species devastate native fish populations, such that their reduced contributions to the ecosystem threaten more than just the creek itself. Consider what happens when the numbers of native fish have been decimated and only exotic fish species remain: seasonal floods occur, the exotic fish that are not adapted to this environment are eliminated or displaced, and the creek is now devoid of an essential link in the food chain for native aquatic birds.

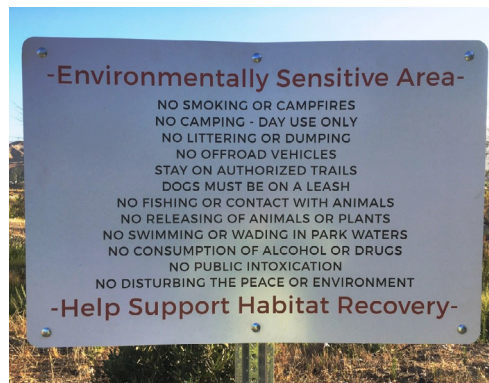
By closing the “water trail” (as it was known by my many users), this area can now remain undisturbed while willow and cottonwood trees regenerate. The understory of mulefat thickets, a plant community that is specially adapted to intermittent flooding, can reestablish with less competition from invasive species and weeds that we unintentionally spread off ourselves and our animal companions. Restoration of this habitat will encourage many bird species back to the area such as the least Bell’s vireo and southwestern willow flycatcher; these species require contiguous stretches of secluded, high-quality riparian habitat for nesting and foraging. Restoring this section of trail back to native habitat will be key in their return to the area.

The new trail alignment gives some of these sensitive species a bit more space. Their presence is part of what makes Big T unique and special. Along these new trail routes, visitors will see new bird species because there are undisturbed areas for them. All of these efforts may take time before the returns take hold, but we can be confident that what we do today at Big T will reach far beyond today’s view. The changes made to the trail system are not a loss, but rather, an adjustment with gains to follow. Preserving this habitat is to preserve what we and future generations of visitors will enjoy.

Help Support Habitat Recovery

Big T is used for recreational purposes, but irresponsible recreation can lead to loss, degradation, and alteration of habitat for sensitive species.

Although naturally occurring events such as wildfires and heavy rain storms can cause changes to terrestrial and aquatic environments, irresponsible recreation can also alter the habitats of many of the wildlife species at Big T. While the vast majority of visitors are good stewards of the property and respect the area, some site users engage in irresponsible activities including, the introduction of non-native animal and plant species to the site, erecting dams (or installation of other barriers) in Haines Canyon Creek, swimming and bathing in the creek, littering and dumping trash, hiking or riding off from authorized trails, creation of new unauthorized trails, making contact with animals, and disturbing and altering the



environment. The site is either home to or has potential habitat for a number of federal and/or state-listed or otherwise sensitive wildlife species. These species are negatively affected by even minor infractions of the rules.

New signage is posted throughout Big T that reads ‘Environmentally Sensitive Area’ with a reminder to better support habitat recovery. Below we explore the site rules, and learn why each rule is instrumental in supporting habitat recovery and public safety at Big T, and what to do if you see a violation of the site rules.

NO SMOKING OR CAMPFIRES

This rule seems pretty obvious, right? Yet, the remains of small campfires have been found in various locations around Big T. All it takes is one rogue ember from a campfire or a cigarette butt that has not been properly extinguished and Big T could be ablaze once again. If you see illegal campfires or other dangerous

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activities that could lead to a fire, contact law enforcement immediately. Work together to keep Big T and the homes that surround it safe.

NO CAMPING – DAY USE ONLY

Once the sun starts to set, it's time to pack up. Please be aware the site is only open from the hours of sunrise to sunset. The recovery goals include restoration and preservation, which requires that only the most minimally invasive activities be allowed on site. Damage to vegetation, trash, the illegal collection of firewood, illegal campfires, and swimming or bathing in the creek, are all activities associated with camping that are not permitted at Big T. Please report any unauthorized camping to Public Works.

NO LITTERING OR DUMPING

Many community members have participated in the Annual Trail Cleanup Day events and know firsthand the amount of trash that ends up on the site, and the huge effort it takes clean it all up. Broken glass, fishing lines, furniture, wrappers, plastic bags, clothes, cans, bleach containers, bottles, and sport balls are just a few of the many trash items recovered. Trash items have been observed entangled in shrubs, floating in the creek and ponds, and tossed out along the trails. While many trash items wash into Big T from upstream, it is important not to add to trash on site. One of the best and easiest ways to support habitat recovery is to pick up trash items found on site and dispose of them properly. Please implement the “leave no trace” mindset and take care to secure all trash items and check the area around you for any trash you may have dropped before leaving the site. There are trash cans located at the Cottonwood Avenue entrance and the north Wheatland Avenue entrance that allow for convenient disposal of trash items.

NO OFFROAD VEHICLES

Off-road vehicles including motorized bikes, dirt bikes, motorcycles, quads and other recreation vehicles are not permitted. The trail system at Big T has been designed for walking, hiking, and equestrian use only. Off-road vehicle use can damage native, recovering habitat, create new unauthorized trails, spread invasive seeds, and is a potential fire hazard. Furthermore, off-road vehicles can be dangerous to pedestrians and equestrians, and wildlife using the trails. It is important to only engage in off-road activities at approved off-road areas in the county.

STAY ON AUTHORIZED TRAILS

The current trails have been rerouted and improved to minimize negative impacts to native habitats. The existing trails are maintained to help keep visitors from wandering off the trails. These trails should only be used by equestrians and pedestrians. Temporary housing encampments and other structures have been observed in off-trail areas, including tents, and “huts” built from native plant materials. Some of the plant materials used were removed from live, recovering, native trees, and other native vegetation was trampled in the removal process. Going off trail leads to the unnecessary damage of vegetation, and disturbs potential nesting birds and other wildlife found within the site. Please be aware that disturbing nesting birds and other wildlife is a violation of state and federal regulations. It is important that authorized trails be the only routes used to navigate around Big T. Bridges and pathways constructed of rocks and logs have also been observed within creek

Violations such as building huts, blocking water flow, and stealing wood compromise sensitive habitat and are completely against the rules of Big T.



at unauthorized crossings. Like rocks dams, these crossings act as barriers that limit the distribution of sensitive aquatic species. Blocking the distribution of sensitive or endangered species is a violation of state and federal laws, and can result in fines exceeding thousands of dollars. Only cross the creek at authorized locations, and report unauthorized crossing to Public Works.

DOGS MUST BE ON A LEASH

Who's a good dog? Probably your dog! But no matter how good your dog is, or how they may stay right by your side, it is important that you keep them on a leash when visiting Big T. Leashing your dog increases public safety, the safety of native wildlife, and the safety of your pet. It is hard to know what may set our pets off or spook them. Letting your dog off leash also increases the risk of encountering other off-leash dogs that may not be “good dogs”, and increases the risk of them encountering some not-so-friendly plants such as poison oak and stinging nettle. In addition, our pets enjoy splashing in the creek to cool off; however, just as human visitors are asked to stay out of the creek it is critical to the

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health of sensitive aquatic species that pets stay out of the creek as well. Don't risk letting them run free! It's not worth it!

NO FISHING OR CONTACT WITH ANIMALS

The Tujunga Ponds are managed and designated as a wildlife sanctuary by the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation. As such, fishing is strictly prohibited in the ponds and adjacent waterways including Haines Canyon Creek. Purposeful contact with animals is also prohibited at Big T. Los Angeles County's Ordinances state that "A person shall not molest, hunt, disturb, injure, shoot at, take, net, poison, wound, harm, kill or remove from any park or riding and hiking trail any kind of animal." Give wildlife space whenever possible. Binoculars are an excellent way to view wildlife without getting too close. If you observe illegal fishing or other prohibited activities or interactions that may harm wildlife please contact Public Works immediately.

NO RELEASING OF ANIMALS OR PLANTS

Avoid introducing non-native species to the Tujunga Ponds and Haines Canyon Creek to help recovery of the native aquatic species. As discussed in the article Invasive Aquatic Species, in the Fall 2018 Edition of Big T Washline, introduced wildlife may thrive in the aquatic ecosystems, but they alter the natural habitat and negatively impact native species. When non-native species are introduced into the ponds or creek, native species are often deprived of the resources, food, and habitat needed to survive. Larger non-native species that are introduced into the ponds and creek, prey on the smaller native species. Releasing non-native or domesticated animals into native habitats can also spread disease to native wildlife. Aquatic weed species are often introduced into waterways by the prohibited dumping of aquariums. If these aquatic weed species take hold, they can be expensive to control and detrimental to aquatic habitats. Avoid the transfer of invasive plants to Big T by checking your clothes, animals, and personal items for seeds, soil, and plant materials before entering the site and disposing of these materials properly in a sealed trash receptacle.

NO SWIMMING OR WADING IN PARK WATERS

Swimming or wading in the creek is tempting during hot summer days. Some visitors construct dams in the creek with rocks, logs or other materials, in order to create deeper, ponded areas for swimming and cooling off. Building dams limits the range and distribution of sensitive aquatic species, modifies their habitat, and can ultimately

Please follow the below guidelines for dealing with someone blatantly violating the rules of Big T:

- › Do not approach or confront rule violators
- › Note the time and date of incident
- › Note the location within Big T (which trail or area)
- › If possible and safe, take pictures of the area
- › Report intoxicated individuals to Los Angeles County Sheriff, Parks Bureau Trails Team at (323) 845-0070
- › Other violations can be reported to Public Works directly at (626) 458-6158



Biologists removing an illegally constructed rock dam.

lead to decreased populations. Swimming or bathing in the creek also introduces pollutants into the water. Use of bathing products such as shampoos and soaps can change the chemistry and quality of the water, and harmful bacteria and pathogens can be transmitted from people and animals to native aquatic species. Dams observed within the creek should be reported to Public Works so they can be carefully removed.

NO CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOL OR DRUGS OR PUBLIC INTOXICATION

In an effort to keep Big T a safe and inviting place for everyone, it is important that alcohol and drugs not be brought to or used on the site. In addition, public intoxication is not to be tolerated. Call local authorities if impaired individuals are encountered.

NO DISTURBING THE PEACE

Disturbing the peace includes willfully making, continuing, or encouraging any excessively loud or unnecessary noise or language which unreasonably disturbs the peace or enjoyment of a park. Please be respectful of others and keep your conduct courteous! In the event of a disturbance or if you feel unsafe, remove yourself from the situation, and call local authorities immediately.

NO DISTURBING THE ENVIRONMENT

Public Works wants to remain engaged with the local community and ensure the continued, shared use of the facility. It is important that everyone does their part to follow the rules and minimize impacts and disturbances to the environment. Unauthorized activities, no matter how insignificant they seem, can result in the loss and degradation of habitat for the sensitive and endangered species that make Big T their home. As an example, shrubs provide food, nesting material, and shade for songbirds and other wildlife. The federal-listed threatened coastal California gnatcatcher is a species that relies on healthy stands of shrub habitat (coastal sage scrub) which they require for nesting. These shrubs may sometimes seem insignificant, but the habitat is vital to the reproduction of California gnatcatchers. In simple terms, everything at Big T from the tiniest pebble to the largest majestic oaks, is either "somebody's" food or "somebody's" home. If we all conduct ourselves as if we are guests at someone else's home while visiting, following the site rules will become second nature.

Sincere thanks and appreciation to community members who follow the site rules, and help to protect Big T.

KID'S CORNER

Fill in the blanks to complete the park rules by unscrambling the words on the right. If you get stuck, look for clues throughout the newsletter.

Hint:

- » NO _____ - DAY USE ONLY
- » NO _____ OR DUMPING
- » NO OFFROAD _____
- » STAY ON AUTHORIZED _____
- » _____ MUST BE ON A LEASH
- » NO _____ OR CONTACT WITH ANIMALS
- » NO RELEASING OF _____ OR PLANTS
- » NO SWIMMING OR WADING IN _____ WATERS
- » NO DISTURBING THE PEACE OR _____

Word:

GPAMNIC
TLNGTIIRE
HIVELCSE
STLIAR
SGDO
HIFGINS
LAMINSA
KRPA
MVINORNNEET

Can you unscramble this important message?

PELH

PRTPSUO

TIHABTA

YCEEVROR

EMERGENCIES? INCIDENTS? QUESTIONS?

CALL 911 TO REPORT ANY EMERGENCY SUCH AS FIRE OR ACCIDENT

• To report minor incidents or regulation infractions contact Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, Parks Bureau Trails Team at (323) 845-0070. (Please DO NOT use 911.)

• Do not attempt to enforce regulations yourself; please allow law enforcement to handle the situation or incident.

• For emergency follow up or to report minor incidents, obtain information, or get questions answered (8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Thursday), please contact:

Los Angeles County Public Works

900 S. Fremont Ave
Alhambra, CA 91803
Email: BTWMA@pw.lacounty.gov
Phone: (626) 458-6158

Where is the Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area?

Downstream of Big Tujunga Canyon, right in Lake View Terrace and south of the 210 freeway, there is 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:

- pw.lacounty.gov/wrd/projects/BTWMA

