

Big T Wash Line

FALL 2022

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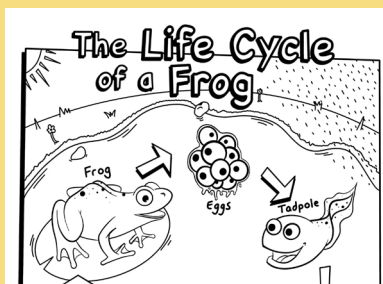
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About the Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area

“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' 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



American bullfrog tadpole metamorphosing into an adult (Credit Gary Nafis)

Big T Amphibians

Amphibians are a group of animals that includes frogs, toads, salamanders, and newts that need a damp to wet environment to survive. Amphibians spend part of their lives in the water, and part on land, which is how they earned the name “amphibian” that comes from a Greek word meaning “double life”. Amphibians are cold-blooded just like reptiles, but they don’t have scales. They can breathe and absorb water through their thin, semipermeable skin and depend upon water for reproduction. Amphibians are found throughout Big T, which provides both terrestrial and aquatic environments for amphibians to live.

Amphibian Life Cycles

Amphibians spend the first part of their lives in the water before metamorphosing into adults. Adult amphibians spend most of their lives on land and return to the water to breed and reproduce. The beginning of this process starts with eggs that are typically laid in water. These eggs are vulnerable and are often eaten by birds, fish, or even other amphibians. Amphibians will search for calm bodies of water with vegetation that can offer protection for their eggs, like the Tujung Ponds and the edges of Haines Canyon Creek. The eggs then develop into larvae, which are called tadpoles for frogs and toads, and efts for salamanders. These larvae must find their own food, escape predators, and perform other life functions all while continuing to develop. A metamorphosis then takes place in which the larvae transform into a miniature version of the adult form. This is usually when amphibians transition from an aquatic to a terrestrial or semi-terrestrial lifestyle. The adults are then able to find a mate, create more eggs, and start the process all over again!

Food and Feeding

Adult amphibians require live prey and will eat pretty much anything that will fit in their mouths including insects, spiders, snails, slugs, and worms. Some are even large enough to eat mice, snakes, and bats! The largest amphibian in the world is the Chinese giant salamander (*Andrias davidianus*), which grows up to 6 feet in length and 110 pounds and eats crabs, fish, and frogs which they sense through vibrations in the water. Many amphibians have a long, strong, sticky tongue which they use to catch prey. There is only one frog species that is known to be vegetarian, the Brazilian tree frog (*Xenohyla truncate*) that is endemic to the state of Rio De Janeiro, Brazil. This frog eats fruits, seeds, and flowers. Interestingly, the food that amphibians eat can sometimes cause them to become poisonous! Many amphibians excrete poisonous toxins from their skin after eating poisonous insects or plants.

Amphibians at Big T

Thankfully there are no poisonous or six-foot-long amphibians found at Big T, but it is home to three species of amphibians including the native California toad (*Anaxyrus boreas halophilus*) and Baja California chorus frog (*Pseudacris hypochondriaca*), and the non-native American bullfrog (*Lithobates catesbeianus*).

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The western toad is native to California and is a small toad that has a wide variety of colors including white, gray, reddish brown, yellow, and green. Its skin is bumpy with black blotches. They live in shallow burrows or under rocks or logs and lay their eggs in long strings that hatch into tadpoles within 10 days of laying. The western toad mainly eats insects and worms.

The Baja California chorus frog is native to California and is a small frog with a large head, big eyes, and round sticky pads on the tips of the toes that help them climb trees. They are most often green or brown but their coloring can vary. They can even change colors in response to environmental conditions! The Baja California chorus frog eats insects by lunging towards them with their large, sticky tongue. This frog makes the classic, familiar “ribbet” sound you hear in movies and can be heard day and night during breeding season.

The American bullfrog is a non-native species out at Big T. This frog is native to the central and eastern United States but is considered a non-native species in California. The American bullfrog was intentionally introduced to California as a food source after gold miners had eaten most of the state’s native red-legged frogs (*Rana draytonii*). Bullfrogs have voracious appetites and will eat almost anything they can fit into their mouths including, bats, birds, rodents, lizards, snakes, and other frogs! In addition, bullfrog tadpoles can eat the tadpoles of other frog species. As a result, bullfrogs are able to out-compete all native frog species.

Threats to Amphibians

Amphibians are considered an indicator species, which is a species that can serve as a measure of environmental health, since they are often the first species affected by changes in environmental conditions. This is largely attributed to their thin, porous skin that they absorb water through and use to breathe. The permeability of their skin requires very specific conditions for survival and any change in their environment including changes in temperature, high wind, increased sun exposure, and pollution can cause amphibian populations to decline. As a result, amphibians are sensitive to environmental disturbances and are impacted easily by any change to their living conditions. In addition, frogs are very susceptible to non-native species like the American bullfrog described above. This has caused amphibians to be the most threatened group of animals in nature.

The restoration efforts out at Big T are helping to minimize negative impacts on amphibians and other native species. The removal of non-native vegetation allows native plants to grow and provides habitat and shady conditions for amphibians to live. Trail maintenance efforts keeps visitors on designated trails reducing habitat degradation and impacts to terrestrial amphibians. Non-native wildlife removal efforts help reduce the competition on native amphibian species by removing predatory species such as American bullfrogs and largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*).

Next time you visit the Big T be on the lookout and see if you can spot any of the amphibians that call Big T home.



Western toad (Credit Gary Nafis)



Sticky foot pads of the Baja California chorus frog (Credit Gary Nafis)



American bullfrog (Credit Gary Nafis)

Meet the Restoration Team

Jay Belmonte

What is your role at Chambers Group and how long have you been working at Big T?

I have been working at Big T since 2019. My role as Foreman of Restoration at Chambers Group is to oversee the Construction/Restoration of certain sites and projects as well as assembling the work crews, tools, safety gear, and equipment and putting in motion the work plans created by the company for sites such as Big T.

Many of Big T's surrounding residents have become accustomed to seeing Chambers Group restoration crews on site. What are you doing out there and why?

Out at Big T my crew and I perform two primary tasks. One of those tasks is exotic plant removal. Our primary goal there is to reduce the competition posed by non-native plant species on recovering native plant species. By reducing competition, it helps to rebuild the habitat that supports sensitive plant and wildlife species. The second task is trail monitoring and maintenance, which we conduct to support the safety of sensitive plant and wildlife species, as well as the visitors that come to enjoy the site. Our goal here is to maintain the trails, free and clear of obstructions and other hazards, allowing visitors to navigate authorized trails safely and avoid deviating into recovering habitat.

You have been working out at Big T for a few years now. How have you seen the site evolve and what are some signs that restoration efforts have been effective?

Since my time working here at Big T I've seen the vegetation rebound following the Creek Fire in 2017. I've seen native growth in areas that were previously dominated by weeds. Observations of least Bell's vireo have increased the last couple years, showing that the recovering habitat has again become suitable for riparian species.

How does the restoration work you conduct at Big T contribute to the safety of the site and surrounding areas?

In addition to reducing the competition between native and non-native plant species, the removal of weeds throughout the site also reduces the fire fuel load which in turn helps to reduce the potential for fire throughout the site, as well as the neighboring communities.

As your crew works to maintain Big T's trail system there are many opportunities for interaction with the public. What have some of the benefits of public interaction been?

Our interactions with the public have been of great value to our crew. One of the benefits has been learning and understanding horses and the things that could scare them such as mechanical weeders and



The Restoration Team working at Big T

chainsaws, which could cause the horse to become startled and cause harm to the horse, its rider, and our crew members. We have learned to stay quiet and still as horses approach and pass. This information has benefited both the public and the restoration crew and couldn't have been made possible without interaction.

Should members of the public let the restoration crew know about any site issues or concerns?

Yes, interaction and communication with the public is important as well as necessary for us to be able to identify hazards or potential hazards that can develop around the site. The public sometimes visits areas of the site that the work crews have not yet progressed to and can inform the crew of any trail issues they encounter. In addition, there have been instances where aggressive dogs have been encountered off leash at Big T and members of the public have made us aware so we could avoid them and coordinate a solution with the proper authorities to contain/remove them. Last year while we were working out at Big T, we were informed that an armed robber was at large and believed to be somewhere on the Big T property. This allowed us to quickly mobilize to work in more public areas and inform residents entering the site that were unaware of the situation. Communicating with the public allows us to pass on information quickly to avoid unnecessary injury.

What else would you like readers to know about your work at Big T?

Even though our work out at Big T is limited in scope, our restoration crew and biologists are passionate about the work we do. Every day we are working to balance mitigation goals and maintain Big T as a place that all can enjoy!

Join us for the 14th annual Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area

TRAIL CLEANUP DAY



January 21, 2023 | 8 a.m.

Water, snacks, and trash bags will be provided.

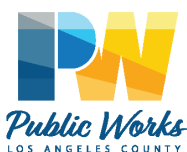
PLEASE BRING:

- Comfortable shoes
- Closed-toe shoes
- Gloves
- Hat
- Sun block
- Bug repellent

If there is rain or poor weather, the event will be rescheduled.

For more information call (626) 458-6327 or e-mail btwma@pw.lacounty.gov

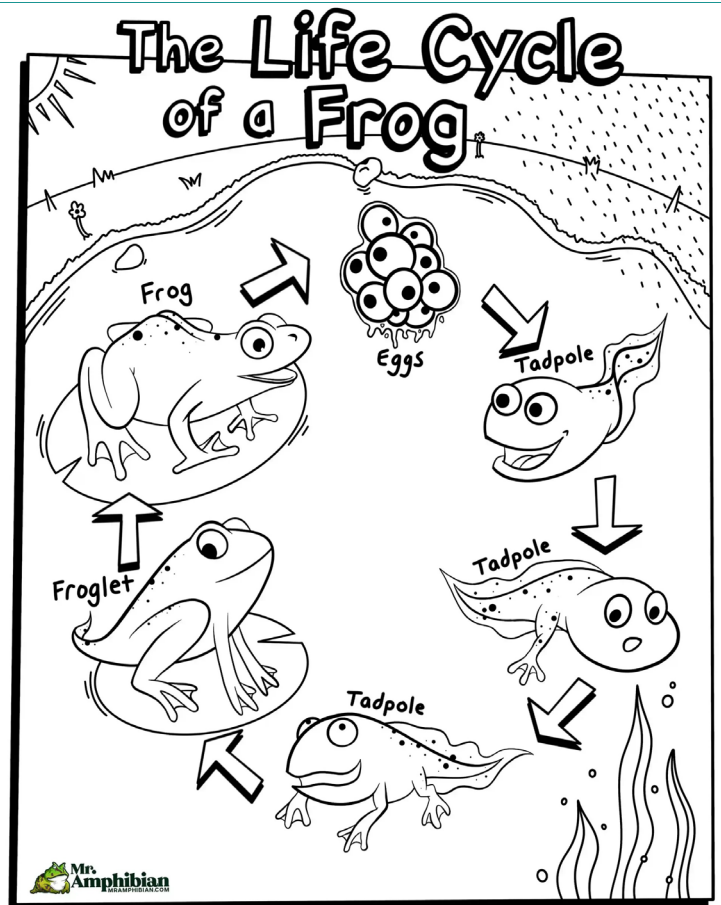
ADA and Title VI Accommodations: Individuals requiring reasonable accommodations, interpretation services, and materials in other languages or in an alternate format may contact the Public Works coordinator at (626) 458-7901. Requests must be made one week in advance of the scheduled meeting date. Individuals with hearing or speech impairment may use California Relay Service 711.



Kid'S Corner

Click on the link to visit Mr. Amphibian's website at www.mramphibian.com to learn about amphibians.

You can also go to www.mramphibian.com/frog-life-cycle-kids to learn about the lifecycle of a frog and then color in the lifecycle to the right.



Report emergencies and incidents such as fire call 911

- 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, 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

