



A Publication of the
**County of Los Angeles Department of
Public Works**

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New Outreach Effort Begins

A new effort to reach a wider audience of Big T visitors began this summer. Each week, Big T receives a wide variety of visitors, many of whom are unaware of just how important Big T is for its plant and animal community. Through on-site interviews and informal question and answer sessions, it has been learned that visitors care very much about protecting Big T. This first glimpse into the possibilities of what outreach efforts can attain is very promising. It's the merging of two communities: the humans who visit Big T each week and the plant and animal species that make it their home. This merging has been possible via a simple but effective information flyer.

During visits to Big T by County of Public Works staff and ECORP biologists, it was observed that public education efforts about Big T were missing an important segment of the local community. People living as close as Tujunga, Sunland and Pacoima choose to come to Big T to get away from the urban setting, relax with their families and friends, and beat the heat. Big T is also host to people from as far away as Lancaster and Palmdale, who visit for the same reasons.

Typically, these families visit Big T during the week-ends. They tend to visit between late morning and the latter part of the afternoon, within view of the creek and always beneath the cool shade of willows and other trees.



As is often the case when uninformed visitors recreate in a natural setting, some important park regulations have been broken. Some activities observed include swimming in the creek, cooking with open flame, and in some cases altering or destroying sensitive habitat.

In order to reach out to these visitors, County of Public Works launched a new outreach program designed to target and inform Big T's visitors. The program's specific goals are centered on the maxim of "informing and not enforcing." Informing the community using the following three points would bring the Department closer to achieving its management goals:

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Station Fire

The Station Fire that began in late August stayed north of Interstate 210 (Foothill Freeway) and out of the Big T Mitigation Bank; however, debris-laden flows from the burn area are expected to be more than normal during the upcoming storm season. The Los Angeles County Flood Control District offers free mudflow protection advice to homeowners in the vicinity of hillside burn areas.

Call (800) 214-4020 or visit www.ladpw.org.

ABOUT THE BIG TUJUNGA WASH MITIGATION AREA

The County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works' implementation of the Final Master Mitigation Plan for the Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area (Big T) has been under way since April 2000.

Big T is parcel of land located in the City of Los Angeles' Sunland area (see map on page 4). Big T covers an area of approximately 210 acres of sensitive habitat. The site was purchased by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works in 1998 for the purpose of compensating for habitat loss for other County of Public Works projects.

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 birds (least Bell's vireo, southwestern willow flycatcher).

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide an update of ongoing programs and to explain the upcoming enhancement measures that will be implemented on the site in the next few months. Newsletters will be published on a bi-annual basis (Spring and Fall).

More information can be found at
<http://www.ladpw.org/wrd/facilities>

New Outreach Effort Begins (Continued from page 1)

- * **Big T is like an island.** Spatially, Big T is surrounded by roads, houses, and non-habitable places for animals and plants. From a biological standpoint, Big T provides a refuge from the suburban landscape. For fish and other aquatic animals, it's their only home.
- * **Big T is unique.** The Santa Ana sucker, the Santa Ana speckled dace, and the arroyo chub are all under threat, but they are all found in Big T. Historically, the riparian areas of Big T have supported populations of southwestern willow flycatcher and least Bell's vireo, both of which are also under intense pressure. Together with the other living members of this community, these creatures makes Big T a place like no other in California.
- * **Big T's future depends on everyone.** Just about every person approached during outreach visits to Big T agrees that the wash is precious. The natural setting, shade, and connection visitors feel to nature during their visits have been evident in these conversations. By making the argument that one's actions add up over time, including actions beneficial to Big T's ecosystem, the County of Public Works hopes to instill a sense of ownership and inclusion in Big T's conservation plan.

Delivering these three "take-home" points will lead to a greater appreciation and adherence to Big T's rules and regulations. County of Public Works wants the posted regulations to make sense to everyone visiting Big T.

The main method of conveying these three take-home points has been a new Big T flyer. 

Kid's Corner

Causing a Splash at Big T!

The American bullfrog, whose scientific name is *Rana catesbeiana*, is an unwelcome animal in the Big T Ponds and in Haines Canyon Creek. This is the largest True Frog in North America, and it is an invasive species in California. An invasive species is a plant or animal that comes from a distant location and whose predators or natural enemies are absent in its new home.

While in its new home, the invasive species can have super-power like abilities. Their populations can grow very quickly. They often change their surroundings in negative ways, and often carry diseases that harm other animals.



The American bullfrog comes from the eastern United States and the Midwest. In these areas, they are not invasive, but in western states, such as California, the American bullfrog is a big problem. The invading bullfrogs are known for their large appetite. They will eat almost anything that will fit in their mouth. This is not good for other animals that live in fresh water. In lakes and streams, bullfrogs eat amphibians, reptiles, bugs, and fish. On land, they will eat small mammals and even birds!

Here's another fact that might surprise you. The female bullfrog can lay up to 20,000 eggs! Each egg can grow into a large tadpole. Fish and other aquatic animals don't like to eat the tadpoles. This means that bullfrog populations can grow very rapidly. County staff at Big T is working hard to remove the American bullfrog.

You can do your part to help protect the native plants and animals at Big T:

PLEASE DO NOT RELEASE YOUR PETS AT BIG T!

Exotic Wildlife Removal Continues at Big T

The overall purpose of the exotic wildlife removal program at Big T is to restore, create, and maintain suitable habitat for native aquatic species. The exotic wildlife removal program consists of the removal of non-native fishes, bullfrogs, turtles, and red swamp crayfish from Tujunga Ponds and Haines Canyon Creek. Different methods were used by biologists to sample the population of exotics present at each location. Some of the methods included: snorkeling, spearfishing, seining, a variety of traps, and electro-fishing.

Due to their ability to tolerate extreme environmental conditions, exotic species can out-compete natives for available space and food resources. Exotics can also pose direct impacts to native species through predation of adults and their young, or indirectly through the transmission of pathogens or parasites. The only way to effectively control the effects of non-native species is to remove them from the ecosystem.

Removal activities in 2009 included four sessions, one in April, one in May and two in June. A total of 1,171 non-native fish and other aquatic species were removed compared with 428 in 2008 (see pie charts on page 4).

In 2009, red swamp crayfish was the species with the greatest number of individuals removed. Most of these individuals were removed by hand, which proved to be the best method. Most exotic species are introduced into sensitive habitats by people releasing pets they no longer want or fish for future recreational fishing.

Even though they might seem harmless, it is important to remember that turtles and fish, along with any other pets, should never be released into the wild because they harm the native species already living there. Once non-native species are introduced into the habitat of other animals they can cause detrimental impacts on the ecosystem. 🐾



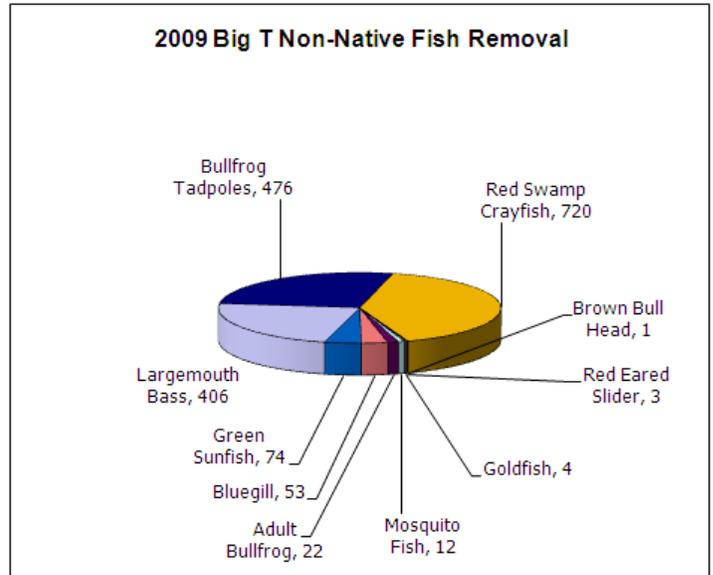
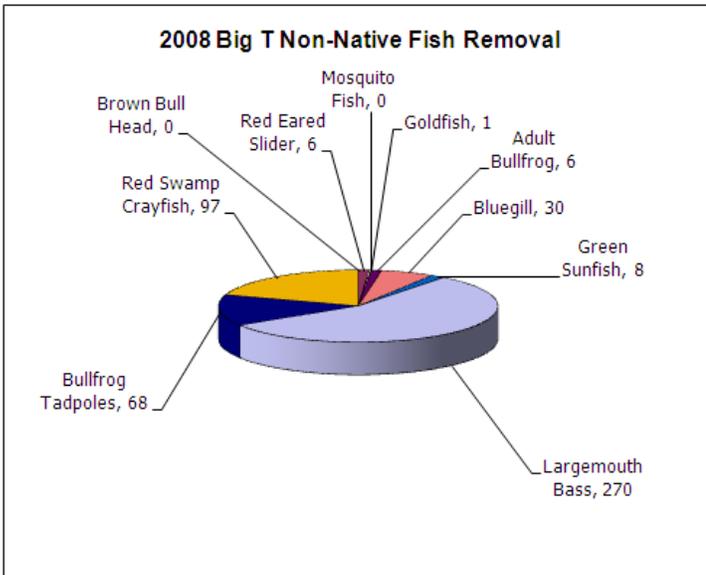
ECORP biologists Terrence Wroblewski and Blaine Schoolfield setting minnow traps in Haines Creek to remove crayfish and small-sized exotic fish species.



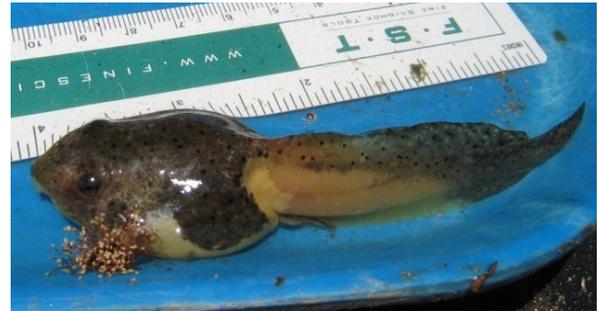
A red-eared slider removed from Big T. This exotic species was likely once someone's pet. Exotic species compete with native species for food and other resources.

It is illegal in the State of California to transport or relocate a fish or other animal without proper permits

Exotic Wildlife Removal Continues



Largemouth bass comprised a large portion of total exotics removed at Big T during years 2008 and 2009.



The American bullfrog breeds in late spring or early summer. An adult female bullfrog is capable of laying up to twenty-thousand eggs in one nest.



Bluegill fish are originally from the Great Lakes and Mississippi river basin but were widely introduced across North America. In Big T, they have had an adverse ecological impact on native fish.



Red swamp crayfish compete with native fish, such as the Santa Ana sucker, for food. They are native to the Southeastern United States but invasive in California.

An Evolutionary Strategy Out of Place

The brown-headed cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) is a species of blackbird that is a *brood parasite*. This means that it lays its eggs in the nests of other birds who then care for and raise the cowbird's chicks. Cowbirds are by nature nomadic. In fact, they've evolved this mode of reproduction as a result of coevolving with large, nomadic mammals such as bison and later, cattle, which accounts for their common name. In the prairie lands of the central United States, brown-headed cowbirds fed on insects that were associated with large herds of bison. When the bison were on the move to another location to pasture, so were the cowbirds.

Brooding or raising young requires time, patience, and a safe, stable location. So the best solution for a wandering species, such as brown-headed cowbirds, is to find a host or "baby-sitter" to raise their young.

Just as brown-headed cowbirds evolved this "brood parasite" mode of reproduction over thousands of years, host bird species also evolved methods of dealing with intrusive cowbird parents and chicks. As a defense, many birds learned to nest in dense forests because cowbirds tend to search for host nests along forest edges. Other defensive strategies include physically removing cowbird eggs or building a new nest floor on top of the cowbird eggs. These modes of defense kept brown-headed cowbird populations in check in prairie ecosystems, but in California, the story is very different.

Unfortunately, many of the host birds that raise cowbird chicks in California and throughout the western United States have not evolved alongside brown-headed cowbirds, so their defensive behaviors are not adequate enough to keep cowbird populations under control. The greatest cost to these "new host" bird species is a loss of reproductive success. Coupled with an increase in fragmented forests (forests with more edges and corridors) because of human development, brown-headed cowbirds in California pose a large threat to native bird species populations. Unfortunately, the populations of many of these native bird species are also either endangered or threatened because of habitat loss and degradation, so the negative effect of brood parasitism by cowbirds on native birds only hastens their decline.

Fortunately, a direct method of limiting cowbirds has proven to decrease nest parasitism while increasing nest success for native birds. This method entails trapping and removing cowbirds in areas where native birds are more likely to nest. In Big T, traps have been placed in areas that attract cowbirds along the edges of the tree-lined creek (also known as riparian areas) and near areas housing livestock and horses. These types of areas are used by cowbirds for nests and food.



A male brown-headed cowbird (*Molothrus ater*)

Because native birds that nest in Big T stand to benefit from our trapping efforts, it is very important that cowbird traps not be disturbed. In 2009, approximately 80 breeding groups (78 males and 111 females plus 3 juveniles) were removed from Big T using four strategically placed traps. This means that native song birds, such as least Bell's vireo and southwestern willow flycatcher, received a leg-up from this ecological obstacle posed by the wandering brown-headed cowbird. ♪

Announcements

The next Community Advisory Committee (CAC) meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, September 24, 2009** from 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm at Hansen Yard, 10179 Glenoaks Blvd., Sun Valley, CA

Please notify County of Public Works if you notice holes in the fences, new trails being cut through vegetation, dumping of trash/debris, or any other activities that may be detrimental to the value of this natural area. Contact information is on page 6 of this newsletter.

The construction of rock dams in the creek is detrimental to native fishes because the pools that develop behind the rock dams become breeding grounds for non-native species. If you see any rock dams in the creek, please notify County of Public Works to schedule a dam removal by qualified personnel.



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:

<http://www.ladpw.org/wrd/facilities/>



Emergencies? Incidents? Questions?

• CALL 911 TO REPORT ANY EMERGENCY SUCH AS FIRE OR ACCIDENT

- Please **DO NOT** use 911 to report minor incidents or regulation infractions. Contact the Los Angeles Police Department's (LAPD's) non-emergency number at (877) ASK LAPD or (877) 275-5273.
- In the case of an emergency situation (those where 911 is involved) please make a follow up call to the Department of Public Works as soon as possible at the numbers listed below.*
- Do not attempt to enforce regulations. Contact LAPD to handle the situation/incident.

* For emergency follow up or to report minor incidents, obtain information, or get questions answered during weekday work hours (8:00 a.m. to 5:50 p.m., Monday through Thursday**), please contact:

Belinda Kwan or Valerie De La Cruz

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 County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works
 900 S. Fremont Avenue
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 Phone: (626) 458-6135/(626) 458-6126
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** After work hours or on weekends, please contact the Department of Public Works at (626) 458-HELP.