



Big T Wash Line

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About the Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area

“Big T” is a conservation area located in the City of Los Angeles Sunland area (see Page 8).

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



Aerial Imagery of Big T in February 2018 after the Creek Fire

Wildfire Prevention and Safety

No activities that could lead to wildfire such as building campfires, smoking, off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, or fireworks, are ever permitted at Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area. However, Big T's location, being surrounded by mountains and open space areas, residential areas and ranches, and various other land uses, make it susceptible to fire from a wide range of sources. Knowing how to prevent fires at home or while recreating in other open space or natural areas is key to keeping our communities and wild spaces safe.



Big T after the Creek Fire in 2017

Wildfires have been occurring in California at an increasing rate over the last several decades, and foothill communities are at particular risk. The threat of fires is especially high during late summer and fall when brush is at its driest and Santa Ana winds are in full force. This past August, Tropical Storm Hilary brought substantial rain to the area, breaking rainfall records across Southern California. Summer rains coupled with our typical warm summer temperatures created ideal conditions for late season weed growth. This is particularly concerning as these weeds mature, dry out, and add to the fire fuel load when wildfire risk is at its highest.

Restoration crews have been working to cut back and remove large patches of non-native plants throughout Big T, brought on by the August rains. Removing this weedy vegetation will reduce fire risk at Big T and help to protect the surrounding communities. Even though campfires, smoking, and OHVs are not permitted at Big T, there is always potential for a fire. According to the National Parks Service:

“Nearly 85 percent of wildland fires in the United States are caused by humans. Human-caused fires result from campfires left unattended, the burning of debris, equipment use and malfunctions, negligently discarded cigarettes, and intentional acts of arson.” In addition to human causes, weather events can spark fires by way of lightning and high winds that can down powerlines.

To help prevent wildfires and protect our foothill communities follow the U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Wildland Fire's “10 Tips to Prevent Wildfires” below.

- 1. Check weather and drought conditions.** Pay close attention to weather and drought conditions, which can affect the flammability of vegetation. Avoid any activities that involve fire or sparks when it's hot, dry, and windy. Remember, conditions and local restrictions should guide your decision for any fire-related activity such as building a campfire, operating equipment, off-roading on dry grass.
- 2. Build your campfire in an open location and far from flammables only when and where fires are permissible.** Many people love to go camping and enjoy the warmth and light from a campfire, but your campfire can cause wildfires if you do not

Continue on next page...

build and extinguish it properly. To build a safe campfire where permitted, make sure you:

- Remember, campfires are never permitted at Big T.
- Select a flat, open location away from flammable materials such as logs, brush or decaying leaves and needles.
- Always use a fire ring if available or create a fire ring using rocks to help contain your fire.
- Scrape away grass, leaves, and needles down to the mineral soil.
- Cut wood in short lengths, pile it within the cleared area, and then light the fire.
- Stay with your fire.
- Extinguish it completely before leaving.

3. Douse your campfire until it's cold. Make sure your campfire is completely out by following the steps below:

- Douse the fire with at least one bucket of water.
- Stir it.
- Add another bucket of water.
- Stir it again.
- Your campfire should be cold to the touch before you leave.
- Remember, campfires are never permitted at Big T



Remains of an illegal campfire spotted at Big T this July

4. Keep vehicles off dry grass. Remember, off-roading is never permitted at Big T. If you are off-roading, remember that your exhaust can reach temperatures of 1,000+ degrees! So, avoid driving or parking over dry grass or other low-lying vegetation. Only off-road where permitted to do so. Remember, off-roading is never permitted at Big T.

5. Regularly maintain your equipment and vehicle. Vehicles and equipment can shoot sparks from their exhaust, particularly vehicles that haven't received regular maintenance. Whether it's a car, truck, or OHV, make sure your vehicle is current on all mechanical checkups and suited for off-road adventures.

6. Practice vehicle safety. Carry a shovel, bucket, and a fire extinguisher in your vehicle to put out fires. OHVs must have a spark arrester. You should also carry a bucket, but you could also use a helmet or anything else to carry water.

7. Check your tires, bearings, and axles on your trailer. If you're towing a trailer, please remember to do a maintenance check to ensure the tires are not worn, the bearings and axles are greased, and safety chains are properly in place and not dragging on the ground.

8. Keep sparks away from dry vegetation. Make sure you never operate equipment that produces sparks near dry vegetation. Always clear the area around your workspace. This area should be even larger if it is windy and dry. Create clearings where all flammables have been removed. The width or radius of the clearing will vary with the conditions from 10 to 25 feet.

9. Check conditions and regulations before you use fireworks or consider safe alternatives. Remember, fireworks are never permitted at Big T, and all fireworks, even the 'safe and sane' variety are illegal in the City of Los Angeles. Fireworks start over 19,000 fires and send over 9,000 people to the Emergency Room each year in the United States. Check your federal, state and city regulations before using fireworks. States, counties, and cities may have different laws and regulations, so a little bit of research could save you the cost of an improper fireworks use penalty, or worse – the cost of fighting a wildfire. Consider safe alternatives such as glow sticks or silly string. Remember, fireworks are never permitted at Big T, and all fireworks, even the 'safe and sane' variety are illegal in the City of Los Angeles

10. Cautiously burn debris and never when it's windy or restricted. Sometimes, people burn trash, leaves, agricultural waste, or other materials. If you plan to burn debris on your private property, make sure you have water nearby (such as a garden hose) and never burn anything if it's windy. Once your burn is completed, be sure to "mop up" the ashes with water and stirring. Wildfires often start from "holdover" debris piles that were not extinguished, days or even weeks after they were burned. There may be burning restrictions in your area, so contact your local fire authority for more information and debris burning tips.

Please remember, no activities that could lead to wildfire such as building campfires, smoking, off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, or fireworks, are ever permitted at Big T. Immediately call 911 if you detect smoke or fire in your area and report the location. If you see a fire at or near Big T, please email us at BTWMA@dpw.lacounty.gov after reporting it to authorities so it can be investigated.

What to Expect in an El Niño Year



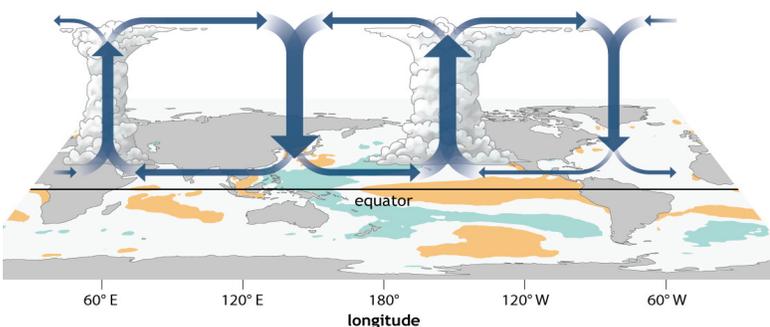
Flooding at Big T after a rain event in January 2023.

As many have heard by now, El Niño is coming! This alternating weather pattern, sometimes referred to as the El Niño Southern Oscillation or ENSO, is anticipated to continue through the northern hemisphere this winter with a greater than 95 percent chance between January and March 2024. As of mid-September, there is a 71 percent chance that a strong El Niño will visit us this winter. So, what is an El Niño anyway? An El Niño occurs when winds along the equator in the Pacific Ocean weaken, causing surface temperatures of the ocean to warm slightly. The warmer water can cause warmer temperatures over the western and northern United States during the winter season and has the potential to cause wetter than average weather. Although meteorologists (scientists who study the weather) anticipate a strong El Niño year this winter, it is not yet certain that one will occur, or that we will receive heavy rains locally. While some El Niño years have brought higher than average rainfall to Southern

California, this is not always the case. Many atmospheric conditions contribute to the development of El Niños, and scientists are still learning how these various conditions affect an El Niño's strength, intensity, and location.

If the Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area receives higher than average rainfall this season, the washes and creek may flood their banks, erosion may occur to the stream banks and trail system, and debris flows from upstream may develop. Heavy rains and flash floods can create a bit of a mess until trail maintenance crews are able to clean up, remove large debris, and repair any damaged trails. It is important to avoid recreating at Big T if rain or flash floods are predicted for the area. You may encounter barricades and signs placed at trail entrances indicating that they are temporarily closed during and after storms. Please respect these closures as they are for your safety.

El Niño conditions



For more information about this season's ENSO outlook please visit the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's ENSO Blog: <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/blogs/enso>

Brown-headed Cowbird Update

Brown-headed cowbirds are native to the Great Plains and traditionally associated with herds of bison that attracted and kicked up a plentiful supply of insects as they migrated from place to place. Brown-headed cowbirds do not build their own nests. One theory is that because the bison were always on the move, cowbirds were rarely at any location long enough to build a nest and raise young, and as such, brown-headed cowbirds evolved into brood parasites. Brood parasites are species that do not build their own nests to lay their eggs. Instead, they lay eggs in nests of other unsuspecting, native songbird species (sometimes after damaging or removing the native bird's eggs) who will often raise the cowbird young as their own. The development and expansion of agricultural and livestock operations may have facilitated the brown-headed cowbird's expansion west, where they continue to thrive at feed lots, ranches, and other facilities with large grazing mammals.

On the Great Plains, many songbird species, having evolved with brown-headed cowbirds, are adept at recognizing cowbird eggs and will remove the eggs or even abandon their nest if cowbird eggs are detected. Unfortunately, songbird species in the far west, including Southern California, have had less time to adapt to brown-headed cowbirds and are more easily tricked into raising cowbird young. In some instances, the "parent" cowbirds will hang around the nest and make sure the new parent songbirds are feeding their young cowbird. Young cowbirds are much larger than songbirds, and the cowbirds will outcompete their siblings or even push them out of the nest to ensure survival. To help the native songbird population thrive and to protect special status songbird species such as the federal and state endangered least Bell's vireo, avian biologists trap and remove these clever cowbirds at Big T. As of 2023, we have been successfully trapping brown-headed cowbirds at Big T for 20 years!

This past cowbird trapping season (April 1 through June 30), 59 cowbirds including 42 females and 17 males were captured and removed. Interestingly, 31 of the 42 females captured were captured in April, early in the cowbird trapping season, which undoubtedly helped to reduce the number of songbird nests parasitized at Big T this year. Further evidence of this year's trapping success is that no juveniles were captured at any of the four trap locations. Locally raised cowbirds are easily and quickly captured after fledging, and therefore, are good indicators of the efficacy of a trapping program. The lack of juveniles captured indicates that very few cowbirds were likely raised at Big T this nesting season, which is great news for our native birds, including at least two least Bell's vireo pairs with nests documented this year!



Brown-headed cowbird egg in a robin's nest



Female (left) and male (right) brown-headed cowbirds



Brown-headed cowbirds perched inside a trap. Photo by Griffith Wildlife Biology

Announcements

15th Annual Trails Cleanup Day

The 15th Annual Trail Cleanup Day is scheduled for December 2, 2023. Please join us in helping cleanup Big T's trails and Haines Canyon Creek! **See the flyer on the next page for more details and hope to see you there!**

Join Us!

Time to Trim Your Trees



Fall is the time of year to trim your trees and shrubs! Why? Almost all native North American birds are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, a federal law that was established in 1918 to protect the migratory birds that spend winters in other locations and return to their nesting areas in the spring to raise their young. In the greater Los Angeles area, the migratory bird nesting season generally extends from February through mid-September. This means that most birds are done nesting by the fall, and the risk of damaging or destroying a nest during yard maintenance activities is greatly reduced.

As a requirement of Big T's maintenance and monitoring program we conduct year-round removal of non-native, weedy plant species and trim back trees and shrubs when they start to encroach on the trails. Vegetation removal

activities occurring during the nesting bird season are conducted only after work areas have been surveyed by an avian biologist. If the biologist finds a nest, a buffer is established to protect the nesting birds, and no work can occur within the buffer until the nestlings have fledged and the birds are no longer using the nest. The biologist will also conduct nest monitoring to make sure nesting birds are not stressed by the work activities being conducted. If signs of stress are observed, the biologist may stop work and increase the protective buffer, limit work activities to only those that don't require loud power tools, or may have the crew move and work in another portion of the Mitigation Area altogether.

Because it's usually impractical for property owners to hire a biologist, avoiding trimming trees and shrubs until the fall is the best way to help protect nesting birds. Trimming your trees in the fall is the best time for your trees as well, as trees and shrubs are dormant in the cooler months. It's a win-win!

Report Fires

As we enter the fall wildfire season, **please report any active fires spotted at Big T or in the surrounding communities by calling 911. Please also email BTWMA@dpw.lacounty.gov** so it can be investigated. Biologists and county workers frequently visit Big T and keep an eye out for fires, suspicious activity, trail safety hazards, and other dangers in the area but we also rely on the eyes and ears of site visitors. Remember, fires of any kind are not permitted within Big T. Let's all work together to keep ourselves and our neighbors safe!



Join us for the 15th annual Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area

TRAIL CLEANUP DAY



December 2, 2023 | 8 a.m.

Water, snacks, and trash bags will be provided.

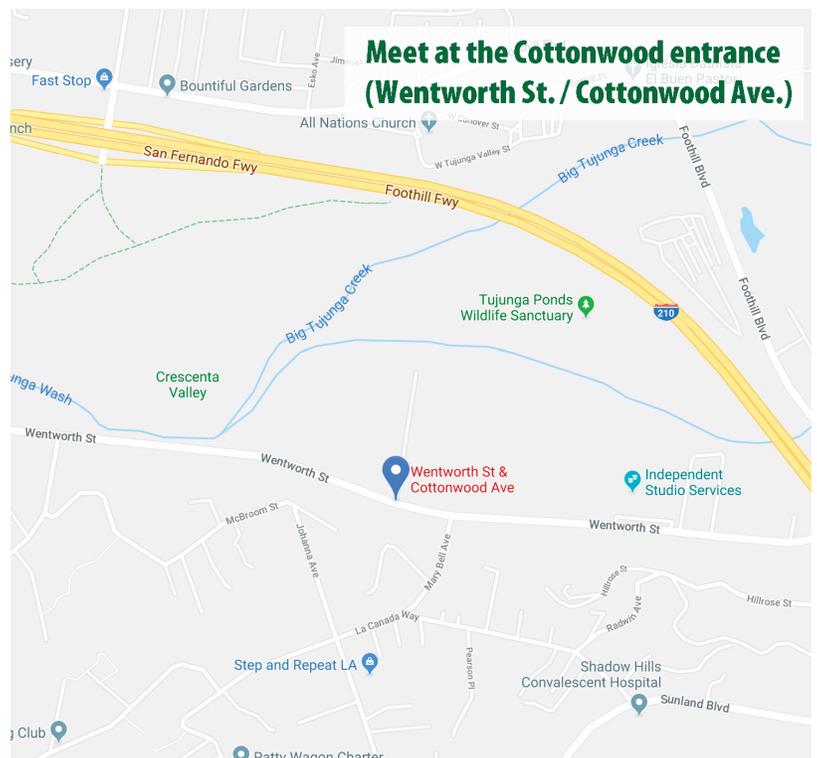
PLEASE BRING:

- 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) 458-6134
or email btwma@dpw.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

Instructions: Circle or draw a check mark next to the items that could start a wildfire.



Fireworks



Black Bear



Off-Highway Vehicle



Pine Tree



Bicycle



Camping Tent



Camp Fire



Car Accident



Chainsaw



Glowstick



Lightning



Hot Cocoa

Answers: Fireworks, Off-Highway Vehicle, Camp Fire, Car Accident, Chainsaw, Lightning

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@dpw.lacounty.gov

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

