

# Big T Wash Line

SEPTEMBER 2010



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



## Announcements

- ◆ The next **Community Advisory Committee (CAC)** meeting is scheduled for Thursday, **September 23, 2010** from 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm at Hansen Yard, 10179 Glenoaks Blvd., Sun Valley, CA.
- ◆ **REMAIN VIGILANT.** While no new incidences have been reported, on June 16, 2010, a local equestrian avoided a certain accident when the equestrian spotted a snare designed to harm rider and horse. The equestrian removed the snare in the nick-of-time, but also spotted another snare near the Big T ponds. Three men were responsible for this "prank" and were not seen again. Please call County Sheriffs Department at 1-800-834-0064 to report any suspicious activity.
- ◆ **Breeding season is ending at Big T.** While this is indeed the case, continue to tread lightly while on your rides and hikes. Post-breeding season means Big T is serving as a giant nursery for new birds and fish.
- ◆ Be on the look-out for **loose dogs at Big T** ECORP biologists and Big T visitors have reported sightings of unleashed and unfriendly dogs on Big T property. Do not approach them or their owners. DPW is consulting with the County agencies (**Sheriffs Department** and **Department of Animal Care and Control**) to correlate a procedure for reporting unleashed dogs. Please report any confrontation with unleashed dogs to the County Sheriff's Department.



## Aquatic Exotics

The effort to remove and control aquatic exotic species continues at the Big T ponds and in Haines Canyon Creek. Please do not disturb traps or nets; they are checked on a daily basis.

The removal effort is crucial in controlling exotic fish and invertebrate populations. This last season was exceptional: a large snapping turtle was captured in the ponds (pg 2).



## Big T Gets its Own 2010 Census!

In late June, a team of ECORP biologist conducted an extensive plant survey throughout the mitigation property. The team recorded just under 100 unique species belonging to 39 families of plants. One third of the identified plants are non-native; the rest belong at Big T. ♪

## 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 a parcel of land located in the City of Los Angeles' Sunland area (see Page 6). Big T covers an area of approximately 210 acres of sensitive habitat. The site was purchased by the County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works (DPW) in 1998 for the purpose of compensating for habitat loss for other County of Los Angeles 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>

## Native Plant Profile: *Hesperoyucca whipplei*



*Hesperoyucca whipplei* has many common names. It is known as chaparral yucca, our Lord's candle, Spanish bayonet, Quixote yucca, common yucca, or more appropriately, the foothill yucca.

This species is native to southern California and to the south in Baja California, Mexico. It occurs mainly in chaparral, coastal sage scrub, and oak woodland plant communities at altitudes ranging from 1,000 to just over 8,000 feet (Big T is about 1,300 feet above sea level). At Big T, it is found conspicuously in the wash.

The plant takes approximately 5 years to begin flowering, at which time it has reached maturity. When it does, it usually dies. (It only has one pollinator: the Yucca moth).

Unfortunately, Big T's specimens have been targeted for their spectacular flowers. Visitors have cut away the flowers, presumably for their aesthetic value. The flowers serve for reproduction, so removing them only harms Big T's local population.

We would like to invite everyone to witness what literally occurs once in the lifetime of this beautiful native plant, but to think twice of the potential harm to Big T's population of native yucca by just removing their ever important flowers.



## Exotic Species News: *Chelydra serpentina*

In March, a large **common snapping turtle** was removed from the east Tujunga pond during a night snorkel survey. ECORP aquatic biologists *carefully* removed the 15-20 lb specimen and donated him to a local turtle-rescue organization.

They are not native to California. Their natural range is from southern Canada to eastern United States. How did this behemoth find Big T? It is very likely that this individual was once an exotic pet but was abandoned by its owner. As expected, this species competes with native turtle species for resources, such as food and habitat.

This capture exemplifies the importance of properly relinquishing unwanted aquatic pets rather than releasing them into Big T.



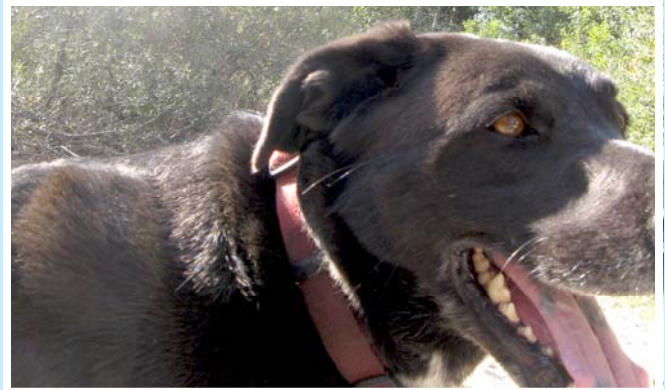
## Station Fire: One Year Anniversary



August 2010 marked the one year anniversary of the Station Fire. Fortunately the fire stayed north of Interstate 210 and out of the Big T Mitigation Bank. However, as expected, the '09 storm season brought debris flow and trash through the Big Tujunga Wash Area.

Trails throughout Big T were effected causing trail erosion and undermined vegetation. Even though a year has passed there is still a high potential for debris flows which will stay in effect for the next 4 years until the burned watershed recovers. Please do not visit Big T during rain events.

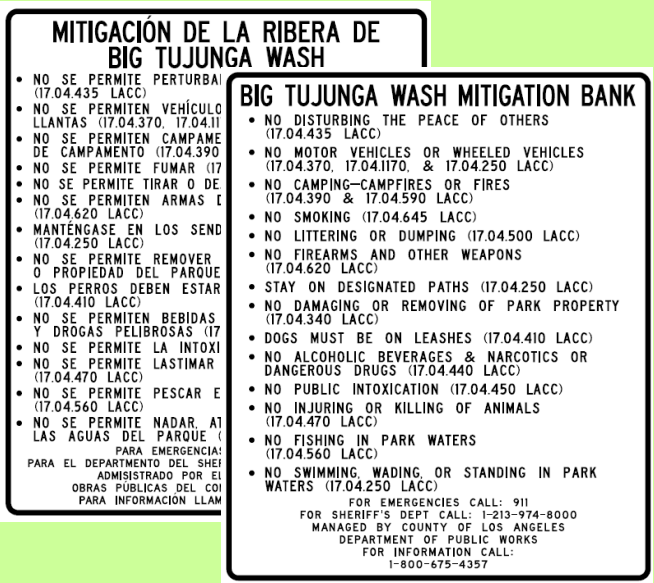
## All Dogs Must Be On Leashes



Dogs love Big T. In fact, there is no better place than Big T for a peaceful walk with your canine buddy. Dogs need a daily dose of physical and mental stimulation, so Big T is perfect. However, we would like to remind everyone that while we encourage dog walks at Big T, **all dogs on Big T property must be on leashes.** It is of utmost importance that regulations are followed **for the safety of other hikers, equestrians, and for other pets visiting Big T.**



# New Signs and Law Enforcement at Big T



You will find the New Signs in both English and Spanish posted at all designated entrances listed below:

- North and South Wheatland Ave.
- Mary Bell Ave.
- Gibson Ranch
- Pond Area

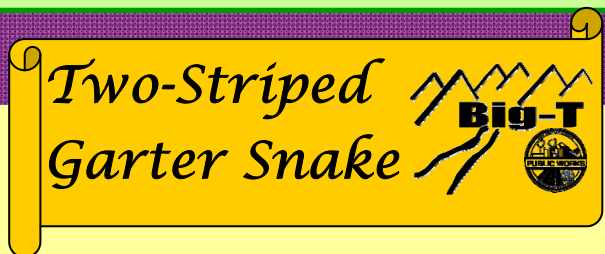
The new signs are posted to help maintain the safety and protection for habitat and all Big T visitors.

The Los Angeles County Sheriffs Department, Parks Bureau, was recently formed to patrol and protect the Big T area and its visitors.

If there is an **emergency, as always, please call 911.**

If there is unlawful or suspicious activity occurring, please contact the Sheriff's Department Dispatch:

1-800-834-0064.



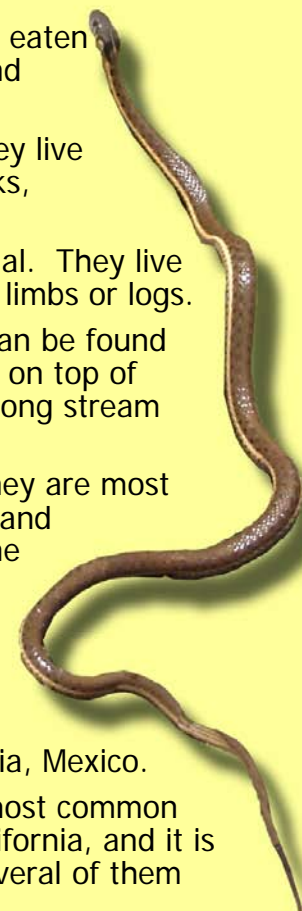
Perhaps you've seen a **two-striped garter snake** at Big T. You might be surprised to learn that a garter snake is not dangerous to people. They like to be in the water or near water. Here are some facts about our native two-striped garter snake.

- The two-striped garter snake gets its name from the two yellow stripes on each side of its body. It is olive green, brown, or dark gray, and it has a red tongue. They can grow to be 18 to 30 inches long. Their bellies are yellow, orange, or red.
- The two-striped garter snake is not venomous to people. Their bite might hurt, but it is not dangerous. Garter snakes have toxins in their saliva that can be deadly to their prey.
  - Since these snakes live mostly in the water, they eat fish, fish eggs, small frogs and toads, tadpoles, insect larvae, and sometimes worms or leeches. They may also eat small mammals like mice.



## Kid's Corner

- Garter snakes may be eaten by hawks, coyotes, and raccoons.
- They are aquatic. They live around streams, creeks, ponds, and lakes.
- They are also terrestrial. They live in holes or under tree limbs or logs.
- During the day they can be found basking (sun bathing) on top of streamside rocks or along stream banks.
- During the summer they are most active in the morning and afternoons. During the cooler months, they are active only during warm afternoons.
- They live from central California to as far south as Baja California, Mexico.
- This is probably the most common snake in southern California, and it is not unusual to see several of them at one time.





**Water Resources Division**  
**County of Los Angeles**  
**Department of Public Works**  
**900 S. Freemont 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 Sheriff's Department at 1-800-834-0064.
- 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 Sheriff's Department 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 5:15 p.m., Monday through Thursday\*\*), please contact:

**Valerie De La Cruz or Cindy Rowlan**

Water Resources Division  
 County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works  
 900 S. Freemont Avenue  
 Alhambra, CA 91803  
 Phone: (626) 458-6126 / (626) 458-6132  
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\*\* After work hours or on weekends, please contact the Department of Public Works at (626) 458-HELP.