

# What is a watershed?

A watershed is the area of land where water collects and drains into a specific river, ocean, lake, or other body of water. For example, the Los Angeles River watershed includes all of the land draining into all of the streams, creeks, and rivers that flow into the Los Angeles River and ultimately out to the Pacific Ocean. Watersheds vary in size from the largest rivers, such as the Mississippi River's watershed which covers all or part of 31 states, to the smallest creeks which can have watersheds of only an acre or more.



## Watersheds in Los Angeles County

### LA County



There are six major watersheds in Los Angeles County which are primarily served by the Los Angeles County Flood Control District (LACFCD) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Army Corps). The Los Angeles County Flood Control District encompasses more than 3,000 square miles, 85 cities and approximately 2.1 million land parcels. It includes the vast majority of drainage infrastructure within incorporated and unincorporated areas in every watershed, including 500 miles of open channel, 2,800 miles of underground storm drains, and an estimated 120,000 catch basins.

**Los Angeles River**

**San Gabriel River**

**Dominguez Channel & Los Angeles Harbor**

**South Santa Monica Bay**

**North Santa Monica Bay**

**Santa Clara River**

## Los Angeles River

The Los Angeles River Watershed encompasses and is shaped by the path of the Los Angeles River, which flows from its headwaters in the San Fernando Valley, in the Simi Hills and Santa Susana Mountains, and eastward to the northern corner of Griffith Park. Here the channel turns southward through the Glendale Narrows before it flows across the coastal plain and into San Pedro Bay near Long Beach. The Los Angeles River has evolved from an uncontrolled, meandering river providing a valuable source of water for early inhabitants to a major flood protection waterway.



- Watershed size: 834 square miles
- Major river: Los Angeles River, 51 miles long. 25 miles maintained by the LACFCD, 26 miles maintained by the Army Corps
- Major tributaries: Compton Creek, Rio Hondo, Arroyo Seco, Verdugo Wash, Burbank Western Channel, Pacoima Wash, Tujunga Wash, Browns Creek
- Includes 5 dams, 94 debris basins, 25 pump plants
- Encompasses 44 cities in Los Angeles County and unincorporated Los Angeles County
- Population: approximately 5 million
- Over 60% of the total watershed is developed
- River channelization began in 1938 and ended in 1954

## Dominguez Channel & Los Angeles Harbor

The Dominguez and Los Angeles Watershed is located within the southern portion of Los Angeles County. With a population of nearly 1 million, considerable demands are made on infrastructure and services within the watershed. Water supply is limited and the majority of water use is from imported sources. Parkland and open space are in short supply and generally are deficient. Existing efforts to address the constraints of the watershed are included in the Dominguez Watershed Management Master Plan.



- Watershed size: 133 square miles
- Major channel: Dominguez Channel, 15 miles maintained by the LACFCD
- Major tributaries: Dominguez Channel, Los Angeles Harbor watershed
- Includes 12 pump plants
- Encompasses parts, or all, of 17 cities in Los Angeles County, the Port of Long Beach, the Port of Los Angeles, and unincorporated Los Angeles County
- Population: approximately 1 million
- 93% of the land within the watershed is developed

## San Gabriel River

The San Gabriel River Watershed is located in the eastern portion of Los Angeles County. It is bound by the San Gabriel Mountains to the north, most of San Bernardino/Orange County to the east, the division of the Los Angeles River from the San Gabriel River to the west, and the Pacific Ocean to the south. The watershed drains into the San Gabriel River from the San Gabriel Mountains flowing 58 miles south until its confluence with the Pacific Ocean.



- Watershed size: 590 square miles in Los Angeles County; 84 square miles in Orange County; 5 square miles in San Bernardino County
- San Gabriel River: 48 miles long; 32.5 miles maintained by the LACFCD; 15.5 miles maintained by the Army Corps
- Major tributaries: Coyote Creek, San Jose Creek, Walnut Creek
- Encompasses 46 cities in Los Angeles County and unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County
- Includes 9 dams, 27 debris basins, 15 pump plants
- Population: approximately 2.3 million
- 26% of the total watershed is developed
- Over 90% of rainfall in watershed is conserved

## North Santa Monica Bay

The North Santa Monica Bay Watershed is comprised of the Malibu Creek Watershed, Topanga Creek Watershed, and other rural Santa Monica Mountains Watersheds. These watersheds are located in the northwest corner of Los Angeles County bounded on the north, west, and east by the Santa Monica Mountains, and on the south by the Pacific Ocean. The watersheds consist primarily of natural open space with significant land areas dedicated as parkland.



- Watershed size: 203 square miles
- Major creek: Malibu Creek, 10 miles of unmaintained, natural river
- Major tributaries: Las Virgenes Creek, Triunfo Canyon Creek, Arroyo Sequit, Trancas Canyon, Zuma Canyon, Topanga Canyon
- Includes 5 debris basins
- Encompasses 6 cities, and parts of unincorporated Los Angeles and Ventura Counties
- Population: approximately 100,000
- Over 65% of the total watershed is developed

## South Santa Monica Bay

The South Santa Monica Bay Watershed is comprised of the Ballona Creek and the South Santa Monica Bay Coastal Watersheds. Ballona Creek is a nine-mile long flood protection channel that drains the Los Angeles basin, from the Santa Monica Mountains on the north, the Harbor Freeway (110) on the east, and the Baldwin Hills on the south. A small portion of the Ballona Creek Watershed is dedicated to open space. The Santa Monica Bay Coastal Watersheds are located in the southwest portion of Los Angeles County along the Pacific Ocean. This area is comprised of watersheds spanning from Castlerock Watershed on the north to Palos Verdes Peninsula Watershed on the south.



- Watershed size: 212 square miles; 130 square miles within Ballona Creek and 87 square miles within coastal watersheds
- Major creek: Ballona Creek, 9 miles total. 7 miles maintained by LACFCD, 2 miles maintained by the Army Corps
- Major tributaries: Centinela Creek, Sepulveda, Canyon Channel, Benedict Canyon Channel, and coastal watersheds
- Includes 3 debris basins, 9 pump plants
- Encompasses 6 cities and unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County (Ballona Creek); 12 cities and unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County (coastal watersheds)
- Population: approximately 2 million
- 76% of the Ballona Creek watershed is developed, while 65% of coastal watershed is developed

## Santa Clara River

The Santa Clara River originates in the Angeles National Forest near the community of Acton and flows westward for approximately 84 miles to the Pacific Ocean. The River is one of the few natural river systems in Southern California and, throughout its length, crosses cities, farmland, and undeveloped lands.



- Watershed size: 786 square miles in Los Angeles County; 1 square mile in Kern County; 243 square miles in Ventura County
- Major River: Santa Clara River, 84 miles of unmaintained, natural river
- Major tributaries: Castaic Creek, San Francisquito Creek, Newhall Channel, Bouquet Canyon Channel
- Encompasses 2 cities and unincorporated areas in Los Angeles County
- Includes 30 debris basins
- Population: approximately 252,000
- 12% of the total watershed is developed
- The river originates in the Angeles National Forest and flows to the Pacific Ocean
- The River is one of the few natural river systems in Southern California

