

# Big T Wash Line

April 2016



A Publication of the  
**County of Los Angeles**  
**Department of Public Works**  
(LACDPW)

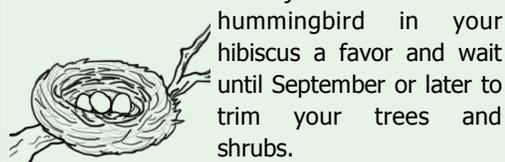


## Announcements

**Report Any Emergencies!** If you see something suspicious occurring in the Mitigation Area, call the LA Sheriff's Department dispatch immediately to report it. LACDPW cannot respond to emergencies; however, please notify [BTWMA@dpw.lacounty.gov](mailto:BTWMA@dpw.lacounty.gov) of any incidents reported to law enforcement and we will gladly follow up. LA Sheriff's Department Dispatch: **1 (800) 834-0064**



**Nesting Bird Season** — The breeding season for most bird species has begun so make sure to save all of your tree trimming activities for the fall! Most bird species are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, a federal law that was established to protect birds, their nests, and their habitat. Violation of this law can lead to fines or even jail time. So do that



hummingbird in your hibiscus a favor and wait until September or later to trim your trees and shrubs.

**Brown-headed cowbirds** — It's time again to begin the trapping program for brown-headed cowbirds that parasitize the nests of other birds. The cowbirds lay their eggs in nests of other birds but never provide care. In order to eliminate cowbird nest parasitism, traps will be placed in and around Big T again in 2016. These traps contain food, water,

shade and have a slot on the top where the birds fly in, but can't get out. Don't worry about the other species that might get in because a biologist checks the traps daily and releases the non-target birds! Traps will be in Big T from April to June. Remember to let the traps be!



**Bilingual visits** — Be sure to say "Hola," "Hello," "Howdy," or "Hi" to our bilingual biologists this summer! Biologists will be on site over the weekends between Memorial Day and Labor Day to talk with people about all things Big T. They will be happy to answer any questions you have. They also carry cool pamphlets that show all the things you can and can't do in the Mitigation Area.

**Fires at Big T** — As you know, fire danger is a serious concern. LACDPW is very aware of this safety issue and is working hard to address it. Biologists and other County workers frequently visit Big T to keep an eye out for fires, suspicious activity, graffiti, rock dams, trail safety hazards, and other dangers in the area but we also rely on your eyes and ears at the site. Remember, fires of any kind are not permitted within Big T. **If you ever see a fire call 911.** Please also email us at [BTWMA@dpw.lacounty.gov](mailto:BTWMA@dpw.lacounty.gov) so it can be investigated. 🐾

## 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 4). Big T covers an area of approximately 210 acres of sensitive habitat. The site was purchased by LACDPW in 1998 for the purpose of compensating for habitat loss for other LACDPW projects.

LACDPW's implementation of the Master Mitigation Plan for the Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area (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. Big T is home to several protected species of fish (Santa Ana sucker, Santa Ana speckled dace, arroyo chub) and contains habitat for sensitive bird species (least Bell's vireo, 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 (spring and fall). More information can be found at

[www.dpw.lacounty.gov/wrd/projects/BTWMA](http://www.dpw.lacounty.gov/wrd/projects/BTWMA)

## California High Speed Rail Alternative Alignment Revised!

The California High Speed Rail E2 Alternative was recently revised to avoid crossing through the Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area! LACDPW is closely following new developments for this proposed project, but you can view the revised proposed alternatives here: [http://www.hsr.ca.gov/docs/newsroom/maps/Palmdale\\_to\\_Burbank.pdf](http://www.hsr.ca.gov/docs/newsroom/maps/Palmdale_to_Burbank.pdf)



## Hey Predators, Try to Get Past This!

Many animals have developed adaptations in order to survive attacks from predators. Adaptations can range from camouflage to help them hide, bright colors to warn predators that they are poisonous or dangerous, or unique reactions to threats to keep themselves safe.

One adaptation lizards have developed to avoid predators is to drop their tails when they are attacked. When a lizard drops its tail, it looks like the animal is injured because the tail is completely detached from its body, but the lizard is perfectly fine! The ability to drop its tail is called caudal autonomy. Once the tail is dropped, it will twitch and wiggle for several minutes. The wiggling, tail distracts the predator, allowing the lizard to safely escape. After a lizard drops its tail it can take weeks for the tail to grow back. Oftentimes the tail that regrows is not as colorful as the original and may lack the original pattern on pattern compared to the rest of the body. However, growing back an unattractive tail is much better than losing your life! As you enjoy Big T, keep an eye out for lizards and check out their tails. If you can see a difference in color or pattern or if they have a short, stubby-looking tail, those are signs that the lizard you are admiring has survived an encounter with a potential predator!



**Different color pattern in a lizard's tail regrowth.**  
Photo: Glenn Upton-Fletcher

Rattlesnakes are another animal with unique adaptations. They have developed hollow segments on the ends of their tails

that, when shaken or rubbed together, create the famous rattling sound. The snake uses this sound to warn predators that they are dangerous. When a rattlesnake shakes its tail, it is announcing, "Beware! I am dangerous and you shouldn't mess with me!" This defense mechanism has worked so well for the rattlesnake that other snake species take advantage of it too! Gopher snakes have picked up on this defense mechanism and will actually mimic the posture of an angry rattlesnake when threatened and can recreate the rattle sound by vibrating its tail in a nearby shrub or leaf litter.



**Monarch butterfly**

Bright colors can also be a survival tactic. Many brightly colored animals sure are beautiful to look at but those bright colors often present a fair warning that the animal is poisonous! The Monarch butterfly is a perfect example of poisonously beautiful color. As a caterpillar, it feeds entirely on milkweed leaves. The milkweed contains a poison called cardiac glycosides that the insect ingests and stores within its tissues, making it poisonous and even harmful to many predators, such as lizards, birds, and frogs. Because of this stockpiled poison, the Monarch butterfly does not need to worry about camouflaging itself against predators – one look at its beautiful coloration is warning enough! 🐍



**A western rattlesnake rattles to warn predators.** Photo: USFWS

## How Do You Stop the Bad Fish From Moving In? Build a Fish Screen!

Big T is undergoing some updates in order to better conserve and protect the sensitive species that make their home here! Haines Creek is one of the few tributaries in the Los Angeles River Watershed still known to support the federally-threatened Santa Ana sucker. Haines Creek provides important habitat for all life stages of the Santa Ana sucker, as well as other sensitive native fish species. The primary source of water to Haines Creek comes from the Tujunga Ponds, but unfortunately these ponds provide excellent habitat for several non-native species that are known to prey on, and compete with, the Santa Ana sucker. The Tujunga Ponds act as a source population for many of these non-native species, including largemouth bass, green sunfish, and red swamp crayfish. Large populations of these species in the ponds reproduce and individuals can disperse into the creek. Complete removal of the non-natives from the creek becomes impossible with the continual repopulation of individuals from the ponds.



**A blocking net (shown here during a fish survey) works similarly to the permanent fish screen that will be installed in May!**

In order to limit the impacts of these non-native species on the native fish community, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service recently provided a grant for the installation of a fish screen between the Tujunga Ponds and Haines Creek. The purpose of the screen is to prevent the dispersal of non-native species from the ponds into Haines Creek. This screen will be constructed of galvanized steel mesh held in place with metal T-posts and it will still allow water to freely flow through it. The fish screen will be installed sometime in May of 2016. If you come across this screen while enjoying Big T, please leave it in

place, undisturbed, so that it can continue protecting the sensitive wildlife downstream. Maintenance crews will be stopping by periodically to clear any vegetation or debris that builds up against the screen. If you see someone disturbing the fish screen or discover that it is in need of immediate maintenance, please notify LACDPW at [BTWMA@dpw.lacounty.gov](mailto:BTWMA@dpw.lacounty.gov). 🐍



## Riversidean Alluvial Fan Sage Scrub: a Plant Community Sculpted by Flooding

Big T is made up of many different types of plant communities that are unique to southern California. One such community is the Riversidean alluvial fan sage scrub (RAFSS). This plant community is unique in that it only occurs on alluvial fans, which are made up of sand, gravel, and other sediments that are deposited where water interacts with mountains or hills during flood events, often creating a large triangle-shaped deposit.

The RAFSS is typically made up of three stages of plant growth that are determined by the period of time since the last major flood event: pioneer, intermediate, and mature. The pioneer stage is the youngest in the RAFSS community, with minimal vegetation and wildlife as a result of a recent flood clearing the area. This stage will often have small plants made up of buckwheat and scale broom. The intermediate stage typically takes three to five years to develop following the last major flood event, and



**A snapshot of the RAFSS plant community at Big T.**

will have higher plant diversity. Plants typically found in the intermediate stage include white sage, yerba santa, chaparral yucca, and prickly pear cactus. The mature stage develops after several years without a major flood event and is typically dominated by large perennial plants that are commonly found in a chaparral community. Some of these plants include holly leaf cherry, laurel sumac and scrub oak.

This plant community is becoming more and more rare with increased urban and residential development. Big T is very unique in that it protects approximately 99 acres of this sensitive vegetation community, which is almost half of the entire property! Next time you're at Big T, be sure to stay on the trail and keep an eye out for these plants in this unique RAFSS plant community in the Big Tujunga Wash. 🌿



**Scalebroom**



**Prickly Pear Cactus**



**Chaparral Yucca**

## Animal Corner: Belted Kingfisher



**Belted kingfisher.**  
Photo: USFWS

If you've ever wandered through Big T and come across a small blue-gray bird with an overly large-looking head, a stylish feather mohawk, and a long beak, chances are you were looking at a belted kingfisher. These unique birds are common during the winter months in southern California near areas with ponds, creeks, or lakes and can regularly be spotted at Big T.

The belted kingfisher gets its name from the blue band that crosses the white part of their chest. This species spends most of its time perched on trees and branches along the edges of ponds and streams, searching the clear water for fish, crayfish, or small aquatic insects to eat. Once the belted kingfisher spots its prey, it will dive head first into the water where it uses its long straight beak to grab its unsuspecting victim. It then flies back up to its perch and gives its prey a couple shakes, or hits the prey item against its perch a couple times before swallowing it head first.

Although belted kingfishers don't nest in southern California, they are very unusual in that they nest in burrows! Nesting burrows are dug in soft banks located immediately adjacent to open water. Both males and females will construct the burrow; however, males are the ones that perform most of the construction work. The burrow slopes upward from the entrance,

presumably to prevent flooding during unexpected changes in water levels, and may be up to eight feet in length!

The belted kingfisher is a welcomed bird at Big T because they prey on many of the non-native species that eat or compete with the native fishes in Haines Creek. The ideal habitat for many of these non-native species (open ponds with clear water and little vegetation) happens to be the ideal hunting ground for the belted kingfisher. Because of this, many of the non-native species are easy prey for the belted kingfisher. The likelihood of a Santa Ana sucker or other sensitive native fish falling victim to a belted kingfisher is low because these fish don't occur in the ponds where the kingfisher prefers to hunt. In addition, the Santa Ana sucker is also a "cryptic species," meaning it blends into its environment, which makes it much more difficult for predators to locate and capture.

Don't just keep an eye out for the belted kingfisher at Big T, be sure to listen for them too! They have a characteristically loud, penetrating, rattle-like call that is unmistakable. You can listen to it here: [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Belted\\_Kingfisher/sounds](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Belted_Kingfisher/sounds). 🌿



**Juvenile belted kingfisher**  
Photo: USFWS

# Big Tujunga Word Search



# Kid's Corner!

**Can you find all the words listed below?**

- ALLUVIAL**
- CAMOUFLAGE**
- CRYPTIC**
- DISPERSAL**
- KINGFISHER**
- MOHAWK**
- MONARCH**
- PIONEER**
- PREDATOR**
- SCREEN**

G A U J I X W C I S B N S R G E V R P G  
 B F N Y T H F L H A T P P M S W Q S R I  
 X O E N M O N A R C H X V J F L O D R B  
 S I L W A D L E T D C U H N M R S A C K  
 Z W W S V L B Q Z R M C K A O C D P J E  
 J D I I U Z D M Q F L X B T R Q M H V B  
 W P G V B G B I C X G Z A E E Y C R G L  
 B Q I C I H K F C O H D E K H V L Y S I  
 Q A P X T M U B R C E N X D S Q O G H V  
 L K N A V O B A Y R B I I T I O B H N C  
 D N E M V Y X K P L E G A L F U O M A C  
 I A D S K V P B T I T Q I Z G Y X Y Q Y  
 S S S Q L N Z X I R O T M M N D L Y X Y  
 P Y G U M C T X C Z I N X F I E Q C I V  
 E W Z D J G F B B Y P A E X K H I O A M  
 R G J G T V E F X S E F G E Q T Q Y A Q  
 S X W B U L C J Q B X O E B R E Q J V E  
 A U K O O P Q P R S M R L O S H S O L Y  
 L K Z J Q G K H M O U D W J U V E Q Q V  
 E X M Y K W A H O M N O E K P N E J H G

## Where is the Big T Mitigation Area?

Downstream of Big Tujunga Canyon, right in Lake View Terrace and 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: [www.dpw.lacounty.gov/wrd/projects/BTWMA](http://www.dpw.lacounty.gov/wrd/projects/BTWMA)



## Emergencies? Incidents? Questions?

- **CALL 911 TO REPORT ANY EMERGENCY SUCH AS FIRE OR ACCIDENT**
- To report minor incidents or regulation infractions contact the Sheriff's Department at 1-800-834-0064. (Please **DO NOT** use 911.)
- Do not attempt to enforce regulations yourself; please allow law enforcement 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 5:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday), please contact:

**Mayra Cabrera**, Water Resources Division  
 County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works  
 900 S. Fremont Avenue  
 Alhambra, CA 91803  
 Email: [BTWMA@dpw.lacounty.gov](mailto:BTWMA@dpw.lacounty.gov)  
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