Big T Wash Line

Spring 2026

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Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area Overview

"Big T" is a conservation area located in the City of Los Angeles Sunland area (see Page 7).

The Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area (Big T) spans approximately 210 acres of sensitive habitat, including the Big Tujunga Wash and Haines Canyon Creek. Los Angeles County Public Works acquired the site in 1998 to offset habitat loss from other Public Works projects.

Since April 2000, LA County Public Works has been implementing the Master Mitigation Plan for Big T. The area protects one of Southern California's most rapidly diminishing habitat types: 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.

This newsletter provides updates on ongoing programs and outlines upcoming site enhancement measures. 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

In this issue


Anna's hummingbird nest

Spring Wildlife at the Big Tujunga Wash Mitigation Area

Spring at Big T marks a period of increased reproductive activity and juvenile recruitment across the site. As temperatures rise and vegetative growth accelerates, primary productivity increases throughout the riparian corridor and adjacent uplands. This seasonal shift supports breeding, nesting, and early-life development for multiple species.

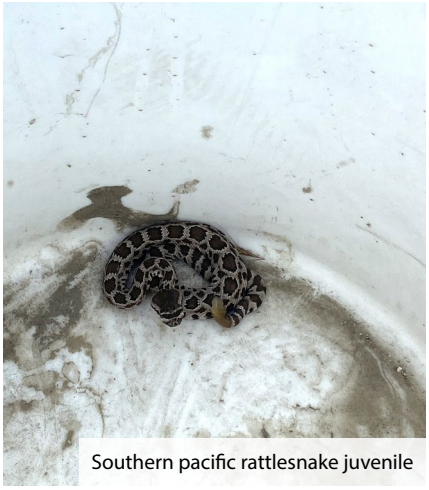
Avian Nesting Activity

Spring represents the primary breeding window for many resident and migratory songbirds inhabiting the Big T riparian corridor. By early spring, males are actively defending territories, which can be observed through song and defensive behaviors. Females flit through the vegetation, assessing habitat quality, vegetation structure, and resource availability prior to nest building. Once a mating pair has been established, they begin nest building.

Big T supports a diverse bird population, including raptors, riparian passerines, and songbirds. Nest placement for riparian bird species is typically concentrated in dense vegetation within the canopy, such as willow and cottonwood stands, where concealment and structural support are provided. Other avian species may build their nests in upland scrub or grassland habitats and, in some cases, even nest directly on the ground. Clutch size, incubation duration, and fledging timelines vary by species, but reproductive success is closely linked to food availability. Juvenile survival during the nestling stage is primarily dependent upon insect availability to support the need for high protein, but some juveniles are also fed regurgitated seeds, crop milk, nectar, flowers and invertebrates like worms. Juvenile survival also requires healthy and diverse vegetative structure for shelter against predators, as well as foraging sources. Acoustic cues, particularly persistent begging calls, often indicate active nests within the canopy before visual confirmation. If you detect signs of an active nest, maintain a generous distance to minimize disturbance and allow nesting activity to proceed uninterrupted.

Because riparian corridors like Big T function as important breeding habitat within an otherwise urban matrix, maintaining native vegetation structure and minimizing disturbance during peak nesting months is critical to sustaining avian recruitment and long-term population stability.

Reptile Emergence and Early-Life Survival


Southern pacific rattlesnake juvenile

Big T hosts a variety of reptile species, including coast horned lizard, western fence lizard, southern pacific rattlesnake, and red and western racers. Rising soil temperatures facilitate the emergence of reptile hatchlings from their underground nests. Young lizards and snakes face high mortality rates because they are small, vulnerable to predators, and not yet strong or fast movers. However, spring conditions help improve their chances of survival by providing plentiful insect prey and increased ground cover from seasonal plant growth. Their survival depends on having stable soil and plenty of safe hiding places, like logs, branches, and rocks, where they can take shelter from predators and extreme temperatures.

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Baja California chorus frog tadpole, *Credit - Gary Nafis*

Amphibian Development in the Riparian Corridor

Seasonal hydrology plays a central role in amphibian reproductive success, including the Baja California chorus frog and California toad (formerly western toad). Ephemeral pools, slow moving channels, and shaded banks of the wash serve as refuges for egg laying and early development. Increased water flow in the spring increases oxygen levels and moves nutrients through the system, which helps aquatic plants and algae grow. This creates an important food source for tadpoles. The length of time water remains in pools and the presence of slow-moving channels are critical factors for young amphibians to fully develop and complete metamorphosis. In drier years, when water dries up sooner, fewer juveniles may survive, which can affect overall population stability at Big T over time.

Considerations During the Breeding Season

Emerging juveniles throughout Big T are sensitive to human disturbance.

- Avian species are sensitive to repeated noise events and close human presence during incubation and brooding, which may result in nest abandonment or increased predation exposure.
- Reptile and amphibian juveniles are vulnerable to incidental trampling and habitat alteration, particularly where informal trails fragment vegetative cover or cross Haines Canyon Creek or the Big Tujunga Wash. The construction of illegal rock dams can also negatively impact amphibians.
- Juvenile rattlesnakes are well-camouflaged and lack developed rattles, so Big T visitors should maintain extra awareness of their surroundings during the spring.
- Coarse woody debris and rock substrate function as a critical refuge and should remain undisturbed to maintain habitat integrity.
- Seasonal management strategies that limit off-trail access, reduce noise near dense vegetation, and preserve structural habitat complexity directly support recruitment success and long-term ecological function.

Western fence lizard juvenile

To support reproductive success and juvenile survival during peak recruitment:

- Remain on designated trails to minimize habitat fragmentation
- Avoid disturbance to dense vegetation, especially during peak nesting months (February – August)
- Don't interfere with structural habitat elements (e.g., logs, branches, rock cover, streambed)
- Conduct wildlife observation at a distance to reduce stress responses

California toad juvenile, *Credit - Gary Nafis*

Spring at Big T is a very important time for wildlife. Many species reproduce and young animals begin to grow during this season, which helps maintain healthy populations throughout the food web. Protecting habitat quality in the spring supports the site's overall ecological health and helps support mitigation goals.

Pollinators at Big T

Big T contains a range of habitats extending from the riparian areas around Haines Canyon Creek and the ponds to the drier scrub habitat in the Big Tujunga Wash. This diversity of habitats results in a variety of plant and wildlife communities, including our native pollinators. These include bees, butterflies, moths, hummingbirds, and many other creatures. Here we will look at some of our common and charismatic native bee pollinators.

Pollination And Why It's Important

Most plants reproduce using flowers that, once pollinated, develop into fruits and seeds. Pollination is when pollen is delivered to a flower's stigma, resulting in fertilization. Pollination can occur in a variety of ways but often involves an animal collecting pollen on its body while foraging at flowers and unknowingly transferring that pollen to other flowers as the pollinator continues to forage. Once the flower is pollinated, it develops into fruit and seeds which allow the plant to reproduce.

Bee Diversity

Bees are a diverse group of insects that rely on pollen and nectar from flowers to survive and reproduce. Because they are so reliant on flowers for food, they are particularly important as pollinators in the wild. By visiting and collecting pollen from numerous flowers, they help plants reproduce by transferring pollen to subsequent flowers as they forage. Most people are familiar with bumble bees – the large, fuzzy, black-and-yellow bees that are common in gardens and wild areas. However, there are numerous other native bee species that inhabit Big T and surrounding areas, each differing in size, behavior, and ecology. For example, of the native bees observed around Big T, sizes can range from one-eight of an inch (the rhus fairy bee) to upwards of one and one-fourth inches (the valley carpenter bee).

Western bumble bee,
Credit - Erica Sarro, USFWS

Social vs. Solitary Bees

When thinking about bees, one usually thinks of colonial hives containing a queen and worker bees, where the queen stays in the nest laying eggs, while the "sister" worker bees forage and bring pollen and nectar back to the hive. Bumble bees and non-native honeybees are conspicuous in the landscape and exhibit this social and nesting behavior. Several native bumble bee species can be found at Big T including the yellow-faced bumble bee and western bumble bee, among others. While non-native honeybees also provide pollination services for local flowers, they can outcompete native bee species for pollen and nectar as well as spread diseases to native bee populations.

Leaf cutter bee,
Credit - Peter J. Traub, stock.adobe.com

Most species of bees are solitary nesters. There are approximately 1,600 species of native bees that occur in California alone and the vast majority of these species are solitary, meaning that the female bee finds and builds her own nest, then lays and provisions her eggs by herself. Some individuals of the same species may nest in the same area as each other, resulting in loose groups of the same species, but these bees generally keep to themselves. Many species of solitary bees occur at Big T including leaf cutter bees, carpenter bees, digger bees, and sweat bees, and they exhibit a variety of nesting and foraging behaviors.

Leaf cutter bees

These are small- to medium-sized bees that nest in existing cavities, such as dead plant stems, in between rocks, or within old

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insect burrows. They are named leaf cutter bees because they often collect plant materials, including leaves or flower petals, to build their nests. If you find any leaves with small holes cut in them, then it is likely a leaf cutter bee was collecting material to build her nest.

Carpenter bees

These are large, dark-colored bees that often chew holes in wood to build their nests, though many smaller species also exist. They may build their nests in fence posts, old timber, or other wooden structures. The males of our native species of valley carpenter bee are large, fuzzy, and bright golden orange.

Western carpenter bee,
Credit - Phil Liff-Grieff, iNaturalist

Digger bee,
Credit - Tom Koerner, USFWS

Digger bees

These are small- to medium-sized bees that nest underground. These species usually dig their own nests in which they lay their eggs. Though these bees can be hard to see while they are foraging, our local species have distinct light and dark-colored bands on their abdomens and light blue eyes which make their appearance quite striking.

Sweat bees

These are small, often bright metallic green bees that usually nest underground. If you see one of these bees, they are hard to mistake for anything else. They collect pollen in dense hairs on the back legs and often can be seen with bright yellow pollen contrasting with their green bodies.

Green metallic sweat bee,
Credit - Cortez Rohr, USFWS

Together, the conspicuous and social bumble bees and the less noticeable, yet abundant, solitary bees contribute to the resilience of Big T's natural communities and provide essential pollination services that support both plant diversity and ecosystem health. When exploring Big T, it is worth spending a few quiet minutes near blooming flowers to see what bee species may be visiting.

What's New?

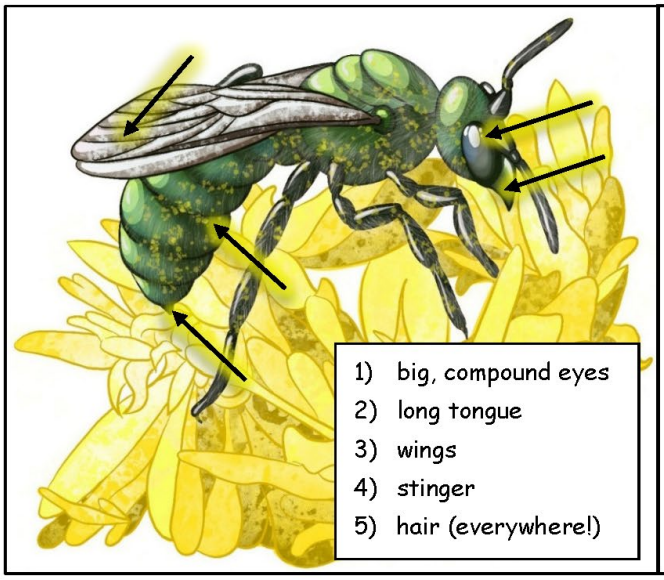
Brown-Headed Cowbird Trapping will be conducted on site between April 1 and June 30. Brown-headed cowbirds are nest parasites that lay their eggs in the nests of songbird species. Cowbird trapping is conducted every year during the peak breeding season to help protect the nests of native songbirds including special status species such as the federal- and state-endangered least Bell's vireo. Avian biologists will be onsite daily to service the traps, provide food and fresh water, and release any non-target bird species. If you encounter one of the traps, please refrain from approaching or disturbing it as this can cause stress to the birds and can deter cowbirds from entering the trap.

The Annual Community Advisory Committee Meeting, hosted by Public Works and Chambers Group, will be held on Thursday April 30, 2026. The meeting will include a review of last year's maintenance programs, and the status of this year's maintenance programs. A Q&A session will be held at the end of the meeting to provide participants with an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered by Public Works staff and/or Chambers Group biologists. A 2026 meeting agenda will be distributed to Big T's mail list recipients ahead of the meeting. The Meeting minutes for 2025 are available on **Big T's webpage.** If you would like to receive information on future meetings and other Big T site user notifications, please fill out the **form here** and email it to **BTWMA@dpw.lacounty.gov.** We hope to see you in April!

The 17th Annual Cleanup Day occurred on December 6, 2025, and was a great success! Several volunteers from Public Works, Chambers Group, and members of the public came together to clean up the trails and Haines Canyon Creek. Thanks to the incredible efforts of our volunteers, this cleanup day made a major impact. Crews removed a wide range of dumped and abandoned materials, including large bulky items like tires, furniture, tents, and bicycles, and shopping carts! Hazardous materials such as paint cans, aerosol sprays, propane tanks, and fuel containers were also removed. In addition, volunteers collected between 35 and 40 bags of smaller debris items including plastic bottles, cans, clothing, tarps, and household items, helping restore the area and improve safety and environmental conditions. We're grateful to everyone who showed up and put in the hard work to make a visible difference! If you would like to participate in our next cleanup effort, please sign up to receive site user notifications (see link above) or visit Big T's webpage for updates.

Kid'S Corner

Meet the peridot sweat bee! She may not look much like the bees you're used to seeing, but she has many of the same tricks up her sleeve. Can you label the things that help our little green friend be a good pollinator? Put the labels in the right places and think about how each adaptation makes it easier for her to collect nectar or pollen and bring them back to her nest. Then, use the box on the right to draw your own pollinator! You can make it as silly as you want – but remember that a good pollinator needs a way to carry pollen, a way to travel, and a way to sense the world around them. Have fun!



Draw your pollinator below!

Report emergencies and major incidents (like fires) by calling 911

- *To report minor incidents or regulations 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@pw.lacounty.gov

(English) For reasonable ADA and Title VI accommodations, interpreting services, and other materials in other languages, please contact Public Works at btwma@pw.lacounty.gov. This service is free.

(Spanish) Para acomodaciones razonables de ADA (Ley de Estadounidenses con Discapacidades) y Adaptación del Título VI, servicios de interprete y materiales en otros idiomas, por favor contactarse con Obras Publicas al btwma@pw.lacounty.gov. Este servicio es gratuito.

(Chinese) 如果您需要合理的便利安排、口譯服務和其他語言的材料，請聯繫公共工程部，電話 btwma@pw.lacounty.gov 此服務為免費服務

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.

For more information, scan the QR code to visit the Big T website.