

Seasons

INLAND EMPIRE



RESOURCE

CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Photo courtesy of Brian Spears, Water Resources Institute

“LYTLE IS VITAL!”

PROTECTING YOUR CREEK PROTECTS YOUR WATERSHED

By Gigi Hanna of the Water Resources Institute at Cal State San Bernardino

It's no secret that Lytle Creek is a welcome way to cool off on a hot day—the area gets as many as 10,000 visits on weekends throughout the summer. What is less known, however, is that the creek is also a vital part of the Santa Ana Watershed, providing drinking water for thousands of households downstream.

You could say that what happens in the creek stays in the watershed. When it comes to dirty diapers or natural “accidents,” that can be a problem for water quality. The naturally flowing water contains low levels of bacteria and is being monitored for bacterial indicators by the Regional Water Quality Control Board and researchers at Cal State San Bernardino. Those

groups, along with several area watershed interests, recently joined forces to help people understand the link between cleanliness of the creek and the quality of their water supply.

The Water Resources Institute at Cal State San Bernardino—in collaboration with Inland Empire Resource Conservation District (IERCD), Santa Ana Watershed Association (SAWA), California Resources Connection (CRC), Urban Semillas, Lytle Creek FireSafe Council and the U.S. Forest Service—is conducting a wide-ranging study and implementing an action plan in the watershed over the next two years. The study has several objectives, including water quality and species monitoring. The action

plan includes public education about the creek, watershed stewardship including prevention of polluted urban runoff and water conservation through drought-tolerant plants, and a wildfire prevention program. The kick-off for the “Lytle is Vital: Watershed Protection Program,” is Sunday, August 3, at the 11th Annual Lytle Creek Community Charity Car Show. The watershed partners will have booths, displays, activities and bilingual educational materials at Green Mountain Ranch and the Mobile Education Center at the Forest Service Station site, from 8 am to 2 pm. Future events will include watershed forums, puppet shows, school programs and general outreach.

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New Mitigation Requirements

The population of the Inland Empire has experienced rapid growth since the last census in 2000. According to the county of San Bernardino database, it is home to six of the fastest growing cities in the nation, and is projected to grow by 1.7 million total residents by the year 2020. This explosive growth has been accompanied by relentless construction of new residences, commercial buildings, and industrial complexes to satisfy the needs of the expanding Inland Empire.

Every construction endeavor that occurs in the state of California has the potential to qualify as a “project,” defined under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as having “...the potential, directly or ultimately, to result in a physical change to the environment.” Once identified, each “project” is then subjected to CEQA review and permitting from regulatory agencies. The Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) is one of the organizations tasked with assigning compensatory mitigation. The ACOE works to offset the projected impact of each construction effort, with assignments ranging from creation of habitat to implementation of best management practices to prevent discharge of toxins into nearby water bodies and storm drains.

Historically, the ACOE has allowed developers to mitigate using a piecemeal, disjointed approach that often resulted in isolated patches of created or restored habitat that remain separated from nearby conservation areas. These isolated habitats are problematic because they provide fewer resources to sustain survival than a larger, connected preserve. Large numbers of isolated areas are also more difficult to monitor and maintain than comprehensive mitigation areas.

Recently, however, the ACOE devised a system in which developers must offset individual impacts to aquatic resources using an approach designed to maximize the success of mitigation. Under the new rules, ACOE will encourage maximization of impact prevention. They will also work from a watershed-wide perspective, accounting for the needs of the entire region, not just the microclimates. The organizations involved with the facilitation of mitigation will also be held to increasingly stringent reporting requirements to ensure consistency among agencies. The overall goal of the ACOE is to constantly improve the way that the nation’s resources are conserved and enhanced to prevent as much loss and impact as is possible.



LAND OWNER PERMISSION: THE STRUGGLE TO GAIN ACCESS

The Inland Empire Resource Conservation District has been involved with the removal of invasive species within district boundaries for the last several years. One major problem with conducting non-native removal projects is that they often require

admittance to private properties in order to access the targeted plants. Many landowners are hesitant to grant permission for access to their property, which makes gaining the proper legal permission to do so extremely difficult. This hesitancy is very understandable, and in response the District has devised several strategies to streamline the permission process.

One tactic is to educate property owners on the benefits of having the invasive plants removed; including improvements to the naturally occurring landscape, as well as lower fire and flooding threats once the non-natives have been eradicated. Another approach stems from liability concerns and a fear of being sued from activities occurring

on their private property. Due to this, the IERCD ensures the landowner is aware that the District assumes full cost and liability for all removal projects conducted on private land.

However, despite the District’s best efforts, there are still landowners who simply do not want employees of the IERCD on their property. This creates a unique challenge for the District because it requires constant monitoring to ensure invasive plants from the untreated property don’t spread to other areas that have already been removed. Although it is not the most desirable solution, simple monitoring when access to land has been denied is a viable option for preventing the out-of-control spread of invasives.

n e w e m p l o y e e

Mandy Parkes was hired as Project Manager for the Inland Empire Resource Conservation District in January of this year. She previously worked in the field of Geographic Information Systems, creating and editing information layers for a variety of vegetation and land use projects. Mandy attended the University of Redlands where she majored in Environmental Studies, and is thrilled to have the opportunity to use her education in her new role with the IERCD.



PUBLIC OUTREACH

Resource Conservation Districts provide many services to the individuals residing within their respective boundaries, including invasive plant removal, open space promotion and preservation, and endangered species protection. However, in order to take full advantage of what Resource Conservation Districts have to offer, residents must first be aware of their existence and capabilities. For most people, knowledge of these districts is often limited at best. The staff of the Inland Empire Conservation District works to find and take advantage of all public outreach opportunities in the area in an effort to expand public knowledge of the district. Increasing the number of people who know about and use district services will improve the habitats supporting the plants and wildlife existing within district boundaries.

Typically, public outreach is performed in the form of environmental education in area schools or participation in local environmental events. In the last year, members of the Board of Directors suggested adding city council talks to the public outreach repertoire. These same members then worked with the District Manager to develop an effective PowerPoint presentation advertising the history and mission of the IERCD that includes a list of services and current projects, a map of district territories, and photos of mitigations and educational materials used in outreach. Once the PowerPoint was completed, the District manager began scheduling and delivering presentations during city council meetings at the various cities within district boundaries. To date, thirteen city councils have been reached and an additional fourteen have been or are in the process of being scheduled.

There have been many positive results from the public outreach at city council meetings. There have been follow-up meetings in order to brainstorm ideas for further involvement with the city of Fontana as well as requests for additional presentations by the Chino Hills Boy Scouts to help members with ideas for Eagle Scout projects. Overall, the increased exposure of the environmental needs and goals of the lands within IERCD boundaries has been helpful in generating public interest in the district. Ultimately, this will assist them in increasing resident participation in district services in an effort to improve the quality of life for all human, wildlife, and plant entities residing within the boundaries of the IERCD.

If you are interested in the outreach presentation and would like to have it presented to your group or agency, please contact Kate Sykes at 909-799-7407 extension 100.

The 2008 Regional Speak Off

IERCD held their annual Speak Off on May 27th, 2008 at the AK Smiley Library in Redlands. The Speak Off is a speech competition for high school students. The topic this year was :“The RCD’s Role in Wildfire Recovery and Restoration”. Students from Redlands and Bloomington High School competed in the District Speak Off.



Conservation Educator Amy Bonczewski with first place winner, Jasdeep Sandhu.

The first and second place winners were both from Redlands High School. First place was awarded to Jasdeep Sandhu, second place was awarded to Jessica Kaushal and third place was awarded to Britney Peterson, from Bloomington High School. Each received a cash award of 50, 100, or 200 dollars. Jasdeep Sandhu will continue on to represent the IERCD in the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts State Speak Off competition this coming November. If you or anyone you know are interested in competing in the district’s speakoff next year, please contact the Conservation Educator at 909-799-7407 X 107.

Free Education Programs!

IERCD offers free educational programs to all schools and organizations within the district. We offer science based programs in Backyard Conservation, Storm Water pollution, Toil of Soil, Trees Please, and Water Conservation, our newest program. Water Conservation is an interactive program that teaches kids about the importance of water and ways to conserve it. Our Conservation Educator will come to your school or event and provide all handouts, materials, and hands-on activities for you and your students. If you are interested in scheduling a program, please contact our Conservation Educator at (909)799-7407, ext 107 or at education@iercd.org.

Chino Creek Clean-up October 18, 2008

The Inland Empire Utilities Agency and the Inland Empire Resource Conservation District are joining forces to organize a clean-up of Chino Creek on El Prado Road in Chino in October. The El Prado Road site is commonly used as a dump site and the residual garbage and trash ends up in Chino Creek. The creek is a tributary of the Santa Ana River which provides

drinking water for Orange County residents and habitat for wildlife. Please join IEUA and the IERCD in our clean-up efforts! Volunteers are needed to assist in the removal of trash and refuse from the site. If you are interested in volunteering, or would just like more information on the clean-up, please contact Mandy Parkes at the Inland Empire RCD at (909) 799-7407 X 106.



RESOURCE

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James Noblet, biochemistry professor at Cal State San Bernardino, is spearheading the water quality monitoring and Tony Metcalf, CSUSB biology professor, will continue studying the speckled dace, an endangered minnow that lives in small freshwater streams.

The main message of the education campaign is to keep trash, and especially diapers, out of the stream because the creek also provides drinking water to people who live in Rancho Cucamonga, Colton, Fontana, Rialto, San Bernardino, Muscoy and Bloomington.



The project advisory board includes members from Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board (SARWQCB), West Valley Water District (WVWD), San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District (SBVMWD), Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority (SAWPA), Fontana Water Company and the Office of San Bernardino County Supervisor Josie Gonzales.