

# HOW CAN I HELP THE RIVER?

Find your place on the planet. Dig in, and take responsibility from there. – Gary Snyder

## Develop a 'Sense of Place':

Start by changing your perception of the Southern California landscape. Re-establish a sense of place rooted in our Los Angeles River watershed and its natural systems: learn its geography; the particular value of its soils; the inherent beauty of this landscape, its seasons and colors; the butterflies, birds and other creatures that make this place their home. Become part of the watershed community.

- Read about the unique history of the watershed in the State of the Tujunga Report.
- Try to picture what your neighborhood looked like 250 years ago: the plants, the animals. ... Absent our modern infrastructure, what would you eat, where would you get your water, where would you build your home?
- Locate where you are in relation to the river or to the nearest wash or creek. Learn its name, its source and follow its current path up and downstream. Picture it in its natural state.
- Notice how water moves through your neighborhood in a rainstorm today.
- Spend the day exploring at Hansen or Sepulveda Dam. Visit the Long Beach estuary.
- Take a hike up into the Angeles National Forest.
- Plant some native or wild lilac, hummingbird sage, or wild rose near your windows. Inhale.

## Capture Rainwater On-site:

Each piece of property can function as its own little subwatershed, capturing, infiltrating and/or re-using every drop of water. Managing rainwater on-site adds to our local water supply, reduces flood flows, and lowers your water bill. It also keeps excess volumes out of the river, moving us one step closer to revitalization. Think of it as urban acupuncture.

- Use a rain barrel to capture the rain coming off your roof and use it to irrigate your landscape.
- Apply a little land-form grading to change your yards topography with swales, berms, and a raingarden to keep every drop on site and infiltrate it to groundwater.
- Make your driveway, walkways, and outdoor spaces as pervious as possible by using decomposed granite, gravel, porous pavers, or permeable concrete.
- Install a dry well or French drain at the end of your driveway.

## Enhance habitat:

Native plants need very little water and are adapted to our unique climate. Landscaping with natives saves precious water supplies for potable use. Native landscapes create habitat and protect our biodiversity, which can both prevent, and enable recovery from, a variety of disasters. Native landscapes – their colors, seasons, and scents – help create a visceral relationship to place.

- Replace your lawn with a combination of native or Mediterranean drought tolerant plants, fruit trees, and an edible garden. Save water, create a habitat for hummingbirds and butterflies, and help feed your family while improving your relationship to nature and its cycles.
- Visit your local native plant nursery, the Theodore Payne Foundation in Sun Valley, familiarize yourself with and learn more about the values of native plants. Join your local chapter of the California Native Plant Society.
- Don't plant invasive species like tree of heaven, ivy, vinca, ice plant, fountain grass, pampas grass and fennel.
- Encourage commercial nurseries to carry more indigenous native, and Mediterranean stock.
- Volunteer with the Forest Service to clean up trash from creeks or eradicate invasive species.

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## Conserve Water:

To make the most of water supplies, residents should become mindful of their water use, making every effort to conserve water, both indoors and outside. Keep your 'water footprint' small. Remember, when you conserve water, you're also conserving energy (19% of our total electrical energy and 33% of our gas energy costs are used to move and treat water around the state), protecting other ecosystems (water we take from the Sacramento Bay-Delta is degrading those ecosystems in the same way that water we took from the Owens Valley degraded those ecosystems), and saving money.

### Indoors:

Simple things can make a real difference:

- Fix leaky faucets.
- Turn the water off when brushing your teeth.
- Be more time-efficient in the shower—keep it under 5 minutes.
- Fill the sink to hand wash dishes—don't leave the water running.
- Install aerators on faucets.
- Install low-flow toilets and showerheads.
- Run your clothes and dishwashers only when you have full loads.
- Use a high water-efficiency clothes washer.\*

\* MWD can provide you with a rebate.

### Outdoors:

Landscape irrigation accounts for more than half of residential demand. Changing your outdoor water habits will result in significant savings on your water bill.

- Water your yard between dusk and 8am to reduce evaporation.
- Check your irrigation system for leaks, broken sprinkler heads, and overspray and replace old water-wasting sprinkler heads to efficient rotating sprinkler heads.\*
- Look into 'smart' irrigation controllers, which automatically make adjustments based on the time of year and the current weather.\*
- Use a drip irrigation system instead of sprinklers to get water to plant roots more efficiently.
- Turn off sprinklers when late fall season rains arrive and only water during long periods between rain storms.
- Install a greywater system to re-use sink and shower water for your landscape.
- Use mulch around trees, shrubs and other plantings to keep moisture in and weeds out.
- Get free mulch from the City of Los Angeles or make your own using yard clippings and kitchen waste like vegetable peelings, coffee grounds and eggshells.
- Don't overseed lawns with cool season rye grasses
- Keep turf grass to a minimum and use low-water using, warm season species like St. Augustine and buffalo grasses.
- Consider transitioning to a native or Mediterranean-based landscape.
- Replace lawn areas with synthetic turf,\* reducing your water bill, eliminating the need for fertilizers or pesticides, and saving time as you'll never have to mow the lawn again.
- Use a broom instead of a hose to clean your driveway and sidewalk.
- Wash your car on the lawn, using a bucket and biodegradable soap, or go to a car wash (most recycle their water).
- Use pool and spa covers.
- Call 1-800-DIAL-DWP to report water waste in the City of Los Angeles.

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## Protect Water Quality:

Changing a few everyday habits can keep trash, bacteria, pesticides, metals and oil from washing into and contaminating our streams and groundwater.

- Avoid chemical pesticides and fertilizers—use organic, non-toxic products sparingly.
- Sweep trash from your property into a dustpan and use yard trimmings for natural fertilizer and garden mulch.
- Clean up after your dog, cat or horse. Pet waste harms aquatic life by raising nitrogen levels, resulting in excessive algae growth; and increasing the amount of bacteria like *E. coli*.
- Help keep litter out of the streets and gutters. All our gutters empty into our waterways.
- Report full catch basins: LA City: (800) 974-9794, LA County: (800) 303-0003
- Dispose of paint, batteries, and other hazardous materials at your local drop-off center, or call (888) CleanLA for a schedule of household hazardous waste collection events near you.
- Recycle your used motor oil at gas stations, auto parts stores, and garages. Never pour it down the drain, in the gutter, or on the ground. Motor oil is extremely toxic.
- Maintain your car to keep it running efficiently. Leaking oil and spilled fuel, copper and asbestos from brake linings, and zinc from tires all contribute to water pollution.
- Look for opportunities to drive less: walk if it's a one mile round trip, bike if it's a little further, try public transit more often.
- Purchase environmentally sensitive products and services, and avoid over-packaged products
- Support your local farmers market
- Choose a dry cleaner that doesn't use perchlorethylene.
- Say no to plastic bags. Get in the habit of bringing your own canvas or other reusable shopping bag with you to the store. Plastic bags create loads of unnecessary litter; they are easily blown by the wind, and often end up in the ocean. Plastic takes hundreds of years to biodegrade, and creates hazards for marine life and other wildlife
- Choose tap water over bottled water. Carry your own refillable water bottle. Bottled water costs approximately 28,000 times more than tap water, is less regulated for quality, and takes significant energy to bottle, transport, and even recycle.

## Apply Political and Social Pressure:

Given the jurisdictional complexity of the watershed, change on the order of magnitude required will not be easy. But there's always a tipping point. Remember, your government representatives work for you, and an informed, engaged and vocal constituency is a powerful force.

Residents should demand that elected officials work in watershed-friendly ways to do the following:

- Recognize and acknowledge the importance of the watershed to our local water supply.
- Expand the use of pervious surfaces throughout the watershed to enhance the capture, infiltration, and natural storage of water.
- Limit development in historic floodplain areas.
- Require that all new and re-development produce a net increase in park space.
- Expand and improve access to watershed-friendly parks and open space.
- Expand public transit options and refine the concept of a transit corridor.
- Create walkable, bikeable communities.
- Provide incentives for watershed-friendly residential landscapes.
- Enact a strong plastic bag ordinance.

Significant social change comes from the bottom-up, from an aroused opinion that forces our ruling institutions to do the right thing. - *Senator Paul Wellstone*

# HOW CAN I HELP THE RIVER?

## Fun Facts about the Los Angeles River

The River is the reason that the City of Los Angeles was established where it is.

The River was the City's main source of water supply until 1914.

The River is home to over 250 species of birds.

The River was once a prime habitat for Grizzly Bears.

The last photo of a native Steelhead Trout caught in the River was in the late 1940s.

Water quality in the living sections of the River is markedly better than in its concrete stretches.

It took 30 years and 3.5 million barrels of concrete to channelize the River.

In 1995, it was designated the country's Most Threatened and Endangered River.

Prior to channelization, 215,000 acres were subject to flooding.

After channelization and subsequent development, 325,000 acres were at risk.

Over 60% of our urban landscape is paved.

Urbanization has greatly altered the rivers' natural flow and the functioning of our watershed. 100 years ago, as much as 80% of rainwater could percolate into the ground. Now as little as 10% of rainwater percolates into the ground, with the rest draining out to sea. An acre of parking lot produces 1600% more runoff than an acre of green space.

In times of peak flow, the river carries as much water as of 80 million garden hoses going full blast *per second* out to the Pacific Ocean – 14 times the flow of NY's Hudson River.

An acre-foot of water is the amount of water it takes to cover a football field to 1' deep.

An acre-foot of local groundwater used for drinking water costs about \$200

An acre-foot of imported MWD drinking water costs about \$800 (and rising)

An acre-foot of Evian cost about \$3 Million

Each 1" storm creates 24,000 acre-feet of run-off, costing us ~\$19 Million

The San Fernando Valley Groundwater Basin has 505,000 acre-feet of available storage space.

THIS IS NOT A DESERT!! We live in a Mediterranean climate zone characterized by wet winters and long dry summers. The Mediterranean ecosystem exists on only 3% of the earth's land surface, and worldwide, is more threatened than the rainforest. Our ecosystem is one of the world's top ten "hotspots" of biodiversity.

More than 30 federal, state and local agencies are involved the Los Angeles River.