



# L.A. Stormwater



March 2008 | Issue 1

Welcome to the first edition of *L.A. Stormwater*. Our hope is that you will find these articles to be helpful resources, providing you with a snapshot of what the City and its partners are doing to restore and protect our local watersheds. As you'll notice, in order for us to continue improving our water quality, involvement from people like you is imperative. To illustrate this, our opening issue highlights various community stakeholders who are going the extra mile to help us with our mission of protecting the environment.

Los Angeles is a beautiful, diverse city that is full of life. We cherish our world famous beaches, picturesque parks and unique neighborhoods. The City is working hard to protect these resources and at the same time restore parts of the community that have been impacted over the years by stormwater pollution.

We look forward to updating you on the effort, as progress is being made all over the City to reduce urban runoff and its negative impact on human and environmental health. We hope you'll join us in our efforts if you haven't already, for our success is dependent upon your support and valued input.



Thank you so much for reading!

Sincerely,

**Shahram Kharaghani**  
Stormwater Program Manager

## Prop O Update



### City Officials Talk Trash during Prop O Press Event

City Officials celebrate the successful completion of Phase I, a multi-faceted plan that included the installation of thousands of litter-catching stormdrain covers.

[read more on page 5](#)

### Cleaning Up Machado Lake



An urban lake on the verge of extinction and a community leader who is poised to save it.

[read more on page 3](#)

### Prop O Helps Fund First Los Angeles "Green Street"



A look at how one neighborhood is changing the way we think about tackling stormwater pollution.

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### Watershed Protection Division's First Responders



First responders clean up one of the largest mercury spills in recent Los Angeles history.

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## City of L.A. Receives Kudos from U.S. EPA

The City's Watershed Protection Division (WPD) is leading by example. In 2007 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) conducted an audit of the City's stormwater management program, focusing on the agency's activities in regulating discharges from industrial facilities at the Port of Los Angeles.

The EPA's evaluation of Berth 161, the Construction and Maintenance Yard of the Harbor Department, showed that the City's strategy is paying off, garnering accolades from the EPA in their final audit report released late last year. The EPA noted the City had gone above and beyond the standard Permit requirements.

"The water quality of the Port is of paramount importance to the City and we will be working closely with the Harbor Department to improve our communication and close coordination to make sure that the Port's tenants conduct their businesses in the most eco-friendly manner," says Enrique Zaldivar, Director of the Bureau of Sanitation.

The City's WPD has been conducting self-imposed Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) audits and trainings at Berth 161, which are not required by the Permit. Coordinating closely with the Harbor Department over the years, WPD has been working to ensure that polluting discharges from Port tenants do not reach the ocean. As a result of these efforts, the EPA has recognized the City as a leader among local governments nationwide for its proactive approach to minimizing urban runoff.



Volunteers learn which plants need to be removed in order to restore the park's natural vegetation

"It is very good news that the City is putting money behind restoring this area. The Prop O money is going to fund a really great plan that addresses many vital issues."



### IT'S EASY TO DO YOUR PART...

Use a broom to sweep up waste instead of hosing down your driveway or sidewalk. Using a hose creates wastewater that picks up pollutants as it travels to the stormdrain and empties untreated to the ocean.



## Cleaning Up Machado Lake: *The Mission of Martin Byhower*

On a crisp Saturday morning, Martin Byhower unloads his van for a half-day's worth of restoration work in the 231-acre Ken Malloy Harbor Regional Park (Ken Malloy Park), home of Machado Lake, which is nestled in the South Bay region of Los Angeles. Every second Saturday of month, Byhower, a 7th Grade Life Science teacher at Chadwick School in Palos Verdes, organizes a renewal project in the park where current students and members of the school's environmental club get their hands dirty while they learn about the ecology of one of L.A.'s most important natural habitats.

"Getting the community involved in restoring this treasure is vital if we are to turn this place around," says Byhower, who has been volunteering his time to improving the park for over 20 years and also serves as President of Palos Verdes/South Bay Audubon Society. "This is really a part-time job for me."

Machado Lake and its surrounding environment are in need of a major recovery effort. The Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board has identified the lake as an impaired water body for DDT, PCBs, pesticides, ammonia, algae, eutrophic conditions, trash, and odor, all of which have negatively affected human as well as aquatic health. Even so, the park is still perhaps the most significant site for migratory bird stopovers in all of Southern California.

Aside from the inherent benefits to threatened and endangered birds, such as the White-tailed Kite, Brown Pelican and California Least Tern -- the 40-acre Machado Lake and its surrounding wetlands also serve as a flood retention basin for almost 20 square miles of the Dominguez

Watershed, which covers the majority of land in the southern portion of Los Angeles. Discharges from the lake potentially end up in the West Basin of the Los Angeles Harbor.

"Getting the community involved in restoring this treasure is vital if we are to turn this place around," says Byhower.

This is why Martin Byhower is excited that the City of Los Angeles has allocated \$117 million in Proposition O funds to clean up Machado Lake and perform restoration projects in the park over the coming years.

During the morning renewal event organized by Byhower, student volunteers and several parents pulled out non-native plants such as coastal sage brush and bush sunflower, cleaned up broken glass and litter, and learned more about the greater ecosystem functions of the lake and park.

"This [project] is a culmination of efforts and recommendations that members of this community have been requesting for a long time," Byhower explains. "It is very good news that the City is putting money behind restoring this area. The Prop O money is going to fund a really great plan that addresses many vital issues. We are all thrilled to see the improvements to come."



# A Successful Collaboration:

## *Prop O Helps Fund First Los Angeles "Green Street"*

The first "Green Street" in Los Angeles came to a celebrated completion last summer along Oros Street in Elysian Valley. One of several projects of its type, the Oros Street overhaul marks the first time a Los Angeles neighborhood sub-watershed will contribute no pollutants to the L.A. River.

"Only clean water, if any, from this neighborhood will enter the Los Angeles River," says Public Works Board President Cynthia M. Ruiz. "[Oros Street] is the first of many green streets to be constructed within the City."

Oros Street has been designed to capture stormwater runoff from private homes and the street itself. The stormwater is then cleaned through a series of soil filtration and vegetative bioretention treatments before it reaches the L.A. River.

The first to be partially funded by Proposition O program grants (over \$385,000) with additional support from the California Water Control Board, the Oros Green Street Project was a collaborative effort, spearheaded by the not-for-profit North East Trees with assistance from City, State, and Federal agencies as well as various community stakeholders. Close coordination was also made with the Los Angeles Department of Public Works, Bureau of Street Services, Bureau of Sanitation and Bureau of Engineering.

Utilizing new technology, the Bureau of Street Services constructed five stormwater gardens along the street corridor. The garden areas in the parkway act as filters for runoff and hold the water for a period of time before it is discharged in to nearby Steelhead Park, which serves as a natural filtration system.

"[The Oros Street project] is a model of project sustainability that is helping to restore nature's services for our neighborhoods," says Larry Smith of North East Trees. "We are very excited about our partnership with the City of Los Angeles."



City workers construct stormwater gardens along the street corridor that work to reduce runoff



## City Officials Talk Trash during Prop O Press Event



From left to right: Councilmember Jan Perry, President of the Board of Public Works Cynthia Ruiz, City Council President Eric Garcetti



The City has retrofitted these catch basin covers on thousands of catch basins

On December 13, 2007 City Council President Eric Garcetti was joined by Councilmember Jan Perry, leaders from the Department of Public Works, Heal the Bay, and the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, as well as numerous reporters and television crews to celebrate a Proposition O victory.

The Prop O Catch Basin Press Conference observed the completion of the first two phases of a three-phase plan to prevent litter from polluting our creeks, rivers and beaches. In Phases I and II, Proposition O facilitated the installation of 14,300 catch basin screen covers and 7,400 catch basin inserts throughout the high and medium trash generation areas of the City, preventing litter from entering L.A.'s surrounding water bodies.

To kick-start the event, a massive blue Vector truck pulled up to the busy intersection of Broadway and 32nd in South Los Angeles to demonstrate a routine catch basin cleaning. City officials and environmental leaders watched in wonder as the

enormous vehicle used its vacuum-like hose to suck out heaps of litter from an uncovered catch basin.

This demonstration was an example of one of the City's many preventative cleanup measures used to remove the litter accumulated in catch basins before heavy rain flushes debris through the storm drain system. According to the Bureau of Sanitation Wastewater Collection Systems Division (WCSO), the City has successfully diverted 1,537 tons of trash -- an equivalent of 170 garbage trucks full of litter -- from reaching the beaches and ocean.



Wastewater Collection Systems Division employee Johnny Pool with City Council President Eric Garcetti in front of a City Vector truck

"We started the program in the areas that generate the most trash so that we could make the biggest impact," said Project Manager Alfredo Magallanes. "As we head into the rainy season, we want to make sure that we are doing everything we can to protect our ocean, lakes, and rivers."

The goal of Phase III is to retrofit approximately 34,000 more catch basins within the next three years, covering the remainder of the Los Angeles communities and protecting coastal areas from high levels of contamination after a rain event.

"This Prop O funded project is just one vital effort toward the City's overall goal to prevent pollutants from entering our water bodies," said Cynthia Ruiz, President of the Board of Public Works. "Litter in the L.A. communities is still a major pollution issue. The most significant solution occurs when residents take personal responsibility for their actions, set an example for the rest of the community and properly dispose of their trash."

# Watershed Protection Division's First Responders

A key aspect of the Watershed Protection Division's (WPD) duties is to respond to hazardous chemical emergencies that impact the community or the watershed. A vivid example of this work occurred early last summer when stormwater inspectors responded to a large mercury spill in a residential neighborhood in Wilmington, a community in southern Los Angeles.



Response team vacuums up mercury droplets spilled in a southern Los Angeles community

The incident took place two days earlier when several teenagers were allegedly playing with a 12-ounce Gatorade bottle full of mercury pellets, when they haphazardly spilled half of its contents on the sidewalk only 100 yards from an elementary school.

As soon as the City was notified of the spill they responded, dispatching inspectors to the scene immediately. One of the inspectors, Howard Wong, was at home when he received the City's call.

"I raced back to the office, picked up maps, my equipment, and got to the location as quickly as possible. I've been doing this type of work for 15 years, and I have never seen a mercury spill so large."

"When we get news about a spill, we'll respond within the hour," says Wong whose team was the first from WPD to respond to the accident. "I raced back to the office, picked up maps, my equipment, and got to the location as quickly as possible. I've been doing this type of work for 15 years, and I have never seen a mercury spill so large."

The contaminated area was significant. Mercury droplets, ranging from pin-head size to 1/2 inch were scattered throughout the 200 foot reach. The total weight of all the droplets was between 2-3 pounds.

"The fact that this happened so close to a school, and because we didn't hear about it until two days after it happened, one of our main goals was to inform the local residents about the spill," says Wong.

Mercury acts as a cumulative toxin building up over time in the human body. Children and the elderly are especially susceptible to mercury poisoning, which made this spill particularly dangerous given its vicinity to an elementary school.

## City of L.A. Stormwater Program Resources

### Recycling & Hazardous Waste Disposal

**City of Los Angeles**  
(for businesses)  
(800) 98-TOXIC / 988-6942

**City of Los Angeles**  
(for residents)  
Stormwater Program Hotline  
(800) 974-9794

**Los Angeles County**  
(for residents)  
(888) CLEAN-LA / 253-2652

### To Report Illegal Dumping or Clogged Catch Basins

**City of Los Angeles**  
Stormwater Program Hotline  
(800) 974-9794

**Los Angeles County**  
Department of Public Works  
(888) CLEAN-LA / 253-2652

### To Obtain Free Educational Materials

**City of Los Angeles**  
Stormwater Program Hotline  
(800) 974-9794

One Call to City Hall: 311



[www.LAstormwater.org](http://www.LAstormwater.org)