



L.A. Stormwater

Improving the Water Quality of L.A.'s Lakes, Rivers and Oceans



June/July 2008 | Issue 3

Students Take a Stand in the Sand at Kids Ocean Day



Two litter brigades help with the clean-up efforts.

Thousands of Los Angeles area students gave back to the oceans on June 6th to mark the 15th anniversary of the "Kids Ocean Day Adopt-A-Beach Cleanup." The annual event brought together nonprofit organizations, state and local officials, students, parents, teachers, and administrators to focus on the health of our oceans, which is threatened by litter, illegal dumping, and polluted runoff.

More than 3,700 elementary students descended on Dockweiler State Beach to participate in a massive beach cleanup and to create an aerial work of art that signaled kids taking charge of caring for our coastal environment. The cleanup comes on the heels of Los Angeles Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa proclaiming June 6, 2008 as "Kids Ocean Day" in Los Angeles.

[read more on page 3](#)

Prop O Update



Habitat in the Making: The South L.A. Wetlands

Get a glimpse at how an entire City block is slated to make the transformation from vacant commercial transport facility to riparian splendor.

[read more on page 5](#)

The Ocean Begins... In Your Neighborhood!



Stormwater Program Manager, Shahram Kharaghani, explains how the beach actually starts at your doorstep.

[read more on page 2](#)

I Wish They All Could be California...Beaches!



Find out how City diversion projects are benefitting local beaches.

[read more on page 4](#)

Instant Beach Grades

VENICE BEACH = A+

That's right! Heal the Bay will send water quality updates right to your cell phone.

[read more on page 6](#)



The Ocean Begins ... in Your Community! *By Shahram Kharaghani*

Summer is officially here and we all know what that means - it is time to head to the beach! What you may not have realized is that the ocean actually begins in your community, even if you don't have beach-front property.

Even on days when it doesn't rain, about 100 million gallons of urban runoff flows through the Los Angeles storm drain system and directly to our beaches. A lot of this comes from excess watering of lawns and landscapes, as well as home car washing. So much water in fact, that this amount would overflow the entire Rose Bowl stadium. You can imagine that street litter and fertilizers on our lawns all have the potential of flowing out to our ocean, carried along by all that water.

According to the Wastewater Collection Systems Division, the team in charge of cleaning out Los Angeles catch basins, the two most common types of trash they remove are paper and plastic. Catch basins aren't made to collect trash, however, but are instead designed to capture water. Ultimately, the most common and toxic pollutants we find traveling to our waterways are trash, dog waste, pesticides, fertilizers and motor oil. These pollutants are a great health risk to swimmers and are harmful to aquatic life.

A fact that some people may be unaware of is that plastics do not biodegrade, they photodegrade, or rather, are broken down by sunlight into tiny particles that are not digestible by the aquatic and bird life that eat it. These plastics, which are polluting vast portions of our oceans, end up killing hundreds of thousands of birds and fish every single year. For example, one plastic bottle takes at least 450 years to break down, which is the main reason why plastics are so harmful to the environment.

But it is not just the usual suspects, such as plastic bags and bottles that are causing big problems. Another commonly littered pollutant is the cigarette butt, which takes up to 25 years to decompose. To give you an example how expansive this problem is, Americans smoked 389 billion

cigarettes in 2005, according to government estimates. In one year, that amount produced approximately 150 million pounds of cigarette butt waste, the equivalent weight of 11,000 garbage trucks full of trash.

The positive side to this story is that since the ocean begins in our communities, stormwater pollution is very preventable. It's the individual contributions of people like you that make the difference. Here are some examples of steps you can take to help curb stormwater pollution:

- ✓ **Bring reusable bags with you when you go shopping.**
- ✓ **Always throw your trash in the garbage (or recycling) can.**
- ✓ **Always pick up after your pet.**
- ✓ **Make a commitment to yourself to pick up just one piece of litter every day.**

Remember, the health of our ocean waters is greatly dependent upon our own actions. So let's do our part to ensure our beaches are safe and ready for all to enjoy this summer.

Thank you for your continued support.
Sincerely,

Shahram Kharaghani
Stormwater Program Manager





More than 20 elementary schools, totaling nearly 3,700 kids from the Los Angeles area, came to Dockweiler State Beach for the clean up and aerial art photo.

From Page 1

STUDENTS TAKE A STAND IN THE SAND AT KIDS OCEAN DAY

The beach cleanup was the climactic celebration by more than 20 elementary schools, which participated in assembly presentations held throughout the school year in and around Los Angeles. The Malibu Foundation for Environmental Education, which organizes the annual Kids Ocean Day beach cleanup, conducted the presentations on behalf of the Los Angeles Stormwater Program and the California Coastal Commission. The presentations address the Los Angeles storm drain system, link students' immediate environment with ocean pollution, and compel students to take volunteer actions to prevent litter and pollution.

"Clean beaches and oceans start with clean neighborhoods," says Michael Klubock, Executive Director of the Malibu Foundation for Environmental Education. "The children have learned that if we all keep our neighborhoods clean, we'll prevent litter from traveling through the storm drains and harming the marine environment. Today's event represents the belief the children have that clean beaches and oceans are possible. Their aerial art piece shows that they are hard at work doing some of the heavy lifting necessary to keep that vision alive."



President of the Board of Public Works, Cynthia Ruiz alongside 5th grader Skye Ochoa, at the Ocean Day press conference.

A new element to this year's event was L.A. Stormwater's high school mentorship program. The program included participation of high school student volunteers that worked with the younger students. The high school students served as mentors to the elementary students during the beach cleanup, providing support, encouragement and motivation to the litter brigades.

"Life on earth depends upon the oceans' health for the oxygen we breathe, the food that we eat, and a livable climate," said Cynthia M. Ruiz, President of the Board of Public Works. "Today, the Malibu Foundation with the City of Los Angeles, State of California, and thousands of our children and teachers said everyone must play a crucial role in protecting and conserving one of our most precious natural resources – our oceans' health depends on our ability to stop littering and polluting the ground we live, work and play on."



Children enjoy the park's playground area.



On the left: "kids in action" cleaning up Dockweiler Beach. On the right: local elementary school students strike a pose with the OctoClean Octopus.



I Wish They All Could Be California . . . Beaches!

As the summer heat begins to roll in, many Los Angelenos will be flocking to our local beaches to seek relief. When they arrive they'll be expecting to enjoy cool, healthy waters, and the City of Los Angeles is working hard to ensure that's exactly what they'll experience.

Dry weather projects include the construction of low flow diversion projects (LFDs), which are structures that route dry weather urban runoff from canyons, streets and small watersheds away from the storm drain system or waterways, and redirects it into the sanitary sewer system, where the contaminated runoff then receives treatment and filtration before being discharged into the ocean.

"Santa Monica Bay and its shorelines are among the nation's most important coastal symbols, and this emphasizes our underlying principle and motivation to protect the bay and ocean," said Cynthia M. Ruiz, president of the Board of Public Works. "To that end, the City of Los Angeles has committed \$500 million from the Prop O bond measure."

In all, the cities of Los Angeles and Santa Monica, along with the County of Los Angeles, have installed a total of 23 LFD structures to decrease the amount of bacterial pollution and contaminated runoff from the streets, sidewalks, yards, and open lots during summer months. Currently the City is in the process of upgrading eight of these LFD structures to increase their capacity and reliability during dry winter periods, making them effective all year round.

These structures divert pollution such as motor oil, dog waste and lawn fertilizer away from waterways and to the Hyperion Wastewater Treatment Plant during the summer months, which helps to ensure that people will be able to enjoy the beach.

The City has incorporated the low-flow diversion structures into the overall strategy to

control dry weather runoff pollution. In conjunction with water quality improvement projects in Ballona Creek, Dominguez Channel, Los Angeles River, and Santa Monica Bay among others.

The conservation group Heal the Bay notes in their Beach Report Card for 2006-2007 that, as a result of the City's LFD projects and other initiatives, "Stretches of beach with good water quality included all of Will Rogers State Beach, including Santa Monica Canyon ... Clean water for all two miles of Will Rogers State Beach was a

first in Beach Report Card history — a testament to Los Angeles City and County runoff diversions and the tougher summer beach water quality regulations."

Though not the cure-all solution, the LFD projects will help to clean up our waterways by treating polluted runoff before it reaches beaches such as Dockweiler and Playa Del Rey.

LFD Locations



Prop O Update



Aerial view of proposed wetlands to be constructed at a former railway maintenance yard. View is looking southeast.

Habitat in the Making: *The South L.A. Wetlands*

Los Angeles was historically a vast rolling plain of grassland scattered with large oak trees. The Los Angeles River and dozens of smaller streams meandered through broad valleys carrying fresh water to the sea. Grizzly bears roamed the hills and wild steelhead trout swam upstream to spawn. When oil was discovered, however, the diverse ecology of the region changed dramatically as naturally occurring wetlands were drained, oil derricks were constructed, and dams were built at a rapid pace.

It may be hard to imagine what once was, but the City of Los Angeles has recently allocated funds to construct wetlands and riparian habitat in a densely populated area of South Los Angeles. Residents will be able to enjoy new trails, boardwalks and educational kiosks at the new South Los Angeles Wetlands Park.

Located five miles south of downtown Los Angeles and ½ mile east of the 110 freeway, the site where the wetlands will be constructed is an entire city block wide. The project's location is currently a vacant commercial transportation facility that was originally built to serve as a maintenance and storage yard for the Los Angeles Railway's fleet of trolley cars over 100 years ago.

"There is a scarcity of green space here, places to go and get in touch with nature," Rev. John Deron Johnson, pastor of Phillips Temple CME Church, a supporter of the wetlands project, recently told the Los Angeles Times.

The South Los Angeles Wetlands Park will serve a valuable purpose, not only to the community by providing open green space, but also for the environment by handling polluted stormwater runoff. The project, funded by Proposition O money, will construct a trash removal device, grease and oil skimmer, and a complex diversion system that will pre-treat an estimated 80,000 gallons of dry weather runoff each day. The water will then flow on to the wetlands area where it will be naturally treated through percolation before it is discharged back into the storm drain system.

Wetlands, with lush native plant vegetation and ample water habitat, serve an important function in providing consistent and reliable water quality improvements. The South L.A. Wetlands with a deep marsh in its main channel, like naturally occurring wetlands, will decontaminate toxins, protect drinking water supplies, reduce flooding and erosion and remove unwanted nutrients like nitrogen and heavy metals from the water before it reaches our oceans.

How Healthy Is Your Beach?



ratings of their local beaches. With this information, beachgoers can make educated decisions about which beach to visit based on its daily water quality grade.

Heal the Bay also offers a feature where the ratings of your favorite local beach will be sent via text to your cell phone every day. This is a great option for surfers and others who hit the beach on a regular basis.

Beach ratings can be impacted by a number of variables, from polluted storm drain runoff to oil and sewage spills. Storm drain pollution can be prevented by reducing litter, picking up after our pets, and properly applying fertilizers and pesticides to our lawns and gardens.

Depending on the amount and type of accident or spill that has occurred, beaches are not always closed to the public. So be sure to check in on your preferred beach's health report before you head for the sand!

The kids may be out of school for the summer, but that doesn't mean that grades aren't still being handed out.

Your favorite local beach is constantly being graded by the local conservation group Heal the Bay, as well as the environmental information portal, Earth911.org. Heal the Bay has a scoring method that uses water quality analysis results submitted by the City and County to the County Health Department which results in a beach grade.

Both organizations update their websites regularly in order to keep the general public apprised of any changes in ocean water quality, giving everyone with an internet connection immediate access to the health

 <p>Heal the Bay</p>	<p>Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card http://healthebay.org/brc/statemap.asp</p>
 <p>Earth 911</p>	<p>Earth 911's Water Quality Report http://www.earth911.org/waterquality/</p>
 <p>COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES Public Health</p>	<p>The County Beach Advisory site http://phps.dhs.co.la.ca.us/phcommon/public/eh/rechlth/ehrecodata.cfm</p>

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
LAstormwater@LACity.org

One Call to City Hall: 3-1-1



LAstormwater.org

 Go paperless. Sign up for the e-Newsletter by visiting our website.