

NEWS CLIPS

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**Resource Conservation and Public
Outreach**

Organized by date

LOCAL BRIEFS

Quake-damaged wastewater line fixed in Oxnard

Ventura County Star 5/04/2018

A broken pipe that has been tricky to fix at Oxnard's wastewater treatment plant has finally been repaired.

The broken wastewater was fixed Monday, nearly two weeks after a leak was discovered. The city had to order a specialized section of the pipe from Texas to be delivered and installed.

On April 18, the city found a sinkhole had developed at the wastewater plant on Perkins Road. A connection to a pipeline was damaged by the recent earthquake centered near the Channel Islands. The pipeline that transports partially treated wastewater to a chlorine tank was leaking. The leaking was contained and there were no spills to the ocean.

Sealant was used as a fix but it didn't work. Workers then installed a bypass pump to transfer the wastewater to the city's advanced water purification facility.

The temporary fix was functioning properly as the city waited for the new section of the pipe to arrive.

Since the installation, no leaks have been discovered, according to city officials

Water districts pool together and oppose new tax

By [The Acorn Staff](#) | on May 02, 2018

The cost of water and sewer service has skyrocketed in recent years, and the upward trend shows no sign of abating.

Consumers are up in arms.

Currently, they are mounting a socialmedia blitz to protest a 2.5 percent rate hike for sewer fees—on top of a previously approved 6.5 percent hike—that will be discussed at a May 22 public hearing by the Triunfo Sanitation District, which includes Oak Park.

The Las Virgenes Municipal Water District has also pursued vigorous rate hikes in recent years to cover the cost of imported water and new capital improvement projects—which is why it's refreshing to see two of the local districts, LVMWD and Calleguas Municipal Water District, come out in opposition to yet another hit on consumer pocketbooks: a water tax proposed by the state Legislature.

Senate Bill 623 attempted to impose a tax on every drinking water system throughout the state to provide funds for districts that can't afford to meet California's high waterquality standards. Some rural water districts in the state are struggling to meet these clean-water requirements and the SB 623 tax would raise money to help them.

Reportedly, the bill stalled in the face of opposition, but a trailer bill is possible. If SB 623 had been passed as written, the typical residential customer would pay about \$1 more per month in perpetuity.

Back to Oak Park . . .

One of the reasons why the Triunfo sewer increase was requested is to help pay for a proposed new water purification system in Agoura Hills that will make the process of providing safe, clean water more efficient. But any new water tax out of Sacramento would be in addition to the 2.5 percent Triunfo increase, which is in addition to the previous 6.5 percent increase.

Seems like it never ends.

Water districts are caught in a squeeze between environmentalists who want the cleanest water possible released into the state's waterways—a demand that comes at a high cost—and consumers who are tired of footing the bill.

Can't say we blame either side.

And all of this doesn't even take into account the future cost of the twintunnel megalith that will channel fresh water underneath the Sacramento Bay Delta for supposedly more efficient delivery to farms and urban areas in the South. What's that going to cost?

As long as Las Virgenes (of which Triunfo is a part) and Calleguas are doing their absolute best to keep their own house in order—that is, salaries in check and overhead to a minimum—we applaud their recent move to oppose the state water tax.

Customer costs are already too high.

Key water district may back massive tunnel system

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ventura County Star 5/03/2018

SAN JOSE, Calif. – A Northern California water agency will vote Wednesday on whether to give its full support to Gov. Jerry Brown's plan to build two multibillion dollar massive tunnels to remake the state's water system, reversing an earlier decision.

Support from the Santa Clara Valley Water District board could renew momentum behind one of the Democratic governor's top priorities as he prepares to leave office. The water district's potential reversal comes just weeks after a state water commission backed funding for a reservoir expansion that is a high priority for the area. Under a previous recommendation, the project wasn't eligible for money.

Brown wants to build two, 35-mile tunnels to divert water from the north to Southern California and the San Joaquin Valley. He argues the twin tunnels will modernize California's water delivery system. But environmental groups fear it would drain too much water from the Sacramento River, the state's biggest river and part of the largest West Coast estuary.

The Santa Clara water district in October approved only a limited role in the project, committing money for a scaled back project featuring just one tunnel. Staff now recommends the board change course and throw its full support behind the project by committing up to \$650 million to the construction of both tunnels.

The reversal comes less than two weeks after the California Water Commission staff released a favorable assessment about the public benefits of the district's Pacheco Reservoir expansion project, for which it is seeking \$485 million. The commission's staff earlier determined the project wasn't eligible for funds. It was one of five projects found to be worthy of money after they were originally rejected.

The Water Commission consists of Brown appointees who can distribute \$2.6 billion from a water bond approved by voters in 2014. It has not made a final decision on the Pacheco Reservoir project.

Water district staff estimates fully funding the tunnels would add \$10.26 to each household's monthly water bill in northern Santa Clara County. Residents further south would pay an estimated \$4.47 more monthly.

"I think they're being pressured by the governor's office," Barbara Barrigan-Parilla of the anti-tunnels group Restore the Delta.

It's false to suggest the district is reconsidering its position because of potential reservoir funding, Marty Grimes said, a spokesman for the water district. The original position to back one tunnel came after large users in California's Central Valley agricultural heartland rejected the project, putting its financing in doubt, Grimes said.

But when the large Metropolitan Water District in Southern California voted to fund the bulk of the project last month, calculations changed, he said.

“The board needs to reconsider that reality,” Grimes said.

The MWD approved \$10.8 billion in funding for the project, which is expected to cost nearly \$17 billion in total.

SCORCHED IN 2013, HILLS ARE REBORN

Springs Fire full recovery could still take 10-20 years

Cheri Carlson USA TODAY NETWORK
Ventura County Star 5/3/2018

A fire started along a busy stretch of Highway 101, sweeping up a steep hill on the Conejo Grade just after sunrise.

Within minutes, the blaze was pushing toward a nearby senior community. Camarillo Springs neighbors walked outside to find the mountain behind their homes covered in flames.

It was May 2, 2013, and the blaze had broken out in tinder-dry brush as intense Santa Ana winds blew up to 60 mph.

Firefighters leapfrogged from community to community as the Springs Fire charged toward the ocean, proving that a large wildfire could happen anytime of the year.

“It was like a wall of fire,” said Sean Anderson, a professor at CSU Channel Islands, one of the first communities threatened that morning.



Laurel sumac, deerweed and other shrubs cover the landscape at Point Mugu State Park, five years after the Springs Fire burned through the area. ANTHONY PLASCENCIA/THE STAR



By 10 a.m., the campus had been evacuated and the landscape was burning, he said. He remembers flames blowing sideways in the wind like a giant blowtorch.

The fire left behind thousands of acres of scorched earth. Much of the footprint stretched over protected parkland once covered in thick green shrubs and leafy trees. No homes were lost to flames.

Five years later, signs of recovery are easy to spot. Steep hills above neighborhoods and roads in the burn scar no longer are at high risk of mud and debris flows.

Green hillsides line Sycamore Canyon in Point Mugu State Park, where close to 90 percent of the land burned.

Skeletons of burned trees and brush still dot the landscape. A few unburned hillsides, now grayish-colored with older stands of chaparral, border the newer, greener shrubs.

Those unburned patches appear thicker and taller, but also stressed from years of drought.

“You notice the difference,” said Katy Delaney, a wildlife ecologist with the National Park Service.

In the days after flames tore through Point Mugu’s Sycamore Canyon, she rushed in accompanied by a firefighter to make sure no critters had gotten caught in research traps.

She remembers walking the scorched landscape.

“Every piece of vegetation, everything, was just gone,” she said.

Drought persists

A springtime wildfire was a rarity. One in the middle of a years-long drought became a double threat.

In May 2013, the brush throughout the county had reached historically dry levels after two years of little rainfall.

In a more typical late-summer and early fall fire, vegetation might have to wait a month or two for rain.

This time, there would be six months or longer before the wet weather could start and experts could see what plants hunkered underground to survive the wait.

But it turned out, they had years, not months, to go.

Rain was scarce over the next couple of winters, moving the county deeper into the drought.

“If you had asked me two years ago before the rains, it was really, really poor” recovery, Anderson said.

But it did start raining.

In 2016, Ventura County marked its first winter with above-average rainfall since 2011. Brown hillsides turned green and recovery got a boost.

After two years of rain, plants and trees are “not quite as dense as they would have been in a normal five-year period,” Anderson said.

But they came back, at least along creeks and at lower elevations. The wildlife did, too.

“We’ve now seen all the critters we saw before 2013,” Anderson of the campus’s monitoring program. “But we’re still not seeing the numbers.”

A plant at risk

Close to 18 months passed before researchers and students monitoring a rare succulent saw signs of life on some of the burned plants.

“That’s a long time for a tiny plant to just be hanging on,” said Stephen McCabe, retired research director of the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum.

The rare succulent called the Verity’s liveforever was found only in the Santa Monica Mountains. It bloomed as the Springs Fire burned.

All of its eight locations were in the fire’s path.

“We went out and started checking places where we knew they had existed before and everything was nuked,” said Anderson, whose students monitored some of the locations over the past five years.

Found on rock faces in areas blanketed with heavy marine fog, the plants often are sunken into beds of lichens. That threw up another roadblock to recovery because the lichen burned, too.

Some of the threatened plants started sprouting after some rain, but the liveforever species still faces steep odds. With fewer plants, its genetic diversity has dropped, putting the species more at risk from disease.

If needed, seeds collected from garden-grown plants could be used in restoration efforts. There are more than 1,500 plants in cultivation, said McCabe, who has studied the species since the 1980s.

“It’s still extremely endangered. But I’m more optimistic than I was in the first year and a half after the fire,” McCabe said.

Back then, he said, “things really looked grim.”

After the Springs Fire, scientists with the U.S. Geological Survey examined which areas would be most at risk during heavy rain, based on the steepness of the slope, type of dirt and how hot the fire burned.

In a burn scar, intense rainfall can bring flash floods. Those flash floods can trigger rock and mud flows down the bare, hardened hillsides.

Burn areas above the Pacific Coast Highway, Sycamore Canyon and Camarillo Springs all were in a high-risk category. All three had major mud and debris flows Dec. 11-12, 2014.

When tons of mud and rocks came down on Camarillo Springs, no one was injured but 16 homes were damaged. Ten were left uninhabitable.

The burned area stayed at higher risk of debris flows years longer than normal. But after a few years of recovery and some protection measures, those spots came off that watch list last year.

Recovery mixed

Officials estimate about 14,000 acres of protected parkland burned in the Springs Fire.

About 12,000 of those acres were in Point Mugu State Park. An additional 700 acres burned in the adjoining Rancho Sierra Vista, part of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area.

In 2014, researchers started monitoring 34 plots in the area where they could measure what species returned and how they fared.

“We’re trying to get a sense of whether they’re going to bounce back from the Springs Fire,” said Mark Mendelsohn, a biologist with the National Park Service.

The concern was that over the longterm shrub species could be lost, triggering a face-off between native and non-native species. If weedier grasslands won out, the area likely would become more fire-prone.

The park has analyzed data and officials said they are working on summarizing results. Generally speaking, the recovery so far has had some mixed results.

It can vary spot to spot, or species by species. Oak trees were hit hard, and the drought likely was a major factor in the losses.

“All these yellow flowers you see around here is deerweed,” Mendelsohn said pointing out thick stands of the plants in Point Mugu State Park this week.

They grew along fire roads and offtrail, mixed in with purple lupines, blue dicks and hummingbird sage.

The deerweed has been a champion in the recovery. But it also highlights a sort of atypical comeback.

In most cases, deerweed does really well right after a fire, Mendelsohn said. Then, as shrubs come back, it gets shaded out and tapers off.

But five years out, the deerweed continues to thrive.

That's OK, Mendelsohn said. It's a native plant, and one that helps the soil chemistry after a fire.

"We're only in Year 5. It could take 10 to 20 years to see the community look like it did before 2013," he said.

"It's a long process," he said. "It's ecology."



Mark Mendelsohn, of the National Park Service, looks at signs of new growth in a laurel sumac shrub at Point Mugu State Park. Five years after the Springs Fire, some species have been slow to return. ANTHONY PLASCENCIA/THE STAR

California is dammed enough

LA Times 5/3/2018

Environmental consequences aside, it would seem to make a certain amount of sense to dam a river in order to store and distribute water where and when it is most needed.

But what if there's no river? Or more to the point, what if every river that can be dammed already has been dammed, and the water in those rivers has already been tapped? The value of new, giant dams is extremely limited and costly without new giant rivers to fill them, and California has no such new rivers.

That's the gist of the situation that faces the California Water Commission, which met this week to begin considering how to spend billions of dollars in Proposition 1 bond funding on storage projects — including huge new dams, which its staff has opposed.

Commissioners should pay heed to their experts and reject projects that are designed for a different era, before the development of more deft and cost-effective technologies and water management practices.

Voters adopted the water bond in 2014, in the midst of a deep drought that may well have become California's new normal. The \$7.12-billion measure allocated \$2.7 billion for water storage projects.

The wording of the bond was carefully negotiated so that various interests could fight later over whether the funding was meant for huge structures like the nation's tallest dam (Oroville, built in the 1960s), or for alternatives to dams, designed and built for a dry era with diminished flow.

The San Joaquin River is already so dammed and diverted that it runs dry in its central stretches most years, yet there is an application for bond funding to add yet another dam, known as Temperance Flat. Meanwhile, backers of the Sites Project want a dam to capture water diverted away from the Sacramento River.

Reservoirs created by either project could be filled only by a succession of unusually heavy storm seasons — and then would be quickly drained by water-rights holders (typically farmers) who have legal claims to every drop. California can hardly count on such excess and would be foolish to allocate its storage resources to such projects.

Creating more traditional reservoir storage does little to ease water shortages for most Californians. A big dam, built in part by public funds, collects water not for all

the public, but for those who already own the water rights. To the extent practical, projects that generate water should be paid for by those who will use it.

Commissioners are no doubt aware of what is happening out of state on the Colorado River, which helps supply much of Southern California. The surface level of Lake Mead — the reservoir created by Hoover Dam — has dropped precipitously and will not recover in our lifetimes; there is too little snowmelt in the Rockies and too much demand in the Western states. Further upstream, there is serious talk of decommissioning Glen Canyon Dam and draining Lake Powell, which experiences so much evaporation that the value of storing water there is in question.

With those great 20th century projects no longer reliable, it makes a lot of sense to look at alternatives — and little sense to spend money on projects that are junior versions of the same thing.

With no new rivers to dam, perhaps it's time to adjust our definition of "river." The largest river in Southern California, measured by volume and flow, is the Santa Ana, which empties into the ocean near Huntington Beach. But the second largest, again in terms of volume and flow of water, is the virtual river that flows out of the Hyperion sewage treatment plant. Hyperion is, in fact, the major component of L.A.'s sanitation system, and its water is — to put it gingerly — dirty. But it is water, it can be cleaned further, it can be stored, distributed and reused. When we have bond funding for storage projects, it makes sense to spend it where the water is, and it's increasingly in urban outflow.

There are numerous projects in the planning stage around California to capture and clean these "rivers" in order to leave more distant water where it is, or to allocate it to environmental preservation or other uses.

Given the choice, it is better to build projects that repair environmental damage rather than inflict it, as old-style dams do. Proposition 1 in fact requires environmental benefits be considered.

Water projects that call for underground storage of cleansed urban runoff may lack the visceral appeal and heroic image of huge structures that lock up Sierra or Rocky Mountain snowmelt. But big dams, the hallmark of 20th century water management, are outmoded. It makes no more sense to build a huge concrete dam today, on or off a river that already has been over-tapped, than it does to build the newest, biggest, shiniest steam locomotive.

California, if you will pardon the expression, is already dammed. It's time now to spend our resources where the water is.

A border most foul Stinking river crosses the line

The stench of this river flowing from Mexico to the U.S. is legendary, but now there's hope of a solution



IN MEXICALI, Mexico, the New River runs under a median, but on hot days its stench rises through grates along the road. The polluted river flows north through the Imperial Valley and into the Salton Sea. (Gary Coronado Los Angeles Times)

By Brittny Mejia
LA Times 5/02/2018

CALEXICO, Calif. — The river is so foul that rumors swirl about two-headed turtles and three-eyed fish. If you fall in, locals joke, you might sprout a third arm.

So go the stories about the New River, whose putrid green water runs like a primordial stew from Mexico's sprawling city of Mexicali through California's Imperial Valley.

The river, with skull-and-crossbones signs warning about the danger it poses, reminds Calexico resident Carlos Fernandez of a scene in "The Simpsons Movie" in which Homer Simpson disposes of pig feces by dumping them into a lake.

"That's the river," the 34-year-old said. "I'm surprised there's no glass bio-dome over us yet."

For decades, government agencies have grappled with what to do about the New River. And although it is cleaner than it once was, it is still such a cesspool of pollution that Imperial Valley residents believe it will never be restored.

Last year, the California Environmental Protection Agency announced an agreement to move forward on a project that will improve water quality in the New River, once designated the most polluted in America.

“It’s a historic problem,” said Jose Angel, executive officer at Region 7 of the California Regional Water Quality Control Board. “No one would like that running through their neighborhood, so why should it run through Calexico?”

There’s a 30-foot gap in the border fence separating Mexicali and its U.S. neighbor, Calexico, allowing the river to flow through, and some migrants crossing the border illegally know that the waist-high water is so disgusting that Border Patrol agents won’t get in to try to catch them. This year, workers are constructing a 30-foot-tall bollard-style barrier, which could eliminate the gap and cut off access to illegal crossers.

David Kim, a Border Patrol assistant chief patrol agent for the El Centro sector, had to see a doctor after he fell into the river in 2001 while following a group of migrants.

The doctor asked him whether the water had gotten in his eyes or mouth, and then took a blood sample. A couple of weeks later Kim came back to get blood drawn again to make sure he was OK.

“We don’t tell agents they have to get in the water at all, because we know how dirty it is,” Kim said.

Fouled with trash and waste, the river flows for 16 miles through Mexicali and then for about 60 miles through the Imperial Valley before emptying into the Salton Sea.

Health guidelines state that fecal coliform bacteria levels in water designated for recreation — estimated using the so-called most probable number (MPN) method — should not exceed 400 MPN per 100 milliliters. In the New River, the fecal coliforms are in the range of 5,000 to 12,000 MPN per 100 milliliters — and that’s when the flow from Mexicali isn’t at its worst.

The situation has gotten significantly better in the last decade. But the New River has defied a complete makeover.

“Even though we managed to get rid of the raw sewage from Mexicali through implementation of national projects ... the river doesn’t meet our standards,” Angel said. “It does pose a public health threat to anyone who comes in contact with that water.”

Historical problem

The New River was created in 1905 when the flooding Colorado River jumped its banks south of the border and flowed north until it filled what was then known as the Salton

Sink and is now the Salton Sea. Because much of the Imperial Valley is below sea level, the New River flows north.

As Mexicali grew as a manufacturing and population center, so did the problems of the river, which has no substantial tributaries, making runoff and sewage outfall its only main sources of water.

About 15 years ago, parts of the river that flowed through Mexicali's metropolitan area were enclosed. The only reminders of the river's existence in the area close to the border is the street's name, Bulevar Rio Nuevo, and the above-ground grates from which the stink emanates on broiling days.

Enrique Vallejo has lived in a home along the river in Mexicali since he was 12. Now 51, he can still recall the green tinge to the water and the mosquitoes that swarmed over the waterway in years past. When it rained, the river overflowed, sending filthy water streaming into his house.

To Vallejo, the river "was a dump."

"We were so grateful when it was covered. It was a huge change," he said.

Across the border, officials are also hoping for a change after Calexico, Imperial County and the Imperial Irrigation District signed a memorandum of understanding in October regarding maintenance and operation of a New River improvement project.

The project, which has been in the works since 2016, includes installment of a trash screen just downstream from the Mexican border, piping polluted water away from Calexico to wetlands and aeration structures for remediation, as well as replacing polluted water with treated wastewater from the city's treatment plant.

Two years ago, the state Legislature appropriated \$1.4 million to fund the planning, design and environmental review of the project. With the memorandum of understanding in place, the planning and design contract was put out for bid at the end of 2017 and awarded in March. Design and planning are expected to be completed in October.

"This agreement marks an important milestone in our efforts to improve the health of the New River," California Secretary for Environmental Protection Matthew Rodriguez said last year.

'Keep Out!!'

Martha Fernandez has lived in her home on Calexico Street for 16 years, but first heard about the river when she moved to Calexico in 1980. For a while, she would walk along its banks.

Then, eight years ago, a yellow sign went up across from her house with a warning in Spanish and English between two skull-and-crossbones symbols:

“Contaminated soil and New River water / Keep Out!!”

After the sign appeared, her walks stopped.

Along Calexico’s streets near the river, some residents expressed doubt that there would be follow-through on cleaning up the river.

From the backyard of his house on Emilia Drive, Joe Valencia has a view of the New River. Valencia, who has lived in the Imperial Valley for 40 years, knows by now that you don’t fish in it.

“I haven’t seen anything change in the years I’m growing up,” the 47-year-old said. “I have my kids coming up, and I don’t think they’ll even see any change either.”

On a recent morning, a Border Patrol agent sat in his green-and-white car, eyes trained on the gap in the fence above the New River. In Mexicali, workers were focused on constructing the new port of entry, while the agent was focused on catching migrants attempting to cross illegally.

Foamy water flowed from the Mexican side and out along the river’s banks, which are littered with water bottles, clothing, shoes and butane lighters.

Fish jumped out from the brown water, and pigeons and sparrows circled above it, occasionally dropping down to take a drink from the water, where corroded tires had settled at the bottom. A light breeze made the smell slightly more bearable.

“I’ve heard of DNA mutations happening to the animals, three-eyed fish and I don’t know what else,” a trainee at a recent Border Patrol citizens’ academy said as he looked into the water, prompting peals of laughter from agents.

“I wouldn’t be shocked,” Agent Juan Gonzalez responded. “If someone told me they found a three-eyed catfish in there, I’d be like, yeah.”

“Or a bird that could play guitar,” Agent Joel Merino added. “Probably.”

‘Still really bad’

The day Agent Kim fell into the water, he had stepped down onto what he thought was a solid embankment. It turned out to be a crust over the water. He sank down to his knees in water that had the consistency of oil.

“The smell that came up, it smelled like an outhouse,” Kim recalled. “Immediately, just that smell started making my stomach turn. I was stuck in my boots, I couldn’t move, because it was just so thick around my legs.”

Kim lay on his stomach and crawled out. A couple of weeks after he gave his second blood sample, the doctor called to tell him that his blood was all clear and that he had not contracted any infectious diseases.

“It has improved a lot,” Kim said about the river water. “But when people say it’s not as bad as it used to be, it’s still really bad.”

Agents often spot migrants in the river and warn them that they are in polluted water. In life-or-death situations — such as when a migrant is drowning — agents have entered the water for rescues.

Kim said he thinks most migrants don’t know how dangerous the polluted water is. But he thinks smugglers do — and try to use it to their advantage.

“They know that as long as you stay in this water, you’re pretty safe — relatively speaking. You’re safe from us, from being arrested,” Kim said. “But as far as being safe health-wise ... there’s no way to know how many people have contracted something from the water that have been in there.”



BORDER CROSSERS know U.S. agents won’t enter the dirty river to catch them. But here, two turn back after seeing Border Patrol agents. (Allen J. Schaben Los Angeles Times)

Water deliveries halted in Nev. mine battle

Scott Sonner ASSOCIATED PRESS
Ventura County Star 4/30/2018

RENO, Nev. – It was an uncharacteristically urgent demand at a U.S. Superfund site where the cleanup of an abandoned World War II-era mine has dragged on for two decades and progress is measured, at best, in years.

Atlantic Richfield, owner of the former Anaconda copper mine, was suddenly halting the free home delivery of bottled water it's provided since 2004 to about 100 residences on a neighboring Native American reservation in Nevada where scientists continue to track the movement of a poisonous plume of groundwater.

"It is imperative that these deliveries do not take place," an Atlantic Richfield contractor wrote this month in a series of emails obtained by The Associated Press.

The Yerington Paiute Tribe alleges the abrupt change was retaliation for its fight against a recent move that puts the state and the company in charge of cleaning up the mine site instead of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Over the tribe's staunch objections, the EPA in February backed off plans in the works for years to elevate the mine formally to priority status on a list of the most contaminated Superfund sites.

"I believe that this dismissive, arrogant act means to punish us by cutting off our water in an attempt to pressure us to stop fighting for our legal rights," Tribal Chairman Laurie Thom told the AP.

The latest clash centers on the tribe's insistence that neither Atlantic Richfield nor the state has any authority to carry out cleanup efforts on its property.

Atlantic Richfield is delivering water to a site off the reservation for tribal members to pick up, and each side blames the other for failing to reach an agreement to resume normal deliveries.

Atlantic Richfield spokesman Brett Clanton said the Houston-based company "is disappointed with the characterization of this sequence of events as retaliatory."

The company began providing the bottled water after tests confirmed poisonous groundwater seeping from the mine had contaminated dozens of neighbors' wells.

It will resume home deliveries, as well as groundwater sampling on tribal property, once a "valid access agreement can be obtained" from the tribe, Clanton said.

The mine's previous owner, Arimetco, left behind a 90 million-gallon toxic stew of uranium, arsenic and other chemicals – enough to cover 80 football fields 10 feet deep – when it abandoned the site in 2000, according to the EPA.

Now owned by BP, Atlantic Richfield paid \$19.5 million to settle a class-action lawsuit in 2015 brought by about 700 nontribal neighbors of the mine about 65 miles southeast of Reno.

The neighbors had accused past owners of conspiring to cover up the extent of groundwater contamination. The company continues a legal battle with the tribe.

The EPA first determined the site qualified for priority Superfund status in 1994 but didn't formally propose the listing until 2016 – 31 years after Nevada regulators first accused Anaconda Mining Co. of discharging pollutants illegally.

Tribal leaders say the water dispute underscores their concerns that Gov. Brian Sandoval has negotiated away any ability to expedite the cleanup without the teeth of the EPA.

Their fears grew when EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt announced April 16 he had dropped the mine from a list of 21 Superfund “emphasis” sites targeted for “immediate and intense attention.”

The emphasis list Pruitt issued last year – a lesser category of priority sites that didn't exist under prior administrations – was roundly criticized by environmentalists and others who said it was an attempt to divert attention from the Trump administration's proposed 30 percent cut in the EPA's budget.

The EPA said in announcing the Anaconda mine's removal from the list that “cleanup activities progress, and completion of specific milestone and timelines have benefited from the administration's influence.” But Dietrick McGinnis, a longtime environmental consultant for the tribe, said the new timelines the EPA released in conjunction with the February agreement to defer any priority Superfund listing indicate groundwater cleanup will be delayed by more than four years.

Twice before, the EPA urged priority listing based on tests that showed toxic levels of uranium, but backed off when state and local business leaders opposed the move for fear of a stigma that could affect property values.

Sandoval announced in 2016 he was reluctantly dropping the state's opposition because the listing would make \$31 million in federal cleanup funds available. But he reversed course in July when Atlantic Richfield offered to provide that money instead and persuaded the EPA to defer any listing.



Nicolas Cuevas, right, and others load plastic water bottles Friday to distribute

Nicolas Cuevas, right, and others load plastic water bottles Friday to distribute to members of the Yerington Paiute tribe. The water is delivered outside the reservation amid a dispute about access. SCOTT SADY/AP

Plan targets water quality L.A. considers property tax to aid stormwater projects

By Nina Agrawal
LA Times 4/30/2018

At Los Amigos Park in Santa Monica, 11-year-old Pony League baseball players wearing Padres and Dodgers uniforms huddled with their coaches after a recent game.

Standing atop a grassy area next to the baseball diamond, many may not have been aware of what lay underneath: a 53,000-gallon storage tank for stormwater runoff.

Built in 2017, the project was designed to divert some 550,000 gallons of water from a nearby storm drain each year, reducing the pollution that flows into Santa Monica Bay.

The diverted runoff is pumped, treated and ultimately used for indoor flushing at the park's bathrooms and for irrigation, keeping the field a vibrant green and reducing unnecessary uses of potable water.

The project is one example of what county leaders hope to see more of as they consider putting a property tax before voters this November to raise revenue for stormwater capture and cleaning.

The measure, a proposed parcel tax of between 3 and 4 cents per square foot of area deemed impermeable to water — such as roofs, driveways, garages and parking lots — could generate up to \$400 million annually. The money would be used to improve water quality, help L.A. County comply with federal clean water regulations and make the region more “water resilient” in the face of a changing climate and unpredictable water supply.

“The urgency and the need are crystal clear,” Supervisors Sheila Kuehl and Hilda Solis wrote in a 2016 motion directing the Department of Public Works to develop a drought resiliency plan, from which the proposed tax emerged. “The time to ensure a clean and reliable water supply for Los Angeles is now.”

L.A. County considered a similar tax in 2013. But that measure, which would have been voted on only by property owners, was killed due to stiff opposition.

Amid a deepening drought in 2016, followed by historic rainfall in 2017, county officials took up the idea again. This time, they convened a “stakeholder advisory committee” to engage leaders from across the region. They developed an education campaign to drum up public support. They added provisions to benefit disadvantaged communities.

The county also sponsored a state bill, approved in October, that would give the local flood control district the authority to levy a tax, rather than a fee — a nuance that provides more flexibility to spend on water quality, supply and community investment.

The water demand in L.A. County each year is about 1.8 million acre-feet. Only about 200,000 acre-feet are collected locally in reservoirs and dams, while tens of thousands more run off into the ocean, sweeping out trash, bacteria and other pollutants with it. (An acre-foot is the volume that covers one acre of surface area to one foot of depth.)

The county has to rely on other sources to make up the difference.

“It’s going to get more expensive,” public works director Mark Pestrella said. “With climate change, with drought, it’s definitely gotten to a place where every drop counts.”

If approved, the parcel tax could enable the county to collect up to 300,000 additional acre-feet of stormwater a year — enough to meet the needs of about 2.5 million people.

While water supply is one component of the initiative, the primary goal is to improve water quality before putting it back into the region’s oceans, rivers and lakes.

Under federal law and associated permits given out by the state, cities across L.A. County are required to clean up the flows they dump into waterways. Doing so is expected to cost about \$20 billion over the next two decades. Without funding, cities can be held liable with fines and costly lawsuits.

“We’re putting on a program that will help cities [meet] their obligation to comply with the Clean Water Act,” Pestrella said.

Under the draft “Safe, Clean Water Program,” schools and government parcels would be exempt from the 3- to 4-cent levy. Property owners would have the opportunity to appeal the county’s tax assessment and qualify for credits or rebates for projects they have already undertaken.

The average tax would range from \$73 a year for a typical single-family house to \$14,500 a year for a commercial building with a large paved area, like a Costco store. It would not have a sunset provision.

Half of the revenue would go toward regional watershed projects, 40% to municipal projects and 10% to the flood control district.

The money could go toward major capital projects such as construction of “spreading grounds” that capture water running off the base of mountains, wetlands improvement or installation of underground cisterns like the one at Los Amigos Park. It could fund smaller neighborhood fixes like “green streets” that absorb water flowing off of sidewalks and into gutters. Or it could be used for operations and maintenance of existing infrastructure.

Regional projects would be vetted and scored primarily on the basis of their impact on water quality and supply. Projects that are the most cost-efficient, leverage outside dollars and provide community benefits — a park that offers recreation space and a mode of carbon capture, for example, or wetlands that restore a natural habitat — would receive additional points. Local governments would select the municipal projects.

“This would be by far the most significant action that the county and its 88 cities have taken to reduce stormwater pollution and start using stormwater as a resource,” said Mark Gold, associate vice chancellor for environment and sustainability at UCLA and former president of Heal the Bay.

In a recent poll about the stormwater measure, two-thirds of voters surveyed said they would “definitely” or “probably” support it. After receiving additional information, close to three-quarters of voters said they would do so.

The ballot measure would need a two-thirds vote to pass.

Richard Bernard, a partner at the research firm Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates, which conducted the poll for the county, said the results showed the most support he has seen for a stormwater measure since beginning polling on the topic more than a decade ago.

“People are increasingly aware of what stormwater is and what stormwater runoff is,” Bernard said. “They’re concerned about the water supply, they’re concerned about water quality, but they’re also concerned about the wildlife off the California coast ... [and] the quality of the beaches.”

But not everyone is convinced.

Businesses, which would face the heftiest taxes, are concerned about the measure’s cost and the lack of specificity about which projects will actually be funded.

“That’s a lot of money,” Gary Toebben, chief executive of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, said. “I don’t think there’s any intent by the business community to just write blank checks.”

Some city leaders commended the county for its broad effort but expressed reservations.

“I truly appreciate the county’s desire to address the issues. However, at this point, I’m not sure whether our city is going to support it or not,” said Marsha McLean, mayor pro tem of Santa Clarita, which opposed the 2013 measure.

Chief among McLean’s concerns is the fact that her city already collects a stormwater fee from residents, and she wants to ensure they don’t get taxed twice.

“We haven’t seen anything substantial to let us know that there is a viable credit rebate program that can work,” she said.

She, along with South Pasadena City Councilwoman Diana Mahmud, also worried funds could be diluted through spending on programs other than compliance with clean water regulations.

The Department of Public Works will accept public comments on the draft plan until May 11 and then submit a revised version to the Board of Supervisors.

The board is scheduled to hold a public hearing on the matter June 26. If the supervisors wish to move forward, they must approve the plan and adopt a resolution to place it on the November ballot by Aug. 10.

Many left in limbo by lead threat Delays mount for lead cleanups

Exide plant closed three years ago, but the vast majority of polluted properties still await cleanup.



KIDS play at their Boyle Heights home, one of 5,000 that aren't slated for cleaning despite high lead levels. (Mel Melcon Los Angeles Times)

By Tony Barboza and Ben Poston
LA Times 4/29/2018

Lupe Perez knows the soil outside her Boyle Heights apartment is contaminated with lead. But it's not easy keeping her 3-year-old daughter away from a yard riddled with the brain-damaging poison.

"I try to tell her not to touch the dirt or play with the dirt, but, I mean, she's going to step on it, it's going to be all over the house," Perez said. "I can't keep her inside all day."

As part of a soil cleanup planned for thousands of properties surrounding the closed Exide Technologies battery recycling plant in Vernon, state regulators detected lead outside Perez's home at hazardous levels — above 1,000 parts per million. Nearly two years later, it hasn't been cleaned.

Such predicaments are common across a swath of southeast Los Angeles County, according to data released last month by California regulators undertaking the largest such cleanup in state history.

A Times analysis of newly disclosed California Department of Toxic Substances Control data shows which homes, schools, child care centers and parks are hardest hit by lead contamination and how long they have been waiting to be cleaned.

It also reveals which properties won't be touched by the state's plan to clean only the worst parcels, which will leave behind a checkerboard-like pattern of safe and contaminated properties stretching more than 1.7 miles from the shuttered plant.

Decades of air pollution from the Vernon facility deposited lead across an area spanning 10,000 properties, regulators said. Tests show more than 7,500 properties exceed California's standard for residential soil. The state plans to clean the 2,500 that are most polluted.

But three years after the Exide plant shut down, just 270 properties have been cleaned — most of them years ago. And while families wait, delays keep mounting.

There is no start date for the cleanup that was supposed to begin by last summer using \$176.6 million in taxpayer funds. Contracting problems have dealt another setback to the project. And Gov. Jerry Brown's administration has made no commitment to clean the more than 5,000 remaining properties with lead levels above what the state's own standards deem safe.

Patience is wearing thin among the area's 100,000, mostly working-class Latino residents. While some wait for the cleanups they were promised, others don't know if their lead-contaminated yards will ever qualify. So they try to keep children inside, away from bare dirt, and avoid gardening for fear of disturbing the poison-laced soil.

Lead is a potent neurotoxin with no safe level of exposure, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Even tiny amounts can cause learning disabilities, lower IQs and other permanent developmental and behavioral problems, with young children at the greatest risk. A California health department analysis found nearly 300 children younger than 6 living near Exide had elevated blood lead levels in 2012, the last year the plant was in full operation.

Perez said she's taken her daughter to the doctor "and so far everything's OK, but I don't know in the long run how it's going to affect her health-wise."

Toxic Substances Control officials blame the delays on contractors, environmental requirements and the large scope of the project, but said they are working as quickly as possible.

"We're not sitting on our hands," department spokeswoman Rosanna Westmoreland said. "We're very anxious to get this all started."

Where lead levels are worst

The newly disclosed data include dates and addresses for soil test results and cleanups — information the state shielded from public release for years.

The highest rates of lead contamination were found in Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles, where more than a third of properties tested have lead levels high enough to qualify for cleanup, a Times analysis shows.

Within those neighborhoods, there are dozens of blocks where more than half of the homes meet the cleanup criteria, soil testing data show. The majority are located north of the shuttered Exide plant clustered on both sides of South Indiana Street, which marks the border between Boyle Heights and East L.A.

The 3500 block of Percy Street, where Perez lives, is among the hardest hit.

Testers found every property on her side of that block has soil contaminated above 80 parts per million, the level at which the state recommends further health-related evaluations.

Perez's home is one of half a dozen properties with levels above the threshold for hazardous waste. More than a quarter of properties on her side of the street don't qualify for remediation under the state's criteria, which weigh multiple soil samples from each property to select them for cleanup.

To clean a property, workers remove contaminated soil for disposal, replace it with clean dirt, then cover it with sod, decomposed granite or mulch. It takes about a week and \$45,000 per yard.

Among those waiting for the soil in her yard to be trucked away is Herlinda Savarino, who marched to demand the closure of the Exide plant. Two years ago she found out her home in East Los Angeles was contaminated. It's now among 10 out of 12 properties on her side of the 1000 block of South Alma Avenue flagged for cleanup.

She has stopped planting tomatoes and peppers to keep her grandchildren from touching the soil. But she fears children elsewhere in neighborhood are being harmed by lingering pollution. If it were a wealthier area, she said, the cleanup "would have been done a long time ago. But since it's Boyle Heights, East L.A., they take their sweet time."

Residents of more than 5,000 other properties find themselves in a different kind of limbo. Their yards have lead levels above state standards but not high enough to qualify for cleanup under the current plan.

Without remediation, those yards will remain above California's screening level of 80 ppm — a threshold state health scientists established to protect children from losing more than one IQ point from exposure to lead in the soil.

The highest share of such properties is in the City of Commerce and Maywood, where more than 70% of properties tested exceed 80 ppm but do not qualify for remediation, the Times analysis shows.

On the 5000 block of Kinsie Street in Commerce, every residential parcel had lead in the soil between 80 ppm and 400 ppm, so none are in line to be cleaned. “You feel powerless,” said Alba Duran, who lives on the block and worries her children and others in the neighborhood are at risk.

A change in plans

Lead contamination was detected near the Exide plant more than four years ago. State regulators had allowed the facility, which melted down used lead-acid car batteries, to operate on a temporary permit for more than three decades, despite a history of air pollution and hazardous waste violations.

The initial cleanup, paid for by Exide, covered only about 200 properties closest to the facility. State regulators at that time applied a more health-protective formula for selecting properties for cleanup, approving plans that said lead levels of 80 ppm or above in residential yards required remediation.

But as tests later found polluted soil extended across a 10,000-property zone and taxpayers started footing the bill, officials shifted to a less-inclusive formula that placed only the most-contaminated, highest-risk properties on the priority list for cleanup.

Westmoreland, the department spokeswoman, said this month it would be wrong to assume “any home that has a level between 80 ppm and 400 ppm requires cleanup. It does not.”

But an analysis of state data shows more than half of the Exide-area residential properties already cleaned under state oversight had lead in the soil at those levels: below the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s 400 ppm standard for children’s play areas, but above the state’s 80 ppm threshold.

Under the current plan, properties with those levels of contamination do not qualify unless they are child care centers.

State officials said they had to change the criteria to place parameters around the cleanup as its size grew. They say their plan ensures properties with the highest lead levels and greatest risk of exposure are cleaned. They said they’d like to clean more yards, but that it would require additional funding beyond the \$142 million that remains.

Community groups and county health officials critical of the plan want authorities to select entire blocks for cleanup rather than proceeding parcel by parcel, an approach they deem piecemeal and insufficient to protect residents.

Jill Johnston, a professor of preventive medicine at USC who reviewed the sampling results, said they show high levels of lead contamination so widespread “that this parcel-by-parcel approach really doesn’t make sense.”

“Such levels of lead pose a risk to the health of the communities, particularly to children, and will continue to cause harm until the soil is cleaned,” Johnston said.

A contracting delay

The latest holdup in the project occurred in February when a \$117-million contract with the firm selected to clean lead from the 2,500 worst-polluted properties fell through.

Toxic substances officials blamed Cincinnati-based Environmental Quality Management Inc., the company that submitted the winning bid for two years of cleanup work. The state awarded the firm the contract in December but terminated negotiations after two months.

“We do not believe they would be able to carry out the contract and the cleanup itself in a manner that would be protective of the community,” Toxic Substances Control Director Barbara Lee said at a February community meeting in Huntington Park.

Environmental Quality Management declined to comment, but in a Feb. 26 letter, the company alleged the department had made “numerous and material changes to the contract documents,” revisions it blamed in part on “errors and inconsistencies” in the state’s bidding documents.

Westmoreland said the contract failure was “not the result of DTSC mistakes or actions by DTSC staff” and had no estimate of how long it would delay the project. The setback, she said, “doesn’t alter our commitment to ensure that the properties that we have funding to clean up get cleaned up.”

Still, it appears unlikely to begin before \$176.6 million in funding set aside under 2016 legislation is scheduled to expire at the end of June with 80% of it unused, according to expenditure records through February. The department said it’s requesting an extension to allow it to spend the rest.

In the meantime, officials last month restarted an expedited program to clean the most-hazardous, high-risk properties while they find a new contractor. The department halted those “time-critical” cleanups after six months in August 2017, having completed 28 properties.

Officials stopped those cleanups because they anticipated beginning the broader cleanup of 2,500 properties shortly after selecting Environmental Quality Management in September 2017, Westmoreland said. She said six cleanups have been completed in recent weeks by contractor National Engineering and Consulting Group Inc. under the expedited program, which selects parcels on a case-by-case basis.

On Wednesday, the department announced that starting next month it would conduct expedited cleanups of another 215 high-risk properties with lead levels above 1,000 ppm under a \$10.4-million contract with that firm.

New disclosures

For years the toxic substances department had kept secret the addresses of homes sampled and cleaned despite years of requests from lawmakers, community members

and reporters. Department lawyers argued that releasing that information would violate residents' privacy and jeopardize participation in the cleanup.

State toxics regulators then changed course, making that information public on the department's website last month. Westmoreland said that the department determined the public's interest in the release of the information outweighed confidentiality concerns and that it has received no privacy complaints about the data.

The disclosure will help the state hold Exide accountable, according to the department. While taxpayers are funding the cleanup, the state is building a case to recoup those costs from the company and any other responsible parties.

Georgia-based Exide, which acquired the plant in 2000 and halted operations there permanently in 2015, has said its lead emissions did not extend into residential areas and blamed the contamination on lead-based paint in older homes and past vehicle emissions.

Exide spokeswoman Melissa Floyd said the company's preliminary review of the soil sampling data "confirms our belief that the level of lead in soil at the majority of the properties has a much greater correlation to the age of houses and their proximity to major roadways than their proximity to the former facility."

The wait continues

The state's new data show Commerce and Boyle Heights residents have been waiting the longest for cleanup since tests detected lead at their homes, with a median wait of 18 months or more.

At a lead-removal project in Omaha, Neb., the median time between soil sampling and remediation is less than six months, according to city statistics on 59 properties going back to 2015.

It was more than 18 months ago that California regulators found high lead levels outside the Boyle Heights duplex that Rosalva Rodriguez shares with relatives with young children on Esperanza Street. It's on the list for cleanup, but as time passes, she has begun to question whether it is truly a priority.

"We're still here in the same spot," Rodriguez said.

Others remain unaware of the dangers outside their homes.

Javier Ibarra, a construction worker who recently moved into a rented house one block over on Sabina Street, didn't know its soil was contaminated with lead above 400 ppm, the EPA standard for bare soil where children play.

Ibarra said his 3-year-old daughter and 6-year-old son spend a lot of time in the frontyard. It is mostly bare dirt and dotted with toys, including a small yellow bulldozer they push around in the soil.



WALLY SKALP LOS ANGELES TIMES

HERLINDA SAVARINO learned two years ago that the property she owns in East L.A. is contaminated with lead. It's flagged for cleanup, but she is still waiting.



MEL MELCON LOS ANGELES TIMES

FRANCISCO CRUZ mows the parkway in front of his home on 53rd Street in Maywood. His yard was cleaned of lead contamination from the shuttered Exide battery recycling plant years ago, but the parkway was not.

Where the soil is contaminated

■ Doesn't qualify for cleanup, but high lead levels present ■ Qualifies for cleanup ■ Cleaned ■ No cleanup required / no access



Sources: California Department of Toxic Substances Control, Nextzen, CoerStreetVap. Graphics reporting by **BEN POSTON** and **TONY BARBOZA**
THOMAS SUH LAUDER Los Angeles Times

An ecological success story

Once toxic, Owens Lake now recognized as a key link for migratory birds.

By Louis Sahagun
LA Times 4/29/2018

LONE PINE, CALIF. — Fearsome gusts of desert wind routinely kicked up swirling clouds of choking dust over Owens Lake on the east side of the Sierra Nevada after 1913, when its treasured snowmelt and spring water was first diverted into the Los Angeles Aqueduct.

It was not until 2001, and under a court order, that the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power began transforming the lake's grim heritage, flooding portions where toxic, powder-fine dust exceeded federal pollution standards.

In what is now hailed as an astonishing environmental success, nature quickly responded. First to appear on the thin sheen of water tinged bright green, red and orange by algae and bacteria were brine flies. Then came masses of waterfowl and shorebirds that feed on the insects.

On Saturday, Owens Lake was designated a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network site of international importance, joining an exclusive group of 104 areas between Alaska and the southern end of South America certified for their outstanding numbers of birds.

Saturday's designation is part of a growing movement across the nation and around the world that sees wetlands as crucial connections to natural vistas that are receding as the planet heats up and development spreads.

Rob Clay, director of the shorebird reserve network headquartered in Plymouth, Mass., said it is also testament to a Los Angeles dust mitigation project that "demonstrates how human welfare and biodiversity conservation are intrinsically linked."

The designation coincided with the fourth annual Owens Lake Bird Festival, which is co-hosted by the LADWP and many of the conservationists who played a large role in holding L.A. accountable for massive dust storms that have besieged the Inyo County territory of striking geographic contrasts where 14,000-foot Sierra Nevada peaks and the Mojave Desert intersect.

On Saturday morning, hundreds of festival attendants led by tour guides crisscrossed the lake's crunchy white shoreline to experience one of the most spectacular avian shows nature has to offer in California.

Among them were Tom and Jo Heindel, of the nearby community of Big Pine, who are nearing completion of a comprehensive scientific survey of every species and subspecies of bird ever documented in Inyo County over the last 150 years.

“When we moved to Owens Valley in 1972, there were only a few wet spots on the lake bed,” Jo, 79, recalled. “Now, it’s a whole new world.”

Across the 100-square-mile lake bed, an estimated 60,000 shorebirds and waders — long-billed curlews, sandpipers, dowitchers, whimbrels, American avocets, black-necked stilts, yellowlegs, cinnamon teals and eared grebes with golden feathers fanning out behind their eyes — were gorging on brine flies to bulk up fat reserves needed to complete migratory journeys to breeding areas in the boreal forests of Alaska, Canada and the Arctic.

Hundreds of rare western snowy plovers are drawn to the lake to nest in the summer.

The shorebird reserve network, which designates at one of three levels — hemispheric, international and regional, depending on the scale of the avian populations of a nominated site — voted unanimously to give Owens Lake international status.

Winning the designation represents nearly a decade of hard work by environmental activists, including Owens Valley botanist Michael Prather, who helped organize the bird festival, and LADWP engineers and biologists.

“Los Angeles’ efforts to improve the Owens Lake environment are praiseworthy,” Prather said. “We believe there are more birds at the lake now than at any time since Joseph Grinnell of UC Berkeley’s Museum of Natural History visited the area a century ago.

“Of course,” he added, “we still have our differences with the LADWP elsewhere in Owens Valley.”

Water wars have raged over Owens Valley since the early 1900s, when the city of Los Angeles had agents pose as farmers and ranchers to buy land and water rights in the area, then began building the aqueduct to slake the thirst of the growing metropolis about 200 miles to the south. L.A. diverted so much water via the aqueduct system that it was nearly impossible for local farmers and ranchers to make a living — a scandal dramatized in the classic 1974 film “Chinatown.”

The LADWP has spent about \$2 billion in accordance with a 1997 agreement to combat dust from targeted areas of the dry lake bed. By introducing vegetation, gravel and shallow flooding, the agency has reduced particle air pollution by more than 95%.

“We’re extremely proud to be in a partnership with Audubon and other groups that worked hand in hand to get to this point,” Marty Adams, chief operating officer for the DWP, said in an interview. “We’ve created one of the largest projects in the world based on natural solutions for quality-of-life issues.”

Jo Heindel was only half-kidding when she suggested that “Los Angeles would face one heck of a legal fight if it ever decided to stop flooding this lake bed.”

“Our side is better organized and has a lot more people than ever,” she said. “Adding strength to our cause: Owens Lake is now a designated international hot spot for shorebirds.”



JO HEINDEL and her husband, Tom, of Big Pine are surveying every species and subspecies of bird ever documented in Inyo County over the last 150 years. ()



AMERICAN AVOCETS feed on brine flies along Owens Lake, now internationally recognized as a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network site. ()

GARDEN TOUR

These oases defy the dry



THE GARDEN designed by Windsor Square homeowner Kathleen Losey has areas for entertaining or hanging out, including a sitting area with creeping fig, India hawthorne and crape myrtles. (Kathleen Losey's Windsor Square garden photographs by Calvin B. Alago Los Angeles Times)

By Emily Young
LA Times 4/28/2018

Who hasn't passed an eye-catching front yard and wished they could sneak in for a closer look?

Curious types will get a chance to do just that — no trespassing necessary — on May 6 when six residential landscapes will be showcased on the Garden Conservancy's annual Los Angeles garden tour.

One stop, at the Fremont Place home of Thomas and Chany Chung, features a newly renovated front yard blanketed with an unusual mix of succulents, cactuses, roses and plumerias beneath tree aloes and ponytail palms. The mosaic-like plantings are so mesmerizing that visitors might easily overlook the 1923 red-brick Colonial designed by noted architect Myron Hunt (known for the Rose Bowl and the Huntington Art Gallery).

“The owners wanted something drought-tolerant and low-maintenance, but they wanted color too,” says garden designer Kenny Kim. So he kept the stacked-stone walls and Chinese elm, trimmed the privet hedge, added boxwood, then replaced a neglected lawn and overgrown shrubs with sedums, echeverias, aeoniums and agaves mulched with gravel. Working a section at a time between swaths of river rock, he also made room for barrel cactus, red-blooming euphorbia and, most recently, an orchard including loquat, persimmon, pineapple guava and fig trees.

Elsewhere, an island of miniature and hybrid tea roses brightens the driveway. And while azaleas and dwarf papyrus fill a shady side garden, crossvine drapes a gazebo with a veil of blooms.

Gracious outdoor living is the highlight at another stop on the tour.

Designed by Windsor Square homeowner Kathleen Losey, the garden of her 1923 Mediterranean-style home boasts multiple outdoor options for entertaining or just hanging out with her two dogs.

“My previous garden was huge and too much to take care of,” says Losey, an artist and former interior designer. “This one’s smaller, but I’m still out there pruning, potting and puttering around.”

She widened a front deck to pair her parents’ patio furniture with an arbor seat for a neighborly spot to sip cocktails at sunset, facing the street.

Out back, a split-level terrace came equipped with a grill, but it was Losey who rolled out the welcome mat: She added a generous awning, set out a dining table and green-upholstered seating, and removed part of a wall to annex the driveway. Terrace steps and a baker’s rack display containers of succulents and herbs.

Down a curved staircase, Losey created still more destinations on terra firma: first, a stone table and bench on gravel beside a fountain and, past a trellis of climbing roses, a sitting area surrounded by creeping fig, India hawthorne and four crape myrtles.

Although Losey usually paints in the garage studio, moving her easel out on the terrace can be tempting.

“In good weather,” she says, “it’s a little piece of heaven.”



THE GARDEN designed by Windsor Square homeowner Kathleen Losey has areas for entertaining or hanging out, including a sitting area with creeping fig, India hawthorne and crape myrtles. (Kathleen Losey's Windsor Square garden photographs by Calvin B. Alago Los Angeles Times)





AT THE FREMONT PLACE home of Thomas and Chany Chung, above, succulents and cactus grow along a flagstone path. Crossvine shades a pavilion, top left. (Fremont Place home of Thomas and Chany Chung photographs by Maria Alejandra Cardona Los Angeles Times)