

Managing the Binational Tijuana River Group Government Agencies and Local Challenges in the Watershed

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

Today the County of San Diego (County) is one of the major land owners in the eight square mile of the Tijuana River Valley (TRV), located north of the border. It wasn't until the 1990's that the County of San Diego started purchasing land in the Valley with the vision of preserving important habitat and establishing a regional park. Currently, the County owns over 1,700 acres of land covering the Tijuana River Valley Regional Park (TRVRP).

Although the County has no jurisdictional authority in the TRV, the County faces many responsibilities and challenges to protect the recreational uses and habitat within the Park.

The TRV has a long history of water quality issues. Stormwater flows bring substantial amounts of sediment and trash and other contaminants from sources in both the United States (US) and Mexico. The sediment and trash pollutants cause water quality impairments that degrade valuable riparian and estuarine, habitats, and impact recreational opportunities for residents and visitors to the Park.

The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) conducts maintenance activities that include channel clearing and trash removal. To date we have removed over 75,000 cubic yards of sediment at a cost of over \$500,000 from Smuggler's Gulch. Additionally through trail clearing and volunteer events we have removed 70,000 tires and tons of trash. This highlights the importance of all of us to work together and come up with creative solutions to the sediment and trash issues which affect everyone on both sides of the border.

Although the County conducts vector control activities and water quality testing in the Valley, our main presence is from a public parks and recreation perspective. DPR's mission is "To provide opportunities for high quality parks and recreation experiences and to preserve regionally significant natural and cultural resources." The County's 1,700 acres are set aside for public access and habitat protection. The TRVRP has over 22 miles of multi use trails and several other facilities which encourage public use. The Park currently has a small baseball field complex, a 200 member community garden, a bird and butterfly garden and a Ranger Station. Long range planning efforts include a 63-acre regional soccer tournament facility and an equestrian center.

The County is also an active member of the Tijuana River Recovery Team. This is a multi-agency, bi-national group with members from the federal, state and municipal levels of both Mexico and the US. The County is working with this team on some innovative collaboration to address the sediment and trash issues in the watershed.

An important collaboration is the Nelson Sloan Quarry. The Nelson Sloan is a former aggregate mining site acquired by the County. Per US Bureau of Mining Reclamation requirements, a

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reclamation plan must be implemented once mining operations cease. The purpose of a reclamation plan is to return the mining site to its natural condition.

Annually hundreds of thousands of cubic yards of sediment are deposited in the Valley, threatening important estuarine habitat. Collaboration between the County, City of San Diego, State of California and International Boundary Water Commission, proposes using this sediment for the Nelson Sloan Reclamation Plan. Through this cooperation the partnering agencies could save as much as \$1M/year through savings in transportation costs and tipping fees.

Through these teamwork and future efforts in working together with all our partners, we are improving the environmental, community, and economic health for both countries as well as sustaining a dynamic balance between passive and active recreation.