

The Stuff of Life Abstracts

Angeles National Forest: The Headwaters of the San Gabriel River, Jody Noiron, Angeles National Forest

The area that is now known as the Angeles National Forest (ANF) was originally set aside for watershed protection in 1892 and was known as the San Gabriel Timberland Reserve. It was the first forest reserve in California and only the fifth in the nation. At that time, surrounding Los Angeles County had a population of 115,000 people. The reserve was established in an attempt to regulate and reverse the extreme damage caused to timber, water, and mineral resources of the San Gabriel Mountains in the 1880s as a result of explosive development of farmlands and towns in the Los Angeles Basin. Today, more than 13 million people live within an hour's drive of the Angeles National Forest. Last year, the population of the United States topped 300 million. More than 10 percent of those people – 36 million – live in California. Of those, 22 million live in Southern California. As the population has grown, the amount of open space in Los Angeles County has diminished almost as dramatically. At this time, the Angeles National Forest represents over 70% of the county's open space. This space experiences year-round concentrated use by millions of people. This use not only impacts the land and water but has the potential to cause conflicts between user groups competing for space. What all of this means for us as managers is that the Angeles has become an urban forest – in fact, the most urban national forest in the country. In the simplest terms of supply and demand, it means that we are faced with a daunting balancing act. While we remain committed to the original tenets of forest and watershed conservation, we must at the same time provide for the increasing public use needs and wants of million for forest visitors each year.

The headwaters of the San Gabriel River are located in the heart of the San Gabriel Mountains, forming part of the backbone of the Angeles National Forest, which traverses southern Los Angeles County, California. The River is dammed five times along its length with three of those dams located on the Angeles National Forest: once along the West Fork by the Prescott F. Cogswell Dam, then twice more downstream of the forks to create reservoirs at the San Gabriel Canyon Dam, and at the former naval test site Morris Dam. The remaining two dams are located at the Santa Fe Dam in the Santa Fe Dam Flood Control Basin in Irwindale; and with the nearby Rio Hondo at the Whittier Narrows Dam. As the river flows from the forested mountains towards the Pacific Ocean, it is influenced by a myriad of factors that affect its quality and quantity. No single resource in Southern California has been more important or caused as much controversy as the issue of water. Our challenge is to ensure that we protect and enhance the resource at its source, promote and encourage enjoyment of the National Forest, and anticipate and attempt to respond to the ever accelerating pressures of a changing environment.

The Main San Gabriel Basin: Sustaining Supplies and Restoring Water Quality, Carol Williams, Main San Gabriel Basin Watermaster

The Main San Gabriel Groundwater Basin provides up to 90 percent of the water supply for the San Gabriel Valley, relying on captured stormwater as well as imported water for replenishment. Statewide drought and cutbacks on imported water deliveries have minimized replenishment opportunities, and Basin groundwater levels are expected to reach an historic low by the end of 2008. Various plans, both short- and long-term, are being developed to help the San Gabriel Valley sustain its groundwater supply for the future. Groundwater contamination, the result of post-World War II industrial activities, has plagued many portions of the Basin for decades; however, through coordinated efforts of local water agencies, the United States Environmental Protection Agency, and various Responsible Agencies, groundwater remediation activities that also provide safe drinking water are now in full swing.

What we have, how we impact it, what we need to do next, Lillian Kawasaki, Water Replenishment District Southern

California has a long history of dependence on imported water. However, imported water supplies are dwindling and water quality is deteriorating. Climate change, local drought and continued population growth pose further challenges. Southern California has significant local water supply resources and with proper management and investment can move the region toward water self-sufficiency and reliability, while helping to protect the fragile Delta ecosystem. Local supply and integrated resource management strategies include: aggressive conservation and water use efficiency; recycled water; groundwater treatment and storage; storm water capture; and watershed, low impact development, habitat, parks and other multi-benefit projects. Water Replenishment District of Southern California (WRD) had begun implementation of its Water Independence Network (WIN), a ten year program of projects designed to phase out reliance on imported water. Southern California leaders must be key participants in the ongoing and future discussions of California's water future and its investment priorities.

The needs of the community must drive our work...but how?, Benny Lee, Environmental Justice Coalition for Water

Oftentimes, when we focus on building a healthier watershed through our various conservation management and restoration efforts, we sometimes fail to keep in mind that a primary goal for making our watersheds healthy is that they will make the humans living in that watershed healthy and improve their quality of life. A healthy watershed is not just an issue of environmental importance, but ultimately an important benefit for human health and a right of those living in the watershed. When we start conserving and managing resources, we must therefore keep in mind how it will affect human health and quality of life. So how do we go about improving ecosystem health with the end goal of improving human health and quality of life? How do we ensure that, when there is a change in resource management policy or activities, the needs of the community are addressed in a manner wherein the end result is not to change the community demographics or push demographic sectors out, but to

incorporate their needs and address them? How do we ensure that watershed management activities are addressing the needs of the community in which the activities are being applied?