

Living on the Frontier Abstracts

Identifying the New Mainstream, Irma Muñoz, Mujeres de la Tierra

Improving watersheds is directly related not only to the environmental quality of a region, but to the health and well being of people overall. A watershed could also be a significant indicator of adaptive capacity to climate change dynamics because a healthy watershed has a better ability to absorb carbon in a manner that could be compatible with economic and other activities such as recreation. In California the allocation of state bond funding and foundation grants tilt toward large land conservation and coastal improvement projects that have long-standing active and well recognized constituencies. Water supply and water quality projects in the upper watersheds of urbanized areas rarely consider overall watershed health and outreach efforts approach the population in a segmented manner through traditional stakeholder groups. This results in projects that may meet isolated water supply or quality goals but have little relation to an overall watershed's health or the overall quality of life for people. Agencies and many environmentalists act as if the whole of human and environmental survival depends upon their own isolated actions. Demographic shifts in urbanized areas call for a new approach to outreach and investments of money and human resources that recognize a new mainstream that can no longer be seen in terms of "majority" and/or "minority" frameworks. This can be compatible with comprehensive approaches to watershed planning because in the new mainstream people are concerned with how individual water supply, water quality and even air quality programs and projects combine to affect community health, recreation and jobs. Environmental justice transforms into environmental equity under this reality because communities that do not act as minorities are not expecting what others can give them (such as justice) but expect what they are rightfully entitled to as a significant percentage of the population.

Closing the Frontier: We are not apart from the environment; we are a part of it, Travis Longcore, USC Center for Sustainable Cities

Thinking about the urban-wildland interface as a frontier is tempting, as the frontier is one of the defining ideas of the West, and indeed of American history. But this idea reinforces an outlook on the world in which nature is untamed, savage, and in need of being subdued by the civilizing forces of American settlement. It reinforces the human-nature dichotomy, leading to the same kind of decisions that brought us rivers of concrete. The healthy watershed of the future can only be achieved by decision making that transcends the frontier mentality. I present three modest examples that illustrate how decisions might be made that avoid the artificial boundary between the city and nature. These examples are as diverse as a proposal to dump sediment on an oak woodland in the interest of flood management, the precipitous loss of Loggerhead Shrike as a breeding bird in the Los Angeles Basin, and water management that attracts, then kills, waterbirds along the San Gabriel River. The decisions leading to these situations would be different if a "multiple-benefit" approach were used by land managers, but might also be even better if the underlying assumptions about the city and nature were

rethought. Such fundamental changes in outlook are essential if we are to envision and achieve a healthier future for the San Gabriel River watershed.

Improving Urban Streams: opportunities and approaches to enhance and restore impacted urban stream systems, Ken Schwarz, Principal, Horizon Water and Environment

Urban stream channels in California may be impacted in many ways, including: hardened stream bed and banks to accommodate urban topography, facilities, and promote stormwater conveyance; reduced or eliminated floodplain inundation and storage; reduced or eliminated natural channels; altered hydrology and hydraulics; increased pollutants and other water quality impairments; barriers to fish and wildlife passage, and reduced or altered vegetation cover. Despite these limitations, stream channel structure and habitat conditions can be improved in the urban setting. This presentation will present tangible, cost-effective, and regulatory compliant approaches to improve urban streams focusing on sediment management, vegetation planting and management, and bed/bank shaping techniques. This presentation will draw on the author's channel restoration work throughout California, highlighting recent stream restoration efforts in Sonoma County, Ca.

Ecology of the Concrete River: Viewing Our Landscapes within the Bounds of Our Ecology, Ellen Mackey, Senior Ecologist, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California; LASGRWC

What does that MEAN?? Envisioning revegetated landscapes within the confines of the ROWS along the San Gabriel river system requires an artist's sensibilities as well as an ecologists understanding of damaged systems. The road back to a fully functioning system, i.e., restoration, will take time and patience; it took us a while to get here and we are taking the steps to return to a healthier system. From an ecologist's perspective, short-term projects along the river system should be considered revegetation rather than restoration, which implies a return to historic functioning. As linear parkways proposed for the SGR system are planned, politicians, landscape professionals, and others should be aware that a number of resources are available to help create a beautiful, durable, low-water use landscape with a high probability for success in spite of the drought. Together with numerous stakeholders, the Watershed Council has edited, written, and surveyed a number of these resources including: Landscaping Guidelines, a native seed population identification program, a site-specific Maintenance Manual, and our detailed survey of the ROWs.