



Dredging starts in San Clemente



Photo by Brooks O. Hubbard IV

Contractors with Manson Construction place a pipeline Nov. 21 in preparation for a beach renourishment project in San Clemente, California. Once submerged, the pipeline will transport sand from a dredge vessel back to shore. Managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, the project calls for coastal storm-damage reduction, which includes construction of a 50-foot-wide beach fill along a 3,412-foot-long stretch of shoreline, using 251,000 cubic yards of compatible sediment. Sand placement operations began Dec. 15. [See the full story on Page 4.](#)

Corps, partners celebrate start of Surfside-Sunset beach nourishment project

LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

SEAL BEACH, Calif. — Representatives with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers celebrated the start of Stage 13 of the Surfside-Sunset Beach Nourishment Project with local, state and federal officials during a Dec. 13 groundbreaking ceremony at Surfside Colony in Seal Beach.

“This is an exciting time for all of us, and it has been a tremendous team effort with our local, state and federal partners,” said Col. Andrew Baker, LA District commander. “Thanks to the outstanding work by the team, we were able to start putting sand on the beach 18 months earlier than originally anticipated.

“This project will benefit so many of our beach communities in Orange County, including Surfside Colony, and the cities of Newport, Huntington and Seal beaches. We at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District are so excited to be a part of the amazing team that made this happen.”

The \$23.1-million project will dredge and backpass 1.2 million cubic yards of sand along the coastline.

The construction contract was awarded to Manson Construction in October, and work began in late November.

For Stage 13, about 1.1 million cubic yards of sand is being placed on the Surfside Beach area.

The proposed beach will be about 4,500 feet in length, and between 350 and 900 feet in width. Additionally, about 100,000 cubic yards of sand will be backpassed from Newport Beach. The borrow site will be adjacent to the Santa Ana River.

The sand will be deposited along a stretch of beach south of the Naval Weapons Station Seal Beach and is then expected by way of natural currents to move south to Huntington, Bolsa Chica and Newport beaches.

The Corps’ is working alongside several partners in the project, including the California De-

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A 'major' promotion



Photos by Dena O'Dell

Los Angeles District deputy commander Maj. Stephen Brooks is promoted to lieutenant colonel during a Dec. 15 ceremony at the district headquarters in downtown LA.

TOP PHOTO: Glen Tucker, left, Los Angeles District security officer, "pins" Brooks with the lieutenant colonel rank.

LOWER PHOTO: Col. Andrew Baker, left, LA District commander, congratulates Brooks on his promotion to lieutenant colonel. Baker presided over the ceremony.

Lt. Col. Stephen Brooks, who originally enlisted in the Army in 2004 and reached the rank of staff sergeant, later earned his commission through the Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia.

Official publication of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District

December 2023
Volume 46, Issue 12

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The *NewsCastle* is published monthly under the provisions of AR 360-1 for the employees and extended engineer family of the Los Angeles District, USACE.

Views and opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the district or of the Department of Defense.

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Happy holidays: Recharge, reconnect, return safely

Hello, SPL Team!

Wow! I can't believe it's already been almost six months since I joined Team SPL as your commander. It's been such a pleasure and privilege to get to know so many of you, share in our challenges and successes, and learn about the LA District's huge, multifaceted mission more and more each day.

I hope everyone is finding opportunities and making plans to spend time with your family, friends and those who matter most during this holiday season. As I mentioned earlier this month, I encourage each division/staff section/field office to conduct an event of your own to commemorate the past year and enjoy qual-



COL. ANDREW BAKER
LA DISTRICT COMMANDER

ity time with teammates. This is not a requirement, but it is certainly appropriate to pause for a moment and congratulate one another for a job well done this year!

The holidays can be wonderful, but they can also bring additional stress to our lives. Recognizing this, I've included some links and contacts below.

Remember: don't be afraid to reach out to a teammate if you feel you are struggling with the holidays, and don't hesitate to check in with each other. We are a team, and working together to solve challenges doesn't need to be limited to delivering our great program safely, on time and on budget.

The holidays can also bring addi-

tional hazards. Please be extra cautious when out on the road, especially at night and during inclement weather. Days are shorter, people are in a hurry, and there is always a certain percentage of drivers who are tired, distracted and/or intoxicated, especially this time of year. We want you to be able to safely reconnect with loved ones, reset, recharge and return without incident. It doesn't matter if it's on or off duty: Your health and safety are top priority!

I am incredibly proud to serve alongside each and every one of you — THANK YOU for making my first six months on Team SPL so great.

Proud to be SPL!

Col. Andrew Baker

- [Army Resilience website](#)
- [Veterans Affairs REACH – the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs suicide prevention education website](#)
- [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Confidential Critical Incident Stress Management/Peer Supporter Team](#). Visit the site, call 314-925-5250 or send an email to cism-vm@usace.army.mil.
- [Confidential National Suicide Lifeline](#): 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Veteran Crisis Text Line: Text "hello" to 838-255
- Crisis Text Line: Text "hello" to 741-741 (free, 24/7 crisis line)
- Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: 988
- [FEI Workforce Resilience – login](#), 1-800-638-3327

Around the District

"I love working for the Corps because the Los Angeles District gives me lots of opportunities to do the kind of work I like to do, and I get to work in beautiful places. My job is often literally a 'day at the beach' during dredging projects."

Huynh, an engineer with the Construction Division, is working on a dredging project in Surfside, California. He has more than 30 years of federal service.



Hoang Huynh
Civil Engineer



San Clemente beach nourishment project receives spotlight as dredging gets underway

LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

SAN CLEMENTE, Calif. — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District began a beach nourishment project along a stretch of shoreline Dec. 15 in San Clemente.

The project was highlighted Dec. 18, as representatives with the Corps joined local, state and federal partners to announce its start during a joint press conference at the beach.

“I’m excited we are bringing the talent and experience of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to work side by side with the City of San Clemente and our other local, state and federal partners in this investment to restore and preserve the shoreline,” said Col. Andrew Baker, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District. “Today’s event solidifies our commitment to guarding the safety and welfare of San Clemente community members and to restoring and protecting the areas where they live, work and play.”

The authorized coastal storm-damage reduction project, includes construction of a 50-foot-wide beach fill along a 3,412-foot-long stretch of shoreline, using 251,000 cubic yards of compatible sediment. Additionally, the area is set to receive re-nourishments every six years on average over a 50-year period, for a total of eight additional nourishments – seven of which will have the same cubic yards of sand moved, while the last will require 84,000 cubic yards.

The Corps, along with its contractor, Manson Construction, began preparations for the project Nov. 21 in the sea-side community by laying down the submerged pipeline to begin dredging operations.

“This is the pipeline that runs parallel to the pier, from the ocean to the shore, where the dredge will connect and pump sand onto the beach,” said Doland Cheung, the Corps’ LA District project manager.

The project is anticipated to be completed by mid-January 2024, weather permitting.

The work follows the signing of a project partnership agreement last February between the Corps and the City of San Clemente.

The loss of shoreline protection reduces recreational beach width and can cause damage to coastal residential and commercial properties from storm-induced waves. This can present a threat to community members, homes, businesses, visitors and transportation corridors, including the nearby Burlington Northern Santa Fe, Amtrak and Metrolink commuter rail lines that carry more than 100,000 passengers per day.

The project is designed to reduce the potential for storm damage to facilities located along the coast and help restore and maintain recreational use along the San Clemente coastal area.

For more information about this project visit: <https://www.spl.usace.army.mil/.../San-Clemente-Shoreline/>.

To view the press conference, visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHo6xFCN6zA>.



Col. Andrew Baker, commander of the Corps’ Los Angeles District, gives remarks to participants attending the San Clemente Beach nourishment project news conference Dec. 18 at the San Clemente Beach Pier, San Clemente, California.

Photos by Brooks O. Hubbard IV



Contractors with Manson Construction Company place a pipeline Nov. 21 in preparation for a beach renourishment project in San Clemente, California. Once submerged, the pipeline will transport sand from a dredge vessel back to shore. Managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, the project calls for coastal storm-damage reduction, which includes construction of a 50-foot-wide beach fill along a 3,412-foot-long stretch of shoreline, using 251,000 cubic yards of compatible sediment. Sand placement operations began Dec. 15.



Photo by Brooks O. Hubbard IV

Representatives with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District celebrate the start of Stage 13 of the Surfside-Sunset beach nourishment project with local, state and federal officials during a Dec. 13 groundbreaking ceremony at Surfside Colony in Seal Beach, California.

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partment of Parks and Recreation, Division of Boating and Waterways; Orange County; Cities of Newport, Huntington and Seal beaches; and Surfside Colony Storm Water Protection District.

Construction is estimated to conclude by the

end of February 2024.

“From coordination and planning to execution, and soon, project completion, this is a team effort and a collective victory for the Corps and our local, state and federal partners,” said Susie Ming, chief of the Corps’ Los Angeles District Coastal Section. “This teamwork helps ensure these beachside

communities stay protected from coastal erosion for years to come.”

The overall project, called the Surfside-Sunset Beach-Newport Beach (San Gabriel River to Newport Bay) Shore Protection Project, CA – also referred to as the Surfside-Sunset Sand Replenishment project – received \$15.5 million in federal funding from the fiscal year 2022 Omnibus Work Plan budget.

The project is designed as remediation for beach erosion damage largely incident to federal flood control, navigation and defense projects, with the mitigation meant to last as long as necessary.

It is intended to provide periodic beach nourishment of about 1.8 million cubic yards of sand every five years, restoring 17 miles of coastline, from the mouth of the San Gabriel River down coast to the Newport Bay Harbor entrance.

To read more about the project, visit: <https://www.spl.usace.army.mil/.../corps-begins-dredging.../> and <https://www.spl.usace.army.mil/.../Proje.../Surfside-Sunset/>.



Photo by Stephen Baack

Freshly dredged sand is delivered Dec. 7 to Seal Beach, California, during Stage 13 of the Surfside-Sunset beach nourishment project, which the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District is managing.

Taking the lead



Photo by Richard Rivera

LA District employees in the Leadership Development Program tiers I and II classes, along with their facilitators and senior leaders, pose for a picture after receiving their graduation certificates Nov. 29 at the district’s headquarters building in downtown Los Angeles. Participants in the program were given the task of breaking into two- to- four-member teams and identifying and collaborating on solutions for one improvement process within the district, which they presented to other district leaders and employees Nov. 27 and 29, respectively. The goal of the program is to develop leaders at all levels of the organization, and across all functional areas and career programs.

Corps' chaplain visits LA District



Photos by Brooks O. Hubbard IV

Chaplain (Col.) Geoffrey Bailey, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers command chaplain, visited with Los Angeles District employees Nov. 30 at the district’s Prado Dam in Corona, California, and the LA District’s Base Yard office in South El Monte, California. The visit was part of a two-day tour of the district.



2023 YEAR IN REVIEW



Col. Julie Baiten, former LA District commander, discusses the San Diego VA Spinal Cord Injury facility and Community Living Center with project managers and contractors May 4 during Construction Safety Day at the VA San Diego Medical Center in San Diego.

Photo by Jenn Rivo



Photo by Dena O'Dell

Louis Munoz, left, Emergency Management specialist with the LA District's Emergency Management Branch, and Delvin Rivas, deputy area engineer with the LA District's High Desert Area Office, discuss the debris mission Jan. 24 at the Santa Monica Debris Basin in Carpinteria, California. Both Munoz and Rivas deployed to Santa Barbara in January to provide technical assistance to the county.



Photo by Dena O'Dell

Col. Julie Baiten, former U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District commander, speaks during a March 23 groundbreaking ceremony for a new Simulations Center at Fort Irwin, California.



Photo by Stephen Baack

Col. Andrew Baker, left, Los Angeles District commander, listens as Derek Walker, Santa Ana River Mainstem project manager with the LA District, second from right, describes the work progress April 6 at Alcoa Dike in Corona, California.



David Van Dorpe, the South Pacific Division's Department of Veterans Affairs Project Execution Office chief, left, briefs Cheree Peterson, former South Pacific Division regional business director, on the progress of the Spinal Cord Injury/Community Living Center during her visit to the Veterans Affairs San Diego Health Care System campus Feb. 17 in San Diego. Dorpe and Peterson here are viewing the SCI/CLC from the new, nearly complete seven-story parking garage.

Photo by Stephen Baack

ABOVE: Project partners, elected leaders and community members from throughout Riverside, San Bernardino and Orange counties gather June 2 to unveil the newly restored bicentennial mural at Prado Dam in Corona, California. Col. Julie Balten, former U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District commander, is visible on the left portion of the photograph.



Photo by Robert DeDeaux

Contractor Thane Mir, a project manager with Rasch Construction Inc., removes sand and rocks from the curb before laying of pavement begins at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District's Ground Transport Equipment project site March 14 near Sierra Vista, Arizona. Mir graduated from Colorado State University with a degree in construction management.



Photo by Robert DeDeaux

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dam operator Matthew Ogden reviews flooded areas above Alamo Dam March 23 at the Alamo Lake State Park in western Arizona. Due to heavy rains, the Los Angeles District began a higher-than-normal water release to alleviate flood effects in and around the state park.



Photo by Stephen Baack



Photo by Dena O'Dell

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District Park Ranger Nick Figueroa assesses the situation Aug. 19, while two law enforcement officers with the Azusa Police Department escort an unsheltered individual and her pet for evacuation out of the riverbed near Santa Fe Dam to a hotel in Azusa, California.



Photo by Stephen Baack

Frank Gonzalez, left, a member of the fence maintenance crew with the Los Angeles District's Operations and Maintenance Branch, takes cues from Nicolas Figueroa, LA District park ranger, during utility terrain vehicle training March 23 at the Whittier Narrows Dam area of operations in Pico Rivera, California.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles commander, Col. Andrew Baker, center, and senior members of the district team discuss widening and deepening ship lanes with Port of Long Beach officials April 3 during a seaborne port excursion off the coast of Long Beach, California.

Photo by John Reese



Pictured is the San Gabriel River side of Whittier Narrows Dam in Pico Rivera Aug. 21, the day after Tropical Storm Hilary made landfall. Although the primary purpose of this and other Corps dams is flood-risk management, about 75 percent of stormwater runoff — an estimated 7,000 acre-feet, valued at \$7 million — passed through Whittier Narrows Dam and was captured downstream for groundwater recharge by the Los Angeles County Public Works.

Photo by Stephen Baack



Former Los Angeles District commander Col. Julie Balten, left, and Joe Mouawad, right, Eastern Municipal Water District general manager, reaffirm their partnership and formally recognize the next phase of project implementation for the South Perris Desalination Program during a July 7 visit to the EMWD facility in Perris, California.

Photo by Stephen Baack



Cheree Peterson, second from right, former South Pacific Division regional business director, receives updates from Walsh Construction & Archer Western Lead Superintendent Jim Major during a walkthrough of the Spinal Cord Injury/Community Living Center construction site while visiting the Veterans Affairs San Diego Health Care System campus Feb. 17 in San Diego. They are joined here by Imad Slaiwa, LA District supervisory civil engineer, and David Van Dorpe, the South Pacific Division's Department of Veterans Affairs Project Execution Office chief.

Photo by Stephen Baack



Officials gather Aug. 11 for the ribbon-cutting on the Energy Resilience Project at Joint Forces Training Base Los Alamitos, California.

Photo by John Reese



2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

Col. Julie Balten, right, former U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District commander, updates Col. Andrew Baker, who assumed command of the district in July, during an April 7 stop at the San Gabriel River side of the Whittier Narrows Dam in Pico Rivera, California.

Photo by Stephen Baack



Priyanka Wadhawan, right of center, chief of the Los Angeles District's LA Metro Project Branch, Mega Projects Division, gives an in-depth update on the LA River Ecosystem Restoration Project to Col. Andrew Baker, at left, April 7 before his assumption of command of the LA District in July.



Photo by Stephen Baack

RIGHT: Col. Andrew Baker, right, formally marks his entry as the 64th commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District during the passing of the colors at the district's change of command ceremony July 14 at the LA District Base Yard in South El Monte, California. Brig. Gen. Antoinette Gant, center, former U.S. Army Corps of Engineers South Pacific Division commander, served as presiding officer for the ceremony. At left is Col. Julie Balten, outgoing LA District commander.



Photo by Stephen Baack

2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

Col. Andrew Baker, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District commander, right, sits with members of the Mekong River Commission and Mississippi River Commission at the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory's Space Flight Operations Facility during a presentation Aug. 15 as part of the Mekong-Mississippi Sister Rivers Partnership Exchange, which took place in the LA District's area of operations Aug. 13-18.



Photo by Stephen Baack

Michael Martino, quality assurance lead with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, left, shows portions of the under-construction Spinal Cord Injury/Community Living Center to Brig. Gen. Antoinette Gant, right, former South Pacific Division commander, June 28 at the Veterans Affairs San Diego Health Care System campus.



Photo by Stephen Baack

Representatives with the Gila River Indian Community and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District commemorate a project partnership agreement signing during a ceremony Nov. 9 at the Gila River Indian Reservation in Arizona. The project is scheduled to be the first solar-over-canal project constructed in the U.S.



Photo by Robert DeDeaux



Photos by Brooks O. Hubbard IV

Col. James Handura, center, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers South Pacific Division, and David Hibner, left, the division's programs director, tour Los Angeles District projects Dec. 4 at Fort Irwin, California.

Division commander tours Fort Irwin construction projects

BY BROOKS O. HUBBARD IV
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

FORT IRWIN, Calif. — Col. James Handura, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers South Pacific Division, and David Hibner, programs director, Senior Executive Service, also with the Corps' South Pacific Division, toured several district projects Dec. 4 at the National Training Center.

Handura, who took command of the division in November, met with Maj. Stephen Brooks, the Corps' LA District deputy commander, and other district employees to receive an overview of ongoing and future projects at the installation.

"I've been on board for almost a week and just wanted to get out here and thank this team for what

you're doing," Handura said. "This is my first resident office visit in this position, and I'm glad to be here and to see what the LA District is doing."



David Hibner, right, programs director for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers South Pacific Division, and Maj. Matt Morgan, left, deputy resident engineer with the Los Angeles District's Fort Irwin Resident Office, discuss projects Dec. 4 at Fort Irwin, California.

Handura also presented commander's coins to several members of the Corps' team for their support on various projects at the Army post.

The new division commander then toured several of the project sites, including the \$52-million Simulation Center and the \$6-million Shockwave Restaurant renovation, where the group received updates from the Corps' contractors performing the work.

Handura and Hibner also met with the Corps' installation partners to discuss the ongoing and future projects.

The LA District has supported the National Training Center at Fort Irwin for more than 60 years, building a world-class training fa-

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cility for the nation's warfighters and facilities in support of Soldiers and their families.

The Corps' Military Construction Program provides premier engineering, construction, real estate, stability operations and environmental management products and services for the Army, Air Force, other assigned U.S. government agencies and foreign governments. The Corps supports construction and engineering projects in every state in the nation and in more than 91 foreign countries, providing reimbursable engineering expertise throughout the world.

Editor's note: Since the date of this reporting, Maj. Stephen Brooks has been promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel.



Photos by Brooks O. Hubbard IV

Jim Long, left, superintendent with R.A. Burch Construction, provides an overview of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Fort Irwin Simulation Center construction project to Col. James Handura, right, commander of the Corps' South Pacific Division, and Maj. Matt Morgan, center, deputy resident engineer with the LA District's Fort Irwin Resident Office, during Handura's Dec. 4 visit to Fort Irwin, California.



Col. James Handura, center, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers South Pacific Division, and David Hibner, left, the division's programs director, tour several Los Angeles District projects Dec. 4 throughout the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California.



Photo by Stephen Baack

Jason Uhley, left, general manager of the Riverside County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, participates in a discussion Nov. 30 during the 2023 Seven County Flood-Control Directors Meeting at the Corps' LA District headquarters in downtown LA.

LA District hosts Seven Counties Flood-Control Directors Meeting

BY STEPHEN BAACK
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Representatives from seven Southern California counties met with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District leaders Nov. 30 during the 2023 Seven County Flood-Control Directors Meeting at the Corps' LA District headquarters in downtown LA.

The group met in a spirit of partnership and open communication to share best practices, updates on regulatory and policy matters related to flood-risk reduction, water conservation, environmental and infrastructure issues, and to discuss the winter weather outlook.

Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, San Bernardino, Riverside, Orange, Ventura and San Diego counties comprise the coalition, along with the National Association of Flood and Stormwater Management Agencies, or NAFSMA, which serves as the coalition's coordinator and facilitator.

"For me, the most important thing about this

meeting is getting to the know our partners in these seven counties," said Col. Andrew Baker, Los Angeles District commander. "It's really a unique problem set that we're dealing with in the American Southwest, so synchronizing and gaining a shared understanding of the issues we're all facing is really important. This provided the venue to do that."

The counties, all of which are members of NAFSMA, have been meeting annually with the LA District for at least the last dozen years, according to Dusty Williams, technical adviser with NAFSMA, an organization in which all seven counties hold membership. When combined, the seven counties area covers more than 43,000 square miles, is home to more than 22 million residents and holds 32 congressional seats.

"It can be a challenge when you've got different government agencies — local, state and federal — to make coordination and communication relationships work, and that's what this has been all about," said David Fleish, assistant

director with Ventura County Public Works. "We have a lot of good discussion and a lot of technical things we talked about, but at the end of the day, it's all about who you're working with and getting to know them, building the trust, building the credibility and building the ability to know whom to call when you need to."

Williams said it makes sense these seven counties have united for this effort, as they all have similar weather patterns, land-use history, transportation needs and geographic features, which differ from many other parts of the U.S.

The coalition, which was originally formed to help advocate for the region in the wake of national-level policy changes after Hurricane Katrina, has since expanded its scope to discuss all matters related to flood-risk reduction and water resources, such as Section 404

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of the Clean Water Act and Section 408 permitting, and how those are applied in Southern California.

"We've got that understanding from the Corps that the Southwest is different," Williams said. "Our flooding is different, our levies are different, everything's different."

"I think we've also helped the Corps' Los Angeles District get Headquarters to understand what we're doing," he added.

A key difference between this inter-agency meeting and others is that no one is at the meeting to advocate for their own projects, he said. Instead, the group is gathered to look at the bigger picture.

"If Riverside County or San Bernardino County or LA County want to talk about a river or creek, they set up meetings before they come and talk about it," Williams said. "For this group, you'll see chief engineers all around the table. These are the department heads and the division leaders. Their mission is to talk about policy more than technical issues — how we do it and what affects most of Southern California."



Photos by Stephen Baack

Dusty Williams, technical adviser with the National Association of Flood and Stormwater Management Agencies, participates in a discussion Nov. 30 during the 2023 Seven County Flood-Control Directors Meeting at the Corps' LA District headquarters in downtown LA.



Representatives with seven Southern California counties and key members of the National Association of Flood and Stormwater Management Agencies meet with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles leaders and subject-matter experts Nov. 30 during the 2023 Seven County Flood-Control Directors Meeting at the Corps' LA District headquarters in downtown LA.

A group that includes contractors, law enforcement personnel and members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District embark on a three-week project to clear encampments and debris in and around the San Gabriel River near Azusa, California.



Photo by John Reese



A group that includes contractors, law enforcement personnel and members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District embark on a three-week project to clear encampments and debris in and around the San Gabriel River near Azusa, California.

Photos by John Reese

San Gabriel River encampment debris clearing continues

BY JOHN REESE, LA DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

To improve the health of the San Gabriel River and reduce risk to the public, including those illegally camping within the riverbed, the Los Angeles District is clearing trash and floatable debris from a stretch of riverbed near Azusa, California.

The project, which began Dec. 4 and is scheduled to be completed Dec. 22, is taking place on land along the river maintained by the LA District for flood-risk management.

“The project area encompasses the Santa Fe Dam basin and spillway, and the San Gabriel River from the 210 Freeway north to just below the Mountain Cove Community,” said Trevor Snyder, project manager with the LA District.

Use of the Corps’ project lands for homeless encampments is prohibited by the agency’s regu-

lations and Los Angeles County, as it presents a health and safety hazard to homeless individuals, residents, the environment and wildlife.

“We’re out here with several law enforcement agencies to assist the Army Corps of Engineers with the homeless situation within the San Gabriel riverbed, here, within the city of Azusa,” said Sgt. Steve Sears, Azusa Police Department. “It’s very important that we provide assistance to the homeless. We have Los Angeles Home-

“It’s very dangerous for the homeless to be living down here, especially with the weather conditions and possible flooding.”

— Sgt. Steve Sears,
Azusa Police Department

less Services Authority out here as well.” Most of the unhoused individuals received a 72-hour warning notice to collect their belongings before departing the riverbed; however, when the project began, several remaining people were asked to leave and then connected with LASHA. Additional project assistance was offered by Los Angeles County Care and Control’s Major Case Unit in the days preceding and during the cleanup.

The project is a result of requests from local communities for assistance from the Corps to remove homeless encampments in the riverbed, with an emphasis on the campers’ safety, said Snyder, who also serves as a homeless liaison. Snyder recently hosted a meeting with state, county and federal agencies to coordinate responses to homeless encampments on Corps-managed lands.

“We strive to protect the lives and safety of those homeless during these cleanups,” Snyder said. “It is important to note that illegally living in a riverbed is very dangerous.”

Snyder said the focus of the cleanup is to remove floatable debris from the flood-risk management project and decrease associated fire risks that these camps bring to the local communities. Fire is a constant hazard in these encampments, as campers routinely use propane tanks or gasoline. Once used and discarded, aerosol cans, propane tanks and gas containers can explode during a blaze.

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Additionally, with predicted El Niño weather conditions, heavy rains are expected this winter that will wash away campsites. Multiple rescues of the unhoused took place last spring after warnings went unheeded.

“It’s very dangerous for the homeless to be living down here, especially with the weather conditions and possible flooding,” Sears said. “We are trying, as a group, to help minimize any danger and provide assistance that they need to keep them out of harm’s way.”

“So far, we have removed 240 tons of trash and debris,” Snyder said. “We estimate a total of 480 tons will be removed. The removal of the floatable debris is critical for the operations of downstream dams, as the trash could clog the trash racks, preventing proper flows.”

The project continues as the contracted crew uses rakes, shovels and their hands instead of heavy equipment in the riverbed to avoid damage to the environment.



Workers contracted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District remove trash and debris from the riverbed of the San Gabriel River Dec. 4 near Azusa, California. The cleanup took place over a three-week period after bird-nesting season ended.

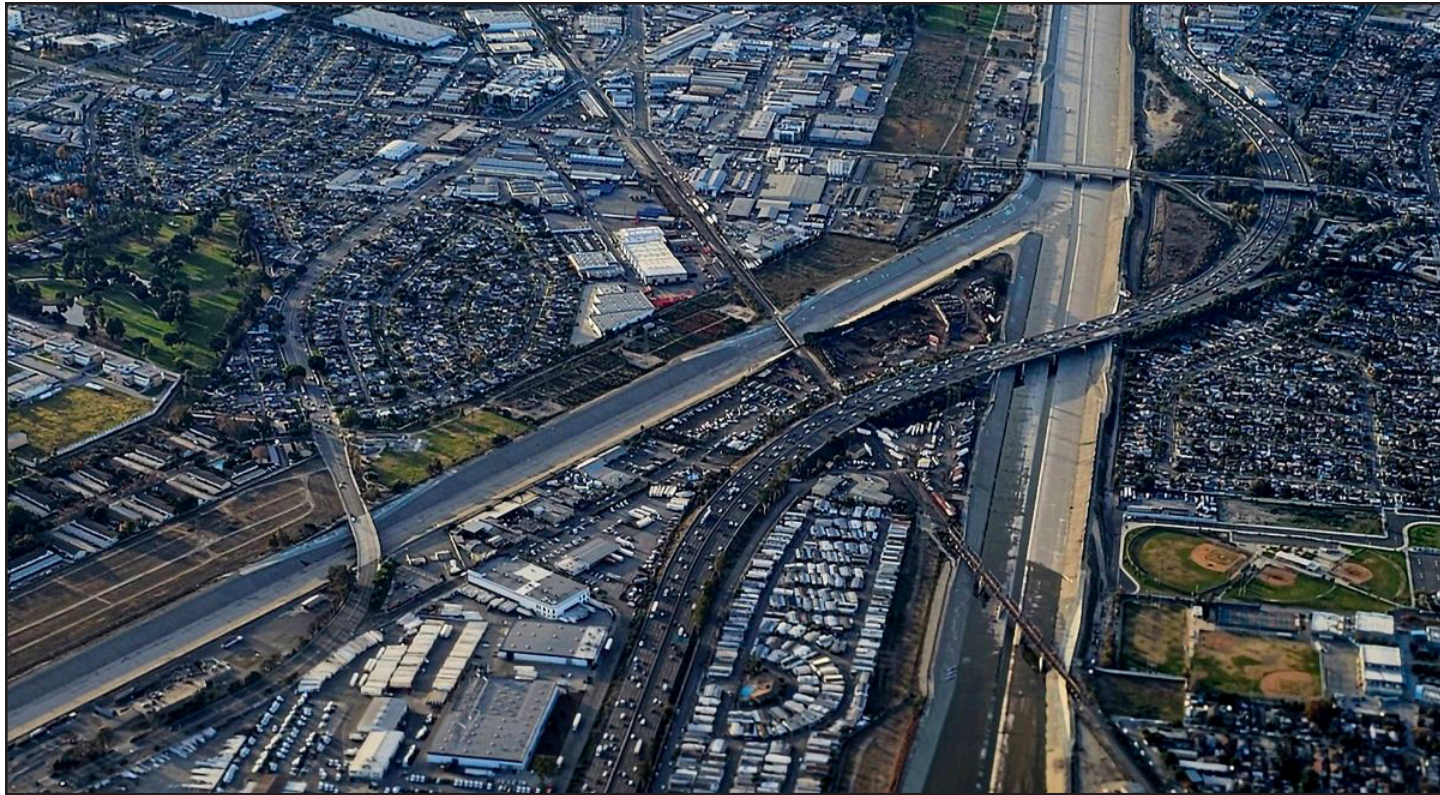


Photo by Brooks O. Hubbard IV

Pictured is an aerial view of portions of the Los Angeles River. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District has several roles in operating, maintaining and regulating the LA River, as well as managing federal lands. Under the Los Angeles County Drainage Area project, the Corps operates and maintains several dams and portions of the river's channels and tributaries. The river flows through seven different congressional districts, 10 city council districts, 20 neighborhood councils and 12 community-planned areas.

Flood awareness workshop

District experts host LA River virtual public community meeting

BY JOHN REESE,
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

LOS ANGELES — The Los Angeles District used a virtual community outreach forum Dec. 14 for public stakeholders to participate in the 2023 Los Angeles River Flood Awareness Workshop.

The workshop was an overview of 25 of the 51 miles of the LA River the LA District manages.

Corps professionals presented a range of functions that directly and indirectly tie into flood-risk management, including operations and maintenance, emergency management, natural resources management, dam and levee safety, hydrology and hydraulics, and the Park Ranger program.

About 40 participants virtually attended. The workshop was organized and hosted by LA District project manager Melanie Ellis.

“Through the Los Angeles Flood-Risk Awareness Workshop, we were able to share updates on projects directly to the residents and communities we are providing flood-risk management benefits to,” Ellis said. “More importantly, this workshop gives us an opportunity to hear directly from the residents and communities. The real-time inter-

actions through presentations, question-and-answer sessions and open discussion provides us an opportunity to share the Corps’ story and intent, and it allows us to build relationships.”

Operations along the LA River corridor require close cooperation among multiple city, county, state, federal and tribal partners. After a welcome by LA District deputy commander Lt. Col. Stephen Brooks, the workshop began with a presentation by Sgt. Matt Coppes, Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department Homeless Outreach Services Team, or HOST.

Coppes explained the program and shared success stories of the formerly unhoused. He noted the importance of the partnership between the department and the Corps addressing homeless encampments in riverbeds.

“HOST has been working to provide relocation services to those who have fallen on hard times,” Ellis said. “The HOST team and Trevor Snyder, Los Angeles District project manager and homeless encampment liaison, have worked together to provide assistance to those in need.”

District experts followed with details about

the Corps’ LA River programs and projects. A historical overview of the river by engineer Jon Sweeten demonstrated how past flooding led to the current channel system. Vintage photos, antique-to-modern maps and news clips helped visually tell the story of the river.

Participants asked questions live or posted them to the chat to be answered immediately or with a follow-up.

The LA River flows through seven different congressional districts, 10 city council districts, 20 neighborhood councils and 12 community-planned areas. The district’s area of responsibility includes five flood-risk management dams, 45 miles of noncontiguous channels and levees, and one debris basin, all part of the LA County Drainage Area project, which includes more than 500 miles of channels and a total of 20 debris basins, in addition to the five Corps dams.

“The areas in and around our projects are densely populated,” Ellis said. “The interest in the projects and the willingness of the residents to participate and help share that information is really encouraging for our team.”

Feeding feral animals or wildlife unhealthy for them ... and humans

BY JOHN REESE, LOS ANGELES DISTRICT PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Some personnel at the Los Angeles District Base Yard in South El Monte, California, think they’re doing feral and wild animals a favor by putting out food.

Sure, critters are cute ... but not only is feeding animals prohibited by the Los Angeles District’s Operations Division and Los Angeles County code, it’s bad for the animals, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services:

“Human food is not healthy for wild animals, and they do not need food from humans to survive. Wild animals have specialized diets, and they can become malnourished or die if fed the wrong foods. Also, animals cannot distinguish food from wrappers or foil and can get sick eating these items.”

A number of different species live on or visit the base yard. Bowls of cat food for feral cats or worse — human food — may have been placed with the best of intentions; however, that practice can attract and embolden other animals, including predators such as a coyote seen casually strolling across the yard in broad daylight.

There’s been an increase in wild animals at the base yard, facility operations specialist Aaron Tieu said.

“The animals, particularly skunks, are becoming a nuisance, and other animals, such as coyotes, may pose a physical and health liability for personnel,” Tieu said. “While I respect the fact people are animal lovers, the base yard is federal property. Feeding or catering to animals is not allowed and must stop immediately.”

The exception is employees who have service dogs. Otherwise, even man’s best friend isn’t supposed to be on the base yard. Tieu will be looking to trap the feral animals and is working with animal control to remove them from the yard. Once trapped, feral cats can be spayed or neutered. Reducing the feral animal population will discourage larger predators.

“Feral cats were the intended diners. We have a few of them on the property,” Tieu said. “One great service the cats provide is rodent control for rats, meaning biological control.”

Ground squirrels and gophers are primarily herbivores and not likely to feed on cat food, Tieu added, noting those animals eat grasses, forbs, seeds, grains, acorns, fruit and nuts. Squirrels and gophers won’t eat cat food, but many other animals will.

“We have plenty of fat squirrels, gophers and lizards,” Tieu said.

District biologist Jon Rishi listed some of the other animals found in the yard that dine on food left by humans: “Coyotes, raccoons, opossums, Norway rats, roof rats and the occasional stray dog are mammals that occur in and around the base yard,” Rishi said. “Birds, such as house finches and towhees, may also benefit from pet feeding dishes left outdoors. And, of course, ants, flies, roaches, et cetera.”

Operations Division Deputy Chief Michael Turanitza said he continues to see bowls or cans of food around the yard and offers a friendly reminder to all employees not to feed the animals.

“We are asking one final time before taking more proactive measures to hold people accountable,” Turanitza said. “We need to really dial this in and take proactive measures.”



Courtesy photo

A coyote (carnivorous vulgaris) chases a road runner (acceleratti incredibilis) at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District Base Yard in South El Monte, California.

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— U.S. Department of
Agriculture Wildlife Services

2023-2024 AMERICA'S ENGINEERS

The People, Programs, and Projects of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers



Innovation, Partnerships Key to Fargo- Moorhead Project Success



Interview

LT. GEN. SCOTT A. SPELLMON

Chief of Engineers and Commanding General
of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

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