



Splash

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STORMWATER PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

I
N
T
H
I
S
I
S
S
U
E

6th and 8th Street Diversion Projects

1

L.A. River (Part II)

3

BMP Handbook

4

CITY of LA and STATE PARTNER to REDUCE POLLUTION in LA RIVER

John Dorsey, Ph.D.
Stormwater Management Division

Meeting in the Los Angeles River channel at the outlet from the 8th Street storm drain in downtown Los Angeles on November 16, 2000, City and State officials announced a collaborative effort aimed at reducing the amount of polluted runoff water flowing to the Los Angeles River and San Pedro Bay.

The City, with help from the Integrated Waste Management Board, a part of the California Environmental Protection Agency, will spend \$1.4 million over the next two years to install pollution reduction systems at the 6th and 8th Street storm drain outlets. These two outlets drain 1,000 acres of downtown Los Angeles. Contaminants contributing to the urban runoff from the outlets include, food from processing industries, commercial, and transportation-related businesses, as well as a significant homeless population.

“Urban runoff pollution is a serious problem facing the City of Los Angeles, and the 6th and 8th Street storm drain outlets are two major sources of pollution in the Los Angeles River,” said Judith A. Wilson, Director of the



Photo: Thi Tran

(Above) Runoff from the 8th Street drain. The grey substance coating the drain's ramp is bacteria feeding off of organic matter found in street runoff. A press conference was held at the site (below) to announce the joint project with local and state agencies.

City of Los Angeles, Bureau of Sanitation. “This partnership enables the City to continue tackling this problem and improving the quality of life for all residents.”

“As a former Southern California resident, I am concerned about the increasing frequency of beach closures,” said Waste Board Chair Linda Moulton-Patterson. “The Board is working closely with cities throughout California to increase recycling and reduce pollution from improper waste handling. We see this as a value-added opportunity where we can help to protect water quality at the same time.”



On November 14, 2000, the Integrated Waste Management Board approved a \$584,136 grant to the City of Los Angeles' Stormwater Management Division to help fund the installation of a Low Flow Diversion (LFD) System at the 8th Street drain and a Continuous Deflective Separation (CDS) System™ at the 6th Street drain. Because the major pollutants in the 8th Street drainage area consist of trash, debris, oil, grease and bacteria, a Low Flow Diversion System was



City of Los Angeles
Department of Public Works
Bureau of Sanitation



6th and 8th Street ...continued on page 2

6th and 8th Street ...continued from page 1

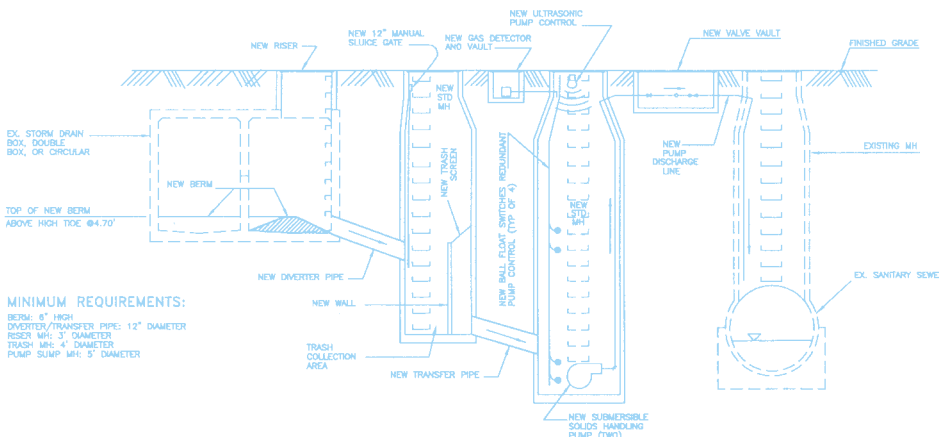
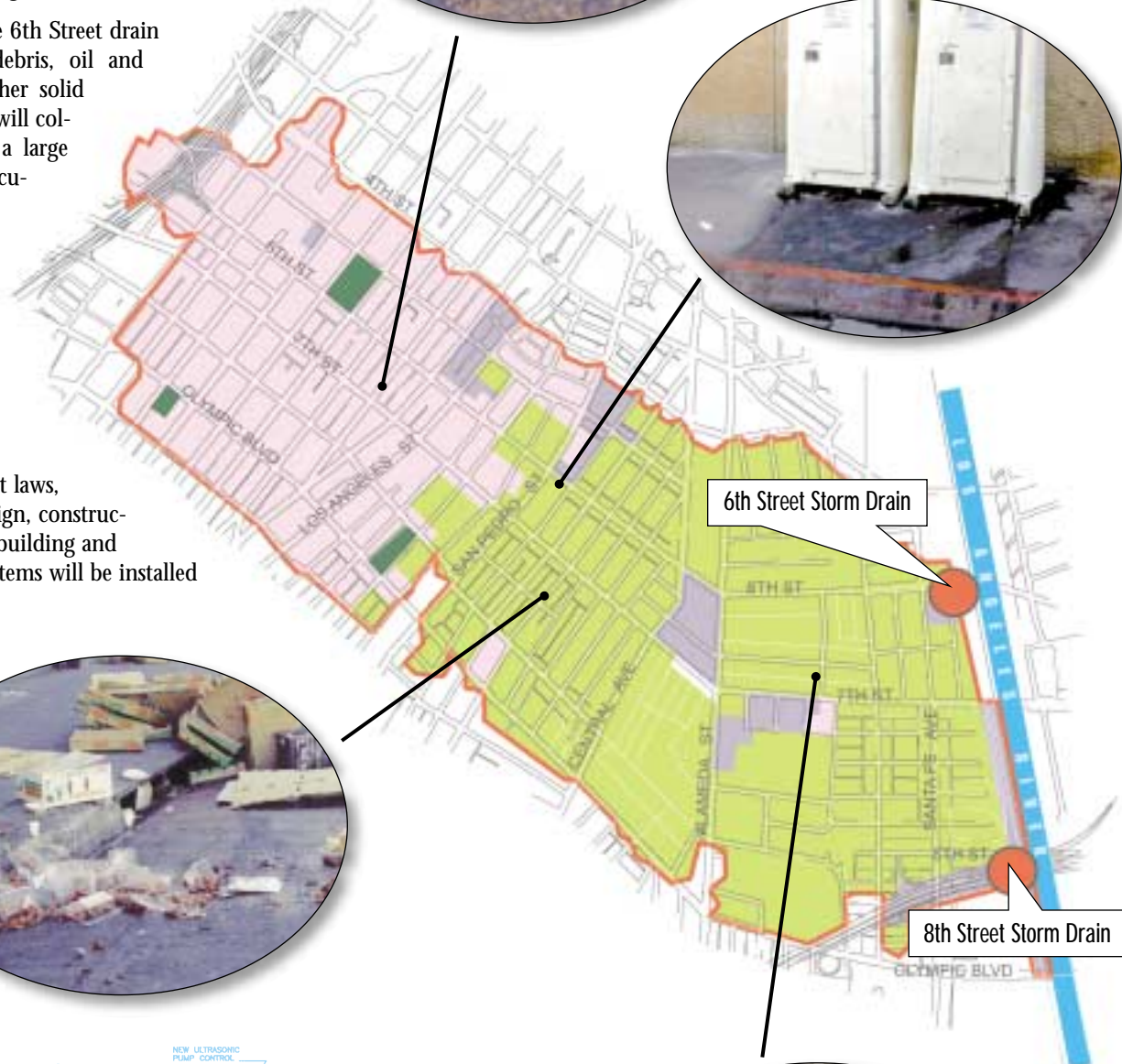
determined to be the most feasible treatment control best management practice (BMP). The LFD System will intercept all pollutants flowing to the Los Angeles River, diverting them to the sanitary sewer system for treatment at the Hyperion Wastewater Treatment Plant. It will operate only during dry weather (April – October) in order to prevent overloading of the system during rainstorms.

The CDS™ System at the 6th Street drain will capture trash and debris, oil and grease, sediments, and other solid pollutants from runoff. It will collect the contaminants in a large basket which will be vacuumed out regularly.

The Stormwater Management Division will be responsible for the operation and maintenance of the systems, as well as for ensuring compliance with California Environmental Quality Act laws, contract procurement, design, construction quality, and required building and operating permits. The systems will be installed within the next two years.

Examples of pollutants in the 8th Street drainage area are (top to bottom): Trash and debris, portable toilet runoff, produce waste and industrial runoff.

- Commercial Use
- Industrial Use



Low Flow Diversion System Configuration

THE LOS ANGELES RIVER: TODAY and TOMORROW

Second of a Two-Part Series

After devastating floods in the 1930's, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began a flood control project to completely contain the Los Angeles River in a concrete-lined channel creating the Los Angeles River that we know today. While covering most of the river bottom unlined to handle the movement of groundwater. One location, in the Sepulveda Dam area of the San Fernando Valley, allows runoff to infiltrate while the second area, east of Silverlake and Griffith Park, allows for rising groundwater to become part of the River's flow. With the addition of year-round water from water reclamation plants, providing 80% of the LA River's dry-weather flow, both of these areas have become important habitats for birds and aquatic organisms.

Construction of the Los Angeles River flood control channel reduced the flood threat by keeping the River from changing its course and provided land for expansion of the City. However, it also created a new set of problems which have become the subject of broad community discussion.

Increased Urban Runoff

Widespread development that followed the "taming" of the River covered not only the River's floodplain, but also large areas of its entire watershed. Spanning the valley to the beaches, and right up to the edge of the channeled River, the City grew, pavement expanded, significantly impacting the ability for rainwater percolation. Prior to the paving of the River and the City, rainwater soaked into the ground replenishing underground wells and maintaining a healthy water supply for residents, or it would flow slowly across the land, as streams leading to the River and ocean.

Instead, rainwater now quickly flows from rooftops, driveways, parking lots and streets—directly into storm drains and down the River. This drainage system collects a great deal of water, or runoff – much more than the natural River and its tributaries used to carry. This streamlined process ushers the water away from the land to prevent flooding, but by doing so, it bypasses the traditional users of this water source – plants, wildlife, and people. Unfortunately, it carries many pollutants as well. Major pollutants found in the Los Angeles River today include: trash and litter; used motor oil and other automotive fluids; herbicides, insecticides and fertilizers; and soil eroded from hillsides and construction sites.

In addition to changing the way water moves across the land, the

lining of the channel had severe effects on the natural ecosystem of the River – plants, trees, wildlife and fish were lost. The riverside environment, known as the riparian area, is the richest kind of habitat for birds and animals – especially in dry climates. Over 90% of the riparian areas that once existed in Southern California have been lost to development and stream channelization.

Watershed Council Formed

Many people and agencies are looking for ways to improve the conditions of the River through watershed management, environmental restoration, water quality programs and improved settings for people to safely enjoy the River. Some changes have already begun. The City of Los Angeles, the County of Los Angeles and numerous other agencies and community organizations are taking steps to make the River an asset to the region. And while protection from flooding continues to be an important concern, more residents are expressing an interest in how flood control decisions are made.

One group that has formed around the vision of a renewed River is the **Los Angeles & San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council** (Watershed Council). The Watershed Council actively works to solve the problems facing the Los Angeles River, as well as the San Gabriel River and is comprised of community groups, municipalities, environmental organizations, government agencies, businesses, and academics. Working together, these groups are all dedicated to finding cooperative, multi-benefit solutions for the watersheds.

The Watershed Council's broad-based approach is reflected in their long-term watershed goals:

- Improve the economic, social and environmental quality of life for those who live in the watershed;
- Provide adequate flood protection;
- Reduce the volume and velocity of storm water and runoff;
- Optimize the use of local water resources;
- Use all water supplies efficiently;
- Improve water quality so as to protect beneficial uses;
- Increase habitat, open space, and recreational opportunities; and,
- Integrate land use planning with water supply/quality/flood control issues.

The City of Los Angeles, with 32% of the Los Angeles River watershed's population and 19% of the area, has been involved in the Watershed Council from the start. The City supports the above goals because each supports economic and environmental sustainability for Los Angeles and the region. Commissioner **Maribel Marin, Board of Public Works**, represents the City on the Watershed Council's Board of Directors.



Upstream view (1939) from what is now the Pasadena Freeway showing channel work in progress.

L.A. River ...continued from page 3

The Los Angeles River has had a varied and colorful history. It is important as we enter a new era of rebirth in the River's life that we continue to recognize its value as a natural resource and the major part that it has played and will continue to play in our city's past, present and future.

DEVELOPMENT PLANNING BMP HANDBOOK NOW AVAILABLE

In coordination with the Departments of City Planning, Building & Safety, Water & Power, Public Works-Bureaus of Engineering and Contract Administration, Harbor, Environmental Affairs, and the Upper Los Angeles River Area Watermaster's Office, a new Development Planning Best Management Practice (BMP) handbook has been developed. This handbook guides the project applicant through the process of selecting, designing, and incorporating stormwater BMPs into a project's design plans. In addition, the handbook includes a background discussion on urban runoff pollution, BMPs selection matrixes, and the design plan review and approval process.

Last year, the Los Angeles County and its Cities were directed by the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board to implement new stormwater requirements to control stormwater pollution from new development and redevelopment projects. The new requirements, known as the *Standard Urban Stormwater Mitigation Plan* or SUSMP, require certain dis-



cretionary projects to include structural Best Management Practices (BMPs) into their design. The SUSMP applies to residential subdivisions (10 homes or more), 100,000+ square-foot commercial developments, automotive repair shops, retail gasoline outlets, restaurants, parking lots larger than 5,000 square-feet or 25 spaces, and hillside single-family residences.

The City adopted an ordinance in September of 2000 giving the City the legal authority to implement the requirements of the SUSMP. The new requirements became law on February 15, 2001.

The handbook is available on the Stormwater Program web site at <http://www.lastormwater.org/pages/publctns.htm>

- Monthly Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council meetings are held on the third Wednesday of every month. Everyone is welcome. For more information, check out their web site at www.LASGRiversWatershed.org
- To learn more about the Los Angeles River, the author of *The Los Angeles River: Its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth*, Blake Gumprecht, will be speaking at the Southern California Academy of Sciences 2001 Annual Meeting, May 4-5, 2001, California State University, Los Angeles. Details at: <http://www.lam.mus.ca.us/~scas>

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Slash, the Stormwater Program newsletter is published quarterly. If you would like to receive future issues or be included on our mailing list, please send a letter of request to: City of Los Angeles Department of Public Works Stormwater Program 650 S. Spring Street Ste. 700 Los Angeles, CA 90014 Please include your return address and/or mail stop. You may also call: (800) 974-9794 or visit <http://www.lastormwater.org>

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