

**APPENDIX E**

**LIVING LIGHTLY IN OUR WATERSHED**

---

**LIVING LIGHTLY  
IN OUR  
WATERSHED**

**A Guide for Topanga Residents  
2001**

Provided by the



**Our Mission**

The mission of the Topanga Creek Watershed Committee is to coordinate and implement a consensus-based, voluntary, sustainable, Coordinated Resource Management Plan that integrates the needs and concerns of the community and addresses all aspects of watershed ecology and watershed management. The Topanga Creek Watershed Committee represents all stakeholders in the watershed and is open to all interested citizens who desire to demonstrate respect for our ecosystem of which we are a part.

**FREQUENTLY-ASKED QUESTIONS**

**What is a Watershed?**

A watershed is a geographic area that collects all the rainfall into a series of drainages and creeks, eventually reaching the sea. The Topanga Creek Watershed is the third largest watershed draining into the Santa Monica Bay. In addition to approximately 12,000 human residents, our Watershed is home to many species of plants and animals, some of which are rare, threatened or endangered. Our common home ties all of us together.

**Why is Our Watershed Important?**

Every resident of Topanga receives the spiritual, aesthetic, ecological and economic benefits that come from living in a healthy watershed. We wake up to the rustling of the oaks and are serenaded to sleep by owl, frogs and coyotes. In return, we each need to recognize the impacts of our actions on this fragile resource and take responsibility for leaving it viable for generations to come.

**How Can I Help?**

There are many ways residents can help preserve our watershed. Below are some suggestions as well as contacts for more information. Please note that the contacts listed are provided for informational purposes only and no endorsement of products or services is implied.

---

## **BACKYARD CONSERVATION**

In addition to the 12,000 people who call Topanga home, the canyon is home to a robust and diverse ecosystem. You can take part in the protection of this fragile natural environment by practicing conservation on your own property by:

- creating habitats using native plants;
- linking your yard to surrounding wildlands;
- minimizing use of pesticides, herbicides, toxic materials.

### **Information and Resources:**

- National Wildlife Federation Backyard Habitat Program, [www.nwf.org](http://www.nwf.org)
- National Audubon Society, 212-979-3117, [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org)
- Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCDSMM) library, 310-455-1030
- Wildlife Habitat Council, 301-588-8994, [www.wildlifehc.org](http://www.wildlifehc.org)
- Fish and Game Department, General information: 562-590-5132,
- Emergency Law Enforcement: 213-620-4700
- Bat Conservation International, [www.batcon.org](http://www.batcon.org)

## **BRUSH CLEARANCE**

Brush clearance is important! It can minimize danger from wildfire, but ground cover and well-established root systems are important in minimizing erosion. The goal is to strike a balance between these two competing purposes. You can help by:

- replacing flammable vegetation with less-flammable within 30 feet of your house;
- mowing before weeds set seeds.

### **Information and Resources:**

- "Landscaping for Fire Safety: Plants Native to the Santa Monica Mountains" available at the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCDSMM), 310-455-1030
- Landscaping consultants available through L.A. County Forestry, 818-890-5719
- Videos available at Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCDSMM), 310-455-1030
- Topanga Coalition for Emergency Preparedness (T-CEP), 310-455-3000
- Fire Prevention and Public Safety Bureau, 213-485-5982
- L.A. County Brush Clearance Unit, 818-756-8022
- California FAIR Plan, 213-487-0111

## **COMPOSTING AND RECYCLING**

Yard clippings are now picked up at the curbside in Topanga, but you can also maintain a compost pile of your own to keep organic material in the canyon to enrich the soil for future growth. Here are some suggestions:

- recycle old trashcans into compost bins;
- keep trash can lids closed to prevent unwanted critter guests;
- do not include meats, fats or cheese in your compost pile.

### **Information and Resources:**

- Master Composting Classes, [www.mastercomposter.com](http://www.mastercomposter.com)
- [www.smartgardening.com](http://www.smartgardening.com)
- California Native Plant Society, 818-348-5910
- Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCDSMM), 310-455-1030
- Californians Against Waste, 916-443-5422, [www.cawrecycles.org](http://www.cawrecycles.org)
- Eric Warblowsky, Compost Evangelist, Master Composter, 805-652-1142

- 
- John P. McAndrew, Compost/Bio Dynamic Methods, 310-454-6090
  - Harmonious Technologies, [www.homecompost.com/](http://www.homecompost.com/)
  - Beverage Container Recycling Information, 800-732-9253
  - Real Goods, 310-455-4645, [www.realgoods.com](http://www.realgoods.com)

### **DRAINAGE CONTROL**

Well-designed and maintained drainage systems not only help to minimize siltation and unnecessary erosion but also add to the value of your property. Remember that everything eventually ends up in the creek or the ocean. You can help by:

- identifying sources of surface water (runoff) flowing over and off your property;
- leaving mulch, vegetation & plant roots in areas prone to erosion;
- fitting your roof with gutters and drainspouts, discharging onto non-erodible surfaces (simple systems can really work);
- using an asphalt or compacted earth berm (or sandbag) on the outside edge of a driveway or building pad to direct runoff away from sensitive slopes to an area where it can be released safely;
- creating on-site retention in cisterns, ponds or old septic tanks to use for irrigation and/or fire-fighting.

#### **Information and Resources:**

- EcoHome, 323-662-5207
- T.R.E.E.S., [www.treepeople.org/trees](http://www.treepeople.org/trees)
- Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCDSMM), 310-455-1030
- Public Works Department, Sewer and Storm Drain Maintenance, 310-478-7253
- State Water Resources Control Board, [www.swrcb.ca.gov](http://www.swrcb.ca.gov)
- Invisible Structures, Inc., 800-233-1510, [www.invisiblestructures.com](http://www.invisiblestructures.com)
- Topanga Underground, 310-455-2189
- Bill Wilson Environmental Planning and Design, 310-441-3861

### **EROSION CONTROL**

Are slopes sliding, gullies forming or tree roots hanging out on your property? Every property owner should conduct a survey of his or her property to determine where erosion problems may exist. Once problem areas have been found, appropriate remedies can be applied.

Remember that:

- plants on slopes need different rooting depths to hold soil;
- jute netting and erosion control blankets made of biodegradable fiber work better than plastic sheets;
- terraced walls of natural rocks can really help;
- it's important to find and fix drainage problems that cause erosion.

#### **Information and Resources:**

- Natural Resource Conservation Service, 805-386-4489
- Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCDSMM), 310-455-1030
- L.A. County Building and Safety, 818-880-4150
- Erosion Control Magazine, [www.erosioncontrol.com](http://www.erosioncontrol.com)
- International Erosion Control Association, 970-879-3010
- Pathworks Railroad Tie Installation, 310-455-1085

---

## **GREYWATER SYSTEMS**

Greywater systems are an excellent way to conserve and reuse water, especially during drought conditions. However, improperly designed and maintained systems can cause serious water quality problems on site and downstream. Some suggestions include:

- always discharge greywater subsurface to prevent a health hazard and salt buildup in soil which is highly toxic to plants;
- use detergents low in salts, boron and other chemicals (detergent analysis is available from the RCDSMM below);
- remember that it is illegal for drains to daylight on the surface;
- use greywater systems for irrigating non-edible plants and providing on-site fire protection.

### **Information and Resources:**

- "Create an Oasis with Greywater" by Art Ludwig and "Building Professionals Supplement" from Real Goods Trading Company, 800-762-7325
- "Detergent Composition and Greywater" available at Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCDSMM), 310-455-1030
- Biosolutions, 310-457-0808
- EcoHome, 323-662-5207
- Oasis Design, 805-967-9956, [www.oasisdesign.net/](http://www.oasisdesign.net/)
- Bill Wilson Environmental Planning and Design, 310-441-3861
- Topanga Underground, 310-455-2189
- Real Goods, 310-455-4645, [www.realgoods.com](http://www.realgoods.com)

## **HORSES AND STABLES**

Horse keepers face unique challenges in minimizing impacts on the watershed. Managing large areas of perpetually bare earth and large quantities of manure are two of the biggest problems. It is important to keep manure out of the creek at all times. Some suggestions include:

- composting manures and corralled animal wastes (see RCDSMM manual below);
- using green or gravel filter berms to surround corrals to prevent sedimentation of the creek and help cleanse runoff.

Keep in mind that manure can spread invasive, flammable weeds.

### **Information and Resources:**

- "Corralled Animal Best Management Practices Manual" available at the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCDSMM), 310-455-1030
- Pierce College Agriculture Department, Ron Wechsler, 805-527-2242, 818-710-2980

## **LANDSCAPING**

Landscaping can be carried out with erosion control, water conservation, firesafety, native vegetation, wildlife compatibility and aesthetics in mind and can accommodate each concern without compromising any of the others. Remember to:

- save water, think native;
- minimize irrigation needs by matching plants in each watering zone;
- keep in mind that planting under oaks has special requirements.

### **Information and Resources:**

- Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCDSMM), 310-455-1030
- L.A. County Forestry, 818-890-5719
- California Native Plant Society, 818-348-5910
- Theodore Payne Foundation, 818-768-1802
- Topanga Fanatical Botanical Society, 310-455-2292
- Local Landscape Designers / Contractors

---

## **RUNOFF CONTROL**

Herbicides, pesticides, chemical fertilizers and other household, stable, automotive and business-related toxic or hazardous materials can severely harm flora and fauna in the watershed. Remember, non-point sources of pollution are the single biggest contributors to poor water quality. Think before you pour and remember to:

- dispose of all toxic materials properly at your local recycling center;
- use toxic materials according to directions and only as a last resort;
- wash your car at a car wash that recycles water, or if you must do it at home, use a good biodegradable soap and don't keep the hose running between rinses.

### **Information and Resources:**

- Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCDSMM), 310-455-1030
- L.A. County Agricultural Commission, 626-350-7077
- Californians for Pesticide Reform, [pests@igc.org](mailto:pests@igc.org)
- State Water Resources Control Board, [www.swrcb.ca.gov/](http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/)
- Fire Department Hazardous Materials Section, 213-485-8080
- Spill Response, 213-890-4045
- To report illegal dumping, 800-303-0003
- L.A. County Hazardous Waste Collection Program, 800-238-0173, [www.lacsd.org](http://www.lacsd.org)
- Santa Monica City Recycling Center, 2500 Michigan Avenue, in Santa Monica

## **SEPTIC SYSTEMS**

Topanga is not served by a municipal sewer system. Every home in the canyon has its own septic system. Proper care and maintenance of septic systems is critical to keep waters in the creek clean and safe for all. Here are some suggestions:

- use water-conserving fixtures to minimize water flow to disposed area;
- install a greywater system to reuse laundry and shower water for irrigation
- fix leaky toilets immediately;
- be careful not to overuse septic system when hosting large parties;
- use sieves in the kitchen sink to prevent excess food waste from entering septic system;
- install a low-maintenance filter in septic tank to extend life of disposal areas;
- install access risers and lids so that potentially costly problems can be identified and fixed;
- do not use bleaches or anti-bacterial soaps;
- pump only every few years.

### **Information and Resources:**

- Advanced Composting Systems, Phoenix Composting Toilet, [www.advancedcomposting.com](http://www.advancedcomposting.com)
- Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCDSMM), 310-455-1030
- Biosolutions, 818-991-9997
- Topanga Underground, 310-455-2189
- W.A.S.T.E.C. Pumping, 800-799-2783
- Andrew Rasmussen, 310-455-3578
- Bill Wilson Environmental Planning and Design, 310-441-3861
- Clivus Multrum Composting Toilets, [www.clivusmultrum.com](http://www.clivusmultrum.com)

---

## **SLOPE STABILIZATION**

Steep slopes require special attention in order to keep them from failing. Slope failure can incur catastrophic damage on wildlife habitat, block roads and undermine foundations. For better slope stabilization:

- use a variety of plants with different root depths when planting;
- don't undercut the toe of the slope;
- create a properly-designed and maintained drainage system to prevent problems.

### **Information and Resources:**

- International Erosion Control Association, 970-879-3010, [www.ieca.org](http://www.ieca.org)
- Maccaferri Gabions, Inc., 916-371-5805, [www.maccaferri-usa.com](http://www.maccaferri-usa.com)
- Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCDSMM), 310-455-1030

## **STREAMBANK STABILIZATION**

Properties adjacent to streams are particularly vulnerable to damage from high-volume storm events. Well-designed stabilization systems can mitigate this danger while improving the health of the watershed. Remember:

- natural banks provide excellent habitat;
- trees along banks moderate temperature;
- hard surfaces can cause unexpected downstream problems.

### **Information and Resources:**

- International Erosion Control Association, 970-879-3010, [www.ieca.org](http://www.ieca.org)
- Maccaferri Gabions, Inc., 916-371-5805, [www.maccaferri-usa.com](http://www.maccaferri-usa.com)
- Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCDSMM), 310-455-1030

## **TREE MAINTENANCE**

Trees are figuratively and literally the "anchors" of the ecosystem and the health of the watershed. Proper planting and maintenance of the trees on your property has a long-term impact on the rest of the watershed. Think before you cut and remember:

- leaves provide the food for the tree and removing them is a stress;
- pruning of major limbs should be done in the rainy season.

### **Information and Resources:**

- Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCDSMM), 310-455-1030
- Agricultural Commissioner's Office, 818-575-5451
- Los Angeles County Forester's Fire Warden Department, 818-890-5719
- Rosi Dagit, Certified Arborist, 310-455-7528

## **WATER CONSERVATION/RECYCLING**

There are many ways homeowners and renters can help conserve water. Conserving water can reduce erosion and siltation and can reduce your water bill too! Keep in mind that:

- water in your tap traveled 300 miles to get here;
- there is a finite amount of water on the planet;
- resource recycling makes a big difference.

### **Information and Resources:**

- Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCDSMM), 310-455-1030
- G.I. Rubbish Co., 805-522-9400

- 
- EcoHome, 323-662-5207
  - Oasis Design, 805-967-9956, [www.oasisdesign.net/](http://www.oasisdesign.net/)
  - T.R.E.E.S., [www.treepeople.org/trees](http://www.treepeople.org/trees)
  - Real Goods, 310-455-4645, [www.realgoods.com](http://www.realgoods.com)

### **WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT OPTIONS**

Topanga is a place where the urban, populated environment interfaces with the natural environment, populated by diverse wildlife. It is important to respect and appreciate the natural environment in which we live and to seek ways to live in harmony with the creatures with which we share the Topanga Watershed. Please try to:

- keep all pet food indoors and trashcans secure to avoid attracting raccoons, coyotes, etc.;
- remove bats and bees from your property instead of killing them.

### **Information and Resources:**

- Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCDSMM), 310-455-1030
- Nature of Wildworks, 310-455-0550
- Agoura Hills Animal Shelter, 818-991-0071
- MetaSearch, [www.Dogpile.com](http://www.Dogpile.com)
- Bat Conservation International, [www.batcon.org/](http://www.batcon.org/)

### **ABOUT US**

Since 1998, the Topanga Creek Watershed Committee has been moving forward in implementing actions identified in the Draft Topanga Creek Watershed Management Plan (April 1996) throughout the watershed. These actions have addressed community education, revision of flood control laws, basic research and ongoing efforts to implement restoration plans. The Topanga Creek Watershed Committee is organized according to a Coordinated Resource Management Plan (CRMP), with all stakeholders sharing in the volunteer, consensus-based planning process.

The Topanga Creek Watershed Committee has met regularly and offered several large community meeting forums to discuss areas of concern. All of the work thus far has been supported by a start-up grant from the Department of Conservation (\$5,000), which ended in July 1999, plus contributions from the Topanga Canyon Town Council, Topanga Community Woman's Club, Topanga Chamber of Commerce, Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains, Trout Unlimited and Topanga Earthday 2000, not to mention lots of volunteer time by many.

We greatly appreciate any help you can provide to either acquire important information or help spread the word throughout the community about the importance of *living lightly in our watershed*.

For more information about our activities, you may contact us at:

**Topanga Creek Watershed Committee**  
c/o Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (RCDSMM)  
122 N. Topanga Canyon Blvd.  
Topanga, CA 90290  
310-455-1030

Visit our website at [www.topangaonline.com/twc](http://www.topangaonline.com/twc)

Desktop Publishing and Mailing donated by Topanga Mail and Message Company  
Logo Design donated by Dan Irwin and Company