

LIVING LIGHTLY IN THE WATERSHED

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A GUIDE FOR RESIDENTS, BUSINESSES, AND VISITORS
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provided by
The Topanga Creek Watershed Committee



with support from
The Resource Conservation District
of the Santa Monica Mountains

For more information, or to participate in the TCWC,
call (310) 455-4156 or visit online at
www.topangacreekwatershedcommittee.com

*All contacts listed are provided for information purposes only.
No endorsement of products or services is implied*

ABOUT LIVING LIGHTLY

A **WATERSHED** is a geographic area where rainfall collects into a network of drainages and waterways that eventually reach the ocean. Extending from ridgeline to ridgeline, the slopes, valleys, and flatlands of a watershed can be understood as a single organism sharing a circulatory system; water moves from high ground to low, as well as underground, sustaining and connecting all the disparate parts.

The **TOPANGA CREEK WATERSHED** is the third largest watershed draining into the Santa Monica Bay. In addition to over 12,000 human residents, the Topanga Creek Watershed is home to a wide variety of plants and animals, some of which are rare, threatened, or endangered. The Topanga Creek Watershed is located in the interface between undeveloped open spaces of the Santa Monica Mountains and heavily urbanized areas of Los Angeles. Keeping this borderland ecosystem clean, healthy, despite the stresses and pressures of the megalopolis, and despite our own presence, and is an ongoing and absolutely essential endeavor.

The **TOPANGA CREEK WATERSHED COMMITTEE** is an all-volunteer group of local residents and other stakeholders who work to protect and promote the health and well-being of the natural environment of the Topanga Creek Watershed. The goal of the TCWC is to encourage residents and others to recognize, take responsibility for, and minimize human impacts on the watershed. We work to protect and care for this place and the life in it so that it will remain healthy, diverse, beautiful, and wild forever.

This guide, ***LIVING LIGHTLY IN THE CANYON***, is a collection of information, suggestions, and resources that we hope residents, businesses, and others will use to better understand and minimize our impacts on the environment.

GETTING INVOLVED

One of the great things about being a Topangan is that there are so many opportunities to connect with your neighbors while making a positive difference in our collective quality of life. Because Topanga is an unincorporated area of Los Angeles County, and we have no city government, we have a greater opportunity and responsibility to take a hands-on approach to the care and management of our community and our environment. Folks interested in environmental issues are strongly encouraged to connect with the following groups and get involved!

Topanga Creek Watershed Committee (310) 455-4156
Educational programs, native garden, activism and interface with government agencies. www.topangacreekwatershedcommittee.org
We do whatever folks want to do or needs to be done to protect and enhance the local ecology, Open to all regardless of background or experience.

Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (818) 597-8627
Fall/Spring Creek Clean Up. www.rcdsmm.org
Topanga Stream Team: water quality monitoring, frogs, turtles, fish studies, etc).
Report wildlife sightings. Invasive plant removal and revegetation projects.

Topanga Earth Day Organizing Committee (310) 702-5683
Great multi-faceted educational and musical event, raises money for non-profits. www.topangaeearthday.org

Topanga Canyon Docents 310-455-1696
Learn about and lead tours of Topanga State Park <http://www.topangacanyondocents.org>

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

South Coast Air Quality Management District www.aqmd.gov

Coalition for Clean Air www.coalitionforcleanair.org

COMPREHENSIVE RESOURCES

Beyond what you will find in this guide, great information regarding harmonious coexistence with wild animals, conscious management of pets, and much more is available for free download at www.topangacreekwatershedcommittee.com.

Also, the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains offers businesses and homeowners the "Keep Your Green" service, a fee-based Sustainable Landscaping Consultation providing site-specific recommendations to help you manage your land in a way that protects the environment, and saves water and money as well. For more information on Keep your Green call the RCDSMM at (818)597-8627 or go to <http://www.rcdmm.org/keep-your-green-sustainable-landscape-consultation>.

ECOLOGIZE LA is a local company that performs detailed, comprehensive audits and analyses of residential and commercial properties, providing custom recommendations for improving the energy efficiency and sustainability of structures, systems, and landscapes. Call (310) 908-5505 or go to www.ecologizeLA.com.

COMPOSTING, RECYCLING, AND HAZARDOUS WASTE

Los Angeles County provides safe ways to dispose of batteries, electronics, chemicals (paint, oil, etc), pharmaceuticals, fluorescent light bulbs, and other toxic substances. Never put these things in the trash or down the drain or leave them outside or anywhere where they might leach into the environment,. They can and do cause serious harm.

Reducing our contributions to the waste stream saves scarce landfill space and reduces the air pollution caused by waste hauling. Look for the recycle symbol on paper, plastic, glass, and metal products, and recycle everything that has the symbol! Compost food and plant waste and use it in your garden. Re-use cardboard boxes, shipping envelopes, scrap paper, jars, etc. and don't buy items with excessive packaging.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Hazardous and e-Waste Disposal http://www.lacsd.org/info/hhw_e_waste/default.asp

LA County Composting classes and discounted bin sales http://san.lacity.org/solid_resources/recycling/composting/index.htm

Master Composter Program www.mastercomposter.com

Curtis Thomsen, composting consultant (888) 772-1616

BioContractors (to purchase discount compost bins) (562) 402-2521

Californians Against Waste (916) 443-5422
www.cawrecycles.org

Recycling Information (800) 732-9253
<http://ladpw.org/epd/recycling>

rePLANET recycle centers (877) 737-5263
www.replanetusa.com

GARDENING, LANDSCAPING, WATER CONSERVATION

Chemicals that are commonly used in gardens, such as fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides, almost inevitably find their way into the creek and ocean where they degrade water quality and do real harm to micro- and macro-organisms. Even when used according to instructions many commercial garden products can also be dangerous to pets and humans; organic gardening is the way to go for people and for the watershed.

Grass lawns are an American tradition, but they usually to require huge amounts of increasingly scarce, expensive, imported water, they make no environmental sense in our Mediterranean climate, they produce a constant stream of green waste, and they demand a lot of maintenance from two-stroke engines, which are terrible polluters. For these and other reasons we strongly encourage homeowners to get rid of their lawns or shrink them. *Instead, landscape with native plants, which require little if any irrigation and provide food and habitat to native insect and animal species!!!*

If you do choose non-native plants for your landscape, save water by opting for drought-tolerant species, and be careful to avoid any plant classified as invasive (i.e.: pampas grass) as they can propagate beyond your property and displace native species.

Consider irrigating from a greywater system (see GREYWATER SYSTEMS below) and use drip irrigation as money- and water-saving alternatives to outmoded, inefficient spray heads. Use the first contact below to get extensive free help re: water conservation.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Water conservation tips (888 828-8602)
www.lacwaterworks.com

Water conservation tips www.bewaterwise.com/tips01.html
Keep your Green www.rcdmm.org/keep-your-green-sustainable-landscape-consultation
Green Gardens Group, aka G3LA (310) 694-8351

www.greengardensgroup.com
Los Angeles County Smart Gardening Program (888) 253-2652
www.smartgardening.com

California Native Plant Society (Los Angeles Chapter) 818-881-3706
www.lacnps.org
Theodore Payne Foundation (818) 768-1802
www.theodorepayne.org

Nature Conservancy (wildland invasive species team) www.invasive.org/gist/esadocs.html
National Wildlife Federation Backyard Habitat Program www.nwf.org/Get-Outside/Outdoor-Activities/Garden-for-Wildlife/Create-a-Habitat.aspx

Los Angeles Audubon Society www.laaudubon.org
Wildlife Habitat Council www.wildlifehc.org
Westside Permaculture gatherings www.wiserearth.org/group/wpg

Caitlin Bergman, Certified Permaculturist. Garden design, classes (626) 278-8299
Santa Monica Mountains Coalition for Alternative to Toxics (310) 455-1060
Californians for Alternatives to Toxics www.alternatives2toxics.org

Alternative Cleaning and Garden Products ladpw/epd/hhw/alternative.cfm
Free mulch www.bewaterwise.com/Mulching_Posters.pdf
Free compost www.lvmwd.com/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=828

TREES

Trees are the anchors of our ecosystem. The selection, planting, and maintenance of the trees on your property has a significant long-term impact on the health of the watershed.

Some things to consider when adding trees to your landscape:

- Native v. non-native – especially avoid pepper and eucalyptus trees
- Attracting favorable animals, birds, and insects
- Fire safety
- Benefits of shade and windbreak
- Water needs
- Maintenance requirements
- Mature size, above and below ground
- Distance from structures, roadways, and power lines

Some things to consider when pruning branches:

- Leaves provide food for the tree, removing them is a stress.
- Cutting Live Oak branches over 2" in diameter requires a county permit.
- Pruning of major limbs should be done in the rainy season.
- Plan at least one year in advance to prune for fire safety.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Los Angeles County Foresters Fire Warden Dept. (Permits)	(818) 890-5719 www.lacofd.org/forestry/forestry.asp
California Oak Foundation	(510) 763-0282 www.californiaoaks.org
Rosi Dagit, Arborist	(310) 455-7528
Agricultural Commissioner's Office	(626) 575-5471 www.acwm.co.la.ca.us

SEPTIC SYSTEMS

Topanga is not served by a municipal sewer system; every home in the Canyon has its own septic system. Septic systems come in a variety of configurations and sizes, but they all need ongoing supervision in order to avoid expensive (financially and environmentally) failures. Malfunctioning septic systems can be a major source of water pollution, especially, but not only, when they are located near creeks and drainages. Use water conserving fixtures and greywater systems to minimize water flow to disposal areas. Less volume in your leach field or seepage pit will lead to a longer life for your system.

- Fix leaky toilets and faucets immediately!
- Be careful not to overuse your septic system when hosting large parties.
- Use sieves in the kitchen sink to prevent excess food waste from entering septic system.
- Don't use a garbage disposal. Compost food waste instead.
- A low maintenance filter can be installed in septic tank to extend life of disposal area.
- Install access risers and lids so that problems can be identified and fixed.
- No bleaches, anti-bacterial soaps, harsh or toxic chemicals, hair or grease should go into the septic system. They can defeat the natural decomposition processes and/or find their way into the creek or aquifers. Use non-toxic beauty and cleaning products.
- Don't do multiple loads of clothes washing in succession. Spread them out over several hours or days.
- Surface liquids and bad smells around leach fields and seepage pits indicate a problem that should be addressed right away.
- Have your system inspected every two years, but don't pump it if it doesn't really need it.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Septic System Owners Manual	available at Topanga Lumber
Los Angeles County Dept. of Environmental Health	(818) 880-4121
BioSolutions	(818) 991-9997 www.biosolutions.org
Topanga Underground	(310) 455-2189
EcoHome	(323) 662-5207 www.ecohome.org
Bill Wilson Environmental Planning and Design	(310) 441-3861
W.A.S.T.E.C. pumping	(800) 799-2783
Real Goods	(877) 989-6321 www.realgoods.com
Clivus Multrum Composting Toilets	(800) 425-488 www.clivusmultrum.com

GREYWATER SYSTEMS

Greywater systems send water from selected drains in your house directly into your landscape, instead of to your septic system. This reduces the load on your septic system and also reduces the need to irrigate your landscape with expensive, imported, treated water. Small systems that take water from the laundry and/or one bathroom sink are currently allowed without a permit, if done in accordance with mandated specifications. The Department of Environmental Health requires a permit for larger, more complex systems. Toilets and dishwashers should never be hooked up to a greywater system. Greywater should be released into your landscape underground, and should be inaccessible to children, pets, and anyone else who might be tempted to drink it. Since the graywater is going directly into your landscape, stick to cleaning products and laundry detergents that are low in salts, boron, and other chemicals. Also be sure that the frequency and volume of greywater flow is appropriate for the plants and soil receiving the water, and vice versa.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Oasis Design – “Create an Oasis with Graywater”	(877)- 399-1199 www.oasisdesign.net
Grey Water Guerrillas	www.greywaterguerrillas.com
Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains for detergent analysis	(818) 597-8627
Alternative Cleaning and Garden Products	ladpw/epd/hhw/alternative.cfm

FIRE SAFETY and BRUSH CLEARANCE

The danger of wildfire in our area cannot be overstated. The potential for a major catastrophe is pronounced and very nearly constant. We clear brush on our properties in order to increase the distance between structures and highly flammable plant material, and to comply with County requirements, but these measures need to be balanced with the need to keep plants rooted into hillsides to minimize erosion. Pine and eucalyptus trees can literally explode in a wildfire and spread fire long distances – if you have these kinds of trees on your property seriously consider removing them. Dead and dying trees should be removed immediately. Create space between plants to make it harder for fire to spread. Make sure your propane tank can be easily located and turned off if there is a threat of fire.

- Remove dead branches, trees and plants.
- Reduce or remove tall grasses, weeds and shrubs under trees
- Replace flammable grasses with less flammable within 30 feet of your house
- Mow before weeds set seed

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Santa Monica Mountains Community Wildfire Protection Plan	www.forevergreenforestry.com/SantaMonicaMountainsCWPP.html
“Evacuating Topanga: Risks, Choices and Responsibilities” by Fred Freer	www.topangamesessenger.com/Evacuating/EvacuatingFrames.html
“A Homeowners Guide to Fire and Watershed Management at the Chaparral/Urban Interface”	www.naturetrust.net/pdf/firewatershed.pdf
Topanga Coalition for Emergency Preparedness	(310) 455-3000 www.t-cep.org
Topanga Survival Guide <i>Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains for a list of fire safe plants and videos on brush clearance</i>	topangasurvival.wordpress.com/survival-guide/ 818) 597-8627 www.rcdsmm.org
California Chapparal Institute	760-822-0029 www.californiachaparral.com
LA County Fire Dept. Malibu Forestry Unit Brush Clearance	(818) 222-1108 (626) 969-2375 www.lacofd.org/forestry/forestry.asp
Topanga Tree Service	(310) 565-7957
LA County Ag Dept Weed Abatement	(626) 575-4393
California FAIR Plan (fire insurance)	(800) 339-4099 www.cfpnet.com
Arson Watch	www.arsonwatch.com

LIVING IN HARMONY WITH LOCAL WILDLIFE

If we humans are to coexist in harmony with the wild creatures of the Topanga Watershed we must educate ourselves as to their habits and needs and exercise considerable care as we go about our business. Above all, **do not use poison to deal with pests** – the creatures you target, when weakened or dead, are easy prey for other creatures, including bobcats, coyotes, owls, and hawks, which in turn become poisoned, and die. This is a serious, ongoing tragedy. While it is generally not the intention of homeowners struggling with ants, rats, or pigeons to kill other creatures, these deaths an entirely predictable result of bringing toxic chemicals into or around your home. There are many effective ways of dealing with pests that do not disperse poison into the watershed. Learn about them and use them.

ALSO: Non-native pet turtles, frogs and crayfish, if released into the wild, can do tremendous harm. Keep them at home. Exclude bats and bees and other nuisances from your house instead of killing them. Keep all pet food indoors to avoid attracting raccoons, coyotes, and other guests. Ravens on the roof hate being hosed down.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Californians for Alternatives to Toxics	www.alternatives2toxics.org
Santa Monica Mountains Coalition for Alternative to Toxics	(310) 455-1060
Alternative Cleaning and Garden Products	http://ladpw/epd/hhw/alternative.cfm
Nature of Wildworks	(310) 455-0550 natureofwildworks.org
Agoura Animal Shelter	(818) 991-0071
Bat Conservation International	www.batcon.org
California Wildlife Center	(310) 458-WILD (9453) www.californiawildlifecenter.org
Companion Animals in the Canyon (Guide)	(310) 455-1303
Snake Relocation	(310) 455-2013 (310) 455-1549 (310) 570-5339
Non-toxic rodent removal	(310) 663-8903
Park Rangers at Topanga State Park	(310) 455-2465
CA Department of Fish & Game	(858)-467-4201
CDFG Emergency Code Enforcement	(909) 484-0167

DRAINAGE, EROSION, and RUNOFF MANAGEMENT

Well-designed and maintained drainage systems protect structures and landscapes and minimize erosion and siltation. Also, water runoff from your property may contain substances alien to the natural environment, which can harm flora and. Try to keep the water that falls on your property on site, so that it filters directly into the earth. Conduct a survey of your property to determine the location of any drainage or erosion issues. Roofs perimeters, drainage downspouts, and areas adjacent to paved areas are the first places to look. Once problem areas are identified, appropriate remedies can be applied, such as the creation of swales and basins and replacing solid pavement with permeable materials.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

State Water Resource Control Board	www.swrcb.ca.gov
Invisible Structures, Inc.	(800) 233-1510 www.invisiblestructures.com
Topanga Underground	(310) 455-2189
Pathworks Railroad Tie Installation	(310) 455-4336
To Report sewage spills or illegal dumping	(888) 253-2652
International Erosion Control Association	(970) 879-3010 www.ieca.org
Natural Resources Conservation Service	(805) 386-4489 www.nrcs.usda.gov

SLOPE AND STREAMBANK STABILIZATION

Steep slopes require special attention in order to keep them from failing. Slope failure can cause catastrophic damage on wildlife habitat, block roads and undermine foundations. 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. Poorly designed systems can be counter-productive. Do not undercut your slopes. Natural banks with trees and plants are ideal. Plant a variety of plants with different root depths to hold hillsides.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

International Erosion Control Association	(970) 879-3010 www.ieca.org
Maccaferri Gabions Inc	(916) 371-5805 www.maccaferri-usa.com
Native Plant List for Slope Stabilization	(818) 597-8627 www.rcdsmm.org

HORSES & STABLES

Equestrians face unique challenges in minimizing the impacts that horses have on the watershed. Large areas of bare earth and large quantities of manure are two of the biggest contributors to compromised water quality in the Santa Monica Mountains. Manure is really bad for aquatic life and it can also spread invasive, non-native, flammable weeds if not composted. Keep manure out of the creek at all times. When riding stay on existing trails and don't let your horse pee or poop near a creek or drainage. Compost your horse manure or keep it in a secure bin away from creeks and drainages.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Equestrian Trails, Inc

(818) 362-6819
www.etinational.org

Guide to Composting Horse Manure

<http://whatcom.wsu.edu/ag/compost/horsecompost.htm>

Horse Keeping: A Guide to Land Management for Cleaner Water

(818) 597-8627
<http://mcstoppp.org/acrobat/Horse%20Keeping%20Guide.pdf>

Pierce College Agriculture Dept. (Ron Wechsler)

(818) 710-2980

SUSTAINABLE BUILDINGS

Sustainability means taking care of present needs without despoiling the environment or diminishing the ability of others, now and in the future, to take care of their own needs as well. Sustainable building means designing and building or retrofitting structures in a way that minimizes environmental impacts on site and beyond, maximizes energy and water efficiency, and uses environmentally friendly materials, systems, and processes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Ecologize LA

Energy efficiency and sustainability consulting

for comprehensive "greening" of residential and commercial property

(310) 908-5505
www.ecologizeLA.com

New West Land Company, Inc

Place-appropriate Inhabitation

(310) 614-6636
www.newwestland.com

California Green Building Design and Construction

(916) 341-6476
www.ciwmb.ca.gov/GreenBuilding

Center for Regenerative Studies

(909) 869-5155
www.csupomona.edu/~crs/

EcoHome Network

Guide to Green Design and Building Professionals

(323) 662-5207
www.ecohome.org/pages/index.html

Real Goods

(877) 989-6321
www.realgoods.com

Artificial Night Lighting (Dark sky friendly light fixtures)

www.darksky.org