

## Flash flood no match for wash fortifications

While an August flash flood wreaked havoc in the northwest portion of the valley, the 100-year storm was no match for the increasingly fortified Las Vegas Wash.

Seven erosion control structures—or weirs—and approximately 2 miles of bankline fortifications easily withstood the flood flows, which were measured at a peak of about 1.25 million gallons of water per minute. None of the structures, which act like stair steps along the steeply sloped 12-mile channel, were damaged during the storm, according to Southern Nevada Water Authority Watershed Division Manager **Kim Zikmund**.

“The erosion control structures did exactly what they were designed to do, and that is protect the wash during storm events,” Zikmund said. “Although this wasn’t a particularly severe test, it’s significant that the weirs were so effective at slowing down the water and preventing erosion.”

The peak flows were about 10 times greater than average, but only about one-quarter of the torrent that tore through the wash in 1999. During that storm, which occurred prior to the construction of the weirs, portions of the wash widened by more

than 300 feet in less than a day as the rushing water undercut the sandy banks, sending tons of silt into Lake Mead. Under the Las Vegas Wash Capital Improvement Plan, 18 to 22 structures will eventually be built across the channel.



A 1999 flash flood tears through the banks of the wash. With the help of newly constructed weirs, the wash withstood more recent flood waters that came during an August storm.

## Monitoring shows link between urban runoff and pollutants

For those who remain unconvinced that the actions of individuals can have an enormous impact on the environment, a recent study of the valley’s urban tributaries should remove all doubt.

The tributaries to the Las Vegas Wash, which include Duck Creek, Las Vegas Creek and the Flamingo Wash, funnel approximately 12 million gallons of urban runoff per day—more than 4 billion gallons a year—to the wash. The study, conducted by the Las Vegas Wash Project Team, confirmed that these flows are generated predominantly by overwatering lawns, hosing off

driveways and washing cars at homes. The flows carry bacteria, fertilizer residue, oil and other contaminants to Lake Mead. Unlike water that is captured and treated before reaching the lake, urban runoff cannot be redirected.

“The concern about urban runoff is that it can carry all sorts of contaminants into the lake,” explained Southern Nevada Water Authority Regional Water Quality Supervisor **Peggy Roefer**. “Urban runoff has the potential to affect a national recreation area as well as the 22 million people who rely on the Colorado River water for their

drinking-water supply.”

Preventing this form of pollution, Roefer noted, is simple because urban runoff has only two major ingredients: water and contaminants.

“It’s really a matter of educating our community,” Roefer added. “By avoiding water waste and disposing of household chemicals, automotive fluids and pet waste properly, Southern Nevada’s residents and business operators can substantially reduce the impact of urban runoff.”

For information about source water protection, visit [lvwash.org](http://lvwash.org).

## Las Vegas Wash Coordination Committee celebrates fifth anniversary

In 1998, representatives from more than two dozen government agencies, environmental groups and businesses gathered to discuss the future of the Las Vegas Wash, a tributary troubled by erosion and water quality issues. Five years later, many of the same people convened for a meeting at the wash's banks to discuss ongoing projects and to bear witness to a remarkable transformation.

"When you look at the strides we've made in terms of on-the-ground activities, the progress is nothing less than amazing," said **Gale Fraser**, chair of the Management Advisory Committee, the multi-agency group that oversees Las Vegas Wash Coordination Committee activities. "It


really is a testament to the power of collaboration."

Formed at the bequest of a citizens advisory committee, the LVWCC includes representatives from local, state and federal agencies; environmental groups; and the business community. Within two years, the committee completed the Las Vegas Wash Comprehensive Adaptive Management Plan, a roadmap that included 44 activities related to water quality, habitat management, erosion control and other key issues.

Less than three years later, seven erosion control structures have been erected across the wash, approximately 2 miles of its bankline have



been fortified and more than 40 acres of tamarisk-infested land have been cleared and replanted with native trees and plants.

The stabilization efforts earned national acclaim as the Floodplain Management Association's 2003 Major Project of the Year. 

## Volunteers dig in to "Green-Up" wash

Hundreds of eager residents dug in for a good cause as part of the Oct. 25 Las Vegas Wash Green-Up, one of the valley's most popular volunteer events.



Since the planting events were launched three years ago, thousands of residents have collaborated to plant more than 20,000 shrubs, trees and emergents in several locations along the wash. The annual spring event was expanded to include a fall planting, due to the outpouring of community support and the benefits that come from introducing vegetation to the wash.

"These plants create habitat for wildlife, while their

roots stabilize the wash's weak soils," said Las Vegas Wash Project Team Senior Biologist **Keiba Crear**. "Without the volunteers' efforts, revegetating the wash would be an enormous challenge."

Some of the species planted during previous Wash Green-Up events include quailbush, cottonwood, mesquite and sandbar willow. This fall's planting was held at the new Bostick Weir. Green-Up events are held twice a year. To learn more about the Las Vegas Wash Green-Up, go to **lvwash.org** or to volunteer for the spring Green-Up, call **822-8584**. 