

From cleanup to “green-up”

Out with the old, in with the new: That’s a philosophy worth following when securing the future of the Las Vegas Wash. A carefully timed cycle of “cleanup” and “green-up” is supporting wash stabilization.

Twice a year, trained professionals conduct controlled burns to safeguard the wash from invasive weeds, such as tamarisk, tall whitetop and giant reed. Tamarisk is particularly troublesome because it seeds quickly, roots deeply and poisons native plants with salt. Left alone, these weeds not only disturb the natural habitat, but also degrade soil and increase the chance of erosion. Due to the weeds’ invasive nature, the best long-term method to keep them out of the wash is to burn them out.

“The burns are a vital part of the invasive weed’s removal process,” explained Environmental Biologist Elizabeth Bickmore. “It would take years

to manually remove the same amount of invasive weeds the burns destroy in just a couple of days.”

With invasive weeds cleared out, biologists and volunteers have an opportunity to install native, beneficial plants in the area. Revegetation projects, like the biannual Las Vegas Wash Green-Up, are vital for future sustainability in the wash. Not only do native plants provide habitat for hundreds of animal species, they also protect the wash from future erosion and serve a major role in improving water quality by “polishing” water as it makes its way to Lake Mead.

Nearly 70 acres of invasive weeds were removed during the last controlled burn in November 2005. Biologists are

planning to revegetate 60 of those acres with native plants this spring. [VW](#)



Closely monitored burns of invasive tamarisk weed along the Las Vegas Wash are followed by plantings of native species that provide habitat, prevent erosion and improve water quality.

Bird survey validates wash renovations

Do birds of a feather truly flock together? Local biologists can answer that age-old question with an enthusiastic “yes.” An ongoing survey is helping biologists on the Las Vegas Wash Project Team identify which bird species can now be found at the wash and in which habitats.

“In the past year we’ve identified more than 130 different bird species with what we call the point count survey,” said



The Albert's Towhee is a shy, but common year-round wash resident that is more often heard than seen. Hundreds of these birds have been identified by their high-pitched chirps in dense vegetation along the channel.

Environmental Biologist Debbie Van Dooremolen. “Not only is the survey important for knowing which species are using the area, but also for knowing how bird communities within the wash are changing over time in response to stabilization and enhancement activities.”

For more than a year, biologists have tracked bird species at 29 specific sites, or points, across 5 miles of the wash. Sites are spread throughout revegetated wetland, riparian and upland habitats, as well as areas where stabilization and enhancement efforts have yet to occur.

Every two weeks biologists visit each point and count all of the bird species seen or heard within each area for a five-minute period. Scientists have identified species through the study that had not been recorded at the wash in more than 30 years.

By understanding the birds’ habitat preferences, biologists and volunteers can work on creating similar environments throughout the wash. Since many birds depend on wetland and riparian areas for



Bird photos courtesy of Dick Barrett

The Black-necked Stilt is a summer resident of the Las Vegas Wash and prefers marshy areas and mud flats.

breeding and survival, the survey provides vital information for future restoration and stabilization success.

The San Bernardino County Museum assists with the study, which is funded by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Projects like the bird point count survey are supported by the Las Vegas Wash Coordination Committee, a 28-member group who work yearlong on issues related to the Las Vegas Wash. To learn more, log on to [lvwash.org](#). [VW](#)