

# THE CURRENT

## Restoring Las Vegas Wash & Wetlands Key to Maintaining Environmental Balance

While most people in Southern Nevada recognize the importance of water as a resource, far fewer appreciate the crucial role water plays in our fragile ecosystem and how important it is to maintain the balance of nature.

In the southeast part of the Las Vegas Valley is the Las Vegas Wash, a stream that channels urban runoff, flood water, flows from the shallow ground water system, and treated wastewater to Lake Mead. Surrounding the Las Vegas Wash is a wetlands area.

The increasing flow of water down the Las Vegas Wash — amounting to more than a billion gallons a year — has weakened the surrounding soil. These increased flows, coupled with flood waters resulting from storm events, have eroded most of the surrounding wetlands, destroying all but about 200 acres. In addition, urban and industrial activities have introduced contaminants into the water. The fragile Las Vegas Wash and Wetlands ecosystem is in jeopardy.

Restoring the wetlands is important for several reasons. As water slowly flows through the wetlands, sediment and other contaminants are captured by the dense vegetation, essentially “polishing” the water before it reaches the lake. While less than 2 percent of the water in Lake Mead comes from the Las Vegas Wash, the wetlands play an important role in source water protection. The wetlands also serve as a habitat for myriad plants and animals, including some rare and threatened species. Finally, the wetlands provide recreational opportunities for both residents and visitors.

## Las Vegas Wash Coordination Committee Created to Develop Management Plan

Protecting water quality has been the subject of considerable attention in Southern Nevada for several years. As with any watershed, inflow sources with the potential to affect the drinking water supply are of great interest to both residents and community leaders.



In 1997, the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) created a 21-member panel of citizens with the goal of identifying key concerns and issues relating to water quality in Southern Nevada. In examining water quality-related issues, the panel realized that protecting the Las Vegas Wash — a natural flow channel which carries shallow ground water, storm water, urban runoff, and treated wastewater to the Las Vegas Bay of Lake Mead — must be a priority.

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Las Vegas Wash



## Facts About the Las Vegas Wash

- Location:** Southeast Las Vegas Valley
- Length:** 12 miles (headwaters - Las Vegas Bay)
- Sources:** Storm water runoff  
Shallow ground water  
Urban runoff  
Clark County Sanitation District wastewater treatment plant outflows  
City of Las Vegas wastewater treatment plant outflows  
City of Henderson wastewater treatment plant outflows
- Avg. Flow:** 153 million gallons/day  
1.45% of Lake Mead inflow
- Significance:** Habitat for diverse plant and animal species  
Natural “finishing” filter for inflows to Lake Mead  
Recreation area
- Key Issues:** Wetlands erosion  
Ground water inflow quality  
Urban runoff inflow quality  
Habitat loss

### The Las Vegas Wash Coordination Committee includes representatives from:

- City of Henderson
- City of Las Vegas
- City of North Las Vegas
- Clark County Sanitation District
- Clark County Health District
- Clark County Comprehensive Planning
- Clark County Parks & Recreation Dept.
- Clark Co. Regional Flood Control District
- Clark County Conservation District
- Southern Nevada Water Authority
- Basic Management Inc.
- Water Quality Citizens Advisory Committee
- Lake Las Vegas
- Las Vegas Bay Marina
- Friends of the Desert Wetlands
- University of Nevada Las Vegas
- Nevada Division of Wildlife
- Nevada Division of Environmental Protection
- Nevada State Health Division
- Nevada Bureau of Health Protection Services
- Colorado River Commission
- National Park Service
- U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
- U.S. Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- U.S. Geological Survey
- U.S. Department of Agriculture

*Committee from page 1*

Less than a year after it first convened, this Water Quality Citizens Advisory Committee emerged with nine recommendations, which it presented to the SNWA’s Board of Directors. One of the recommendations from the citizens advisory committee was that a comprehensive management plan for the Las Vegas Wash be developed. To ensure that this plan represented all stakeholders of the Las Vegas Wash, a committee was created comprising more than two dozen local, state, and federal agencies, local environmentalists, business people, and members of the public. This panel, named the Las Vegas Wash Coordination Committee (LVWCC), will oversee the development of the management plan.

# PERSPECTIVE

*An editorial by the  
Las Vegas Wash Project Coordination Team*

## Public Participation Is Essential to Development of Las Vegas Wash Management Plan

The Las Vegas Wash Coordination Committee (LVWCC) is the direct result of public participation. If not for the 21 people on the Water Quality Citizens Advisory Committee who gave their time and energy to identify and prioritize Southern Nevada's most important water quality issues, the progress we've already made would not be possible.

However, this is only the beginning. In the months ahead, the LVWCC will begin to closely examine some of the issues associated with each aspect of the Las Vegas Wash and develop recommendations for dealing with each of those issues. If the coordination committee is to truly serve the public's needs, it must have first-hand input about those needs. As progress continues, the project team will host public workshops to share research findings and discuss options relating to key issues.

Protecting the Las Vegas Wash is not the responsibility of a particular government agency or an environmental organization; it is the entire community's responsibility. And while the LVWCC is spearheading the effort to develop a long-term comprehensive management plan for this important environmental resource, it is all of our responsibility to make sure the recommendations reflect the entire community's best interest.

Public workshops and events will be announced through a variety of vehicles, including this newsletter. With just a little time and effort, you can make a tremendous difference in the future of the Las Vegas Wash.



### UPCOMING EVENTS:

*April 10, 1999*  
**Las Vegas Wash & Wetlands Clean-up**  
**Sam Boyd Sports Complex**

*April 17, 1999*  
**Earthfest**  
**Sunset Park**

# Las Vegas Wash & Wetlands Clean-up Set for April 10

Mark your calendar! On Saturday, April 10, you can help protect our environment by joining Friends of the Desert Wetlands and the Las Vegas Wash Coordination Committee for the second annual Las Vegas Wash & Wetlands Clean-up.

The Las Vegas Wash is one of Southern Nevada's most valuable resources, channeling water into Lake Mead and providing a habitat for wildlife. Unfortunately, illegal dumping and storms have left the wash strewn with trash.

Check-in is from 7 a.m. to 8 a.m. at the Sam Boyd Sports Complex. Take Russell Road east past Boulder Highway, then follow the signs. Participants get a free barbecue lunch, giveaways and raffle tickets for great prizes. For more details, call the Clean-up information line at 598-5589.



Saturday, April 10, 1999  
7 a.m. to 2 p.m.  
Sam Boyd Sports Complex

## Schedule of Events

- 7 a.m. - 8 a.m.
  - Volunteer Check-In
  - Board the Shuttle
- 8 a.m. - 11 a.m.
  - Clean Up
  - \*Please Bring Gloves\***
- 11:30 a.m. - 2 p.m.
  - Bar-B-Que
  - Water Information Fair

