The San Diego River: Encampments

Rob Hutsel
President and CEO
Over the years, we have organized volunteers to remove more than 2 million pounds of trash from in and along the River.

In October 2017 we got some terrible news.
2017 Annual Survey Results

- 84% increase in number of encampments along the River in one year.
- Nearly 100% of trash now sourced to encampments
Problem:

Cleanup efforts weren’t keeping ups with the estimated nearly one million pounds of trash annually deposited in the riverbed by encampments along the River
Hepatitis A Outbreak

• 20 deaths
• 401 Hospitalizations
• Significant percentage homeless
Media Focus on the River

• “Tijuana Sewage is not Fueling the Hep A Outbreak, but the San Diego River might be”
  » 9/22/17
  » Voice of San Diego
Heightened Media Attention

• “Many worry trash will pile up around the San Diego River after a local non-profit stops cleanups...”
  • 10/10/2017, NBC San Diego

• “Water board records show studies tying health danger to homeless camps went unaddressed for years”
  • 10/09/2017, Union Tribune
STRATEGY

• Increase data collection

• Advocate for resources and collaborate

• Increase cleanups

• Willing to be a visible leader on a largely social issue
Data Collection – Citizen Science

Regular Focused Surveys:
2-3 per week

Annual Point in Time Count

Annual River Blitz

Protocol-Based and Reliable

Problem Areas Surveyed Every 2 Weeks or Better
Public Data Portal

www.immappler.com/sandiegorivertrash

DATA used to coordinate cleanups and provided for research

What Success Looks Like

Private Property (Grantville)

Key Points

• Value of Elected Officials
  – Public Prioritization including media attention
  – Convening of stakeholders
  – Agency Budgets & Prioritization

• New partnerships: “blue” & social service

• It requires ongoing level of effort

• Regulatory action
  – Changes cost benefit of no / limited action
  – Public relations role
  – Need to follow through

• Nonprofit Leadership and Role

Our Amazing Volunteers
2.5 million lbs. removed since we began keeping records.

On track for 300,000 lbs+ removed in 2018
2 – 3 cleanups per week
Staff dedicated to collaboration
Going Forward...

1. We need to better understand the risks of latrine sites in an alluvial floodplain with year-round surface groundwater.
2. Private property owners cannot address encampments by themselves.
3. Ongoing coordination of key stakeholders is vital.
4. Encampments continue to generate trash, and therefore, a sustained program is needed.
5. Financial Support of Nonprofit Coordination Efforts Can Be Highly Effective.
6. People-centric, compassion and yet demand results.

*Connect. Create. Conserve.*