

San Diego River  
Photographic Tour of a Polluted Watershed – Santee Segment

Submitted to:  
California Regional Water Quality Control Board  
San Diego Region  
9771 Clairmont Mesa Boulevard, Suite A  
San Diego, CA 92124-1324  
Atn: Keri Cole  
[303dlist@rb9.swrcb.ca.gov](mailto:303dlist@rb9.swrcb.ca.gov)

May 10, 2001

By Van K. Collinsworth

**Qualifications:**

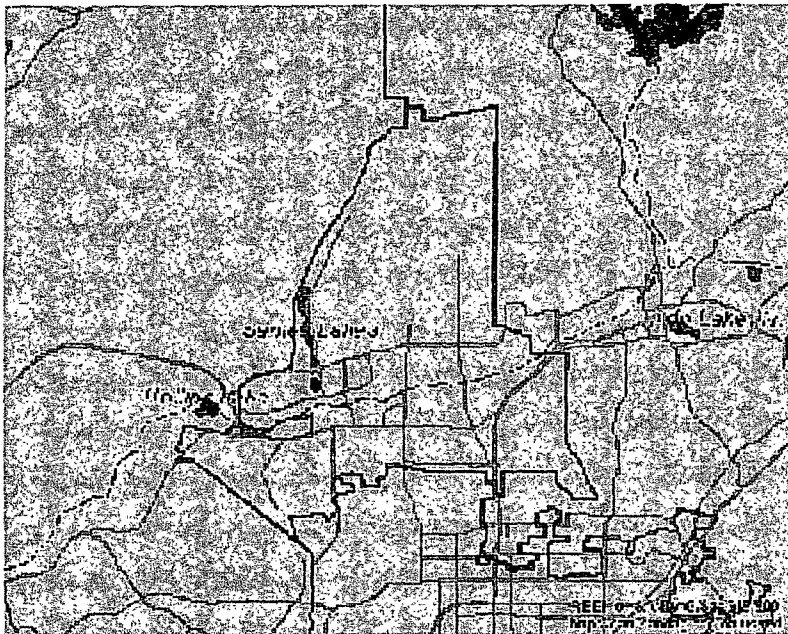
M. A. Geography emphasis, Humboldt State University

B.A. Geography, Humboldt State University

Undergraduate courses in Natural Resource Planning include: Watershed Management, Ecosystems Analysis, Biology, Botany, Zoology, Physical Geography.

Work experience: Forestry Technician, USDA-Forest Service, seven seasons. Resource Analyst, Preserve Wild Santee, seven years.

**San Diego River**  
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**Photography by Van K. Collinsworth & Tom Abshire**



**Conclusion:**

**The San Diego River, and its tributaries within Santee (Sycamore Creek and Forrester Creek) are impaired water bodies that should be added to the “303(d) list” under the Clean Water Act.**

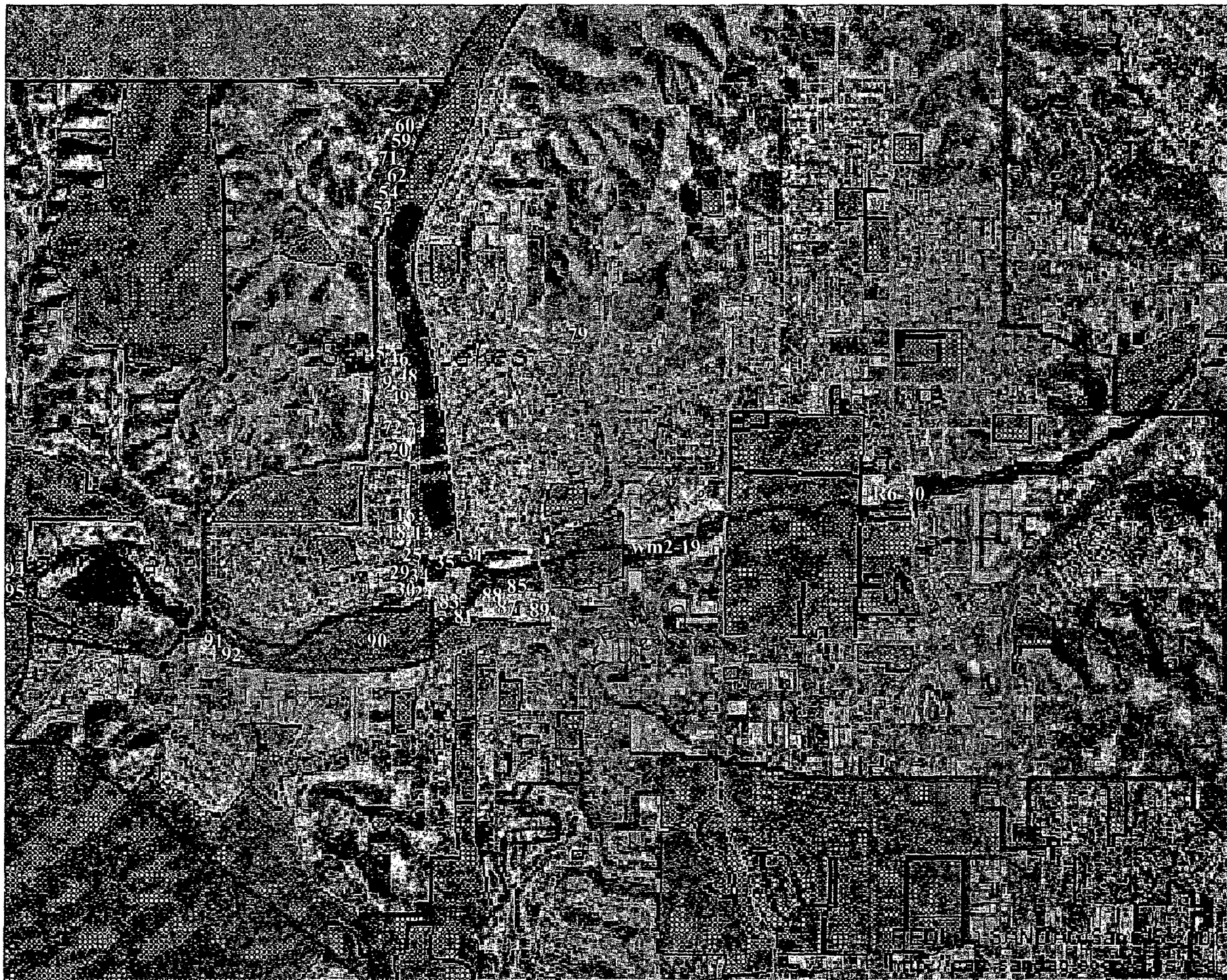
All three water bodies exhibited eutrophic conditions (algae blooms, algal mats, decomposing plant matter, offensive odors, stagnation). These conditions impair beneficial uses such as recreational swimming, fishing, and sensitive species habitat. Causes include nutrients from fertilizers, animal wastes, industrial wastes, and municipal wastes.

The San Diego River, Sycamore Creek, and Forrester Creek are all severely impaired by the invasion of exotic plants. These riparian areas provide habitat for sensitive and endangered species such as the least Bell's vireo. Giant reed (*Arundo donax*) and other invasive species are rapidly displacing the native habitat which native species depend upon.

**Study Area:**

The San Diego River watershed in the vicinity of Santee served as the focus area.

**See Index Maps , San Diego River Watershed – Santee Segment**



Sycamore = 9, 49, 13, 18, 25, 16, 17, 71, 59, 60  
Farmer = 24, 72, 74, 45, 46, 52, 54, 62  
Farmer = 81

|                           |                              |                                       | BENEFICIAL USE |                                   |     |       |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |  |  |  |  |  |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|-----|-------|-------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Inland Surface Waters     | Hydrologic Unit Basin Number |                                       | MUN            | AGR                               | IND | REC-1 | REC-2 | BIO | WARM | COLD | WILD | RARE | SPWN |  |  |  |  |  |
| San Diego River Watershed |                              |                                       |                |                                   |     |       |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |  |  |  |  |  |
| San Diego River           | 7.12                         | La Mesa, El Cajon                     | 0              |                                   | ●   |       |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |  |  |  |  |  |
| Lake Jennings             | 7.12                         | El Cajon                              |                | See Reservoirs & Lakes- Table 2-4 |     |       |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |  |  |  |  |  |
| Quail Canyon              | 7.12                         | El Cajon, Alpine                      | 0              |                                   | ●   |       |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |  |  |  |  |  |
| Wildcat Canyon            | 7.12                         | El Cajon, San Vicente Reservoir       | 0              |                                   | ●   |       |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |  |  |  |  |  |
| San Vicente Creek         | 7.22                         | San Vicente Reservoir, El Cajon Mtn.  | ●              | ●                                 | ●   | ●     |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |  |  |  |  |  |
| Padre Barona Creek        | 7.12                         | San Vicente Reservoir                 | 0              |                                   | ●   |       |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |  |  |  |  |  |
| San Vicente Creek         | 7.12                         | El Cajon, San Vicente Reservoir       | 0              |                                   | ●   |       |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |  |  |  |  |  |
| Slaughterhouse Canyon     | 7.12                         | San Vicente Reservoir                 | 0              |                                   | ●   |       |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |  |  |  |  |  |
| Los Coches Creek          | 7.12                         | El Cajon                              | 0              |                                   | ●   |       |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |  |  |  |  |  |
| Forrester Creek           | 7.12                         | La Mesa, El Cajon                     | 0              |                                   | ●   |       |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |  |  |  |  |  |
| Sycamore Canyon           | 7.12                         | La Mesa, Poway, San Vicente Reservoir | +              | ●                                 | ●   |       |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |  |  |  |  |  |
| unnamed tributary         | 7.12                         | La Mesa, Poway, San Vicente Reservoir | +              | ●                                 | ●   |       |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |  |  |  |  |  |
| Clark Canyon              | 7.12                         | San Vicente Reservoir                 | +              | ●                                 | ●   |       |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |  |  |  |  |  |
| West Sycamore Canyon      | 7.12                         | Poway                                 | +              | ●                                 | ●   |       |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |  |  |  |  |  |
| Quail Canyon              | 7.12                         | La Mesa, Poway                        | +              | ●                                 | ●   |       |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |  |  |  |  |  |
| Little Sycamore Canyon    | 7.12                         | La Mesa, Poway                        | +              | ●                                 | ●   |       |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |  |  |  |  |  |
| Spring Canyon             | 7.12                         | La Mesa, Poway                        | +              | ●                                 | ●   |       |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |  |  |  |  |  |
| Oak Canyon                | 7.12                         | La Mesa                               | +              | ●                                 | ●   |       |       |     |      |      |      |      |      |  |  |  |  |  |

● Existing Beneficial Use

Waterbodies are listed multiple times if they cross hydrologic area or sub area boundaries.

0 Potential Beneficial Use

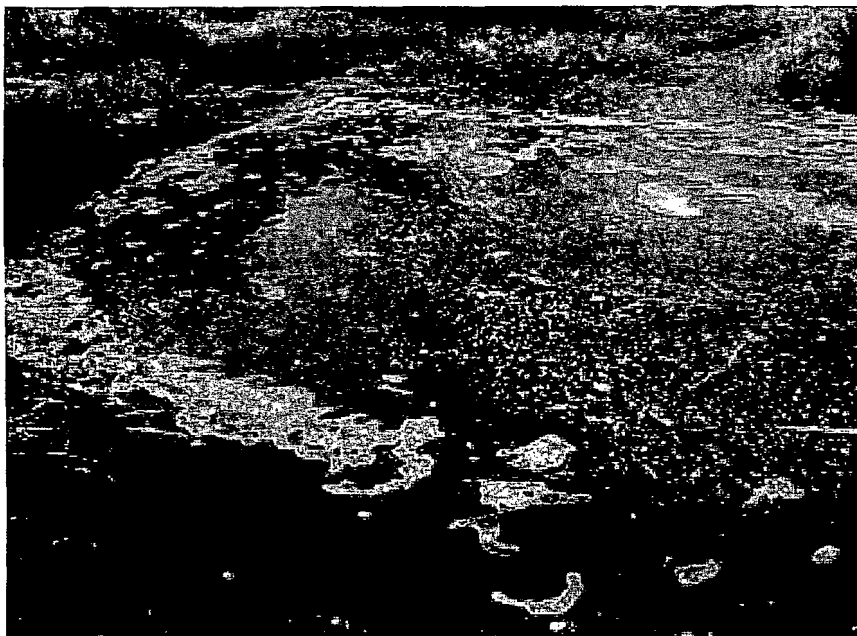
Beneficial use designations apply to all tributaries to the indicated waterbody, if not listed separately.

+ Excepted From MUN (See Text)

● Photos demonstrate beneficial uses are impaired

|       |                                                          |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| MUN   | beneficial use of municipal and domestic supply          |
| AGR   | beneficial use of agricultural supply                    |
| IND   | beneficial use of industrial service supply              |
| REC-1 | beneficial use of contact water recreation               |
| REC-2 | beneficial use of non-contact water recreation           |
| WARM  | beneficial use of warm fresh water habitat               |
| COLD  | beneficial use of cold fresh water habitat               |
| WILD  | beneficial use of wildlife habitat                       |
| RARE  | beneficial use of rare, threatened or endangered species |





# **Photographs:**

## **San Diego River**

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5/4/2001

Mission Trails Park Recreation Area: Foam and algae bloom. Bottom of river layered with algal mats and garbage. Recreators often swim and fish in the river despite the health risks.



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Fisherman obtain polluted water for crayfish harvested from San Diego River at Mission Dam, Mission Trails Regional Park, City of San Diego. An adjacent picnic area is impacted by river odors.



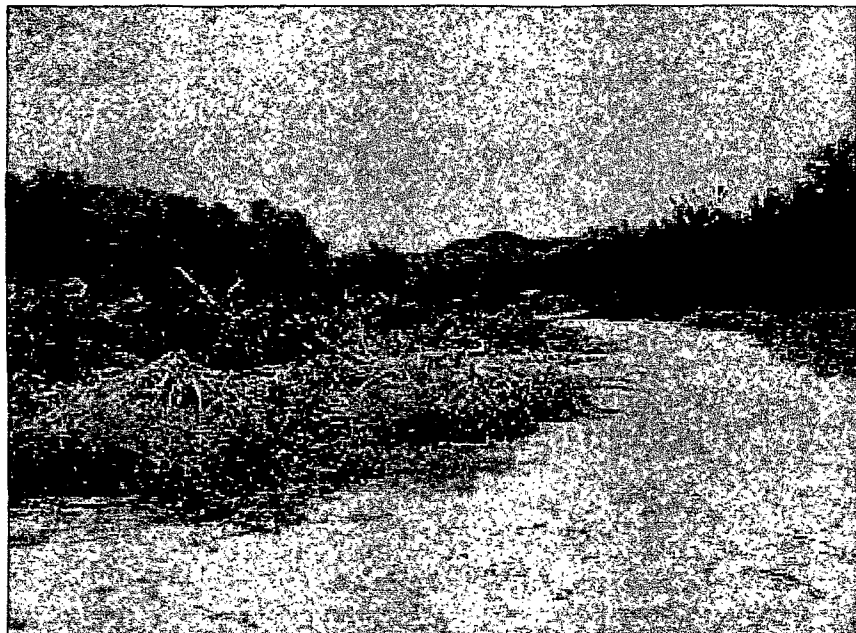
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Invasive species in the San Diego River floodplain ; Peruvian Peppertree (*Schinus molle*) and palm.



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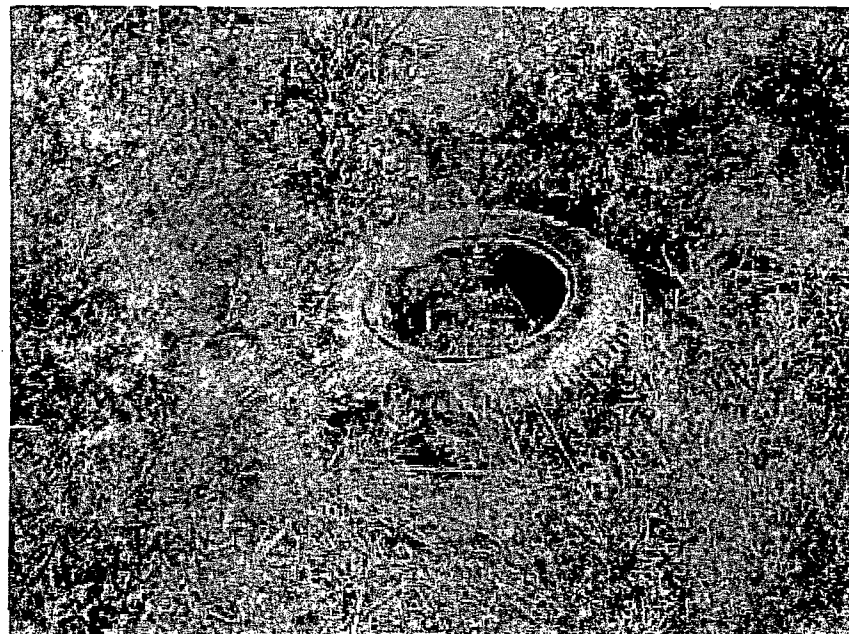


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Dump at Carlton Oaks Golf Course in the San Diego River Floodplain. Golf course is also a source of fertilizer runoff. Old tires in dump site.





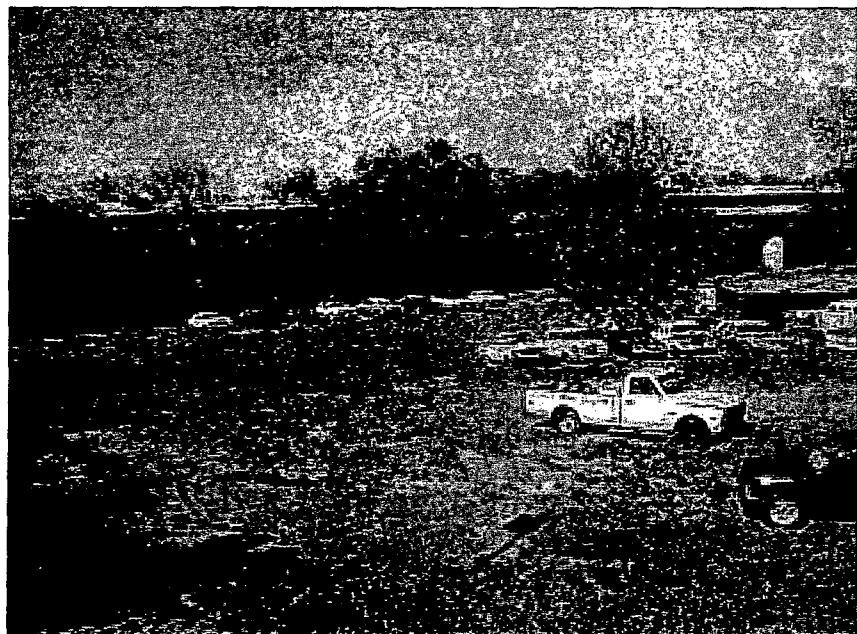
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Solid wastes on Forrester creek near its junction in the San Diego River floodplain.





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Fields of invasive *Arundo donax* in S.D. River floodplain on CALTRANS property damaged by the construction of SR-125.

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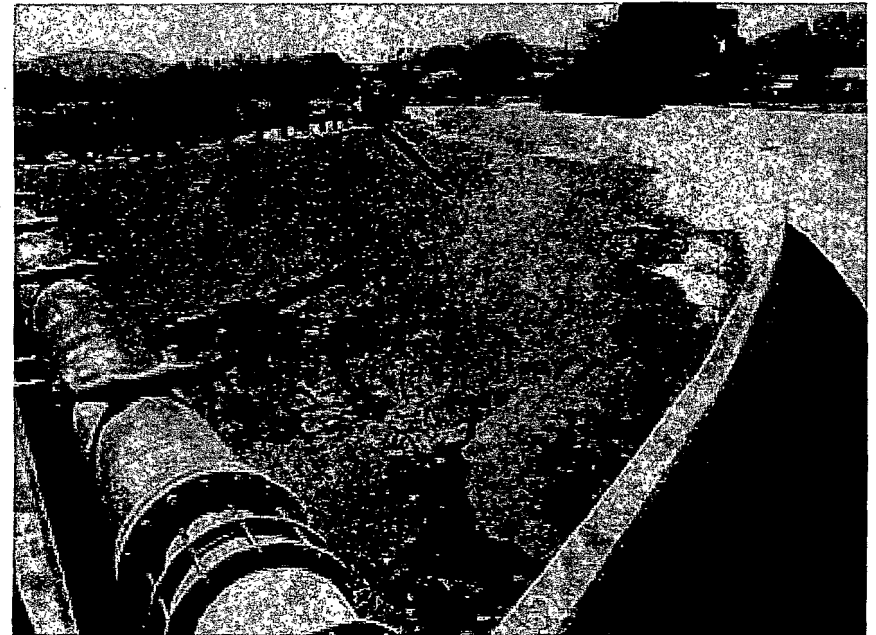
5/4/2001

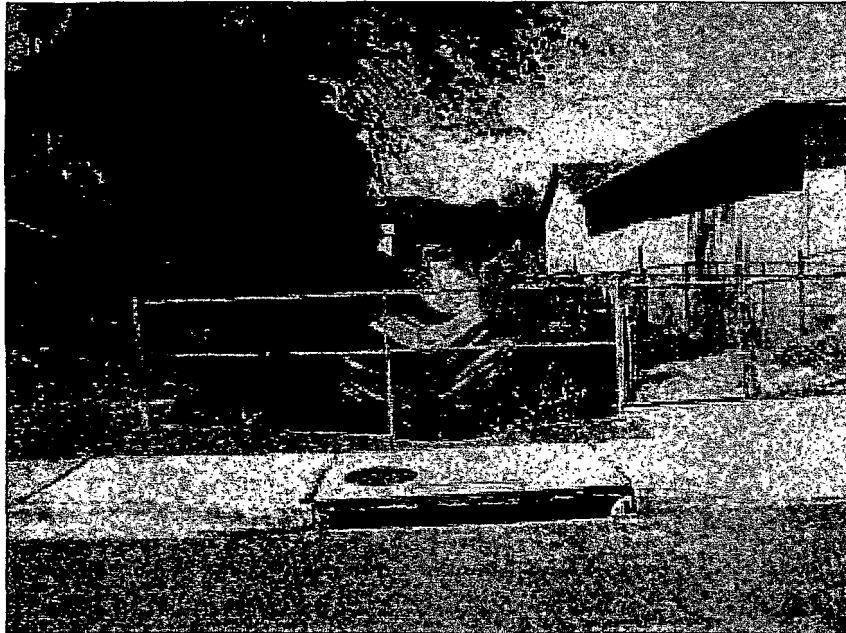
Algal mats and invasive palms at Fanita Creek entrance to S.D. River floodplain.

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**Santee storm drain examples:**

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Storm drain on Lake Canyon Road adjacent to Halberns Blvd. is a source of non-point source pollution typical of the San Diego watershed in Santee. Drains often carry highly polluted "dry flows."

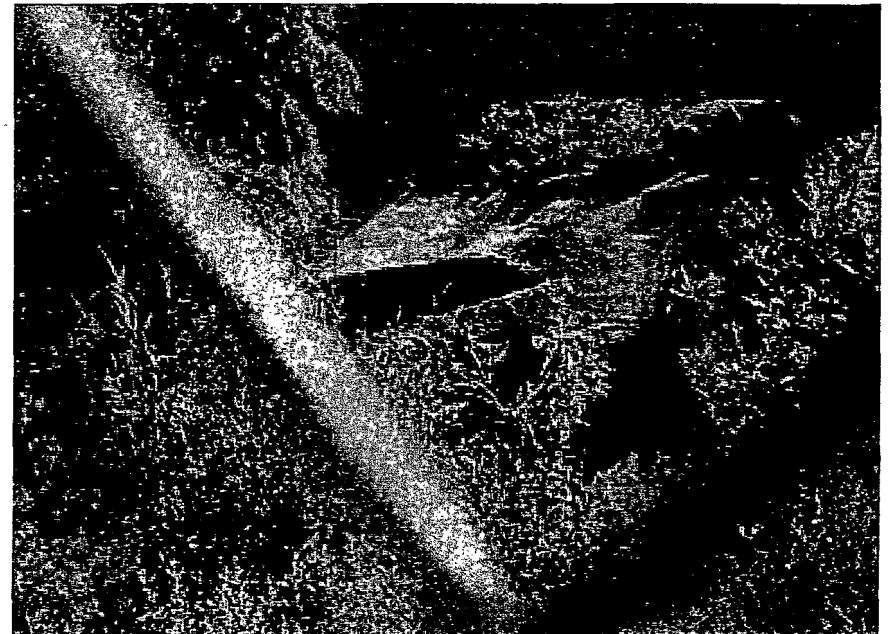
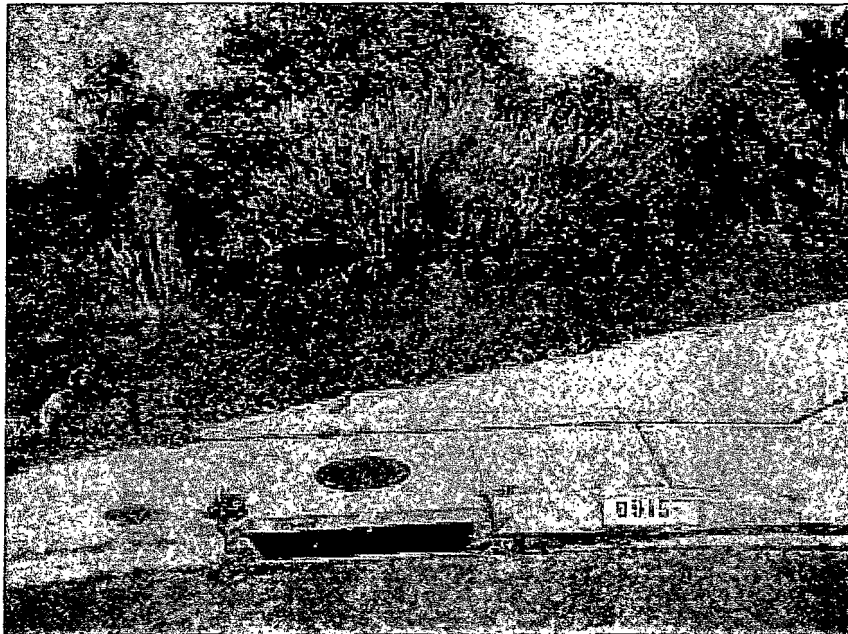
009\_5-3-2001.jpg

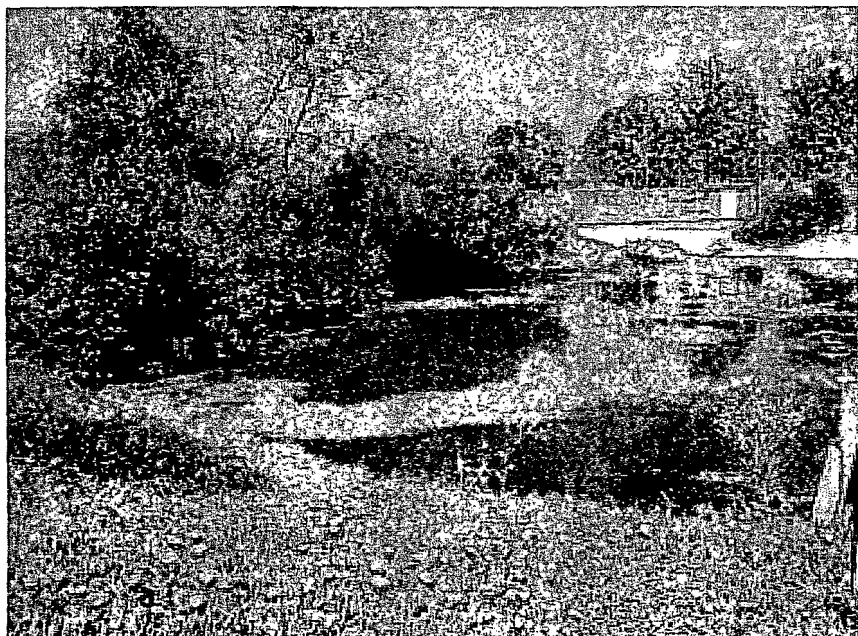
5/4/2001

Storm drain at 8915 River Valley Circle directs "dry flows" directly into Sycamore Creek. *Arundo donax* and palms invade riparian habitat of the endangered least Bell's vireo.

049\_5-3-2001.jpg

Storm drains with polluted waters empty directly into Sycamore Canyon Creek.





**Sycamore Creek (San Diego River to Fanita Ranch adjacent to Santee Lakes):**

013\_5-3-2001.jpg

Sycamore Creek at Carlton Oaks Bridge and Padre Dam Municipal Water District. Algal mats and invasive ice plant.

025\_5-3-2001.jpg

Sycamore Creek at Carlton Oaks Bridge near junction with San Diego River floodplain. Algae blooms and solid waste.

018\_5-3-2001.jpg

Sycamore Creek. Note algae bloom at storm drain (upper right). Storm drains carry polluted "dry flows" and directly enter the creek.





016\_5-3-2001.jpg

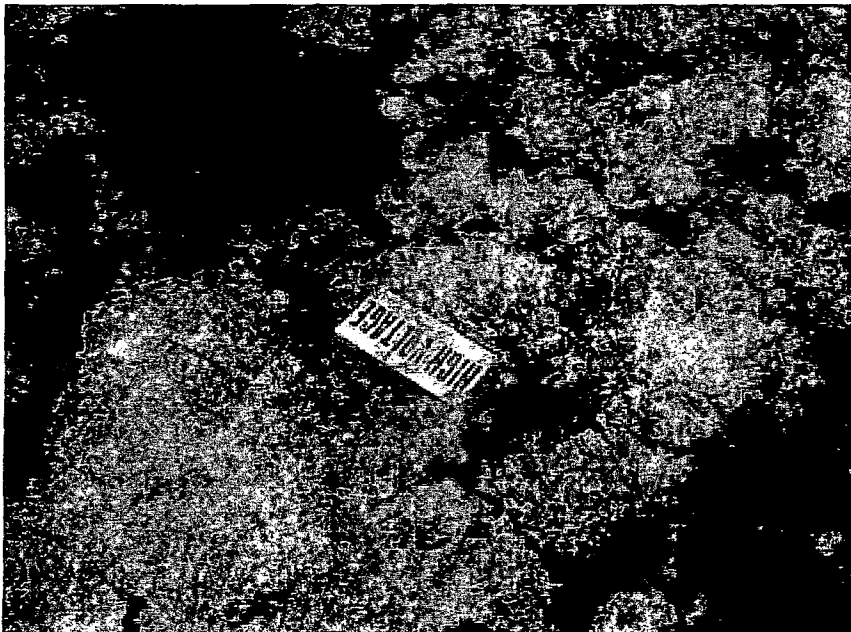
Algal mats in Sycamore Creek at Carlton Oaks Bridge and Padre Dam  
Municipal Water District.

024\_5-3-2001.jpg

Algal mats and solid waste in Sycamore Creek at Carlton Oaks Bridge.

017\_5-3-2001.jpg

Algal mats and solid waste in Sycamore Creek.







072\_5-3-2001.jpg

Natural vegetation cleared and replaced with invasive ice plant and Blue Gum Eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globules*). Sycamore Creek west of Santee Lake #1.

074\_5-3-2001.jpg

Construction sediment on the bank of Sycamore Creek. Santee Lakes Regional Park adjacent to Lake #1.

020\_5-3-2001 .jpg

Sycamore Creek banks dominated by invasive plants such as *Arundo donax*



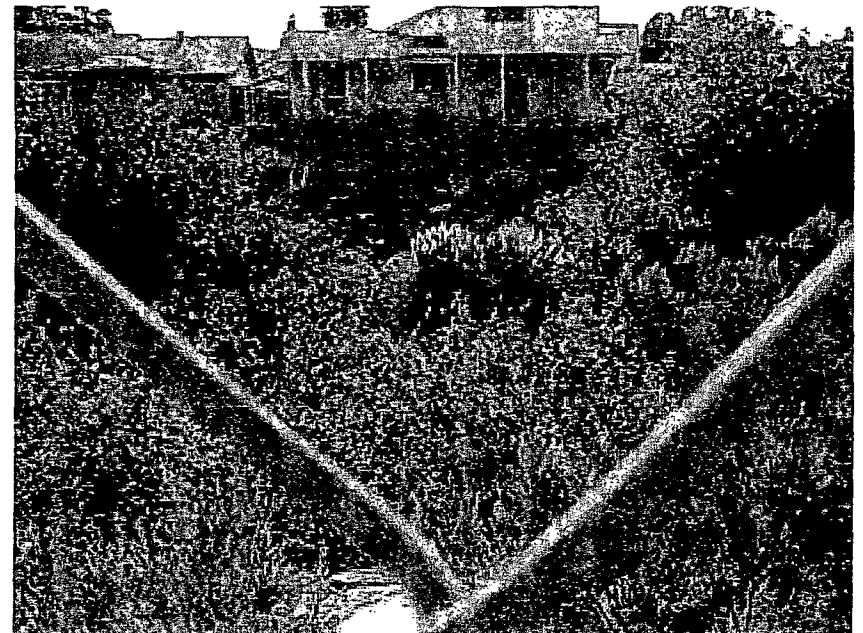




045\_5-3-2001.jpg  
046\_5-3-2001.jpg

Numerous homeowners clear native vegetation to maintain their views of Santee Lakes. Vegetation is left to decay and be swept away by Sycamore Creek.

048\_5-3-2001.jpg  
Pampass grass (*Cortaderia selloana*) invades Sycamore Creek.





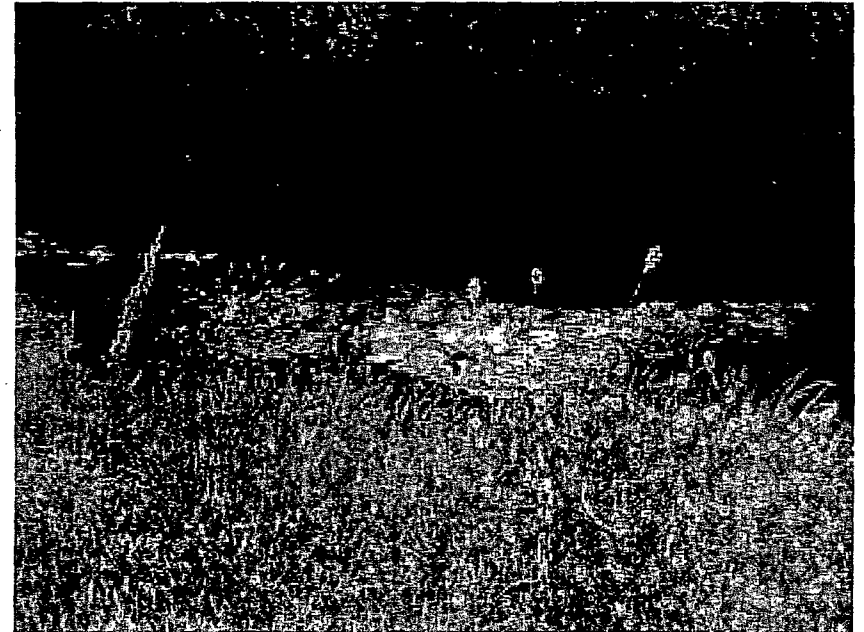
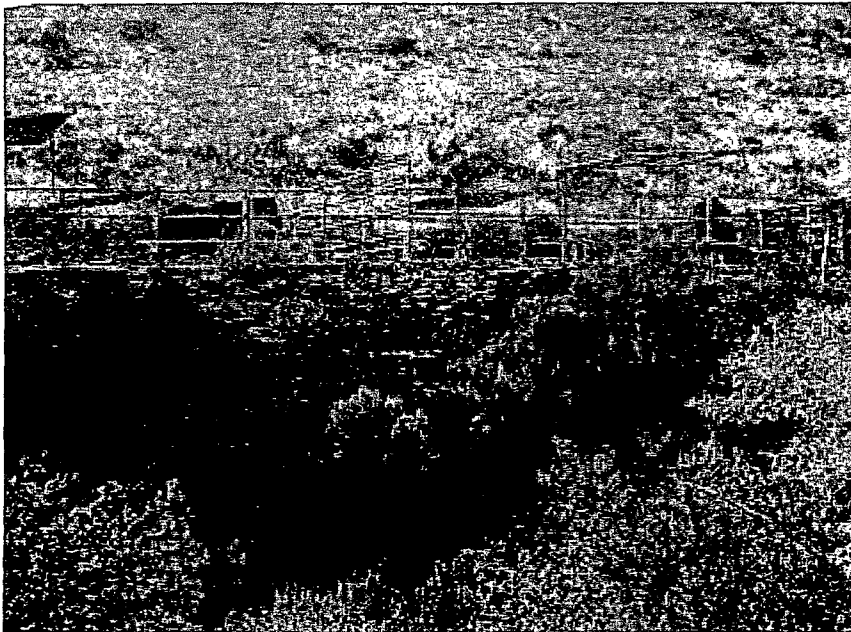
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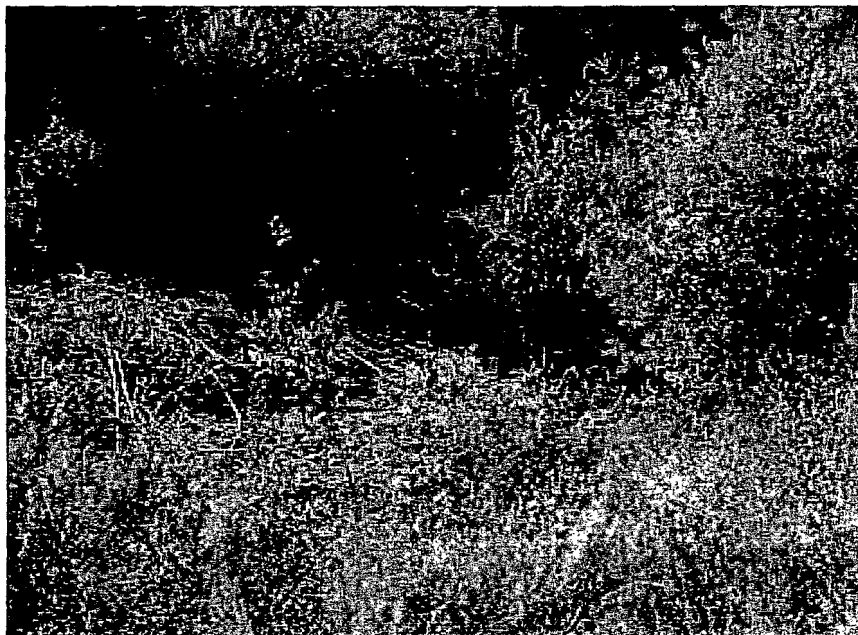
054\_5-3-2001.jpg

Horse stables at 10300 Pebble Beach Drive dispose of animal wastes by shoveling it over the bank directly into Sycamore Creek.

062\_5-3-2001.jpg

Algae blooms in Sycamore Creek adjacent to Santee Lakes Campground.





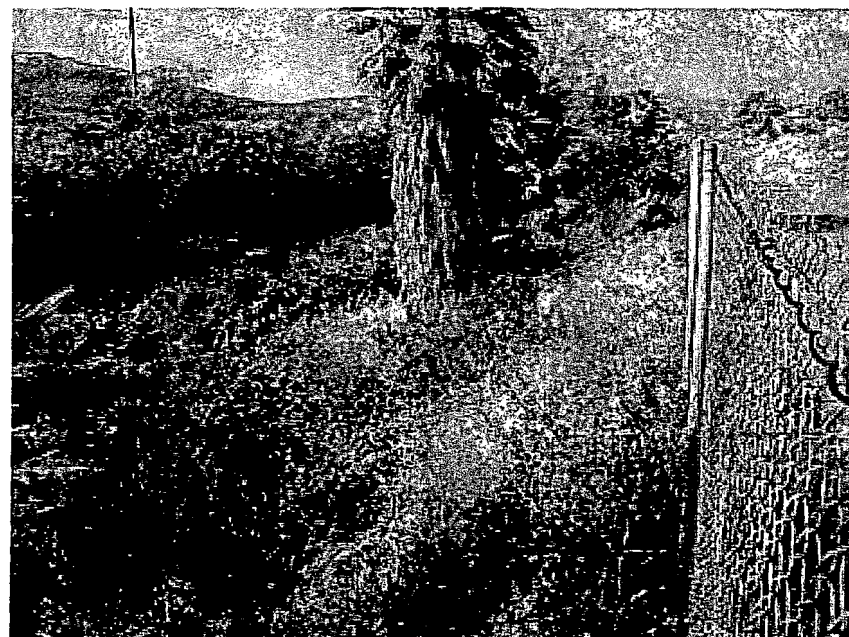
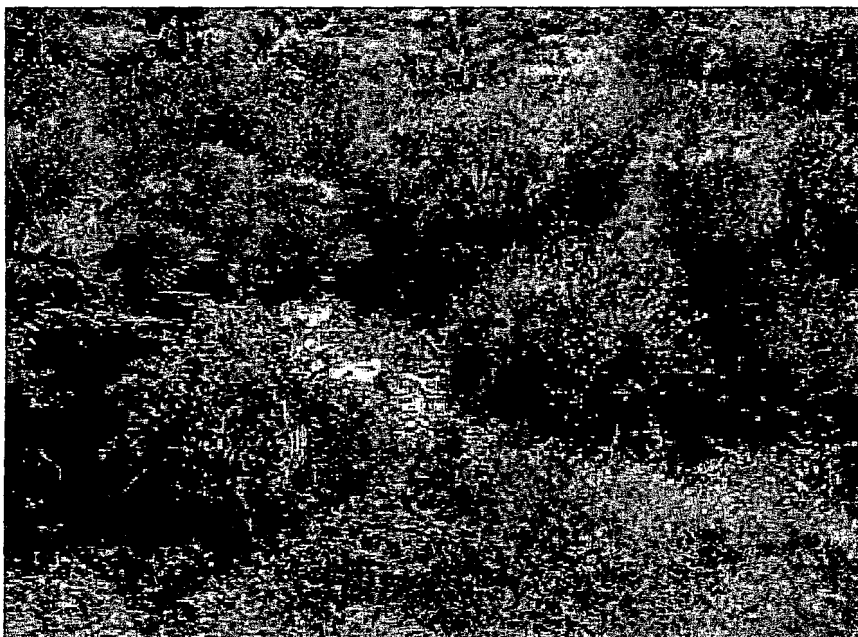
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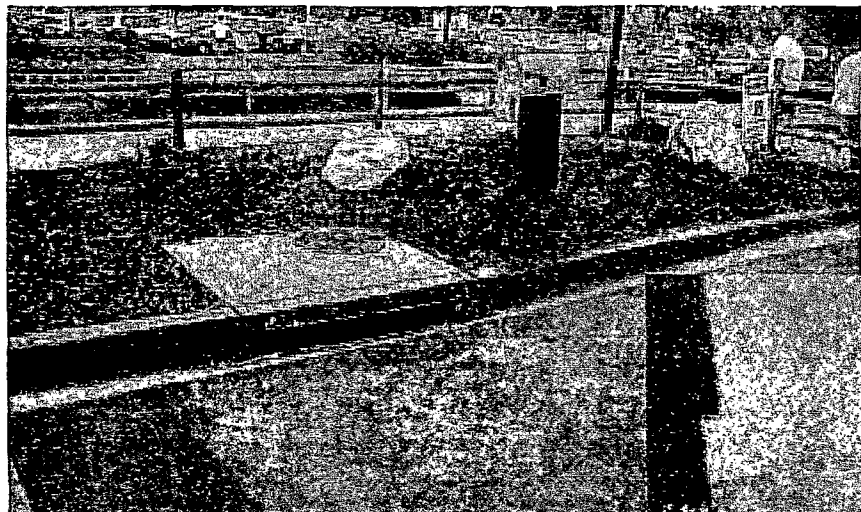
Pampass grass (*Cortaderia selloana*) and Giant Reed (*Arundo donax*) invade Sycamore Creek.

060\_5-3-2001.jpg

059\_5-3-2001.jpg

Tamarisk and palms invade Sycamore Creek adjacent to Santee Lakes campground.





wm02\_5-8-2001.jpg

wm09\_5-8-2001.jpg

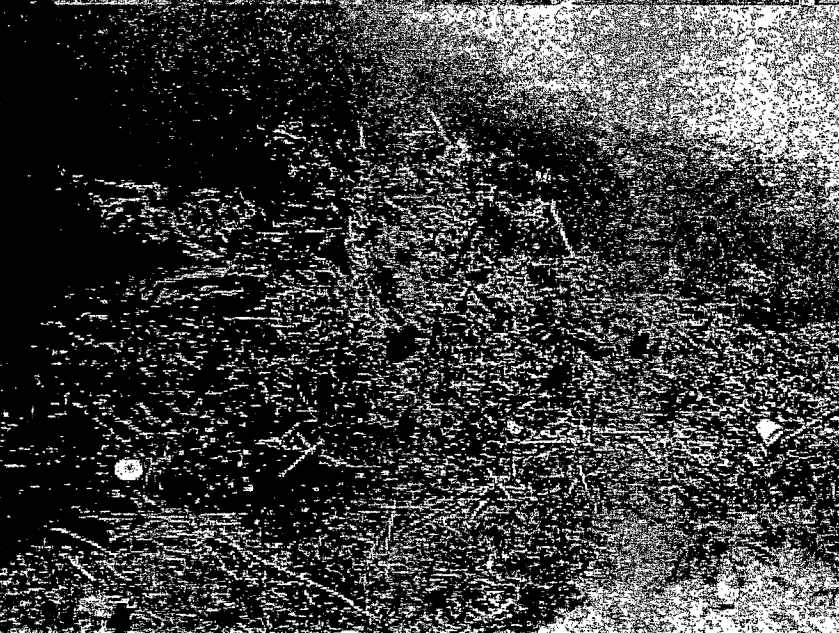
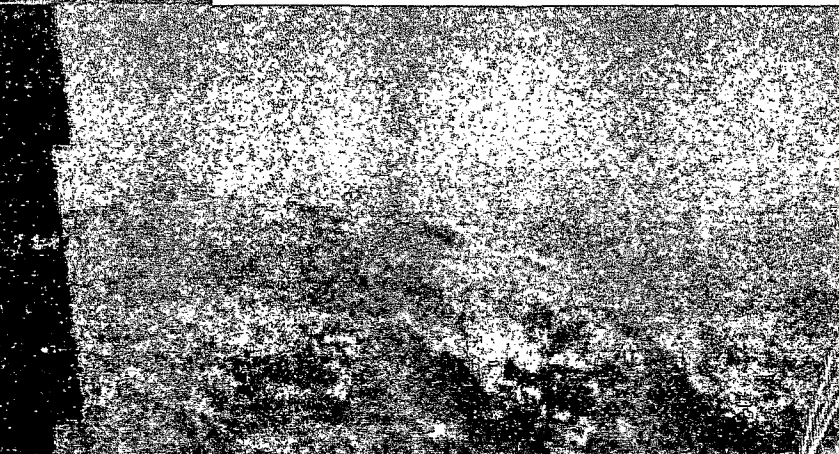
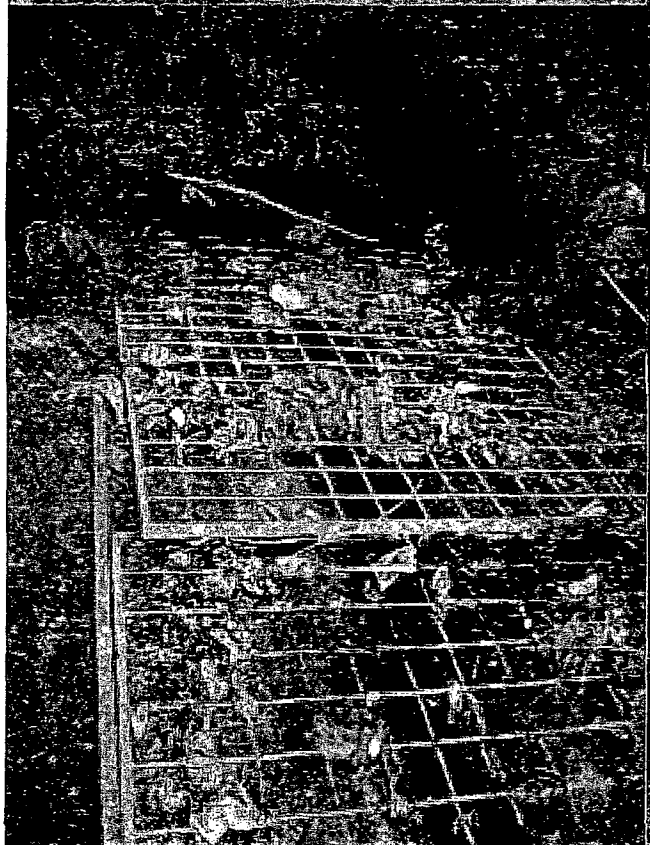
Walmart parking lot drains directly into SD River.

San Diego River

wml8\_5-8-2001.jpg

wml7\_5-8-2001.jpg

Garbage and algae on surface and bottom of SD River.







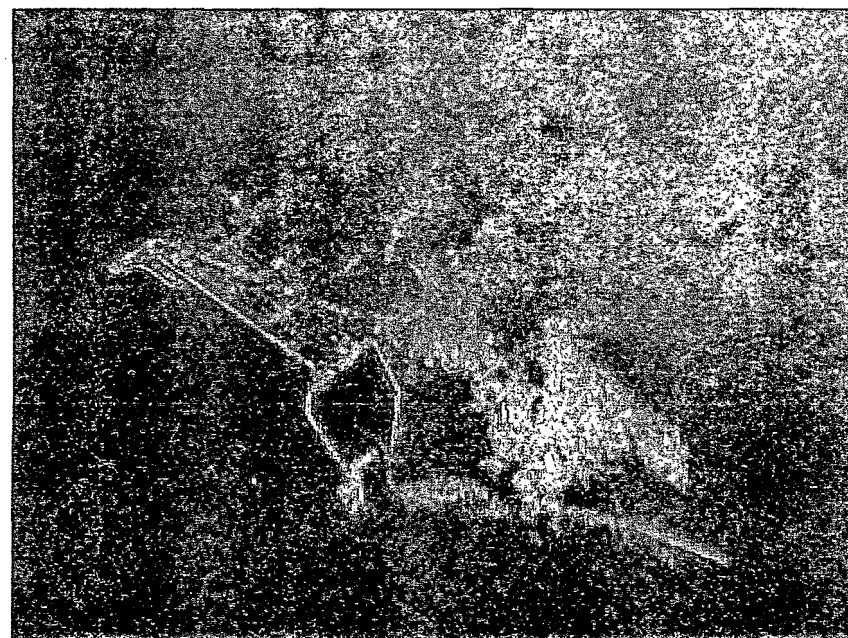
wm05\_5-8-2001.jpg SD River is habitat for endangered least Bell's vireo.

wm11\_5-8-2001.jpg Shopping carts become solid waste.



wm16\_5-8-2001.jpg Plastic bottle, shopping cart, algae along river.

wm19\_5-8-2001.jpg Shopping cart and other waste in SD River.





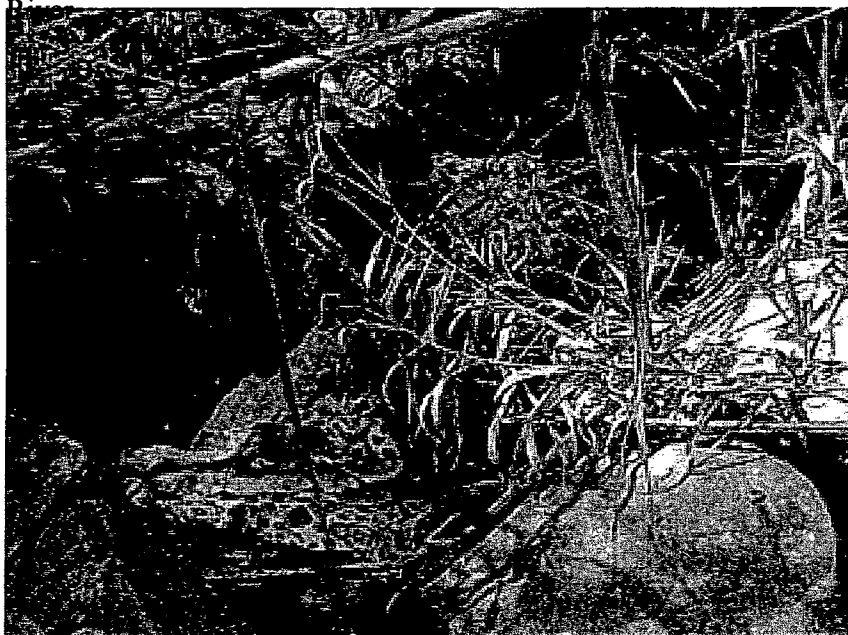


R06\_5-5-2001.jpg & R07\_5-5-2001.jpg Road drains sediment from RCP Block directly into SD River.



R11\_5-5-2001.jpg Invasive *Arundo donax* and soiled diapers.

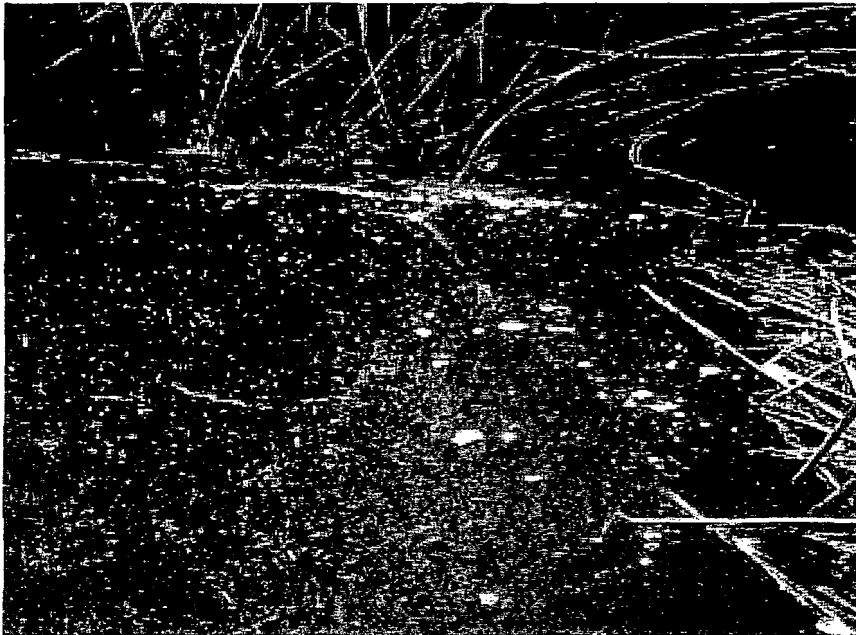
R15\_5-5-2001.jpg Solid waste and algae in San Diego





R16\_5-5-2001.jpg  
Invasive *Arundo donax* in San Diego River.

R18\_5-5-2001.jpg & R14\_5-5-2001.jpg  
Solid waste in the San Diego River.



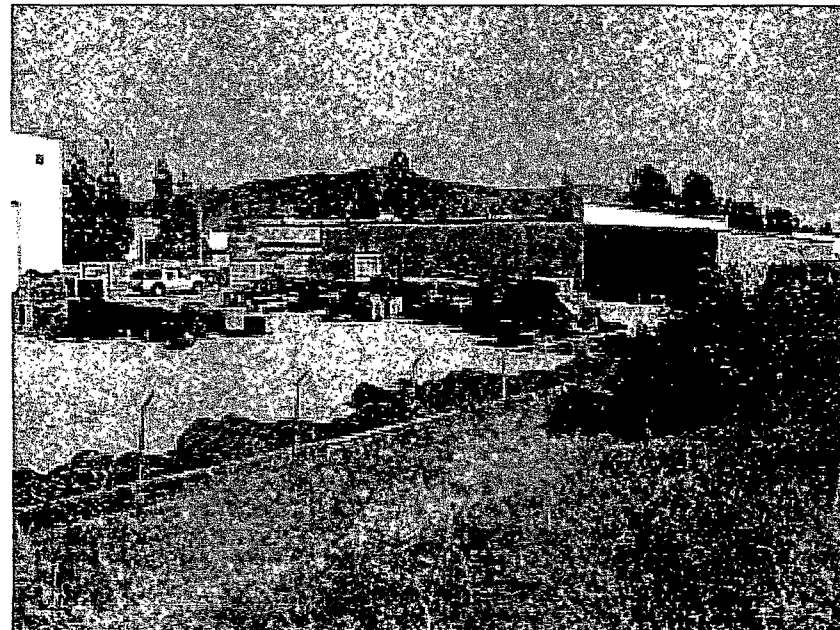
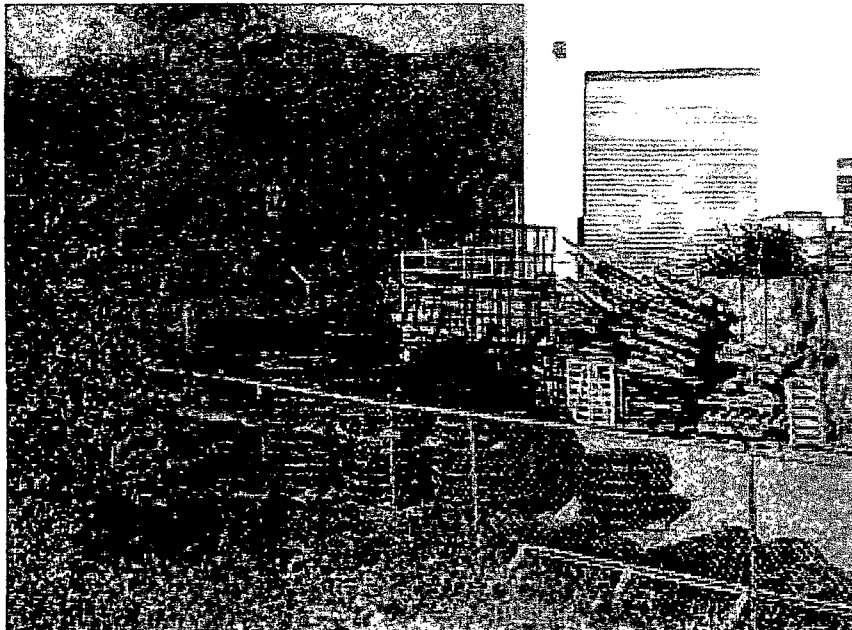


R27\_5-5-2001.jpg Graded floodplain with invasive species in background.  
R26\_5-5-2001.jpg Algae bloom east of RCP, SD River.



R21\_5-5-2001.jpg Oil contamination.  
R25\_5-5-2001.jpg. Solid waste in SD River floodplain.





R30\_5-5-2001.jpg & R28\_5-5-2001.jpg  
Industrial storage along the San Diego River bank east of Magnolia Avenue.

R20\_5-5-2001.jpg

Tire caught on base of tree in San Diego River bottom.

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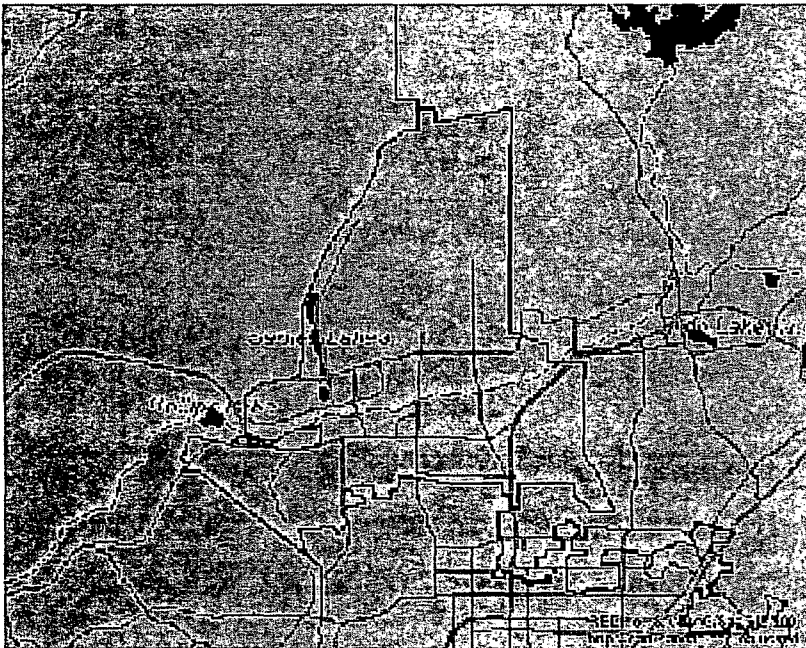
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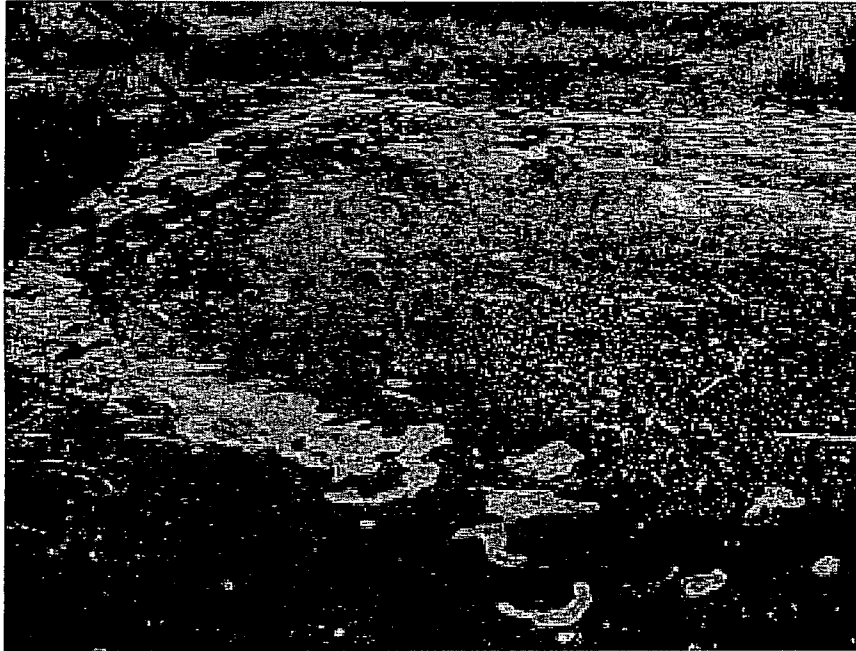
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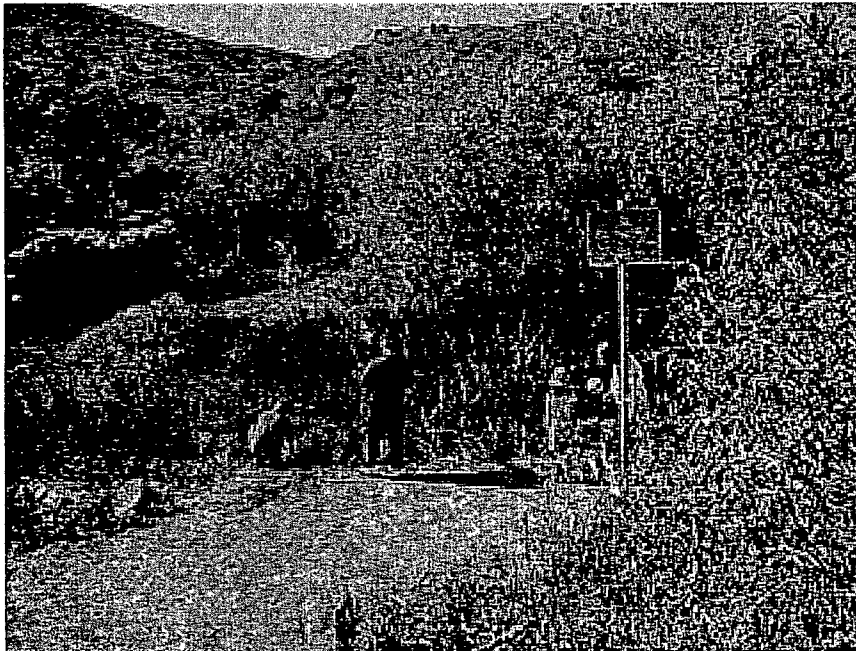


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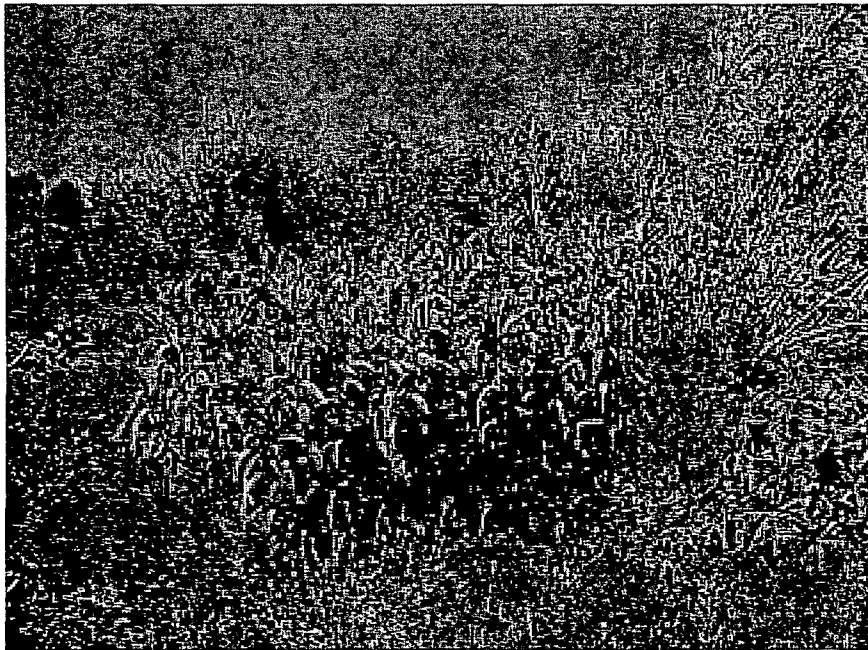
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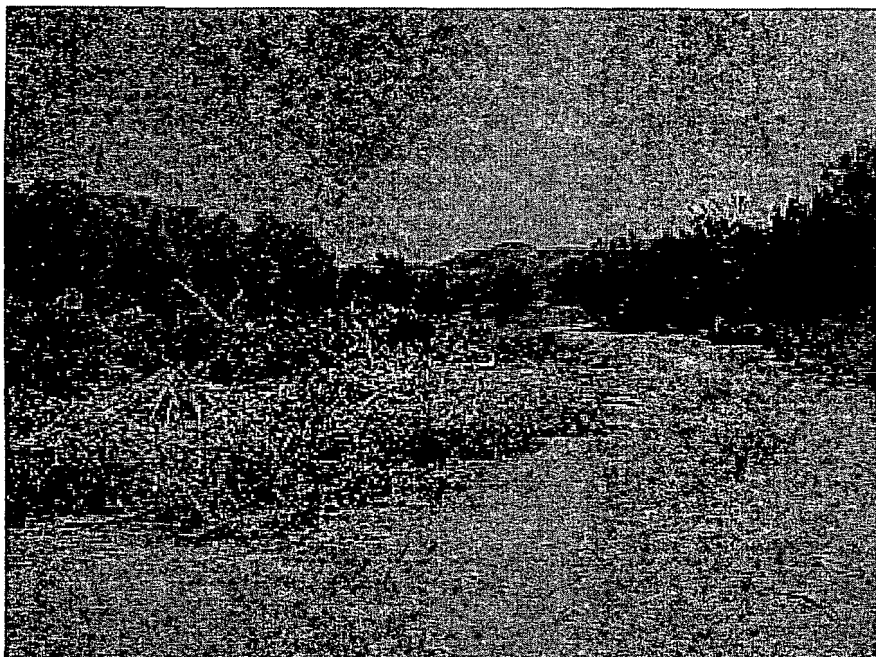
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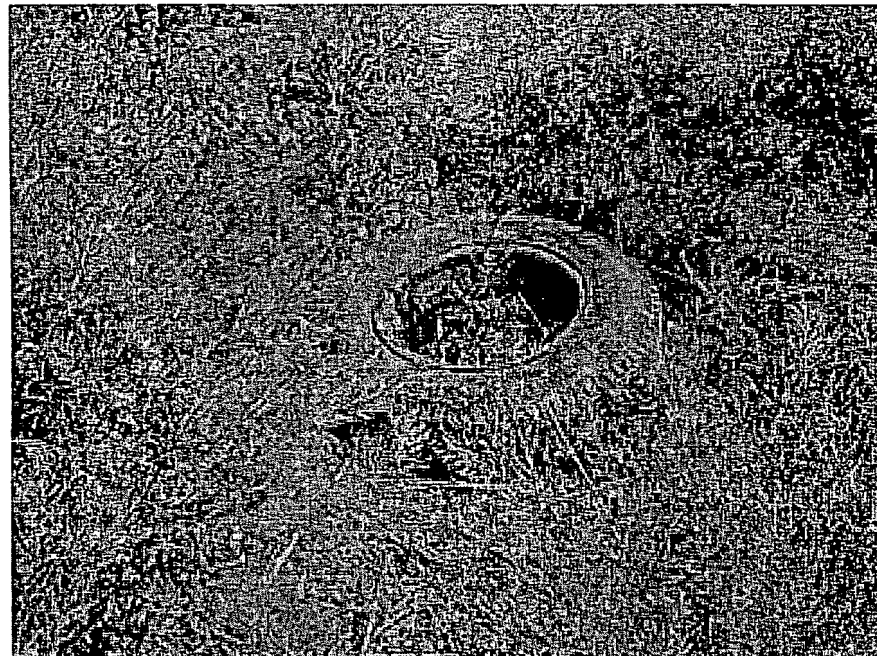


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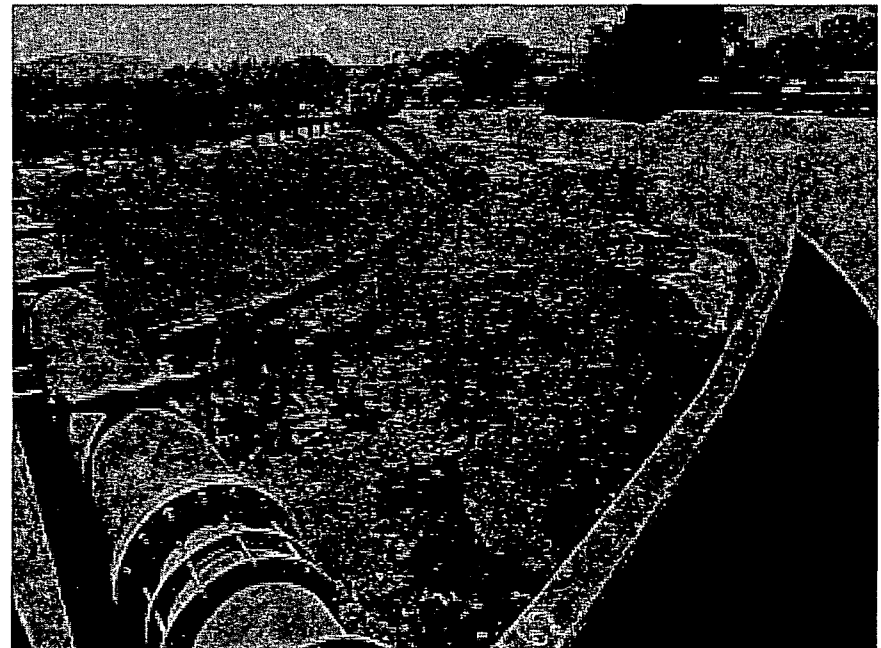
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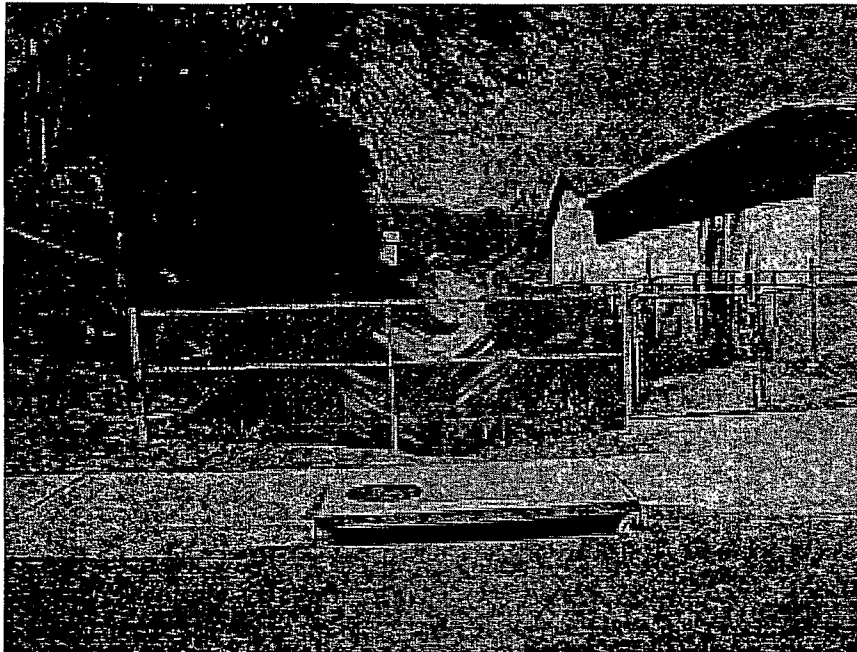
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5/4/2001

Storm drain on Lake Canyon Road adjacent to Halberns Blvd. is a source of non-point source pollution typical of the San Diego watershed in Santee. Drains often carry highly polluted “dry flows.”

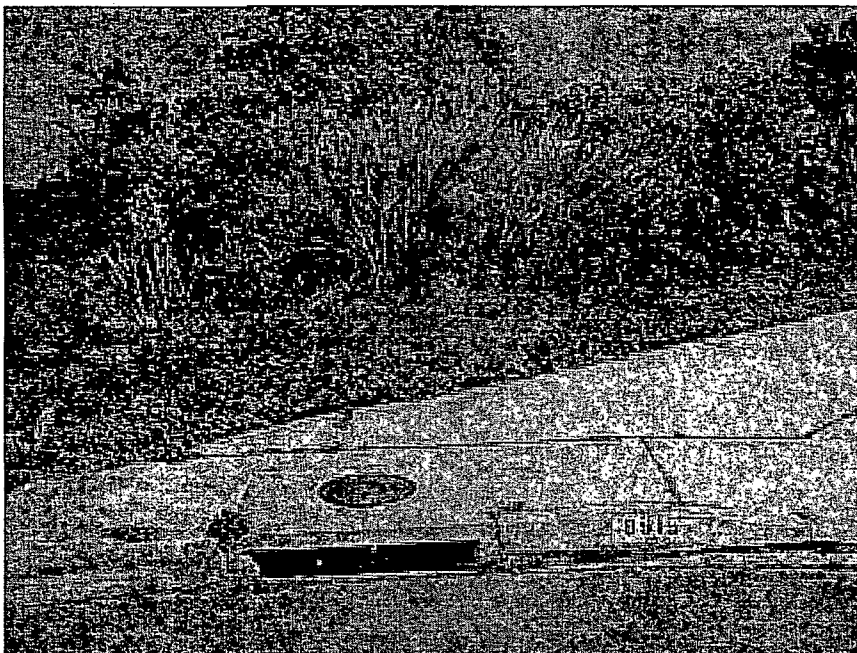
009\_5-3-2001.jpg

5/4/2001

Storm drain at 8915 River Valley Circle directs “dry flows” directly into Sycamore Creek. *Arundo donax* and palms invade riparian habitat of the endangered least Bell’s vireo.

049\_5-3-2001.jpg

Storm drains with polluted waters empty directly into Sycamore Canyon Creek.





**Sycamore Creek (San Diego River to Fanita Ranch adjacent to Santee Lakes):**

013\_5-3-2001.jpg

Sycamore Creek at Carlton Oaks Bridge and Padre Dam Municipal Water District. Algal mats and invasive ice plant.

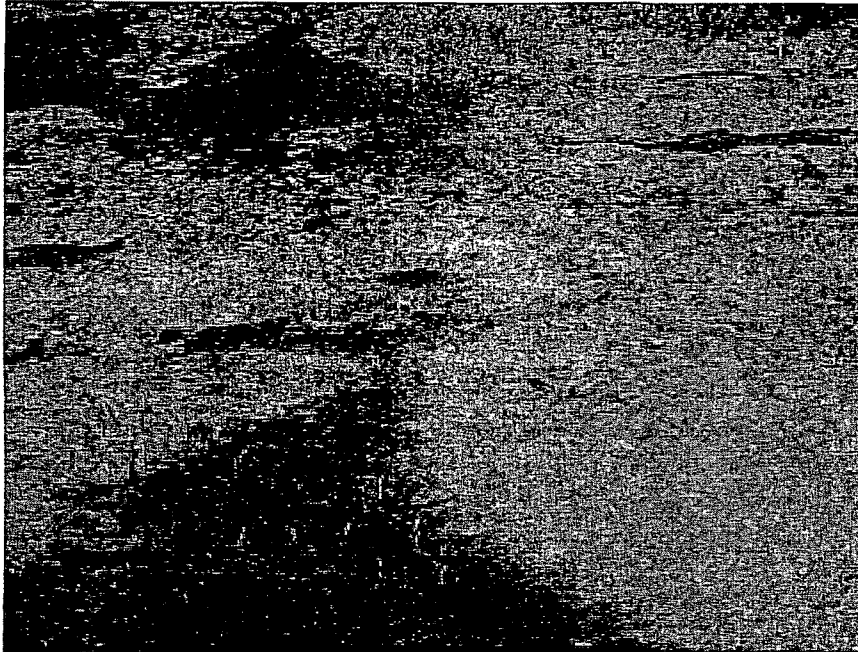
025\_5-3-2001.jpg

Sycamore Creek at Carlton Oaks Bridge near junction with San Diego River floodplain. Algae blooms and solid waste.

018\_5-3-2001.jpg

Sycamore Creek. Note algae bloom at storm drain (upper right). Storm drains carry polluted "dry flows" and directly enter the creek.





016\_5-3-2001.jpg

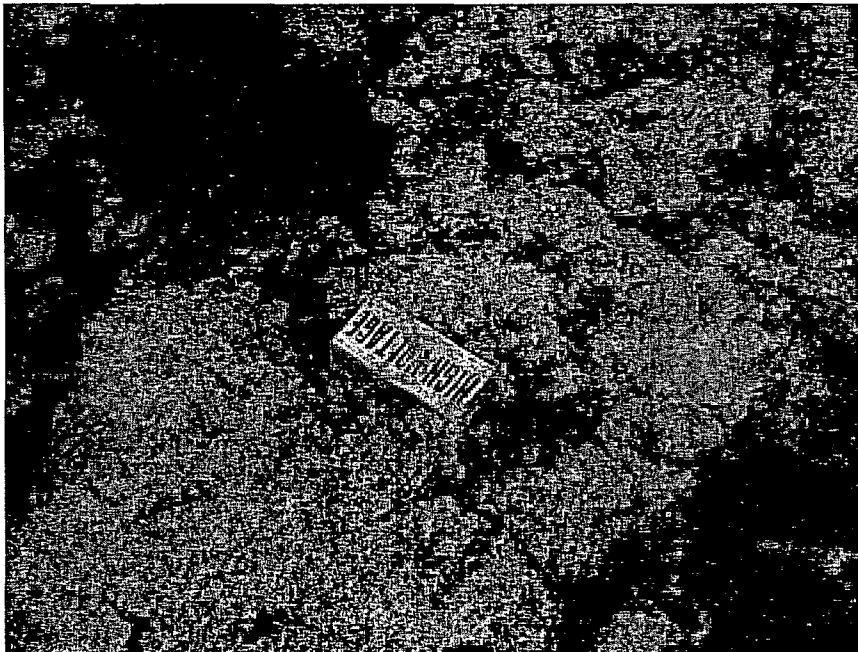
Algal mats in Sycamore Creek at Carlton Oaks Bridge and Padre Dam  
Municipal Water District.

024\_5-3-2001.jpg

Algal mats and solid waste in Sycamore Creek at Carlton Oaks Bridge.

017\_5-3-2001.jpg

Algal mats and solid waste in Sycamore Creek.







072\_5-3-2001.jpg

Natural vegetation cleared and replaced with invasive ice plant and Blue Gum Eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globules*). Sycamore Creek west of Santee Lake #1.

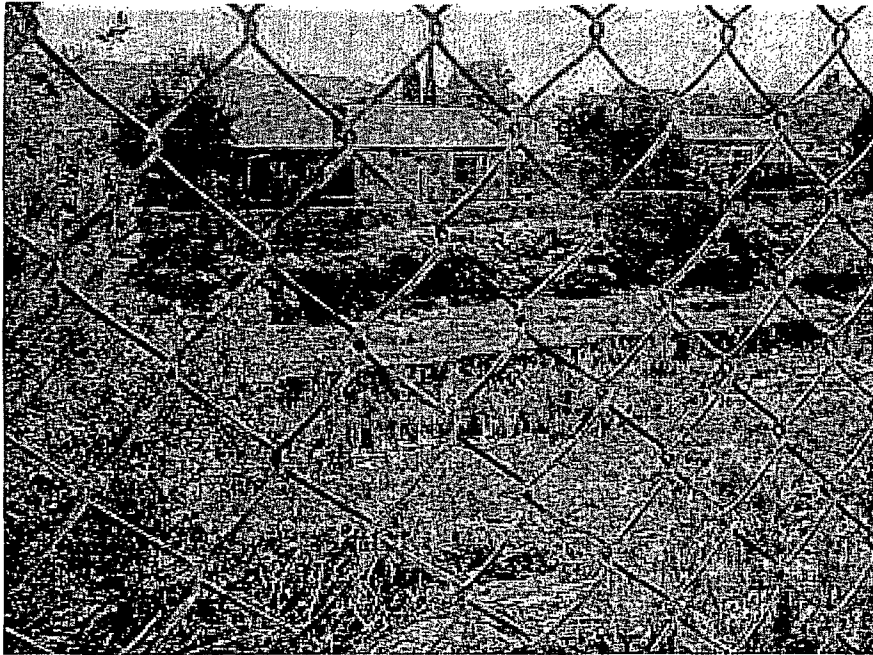
074\_5-3-2001.jpg

Construction sediment on the bank of Sycamore Creek. Santee Lakes Regional Park adjacent to Lake #1.

020\_5-3-2001.jpg

Sycamore Creek banks dominated by invasive plants such as *Arundo donax*





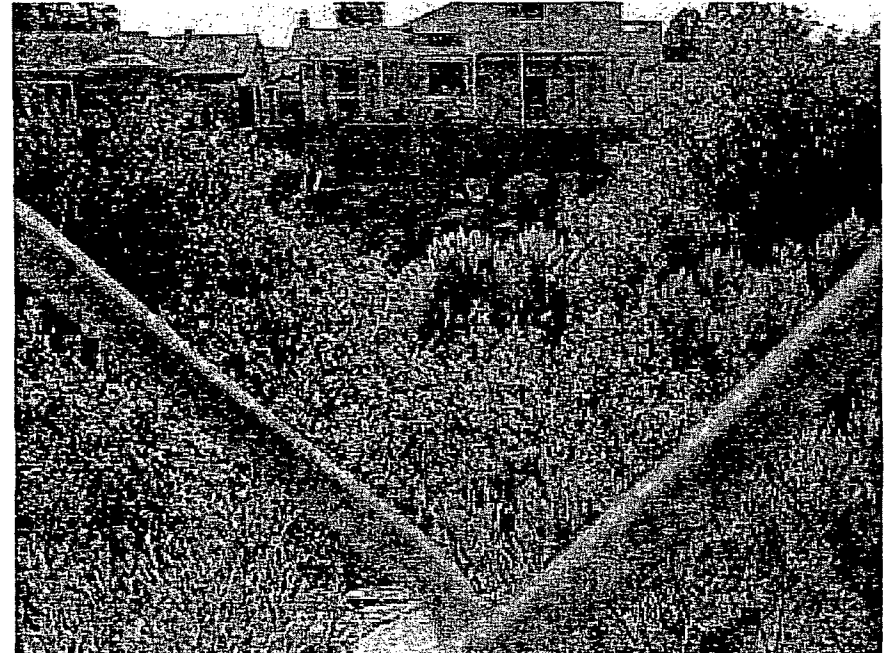
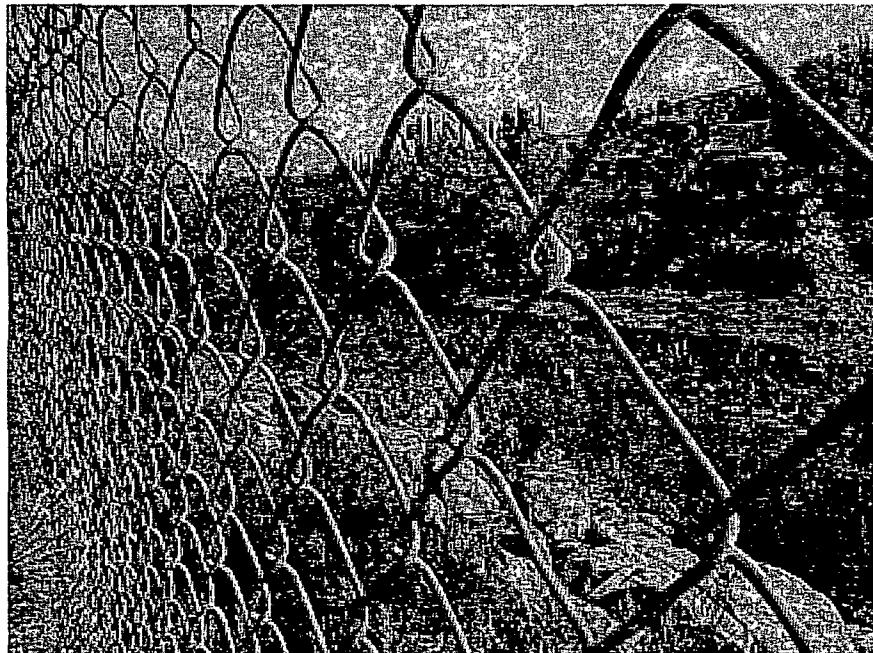
045\_5-3-2001.jpg

046\_5-3-2001.jpg

Numerous homeowners clear native vegetation to maintain their views of Santee Lakes. Vegetation is left to decay and be swept away by Sycamore Creek.

048\_5-3-2001.jpg

Pampass grass (*Cortaderia selloana*) invades Sycamore Creek.





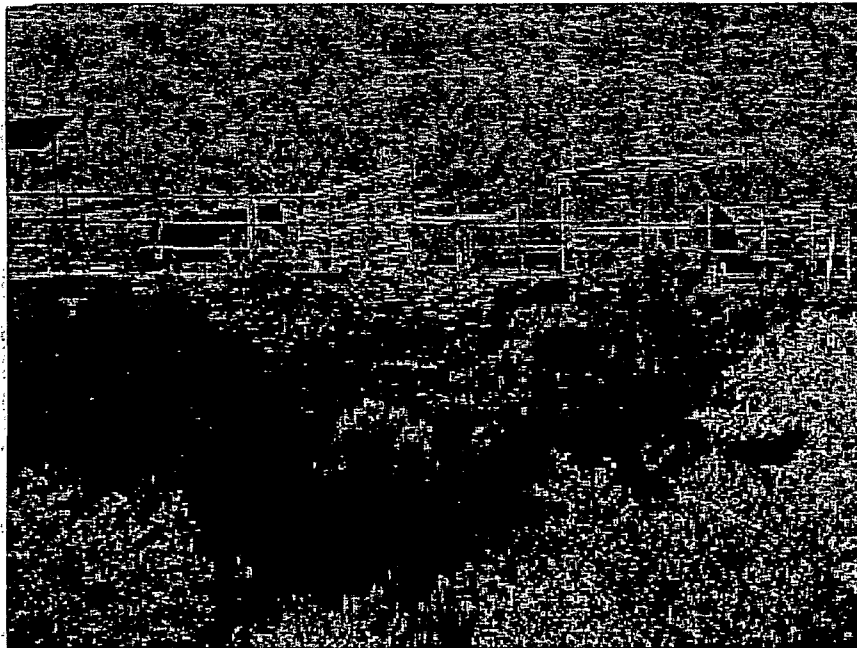
052\_5-3-2001.jpg

054\_5-3-2001.jpg

Horse stables at 10300 Pebble Beach Drive dispose of animal wastes by shoveling it over the bank directly into Sycamore Creek.

062\_5-3-2001.jpg

Algae blooms in Sycamore Creek adjacent to Santee Lakes Campground.





071\_5-3-2001.jpg

Pampass grass (*Cortaderia selloana*) and Giant Reed (*Arundo donax*) invade Sycamore Creek.

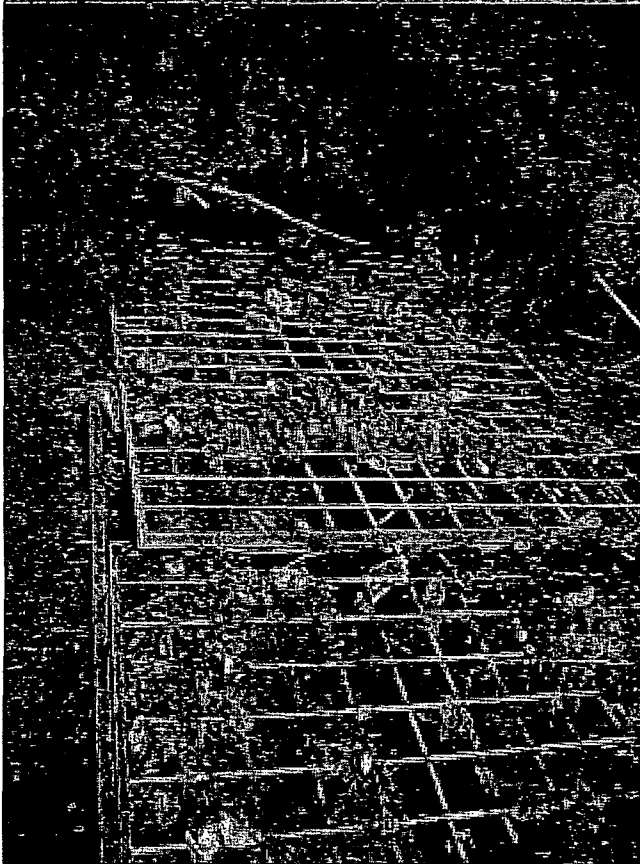
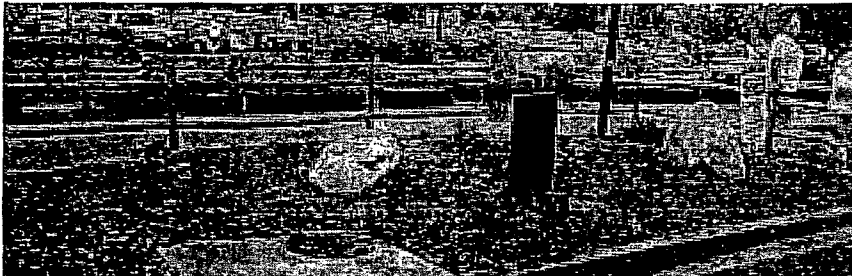
060\_5-3-2001.jpg

059\_5-3-2001.jpg

Tamarisk and palms invade Sycamore Creek adjacent to Santee Lakes campground.







wm02\_5-8-2001.jpg

wm09\_5-8-2001.jpg

Walmart parking lot drains directly into SD River.

San Diego River

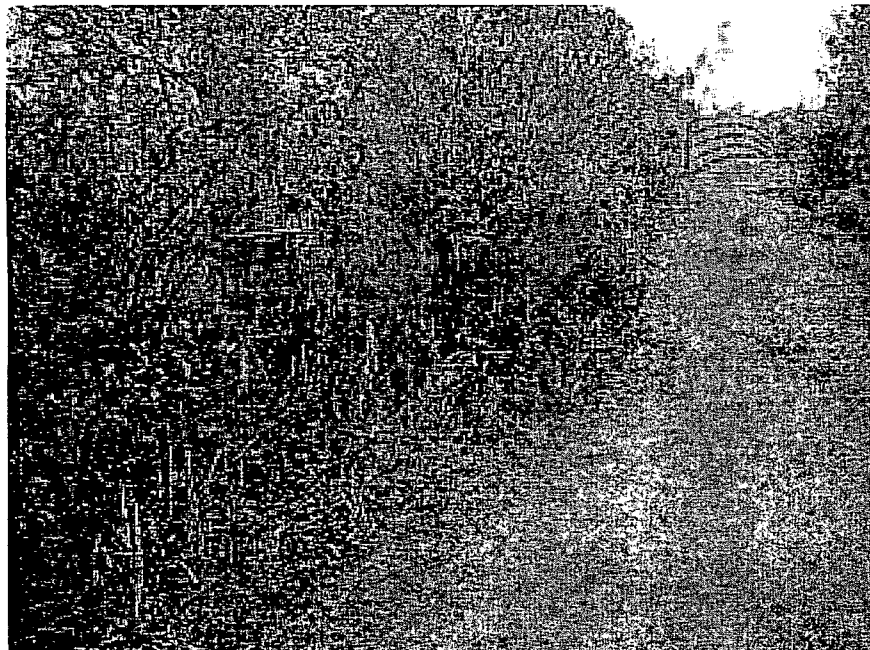
wm18\_5-8-2001.jpg

wm17\_5-8-2001.jpg

Garbage and algae on surface and bottom of SD River.



wm05\_5-8-2001.jpg SD River is habitat for endangered least Bell's vireo.  
 wm11\_5-8-2001.jpg Shopping carts become solid waste.



wm16\_5-8-2001.jpg Plastic bottle, shopping cart, algae along river.  
 wm19\_5-8-2001.jpg Shopping cart and other waste in SD River.





R06\_5-5-2001.jpg & R07\_5-5-2001.jpg Road drains sediment from RCP Block directly into SD River.

R11\_5-5-2001.jpg Invasive *Arundo donax* and soiled diapers.



R15\_5-5-2001.jpg Solid waste and algae in San Diego River.







R16\_5-5-2001.jpg  
Invasive *Arundo donax* in San Diego River.

R18\_5-5-2001.jpg & R14\_5-5-2001.jpg  
Solid waste in the San Diego River.



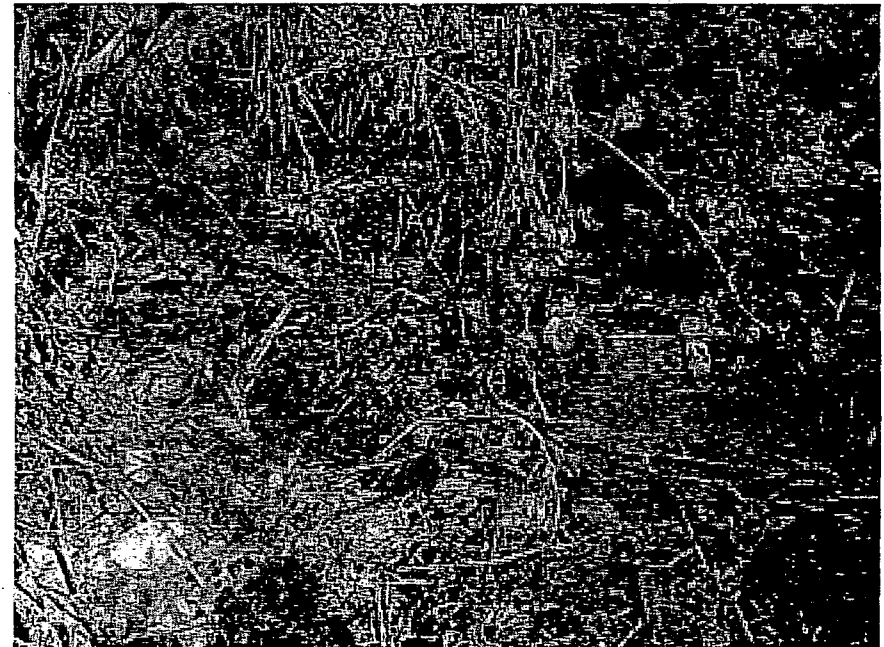


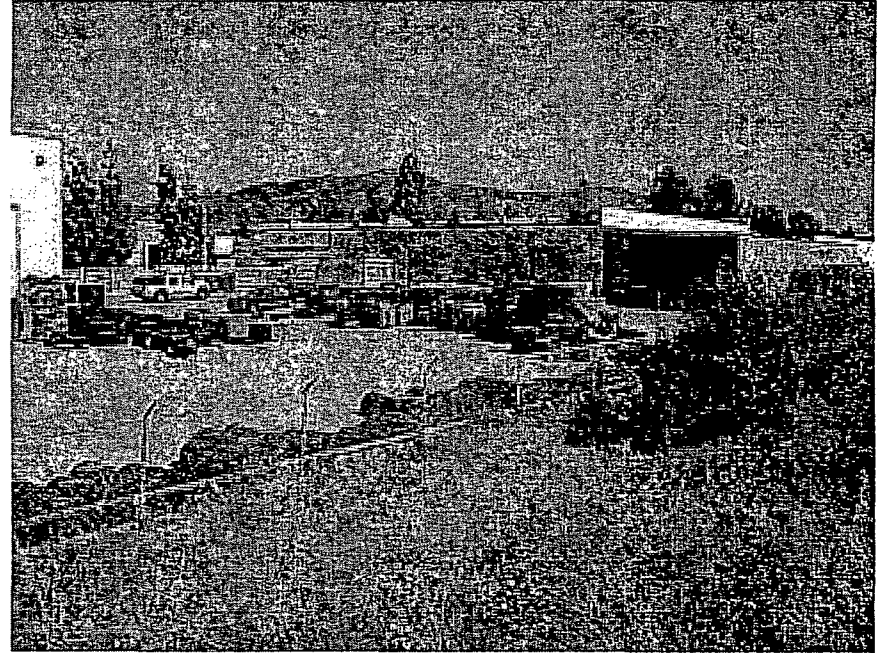
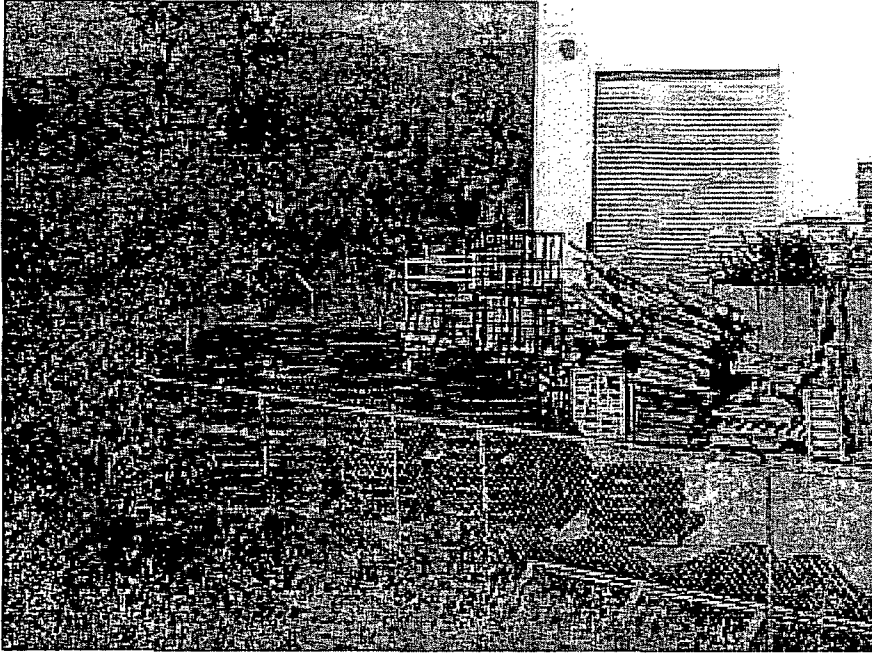


R27\_5-5-2001.jpg Graded floodplain with invasive species in background.  
 R26\_5-5-2001.jpg Algae bloom east of RCP, SD River.



R21\_5-5-2001.jpg Oil contamination.  
 R25\_5-5-2001.jpg. Solid waste in SD River floodplain.





R30\_5-5-2001.jpg & R28\_5-5-2001.jpg

Industrial storage along the San Diego River bank east of Magnolia Avenue.

R20\_5-5-2001.jpg

Tire caught on base of tree in San Diego River bottom.

