



## Why Restoring Strawberry Creek Matters

Restoring Strawberry Creek matters because it is so important to all of us as individuals, to the National Forest, and to the San Bernardino Mountains.

Strawberry Creek is a special place where a huge variety of plants and animals evolved and adapted to the unique geological, terrestrial, and aquatic conditions found in the Strawberry Creek Watershed. Most of us believe we have a moral obligation to take care of the Earth and its natural resources, and to pass it on in good shape to future generations.

Prior to the diversion of the springs for bottled water, Strawberry Creek was lined with alders, willows, and other riparian species making it extremely valuable for wildlife. Strawberry Creek supported a huge variety of plants and animals including the southern rubber boa, California spotted owl, mountain yellow-legged frog, two-striped garter snake, southwestern willow flycatcher, least Bell's vireo, Santa Ana sucker, Santa Ana speckled dace, and arroyo chub which are all now listed as threatened, endangered or sensitive. Diversion of the headwater springs has led to declines in amount and quality of the habitat for these species. Many of these species, which had lived in Strawberry Creek for thousands of years, have been completely eliminated since the diversion of the springs. More common species that we know and love like raptors, songbirds, deer, bear, mountain lion, bobcat, fox, and coyote have all been adversely affected by the unnatural drying of the stream. Several miles of stream are now totally dry in the summer

Strawberry Creek has been identified by biologists as one of the highest priority areas for aquatic species restoration in all of southern California due to its isolation and protection from damaging human activities. This would include species that have been eliminated since diversion like the endangered frogs and fish. All it takes is getting the natural water back in the stream. Species such as spotted owl, two-striped garter snake, and rubber boa will reoccupy the degraded habitat as it recovers with the addition of water and other restoration activities like planting riparian and other plants.



*-November 2023 Site visit by USFS, State Water Resources Control Board and public.*

The location of Strawberry Creek makes it a very important landscape linkage and wildlife movement corridor. Animals that migrate and move seasonally are able to use Strawberry Creek in the winter and then move over the mountain if needed in the summer for cooler conditions. The stream and riparian corridor from the mountaintop to the valley bottom is important to many species that move to fill their needs. The location of Strawberry Creek on the front slope of the San Bernardino Mountains makes it an important linkage from City Creek to Waterman Canyon and other riparian areas to the west.

Riparian and wet spring areas (like the Strawberry Creek headwaters would be without diversion) are less likely to burn nor burn as hot as the upland drier areas without soil moisture and water loving vegetation. The Strawberry Creek headwaters sit immediately below Strawberry Peak and Rimforest where approaching wildfire from the south could, and would, burn into the community. Having a restored, wetter Strawberry Creek headwaters would help protect the community from future wildfires.

Downstream and mountain water users are adversely affected by the removal of water from the springs for bottled water. It is public water, and should not be exported from our mountain. Water that is taken away from the Strawberry Creek Springs is not allowed to flow north in the natural stream to the Valley or soak into the