

More rainfall to be saved for dry spells

\$650,000 effort will create small parks in East Valley

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A massive new conservation effort is gearing up to capture storm-water runoff and rain and use it to replenish the groundwater supply in the east San Fernando Valley.

From Sunland to North Hollywood, the Tujunga Watershed Project would break the vast expanse of concrete that prevents water from seeping into the San Fernando Valley groundwater basin, which supplies about 15 percent of the city's drinking water.

"The east San Fernando Valley is pretty park-poor, and with watershed management we have an opportunity to create more open space," said Melanie Winter, executive director of The River Project.

"If you want to capture storm water and let it soak into the ground, you need areas without asphalt and concrete."

The Tujunga Watershed Project will incorporate about 20 neighborhood sites, such as small parks and green spaces, and several major efforts, including one to expand the spreading grounds where ponds of rainwater percolate through sandy soil into the aquifer.

The project is also aimed at conserving more water, controlling flooding and improving water quality.

It's a two-year, \$650,000 effort funded by the California Bay Delta Authority, which wants to lessen Southern California's dependence on Northern California water.

The effort will kick off Saturday with a crash course on the Tujunga Watershed Project. Residents are invited to learn more about it and to offer their own list of illegal dumping areas, open space possibilities and vacant lots that could become parks.

"The way that we're going to start this is by having discussions in the community and really collecting input on what kinds of improvements they'd like to see in their community," said Sabrina Drill, natural-resources adviser with the University of California Cooperative Extension.

TO LEARN MORE - A crash course on the Tujunga Watershed Project will be given Saturday at Ritchie Valens Park, 10731 Laurel Canyon Blvd., Pacoima. Two presentations will be offered -- at 11 a.m. and at 2 p.m. Call (818) 980-9660 or e-mail info@theriverproject.org for more information.