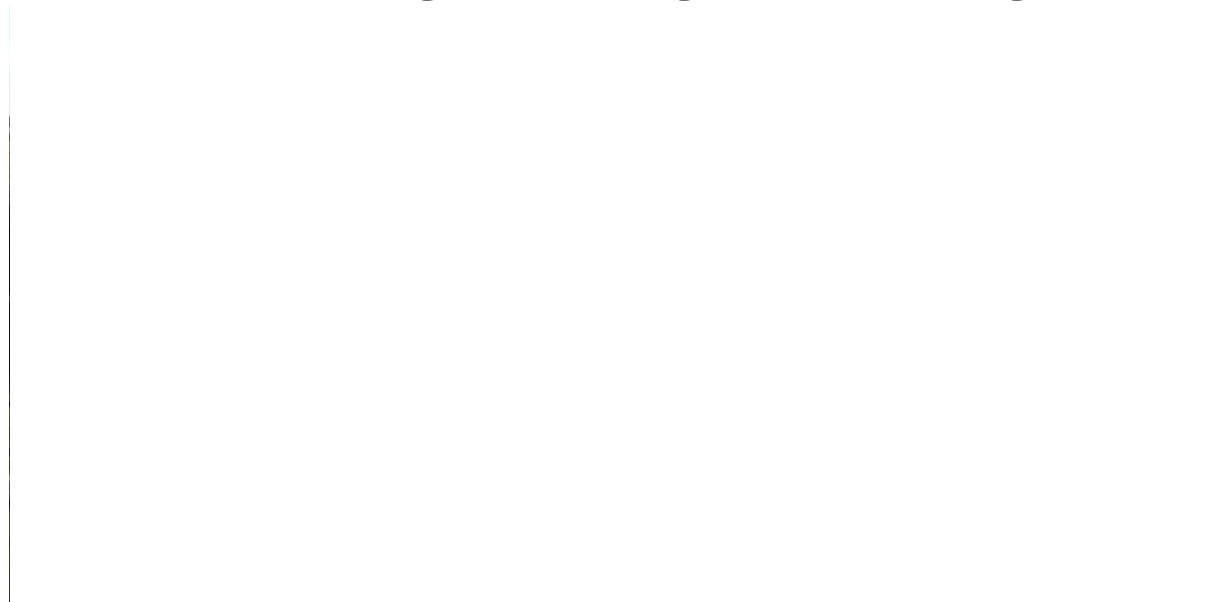


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Facing San Diego's Challenges



Trash litters the ground near a storm water pipe. File Photo

By **[ROB DAVIS](#)** Voice Staff Writer

Thursday, Dec. 27, 2007 | The San Diego region has no shortage of environmental challenges. The county is home to more endangered species than any other in the country. Global warming has contributed to a 7-inch rise in sea levels since 1900, only the beginning of the local manifestations scientists expect from climate change. Each winter, millions of gallons of sewage-contaminated runoff sweep down Tijuana's hillsides and get dumped in the Pacific Ocean.

With those issues in mind, we turned to researchers, politicians, environmentalists and bureaucrats and posed one question: What's the greatest environmental challenge facing the region?

The answers were as diverse as the respondents. They pointed to water, climate change, growth -- and us, the very people populating this biologically rich landscape.

Here's what they had to say.

Rick Van Schoik, director, North American Center for Transborder Studies, Arizona State University and a former San Diego State professor: "There are too few people who understand the way energy is generated or arrives in San Diego. And too few people who understand how water arrives in San Diego. And precious few who get the nexus of that energy and water arriving. If we were rich in either one, it would be a little bit easier to understand the laissez faire attitude. But we need to be so serious about that connection. We're at the end (of the pipeline for both.)"

Mike White, San Diego director, Conservation Biology Institute: "It is defining our patterns of growth. As people spread across the landscape, they change it. It's not just San Diego. It's every county in California. There's no stopping that movement of growth into these rural areas. And it just has so many implications for natural resources at every level. You have to change your fire protection, water, wastewater, transportation, air quality. But it's a runaway train. I don't know how you get your arms around it, with our property rights philosophy."

Rick Halsey, executive director, California Chaparral Institute: "It's the need to help people reconnect with the natural landscape. Every problem we have environmentally is connected to

