

LA JOLLA VILLAGE NEWS

August 28, 2026

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A father and daughter look at an injured sea lion from the western staircase at La Jolla Cove, a massively popular beach for its small size and close proximity to wildlife. (Photo by Thomas Murphy/Special for Times of San Diego)

COVER STORY

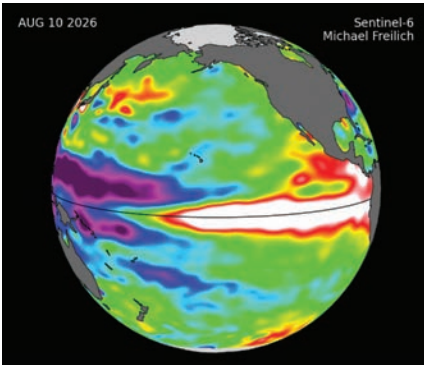
Should La Jolla Cove close to protect sea lions? San Diego faces mounting pressure

Despite increased park ranger presence and public education campaigns, people continue to approach, touch and harass the marine mammals. The Seal Society of San Diego, a volunteer program that educates the public to promote safe viewing of local harbor seals and sea lions, is calling on the city to protect the pinnipeds at La Jolla Cove and the Children's Pool. The debate has also drawn the attention of state and federal agencies. The Coastal Commission and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are discussing with city officials what additional measures could protect the sea lions, with beach closure viewed by many as a last resort. **PAGE 2**

WEATHER

'Super' El Niño – what scientists know now and what to learn

Scientists at UC San Diego's Scripps Institution of Oceanography have been studying the formation of this El Niño. Researchers published a new, multi-part FAQ guide explaining what El Niño is, why this year's event could be unusually strong and how scientists are tracking it. For San Diegans, El Niño can mean more rain, bigger surf, coastal flooding and warmer ocean temperatures. But scientists say it's still too early to know exactly what this year's event will mean, particularly when predicting rainfall and flooding. **PAGE 9**



ARTS

La Jolla Historical Society changes name, not mission

La Jolla Historical Society has been renamed The Museum of History and Culture La Jolla. The institution's new name reflects its growth from a traditional historical society into a museum offering exhibitions, educational programs, community events and an extensive collection of historic materials. The museum's continuing role is to serve as a resource where residents and visitors explore history, art, ideas, and culture. **PAGE 7**



San Diego faces mounting pressure to close La Jolla Cove

By Thomas Murphy
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

LA JOLLA — At La Jolla Cove, anyone who steps too close to a sea lion may be met by a megaphone-wielding park ranger and, at times, jeering onlookers — part of the city's balancing act between protecting wildlife and maintaining public access to the iconic beach.

Striking the right balance has proved difficult. Despite increased park ranger presence and public education campaigns, people continue to approach, touch and harass the animals.

The balancing act became even more evident after a late-night viral video taken on July 22 showed a man repeatedly kicking a sea lion at Point La Jolla — near La Jolla Cove.

Tyler Muehl, an 18-year-old La Jolla resident, pled guilty in federal court on Aug. 13 to violating the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

While his admission resolved the case, it left San Diego officials debating how best to protect sea lions at La Jolla Cove while preserving public access to one of San Diego's top tourist attractions.

At the same time, advocacy groups are pushing for immediate action.

The Seal Society of San Diego, a volunteer program that educates the public to promote safe viewing of local harbor seals and sea lions, is calling on the city to protect the pinnipeds at La Jolla Cove and the Children's Pool.

At the same time, more than 23,000 people have signed a Change.org petition calling on the city to close Children's Pool to the public.

State and federal agencies are also chiming in, conversing with city leaders about possible solutions.

The debate has also drawn the attention of state and federal



Five teenage swimmers appear to violate the Marine Mammal Protection Act by approaching sea lions nestled within the eastern cliffs at La Jolla Cove. (Photo by Thomas Murphy/Special for Times of San Diego)

agencies. The Coastal Commission and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) are discussing with city officials what additional measures could protect the sea lions, with beach closure viewed by many as a last resort.

Coastal commissioner Matt O'Malley, San Diego's representative on the commission, expressed his frustration with the city at the state agency's meeting on Aug. 14, the day after Muehl's guilty plea.

"I'm at the point where I believe a partial closure is the only way to deal with this issue until the city gets their program implementation figured out and investigates what is going on here," O'Malley said. "I'm sorry to have to be an advocate for that at this point."

O'Malley said the city has failed to do enough to protect marine life. "I'm left to conclude that where there is a will, there is a way, and I can only conclude there is no will on behalf of the city to protect the wildlife in this area," O'Malley said.

City Council President Joe LaCava, a longtime La Jolla resident, disagrees with O'Malley. LaCava says he and city officials have worked to increase ranger

presence during peak tourism periods, install new signage and educate visitors by coordinating with volunteers and private tour companies.

LaCava and the city oppose closing La Jolla Cove, believing it is not right to broadly eliminate public access because of individual unlawful actions.

Visitors who ignore warnings to keep their distance are entering the territory of animals that weigh hundreds of pounds — the biggest is Big Hank the "Tank," La Jolla Cove's dominant male sea lion, who weighs up to 1,000 pounds.

The 140-foot shoreline is home to Hank and other sea lions that regularly sit, swim and play right next to beachgoers.

WHO CAN ENFORCE THE LAW?

The sea lions are federally protected, and violations of the Marine Mammal Protection Act are federally enforced by the National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA's habitat protection division, not the city of San Diego. The agency urges witnesses to report suspected violations to investigators.

But federal enforcement does not mean there is no role for the city.

Park rangers have increased their presence during tourism peaks, while volunteers and tour guides have been enlisted to educate visitors. And yet, people continue to approach the animals to take selfies, throw sand or rocks, pet them and otherwise disturb them.

"Maintaining public access does not mean taking a passive approach to protecting wildlife," a city spokesperson told Times of San Diego. "When rangers observe concerning interactions with marine wildlife, they can document those incidents and provide that information to NOAA Enforcement for investigation."

COASTAL AREAS CLOSED TO PROTECT MARINE MAMMALS

Rugged, ancient sea cliffs break up La Jolla's seven-mile coastline into six iconic sections, two of which already have public access restrictions.

Point La Jolla is closed year-round to protect the sea lions sprawled across the slippery sandstone outcropping. A short walk southwest on Coast Boulevard brings visitors to Children's Pool, which is closed during harbor seal pupping season from December to May.

But LaCava said Point La Jolla is not necessarily a model for closing the Cove.

"Point La Jolla itself is just a rocky outcrop. Nobody sees that, and the Commission didn't see that as a coastal access issue," LaCava said. "People really shouldn't be walking out there anyway."

The distinction matters. Point La Jolla is an algae-slicked sandstone shelf where sea lions like to lounge, while the Cove is a popular and heavily used public swimming beach.

Closing the Cove would therefore raise a much larger coastal-access question.

Robyn Davidoff, who has

chaired the Sierra Club Seal Society for seven years, remembers the fight to temporarily close the Children's Pool as a years-long, grueling effort. "I joined, and everyone in the group was moving on. They said, 'Look, we did the Children's Pool. It was very nasty and took a lot of years,'" Davidoff said.

With Davidoff at the helm, the group later began advocating for the sea lions at Point La Jolla.

"In 2021, we got a six-week closure for Point La Jolla. In 2023, we got year-round closure," Davidoff said.

The history shows that wildlife closures require coordination among the city, Coastal Commission, wildlife agencies and community groups while accounting for California's coastal-access requirements. In short, it's not an easy change.

IS PROTECTION NEEDED?

Sea lion pups are particularly vulnerable during pupping season from May to October, according to the city, which warns that human interaction with newborns can lead to abandonment and injury.

The Seal Society estimates that 43% of pups have died so far this year, compared with more than half in each of the previous two years. Mortality at the closed Point La Jolla site is estimated to be 6%.

For Davidoff, education alone isn't enough. Visitors cycle through the small beach constantly, and rangers cannot be there to warn every person who approaches the animals.

"It's very difficult to deal with millions of tourists a year on a very small beach. People come and go every ten minutes or so to see the sea lions, and so they may not have heard the message," she said.

Davidoff said the city needs a visible physical boundary around the animals.

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Stolen vehicles decrease in La Jolla and University City

By Dorain Hargrove
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO – Vehicle thefts fell across most San Diego neighborhoods in 2025, according to data obtained by Times of San Diego.

As the number of stolen vehicles dropped in the city of San Diego, so too did the number in La Jolla and University City.

La Jolla and surrounding neighborhoods recorded 59 stolen vehicles in 2025, down from 85 in 2024, according to San Diego Police Department data. University City reported 72 stolen vehicles last year, compared with 79 the year before.

The area with the highest number of reported vehicle thefts in both communities was the 4500 block of La Jolla Village Drive, near Westfield UTC, where 11 vehicles were reported stolen in 2025. The 8500 block of Costa Verde Boulevard near Nobel Drive ranked second with six reported thefts.

As was the case throughout San Diego, thieves targeted Jeep Wranglers the most, with 13 stolen vehicles, while the Toyota Tacoma and Honda CR-V were tied with 10 reports each.

San Diego recorded 3,390 motor vehicle thefts in 2025, down from 4,172 in



Jeep Wranglers are the most stolen vehicle in San Diego. (Photo by Tessa Balc/Times of San Diego)

2024, a nearly 19% year-over-year drop. Eighty-one of the city's 122 neighborhoods reported fewer vehicle thefts than in 2024, while eight saw no change.

San Ysidro recorded the largest decrease, while Pacific Beach posted the biggest increase.

In San Ysidro reported vehicle thefts fell from 229 in 2024 to 102 in 2025, a decline of 127.

Other neighborhoods also saw major drops.

In Mission Valley West, police received 46 fewer reports. In Otay Mesa West, the number dropped by 40, followed by Kearny Mesa (35 fewer), Bay Terraces

(34), University Heights (29) and North Park (27).

Despite the citywide decline, some neighborhoods recorded increases in vehicle thefts.

Pacific Beach reported the highest year-over-year increase, with 173 stolen vehicles reported in 2025, an increase of 34 from the year before.

Other neighborhoods with notable increases included Mission Hills, up 13 thefts; Midway District and Mission Bay Park, each up 12; Emerald Hills, up 11; and Talmadge, up eight.

NEIGHBORHOODS WITH THE MOST VEHICLE THEFTS

While San Diego saw a steep drop in the overall number of stolen vehicles, some communities still see a high number of vehicle thefts.

Otay Mesa still sits at the top of the list for stolen vehicles.

In 2025, vehicle owners who parked in Otay Mesa reported 419 vehicles stolen, only five fewer than in 2024 when people reported 424 thefts.

The second highest number of stolen vehicle reports came from Pacific Beach (173), followed by North Park (117), San Ysidro (102) and Midway (96).

La Jolla teen on video repeatedly kicking a sea lion pleads guilty

By Dorian Hargrove
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

LA JOLLA – An 18-year-old La Jolla teen pleaded guilty to repeatedly kicking a sea lion that was perched on a seawall near La Jolla Cove in July. The attack was caught on video and went viral, prompting an investigation by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Nearly two months after the brazen assault, 18-year-old Tyler Muehl pleaded guilty, admitting he was the man in the video.

"National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Fisheries Office of Law Enforcement takes all violations of the Marine Mammal Protection Act very seriously," said NOAA-Fisheries Office of Law Enforcement West Coast Division

Assistant Director Eric Morgan in a statement. "Intentionally striking or kicking a marine mammal is not only illegal — it is dangerous for the well-being of the animal."

Federal prosecutors say Muehl admitted to kicking the sea lion as it sat on the wall at night on July 22 near Ellen Browning Scripps Park. Muehl said, according to the plea agreement, that he first went to the sea lion acting as if the two were in a fight.

As he approached the sea lion, Muehl kicked the sea lion twice in the head. As the sea lion tried to retreat, Muehl kicked the sea lion a third time, and thrust a fourth kick as the sea lion retreated over the wall.

Federal prosecutors say Muehl pleaded guilty to "knowingly and unlawfully tak[ing] a marine mammal in waters or on

lands under the jurisdiction of the United States in that he did harass and hunt" the sea lion.

After video of the attack went viral, local leaders, including Mayor Todd Gloria and Council President Joe LaCava, immediately responded. In a joint statement, they called the incident "disturbing and unacceptable."

Gloria, in another statement, said, "Today's guilty plea makes clear that harming or harassing our marine wildlife has serious consequences. I appreciate our federal partners for taking this case seriously. Our coastline belongs to all of us, and protecting its wildlife requires everyone to respect these animals, keep a safe distance and follow the law."

Muehl is scheduled to be sentenced in federal court on Oct. 20. The maximum penalty for violating the Marine Mammal Protection Act is one year and a fine of up to \$100,000.

City News Service contributed to this report.

Torrey Pines students sue school district over discipline for Trump flyers

By Dorian Hargrove
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO – A federal lawsuit accuses Torrey Pines High School administrators of retaliating against two students for expressing pro-Trump views at an anti-ICE rally on campus and falsely reporting one of them to police, leading to an overnight psychiatric hold.

In an Aug. 19 federal complaint, one student, referred to as M.F. in the complaint, says he and a co-plaintiff, referred to as A.F., attended the Feb. 6 anti-ICE demonstration to express their contrary viewpoints.

To demonstrate that, M.F. carried a small printout displaying the letters "LGBT" — above each letter were images of the Statue of Liberty for the "L", a rifle for the "G", a glass of beer for the "B", and a photo of President Trump representing the "T."

Following the rally, M.F. returned to class still holding onto the flyer. His teacher, according to the lawsuit, became upset at seeing the flyer and immediately left the classroom.

Three days later, the lawsuit alleges that Torrey Pines High Assistant Principal Angela Guerrero called both students to the office to inform them they were receiving two days of detention for bringing the flyers to the demonstration and for "frightening" other students.

That same week, M.F. was again called to the office, this time alone and to face more serious allegations.

Inside the vice principal's office, M.F. was accused of making "disturbing searches" on a public computer at the school, including "how to load a Glock," "how to load a magazine" and "how to dispose of a body."

The teen, the complaint states, denied ever making such queries and said that other students often tamper with classmates' computers and that access is not protected.

According to the lawsuit, Guerrero sided with M.F. and sent him back to class.

The next day, five to six police officers came to the school and interrogated M.F.

"School officials refused to allow M.F.'s parents to see him, instead requiring them to speak with a crisis social worker," reads

the lawsuit. "The crisis social worker stated that [M.F.'s teacher] requested the police because the searches made Defendant (Theresa) Barnes feel 'scared' and 'unsafe.'"

Police removed M.F. and transported him to a mental health facility where he was held overnight on a 5150 psychiatric hold. Meanwhile, a police search of M.F.'s house and room, according to the federal complaint, was fruitless.

"M.F. did not research how to load a "glock," did not confess to murder, was not watching homicide videos, and did not target the LGBT community. The claims were completely false, as school officials were fully aware," states the complaint.

And while M.F. was not charged, his lawsuit claims the retaliatory behavior at school continued for months following the Feb. 6 anti-ICE protest.

He, according to the complaint, was not allowed to play on the varsity baseball team. He was forced to meet with counselors and was asked to take testing for "Special Education placement and ongoing mental health monitoring."

The complaint alleges school administrators referred to him as an "LGBT bully."

Attorneys for the students say the disparate treatment is another example of a school district that disciplines students for conservative political viewpoints.

"[The District's disparate treatment of M.F... reflects a custom, practice, and/or policy at the District of disciplining students who express politically conservative or pro-law-enforcement viewpoints more severely than students who express the contrary viewpoint, for materially similar or less serious conduct," reads the complaint.

San Dieguito Union High School District spokesperson, Edwin Mendoza, issued the following statement on behalf of the district:

"The District does not comment on confidential student matters or matters that may involve litigation. Laws protecting student privacy limit the information that may be shared regarding individual student matters."

Please know that our District remains committed to ensuring a safe, welcoming learning environment for every student."

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The Social Diary – The 80th Jewel Ball, a Glorious Festa Di Venezia!

By Margo Schwab

SPECIAL FOR TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

It was a night to be remembered as a fancy black-tie crowd of 850 arrived at the La Jolla Beach & Tennis Club for the 80th Jewel Ball on Aug. 8. The transformed club included a gondola from Pernicano's, it's been sitting in a neighbor's back yard for months, and sumptuous Venetian backdrops created by design co-chairs Ingrid de Alba de Salazar and Stephanie Stone. They are part of the mighty Las Patronas hosting organization including this year's

brilliant Jewel Ball chair Jenny McGowan, her co-chairs Sara Carpenter and Laurel Hanson, and president Colleen Lighter.

There were many highlights including caviar at the posh tables, my idea, and dancing 'til midnight. This Jewel Ball is predicted to raise record funds for many worthy San Diego organizations including Alpha Project, Canine Companions, Meals on Wheels San Diego County, National Marine Mammal Foundation, Promises2Kids, Sanford Burnham Prebys Medical Discovery Institute, and Workshops for Warriors!



Emerald Patron guests of Valerie and Harry Cooper, Margo Schwab in Haute Couture Roberto Cavalli with Scott Johnston in Moschino jacket and Versace ensemble. (Photo by Gilda Adler)



Guy Clark with Harry Cooper in Alta Sartoria from the Dolce Gabbana show in Venice and Valerie Cooper also in Alta Sartoria and Dolce Alta gown, with Harrison Morgan.



Super Concierge Doc, Dr. Joe Andrews and his wife Cathy with Jewel Ball Honoree Dianne Bashor majestic in custom Grayseful of Palm Desert gown, and Donna and Bob Allan.



Caroline Nierenberg with Palm Beach 'It guy' Harrison Morgan, and the beautiful Valerie Cooper.



Mike and event chair Jenny McGowan in Atelier La Jolla gown ensemble with Jenny's mother Jean Sexton. Jenny and Jean head up the Wilson Sexton Foundation. (Photos by Margo Schwab/Special for Times of San Diego)



Bertrand and Denise Hug of Mille Fleurs.



Chris and Lorna McKellar with Lorna's son Duncan Brown.



Scott Johnston with Jeanne and Bill Larson of The Collector Fine Jewelry and Pala International.



Guy Clark, Linda Swortwood, Denise Hug and Harry Cooper.



Brooke Sheridan and her daughter Torrey McClure, with Hanna and Terry Sheldon.



Valerie Armstrong resplendent in vibrant Ralph Lauren.



Kim Chao.



Margo Schwab with Guy Clark, Valerie and Harry Cooper, and Harrison Morgan.

La Jolla Historical Society changes name but not mission

By Dave Schwab
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

LA JOLLA – After 62 years, La Jolla Historical Society is now officially dubbed The Museum of History and Culture La Jolla.

The organization's mission, however, remains unchanged: To inspire and empower the community to make the region's diverse past a relevant part of contemporary life.

The museum's continuing role is to serve as a resource where residents and visitors explore history, art, ideas, and culture.

The former La Jolla Historical Society campus is on property once part of Ellen Browning Scripps' extended family estate. It was the home of renowned La Jolla philanthropist Ellen Browning Scripps' half-sister, Virginia Scripps. Her home was nearby at the site of the modern Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego on Prospect Street.

The institution's new name reflects its growth from a traditional historical society into a museum offering exhibitions, educational programs, community events and an extensive collection of historic materials.

A new chapter was marked on Saturday, Aug. 15, when La Jolla Historical Society unveiled its new name and expanded identity with a community celebration.

The museum's executive director, Lauren Lockhart, noted the name change has actually been in the works for some



time. "It's actually been a conversation that predates me as a member of the organization for five years," said Lockhart. "It's something the organization has contemplated for at least 10 years."

Lockhart said the society outgrew its old name. "Since 2008, when this campus was gifted to the historical society, and we had a permanent home, we really started to build out our public programs and exhibitions," she said.

Given the rapid growth, Lockhart said there were ongoing conversations about their expanded mission. "[That means], doing so much more than you'd expect from a traditional historical society, especially as the professionalism and the quality of our exhibitions developed."

Added Lockhart, "Our peers in the arts and culture field recognized us as a museum. We have a collection of tens of thousands of photographs, postcards and architectural drawings, and we're the stewards of those materials. So, we've really thought of ourselves for a long time as a museum."

Added Lockhart: "There was some confusion about the existing name – people didn't know what to expect."



Visitors check out the exhibits at The Museum of History and Culture La Jolla. (Photo courtesy of Museum of History and Culture La Jolla)

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City leaders urge residents to prep for flooding due to El Niño

By Drew Sitton
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO – It's here, and it's big: 2026 is the year of the potentially record-breaking Super El Niño.

Nearly every city department was on hand at Balboa Park on Tuesday to explain the city's preparations for heavier-than-normal storms and flooding — while urging residents to do their own readiness work, too.

"The city is doing everything we can to be prepared, and we're asking for your partnership in doing the same," Mayor Todd Gloria said. "You do your part. We do ours."

The Office of Emergency Services, Police, Fire-Rescue, Transportation, Stormwater, Homelessness Strategies and Solutions, Environmental Services, Performance & Analytics, and Communications, among others, were in attendance alongside elected officials.

In other words, the entire city is preparing in case of a potential natural disaster.

"The leaders and subject matter experts behind me represent our city's unified approach to preparedness," said Fire Chief Robert Logan. "But preparedness doesn't start and stop with city departments. We're asking San Diegans to prepare with us."

The cross-section of department officials reflected the city-wide action being taken ahead of expected extreme weather conditions this fall and winter, with the warm water in the Pacific from El Niño expected to drive heavy rains and fast flooding.

"If you've seen flooding in the past in your neighborhood, expect the same, or perhaps even worse during El Niño," said Council President Joe LaCava. "We need residents and businesses to take steps now."

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Partners from other jurisdictions were in attendance too, including the county's emergency response team.

In addition, Assistant Fire Chief Robert Rezende announced that a meteorologist from the National Weather Service, Felix Castro, will also be embedded in the Office of Emergency Services.

"(Emergency planners) have worked tirelessly alongside staff from nearly



Fire chief Rob Logan addresses the media during a press conference on preparing for El Niño weather. (Photo by Drew Sitton/Times of San Diego)

every city department to get us ready for El Niño, to ensure a citywide preparedness to handle whatever comes our way. We're not taking this weather event lightly," Rezende said. "Residents need to take steps to stay ready too."

He urged residents to research whether they are in a FEMA flood zone, build a to-go kit with three days of supplies, create an evacuation plan and stay informed by signing up for Alert San Diego emergency notices. Then, when the storms hit, never drive or walk through flooded areas and move to higher ground if flooding is a threat.

"If an evacuation order is issued, that is not the time to make a plan. It is the time to execute your existing plan," Rezende said.

The city launched an El Niño webpage to detail how to prepare for the expected extreme weather and connect residents with resources.

"Preparedness is a shared responsibility because when we prepare together, San Diego is stronger and safer," Logan said.

The fire chief said he was proud that OES reorganized to fall under the Fire-Rescue department because it "strengthens the connection between citywide emergency planning and operational response."

During storms, transportation and stormwater staff will patrol neighborhoods, ready to address clogged drains or other issues that arise.

First responders also have heavy-duty equipment on hand for rescues.

INFRASTRUCTURE MAINTENANCE

One aspect of getting ready for heavy rains is clearing drains and maintaining stormwater channels, pipes and pump stations.

"We've really accelerated maintenance on all of those," said Todd Snyder, director of the city's Stormwater Department.

Before 2024, he said the city typically cleared four stormwater channel segments per year. In the budget for fiscal year 2027, the department plans to clear 67 segments, accounting for 20 miles. To do that, crews are out six days a week for 12 hours per day.

"That's historically far and above anything that we've ever done before," Snyder said.

After the January 2024 floods, San Diego increased its investment in the stormwater system. Multiple capital improvement projects are underway to replace aging infrastructure.

Long-term, the city is upgrading an aging system.

The city took out a \$733 million low-interest federal loan from the Environmental Protection Agency to pay for upgrades to the system, but those dollars are expected to run out long before the system is fully upgraded. Those take years though, with current stormwater systems not up to the task.

"Our stormwater system faces a \$5 billion funding gap over the past five years," LaCava said. "But I have never seen a city hall under this leadership move more quickly to understand the nature of stormwater, our

infrastructure and the potential impact to residents and our businesses."

However, even with the boost in maintenance, as well as several ongoing capital improvement projects in the stormwater system, it won't be enough amid the scale of predicted rains and how old the system is.

"If we get a storm of the magnitude that we saw in 2024, we are going to have areas flood, regardless of how much maintenance is happening," Snyder said. "I went and inspected those channels yesterday. They are as clear as a whistle, but they will flood if we get enough rain."

Snyder urged residents to pay attention to whether they're in the flood zone, which covers 15,000 acres in the city.

LESSONS FROM 2024

The fumbled response to the January 2024 flooding that drove people out of their homes for months at a time was top of mind for city leaders looking to improve preparedness this time around.

"The actions being taken now really are a reflection of the way that that sat with all of us," San Diego City Councilmember Sean Elo-Rivera said. He echoed others that the city had never prepared so thoroughly for a flood event before now.

And while the city was not prepared in 2024 for long-term recovery, Elo-Rivera praised community members for helping each other in the wake of the floods. He emphasized that the community needed to prepare again, and be treated as a stakeholder in the city's response.

"When the system fell short, our community stepped up," Elo-Rivera said, describing the response to the floods as the most moving experience he's had while in office. "The people who live along these channels can see the problems first and can be part of the solution."

Elo-Rivera announced the creation of a community task force made up of many of the people and organizations that responded to the 2024 floods, now with designated roles for the next round of extreme weather.

"We're reactivating that 2024 network, reaching out now to those who were there in the moments immediately after, and the months that follow that flood, so we have a plan in place before the rain to prevent, mitigate response, or recover from any flooding," he said.

'Super' El Niño – what scientists know now and what to learn

By Thomas Murphy
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO – As San Diego city workers prepare for a potentially historic “super” El Niño, some scientists say it’s still too early to tell if San Diego and Southern California are in for historic rainfall and flooding.

Scientists at UC San Diego's Scripps Institution of Oceanography have been studying the formation of this El Niño. Researchers published a new, multi-part FAQ guide explaining what El Niño is, why this year's event could be unusually strong and how scientists are tracking it.

For San Diegans, El Niño can mean more rain, bigger surf, coastal flooding and warmer ocean temperatures. But scientists say it’s still too early to know exactly what this year’s event will mean, particularly when predicting rainfall and flooding.

Historically, El Niño has increased the odds of wetter weather across Southern California, but the strength of an El Niño and actual rainfall in San Diego are not always intertwined.

One thing researchers do agree on is that forecast models reveal a moderate-to-large El Niño this year, with some suggesting it could be the largest in the 150-year historical record.

So, what exactly should San Diegans expect this year?

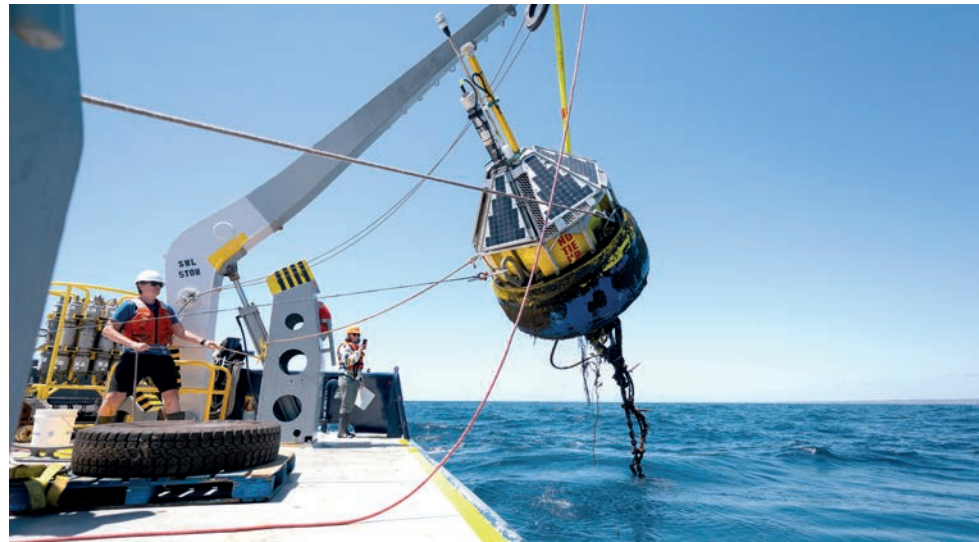
WHAT IS THE EL NIÑO-SOUTHERN OSCILLATION?

El Niño is a natural climate pattern that begins thousands of miles away in the tropical Pacific Ocean. When water near the equator becomes unusually warm, it can alter weather patterns around the world.

El Niño is one of two dominant weather patterns in the Pacific. While El Niño occurs when warm water builds up, the opposite pattern, La Niña, occurs when cooler water gathers in the region.

Southern California typically experiences drier conditions during La Niña. The two patterns are part of a larger climate cycle known as the El Niño-Southern Oscillation.

In the case of El Niños, rising temperatures weaken the east-to-west trade winds that normally push warm surface water westward across the Pacific. As those



Graduate students in Scripps Institution of Oceanography retrieve a mooring off the coast of Del Mar, which measures the temperature and salinity of the ocean.

(Photo by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego)

winds weaken, warmer waters remain and build up in the east. Higher ocean surface temperatures affect the air above, creating more intense storms.

“The tropics are like the engine room of the Pacific,” Shang-Ping Xie, a Scripps professor of climate science, wrote. “Heat in the tropics drives global atmospheric circulation. In that sense, variations in the tropical Pacific like El Niño can have huge impacts on global weather patterns.”

One key measure is whether sea-surface temperatures in specific areas of the Pacific on the equator remain at least 0.9 degrees Fahrenheit above average. Those sea-surface temperatures are now what federal agencies are monitoring.

Sea-surface temperatures in the region are 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit above average, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, putting the odds of a very strong El Niño during fall and winter at greater than 90%.

While the presence of an El Niño is a certainty, its impact on Southern California and beyond is not as certain.

“It does not necessarily mean that the event will have a huge impact on our own weather in the U.S. during the upcoming fall and winter,” said Scripps researcher Art Miller. “Calling this a Super El Niño simply refers to the magnitude of the event in the tropical Pacific.”

More often than not, El Niños have resulted in stronger and more frequent winter storms for San Diego County.

“We’re keenly interested in this 2026–27 strongly developing El Niño because some previous strong cases, like the massive events in 1982–83 and 1997–98, were among the wettest years on record in California,” Scripps climate researcher Dan Cayan wrote.

“While we might partially attribute elements of individual storms to El Niño, we are left with statistical odds, rather than precise yes or no characterizations,” Cayan continued.

For residents along Chollas Creek in Southcrest — a neighborhood that suffered severe flooding during the January 2024 storms — another strong El Niño raises concerns that San Diego could see similar flooding again.

Preparations are already underway.

The Office of Emergency Services has formed an El Niño working group with representatives from city departments and public safety agencies to coordinate how the city prepares for storms, responds to emergencies and communicates with the public.

EL NIÑO COULD BRING COASTAL FLOODING WITHOUT MORE RAINFALL

Potential heavy rainfall is not the only danger of the oncoming El Niño. Changes in ocean temperatures, waves and storm patterns can increase coastal flooding and accelerate erosion, particularly during high tides.

Scripps scientists will map California’s

coastline before and after this year’s El Niño to monitor coastal changes and infrastructure damage.

Sea levels along the California coast can temporarily rise by as much as 13 inches during strong El Niño events, according to Scripps coastal geologist Adam Young, so this research can help predict how future sea level rise will impact the coast.

Those effects are occurring against a backdrop of unusually warm ocean temperatures. San Diego is already experiencing a marine heatwave, which led to dead seabirds lining beaches in March. This year has seen 42 record-high ocean surface temperatures at the Scripps Pier in La Jolla.

El Niño also sends subsurface waves along the coast that push warm surface water downward and suppress the normal upwelling of cold, nutrient-rich water. That can warm coastal waters while reducing the nutrients available to the base of the marine food web.

“Decreased vertical mixing can suppress nutrients from reaching the sunlit upper ocean, which fuels the base of the food chain and can thereby lead to less food availability for birds, sea lions, whales and other marine life,” Miller wrote.

WHAT SHOULD SAN DIEGANS DO NOW?

City officials recommend that residents make an emergency plan, prepare an emergency kit, sign up for emergency alerts and check whether their homes are in or near flood-prone areas.

These areas include Chollas Valley, Sorrento Valley, Mission Valley and the Tijuana River Valley, according to city maps.

The city says 15,000 acres and more than 6,900 structures are located in FEMA-designated flood-hazard areas. Officials also warn that flooding can occur outside those designated zones.

Residents should also know their evacuation routes and never attempt to drive or walk through floodwater.

The Office of Emergency Services has launched an El Niño preparedness webpage with information about flood risks, emergency preparation and alerts.

But it does mean there is enough uncertainty — and enough potential for extreme weather — that officials will continue preparing before the first major storm arrives.

City's aging stormwater system requires repairs before El Niño

By Drew Sitton
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO – As warnings of a potentially historic El Niño mount, city crews are fast at work preparing for the unknown.

Workers in the city's Stormwater Department are tasked with clearing a record number of stormwater channels to prepare for potential flooding, along with replacing flood control gates in Mission Beach and conducting emergency repairs on stormwater pumps and generators.

On Aug. 20, city directors for the Office of Emergency Services, Stormwater and Infrastructure updated councilmembers on the Environment Committee about their departments' work to try to prepare the city for what could be a historic El Niño weather pattern.

Assistant Chief Robert Rezende from the Office of Emergency Services noted that sharing the plan with the council was the first step in the city's preparation for what would be the strongest El Niño since before 1950.



Flooded and road closed signs in Mission Valley. (File photo by Adrian Chidress/Times of San Diego)

"This is not the culmination or the end point of the preparedness that we're doing," Rezende told committee members. "It's not that it's done. It's really just getting started."

Preliminary preparations began in June, when the city formed a large working group with employees from 24 departments. The group was tasked with identifying gaps in past flood responses and preparing the city as much as possible for potential floods. The working group, said Rezende, also used an audit of the city's response to floods in January 2024

that destroyed dozens of homes in South San Diego.

During the Aug. 20 Environment Committee meeting, department leaders said the working group has identified 50 projects and is working towards improving communication and coordination between departments, agencies and the public.

At least one councilmember on the committee expressed concern that the city needs to focus on infrastructure needs.

"The city has launched a website. A website is not gonna solve the city's inadequate storm drain system," said council president Joe LaCava.

One of the most concerning obstacles the city faces, however, is finding the funds needed to pay for the preparations and improvements.

Those budget constraints can be seen clearly in the case of the "sandbag working group." While the group has prepared a plan, found a vendor and secured a storage area to fill 100,000 sandbags to hand out to residents, it has yet to find \$300,000 to execute the plan, which will take two months to complete.

That is only one of many El Niño-related projects that face budget uncertainties.

Despite using low-interest federal loans, known as WIFIA, to design a replacement for the city's largest stormwater pump in Old Town, the city does not have funds to actually replace it. In addition, the Jamacha Waterway Revitalization Project is in the design phase too, but the city needs \$100 million to complete the project.

The stormwater department, meanwhile, began inspecting and clearing important stormwater drains when the fiscal year began.

Much of the maintenance focus has been on areas fixed around Chollas Creek that were reconstructed after the January 2024 flood.

Despite this, stormwater director Todd Snyder had a grim outlook on the upcoming winter weather. Snyder noted that very few of the city's channels and drains have the capacity to handle a 100-year storm, which is a measure of a large amount of rainfall within a short period of time, such as two inches within three hours in San Diego.

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City could potentially develop libraries sites to ease housing crisis

By Brooke Binkowski
TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO – A plan to turn library sites into housing has raised some eyebrows around San Diego.

But reports that it’s actually happening are greatly exaggerated, according to city statements.

It is no secret San Diego has been dealing with a historic housing crisis, exacerbated by a sky-high cost of living. The prices of available homes for sale don’t help much either, making San Diego one of those most expensive places to live in the country.

In light of that fact, city officials have been scrambling to find ways to create new housing or free up existing places in order to give people shelter and homes.

One of their options is freeing up city property, whether it is defunct, unused, or could be appropriated for a different use. To that end, there is an ongoing discussion of turning over city land to be used for new housing.

This raised some alarms, particularly for those who care about libraries. Are those sites also being eyed as spots for potential housing developments by the city?

The city of San Diego said in recent statements that there is no set plan in place to do so, and that they are “currently

gathering community feedback and conducting analysis to help inform a future plan ... while continuing to provide critical public facilities, such as libraries.”

The statement also said that they were “exploring opportunities to add housing to City-owned properties,” and that no decisions had been made about development at this time.

The city added that the effort is intended to explore opportunities and ideas to add housing to city-owned properties, including libraries — not to replace any existing facilities.

The city of San Diego has conducted a series of open houses and public listening sessions in various neighborhoods as it continues to pull together its Affordable Home Development Master Plan, where a list is displayed of all the city’s properties that could potentially be used for housing.

These sites, which are not limited to just libraries, include:

- The Mira Mesa Library adjacent lot;
- The North Park Library;
- The University Community Library;
- Barnes Tennis Center overflow;
- The University Heights Library;
- San Ysidro vacant lot;
- Balboa Park Operations Yard;
- Rose Canyon Operations Yard;
- The Clairemont Library;

City to pay \$10M to La Jolla homeowners association over damages from sinkhole

FROM STAFF REPORTS

SAN DIEGO – The city of San Diego is paying \$10 million to settle a lawsuit from a La Jolla homeowners association and an owner of a condominium over a giant sinkhole that formed outside the complex from a failed stormwater pipe.

The \$10 million payout comes more than three years after a sinkhole formed at 8803 Gilman in March 2023, after a stormwater drainpipe failed during a series of storms. As crews worked to repair the area, another drainpipe failure caused the ground to sink more, leaving a more than 80-by-40-foot hole just steps from the La Jolla Terrace Condominiums.

The sinkhole caused the ground near

several buildings to move, resulting in large cracks in the foundation and causing entire condos to shift, and eventually forcing residents to leave.

In 2024, the homeowners association and seven condominium owners filed legal claims against the city of San Diego and the construction company that the city hired to replace the large drainpipe and reinforce the ground surrounding it.

On Tuesday, Aug. 25, San Diego City Council is expected to give final approval on the \$10 million payout to the homeowners association and to only one of the owners.

The lawsuit filed by the other condominium owners and some renters is not part of the settlement. Those cases are ongoing.

SUDOKU

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CROSSWORDS

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						38						39	
	40									41	42	43	
44							45	46	47				
48							49						
50							51						

24. Ancient settlement in modern Turkey
25. You can call Paul Simon this
26. Opposite of a pro
29. Atomic #28
30. Type of drug (abbr.)
31. Arrives at
32. Nullifies
35. Bird's beak
36. Partner to "oohed"
38. Ray-finned fishes
40. Taxis
41. Sat on and controlled
42. Sea eagles
43. Remain as-is
44. Chinese revolutionary
45. Tooth caregiver
46. Snakelike fish
47. Compensate

ANSWERS

1	9	2	8	5	4	6	7	3
6	4	8	3	2	7	9	5	1
7	5	3	9	1	6	8	2	4
3	8	9	2	7	5	4	1	6
2	1	6	4	8	3	5	9	7
4	7	5	1	6	9	3	8	2
5	3	1	7	4	8	2	6	9
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CLUES ACROSS

1. A vast desert in Africa
7. Reciprocal of a sine
10. Type of phone
12. Biblical figure
13. One who renounces a religious belief
14. Warren and Monroe are two
15. Wild ox
16. Dismounted a horse
17. Cave dweller
18. Where infants sleep
19. Popular type of shoe
21. Clumsy large person
22. Evil-like
27. Integrated circuit
28. Austin-based athlete
33. Postscript
34. Follows 18
36. People of Gambia
37. Popular actor Nicolas
38. Platform for a lectern
39. Taxi
40. American songwriter Sammy
41. Iranian city

CLUES DOWN

44. Heavy clubs
45. One who is expelled
48. In bed
49. Lifelessness
50. Former CIA
51. Most slick
1. Slovenly person
2. In addition
- 3.hovels
4. Pie ____ mode
5. Subway rodent
6. They ____
7. Indigenous S. American people
8. Fine sand
9. Central nervous system
10. Nightclub entertainment
11. The perfect example of something
12. Supreme Islamic leader
14. Pain
17. Binary-coded decimal
18. Projecting corner of an angle
20. "Succession" actor Brian
23. Dinner table decor

Coach urges La Jolla girls golf to watch balance, tempo, tension

By Ed Piper
SPECIAL FOR TIMES OF SAN DIEGO

LA JOLLA – At last year’s team tryouts, La Jolla golf coach Christie Quinn’s program was invaded by an unexpected youth movement: Seven freshmen, along with two sophomores.

They joined nine upperclassmen at Balboa Golf Course and swung, twirled, missed and often connected with the tiny white ball.

Several had been brought by friends and classmates, in the way girls try different sports in this age of a boom in girls’ and women’s athletics. And they do it alongside people they sit with in class on campus during the school day. Some had never tried swinging a golf club before — an often-frustrating experience, but rewarding in the trying and the camaraderie.

The Vikings were also aided by a secret potion of “grandpa power,” as a then-unknown ninth-grader showed up at the driving range only because her forebear had exposed her to the game and drove her to the tryouts.



Vikings' Liesl Kijora shows off her drive power at practice on Aug. 17 at Mission Bay Golf Course. (Photo by Ed Piper/Special for Times of San Diego)

The girl was Liesl Kijora, and her grandfather, Robert “Bob” Bergstrom, who

faithfully cooled his heels during matches a year ago in the dining rooms and snack bars of the various courses La Jolla played on, until match conclusion.

The Swedish redhead, who attended sixth and seventh grade in that Scandinavian land, immediately blossomed into the varsity squad’s No. 1 (of six who compete in each interscholastic match), along with veteran Bella Itkin, then a junior.

Kijora (pronounced “key-YOUR-uh”) shot some low scores in facing the “giants” of the Western League, which includes juggernauts La Costa Canyon and Cathedral Catholic. Besides, the Vikings play state champion Torrey Pines in non-league encounters, including one at Fairbanks Ranch this season.

Quinn, also a private swing instructor, led Kijora, now a sophomore, Itkin, now a senior, and 11 other girls in some curious exercises at Mission Bay Golf Course on Aug. 17: taking a stroke while standing on one leg like a flamingo, swinging with one arm and taking a stroke with eyes closed.

“This is something you want to incorporate into your personal practice,” the coach implored in total seriousness after the blind-swing experiment. “Professional golfers do.”

“Coach Christie,” as she’s known, in a 90-minute session, went through the progression of her three points of “B-T-T”: balance, tempo, and tension. The one-foot stance addressed proper balance. Scuffing the mat on the driving range introduced the tempo (“the ball goes up when you scuff the mat, then you can adjust from there”). Tension is “how hard you grip the club.”

Three freshmen joined the crew this fall, along with a first-time golfing sophomore. Kijora and Itkin at the top are followed by seniors Turi O’Brien and Milena Malik, a 5-foot-8-inch tall golfer.

Junior Sammi Brodsky, last year’s JV captain, moved up to varsity. Natalie Sutton and Tiffanie Brownson, both 10th-graders, fill out the varsity roster. The four JV’s include Skylar Britt, a sophomore, and Vivienne Yurcich, Kennedy Cousino and Zoe Oyler, all freshmen.



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