

# The Growing Threat of Trail- Based Vehicle Evasion & Targeted Facility Thefts



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## OVERVIEW

In recent months, Los Angeles County has experienced a growing trend where criminal suspects evade law enforcement by using unconventional terrain such as park trails, flood control channels, riverbeds, and underground storm drain systems. These suspects, often involved in vehicle theft, commercial burglaries, and vandalism, exploit these natural and urban infrastructure gaps to flee unseen and escape apprehension. The vulnerability of open space and trail systems, especially those adjacent to golf courses, recreational centers, and major freeways, has become increasingly evident.

## TACTICAL EVASION TRENDS

- Suspects flee onto regional park trails and access riverbeds directly from freeway off-ramps or urban roads.
- They utilize storm drains and flood control basins as hidden transportation corridors during or after pursuits.
- Golf courses and construction-adjacent parks are being targeted for high-value vehicles (e.g., golf carts, ATVs, construction equipment).
- These areas typically lack surveillance infrastructure and after-hours patrol coverage.
- The use of terrain reduces the likelihood of helicopter visibility and K-9 tracking.

### PURSUIT SUSPECT ESCAPES

FOX 11



## Policy Recommendations

- Implement remote monitoring using trail-mounted cameras and flood basin infrared sensors.
- Increase coordination between LASD Parks Bureau, municipal law enforcement, CalTrans, and LA County Flood Control.
- Conduct quarterly terrain risk assessments in high-theft recreation zones.
- Use drone surveillance along open-space corridors during major operations.
- Consider use of bollards, gates, and trail barriers to block vehicular access during non-park hours.

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## EMERGING RISKS TO PUBLIC & PRIVATE ASSETS

Publicly owned regional parks, city-run community recreation centers, and privately maintained golf courses are increasingly vulnerable. Suspects often enter or flee from these properties using trails, dry creeks, or unimproved service roads.

## CONCLUSION

Law enforcement agencies, city planners, and parks departments must collaborate to develop proactive surveillance strategies and architectural deterrents to minimize suspect access to trail systems and riverbeds. As the nature of urban pursuit changes, infrastructure design must evolve to incorporate crime prevention considerations alongside community recreation.

## REFERENCES

- ABC7 Los Angeles. (2025, May 9). Golf cart chase ends in Los Angeles River [News story]. ABC7 Los Angeles.
- CBS News Los Angeles. (2025, August 28). Deputies chase reckless driver who fled under 60 Freeway in East LA [News story]. CBS News Los Angeles.
- FOX 5 San Diego. (2024, February 2). Driver crashes stolen pickup into canal during pursuit [News story]. FOX 5 San Diego.
- KTLA 5. (2025, August 15). Suspect drives into L.A. River near 6th Street Bridge and escapes through storm-drain tunnels [News story]. KTLA.

### Confirmed 2024 - 2025 Incidents

Date	Location	Description
February 2, 2024	Norwalk / 605 Freeway	Stolen pickup crashed into drainage canal under I-5; suspect fled on foot.
August 28, 2025	East LA / I-5 Greenspace	Driver fled into Greenspace and abandoned vehicle under overpass during police pursuit.
August 15, 2025	Boyle Heights / LA River	Suspect drove into LA River near the 6th Street Bridge and exited near the 7th Street Bridge. He then fled through a storm drain. Officers were unable to locate him.
May 9, 2025	Elysian Valley / Fletcher Dr	LAPD officers rescued Alfred Rivas from the LA River after he fled in a stolen golf cart, entered the riverbed, crashed, and attempted to swim. Officers entered the river to save him.

### Facility Vulnerability and Escape Route Patterns

Facility Type	Targeted Asset	Method of Entry	Typical Escape Route
Regional Park	Construction Vehicles (e.g., Bobcats)	Trailhead access or cut fencing	Unpaved trails or flood channels
Golf Course	Golf Carts, Landscape Trailers	After-hours via service roads	Service trails connected to regional paths
Public Works Yard	Utility Trucks, Tools	Unlocked side access gate	Flood control channels or storm drains

### Commonly stolen items include

- Utility terrain vehicles (UTVs), golf carts, maintenance trucks.
- Landscape trailers, zero-turn mowers, compact excavators.
- Surveillance gear, electrical tools, and copper wiring from utility sheds.

The trend suggests organized efforts targeting soft-infrastructure assets, likely due to limited patrol coverage and late-night accessibility.