

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With more than seven million people living in the watersheds drained by the San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers, the effects of humans on natural ecosystems are extensive: native habitat is scarce, wildlife movement is obstructed, surface and groundwater quality is largely impaired, and ocean water quality is adversely affected. While flood protection has been a high priority and largely successful, creation of sufficient park space, a comprehensive network of trails and bike paths, and opportunities to observe nature in urban settings have been a low priority.



Los Angeles Region from Space

In recent years, cities, communities, agencies, and groups have been working to propose new solutions to these problems. To build upon these recent efforts, the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC) have jointly developed this Watershed and Open Space Plan.

The purpose of this plan is twofold: (1) articulate a vision for the future of the San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers Watersheds; and (2) provide a framework for future watershed and open space planning.

The vision for the future can be summarized simply:

Restore balance between natural and human systems in the watersheds.



Los Angeles River at Elysian Park

To achieve that vision, the central element of this plan is a set of **Guiding Principles**, which provide over-arching goals that can be used to guide open space planning in the watersheds. Cities, communities, federal, state and local agencies, groups, and individuals can use the guiding principles to develop plans and projects.

This plan discusses, but does not propose, specific projects. Subsequent plans will be necessary to determine how and where the majority of specific projects will occur. These include subwatershed plans and open space, trail and bike path plans to be developed by individual cities, agencies and organizations. This plan is intended as a living document that will evolve over time, as priorities evolve and needs dictate, based on periodic assessments of progress. As other related plans are developed, they will serve as elements of a comprehensive plan for open space.



Bosque del Rio Hondo



San Gabriel Mountains

A. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Guiding Principles are intended to allow jurisdictions to advance, promote, and enable the following concepts:

■ **LAND: Grow a Greener Southern California**

Create, Expand, and Improve Public Open Space Throughout the Region

Improve Access to Open Space and Recreation for All Communities

Improve Habitat Quality, Quantity, and Connectivity

Connect Open Space with a Network of Trails

Promote Stewardship of the Landscape

Encourage Sustainable Growth to Balance Environmental, Social, and Economic Benefits



Pan Pacific Park

■ **WATER: Enhance Waters and Waterways**

Maintain and Improve Flood Protection

Establish Riverfront Greenways to Cleanse Water, Hold Floodwaters and Extend Open Space

Improve Quality of Surface Water and Groundwater

Improve Flood Safety Through Restoration of River and Creek Ecosystems

Optimize Water Resources to Reduce Dependence on Imported Water

■ **PLANNING: Plan Together to Make It Happen**

Coordinate Watershed Planning Across Jurisdictions and Boundaries

Encourage Multi-Objective Planning and Projects

Use Science as a Basis for Planning

Involve the Public Through Education and Outreach Programs

Utilize the Plan in an On-Going Management Process



Arroyo Seco

B. STRATEGIES

To grow greener, enhance waters and waterways, and plan together, the RMC and SMMC will develop and implement strategies that translate the guiding principles into project-specific plans and work programs, from which individual projects can be identified, proposed, and developed. These strategies include:

Education: The State Conservancies will place a high priority on public education and outreach. Restoration of the watersheds will require changes in behavior, shifts in resource priorities, and decisions on how to balance environmental and

economic needs. This requires local understanding of the key issues to allow the public to make informed choices.



Educating the Next Generation

Partnerships: Restoration of balance to the watersheds will require that the State Conservancies work with agencies, cities, communities, neighborhoods, interest groups and individuals to form partnerships to develop plans and implement projects.

Funding: To restore the watersheds, substantial financial resources will be needed. The State Conservancies will encourage, coordinate, and support efforts to secure additional funding from traditional sources, such as Congress, the State legislature, and government agencies, as well as corporations, private foundations, trusts and individuals.



Simi Hills

Multi-Objective Planning: All relevant federal, state and local agencies, cities, private groups and

individuals will be encouraged to incorporate the guiding principles into the development of plans and projects. The Conservancies will also ask the cities to consider incorporation of the guiding principles into the next update of their General Plan.

Management: Open space should be managed consistently for the benefit of the people, wildlife, and the environment. Whenever feasible, acquisition of open space should include a plan to identify responsibility and funding for future management of open space.

Monitoring and Assessment: The State Conservancies will work to develop a joint assessment process for restoration of the watersheds, monitor progress towards meeting the goals described in this plan, and periodically revise and update the plan as appropriate.



Headwaters of the Los Angeles River

C. OPPORTUNITIES

To achieve the vision of the future for the watersheds, to encourage use of the guiding principles, and to implement the strategies described above, the State Conservancies will work with agencies, cities, and groups to identify opportunities and individual projects.

■ Land Acquisition, Connectivity, & Open Space

River Parkways: Create a continuous ribbon of open space, trails, active and passive recreation areas, and wildlife habitat along the Los Angeles, San Gabriel, and Rio Hondo Rivers. The specific treatment of each segment of the greenway should be determined by the existing conditions of the parcel, the needs and desires of the local community and



Conceptual River Parkways

the opportunities for connection and linkages presented at that location.

Urban Lands: Acquire parcels in urbanized areas where appropriate to provide open space, passive

recreation, habitat restoration, and flood mitigation uses. Balance acquisition costs, including clean up of brownfields where feasible, with the value of providing additional open space.

Mountains, Foothills and Hills: Acquire mountain and hillside open spaces that provide important wildlife habitat and open space values. The hillside open space network, in conjunction with the river network, should connect the San Gabriel Mountains with the Puente and Chino Hills and the Santa Ana Mountains, the Angeles National Forest with the Cleveland National Forest and the Santa Monica Mountains with the Santa Susana Mountains, Verdugo Hills and Simi Hills, and the San Gabriel Mountains.



Urban Riverfront Parcel



Trail in the Whittier Hills

Tributaries: Provide open space along tributaries in urbanized areas to extend the river parkways and allow for pedestrian and bike paths, restoration of habitat, water quality improvement, and flood protection.

Trails and Bike Paths: Create a comprehensive network of pedestrian, bike, and equestrian trails that use existing corridors (such as rivers, tributaries and powerline rights-of-way) where available and provide new connections where needed.



Upper San Gabriel River Trail

Community Gardens: A network of community gardens, that incorporate native plants, throughout the urbanized portions of the watersheds, to provide gardening opportunities for residents that do not have access to private land.

■ Public Access

Improve and Expand Existing Facilities: The State Conservancies will work with individual cities and agencies to identify opportunities for the enhancement of existing open spaces within their jurisdictions, and assist in identifying funding sources.

Create New Facilities: The State Conservancies will work to identify opportunities to acquire land and develop new facilities, encourage donations of land parcels, and secure and maintain conservation easements where acquisition or donation is not feasible.



Confluence of the Rio Hondo and Los Angeles River

■ Water Resources

Flood Protection: Maintain and enhance flood protection using a range of flood protection methods, both structural and non-structural. Use open spaces and planted areas to filter, cleanse, and retain stormwater and enhance groundwater infiltration.

Surface Water: Improve water quality to optimize water supplies and protect beneficial uses. Encourage infiltration of urban runoff into groundwater where consistent with water quality goals, to extend the water supply and reduce reliance on imported water.

Groundwater: Expand and enhance groundwater infiltration and recharge wherever possible, and when consistent with water quality goals.



Legg Lake in Whittier Narrows

■ Native Plants and Wildlife

Habitat/Corridors: Preserve and protect important terrestrial, avian, and aquatic habitats in the watersheds. Preserve or establish habitat linkages and/or corridors in the Santa Susana Pass, Newhall Pass, Angeles National Forest to the Verdugo Mountains, Griffith Park to the Verdugo Mountains, the Verdugo Mountains and San Gabriel “Stepping Stones,” the San Gabriel River, the Puente & Chino Hills, the Puente Hills to San Jose Hills and the San Gabriel Mountains, and the Los Angeles River.



Great Blue Heron

Wetlands: Restore and expand wetlands wherever feasible in the watersheds, and incorporate those wetlands as elements of natural systems, to treat urban run-off, improve water quality, and provide wildlife habitat.

D. NEXT STEPS

To restore balance to human and natural systems in the watersheds, plans and projects for open space, habitat, and water resources should incorporate the relevant Guiding Principles articulated in this plan. This includes the Los Angeles River Master Plan and ongoing (or pending) subwatershed plans (including Arroyo Seco Watershed Restoration Feasibility Study), the (in progress) San Gabriel River Master Plan, and future plans for parks, open space, and bike trails in the counties, and individual cities and communities.



Trail Above Monrovia

Following adoption of this plan, the RMC and SMMC will develop and propose specific projects within their territories to begin prompt implementation of the plan. These projects will be evaluated using the project evaluation criteria included in Appendix E.

The Resources Agency will work on the California Continuing Resource Investment Strategy Project (CCRISP), an initiative to help state agencies and the state’s conservation partners make better decisions about how to conserve our state’s precious natural resources.

The Rivers & Mountains Conservancy will, within three years, work with appropriate partners to develop the following plans: River Parkways Plan; Tributaries Plans, Trails and Bike Paths Plan; Mountains, Hills & Foothills Plan; Habitat Conservation

Plan; Cultural Landscapes Plan; and a Monitoring and Assessment program.

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy will develop a Watershed Work Program.

California State Parks will implement the urban park strategy for the Los Angeles area. The California Coastal Conservancy will develop wetlands restoration projects. The California Department of Fish and Game will work on habitat conservation planning. The Wildlife Conservation Board will work on acquisition of critical habitat and public access funding. Caltrans will develop bikeways and restoration projects. The Los Angeles and Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Boards will coordinate water quality improvements with interested parties. The US Forest Service will complete a Forest Plan Update that includes the Angeles National Forest. The US Army Corps of Engineers will continue work on wetlands restoration and flood control projects. The US National Park Service will prepare a River Parkways Study (if funded) and develop the De Anza Trail. The Los Angeles County Department of Public Works will complete the San Gabriel River Master Plan and work on river-related projects. The Orange County Office of the Chief Executive will complete a subwatershed plan for Coyote Creek (with the assistance of the Army Corps) and implement watershed related improvements. Individual Cities will identify new projects and consider incorporation of the Guiding Principles into the next update of their General Plans.



Los Angeles River