

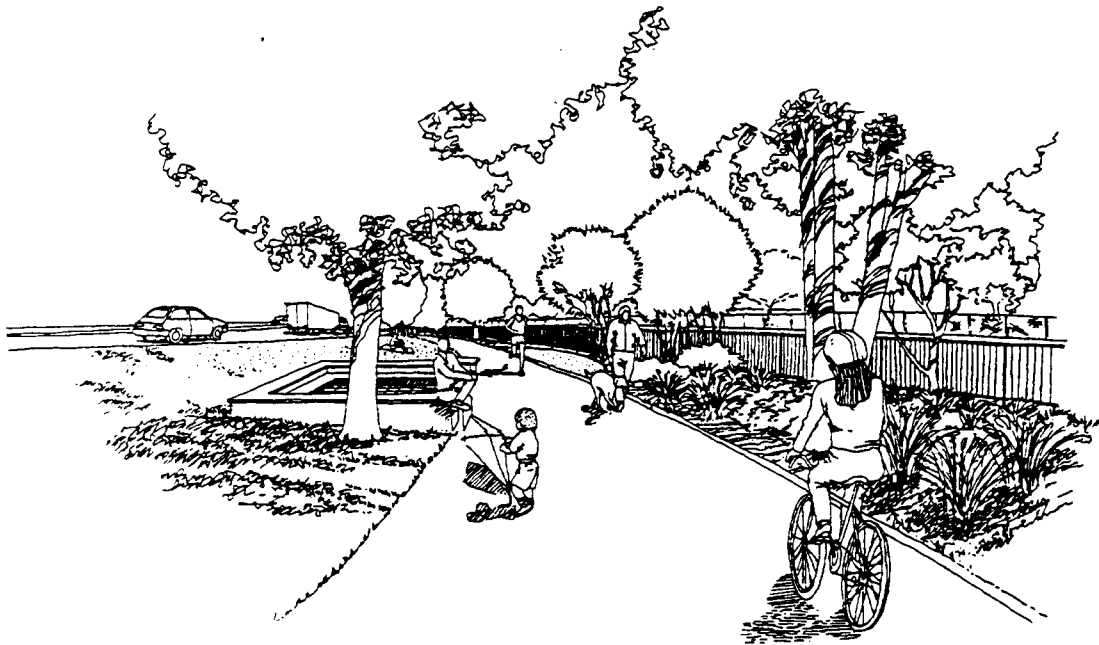
RECREATION

The goals and objectives developed by the Advisory Committee for Recreation are:

Provide a safe environment and a variety of recreational opportunities along the river.

Ensure safe access to and compatibility between the river and other activity centers.

- Secure ongoing and long-term funding for land acquisition, construction and maintenance of additional recreational facilities.
- Provide a network of continuous multi-use trails.
- Ensure access and compatibility between the river and other activity centers.
- Provide for a variety of active and passive recreation opportunities.
- Ensure public safety and security along the river.
- Expand open space.





A. EXISTING CONDITIONS

While development along the Los Angeles River has not been focused towards facilitating or encouraging recreational activities, some recreational features have been added over the years. One of the few areas where recreational use has been encouraged is a 12-mile section on the lower river where the Los Angeles-Rio Hondo (LARIO) Trail system supports cyclists, hikers and equestrians. Along this and other reaches adjacent park lands exist, but typically they are fenced off from the river for safety reasons.

People are typically drawn to the river for recreation and for open space. Along with the developed recreational facilities, a variety of unauthorized recreational uses occur.

QUALITIES OF THE RIVER SETTING

Spaciousness: In its lower reaches, the river is up to 500-feet wide (measured from the top of the levees). This gives people room to step back from the crowded city streets.

Visual contrast: The river provides a visual contrast to the typical urban landscape of streets, cars and buildings.


Natural elements: The river setting provides people the opportunity to experience flowing water, vegetation and birds.

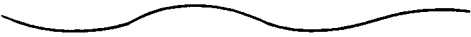
Sound control: In some places, the sound of flowing water can muffle the noise of nearby freeways. In others, the sounds of the city are kept at a distance by the vastness of the open space.

Vistas: Standing on the levee in the lower reach of the river, one can look out over the city, a perspective uncommon on the flat coastal plain. Several vantage points offer views to distant land marks, such as downtown Los Angeles, the San Gabriel Mountains or Palos Verdes Peninsula.

UNPLANNED USES

The qualities listed above draw people to the river despite the lack of support facilities in most areas, and many unauthorized activities take place along the river.





People ignore signs and climb over or through fences to walk, jog or sit along the river.

In some areas, homeless people bathe and find a quiet refuge from the pressures of the city streets. Bird watchers walk the banks to look for species which live in the river environment. During lunch hours, workers from nearby industries play soccer on the wide concrete channel bottom. Downstream, where sediment collects on the wide channel bottom, neighborhood people tend gardens, irrigating them with water scooped from the low flow channel. Children in downtown Los Angeles ride their bicycles on the channel invert because the river edge is lined with railroad tracks.

The number of people using the river and the variety of uses they find there reinforce the river's value as a recreation resource.


EXISTING FACILITIES

The existing recreational facilities adjacent to the Los Angeles River and Tujunga Wash include bicycle, equestrian, and hiking trails, parks and golf courses.

TRAILS

There are approximately 12 miles of trail open to the public along the Los Angeles River. The oldest and longest of these is the LARIO Trail, a 20-mile regional trail system connecting Long Beach and Whittier Narrows Dam in Pico Rivera. From the mouth of the Los Angeles River, the LARIO Trail leads north along the east levee of the river, then northeast along the Rio Hondo Channel to Whittier Narrows Dam. Here it connects with the San Gabriel River Trail which provides a link northward to the mountains. Located atop the levee on the maintenance road, the paved portion of the lower LARIO Trail serves cyclists, hikers and walkers. At the outside base of the levee, an unpaved trail serves equestrians, hikers and walkers. Together these trails provide an important regional recreational connection from the ocean to the San Gabriel Mountains.

On the west side of the river, the upper LARIO Trail begins at the Imperial Highway and continues north to Atlantic Boulevard along the paved maintenance road. This portion of the river does not have an equestrian trail. From Atlantic Boulevard north through downtown Los Angeles and Elysian Park, no cycling or equestrian trails exist, nor are any planned since no maintenance roads exist on either bank. Access along this



reach of the river is further hampered by the presence of active railroad tracks next to the channel walls. Plans are underway by the City of Los Angeles to construct a six-mile bike path along the west bank of the river from Barclay Street north of Elysian Park to Riverside Drive in Griffith Park.



In the Griffith Park area, several private equestrian stables, including the City of Los Angeles' Equestrian Center, operate adjacent to the river. Some riders use a two-mile segment of the maintenance road north of Los Feliz Boulevard and, during summer months, make low-water river crossings to reach the equestrian trails in Griffith Park. On the east side, earthen ramps provide access to the bottom of the river and a tunnel leads from the opposite side under the I-5 Freeway to Griffith Park. A masonry sound wall was installed by the City of Los Angeles along the approach to the tunnel to shield horses from freeway noise.

In some locations, small sections of trail have been created and are used by surrounding communities. Along Tujunga Wash, a quarter-mile-long trail and greenway was developed at L.A. Valley College which serves as a jogging and walking path. Another example is "Ernie's Walk" located in the San Fernando Valley. As part of the County's "Adopt a Channel" project, a local resident adopted a portion of the channel's maintenance road and planted trees, shrubs and flowers. This trail serves the community as a retreat and a pleasant walk along the Los Angeles River.

In addition to the trails described above, the flood control maintenance roads, although fenced off for safety reasons, are often used as de-facto trails in all communities along the Los Angeles River.

OTHER FACILITIES

There are approximately 16 parks and 4 golf courses immediately adjacent to the Los Angeles River and Tujunga Wash which lack safe access to the river. Limited access and recreational opportunities, especially in the downtown Los Angeles area, were among the key concerns documented in public workshops.



NEED FOR RECREATION

Los Angeles County lacks sufficient parklands and open space for its population of more than nine million. Based on the accepted formula for determining the amount of regional parkland needed in a city (6 acres per 1,000 people), the county falls 13,296 (20.8 sq. mi.) acres short.

Only 4% of the land within the City of Los Angeles is devoted to public open space and parks. This is the lowest of any urban center in the nation. The need for recreational amenities in Los Angeles was documented most recently in a survey sponsored by Rebuild L.A. More than 77% of the residents in the areas most affected by the 1992 civil unrest see parks, recreation and adult sports programs as “absolutely critical” or “important” needs in their communities. The perceived need ranks second only to youth services.


The passage of Proposition A in 1993 confirmed the need and desire of Los Angeles County residents for more parks and open space. The bond measure, which passed with a 64% majority, generates funds for developing safe neighborhood parks, gang prevention, tree planting, senior and youth recreation, beaches and wildlife protection.


Specific recreational needs along the river were identified in meetings with the Advisory Committee, the Recreation Subcommittee, public workshops and community members:

- The need for a variety of recreational uses along the river by adjacent communities.
- The need for a continuous trail system along the entire river.
- The need for adjacent property owners to be informed of and protected from potential hazards associated with increased recreational activities along the river.
- The need for a safety patrol system serving the entire Los Angeles River and Tujunga Wash.

OTHER PLANNING EFFORTS

Further evidence of the need for recreational amenities can be seen by the many planned and on-going projects. Projects which relate directly to the Los Angeles River include:

- The Los Angeles River Greenway (Griffith Park to El Pueblo State Park) by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority.
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- City of Los Angeles Bikeway
 - U.S. Army Corps Bikeway
 - The Los Angeles River Greenway (Riverside Drive to Los Feliz Boulevard) by the City of Los Angeles.
 - L.A. Greenways Plan by the City of Los Angeles Department of Environmental Affairs.
 - Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, planned by the National Park Service.
 - Los Angeles River bike path by the City of Los Angeles.

(These projects are identified as “Other Projects” in the Reach Characteristics Section.)


The Master Plan will contribute to the coordination of these efforts, enabling them to be more efficient in addressing community and regional recreational needs as expressed by the Advisory Committee, the subcommittees and public workshop participants.

MAINTENANCE

Currently the LARIO Trail is maintained by the Los Angeles County Departments of Public Works or Parks and Recreation. Parks or other lands outside the right-of-way are maintained by private parties and adjacent jurisdictions.

SAFETY MEASURES

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Works addresses safety issues through various means, including: fencing the right-of-way, signs, educational videos, call boxes and a permitting process to monitor special uses and public events in the river. The County Lifeguards and the City of Los Angeles’ Fire Department have Swift Water Rescue Teams on call for emergencies.





B. RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Regional Trail System**

- Create a regional greenway and trail system that will link existing trails and enhance potential trail opportunities. A continuous trail would connect the San Gabriel Mountains north of Hansen Dam to the ocean at Long Beach. An effective regional trail system would encourage increased trail use and promote the development of other recreational uses adjacent to the river.
- All future bike trails must be designed to the State of California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) standards, in compliance with Sections 2374 and 2376 of the Street and Highways Code. Whenever possible, bike and equestrian trails should be kept separated. Where possible, walkways should be provided adjacent to the bike trail, particularly in areas of heavy pedestrian use.
- As projects are constructed, secure funding for maintenance and safety purposes.
- As trails are developed and improved, provide safe and well-defined access to adjacent parks and other community facilities.


- **Develop Interpretive Sites**

Develop a series of interpretation sites, which could be either in buildings or on open space. Each would offer a unique experience. And each would focus on a topic specific to its location, highlighting a particular subject such as history, culture, environment, river engineering, water conservation, or industrial development. (For a detailed description see Aesthetics section.)

- **Vista Points at Bridges**

Provide pedestrian vista points at all bridges over the Los Angeles River. Include interpretive signs where feasible.

- **Adjacent Facilities**

- Encourage development of vacant land adjacent to the river into park and recreational facilities, especially in high-need areas.
 - Provide connections to the river from nearby (within one mile) parks, schools, workplaces and public gathering locations.
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C. CHANGES IN POLICY AND PRACTICES TO SUPPORT RECREATION GOALS

- Cities should include the river in the open space elements of their general plans. Here they can specify the types of recreational uses appropriate for their communities. Cities can also connect their city bike and equestrian trails to the Los Angeles River Trail.
 - All affected cities could require that new development incorporate and dedicate portions of trail along the Los Angeles River within the facility design. They could also require that safe trail access is included in their development plans.
 - Agencies should coordinate their efforts by forming Agreements or Memoranda of Understanding for development, maintenance and acquisition of recreational facilities. For example, pooling resources to create a river patrol could be a cost-effective way to manage river security.
 - Additional safety programs could warn people recreating near the river of rising water levels through patrols, additional lighting, sirens and warning signs. Additional recreation and aesthetics provided in utility easements will also require strict public safety programs.
 - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works should look at cost-effective ways to allow more public access to the river while maintaining necessary safety standards.
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