

DATE: May 14, 2015

TO: Watershed Conservation Authority Governing Board

FROM: WCA Staff

THROUGH: Mark Stanley, Executive Officer

SUBJECT: Item 6: Liaison and Activities Report

Greater Los Angeles County Regional Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Planning: The California Department of Water Resources has announced an additional round of Proposition 84 IRWM Implementation Grants. In preparation for this announcement the Greater Los Angeles County Sub-regional Committees requested local agencies and organizations to submit their project proposals and they are in the process of holding meetings to score and rank projects against the State guidelines. High scoring projects from each region will be submitted to the Leadership Committee for final selection of the list of projects to be included in the regional submission to the Department of Water Resources at their May 27, 2015 meeting.

San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority: The SGRDCA continues to establish a social media presence, including the publishing of a monthly informational newsletter highlighting the progress of the project. The April newsletter is included below.

April 2015

Dear Friends of the Discovery Center,

Earth Day 2015 marked the 45th birthday of the modern environmental movement. Earth Week celebrations around the world called for action on climate change and for environmental equity for all communities.

The Earth Day Network calls 2015 possibly the most exciting environmental year in history, when international movements for environmental justice and sustainability are gaining momentum toward positive change.

Here in Southern California 2015 will be a big year for environmental education equity as the San Gabriel River Discovery Center turns a major corner—thanks to your support and that of hundreds of community groups, activists and educators. Funding is now in place for the first stage of development.

The vision behind the San Gabriel River Discovery Center lines up with the international Earth Day 2015 spirit: equity and access to quality environmental education for underserved communities.

The Discovery Center Project means restoration and support for the San Gabriel River watershed area and the creation of community space at Whittier Narrows with state-of-the-art facilities for local residents to learn about water issues and discuss the drought and our rapidly changing eco-systems.

As a jewel on the “Emerald Necklace”—a series of parks on a 17-mile loop of bike and pedestrian trails along the San Gabriel and Rio Hondo Rivers—the Discovery Center Project dovetails with the mission of Amigos de Los Rios, a project supporter, to provide green space and park access in an increasingly urbanized inland area.

This month architects are reviewing Discovery Center plans for the design of wetlands to be used by native and migrating birds, re-planting of native trees and an outdoor classroom to expand the EcoVoices education program that guides thousands of students yearly along watershed trails and through hands-on scientific activities that teach about water and the fragility of the local ecology.

We'll keep you informed as things roll along. Wishing you a happy springtime!



San Gabriel Mountains National Monument: Following the October 10, 2014 Presidential Proclamation establishing the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument, two separate planning processes have been initiated. The first is the preparation of an amendment to the Angeles National Forest Land Management Plan, referred to as the Monument Management Plan. When complete, the resulting planning document will guide management of monument resources for the next 10 to 15 years. The process to develop that plan includes public input as mandated by the 2012 U.S. Forest Service Planning Rule, which requires transparent, thoughtful and frank deliberation and engagement of diverse perspectives and interest. Currently, the U.S. Forest Services has finalized its public engagement plan and will be conducting public meetings shortly.

The second planning activity involves the establishment of a San Gabriel Mountains National Monument Collaborative. An emerging purpose for this Collaborative is to represent diverse stakeholder perspectives in identifying, prioritizing, and advocating for investments, management objectives, and values that sustainably benefit the Angeles National Forest, the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument, and all the communities throughout the region. Facilitated by the National Forest Foundation, the collaborative is currently formulating its procedures and processes. While the Collaborative includes RMC and LACFCD representation, the WCA is currently requesting that it have its own representation on the Collaborative.

San Gabriel National Recreation Area: The WCA continues to track (Chu): San Gabriel National Recreation Area Act. The bill was introduced to Congress and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation on June 12, 2014. However, no further action was taken during the 113th Congress. Co-sponsors included Congressman Tony Cardenas (D-CA29) and Adam Schiff (D-CA28). Proposed Wilderness additions and Wild and Scenic River designations within the Angeles National Forest are also being tracked by the WCA. Although Congresswoman Judy Chu released draft legislation earlier this year for public comments, the WCA is not currently aware of any public meeting or activities related to this topic. Staff will continue to monitor.

SPECIAL EVENTS

WCA Junior Ranger Program: A \$2,500 grant from 3M was utilized in March by staff, in collaboration with the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) rangers, to provide a Jr. Ranger Program for young people aged 7-12 years old from surrounding communities. Response to the program held over three weekend Saturdays was very encouraging. On average seventeen children, along with parents, extended families and younger siblings swelled participation rate to over thirty people engaged with positive stewardship messages. The participants were invited to learn about and explore nature with our park rangers and activities included fun, educational, and hands-on talks, crafts, and hikes at the River Wilderness Park. Post program surveys have been sent to participants and so far the verdict has been rave and positive reviews of the program and has uncovered a strong desire and demand for more programs of this type in the future.



Junior Ranger participants learning about nature and making crafts at River Wilderness Park 3/28/2015

WCA PROJECTS

Azusa River Wilderness Park Project: Staff is currently preparing a grant proposal for the 2015 Caltrans Active Transportation Program for the San Gabriel River Bike Trail Gap Closure, Roundabout and Park Entry Improvements Project. This funding request will be in an amount of approximately \$2 million and would fund the construction of 1,750 feet of Class I bike trail and a safe crossing and roundabout on State Route 39, closing the gap between the River Wilderness Park and the San Gabriel River Bikeway. The funding proposal will also include the internal park trail network proposed within the River Wilderness Park Front Entry Improvements.

Additionally, design consultants working on the Front Entry Improvements have submitted 60% construction documents that are currently under review by staff. This design development includes approximately one half of the park, located closest to State Route 39. As identified in the adopted River Wilderness Park Master plan, the design work includes a proposed roundabout on State highway, extension of the Azusa Bike Path into the park, and other site programming that includes a pavilion, bathrooms, trail systems, river overlooks, an adventure play area, and a special use camp area. Signage and utility planning, undated CEQA analysis, and a concept development for a future concessioner building (café and retail space) is also included as part of this effort. A presentation of this final design has been scheduled for the July Board meeting.

Citrus Grove Heights Bike Stop: Two conceptual design options for the bike stop have been completed and stakeholder review meetings have begun to finalize design of a preferred plan.

Key stakeholders include the City of Pico Rivera, City of Whittier (due to adjacent water conveying infrastructure), BikeSGV, Los Angeles County Flood Control District, County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works Bike Coordinators, County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation Planning Division, and the Puente Hills Habitat Authority.

City of Los Alamitos' Coyote Creek River Parkway: Phase 2, utilizing grant savings, involves bikeway improvements, interpretive signage and potentially decorative entry gates. WCA provided a professional services proposal to the City to provide interpretive design support and facilitate communication with LA County Flood Control district in their placement and install.

Located on the following page are photos of plant establishment progress this spring, as well as, installed decorative gates and site features.



Duck Farm Project: May 11th marked AECOM's completion of the pick-up of the permit agency comments to the Construction Documents. The newest Landscape Architect, brought on board in March, has been coordinating the effort and Willdan Consulting is currently reviewing the packages for quality control and to confirm the plans are ready for resubmittal to each agency for review, approval and issuance of permits or consent as applicable. Upon receipt of agency approvals, a For Construction set will be issued and a Request for Bids notice will be posted.

WCA staff continues to hold preliminary and informational talks with a Green Technology consortium interested in investing in the use of and demonstration of green products at the Duck Farm and potential capital improvements to the property. Staff is anticipating receipt of a proposal in the coming month and will continue to provide updates as the situation warrants and/or discussions develop.

Staff is also in the process of investigating the potential for bringing an onsite property manager for the Duck Farm to provide enhanced security and maintenance activities on the property in exchange for living on the property in a RV; the person, whether employee or independent contractor, would be covered under WCA's workers comp policy.

Emerald Necklace: The WCA is managing the Emerald Necklace Feasibility Study and Implementation Planning Project with the purpose of identifying trail connection and urban greening projects throughout the 17-mile network. This work is being conducted in collaboration with members of the Emerald Necklace Coordination Committee, which includes staff from the RMC, Amigos de los Rios, County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation, Los Angeles Flood Control District, and County of Los Angeles First Supervisorial District.

The Implementation Report is scheduled to be completed by late summer of 2015, and the final Program EIR is scheduled to be certified in 2016. These activities will complete the Feasibility Study and Implementation Planning Project initiated in 2011. This final report will detail the necessary steps in constructing a suite of priority projects identified out of the previously completed feasibility study, while the EIR will outline the cumulative environmental impacts of these projects at a programmatic level and identify further steps that must be taken to meet the CEQA Statute and Guidelines. Priority projects focus on development of trail connections to and within Whittier Narrows Regional Park, trail development along the Rio Hondo, and development of a 'Quarry Clasp' trail connection.

Gateway Cities Greenways and Rivers Master Plan: The grant will develop a greenway and green infrastructure plan for the missing middle section of the Los Angeles River and surrounding Gateway cities region. The goal of the project is to provide a planning document and tools to allow cities and the region to move projects forward and be successful in attaining funding from a variety of sources to improve health and the environment through green infrastructure, parks, trails, greenways and river linkages within the Gateway Cities and along the Lower Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers.

Drafts of master Plan framework, Advisory Committee and Data Management structure have been developed and will be shared with Gateway COG representative this month and prior to proceeding with data collection and outreach activities. Staff is collaborating with other NGO's and interested parties working in the Gateway Cities and adjacent region on potential sharing of open source data in hopes of establishing a planning tool that is consistent to the larger watershed and greater LA region.

Mt Baldy Habitat & Open Space: The Informational and operational signs presented below have been fabricated and will be installed as part of an Eagle Scout project on the property. Content and location consultations were conducted with Legal Counsel and the WCA Insurance Carrier prior to their fabrication.



San Gabriel River Confluence with Cattle Canyon Project: The Cattle Canyon Project seeks to address unsustainable recreation practices, which includes habitat disturbance and increased risk to human health from water contact recreation. Other goals of the project seek to improve safety, and to enhance the visitor experience and quality of recreational amenities provided along the river.

The current Phase 1 of Cattle Canyon Project includes both a planning study and an outreach program focused on the prevention of specific harmful recreational behaviors through an information campaign

meant to build awareness among site users. The planning study, includes a comprehensive site assessment and conceptual planning process that has identified opportunities for physical improvements, as well as to a lesser extent, management considerations that will improve site conditions.

In early March the planning consultant submitted administrative drafts of three site plan alternatives which focus primarily on physical site improvements to the site. These alternatives present different levels of programming that accommodated different levels of use. Based on comments from the advisory committee, as well as target stakeholder outreach, the concepts presented within these alternatives will be refined into a preferred conceptual site development plan and final concept planning report.

South Gate Habitat Restoration Project/Parque dos Rios: A professional services design contract has been executed with North East Trees, architect of record, to complete updates to the permit packages as required per comments received from permit agencies. Following securing permits, staff will coordinate with Willdan to begin the construction bid process. LACFCD is in process of evaluating options in its consideration to permit project to utilize their water line to irrigate the proposed park during its establishment period before being released from supplemental water in the future.

Walnut Creek Habitat & Open Space: Acquired in 2008, the Walnut Creek Habitat and Open Space Property is a total of 60.8 acres. It is located directly east of Bonelli Regional Park and along the Walnut Creek riparian corridor. Approximately 6.7 acres are owned by the City of San Dimas and 54 acres are owned by the WCA. The City's portion is directly adjacent to the Loma Vista Park, creating a continuous property that will enlarge the park and open it up to the natural open space area.

After completing a conceptual development plan for the site in coordination with the City of San Dimas, the City secured Prop A funding begin phase 1 development including trail development and public access. Since the last Board meeting the City and WCA executed agreements necessary to proceed with the Phase 1 Project, including a MOU that outlines the cooperative development and operation, as well as designating the WCA as lead agency for CEQA purposes.

A CEQA Initial Study identified project impacts that would be reduced to a less than significant level with implementation of mitigation measures. The WCA and City have prepared a Draft Mitigated Negative Declaration, and the WCA has issued a Notice of Intent and recorded on May 12th by the Consultant; thus, beginning the 30 day public review period. Comments received during the review period, as well as, any recommendations from the City of San Dimas City Council will considered prior to staff proposing the WCA Governing Board adopt the Mitigated Negative Declaration at the July Board meeting. Copies of the Initial Study, the proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration, and supporting materials are available at San Dimas City Hall and WCA offices as well as accessed through the WCA and City websites.

Lastly, the WCA continues to work with the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, an adjacent property owner, to address potential lot-line adjustments, land swaps, and utility easement concerns.