

DATE: January 19, 2022
TO: Watershed Conservation Authority Governing Board
FROM: WCA Staff
THROUGH: Mark Stanley, Executive Officer
SUBJECT: Item 07: Liaison and Activities Report

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

For full text and history of bills and initiatives, visit these web sites:

Federal Bills: <https://www.congress.gov>

State Bills: <http://www.leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/>

Current as of 1/09/2023

The following is the status of legislative bills that have been introduced in the current session by Senate and Assembly potentially of interest to the RMC and its respective Joint Powers Authorities. Bills can be tracked on the legislative website: <http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/>

STATE

PARKS AND WATER

AB 57 (Kalra D) California Pocket Forest Initiative

Introduced: 12/6/2022, **Status:** Read first time

Summary: Would establish the California Pocket Forest Initiative in the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and would authorize the department to coordinate implementation of the initiative in conjunction with the act. Upon an appropriation by the Legislature, the bill would authorize the department to provide grants to cities, counties, districts, nonprofit organizations, and public schools to establish pocket forests on public lands, as provided. The bill would require the department to prioritize disadvantaged communities and communities that lack publicly accessible green space for these grants. The bill would require the department to partner with one or more academic institutions to test, and submit a report on or before January 1, 2030, to the Legislature that evaluates, the applicability and effectiveness of the Miyawaki method, as defined, to restore degraded lands and reforest urban areas in multiple regions throughout California. The bill would repeal these provisions on January 1, 2031.

PROJECTS OF SIGNIFICANT INTEREST

River Ranger Program (AB 1558- C. Garcia): The River Ranger Pilot Program Project Team consisting of Conservation Corps of Long Beach (CCLB), River in Action (RIA), and Nature for All (NFA) continues with its program planning, development and implementation.

The River Ambassadors continue with their 26-week program that began on June 27th, 2022. The crew has a regular schedule of education days in the classroom on Wednesdays and field work from Thursday to Saturday in the REACH Zone at the LA River and Rio Hondo. They continue with maintenance in the field, meanwhile every Saturday they conduct outreach and education along the bike path. As part of their program, the River Ambassadors have attended a variety of lectures and training where they learned from different organizations about climate change, the LA River, impacts of runoff, wetland ecology and native flora and fauna and have received essential skills for trail, tree, and park maintenance. The River Ambassadors have also been involved in a variety of community events, such as a tree planting event at the Urban Orchard, and a Day of Service with Edison. They help train volunteers and lead demonstrations where they have taught volunteers how to identify native and invasive plant species while also collecting litter and recyclables along the river. The crew participated in the most recent FoLAR Clean-up and helped remove over a thousand pounds of trash from the riverbed. The River Ambassadors were also recently featured on news outlet, KCAL, where they shared their experience of working along the LA River and about the impact and importance of the River Ambassador Program. CCLB is holding a Career Fair on January 18th for the River Ambassadors and Corps members to learn more about different career paths they can pursue after their program.



CCLB activities and events

River in Action continues with their environmental education K-5 workshops and the distribution of the coloring book, “The Adventure of Roxanna and the Lower LA River Treasure Island Park.” They will be conducting STEAM workshops, field trips and outreach tabling events near Reach Zone 1 throughout the year until February 2024. Their next event is a Water Museum Field Trip to the Water Replenishment District’s Albert Robles Learning Center on January 21st where students and community members will be given a tour of the water treatment facility and learn about the water cycle, water conservation, groundwater and environmental stewardship. This event will be followed by an outreach tabling event in February at the Paramount Farmers Market.

Nature for All held their 2nd event on November 26th at John Anson Ford Park which was a workshop on community science along the river. There were 8 participants involved in discussions on community

science and inclusion, and they were also introduced to the iNaturalist application and practiced making observations on the local flora and fauna at the park and along the Rio Hondo bikeway. Nature for All has actively promoted workshops through newsletters, social media platforms and their ambassadors distributing nearly 1k fliers to date. Their plan is to provide interpretive programming focusing on ecology of the area and community science through the month of April and host a BioBlitz in the reach zone for the 2023 City Nature Challenge. They are also partnering with Healthy Active Streets to hold a series of educational and recreational bike tours of the reach zone. Their first bike tour will be held on January 28th at Hollydale Park.



Nature for All activities and event



On May 31, 2019, the Los Angeles River Ranger Program Establishment Plan was delivered to the State Legislature. The full report and supplemental documents may be downloaded at www.rmc.ca.gov. The Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC) established an agreement to implement Assembly Bill 1558 (AB 1558), also known as the River Ranger Bill, introduced by Assembly member Cristina Garcia (AD 58). The bill required both Conservancies to

collaborate with multiple state and local agencies to develop a river ranger program to provide a network of river rangers along the entire 51-mile Los Angeles River and its tributaries. The Conservancies agreed to implement AB 1558 with support from their JPAs – WCA and MRCA.

The recommendations included establishing a pilot program along four reaches of the Los Angeles River, two in the upper portion of the river and two in the lower river. The first of the four reach zones to be established is at the confluence of the Rio Hondo with the Los Angeles River inclusive of the cities of South Gate, Downey and Bell Gardens. The reach zone is approximately five miles along the river corridor.

San Gabriel Mountains Community Collaborative: The Collaborative last met November 27, 2022. This in-person gathering was held at Charles Farnsworth Park in Altadena as an opportunity for Collaborative members to socialize and re-connect. No official business was conducted. The next Collaborative meeting is scheduled for January 26th. The WCA continues to participate in the Visitor Reception Working Group, which meets twice a month with the goal to assist the USFS with the Angeles National Forest Visitor Reception, Interpretation and Education Plan.



A SGMCC field trip to the Arroyo Seco in July 2022.

The SGMCC has a Steering Committee and topical ad-hoc Committees working to enhance National Monument management and accessibility for local communities in five areas: Trails and Recreation, Transportation, Volunteer Engagement, Conservation Education, and Forest Health. Meetings occur every other month.

WCA PROJECTS & PROPERTIES

San Gabriel River Center (River Park House) and Gardens Project: The project is currently in the permitting phase with submittals to County permitting agencies and Southern California Edison (SoCal Edison) by the Design Team. Many permits are close to final clearance, however, some have presented

challenges. The access road from Valley Blvd will require certification to meet “All Weather Access” requirements. This involves additional survey, geotechnical, and engineering work, and may require coordination / approvals from other agencies. The design team has been working to address these challenges, respond to plan check comments, and resubmit drawing packages.



San Gabriel River Center and Demonstration Gardens

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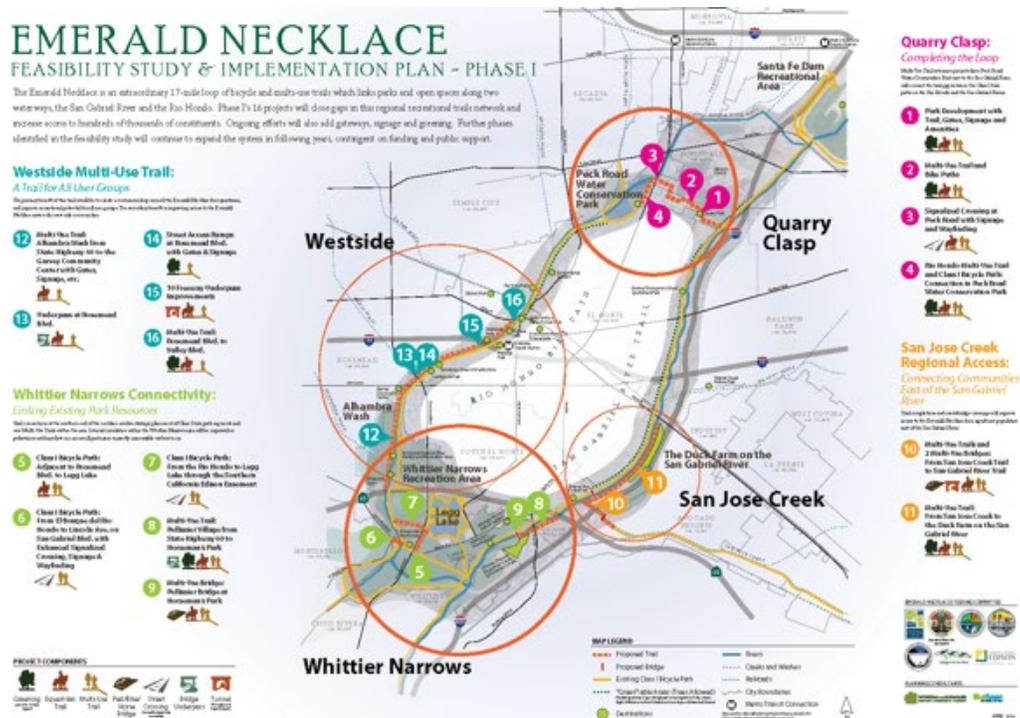
The San Gabriel River Center and Gardens Project will transform a 1929 Spanish colonial revival farmhouse into a water-wise educational resource and visitor center for the public. The surrounding demonstration gardens will include the construction of practical landscape-oriented water capture and conservation strategies that average homeowners can achieve in their own landscapes.

San Gabriel Valley Greenway Network Strategic Implementation Plan: The Plan is a multi-objective effort to transform existing Los Angeles County Flood Control District right of way in the San Gabriel Valley into a world-class Greenway Network in conjunction with identifying ways to upgrade and enhance the District's existing flood control facilities. The Plan will build upon the San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments' (SGVCOG) ongoing Active Transportation Planning Initiative and will highlight connectivity with other planned active transportation components and green urban infrastructure projects throughout the San Gabriel Valley.

In support of plan development the WCA has facilitated community engagement at the local level as approved by the WCA Governing Board January 2021 through an agreement with the LA County Flood Control District October 2018.

The Plan will accelerate development of greenway design standards and create cooperative agreements with other agencies to expedite project delivery for shovel ready projects. This approach will enable simultaneous implementation of high priority greenway projects while ensuring consistency with the broader master planning of the Greenway Network.

Emerald Necklace: The last meeting was November 17, 2022. WCA staff provided updates on its Emerald Necklace projects in both construction and planning stages, including River Park, San Gabriel River Center and Gardens, San Gabriel River Walk, and River Park Equestrian Center. The group will continue to meet quarterly in an effort to identify funding, prepare grant applications and seek to partner to develop projects identified in the Emerald Necklace Plan.



The Emerald Necklace is a 17-mile interconnected network of existing and envisioned bikeways, multi-use trails, parks, and greenways along the Rio Hondo and the San Gabriel River. Along the Rio Hondo the Emerald Necklace stretches from Peck Road Water Conservation Park in the north to the Whittier Narrows

Recreation Areas in the south. Along the San Gabriel River, it stretches from Hanson Quarry in the north to Whittier Narrows Recreational Area in the south.

The Emerald Necklace Implementation Plan – Phase 1 (Proposed Project) includes 15 related projects that would close gaps in a regional recreational trails network and increase access to the trails to hundreds of thousands of people in the project area.

Mid/Upper San Gabriel River Technical Assistance and Planning: The WCA has entered into an agreement with the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project (SCCWRP) to install additional water temperature sensors and has closed two RFPs for both supplemental biological study as well as tributary mapping and concept development.

The LA County Sanitation Districts have initiated a temperature study for surface water discharges into the San Gabriel River and Rio Hondo watersheds. That study is to evaluate conditions and set plans for source control at the 5 water reclamation plants in these areas for actions spanning the next ten years. This supplemental study is structured to support these efforts and serve as references for plan work, implementation, and site management across the Mid/Upper San Gabriel River watershed.

Lower Los Angeles River Technical Assistance: The WCA is working to facilitate realization and assistance for Lower LA River projects and stakeholder engagement. The WCA has been coordinating with RMC staff and has started meeting with local cities and working to identify and support project leads.

Lower Los Angeles River Technical Assistance is made possible by a technical services grant authorized by the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) through the Proposition 68 Grant Program. The purpose of the project is to facilitate project realization along the Lower Los Angeles aligned with the Lower LA River Revitalization Master Plan (LLARRP), San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy Common Ground, and watershed planning principles maximizing benefits for both local and regional communities.

Foothills Open Space Engagement and Preacquisition: Interviews with appraisers resulted in the RFQ which is currently being prepared (Item 15).

Azusa Foothills Acquisitions and Interim Land Management Plan: Wildscape Restoration submitted draft Invasive Species Management Guidelines for the Azusa Foothills Open Space parcels. WCA is expecting the finished Guidelines by January 15, 2023.

Over 100 people of all ages participated in seven stewardship and engagement workshops which took place from November to January. Six workshops were hikes to Art and Chema's Overlook on WCA's Azusa Foothills Open Space lands on Glendora Ridge above Azusa. Three walks were co-organized with Azusa Beautiful: Birdwatching 101 and Bird Photography (Raul Roa), We are Visible: Local History of the Gabrieleno People and their Resilience (Kevin and Nathan Nunez), and Hiking with California Native Plants (Brenda Kyle and Michael Garcia). Suzanne Avila, MA, led two hikes (Think River! and It's Still the Stone Age) as well as an interactive workshop in the El Encanto conference room (Canyon City Heritage). Elizabeth Renteria, LCSW, presented Nature as a Wellbeing Intervention as a hike, and will be presenting

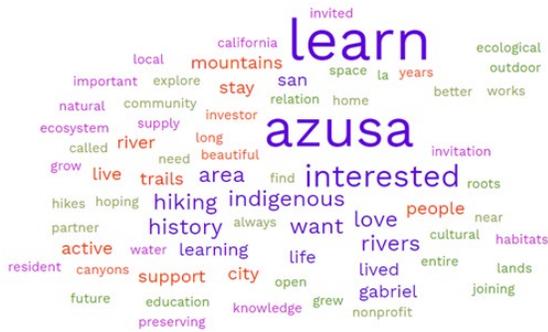
the same content in Spanish on January 21, 2023. The full schedule of workshops was shared on WCA social media and City of Azusa communications outlets, and can also be viewed at: https://www.wca.ca.gov/azusa_foothills_stewardship_workshops

The workshops enabled WCA to test the logistics of a guided access program and its impacts on Rancho Vasquez as well as the immediate residential neighborhood. Feedback so far has been positive, showing there is demand for access opportunities to continue.

The final Stewardship Plan for the Azusa Foothills Open Space will include both the Invasive Species Management Guidelines as well as a summary of workshop themes, discussion, and participant recommendations for structuring future access programs.

Below: Word clouds generated from responses to “Tell us (briefly) why you chose to participate in this workshop”. The largest words in each cloud are mentioned the most times in responses.

Think River



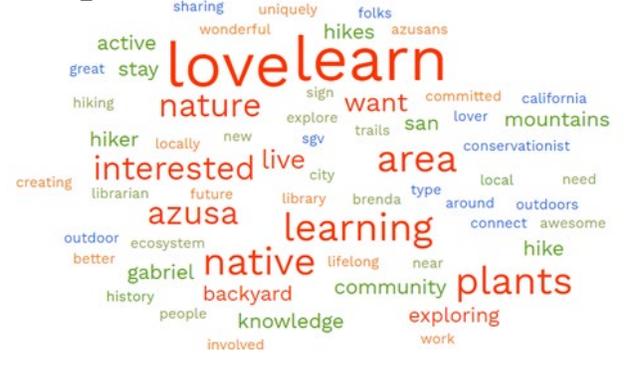
We are Visible



Nature as a Wellbeing Intervention

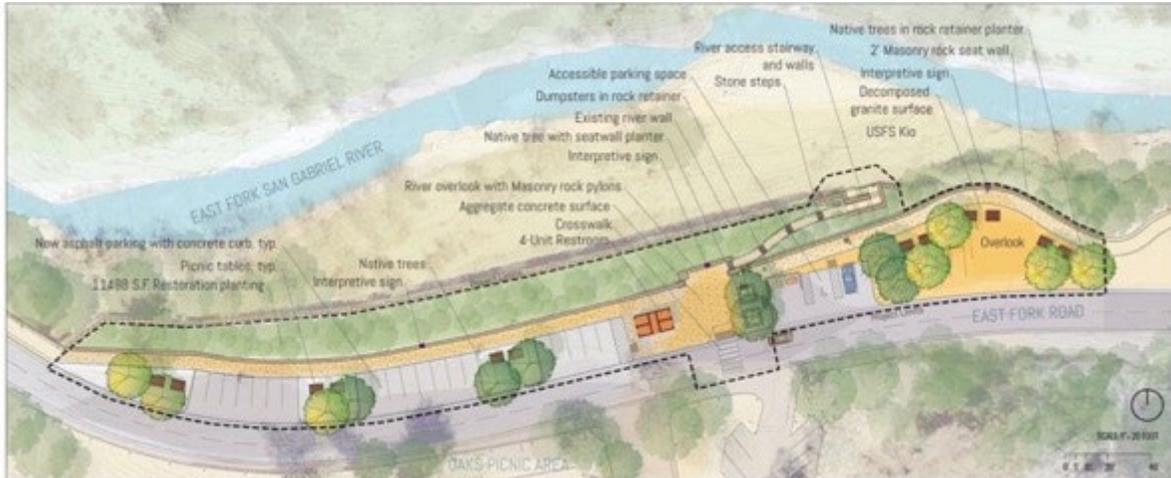


Hiking with Native Plants



The Azusa Foothills open space acquisitions protect some of the last undeveloped private holdings along the foothills from development, in order to support watershed restoration, community-driven stewardship, and compatible public uses. WCA acquisition of these lands augments an existing cluster of contiguous public conservation lands in the Azusa Foothills that includes WCA’s River Wilderness Park, Azusa-RMC Open Space, and City of Pasadena Open Space.

Mt Baldy Wilderness Preserve Fuel Modification: 16 program participants and six crew supervisors from The San Gabriel Valley Conservation Corps (SGVCC) worked under the supervision of California Botanic Garden in the first phase of broom removal at Mt. Baldy Wilderness Preserve. The crews removed 160



Initial concept plan for the Oaks River Access project

Along a 2.5-mile segment of the East Fork San Gabriel River recreational use is highly concentrated. This heavy use combined with the lack of facilities has resulted in degraded conditions. In response, the Cattle Canyon Project seeks to better manage the recreational use and balance the needs for resource project within this area of the San Gabriel Mountains.

Walnut Creek Habitat & Open Space: WCA continues to work on the remaining scope of work on its Prop A mini grant, which was extended to September 2023 to facilitate close out of the lot line adjustment with the Buddhist Tzu-Chi Foundation. In December 2022, Phil & Sons removed a cluster of invasive palm trees from the site.

In November 2022, WCA and Tzu Chi met with Southland Civil Engineering on site to stake boundaries of areas to be exchanged. Using those points, Southland Civil Engineering prepared an exhibit showing the areas to be exchanged to be equal in area. Minor adjustments were made to insure WCA access between eastern and western portions of the WCA parcel. Southland Civil will write a legal description of the areas designated and submit the application for lot line adjustment to LA County. WCA is drafting a use and maintenance agreement for Tzu Chi's continued use of road access through the WCA parcel.





Some examples of the interpretive and operational signs installed at the Walnut Creek Nature Loop trail.



WALNUT CREEK – WEST PHASE ONLY

Acquired in 2008, the Walnut Creek Habitat and Open Space Property is a total of approx. 60.8 acres. Approximately 6.7 acres are owned by the City of San Dimas and 54 acres are owned by the WCA.