



FIGURE 1: Hidden L.A.

PHOTO: DIGITALLY REPRODUCED BY THE USC DIGITAL ARCHIVE ©2004,  
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# LOS ANGELES RIVER 3.0: CHANGING THE COURSE OF LOS ANGELES

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## Introduction

The Los Angeles (LA) River is a disruptive force that has changed the face of the city since its beginnings. The river has gone through multiple iterations as a critical source of fresh water, an infrastructure project for controlling flooding, and now a public resource for a sustainable city. Once disguised, the LA River is now being openly enjoyed by the public, from kayaking, cycling, and horseback riding to bike-in movie screenings. This renewed attention to the river is driving major investment. In summer 2013, the LA River Revitalization Corporation broke ground on the first philanthropically funded bridge in LA. The landmark La Kretz Crossing connects East and West Los Angeles, linking the newly expanded North Atwater Park to 4,200-acre Griffith Park via a bicycle, pedestrian, and equestrian structure. With spectacular views of the LA River, the surrounding parks, and downtown Los Angeles, the cable-stayed bridge will announce the river's rebirth.

All the good that is happening reflects tremendous changes in attitudes toward the river that date back to the beginning of Los

Angeles. In 1781, the fresh water of the Los Angeles River attracted the forty-four settlers known as “Los Pobladores” who planted the seeds of a city. The river was lush and green, and a central place for residents to work and play. In the 1940s, to protect against flooding and to support the infrastructure needed to grow a city with roads and rail, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers channelized the river into what we see today. Now, through a series of public-private partnerships, Los Angeles has an opportunity to create the longest urban greenway in the country. An LA River Greenway will transform LA. For too long, Angelenos have been stuck in a concrete landscape—frustrated that the only river they know is one of cars and cement. Every world-class city has defining public spaces—this is ours. It can be thought of as a linear Central Park—a grand public space that will redefine how we connect with Los Angeles. That is what the LA Greenway is truly about: connectivity. The LA Greenway will connect LA communities fragmented by major roads, connect Angelenos to their environment, and connect Angelenos to one another. Imagine a place, tracing from the San Fernando Valley, through the heart of downtown Los Angeles, and out through Long Beach Port, where kids can play, families can picnic, people can gather, and restored nature can flourish.

Transforming the Los Angeles River means turning what has historically been seen as a liability into an innovative civic and environmental asset, linking the Santa Monica Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. We have a real opportunity to create the city where we want to live. We can enhance the quality of life in a city hungry for green space and strengthen communities by restoring the LA River to a vibrant green corridor that people from throughout the country will want to visit and enjoy. The LA River Greenway will be the single greatest transformation of Los Angeles in the twenty-first century. It's not often that you can make an impact at this scale, along the full fifty-one miles of the river pathway.

An LA River Greenway will transform LA. ...Every world-class city has defining public spaces—this is ours. It can be thought of as a linear Central Park—a grand public space that will redefine how we connect with Los Angeles.

Looking ahead, we need to strengthen the leadership and planning to work collaboratively across sectors and jurisdictions to be effective stewards of the Los Angeles River. We need to move more river-related projects from concept to construction. We need to make the vision for the LA River tangible for the public, and highlight our project's inevitability. Building from the City's LA River Revitalization Master Plan (2007) and the County's LA River Master Plan (1996), the LA River Revitalization Corporation aims to create a broad coalition of public, private, and philanthropic interests to support a common agenda based on the Greenway 2020 campaign.

The Los Angeles River Revitalization Corporation (RRC) is an entrepreneurial nonprofit venture responsible for catalyzing responsible real estate and related community development along the Los Angeles River. Founded in October 2009, the RRC was incorporated as an independent nonprofit by the mayor and City Council to act nimbly and quickly to implement the LA River Revitalization Master Plan. This Master Plan is a twenty-five-year blueprint for transforming the thirty-two-mile stretch of the LA River that flows through the City of Los Angeles. The LA River is at the heart of our vision to create new way of living in Los Angeles—the Greenway.

Los Angeles's once sprawling landscapes of orchards, river banks, and beaches inspired millions to seek the opportunity-laden Western frontier. The river, snaking from the San Gabriel

Mountains to the Pacific Ocean, and 852 square miles of watershed served as a foundational resource that supported the quickly growing agricultural settlement. As Los Angeles grew into the West's largest economic powerhouse, the river's floods and shifting alluvial plains wreaked havoc on the factories and transportation yards that were built along the river's edges, posing a direct threat to the city's continued economic success. Thus, the river and its watershed were understood as a high-risk liability that needed to be controlled, resulting in concrete channelization in the 1930s. The transformation of the river from a rich, riparian landscape to a cement thoroughfare turned LA's once treasured life source into a piece of inaccessible infrastructure. Decades later, forgotten and ignored by the city's inhabitants, the now barren river channel, except for a few soft-bottom stretches, serves as a reminder of the river's reputation as a liability while continuously limiting natural habitats, the provision of green space and recreational opportunities, and the overall connectivity of Los Angeles's inhabitants.

In the past, cities and development were considered the antithesis of nature. More recently, however, nature and the city have been reframed as being intrinsically bound together; cities are created not through the destruction of nature but through the processing of nature from its organic state to its constructed state. Indeed, "Nature plays a complex triple role in urban development" as a resource input, as a location in space, and as a shell for our emotional and physical existence (Hall and Pfeiffer 2000, 104). In the creation and development of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles River has played each role. In each role (as a resource input, a location in space, and a shell), the river has been defined by the historical, environmental, social, and political contexts of Los Angeles itself. Today, efforts to revitalize the LA River and its tributaries offer a transformative opportunity to again redefine the river as all three roles at once.

Recent environmental efforts seek to revitalize the river's riparian ecological habitats and repurpose the river as an opportunity for parks, recreation, and community development. Through these revitalization efforts, river advocates are redefining the LA River not as a resource, a location, or an emotional and physical shell, but instead as a way to chart a new course to creating a healthier and vibrant Los Angeles, competitive and relevant to the needs of the twenty-first century. However, one of the core challenges facing these revitalization efforts is in reorienting the existing urban framework that defines the river as a single-purpose flood control mechanism toward a framework that defines the river as a multipurpose asset, ranging from parks and bike paths to opportunities for community and economic development. Further, the LA River provides critical environmental services to the greater Los Angeles watershed that are extremely valuable, in dollars and otherwise. With some of the river's natural functions restored, such as infiltrating rainwater, carrying stormwater, and providing habitat, the river's value as an asset will increase immensely.

To champion the river's multipurpose, asset-oriented framework, continued leadership and planning are needed to bring together the various environmental and greening agendas across local, county, state, and federal interests. The RRC's challenge is to articulate

how the river fits into each department's silos and then challenge the departments to work together, including across jurisdictions, to more effectively implement river restoration and responsible land use projects. The RRC seeks to explore how the river's revitalization can be streamlined with appropriate governance that creates more opportunities for habitat restoration, community involvement, economic development, and urban entrepreneurship.

This article explores the governance challenges and legislative opportunities facing the LA River's revitalization. In first examining the river's history, the article provides a contextual framework for the river as a natural resource and infrastructure. The next section will detail the different government bodies that have jurisdiction over the river and how these governance structures pose governance challenges and increased revitalization opportunities. Finally, the article offers examples of legislation that would help further the stewardship of the LA River, its watershed, and its revitalization efforts. These examples are prime opportunities for policy to set the groundwork for enhanced urban river revitalization efforts while championing the river's reputation as Los Angeles's newest, oldest asset. Indeed, the LA River can become a symbol of LA's renewal as the river serves as an opportunity to reimagine nature, and community, in the city (Gottlieb 2007).

## A Brief History of the LA River in Three Parts

### The LA River 1.0: A Natural Resource

The Los Angeles River's history can be organized into three phases: first, its original natural state (Figure 1); second, its cement mechanized state; and, now, an opportunity for ecological and urban revitalization. The RRC has termed these three phases River 1.0, River 2.0, and, currently, River 3.0, with 3.0 offering a hybrid of the river's characteristics as it existed during the 1.0 and 2.0 phases.

When settlers first moved to the Los Angeles basin, they built orchards and towns along the river's banks. The river served as the backbone of the new city's economic success. LA County became the number one agricultural county in the United States until the 1950s. As much as the city depended on the river, however, its course was erratic with constant directional changes (Gottlieb 2007, 108). At the onset of the twentieth century, the city began to rapidly industrialize, serving as the West Coast's largest port. During this time:

the LA River began to lose some of its visual appeal as anchoring the region's attractive landscape. Instead it came to be seen as a barrier for existing and future residential and industrial development along its path, owing to the propensity to carry rapidly flowing flood waters during the occasional but fierce storms that periodically occurred. (Gottlieb 2007, 139)

Along with the floods, focus on the LA River began to change with the construction of the LA aqueduct and the availability of LA's first imported water supply: The river was no longer an integral source of water for the city (Gottlieb 2007, 140). After two



**FIGURE 2:** The concrete bed of the LA River. PHOTO: EDWIN BECKENBACH

intense, destructive floods in 1934 and 1938, the city earned federal funding to finally control the river's ongoing flood risks. Since "Land-use planning is key to a locality's prosperity, demography and success" (Pinectl 2003, 981), the decision to channelize the river was key to Los Angeles's continued prosperity.

### The LA River 2.0: Mechanized Infrastructure

Plans to channelize the LA River were developed in the 1930s and implemented during the '40s and '50s by the Works Progress Commission (Artz 2012a; Armstrong 2012). When the Army Corps of Engineers was commissioned for the project, they were challenged to find the most effective way to provide flood control: "As the Army Corps of Engineers has often reminded its critics, Los Angeles, sited in an alluvial plain at the foot of a rugged, rapidly eroding mountain range, has the worst flood and debris problems of any major city in the Northern Hemisphere" (Davis 1999, 69). The resulting channelization design provided an effective and, indeed, elegant means of quickly conveying water from the San Gabriel Mountains to the ocean (Figure 2). The river was straightened, widened, and reinforced into a fifty-one-mile cement flood control channel, thus allowing millions of people to settle within the river's historic flood plain (Artz 2012a).

Although this strategy solved Los Angeles's flood problems, it also "[entombed] the natural river into a concrete straightjacket – effectively destroying the riparian landscape" (Davis 1999, 69). Predictably, the channelization of the river redefined the urban landscape: "Areas surrounding the river became fenced off, a forbidden territory that effectively [belonged] to the engineering agencies" (Gottlieb 2007, 141). At the time, however, the involved parties, including the city and the Army Corps of Engineers, did not necessarily understand that building this massive piece of infrastructure would damage the environment forever and set in motion this disconnect between people and nature (Armstrong 2012). In the decades following the channelization, the river became increasingly divorced from its natural origins. Since the river exists as



**FIGURE 3:** A view of an integrated social and environmental Greenway north of present-day downtown. PHOTO: PORT A+U

a concrete flood channel rather than a river, communities and houses along the edge have literally turned their backs to the river, viewing it as a liability and an eyesore.

### LA River 3.0: Paradise Unpaved

River 3.0 is just beginning. Technology has advanced in the sixty years wherein we can maintain flood control capacity, while we restore some of the river’s natural functions and bring the city back to the river once again. River 3.0, as envisioned in the city’s Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan (LARRMP), will transform the river channel from its single-use purpose as a flood control mechanism to a multi-benefit asset for ecological restoration, greening and recreation, and community development (Figure 3). Just as the city rationalized channelizing the river to protect local prosperity and success in the 1930s, the LARRMP’s river-focused land-use planning is also key to the city’s “prosperity, demography, and success.” Restoring some of the river’s natural functions will not only provide immense ecological benefits to the river and its watershed but will also provide economic and social value: “Parks and open space, clean air, and attractive waterways are visible components of attractive urban regions, and should be added to the understanding of how localities promote economic development in a competitive globalized world” (Pinectl 2003, 982). The LARRMP links economic development, community revitalization,

and habitat restoration strategies to create a more holistic urban river revitalization approach. The river’s environmental, social, and economic impacts do not exist in silos: They are intrinsically integrated in its construction. As more and more revitalization projects take place along the LA River, the connectivity of the environmental, social, and economic impacts must be continuously considered and understood.

The evolution of the LA River from a natural resource to a concrete channel to, next, an urban greenway reflects the changing needs of the city and its inhabitants. Today, the LARRMP is a symbol of the city’s urban regeneration efforts, offering a new framework for understanding urban LA and the important role of urban rivers in sustainable urban ecosystems. As Carey McWilliams wrote fifty years ago:

Los Angeles is a ‘land of magical improvisation,’ a characteristic that . . . can be extended to such extraordinary initiatives such as efforts to re-envision the Los Angeles River as the centerpiece of building community and reimagining nature in the city. (Gottlieb 2007, 6)

Former Los Angeles Mayor Villagrosa refers to the river’s restoration efforts as “un-paving paradise” (Armstrong 2012). Although

restoration efforts have been powered by the desire to “undo the continuous loss of urban nature (Gottlieb 2007, 51), the LA River’s revitalization is not simply about bringing nature back to the city; it’s about directing the course of the city to be relevant and competitive for the next fifty years.

## Challenges of Jurisdiction and Single-Purpose Agendas

Although the LA River was originally solely under the jurisdiction of Los Angeles County and the Army Corps of Engineers, today the river is controlled by multiple governance scales, including city, county, state, and federal. Because the river is not under a single jurisdiction, it is especially important that the river is considered in the environmental and greening agendas of each governing layer. At the city level, for example, decisions regarding the river require the involvement of multiple departments, including the Bureau of Engineering, Bureau of Sanitation, Department of City Planning, and Department of Parks and Recreation. Rather than excluding the river from the departments’ agendas, as was often the case, the river’s revitalization provides an opportunity for different departments to develop cohesive strategies that streamline processes relating to the river’s revitalization projects. Before the ways in which governance structures and policies can facilitate revitalization are explored, the current multi-scalar (and multipurpose) projects that are taking place along the LA River, their limitations, and opportunities must be understood.

## Federal and City: The Army Corps of Engineers’ LA River Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ LA River Ecosystem Restoration (ARBOR) Study is investigating opportunities to restore the critical natural and cultural heritage resource that is the LA River, which flows through historically disadvantaged communities and underserved neighborhoods of Los Angeles (Figure 4). The seven-year, \$9.7 million study will lead to the restoration of two thousand acres of habitat along eleven miles of the river from downtown to Griffith Park, to revitalize and create a functional, connected watershed that will provide a more diverse ecological system across the region.

The project will provide an economic boost to the area, increasing property values in the vicinity of the study area and improving the quality of life for residents of Los Angeles. Many of the historically disadvantaged communities along the river do not have access to open space resources and have high unemployment rates. The project will provide an opportunity to rectify this environmental injustice.

Although the LARRMP advocates for projects that provide restoration and recreation, the Army Corps of Engineers is assigned to provide habitat restoration and endangered species protection, with limits on the percentage of the study that can be used in recreational development. However, the ARBOR Study is bringing much needed local and federal attention to the LA River and its potential future redevelopment. Indeed, part of the challenge for the



FIGURE 4: A map of the Army Corps of Engineers’ ARBOR area.

PHOTO: ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

Army Corps of Engineers’ ARBOR project team is to make a case to show that “urban ecosystem restoration has a place in the Corps’ restoration initiative” (Artz 2012b). If the ARBOR Study becomes a federally supported project, then the LA River will directly benefit while the importance of urban river restoration is elevated as whole.

At the local level, the RRC plays an integral role in building political, stakeholder, and community support for the river’s ecological restoration. In linking the river’s environmental restoration to local communities and opportunities for economic development, the ARBOR Study becomes more than just a habitat restoration project. The study is a means of paving the way for increased activity and investment in the river’s overall revitalization.

## Federal: Urban Waters Federal Partnership

The LA River Watershed has been chosen for the Urban Waters Federal Partnership’s first phase pilot program, which is focused on communities. The Partnership, which consists of thirteen federal agencies including, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of the Interior, and Department of Energy, seeks to “revitalize urban waters and the communities that surround them, transforming overlooked assets into treasured centerpieces and drivers of urban renewal” (Urban Waters Federal Partnership 2011b, 1), with a particular aim to improve urban water areas in blighted communities. Similar to the RRC’s local efforts, the Partnership asks government agencies to break down their program silos to pursue a collective effort that will “reverse past neglect, energize existing programs, and engage new partners” (Urban Waters Federal Partnership 2011b, 1). In many ways, the Partnership serves as a federal-level model of what the RRC aims to achieve at the local level. By creating opportunities for agencies, departments, and organizations to work across programs toward the same revitalization goals, the overall long-term benefits will be more effective for all participants.

The LA River Watershed was one of seven locations chosen for the First Phase Pilot Program. Similar to the objectives of the

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LARRMP, the LA River Watershed's project will enhance flood protection, improve water quality through green infrastructure, facilitate safe public access, and revitalize riparian ecosystems (Urban Waters Federal Partnership 2011a). In addition to the federal partners, the local project will also partner with state agencies (such as State Coastal Conservancy and Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority), local government agencies (including the City of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles County Flood Control District), and nongovernmental organizations (including the RRC, LA Conservation Corps, and Friends of Los Angeles River [FoLAR]). These multi-scalar partnerships will be working together to complete a multitude of projects, feasibility studies, and outreach programs over the next two years. Most importantly, "The Partnership helps . . . coalesce local leaders around issues of national importance which, in turn, helps encourage practical grassroots projects that are better coordinated and implemented more efficiently given limited resources" (Urban Waters Federal Partnership 2011a). Here the RRC's efforts to elevate the conversation about the LA River watersheds become important. In articulating how the river and its wider watershed relate to different projects, agencies, and organizations, multi-scalar organizations can work across program areas to make the LA River a leader in the national urban waters revitalization effort.

### Federal: America's Great Outdoors Initiative

In 2010, President Obama launched America's Great Outdoors (AGO) Initiative to develop local agendas for conservation and recreation. Similar to the Urban Waters Federal Partnership, the AGO is working to make the federal government a better partner with states and local communities while encouraging local, grassroots conservation and restoration initiatives. In the AGO's fifty-state report, which outlines some of the country's most promising opportunities to reconnect communities with nature, two California projects were highlighted. One was recreational efforts for the LA River (U.S. Department of the Interior 2011). As a result, the Department of the Interior (DOI), which has led this initiative, will work with its key bureaus (including the National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management) to make

resources available to support the goals of the LARRMP, especially for river revitalization efforts and building recreational trails along the river's edge. This groundbreaking federal initiative encourages partnerships to occur from the ground-up and highlights the importance of local knowledge as it relates to urban conservation issues. In this vein, there's a distinct opportunity for local LA organizations to leverage their energy and resources to instigate river revitalization partnerships and projects.

### State: Senate Bill 1201

Most recently, and perhaps most importantly, California passed Senate Bill 1201 in 2012 as a result of the advocacy group Friends of the Los Angeles River who championed greater access to the LA River. After decades of the flood channels being closed to the public, the bill legalizes access to the soft-bottom sections of the LA River by reclassifying natural-bottom flood channels as natural rivers, which is necessary to release local agencies from liability for harm that occurs in flood channels. SB 1201 also created the Los Angeles River Interagency Access Council, which will coordinate state and local agencies in providing public access and developing safety policies for the LA River. Although SB 1201 occurred later in the LA River's revitalization timeline, the passing of the legislation indicates that restoration and recreational efforts can actually take place in that relevant projects can ensure access to previously inaccessible areas.

### County: LA County's Sediment Management Strategic Plan

The County's role is primarily focused on flood control and environmental management of the LA River. In 1996, the County developed the Los Angeles River Master Plan, which outlines a system of greenway trails and parks along the entire river and through several cities (Armstrong 2012). Because the LA County Flood Control District manages the LA River as a flood control mechanism, along with the Army Corps of Engineers, the Flood Control District's activities and projects, such as the County Master Plan, are often more closely oriented toward flood control efforts while the LARRMP focuses on reconnecting communities to the river. The Flood Control District manages a system of dams, reservoirs, debris basins, and other drainage infrastructure, which reduces the risk of floods but simultaneously results in highly unnatural sediment transport in the river itself. LA County's Department of Public Works recently created the Sediment Management Strategic Plan to provide direction on how to handle new challenges of sediment management and how to pursue other management alternatives that can reduce the negative environmental impacts. Although the Strategic Plan is a living document that still primarily focuses on flood risk management and water conservation, the plan is a unique opportunity for the County to pursue more environmentally focused flood management activities. Such activities could include opportunities for more natural sediment control and reduced vegetation removal to increase the river's natural habitat and aesthetic qualities. Through the Sediment Management Strategic Plan and other similar projects, the County will play a key role in shifting perception of the river from a single-function flood control channel to a multi-benefit river with ecological value.

## LA City: Community Specific Plans and Tributary Protection

The City of Los Angeles is the champion and steward of the LA River revitalization efforts. In various partnership and management roles, the City's LA River Project team, housed in the Bureau of Engineering, serves as a focal point for facilitating revitalization and restoration efforts. In a partnership role, the City is the "public entity helping to implement [the LARRMP] and [is] the local sponsor of the Army Corps of Engineers' LA River Revitalization Feasibility Study" (Armstrong 2012). In a management role, the City oversees the development and eventual implementation of the River Improvement Overlay (RIO) District, which outlines specific land zoning rules that will reorient communities and plant palettes toward revitalizing the river's riparian landscapes. Community planning areas and community specific plans, such as the Cornfield Arroyo Seco Specific Plan, are areas where the city is developing plans to reorient communities toward the river while leveraging the environmental and recreational benefits. Such activities will prove critical as components of the LARRMP are implemented and if the Army Corps of Engineers' feasibility study becomes a funded project. Further, the City protects the tributary streams that feed into the river to prevent past mistakes related to the river's channelization.

## Re-Framing the LA River

In establishing the LA River as multipurpose asset, the most influential task will be to insert the river into key urban conversations to better lead and coordinate the river's transformation into a great urban greenway. Although the river in recent history has been framed as a piece of mechanized infrastructure, protecting LA's population from harm, the LARRMP has outlined a path to restore some of the river's natural qualities while reconnecting communities and the city of Los Angeles as a whole to the broader watershed. Indeed, "Part of the power of the efforts to restore or at least modify the LA River's current state as a concrete channel has been the power of nostalgia, the desire to undo the continuous loss of urban nature" (Gottlieb 2007, 51). The LARRMP's environmental restoration, recreational development, and community revitalization projects provide an opportunity for the river to be built anew. If the river is reestablished as a resource, an asset, and an actual place, then the river can effectively change the course of LA.

Although the previously outlined projects and partners have incited key, influential efforts to revitalize the LA River, the challenge is elevating river restoration conversations at the local level. Conveying the plan to the public continues to be difficult. Moreover, there is "still widespread lack of awareness of the LA River, that it exists at all" (Armstrong 2012). Although public awareness is important, the attention of policy and legislation could lead to key changes that will streamline and encourage revitalization efforts from several perspectives. Further, in the river's current form, the LA River is, quite literally, a piece of infrastructure. To repurpose a piece of infrastructure, there must be attention from the highest levels of government. Although federal involvement thus far (such as the Army Corps of Engineers' Feasibility Study and the Urban

Watersheds Federal Partnership) has initiated this attention, an ecosystem of policy and legislation must be built to support and continue these efforts. Although grassroots organizations, such as FoLAR, have advocated for the river's revitalization since the 1980s and many local organizations and public entities have successfully implemented pocket parks, river trails, and more, these organizations are limited when it comes to affecting infrastructure. At the moment, neither local organizations nor government agencies have the means to build multimillion-dollar, multi-jurisdiction projects. As the LA River illustrates, urban river revitalization:

raises a series of questions about how environmental management is being incorporated into urban governance in different urban contexts, not least in terms of how local territorial structures associated with ecological modernization are situated in relation to those concerned with promoting urban development, managing territorial redistribution and the like. (While, Jonas, and Gibbs 2004, 549–50)

## Articulating the LA River: A Series of Vignettes

This section explores examples of how the river's profile could be elevated in the agendas of different government departments and agencies. More importantly, elevating the river's profile as an asset, a benefit, and a place across multiple agendas can further reduce programmatic silos and invite enhanced cross-governmental partnerships. The first examples examine how current policy or legislation could be modified to streamline revitalization and restoration efforts. The next set of examples explores potential measures of which, if they're put forth, the river should be a focal point. These vignettes articulate examples of how organizations can and should begin to think about the river in a multipurpose, asset-based framework.

### LA County Storm Water Pollution Measure

LA County's Storm Water Pollution measure from the Los Angeles County Flood Control District, which was recently deferred from being placed on the ballot, proposed placing a levy on all property owners within the district. The parcel fee would have raised an estimated \$290 million per year to help cities and the County mitigate water quality issues stemming from polluted stormwater and urban runoff. Although tight budgets were of significant concern for public agencies residing within the flood control district, a different approach to the measure might have elicited a different response. For example, if the river's restoration goals, as outlined in the LARRMP, Proposition 84, and the Feasibility Study, had been included as one of the main reasons for the Storm Water Pollution Measure, then the flood control communities may have had a better vision of the benefits of mitigating water quality issues. The parcel fee might have been considered more than an additional property cost but instead would have been part of the larger, transformational effort behind re-imagining the river and the future of Los Angeles. The Storm Water Pollution Measure would provide much needed eco-services for treating the river's polluted, potentially hazardous, stormwater runoff. Given the recent passing of SB 1201, which allows public

access to the natural bottom portions of the flood channel, the proposed stormwater treatments are especially important. However, because the measure did not promote the broader environmental and health benefits of revitalizing the river as a whole, the measure's long-term benefits failed to capture the public's imagination.

### LA River Greenway 2020

Imagine a fifty-one-mile continuous greenway from Canoga Park in the Valley to Long Beach. More than twenty-six miles of paths already exist. The LA River Greenway 2020 campaign aims to close the gap on the remaining twenty-four miles to create one of the largest urban greenways in the country. The RRC seeks to build a shared vision and partnership with leaders from public agencies, design, nonprofits, and philanthropy communities to collaborate, integrate planning, and raise public and private resources. Access to and along the river is the catalyst to activate this great public resource. The Greenway is more than an environmental project. It is critical to connecting the divided and expansive Los Angeles metropolis, linking together fourteen cities and the diverse communities that span the river's length. The LA River Greenway is key to anchoring a permanent, regional non-motorized transportation corridor in Los Angeles County. Greenway 2020 would not only provide Angelenos safe routes for commuting to work but would also create more access to open space and recreation for the underserved neighborhoods along the River. A continuous bike path would fundamentally transform the way Angelenos relate to the river and move across the region. In addition to non-motorized transit opportunities, the Greenway opens opportunities for increased public transit, as one third of all Metro stops are within one mile of the river.

Key projects to extend this LA River Greenway are in motion. As part of the Evolution project, NBC/Universal will extend the existing seven-mile greenway to Lankershim by 2016. The RRC will work to extend the Greenway from Lankershim along the river to Balboa Park and then to Warner Center to complete the river's westward leg. Concurrently, the RRC will work to bridge the gap between the end of the existing Elysian Valley bike path at the north edge of downtown and the City of Vernon, where the existing river path resumes and travels the remaining 16.8 miles to the ocean.

Momentum for the LA Greenway has been building. Legislative bill AB735 was recently introduced in Sacramento by Representative Jimmy Gomez to champion greenways statewide. Mentioning the LA River by name, this initiative is part of a broader Greenway 2020 campaign to build support. Greenway 2020 captures the imagination of the public. It continues to engage key public agencies. The RRC has been central to the effort to make the case for the LA River as a leading civic priority.

To leverage the resources and funds required to accomplish LA River Greenway 2020, Los Angeles will need to work in partnership. Revitalizing the LA River will be the single greatest transformation of Los Angeles in the twenty-first century. The RRC will lead the charge and create the essential public, private and philanthropic partnerships this project needs to succeed.

With some of the river's natural functions restored, such as infiltrating rainwater, carrying stormwater, and providing habitat, the river's value as an asset will increase immensely.

### Conclusion

The Los Angeles River is an integral part of the history of Los Angeles. Once forgotten, the river is now being reimagined as the heart of a more sustainable city. The LA River is an idea whose time has come. The revitalization of the LA River will be a key test of the feasibility of public-private partnerships to pave the way toward tangible change. An ambitious vision, the revitalization is an indicator of the public values of the Los Angeles, and the extent to which the city can come together to shape its urban landscape. The LA River will be a continuous fifty-one-mile greenway that creates open space, connectivity, and economic revitalization from the Valley to Long Beach.

The public sector is increasingly coming together to advance river transformation. Acting as a hub to cut across jurisdictions, the LA River Revitalization Corporation is working to create healthy, vibrant communities, enhanced green infrastructure, and better recreational facilities. River revitalization will happen; the policy and projects are already in motion. A range of city, state, and federal initiatives—described above—have created the enabling context for the LA River to thrive. The only question remaining is how long river renewal will take. One thing is clear. A restored LA River will be a centerpiece of Los Angeles—to identify the city with a sustainable future. We will transform the Los Angeles River, and, in turn, positively affect the lives and opportunities for all Angelenos.

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