

Environmental Report—March, 2016

Submitted by Joan Licari

Quemetco Battery Recycling Plant:

The latest information about the Quemetco battery recycling plant includes the following:

- The target date for sampling of areas around the plant for lead and arsenic is June 2016.
- Quemetco will have to prove that the lead found during sampling is not theirs. The Dept. of Toxic Substances control will not do the fingerprinting and will assume all is due to Quemetco unless otherwise proven false.
- Testing will begin in public right of ways
- Quemetco has agreed to ¼ mile testing to begin with sampling to begin at industrial sites first to be followed by public properties, creek, roadways etc.
- The Public Participation Specialist from DTSC is going to conduct a community survey for a one-mile radius to be sent out on March 18th with an up-date the first week in April. If this timeline can be met, field work could begin as early as late May or early June. The goal is to start mid-May.

Discovery Center Questions

Questions have recently been raised at our annual meeting and also at the last HHIA meeting in February about support by HHIA in the past for the San Gabriel River Discovery Center and whether HHIA should reconsider this backing. The Discovery Center is to be located on a site in the City of South El Monte and within the Whittier Narrows Recreation Area. This is the park in which Legg Lake, a skeet shooting range and extensive park lands are located. The project does not only include the Discovery Center but also restoration of the grounds around the center.

“The Discovery Center will present the story of the San Gabriel River watershed, emphasize the importance of water resources and the natural values of the watershed, and provide educational and outdoor experiences for people of all ages. The Center will also continue the cultural, natural history and ecosystems messages; and outdoor experiences presented by the L. A. County Department of Parks and Recreation at the existing Nature Center. The following statements will guide the Authority in its development of the Center.” (<http://discoverycenterauthority.org/about/index.html>)

The proposed 14,000 ft.² Nature Center will replace the existing Whittier Narrows Nature Center with a U.S. Green Building Council LEED Platinum standard building. The building that now exists was originally a 1920s farm house brought in to the site by the Audubon Society. The current building is in bad repair due to termite damage, lack of updated electrical system, and does not meet modern standards for visitor facilities. It is small and does not meet the needs of classes that visit the area, for storage and work areas or for meetings of community members.

The facility is located behind the Whittier Narrows Dam in an area that was flooded periodically by flow from the San Gabriel Mountains. When the Tongva/Gabrielino Native Americans and Spanish were in the area, the land was marshy due to a high water table in Whittier Narrows. The water table has dropped thus the surface is no longer wetlands. However, because of its location behind the Dam, the building will be constructed only in at an elevation that is above that which could conceivably be flooded if Southern California was receive unusual rainfall.

The project is considered as the pendent of the Emerald Necklace Project, the 17-mile long loop of trails and parks. The proposed 14,000 ft.² Nature Center will replace the existing Whittier Narrows Nature Center with a U.S. Green Building Council LEED Platinum standard building—the highest environmental rating a building can receive. It was in the area considered by the National Park Service as part of the original proposal for a national recreation area. Although the area was not included in the San Gabriel National Monument established by President Obama by proclamation, it is now included in a proposal by Representative Judy Chu submitted to Congress for national recreational area status along with the Puente-Chino Hills.

The Nature Center building that now exists was a 1920s farm house brought to the site by the Audubon Society in the 1950s. The current building is in bad repair due to termite damage, need of an updated electrical system, and buildings that do not meet modern standards for visitor facilities. It is small and inadequate to meet needs of classes that visit the area, for storage, office and work space or for meetings with community members or groups.

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The project is located between the Rio Hondo and the San Gabriel River. Bicycling, hiking and equestrian trails extend outward from the facility to link with the San Gabriel River channel and the Emerald Necklace trail along the San Gabriel River. The project goal is to operate an interpretive center in the area to educate the general and school age public within a 25-mile radius. Throughout the years, thousands of children from local schools have been guided through the area by volunteer docents from the existing Whittier Narrows Nature Center.

The area was once used by the Tongva/Gabrielino Native Americans for hunting, gathering and fishing for salmon that once ran in the waters of the nearby river. There is, however, no evidence that the area was a permanent village site. The original San Gabriel Mission was located close-by, but was abandoned due to flooding after a few years and moved to its present site in the City of San Gabriel. One of the last battles in the war between Mexico and the United States was fought across the Rio Hondo and on the bluffs nearby and the Sanchez Adobe is in the vicinity—making the Discovery Center an ideal place to recount the early history of Native Americans, Spanish, Mexican era, the oil development in the Montebello Hills. The site was

also used as a walnut orchard before construction of the dam and for cattle grazing. Historic designation sought for the building was refused because it is not located on its original site.

Vegetation around the current building site is in lawn, with a mix of non-native plants such as London Plane trees and *Sequoia sempiverans* and natives. An L.A County Sheriff's station, also in disrepair is located adjacent to the building.

Stage one of the project will involve improvements to the landscaped areas with native plants and upgrading trails and educational signage. Funding for this part of the project has been obtained. It will include a constructed wetland, a naturalized bioswale, a covered outdoor classroom, habitat buffer, outdoor interpretive elements, 116 parking spaces with vehicle access and pedestrian pathways. Expected date of construction for Stage 1 is anticipated for September 2016. Educational materials and designs for museum displays are being developed.

Stage two will include the Nature Center building for which funding has not yet been secured and for such elements as a biologist, cultural history (Native American) monitor, and management services.

There has been controversy about this project over the years. Friends of the Whittier Narrows Nature Center have opposed the project. The Kizh Nation of Native Americans in Jan. 2015 secured a Native American Sacred Lands Designation for the area that includes parts of South El Monte and all of Whittier Narrows. The Department of Parks and Recreation and Discovery Center Authority are evaluating Native American settlement and how it affects the project



Current building and grounds



Concept of new LEED building



Inside the current building

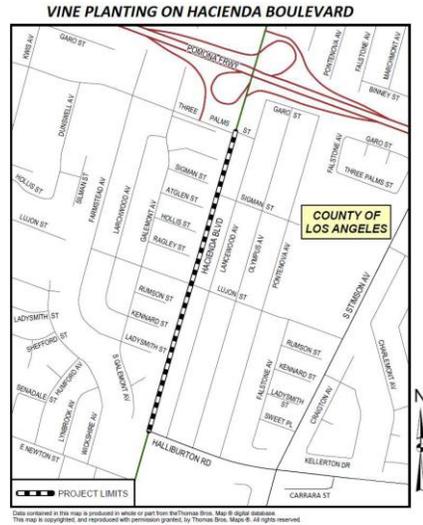
Hacienda Beautification progress:



Rendition of the Hacienda Beautification project.

The project is located along Hacienda Boulevard from Halliburton Road to Three Palms Street in the County unincorporated community of Hacienda Heights. Please see project map. The project is estimated to be completed this month.

The project includes: installation of a black metal trellis in front and along the existing block walls on both sides of Hacienda Boulevard; planting of vines; installation of an irrigation system.



VIOLET TRUMPET VINE
(CLYTOSTOMA CALLISTIGIODES)



CAROLINA JESSAMINE
(GELSEMIUM SEMPERVIRENS)



SCARLET TRUMPET VINE
(DISTICTIS BUCCINATORIA)

PLANT PALETTE

Hacienda Boulevard Median Relandscaping Plan (Palm tree replacement)

A meeting was held on Feb. 23rd with the residents of Landscape Maintenance District concerning the required removal of palms along Hacienda Blvd. between La Monde to Del Prado Drive. To view the presentation from this meeting go to:

<https://dpw.lacounty.gov/rmd/lmd/docs/zone34/Zone%2034%20Presentation%20Nov.pdf>

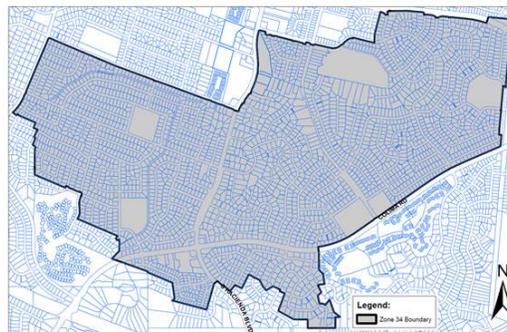
Landscape Maintenance District Zone 34 is a section of Hacienda Heights in which residents through their property tax bills pay for planting and maintenance on the median plantings in this area. This was voted upon in the 1950s by the home owners in the area at the time.

The large median in this area had over 100 palm trees. Recently, 35 palm trees were removed because they were determined to be a potential safety risk due to ailing health caused by a number of factors, including the prolonged drought, lack of irrigation system, and disease.

Additionally, 56 other palm trees were identified as potential future hazards and will be monitored closely to determine whether or not they will be removed.

Three options for relandscaping were presented (see presentation noted above). Residents present voted for replanting planters where trees have been removed with drought resistant trees (Palo Verde trees) and shrubs. Planters will be enlarged to allow more penetration of rainwater, and shrubs will be used to fill in open spaces. No irrigation will be installed due to cost constraints. Plants and trees will be watered periodically by water trucks until established.

A segment of the median along Hacienda Boulevard at Annellen Street identified and the Dept. of Public Works has retrofitted one of the existing planter area with new drought-tolerant landscaping so residents can see what the plantings would look like.



The area included in Landscape Maintenance District 34

Duck Farm Progress

Extending along a 1-mile stretch of the San Gabriel River, the 31± acre Duck Farm River Park project is a work in progress as the Watershed Conservation Authority transforms this former Woodland Duck Farm site into an urban greenway like none other in the San Gabriel Valley.

The park, when completed, will reconnect the community with nature and the river through a 1.5-mile trail loop, river overlook, native planting, demonstration garden, dry-stream, picnic area and interpretation. It is our hope to inspire the public, and especially local youth for future generations, to learn more about our watershed, water conservation and sustainability. Native landscaping and a river overlook will connect residents with the natural and historical identity of the San Gabriel River Watershed. While other iconic landscape elements and trailside interpretive stations will inform park guests of the story of green energy from sun, wind, and water sources. The story of water conservation and replenishment will be further revealed at the overlook alongside the San Gabriel River.

Currently soil remediation is being conducted in the area due to the use of this area as a duck farm.



Diagram of plans for the Duck Farm