

HACIENDA HEIGHTS IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION
COMMITTEE REPORT
ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE
JEFF YANN, CHAIR

MEETING DATE: October 20, 2014

SAN GABRIEL MOUNTAINS NATIONAL MONUMENT

At a widely publicized event at Bonelli Park, President Obama signed a proclamation creating the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument encompassing 345,000 acres of Angeles National Forest located within the watershed of the San Gabriel River. While this act alone does not achieve the goal of enhancing protection for the river and hillside areas near Hacienda Heights, it is hoped that it will serve as a catalyst for Congress to implement the full National Recreation Area envisioned in HR 4858. As an example, the day after the proclamation was signed, on our recent vacation, we visited Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve. This park was originally created as Great Sand Dunes National Monument by President Herbert Hoover in 1932. In 2004, Congress approved its status as a national park with the addition of a substantial acreage in both the local mountains, including 14,000 foot Kit Carson Peak, and prairie lands. The preserve will eventually include a bison herd. Hopefully, a similar transition to include the important areas in the NRA bill can happen more quickly.

SAN GABRIEL RIVER DISCOVERY CENTER:

From Elva Yanez of the **San Gabriel River Discovery Center** Authority

On October 9, the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board released a hold on \$2.2 million previously allocated for construction of the Discovery Center, but constrained to await completion of fundraising for this project. These funds, along with approximately \$5 million previously authorized by the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy and Supervisor Gloria Molina, will allow design and construction of facilities planned for the grounds of the Center. These include an outdoor classroom for school groups, a restored wetland to filter local storm water, nature exhibits and trails, and significant habitat restoration on the former agricultural land within the Discovery Center campus. These improvements, coupled with the Youth Science Center's EcoVoices program, which will continue in the new outdoor classroom, will begin to illustrate the important environmental message of the Discovery Center and, presumably, serve as a magnet for funding to complete the exhibit hall. In addition, it will result in a substantial improvement in the existing condition of the current Nature Center.

SOLID WASTE ALTERNATIVE TECHNOLOGIES

Senate Bill 498, introduced by Senator Richard Lara, was signed by Governor Brown. Although, as noted last month, this bill does not accomplish all that was initially hoped for in promoting conversion technologies, it provides an opening to move further toward implementation. Next week, Public Works plans to present a roadmap for future activities for approval by the Board of Supervisors, including a proposal to host an annual conference on the benefits of these technologies in achieving a zero-waste strategy for both the County and State. The last conference attracted many attendees and Don Knabe served as its keynote speaker.

SAN GABRIEL RIVER DISCOVERY CENTER:

On Thursday, October 9, 2014, the San Gabriel River Discovery Center took a major step towards becoming a reality.

At a packed hearing before the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Board, more than 125 students, conservation workers, scientists, youth counselors, representatives of local Native American communities, San

Gabriel Valley community members along with representatives from Heal the Bay, the Natural Resources Defense Council and other environmental groups, listened, applauded and testified.

They all turned out in support of the Discovery Center vision to revitalize a major Southern California watershed area and provide a state of the art environmental education facility for the children and families of the San Gabriel Valley and other inland communities. (See below to get a sense of the diversity of stakeholders who attended.)

The Regional Board staff presented a report recommending approval of a revised work plan for the two-stage Discovery Center project that would re-order the project sequence: stage one would build on the existing successful [EcoVoices](#) environmental education program at Whittier Narrows and restore and support local habitat, stage two would create a state-of-the-art interpretive center.

Mark Stanley, Executive Officer of the San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority, provided Board members a detailed update on the educational programming currently taking place at the Discovery Center site and the improvements to be made in stage one of the construction.

The EcoVoices program has been a successful program for over 5, 000 students--and that's barely scratching the surface, Stanley said. "Our program element is based on providing information about the watershed that we all live in, giving folks the opportunity to not only understand their home environment but the community around it and around the watershed."

It's very important that people understand the way water impacts our lives, he added.

He outlined the proposed Stage One improvements including a covered outdoor classroom for EcoVoices; a 29,000 square foot constructed wetlands to filter and cleanse storm water on site; habitat restoration and bioswales with storm water treatment functions, the replanting of a walnut woodland area.

The Regional Water Board's Executive Officer, Sam Unger, is expected to approve the project's revised work plan that allows for the release of \$2.2 million in Supplemental Environmental Project (SEP) funds for construction of water quality components and restoration of the site area.

Fifteen speakers testified in support of the Discovery Center mission.

Gabrielino/Tongva Nation representative Sandonne Goad spoke to the future.

"When you agree to support the Discovery Center, you will not only be gaining a new generation of environmental stewards, but conscientious guardians of our water resources."

Comments addressed the need for water quality improvements to the site, equitable environmental education for students living in the San Gabriel Valley and restoration of local habitat. Significantly, there were no opposition speakers at the publicly noticed meeting.

Following public comment, Board members spoke about the importance of the project, the current drought and the recent National Monument designation of the San Gabriel Mountains by President Obama. They also applauded the participation of the students from Wilson High School's Environmental Science Academy and the San Gabriel Valley Conservation Corps members—beneficiaries of the Discovery Center and future environmental scientists, engineers and decision makers.

Once other funds already committed to the Discovery Center are secured, construction drawings for the project should be ready by April 2015 and stage one construction completed by May 2017.

Stage one includes environmental revitalization and support of EcoVoices program. Stage two will require additional funding and will include construction of the 14,000 square foot interpretive building with two classrooms, public exhibit areas, administrative offices and maintenance space as well as an open air classroom.

The San Gabriel River Discovery Center Foundation thanks everyone who attended the Regional Board meeting and the organizations they represented (listed below); thanks also to the organizations and individuals who submitted letters of support.

- Wilson High School Environmental Science Academy – 75 students; Fernando Arceniega, speaker; and teachers Michael Aragon, Anthony Orozco, Ben Elizando
- San Gabriel Valley Conservation Corps –Danny Oaxaca, Executive Director, plus 25 corps members and staff
- Youth Science Center – Richard Shope, staff and Board members
- Urban Semillas – Miguel Luna
- Anahuac Soccer Association – Raul Macias
- Gabrieleno-Tongva of San Gabriel Mission – Julia Bogany
- Gabrielino/Tongva Nation – Sandonne Goad
- Office of Assemblymember Ian Calderon – Samantha Marquez
- Office of LAUSD Board Member Monica Garcia - Klarissa Palacios
- LAUSD Eastside Superintendent's Office – David Downing
- Heal the Bay – Peter Shellenbarger and Kristen James
- Natural Resources Defense Council – Damon Nagami
- San Gabriel River Discovery Center Foundation – Belinda Faustinos and Ken Manning

We will continue to update you on future progress on the San Gabriel River Discovery Center!

Best regards,
Elva Yanez