



## **Whittier Narrows Recreation Area Master Development Plan Input Public Meeting #1 – October 23, 2008 Summary of Participant Comments**

### **Overview**

The first public meeting for the Whittier Narrows Recreation Area (WNRA) master development input process was held on October 23, 2008 at South El Monte High School, with 103 people signing in. Another 50 individuals, including the project team and core agency partners, also attended. Simultaneous translation of the presentation and facilitation of small breakout groups was provided in Spanish.

### **History and Objectives of the Planning Effort**

A master plan was completed for the Area in 1974 and updated in 1996. Population growth, demand for recreation services, and changing recreation preferences have prompted agency partners, including the Army Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles County Departments of Parks and Recreation and Public Works, the cities of Pico Rivera, South El Monte, Montebello, Whittier, and Rosemead, and the Watershed Conservation Authority and Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, to seek input for possible improvements to the Area. Opportunities for improving water quality and enhancing habitat are also being sought.

This project will result in conceptual proposals for possible improvements at the Area, and will also examine the potential impacts of those proposals. It is not a master plan update, but will provide information to the Army Corps of Engineers that may be used in a plan update.

### **Project Presentation**

The meeting began with a brief presentation that covered the following:

- Impetus for the project, and project partners
- Key focus areas for the planning effort: water resources, including flood storage, conservation, and water quality; habitat enhancement and management of invasive species; reconnecting surrounding communities to nature; recreation needs; safety and security; and management, maintenance, and operations.
- Project work plan and schedule
- Community outreach plans
- History of the WNRA
- WNRA's role in the regional "green space" system
- WNRA's role in flood storage and requirements
- WNRA's role in water conservation and groundwater recharge

- Habitat and resource values and issues
- Existing recreation uses, potential future demands

*A copy of the presentation is provided under separate cover.*

Public meeting participants were then introduced to two small-group exercises:

1. A map exercise where participants were asked the following questions and encouraged to record their comments directly on the maps or on sticky notes:
  - a. What areas of the WNRA do you use?
  - b. What areas don't you use – and why? Are there areas that you feel are underutilized?
  - c. Are there areas where you currently don't feel safe – or feel that they are safe to use?
  - a. Would you visit the WNRA more often if you could get there safely by bus, bike or on foot?
  - d. Are there areas you would like to see changed or improved – and how?
2. An image board exercise where participants were asked to place a red dot next to images that they felt were not appropriate for the WNRA and a green dot next to images that they felt the plan should pursue. Images were organized into the following categories: (a) flood storage (b) water quality (c) active recreation (d) passive recreation (e) habitat enhancement.

Results of the exercises are summarized below.

Participants were also invited to provide written comments, in a more open ended fashion, on a form provided for that purpose. These comments are also summarized below.

### **“Top 12” Issues from the Map Exercise**

Below are the most frequently mentioned issues from the map exercise. *The maps with transcribed comments are provided as a separate attachment.*

- 1) *Water Quality, Use & Drainage (16 comments)*
  - a. Irrigation & Water Recycling – irrigation system may be old and inefficient, sprays walkways and drive lanes, runs for a long time and grass gets saturated. Can there be less watering near playing hours, and more at sunup ? Can the system be upgraded/zoned to use less water ? Are there options for using recycled water to irrigate?
  - b. Health of Legg Lake + keep full for wildlife + edible fish – regular testing to assess when/where nutrient or other pollutant levels are too high.
  - c. Fill dry mitigation lakes – these are required to be kept full and have not been.
  - d. Keep water moving to prevent mosquitoes. Avoid standing water, especially if water quality best management practices are implemented.

- e. Make regular maintenance (trash removal, invasive vegetation etc.) in Rio Hondo and San Gabriel channels a priority.
- f. Improve drainage at equestrian center.
- g. Homeless population dumps grey water into lakes and creek, dog waste also a problem.

2) *Maintenance (12 comments)*

- a. (Archery/Model Airplanes/Equestrian Center /Campground/Tennis/Around Lakes) – pertains both to regular maintenance and needed capital repairs. If capital repairs can “catch up” then there may be a better chance of engaging volunteers to help with ongoing cleanup tasks.

3) *Habitat (protection, restoration & nature center maintenance) (10 comments)*

- a. Some concern for removing invasive species, due to the habitat they provide. Removal plan should be carefully phased and implemented so that areas do not lose all their vegetation – and associated habitat value – at once.
- b. Removal of invasive species – desirable, but see above.
- c. Habitat connections – need to look at regional connections.
- d. Water availability – need to ensure sufficient water remains available in lakes and channels to sustain habitat.
- e. Nature Center – access should be improved, now the building and entrance are on a “blind” corner and not visible. Many comments relating to need for strong focus on community outreach, educational programming, connection to S. El Monte science/gardening programming. Request for community meeting rooms, here or in another building.

4) *Security & Safety (9 comments)*

- a. Bicentennial Camp Ground
- b. Equestrian Area
- c. Archery
- d. Soccer fields
- e. Tennis Area
- f. Additional patrolling in remote areas – e.g. near Rio Hondo, outer reaches of archery area, homeless people congregate, sometimes people go there to drink, vandalism has been an issue, need regular patrolling

- 5) *Gardens (7 comments)*
  - a. Sensory Gardens
  - b. Edible Gardens for HS and Garden Club
  - c. Would like to see more community gardens -- strong support from monolingual Spanish-speaking participants
  
- 6) *Bathrooms (need more & need maintenance) (6 comments)*
  - a. Soccer Fields
  - b. Equestrian Areas
  - c. Archery
  - d. Tennis
  
- 7) *Traffic and Parking (6 comments)*
  - a. Vendors on Rosemead -- cause congestion
  - b. Rosemead in general – many accidents, access off Rosemead is difficult, can roadways be narrowed or traffic calmed to make access safer
  - c. Parking by Soccer Fields during Games – can get congested
  - d. Don't add parking to the Nature Center
  
- 8) *History: interpretation/markers (6 comments)*
  - a. Mark/interpret archaeological site, site of San Gabriel Mission
  
- 9) *Connections to High School, surrounding area and access (5 comments)*
  - a. Visual and physical connections to Nature Center could be improved
  
- 10) *Paths and Trails (5 comments)*
  - a. Trail Separation for different uses, especially bike and equestrian
  - b. Clear trail hierarchy – mapped routes, maybe a system of pavement markings that would help visitors relay their location if needing medical help or ranger support
  - c. ADA access – need to identify which areas are/should be accessible
  - d. Drinking Fountains
  
- 11) *Signage, Maps & Event Calendar (4 comments)*

- a. Need to implement comprehensive signage program, provide visitor maps, interpretive markers
- b. Attention to image and “branding” of WNRA is needed

12) *Recreation Center, Programming (Advertised on a Calendar) and meeting rooms (4 comments)*

### **Image Board Exercise**

Results from the “dot voting” are summarized below. *Copies of the image boards and voting are attached.*

#### *Protect & Enhance Habitat:*

- a. Overwhelming support for images of naturalized channel
- b. Overwhelming support for environmental education image

#### *Connectivity:*

- a. Trails of all types desired, except mountain biking

#### *Active Recreation:*

- a. Little support for additional soccer/golf (2: 1opposed) – many participants commented that “there were enough fields” or that “schools already provided them”
- b. Little support for additional football/baseball (2: 1opposed)
- c. Strong support for shooting/archery (2:1 and 4:1 in favor) – strong contingents for each sport were present at the meeting
- d. Strong support for equestrian activities, model aircraft (5:1 and 7:1 in favor)
- e. Strong support for disc golf -- emphasize healthy lifestyle (22 for, 0 opposed)

#### *Passive Recreation:*

- a. Very strong support for water edge access, picnicking, nature study/education, fishing

#### *Flood Management:*

- a. Strong support for channel sections that could provide for multi-use trails but support flood management objectives. We suspect that participants did not understand the park images and were reacting to the large areas of lawn.

#### *Water Quality:*

- a. General support for water quality Best Management Practices

## Open Ended Comments

Comments have been transcribed verbatim below.

**Comment 1** - County of L.A. and the US Army Corp. of Engineers are doing a great job of diversifying sporting interest making this park not just baseball or soccer fields. Shooting sport is important for our future Olympics and other international competitions. What LAR&R Club has offered is a great opportunity for youth & the public, the community and people young & old to enjoy competitive shooting sport. The closest facility of this quality is the US Olympic Training Center in Colorado. Please keep and nurture this vital asset.

- Comment 2** –
1. Improve river habitat and the park are habitats remove non-native plants.
  2. Do not add soccer fields-utilize existing school sites.
  3. Preserve our passive open space.
  4. Save any native Indian sites.

**Comment 3** - I would like to see the archery range and classes improved. Add lights for night shooting, and add shooting distances out to at least 80 yards (80 + yards would be even better.)

**Comment 4** - I did not see any images nor hear any mention of the community gardens, in particular the Earthworks Community Farm. The Earthworks community Farm is a project of the Los Angeles Conservation Corps, and provides job training and environmental education to at-risk youth in the El Monte & South El Monte areas. In addition to the economic benefit the youth receive, they also have opportunities to participate in group building activities that help them better cope with the rapidly changing world (As well as fun outings, camping, and movies.) This year alone, corps members helped to harvest over 8,000 pounds of produce from the 4.5 acre Earthworks site.

**Comment 5** - No more

- No football fields
- No Golf Course
- Improve river habitat
- No soccer fields we pay for high schools use them
- No more parking lots – use public transportation (busses or vans) so you don't mess up the natural habitat
- Police horse patrol for safety
- Groups in the park should be respected and allowed to continue without developing our open space
- Bathrooms are a good idea

**Comment 6 - Passive Open areas**

- No soccer expansion
- Map is wrong
- Natural
- Dog Park
- Patrol Guards
- Sunday park bus lines
- Peace and quiet
- Children can listen to real birds
- Leave the trees alone
- Preserve Mission Viejo archaeological site – mule fat lines

**Comment 7 - It's currently impossible to reserve soccer fields for play**

- There is a need for full size and 5-A-Side soccer fields

**Comment 8 - Gardening**

**Comment 9 -** I feel the proposed 18,500 ft<sup>2</sup> Interpretive Center is inappropriate for the WN natural area. The RMC should withdraw funding and support till a new site, outside the WNNA is selected.

**Comment 10 -** As a professional herbicide licensed applicator, I work to control invasive wild land weeds (Arundo, castor bean, ailanthus, passion vine, perennial pepper-weed, milk thistle, eucalyptus, Mexican pampalus) along the Rio Hondo and San Gabriel River Riparian Corridor and the natural habitat areas south of Durfee. My suggestions:

- (1) The Rio Hondo is the only natural, non-channelized unconfined river channel in a 10 mile radius. It deserves better management, visibility and access. Management problems: Homeless camps, exotic vegetation, urban trash brought in by floods.
- (2) The wildlife ponds between Durfee & Siphon were dry for years due to broken pumps. Yet ground-water is pumped out and cleaned of certain irrigation by the EPA facility, then dumped into the Zone 1 ditch aka Lario Creek. Why not release this water to wildlife ponds?

**Comment 11 –** I would like to add “paintball” as a recreational activity.

**Comment 12 –** We need the Army of Corps of Engineers to stop the Farmer/Workers from using the South rest-room as a wash basin. Also the Farmer infringes on our entrance road every year when replanting. We have an entrance gate but he has a section of fence down so anyone can enter the area anytime.

The farmer workers use the area next to the south fence/power lines as a latrine and you constantly smell feces and urine.

- Comment 13** -
1. Security @ Equestrian Center
  2. Manager @ Equestrian Center
  3. More trails for horses (no bikes)
  4. Drainage @ Equestrian Center
  5. More bathrooms @ Equestrian Center
  6. Trails thru park
  7. Animal safety @ Sports Arena-horses are constantly abused there. Seaca takes 1-2 hours to respond to complaints. Animals are beaten, left in the sun For 4-10 HOURS without water etc.

**Comment 14** - Think long term. Will the developments planned like the misnamed Discovery Center service children and their grand- children? The cost of \$30 million is a tax on the children is alleged to benefit because it comes from bonds.

The endangered species in the Whittier Narrows Natural Area will be impacted by construction and parking in the natural area.

Who will explain to the children about what isn't there anymore. No new habitat is being made by nature.

**Comment 15** - Building or improving the Disc golf courses. Would like to see it maintained better. Water too much. Many flooded areas. Cut the edge of the grass more often.

**Comment 16** – (un-readable-too light)

**Comment 17** -

1. The Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, Recreation Route, currently runs along the San Gabriel River, Whittier Narrows Dam and Rio Hondo. National Park Service would like to provide signs or trail markers to identify the route (“on the ground”).
2. Will the old S.G. mission site be identified and protected as part of the process?
3. There is a potential to develop a new recreational trail West from Whittier Narrows, along the SCE corridor through North Montebello. Can we plan a connecting point across Rio Hondo?
4. The trail across Whittier Dam is closed at the dam. What would it take to open access across the dam? Your plan shows this as a regional trail...

