

# WATERSHEDWISE

Volume 1, Number 2, June 1998

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## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dorothy Green

Welcome to the first issue of the Watershed Council's newsletter. This Council was formed to foster better communication between and among government agencies and between government and the community in the watershed in order to integrate planning for restoring and enhancing the watershed.

Since our incorporation as a California non-profit 501 [c]3 Corporation almost two years ago, we have successfully adopted a mission statement (p.2), developed an outline for an integrated watershed management plan, provided a forum to air problems and search for some solutions, and are

working on our first restoration, a small wetland in Hazard Park in east Los Angeles. Most importantly, we have unanimously adopted a vision of what the watershed could and should look like in thirty years.

This newsletter is designed to help facilitate better communication—to keep everyone who might be interested in the future of the watershed informed about major activities in the watershed, to profile the important agencies and community groups in the watershed, and to make the data bases and other information we have developed available to all. (see back cover)

We hold monthly Stakeholders meet-

ings which are open to anyone who might wish to attend where issues of general concern are aired. They are held on the third Wednesday of the month at County Public Works in Alhambra from 9a.m. to about noon. The minutes are mailed at no cost to everyone who wishes to be on our mailing list, as is our newsletter. We are anxious to build our mailing list to include everyone who is interested in what we do.

We would be grateful if you would share this newsletter with others, and encourage people to join with us in preserving, enhancing and restoring the many beneficial uses of our watershed. ☘

# THE LOS ANGELES & SAN GABRIEL RIVERS WATERSHED COUNCIL

801 Holmby Avenue Los Angeles, CA 90024 (310) 270-4151 fax: (310) 270-4152

To facilitate a comprehensive, multi-purpose, stakeholder driven consensus process to preserve, restore, and enhance the many beneficial uses, economic, social, environmental and biological, of the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers watersheds eco-system through education, research, planning and mediation.

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## THE VISION consensus campaign

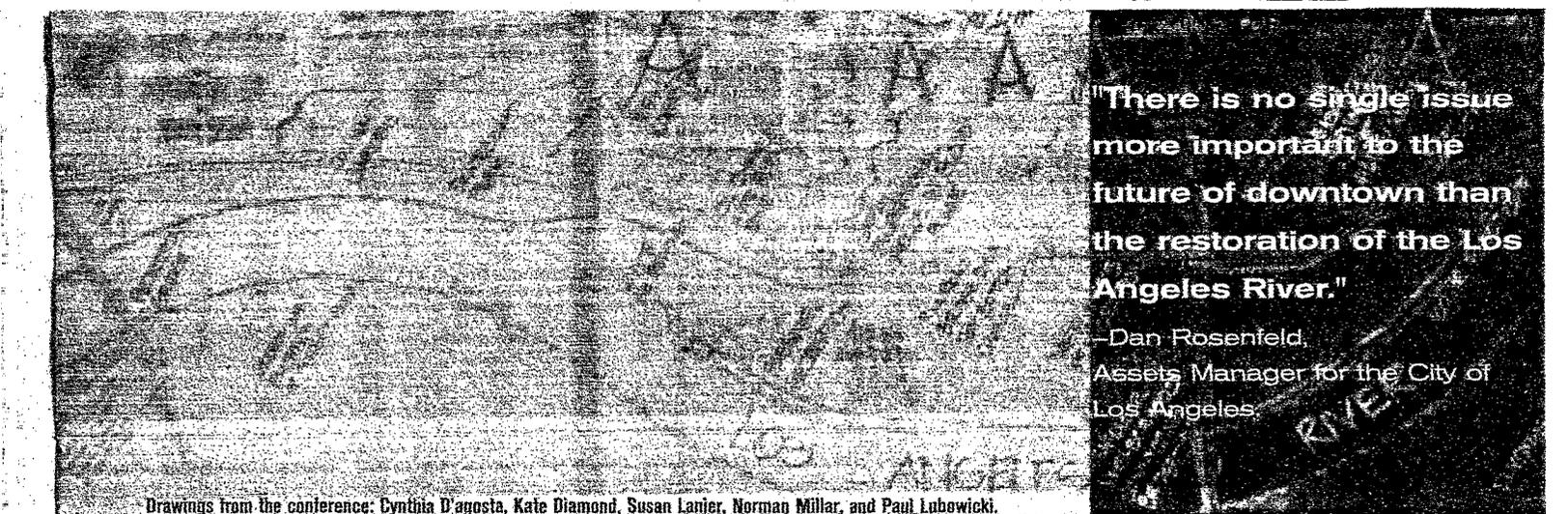
We, the Los Angeles & San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council, have unanimously adopted a Vision of what the watershed should look like in 30 years. Our Vision includes a much more coordinated and comprehensive approach to managing all of our resources that can provide multiple benefits to all of us who live and work within the Watershed. (see "Conference" story at right.)

The benefits of implementing the Vision can be enormous. They include increased economic health, cleaner air, cleaner water, less crime, less poverty, greater access to recreational opportunities, and increased natural wildlife habitat. In short, a better quality of life.

The only way we can achieve the Vision, is to develop a consensus in the broad community that the Vision is worth working and fighting for. For only when most people agree that it is important to our future to implement the Vision, can the Vision become a reality. The Watershed Council has started the process of building a consensus by working together with a wide variety of people to develop the Vision. It was adopted first by our board, and then by all of the Stakeholders after extensive debate at many meetings. Each time the language was refined to look beyond the rivers, to the broader watershed. The Vision was adopted unanimously.

Now it is time to reach out to the community -- to build a much stronger and broader consensus that is so powerful, so pervasive, that our elected officials can only agree with us and then get out in front to implement the needed changes in public policy. We need an army of people who are convinced that this Vision is worth working and fighting for to go out into the community and solicit endorsements -- from community leaders and community groups and our elected officials. And we need to be able to hire a staff person to coordinate the campaign.

This is the most exciting coalescing of ideas to ever hit our city and region. We are sure that you will want to become a part of this campaign, to help make the Vision a reality. Call or write the office to volunteer your time and effort. Checks in the mail will be sincerely appreciated as well. Everyone who lives in our watershed will thank you. The Watershed Council is non-profit and tax deductible. ☘



"There is no single issue more important to the future of downtown than the restoration of the Los Angeles River."

-Dan Rosenfeld,  
Assets Manager for the City of  
Los Angeles.

Drawings from the conference: Cynthia D'agosta, Kate Diamond, Susan Lanier, Norman Millar, and Paul Lubowicki.

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Most of the railroad activities at Taylor Yard are being moved to Colton. The yard could be transformed to provide multiple benefits to the community. It can contain soccer fields that can flood during major storm events to protect downtown from flooding, and restored wetlands and riparian habitat to provide connections to the natural world. Commercial and industrial uses along San Fernando Road and the 2 Freeway can provide jobs for local residents.

## "FROM DRAIN TO DREAM: THE GREENING OF OUR WATERSHED" CONFERENCE

On Saturday, April 18, we introduced our vision of what we would like the watershed to look like circa 2025 at our annual Watershed Conference. It was described in detail by Arthur Golding, its principal author and Vice President of the Watershed Council. This vision seeks to integrate all of the issues and concerns of the stakeholders into one comprehensive planning process that recognizes how everything is inter-related to everything else: issues, agencies, communities. And how we must all work together cooperatively to make the vision a reality.

The main ideas include managing the watershed for economic vitality, environmental health and sustainability; using all of our water resources efficiently; managing the forest for water supply and quality; celebrating our rivers with greenway/bikeways, habitat, recreation areas, and interpretive signs; restoring habitat for fish, birds and wildlife; redeveloping urban zones with offices, shops and cafes; improving water quality to support boating, fishing and swimming in the rivers

and at the beach; and creating truly livable communities around the revitalized rivers. The full statement is available from the office.

Four extra-ordinary efforts at providing design ideas to solve a number of problems along the Los Angeles River were then presented. The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), at their annual convention in Los Angeles about a year and a half ago, produced a CD Rom full of ideas about how to improve the aesthetics of the Los Angeles River, how to treat the confluences of the river's main tributaries in special ways, and how the river might be expanded to continue to provide additional flood control while also providing parkland, open space and the stimulus needed for redevelopment.

ASLA then teamed up with Friends of the Los Angeles River (FoLAR) to look specifically at the Studio Reach of the river, from Studio City to where the river turns the corner around Griffith Park in the San Fernando Valley. Both Studio City and the confluence with the

Verdugo Wash where the river turns to head south will flood in a hundred year storm. Efforts are being made to build a bike path from the Valley to downtown along the river. The studios, and there are seven or eight of them that front the river, are concerned about their privacy and security. A number of very creative ways of dealing with all of these problems in an integrated way were designed and presented.

TreePeople is working to demonstrate how water and energy can be saved on differing land uses by planting trees, using cisterns, returning all green waste to the site, and a number of other creative ideas that make both environmental and economic sense. They developed designs for a single family home, which has just been retrofitted, for an apartment building, for commercial and industrial, and for Crenshaw High School as the publicly owned example. This design would salvage all of the water that falls on the High School property and from 25 acres of surrounding community, and by using the gray water from the school showers, provide sufficient water to irrigate an increased amount of landscaping.

A final workshop sponsored by FoLAR, the Sierra Club and URP, developed plans for the river as it flows through downtown. The planning process addressed the Taylor Railroad Yard, across the river from Elysian Park, which is being partially abandoned as a marshalling and repair rail yard; the old Cornfields rail yard just north of Chinatown; the east side of the L A River across

⋮ continued on page 7



Natural springs support many natural wetland plants, including cattails, willow and Nutleaf along with many exotic that must be removed. The trees in the park, as well as in the wetland area, are home to many species of birds.

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# HAZARD PARK and THE ALEX MAN WETLAND

With the generous support of a grant from the California Coastal Conservancy, the Watershed Council has been able to hire a consultant to study the water and the plant and animal life of a natural wetland in the middle of Hazard Park next to County USC Medical Center in east Los Angeles. Psomas, the consultant, has found it to be an excellent candidate for restoration with natural springs providing a dependable water supply. They have presented us with a conceptual plan for what could be done.

An old unused railroad spur bisects the park, below grade thru the wetland area. The spur is now being abandoned and placed on the market for sale. The tracks and roadbed would have to be removed, as would many of the non-native plants that now grow in the wetland area.

We would like to buy or acquire the entire rail spur because it could provide the base for a bikeway or trailway that could connect Hazard Park to Lincoln Park, to a number of local schools, to the Ascot Hills (also being considered as a site for community activity), perhaps connecting with Debs Regional Park and the Arroyo Seco.

Special thanks must be given to a whole host of people who have worked long and hard to develop this project:

- \* Alex Man who has fought to save and restore Hazard Park for 40 years and for whom the wetland is being named. The California Coastal Conservancy whose grant made the study possible
- \* Psomas, who has done a great job of analysis.
- \* The UCLA Landscape Architecture class of Professor Richard Mayer who spent the winter quarter building a model of the Park and surrounding neighborhood and developing some conceptual ideas for restoring the park.
- \* Councilman Richard Alatorre and his staff for their support, especially Lou Calanche, who gave generously of her time to help us understand the neighborhood.
- \* Calvin Abe Associates who provided us with maps of the region.
- \* All of the neighboring organizations including Dennis Pilien of the Bravo Medical Magnet High School next door who are meeting regularly to help each other, and to help us reach out to develop a better planning process for the park and bikeway by involving the neighborhood.
- \* And Joel McLafferty, Watershed Council board member, who as a volunteer has taken on the incredibly time consuming task of coordinating all of this activity. ❁

Despite the three major aqueducts that bring water to Southern California from hundreds of miles away, the water from our mountains still provides about 35% of the local supply.

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Profile: **Forest Service**

# ANGELES NATIONAL FOREST THE SOURCE OF OUR DRINKING WATER SUPPLY

The top of the Los Angeles basin's watershed is occupied by our own Angeles National Forest. It is one of 156 national forests set aside by Presidential proclamation, the first in California, eighth in the nation. It was established in 1892. The Angeles is unique because it is the most intensively used and most urbanized of all the National Forests in the Forest System. It also contains the steepest and most rugged terrain found anywhere in the world.

Consisting of 690,000 acres, the Angeles covers one quarter of the land area of Los Angeles County. It ranges from 800 feet above sea level in the San Gabriel Canyon to 10,064 feet above sea level on Mount San Antonio Peak, better known as Mount Baldy. The mountains

rise abruptly and almost vertically above the alluvial plains and can be seen over great distances, especially on a clear day.

Droughts, wild fires and floods have always been a way of life for those who live in our valleys. With development, these natural disasters have taken increasing tolls. It was the wildfire and flood events of 1860, 1870 and 1880 that galvanized people into petitioning the Federal Government to do something with the public lands that were too steep to homestead. These lands were set aside to secure and protect the water supply that feeds the aquifers under the San Gabriel and Los Angeles basins.

Up until 1913, local water from the San Gabriel Mountains was the only source of water for the Los Angeles basin. Despite the three major aqueducts that bring water to Southern California from hundreds of miles away, the water from our mountains still provides about 35% of the local supply. The San Gabriel River furnishes 90% of the water for communities in the eastern portion of the county. Pasadena gets 52% of its water from local sources. However, most of the water in the Los Angeles River watershed goes directly to the



The mountains rise abruptly and almost vertically above the alluvial plains and can be seen over great distances especially on a clear day.

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ocean via the flood control channels.

Besides drinking water, the San Gabriel mountains, which make up the Angeles National Forest, provide us with a great view, snow for five ski areas on the forest, and running streams for us to hike or picnic near. It is the most heavily used area of public land in the country with over 33 million visitors each year. It exceeds the use of Yellowstone, Yosemite and Sequoia Kings Canyon National Parks combined. And it is home to many wildlife species, including numerous threatened and endangered plants and animals. The forest provides habitat for many fish species, amphibians, a large variety of birds, deer, bears, coyotes, bobcats, wolverines, mountain lions, bighorn sheep, fox, rare ringtailed cats, raccoon, squirrels and many more. It employs approximately 500 people at the height of the summer season.

As our population grows and imported water supplies are restricted, we must utilize our own water resources more efficiently. Although Southern California will never be totally self sufficient, except perhaps in the El Nino years like we just experienced, we can do much more to capture water that now goes directly to the sea, and use it to recharge our ground water.

We can also significantly reduce the adverse impacts to our watersheds and to air quality caused by high intensity wildfires by making even greater use of prescribed fires. Planned use of fire will result in far less soil loss, sedimentation and flooding while increasing flows of quality water to our spreading grounds for groundwater recharge.

The forest, a national treasure, is the scenic backdrop and extended backyard for some 12 million or more valley residents. Besides providing us with life giving water, the Angeles also provides balance to the lives of millions of residents who rely heavily on those mountain watersheds for mental and physical escape from the daily pressures of urban living. It is a place of silence, peace and solitude in a beautiful, majestic wildland setting that belongs to all of us and is just an hour from the center of downtown Los Angeles. ❖

Mike Rogers  
Forest Supervisor  
Angeles National Forest

## Drain to Dream Conference

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from the artist loft area; and the problems faced by bikeway planners trying to get a bikeway down the Arroyo Seco and into downtown past the jumble of freeway interchanges and storm channels that lie in the way.

Conference attendees were then enlisted to help develop a plan to spread the word, to expand the universe of those who understood our vision and what could be done to accomplish its goals. We ended with three elected officials who described their efforts at accomplishing our vision: Carrie Sutkin representing Supervisor Gloria Molina, Long Beach City Councilman Alan Lowenthal, and Los Angeles City Councilman Mike Feuer. It was a truly inspiring end to an exciting day.

We would like to invite you to join with us, help us spread the word about what is possible, and persuade others to adopt this ambitious goal. Multiple copies of the vision statement brochure, and the proceedings of this conference are available from the office. ❄

# ACCOMPLISHMENTS 1997-1998

### Grants successfully completed:

- U. S. EPA grant to develop and publish two data bases: a list of community groups in the watershed, and a list of projects including who is doing them, funding sources including partnership opportunities, and publishing our first newsletter.
- California Coastal Conservancy grant to study the hydrology and biology of the wetlands in Hazard Park, east Los Angeles, and develop conceptual restoration plans.

### Organizational accomplishments:

- Adopted our first five year strategic plan.
- Adopted a vision of what the watershed should look like in 2025. Printed a fine brochure containing the text of the Vision to be 'sold' throughout the watershed.
- Held a conference, From Drain to Dream: the Greening of Our Watershed April 18, 1998 where four charettes were presented and discussed in relationship to our Vision of the future of the Watershed. Action plans were developed to promote this Vision.
- Adopted procedures for endorsing or supporting others' efforts. They must be in keeping with our goals and objectives and not be so contentious as to threaten our viability.
- Adopted a working definition of 'consensus'. After all sides of an issue are thoroughly aired and debated, majority rules.
- Partnered with Cal State LA who produced for us a CD Rom of digitized maps in fulfillment of their NASA grant to use GIS technology to help community groups.

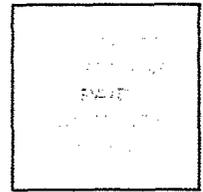
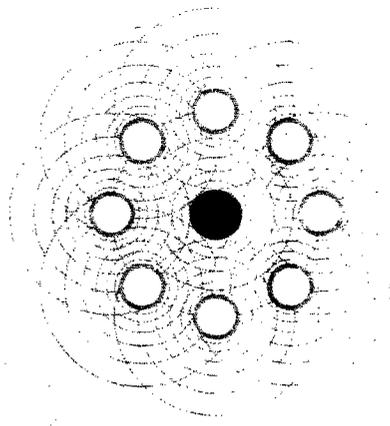
### Provided help to agencies and groups involved in the Council:

- Developed politically defensible criteria for

- prioritizing projects for funding under Prop A and Prop 204, and ranked some of the proposed projects.
- Gained access to County Public Works land for the Breeding Bird Atlas folks.
- Continued to work with County Public Works and the Army Corps of Engineers on developing the scope of work of a three year watershed feasibility study.

### Held workshops to air a number of contentious issues in an effort to resolve them:

- Hired a mediator to interview participants in the LACDA Alternatives Task Force in an effort to help build trust and a better working relationship between the LACDA cities the environmental community and the Watershed Council:
- Held discussions between the local community, elected officials, their representatives and a number of agencies about the Army Corps fences at the ends of streets which dead end onto the river in Atwater. The fences create a barrier between the local residents and the river which is used by gang members.
- Held workshops to explore with multiple agencies the problems of arundo donax (Giant Reed) eradication. U. S. Forest Service, the Nature Conservancy, Army Corps and others.
- Other workshops covered a number of water quality issues, El Niño and what was done in preparation, the CalFED process to restore the San Francisco Bay Delta and secure our water supply, Hazard Park, the Los Cerritos wetlands, and the gravel pits in the city of Irwindale. ❄



THE LOS ANGELES & SAN GABRIEL RIVERS WATERSHED COUNCIL  
801 Holmby Avenue Los Angeles, CA 90024

## calendar

**Monthly Stakeholder meetings** on the third Wednesday of the month held at County Public Works, 900 South Fremont, Alhambra. Everyone is welcome. July 15, August 19, and September 16. 9:00 a.m. to Noon.

**For tours of the TreePeople home** that has been retrofitted to save water and energy as described in the conference above, call TreePeople 818-753-4600.

**For tours of a stream restoration project** that used new soft technologies in the Malibu Creek Watershed, call Kathleen Bullard of the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains 310-445-1030.

## PUBLICATIONS

Write or call for copies of:

### Data Bases:

- A data base of community groups in the watershed. There are now over 900 groups or community leaders in our data base, which we are constantly updating and enlarging with your help.
- A data base of projects in the watershed. Who is doing what, with what resources, and who needs help or partners. Please help us keep this updated.
- An annotated list of government agencies active in the watershed, with their major responsibilities
- An annotated bibliography, not complete, of studies and papers of interest.

### Internal Documents:

- Our Vision of the Watershed circa 2025, adopted unanimously
- Outline of an integrated watershed plan
- Our Five Year Strategic Plan
- "From Drain to Dream: the Greening of our Watershed" April 18, 1998 Conference proceedings.

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WATERSHED COUNCIL

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