

Memorandum

To: The Upper Los Angeles River and Tributaries Working Group

Date: April 16, 2020

From:  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Director

Subject: **Agenda Item 8: Consideration of resolution approving and adopting the Upper Los Angeles River and Tributaries Revitalization Plan, and recommending approval and adoption of the Plan to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Working Group adopt the attached resolution approving and adopting the Upper Los Angeles River and Tributaries Revitalization Plan, and recommending approval and adoption of the Plan to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.

Legislative Authority: Public Resources Code Sections 33220.

Background: The legislation establishing the Upper Los Angeles River and Tributaries (ULART) Working Group, Assembly Bill 466 (AB 466), Chapter 341 of the Statutes of 2017, requires a master planning process for a Revitalization Plan (Plan). Legislation also requires that the Plan address the unique and diverse needs of the Upper Los Angeles River, Pacoima Wash, Tujunga Wash, Verdugo Wash, and any additional tributary waterway that the working group determines to be necessary, which prompted the addition of the Aliso Canyon Wash and the Burbank Western Channel, as determined by the working group. Subsequent legislation, Senate Bill 1126 (SB 1126), Chapter 895, Statutes of 2018, extended the deadline of the plan and added an additional tributary, the Arroyo Seco. The revitalization plan shall require a master planning process that includes community engagement and a prioritization of disadvantaged communities. Legislation stated that the plan shall be consistent with and enhance, and may be incorporated into plans that include, but are not limited to, the County of Los Angeles' River Master Plan. In December 2017 the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy granted funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) to assist the Conservancy to administer the Working Group and develop the revitalization plan.

Project History

The ULART planning process formally commenced in August 2018 and as the project progressed, the parameters established by the Working Group were modified and defined through extensive discussion and review of opportunities. On multiple occasions this was an expansion of scope, leading to further study, additional work products, and adjustments to the project timeline. The Working Group convened monthly for a period of 20 months through 23 publicly held working group and committee meetings, in addition to 10 community meetings to gather feedback and develop a comprehensive, collaborative, and inclusive planning process. Two committees were identified by the working group — People and Recreation and Water and the Environment to provide feedback throughout the process through the lens of each of the two broad categories. These committees met 14 times. The meetings were held in a variety of locations throughout the study area, and each meeting included time for public comments. The plan's mission statement, goals, and

objectives were developed to ensure that revitalization efforts included in the Plan served the needs of the river communities while improving quality of life.

The planning process included three phases: Inventory and Analysis, Concept Development, and Plan Preparation. The MRCA partnered with seven non-governmental organizations (NGO), who provided project outreach and engagement activities throughout the process in all three phases. NGO partners worked in distinct areas that were geographically diverse throughout the ULART study area. NGO'S undertook outreach in a variety of ways, including visiting farmer's markets, schools, community events, etc., to conduct in person engagement. Their outstanding efforts combined to spread informational awareness of the plan, as well as solicit input and feedback which went toward plan development. NGO partners also conducted outreach for the ten community meetings and distributed information about the ULART plan thru their social media outlets. The seven NGO partners were: Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples, River LA, Pacoima Beautiful + Friends of the Los Angeles River, The Mulholland Institute, The River Project, and The William C. Velasquez Institute.

Document Overview

The Plan's framework intentionally mirrored the process used for its sister document, *The Lower Los Angeles River Revitalization Plan* (2018), so that both documents can be incorporated into the related LA River Master Plan Update (LARMP). The LARMP is currently being updated by Los Angeles County Public Works for the entire 51 miles of the Los Angeles River main stem, but does not include tributaries. The LARMP is a comprehensive update from an earlier 1996 version and is planned to be completed in late 2020.

The Revitalization Plan comprises Volume 1, with technical appendices found in Volume 2. Within Volume 1, an Executive Summary briefly outlines the study area, project planning process, as well as an overall review of project opportunities. Chapter 1 details existing watershed conditions, native nations within the planning area, history, literature reviewed, and context of the relevant regional watershed plans. Chapter 2 outlines the planning process, needs, and community outreach and engagement efforts. Chapter 3 contains all of the 344 project opportunity areas identified during the study, as well as bundles of projects that were aggregated into design areas. In all, 11 design areas were studied in more detail, and these are presented as detailed concepts in the Plan. Nine Project Elements are described, and these can be generally applied to the 300+ opportunities that did not fall within a detail design area. Chapter 3 also includes an extensive amount of Resiliency Metrics quantifying the benefits of implementing the proposed improvements. Finally, Chapter 4 presents an implementation and next steps plan for how the Plan can be used and move forward.

Public Review

In the summer of 2019, MRCA released an online webtool which allowed the public to view and provide comments on the opportunity areas. Viewers were able to see opportunity areas and recommend additional new opportunity areas, with the option of uploading

photos and documents for the project planning team to utilize. This first webtool was available for approximately two months. A second webtool to facilitate review of the draft Plan was available for public use starting September 2019. Chapters 1 and 2 of the Draft Plan were released for review and comments in September 2019 with the remainder of the plan released in December 2019. Both Volumes 1 and 2 of the full Draft Plan (in English and Spanish) were available for review and comment online via the project's website at: <https://www.upperlariver.org/>. Physical copies of the full Draft Plan were made available to the public at MRCA's Cypress Park office. During this review period, MRCA staff also coordinated two in person Listening Sessions, held in English and Spanish, to offer the public the opportunity to view the plan and submit comments in person. Laptops and ipads were made available for viewing the plan as well. Staff were available to answer questions and help direct people to sections in the plan as needed. The public comment period closed on January 21, 2020.

In all, over 500 comments were received via the online document tool (Konveio), written letters, e-mails, verbal correspondence, and at the Listening Sessions. The project planning team compiled and addressed each comment within a comment response log (see Volume 2, Chapter G). Comments received ranged from overarching issues to specific details. Each comment is noted in the response log, and whenever feasible appropriately addressed within the Plan.

Total hours for the completion of this effort, including preliminary inventory analysis, comment compilation and development for the final Upper Los Angeles River and Tributaries Revitalization Plan by the consultant team required more than 10,000 hours by staff.

CEQA Analysis

The Revitalization Plan is a feasibility and planning study and does not, in itself, authorize any project. Adoption of the Revitalization Plan does not have a legally binding effect on later activities. Section 15262 of the CEQA Guidelines states that a project involving only feasibility or planning studies for possible future actions does not require the preparation of an EIR or Negative Declaration. Consideration of environmental factors is still required, and this is provided by the Plan's Resiliency Metrics. Further authority for this Statutory Exemption can be found in Sections 21083, 21102 and 21150 of the Public Resources Code.