



San Gabriel River Discovery Center: Ensuring Equitable Environmental Education Opportunities in LA County

Fact Sheet - April 2014

Background

- The San Gabriel River Discovery Center is the focal point for the revitalization of the San Gabriel River.
- The Discovery Center is an innovative environmental resource that will combine the study of natural science—specifically water resources and related watershed management—with educational programming that interprets the San Gabriel River watershed, encourages exploration and increases understanding, appreciation and stewardship of a revitalized San Gabriel River region.
- Located on an 11-acre site next to the San Gabriel River at the Whittier Narrows Natural Area (WNNA), the Discovery Center is part of the 320-acre Whittier Narrows Regional Park, the largest operated by LA County. This accessible ecological area is home to birds, other animals and plant life, and provides a sanctuary for the people in the region.

Equitable Environmental Education

- The Discovery Center will ensure equitable environmental education opportunities for all residents of Los Angeles County. Currently, there are no regional environmental education facilities that serve the San Gabriel Valley and LA Metro communities with a scope comparable to the Discovery Center.
- All existing educational venues that focus on water resources in LA County are located on or near the coastline, e.g., the Aquarium of the Pacific (Long Beach), Santa Monica Pier Aquarium, SEA Lab (Redondo Beach), City of Los Angeles Environmental Learning Center (Playa Del Ray), and Cabrillo Marine Aquarium (San Pedro).
- The Discovery Center site is close to many low-income communities that have few environmental amenities; free admission will ensure that everyone can afford to

visit. Outreach efforts and programming will be language accessible so that non-English speakers can fully participate in Discovery Center activities and special events.

- The Discovery Center will replace a small and deteriorated nature center built approximately 75 years ago with 11-acres of restored open space. The new, LEED Platinum-certified interpretive building will accommodate increasing demands for 21st century environmental science learning opportunities and hands-on outdoor nature experiences for a diverse and growing population.

Current Status

- On-site Discovery Center activities started in March 2013 with EcoVoices, a standards-based, environmental educational program. In weekly visits over a 12-month period, 36 schools and more than 3,200 students have explored the San Gabriel River watershed and taken part in hands-on environmental science learning.
- The Discovery Center will be constructed in two stages. Stage 1 develops the majority of the outdoor improvements on the Discovery Center site. EcoVoices field trips and public access to the WNNA will continue during this phase.
- Stage 1 improvements include: a covered outdoor classroom; a 29,000 square foot constructed wetlands to filter and cleanse stormwater on site; habitat restoration and a bio-swale with stormwater treatment functions; replanting of a walnut woodland area; signs and interactive educational displays; paths, trails and walkways; and a parking area that will accommodate three school buses.
- Stage 2 of the Discovery Center development includes construction of the 14,700 square foot interpretive building with two classrooms, public exhibit areas, administrative offices and maintenance space as well as an open air classroom.



Funding and Construction Schedule

- A total of \$9,850,000 has already been committed to fund the Discovery Center, more than enough to cover the estimated \$6,000,000 required for Stage 1 construction.
- Once we are closer to finishing Stage 1 improvements, the focus can then move to fundraising and completion of Stage 2's building component.
- Construction of Stage 1 improvements is tentatively scheduled to be complete by July 2016 and Stage 2 by December 2017.

Funding commitments include:

- ✓ Rivers and Mountains Conservancy: \$3,000,000
- ✓ LA County Supervisor Gloria Molina: \$3,000,000
- ✓ LA County Sanitation Districts: \$2,200,000¹
- ✓ Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District: \$780,000
- ✓ Central Basin Municipal Water District: \$530,000

Environmental Review and Mitigation

- The Discovery Center Authority is committed to the conservation of natural resources and sustainable building practices. In compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act, the Discovery Center Authority undertook an extensive environmental assessment and public input process.
- In January 2010, the Discovery Center Authority adopted the Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) that outlined numerous requirements to reduce or mitigate environmental effects of the Discovery Project including:
 - ✓ Of the 300+ trees on site, 27 native and non-native trees will be replaced and six others relocated. Native trees will be replaced in-kind at a ratio of 2:1. Non-native trees will be replaced at a ratio of 1:1 with a species native to the area. A total of 58 native trees will be replanted for mitigation purposes.
 - ✓ Provide appropriate contractor education, scheduling, staging, fencing, lighting, signage and other measures to protect sensitive biological resources and habitat.
 - ✓ That the Discovery Center Authority be responsible for developing and implementing a Resource Management Plan to guide all phases of Natural Area management and maintenance.
- The Discovery Center's restoration efforts—including the re-establishment of native plants and trees, and the creation of the constructed wetlands—will increase sensitive habitats and create a beneficial impact for the Cooper's hawk, raptors and the yellow-breasted chat among other species.

¹ As part of a settlement of Regional Water Board enforcement action.



Realizing the Opportunity

- The Discovery Center holds the promise of providing an anchor for the revitalization of the San Gabriel River and a much-needed environmental education venue for LA County's underserved communities and 1 million K-12 students in the Discovery Center's service area.
- Visitors from all cultural and economic backgrounds will benefit from accessible and affordable opportunities to celebrate a revitalized San Gabriel River, learn about the natural and cultural history of the watershed, explore the Whittier Narrows Natural Area and find out about other parks and outdoor recreation opportunities in the region.
- By increasing awareness and knowledge, stewardship and conservation action, Discovery Center programming will improve public policy, individual and community behavior, and ultimately protect water resources and habitat for future generations.

Project Partners

- The Discovery Center site is owned in part by the Los Angeles County and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority will operate the Discovery Center under a sublease from the County.
- The San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority is a joint powers agency made up of the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, the Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District and the Central Basin Municipal Water District.

Photos courtesy of EcoVoices

For more information about the Discovery Center visit www.sangabrielriverdiscoverycenter.org

Produced by the San Gabriel River Discovery Center Foundation • 323-397-1554



ENDORSEMENT FORM

Please join us to . . .

**Support Equitable Environmental Education
and the San Gabriel River Discovery Center!**

The EcoVoices youth education program has been up and running for over a year at the future site of the San Gabriel River Discovery Center at Whittier Narrows Regional Park.

EcoVoices has been a great success!

Over the past year students from South El Monte to Pomona and East Los Angeles, have explored the San Gabriel River ecosystem and watershed and learned the scientific method to better understand and protect the local environment.

Now it's time to move on to the next phase and create a more vibrant Discovery Center—one that includes wetlands for local and migrating birds and wildlife, a covered outdoor classroom, walnut woodland restoration, walking trails and interpretive displays to provide background for students exploring the local riverside. The final stage of development will be the construction of the Discovery Center building.

The San Gabriel River Discovery Center Foundation is gathering endorsements to help push us through this critical phase of the project.

Will you join us?

Completion of the Discovery Center is a matter of environmental equity.

The existing nature center at Whittier Narrows was built approximately 75 years ago. Its outdated exhibits and facilities fail to meet the current or future needs of local students.

The site does not have adequate school bus parking or the laboratory equipment and technology students must have in order to build the skills required to advance 21st century careers related to science and environmental protection.

There are a number of regional educational venues that focus on water, but their emphasis is on the ocean or marine life, and most are located on or next to coastline.¹ When completed, the Discovery Center will ensure that children living in the San Gabriel Valley, East and South Los Angeles, the Gateway cities and other nearby communities have access to quality environmental educational opportunities in their own backyards.

We're asking for support from individual community, educational, environmental and civic leaders concerned with protecting the local environment, the equitable distribution of environmental amenities and, maybe most important, educating our children to care for the natural world.

What you can do:

- * **Formally endorse the Discovery Center project by signing and sending in this form.**
- * **Educate your staff and constituents and mobilize them to support the Discovery Center.**
- * **Participate in upcoming public meetings about the Discovery Center.**
- * **Communicate by sending letters and emails in support of the Discovery Center.**

NAME _____

ORGANIZATION (for identification purposes only) _____

EMAIL _____ PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____ CITY/ZIP _____

SIGNATURE: _____

Email completed forms to: ColibriStrategies@gmail.com • For more information call: 323-397-1554

¹ For example: Aquarium of the Pacific, Long Beach; Santa Monica Pier Aquarium, Santa Monica; SEA Lab, Redondo Beach; LA Environmental Learning Center-Hyperion Treatment Plant, Playa Del Rey; Cabrillo Marine Aquarium, San Pedro



San Gabriel River Discovery Center Supporters

Partial Listing

City Councils

City of Industry
El Monte
Maywood
Monterey Park
Rosemead
South El Monte
Temple City
Whittier

Community Organizations

Amigos De Los Rios
Anahuak Youth Sports Association
El Monte Jets
Project Amiga
Rotary Club of Industry Hills
San Gabriel Valley Conservation Corps
Spiritt Family Services
West Covina Chamber of Commerce

School Boards

Alhambra Unified School District
Azusa Unified School District
El Monte City School District
El Monte Union High School District
Garvey School District
Hacienda La Puente Unified School District
Rio Hondo Community College District

Elected Officials

Gloria Molina – County Supervisor
Ed Hernandez – State legislator
Hilda Solis – U.S. Congress retired
Kevin De Leon – State legislator
Michael D. Antonovich – County Supervisor
Mike Eng – Los Angeles Community College District
Robert Gonzales – Azusa City Council
Salvador Ramirez – El Monte Union High School District
Xiolin Cruz Gonzalez – Azusa Unified School District
Gil Cedillo – Los Angeles City Council member

Abridged Timeline

2000: Planning begins with 20 stakeholder groups
2003: Stakeholder Committee forms and develops initial program focus
2005: Site selection process prioritizes the WNNA
2006: Environmental review process begins
2007: \$9.6 million of proposed \$22 million budget secured
2009: Release of draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR)

2010: EIR certified and schematic design produced
2011: SGRDC Foundation established to raise funds for Discovery Center
2012: EcoVoices educational program developed
2013: EcoVoices weekly field trips offered on site
2014: Sequenced work program finalized to deliver project in two stages