Antonio R. Villaraigosa
Mayor

Dear Fellow Angelinos:

The Los Angeles River traverses our diverse City, touching neighborhoods from its headwaters in Canoga Park through Downtown. Today, most of the River’s 51 miles - 32 of which are in the City of Los Angeles - flow within a concrete channel, serving a vital function as a flood control measure for the City and County of Los Angeles. This important but singular function has limited the vast potential of the River as a focal point for economic growth and community revitalization, environmental stewardship, and recreational opportunities. After nearly two years of research and dialogue, the long awaited Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan provides the first comprehensive proposal for river restoration.

The Plan provides a 25- to 50-year blueprint for transforming the City’s 32-mile stretch of the river into an ‘emerald necklace’ of parks, walkways, and bike paths, as well as providing better connections to the neighboring communities, protecting wildlife, promoting the health of the river, and leveraging economic reinvestment.

In order to give the Plan continued life, it proposes the establishment of an innovative, three-tiered River management structure—linking together governance, entrepreneurship, and philanthropy. In fact, the City has already laid the groundwork for ongoing cooperation with other public agencies such as the County of Los Angeles, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, and the Army Corps of Engineers, to facilitate River Corridor improvements as soon as possible.

The Plan has been a collaboration of elected officials, multiple city departments and bureaus, a network of experts and consultants, concerned citizens, and environmental and recreational groups. A critical element of the Plan will be to provide ongoing opportunities for public involvement as specific projects move forward.

The adoption of this Plan marks an auspicious moment in our collective effort to revitalize the Los Angeles River. Whether you live in a neighborhood adjacent to the River or in a community 20 miles away, I hope that you will celebrate with us.

Very truly yours,

Antonio R. Villaraigosa
Mayor

ARV/kkj

Dear Friends:

The development of the Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan can be traced to a bold neighborhood vision in the early 1990s to convert an old rail yard, known as Taylor Yard, to benefit the community. In this neglected riverfront, just north of downtown, residents saw more than just a 200+ acre industrial lot. They saw parks. They saw natural habitat. They saw neighborhood revitalization.

But just as important, the intensive community process, which allowed residents to create a vision for Taylor Yard in the early 1990s, became the template used a decade later to renew more than 32 miles of the Los Angeles River.

With this in mind, in June 2002, the Los Angeles City Council established the Ad Hoc Committee on the Los Angeles River to work with stakeholders on major revitalization efforts such as recreation, neighborhood identity, wildlife habitat, water replenishment, jobs, tourism and civic pride.

In October 2005, we launched a series of public workshops that have drawn thousands of people - from Canoga Park to Boyle Heights - of diverse ages, ethnicities and economic backgrounds, to weigh in on the River renewal. Their vision is captured in this master plan, one of the greatest opportunities to change the face of L.A. Even beyond City boundaries, it is a 25-year blueprint that weaves in environmental enhancement, green space and economic development that impacts the region.

The master plan is the result of tireless efforts by residents, community leaders, environmentalists and others who never stopped believing that the River, a trench entombed in cement, could be renewed, brought back to life.

Our communities want parks. They want wildlife habitat. They want neighborhood revitalization for our families and children. No one deserves it more than them.

After all, it is their vision.

Sincerely,

Ed P. Reyes
Chair, Ad Hoc Committee on the Los Angeles River
ORGANIZATION OF THE PLAN

The Plan includes ten chapters.

- Chapter One describes the River’s transformation from a functioning natural system to a channelized flood control structure, and summarizes the inspiration for this Master Plan.

- Chapter Two presents the overarching vision for River revitalization, including images of proposed improvements, short- and long-term projects, and the expected benefits, including social impacts.

- Chapter Three describes hydraulic, ecological and public access considerations that have motivated the Plan, and sets the Plan within a watershed and policy context.

- Chapter Four summarizes recommendations for revitalizing the River within and adjacent to its existing right-of-way, including recommendations for flood mitigation, water quality, public access and ecosystem restoration.

A project managed by the City of Los Angeles Department of Public Works Bureau of Engineering Gary Lee Moore, P.E. City Engineer

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. INSPIRATION
   - The River’s Past
   - Building on a Strong Foundation
   - Master Plan Scope and Planning Horizon

2. VISION
   - The River as the Soul of the City
   - The River’s Future: Revitalization Vision and Goals
   - Values Shaping the Plan
   - A River Transformed: The Benefits of Reinvestment

3. ISSUES AFFECTING THE PLAN
   - Physical Characteristics of the River Channel
   - Hydraulic Considerations: Channel Capacity and Velocity
   - Water Quality
   - Ecological Function and Habitat Value
   - Recreation and Public Access to the River
   - Transportation Considerations
   - The Larger Watershed Context
   - The Larger Policy Context
   - Engaging the Community in the Planning Process

4. REVITALIZE THE RIVER
   - Goals and Recommendations Summary
   - A Phased Approach to Restoration and Revitalization
   - Goal: Enhance Flood Storage
   - Goal: Enhance Water Quality
   - Goal: Enable Safe Public Access
   - Goal: Restore A Functional Riparian Ecosystem
   - Management and Maintenance Considerations

5. GREEN THE NEIGHBORHOODS
   - Goals and Recommendations Summary
   - Goal: Create a Continuous River Greenway
   - Goal: Connect Neighborhoods to the River
   - Goal: Extend Open Space and Water Quality Features into the Neighborhood
   - Goal: Enhance River Identity
   - Goal: Enhance the Use of Art Along the River

6. CAPTURE COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES
   - Opportunity Areas as Demonstration Sites
   - Opportunity Area Selection Process
   - Canoga Park Opportunity Area
   - River Glen Opportunity Area
   - Taylor Yard Opportunity Area
   - Chinatown-Cornfields Opportunity Area
   - Downtown Industrial Area Opportunity Area
   - Additional Opportunity Areas
### 7. CREATE VALUE
- Create Value
- Economic Opportunities and Consequences
- Economic Development Objectives and Analyses
- Economic Development Scenarios
- Estimate of Economic Development Costs and Benefits
- Summary of Economic Impacts

### 8. COMMUNITY PLANNING FRAMEWORK
- Community Planning Framework
- Community Plan Updates
- Future Recommendations: The River Improvement Overlay (RIO)
- Green Street Standards

### 9. RIVER MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK
- Los Angeles River Management Areas
- Towards a Comprehensive River Management System
- Goals for Los Angeles River Management
- Recommended River Management
- Los Angeles River Authority
- Los Angeles River Revitalization Corporation
- Los Angeles River Foundation

### 10. IMPLEMENTATION
- Interim River Management Actions
- Interim Project Phasing
- Specific Proposals
- Estimated Costs for Proposed Plan Improvements
- Financing River Improvements
- Map of Potential Projects

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**Chapter Five** summarizes recommendations for “greening neighborhoods” and reconnecting them to the river. A continuous River Greenway becomes the spine of the City, connected to adjacent neighborhoods by pedestrian-friendly Green Streets.

**Chapter Six** provides a framework for capturing community opportunities through a renewed orientation and focus on the River.

**Chapter Seven** describes the economic value and potential quality of life benefits that might accrue through this renewed orientation.

**Chapters Eight through Ten** discuss policy and economic development possibilities for implementation.

**Chapter Ten** includes a detailed list and maps outlining specific proposed projects along the River Corridor.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXT OF THE LOS ANGELES RIVER

The Los Angeles River flows approximately 51 miles from its origin in the San Fernando Valley region of the City of Los Angeles, to Long Beach Harbor and the Pacific Ocean. The River runs east/southeastward through Los Angeles and along the cities of Burbank and Glendale in its northern reaches, and then heads southward, flowing through the cities of Vernon, Commerce, Maywood, Bell, Bell Gardens, South Gate, Lynwood, Compton, Paramount, Carson, and Long Beach, respectively. The first 32 miles of the River flows through the City of Los Angeles, intersecting 10 Council Districts (Districts 3, 12, 6, 2, 5, 4, 13, 1, 9, and 14, respectively), 20 Neighborhood Councils and 10 community planning areas as follows (in geographic order from north/northwest to south/southeast): Canoga Park-Winnetka-Woodland Hills-West Hills; Reseda-West Van Nuys; Encino-Tarzana; Van Nuys-North Sherman Oaks; Sherman Oaks-Studio City-Toluca Lake-Cahuenga Pass; Hollywood; Northeast Los Angeles; Silver Lake-Echo Park; Central City North; and Boyle Heights.

The River begins in the Canoga Park community at the confluence of Bell Creek and the Arroyo Calabasas—approximately two miles north of the northern foothills of the Santa Monica Mountains. The River extends east/southeastward through the communities of Reseda-West Van Nuys, and Encino-Tarzana toward the Sepulveda Dam Recreational Area and Flood Control Basin. From the Sepulveda Basin, the River continues eastward through the communities of Van Nuys, Sherman Oaks, and Studio City. The Central Branch of the Tujunga Wash joins the River from the north in Studio City. From this point, the River continues approximately 6 miles eastward along the southern border of the City of Burbank and the northern border of Griffith Park. At this point, the Verdugo Wash joins the River from the northeast. Here, the River is approximately 1.5 miles south of the southern foothills of the Verdugo Mountains and bends sharply southward, roughly paralleling the Golden State (5) Freeway. The River continues southward between Griffith Park to the west and the Atwater community to the east, through Elysian Valley, Lincoln Heights, Boyle Heights, and Downtown before flowing out of the City of Los Angeles, into the City of Vernon.

The Los Angeles River is the original source of life for the City of Los Angeles. It is where first the Native Americans and later the Spanish built the City’s earliest settlements. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the River powered the City’s industry and served as an important transportation corridor, creating economic value and growth. With extensive building in the growing City came the encroachment into the River’s floodplain and the inevitable damage from floods. Homes and businesses were flooded on numerous occasions in the first half of the 20th Century; in 1914, 1934, and 1938, devastating floods prompted the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Los Angeles County Flood Control District to construct the concrete-lined channel that now conveys the River for most of its 51-mile length.

Over time, with the rail yards, warehouses, and other industrial uses that line the River’s edge, the River has become both literally and figuratively isolated from most people and communities. Most residents cannot see the River, let alone enjoy it as a valuable public resource. For the six decades since the River was paved, it has been treated as an unwelcome guest in many neighborhoods.
GROUNDWORK FOR THE REVITALIZATION MASTER PLAN

Over the past two decades, Los Angeles communities, with many local, state, and federal government agencies and nongovernmental organizations, have engaged in efforts to revitalize the Los Angeles River and its watershed. The City of Los Angeles has invested in parks, bike paths, bridges, street improvements, and other projects. The County of Los Angeles has begun to implement the Los Angeles River Master Plan, adopted by the County Board of Supervisors in 1996. California’s Conservancies and California State Parks have fostered the creation of numerous new open space amenities in the River Corridor—notably the establishment of the Los Angeles State Historic Park at the Cornfields and the Río de Los Angeles State Park at Taylor Yard. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is engaged in several studies to restore a functioning ecosystem within selected areas of the channel. Many nonprofit groups, including the Friends of the Los Angeles River (FoLAR), Tree People, North East Trees, The River Project, the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council, the Trust for Public Land, and others have also worked tirelessly to raise public and civic awareness of the River’s potential and to implement revitalization projects. Several research endeavors and associated data have been made available by educational institutes, including those of the University of Southern California’s Center for Sustainable Cities’ GreenVisions program and the University of California at Los Angeles Institute of the Environment.

In June 2002, the Los Angeles City Council approved establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Los Angeles River to focus on the revitalization of the Los Angeles River and its tributaries. The Committee coordinates and partners with other stakeholders on major revitalization efforts, identifies linkages between projects and communities, recommends policy changes, and creates a City role for River revitalization. Chaired by Councilmember Ed Reyes, the Committee has focused on major revitalization issues, including opportunities for implementing projects, such as bridges, parks, bicycle paths, pedestrian trails, other recreational amenities, and programs to encourage public education, litter removal, job creation, community development, tourism, civic pride, and improved water quality. Together these actions have served to bring value to neglected spaces and foster a sense of place along the River throughout the City.

In 2005, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa formally endorsed the City Council’s motion to develop this Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan (LARRMP). The LARRMP represents a milestone achievement for the City in its massive scope—coalescing diverse stakeholders around a revitalization agenda for the still often-overlooked Los Angeles River. The Plan is intended to be a 25 to 50-year blueprint for implementing a variety of comprehensive improvements that would make the River one of the City’s most treasured landmarks and a catalyst for a sustainable environment.

REVITALIZATION MASTER PLAN: A FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE

The Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan provides a framework for restoring the River’s ecological function and for transforming it into an amenity for residents and visitors to the City.

The Plan includes:

- Recommendations for physical improvements to the River corridor, and to the green space network in adjacent neighborhoods;
- Recommendations at a policy level for managing public access and ensuring public health and safety;
- Recommendations for a River governance and management structure; and
- Recommendations for short- and long-term priority projects and potential funding strategies.
REVITALIZATION MASTER PLAN GOALS

REVITALIZE THE RIVER
- Enhance Flood Storage
- Enhance Water Quality
- Enable Safe Public Access
- Restore a Functional Ecosystem

GREEN THE NEIGHBORHOODS
- Create a Continuous River Greenway
- Connect Neighborhoods to the River
- Extend Open Space, Recreation, and Water Quality Features into Neighborhoods
- Enhance River Identity
- Incorporate Public Art Along the River

CAPTURE COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES
- Make the River the Focus of Activity
- Foster Civic Pride
- Engage Residents in the Community Planning Process and Consensus Building
- Provide Opportunities for Educational and Public Facilities
- Celebrate the Cultural Heritage of the River

CREATE VALUE
- Improve the Quality of Life
- Increase Employment, Housing, and Retail Space Opportunities
- Create Environmentally-Sensitive Urban Design and Land Use Opportunities and Guidelines
- Focus Attention on Underused Areas and Disadvantaged Communities

THE RIVER’S FUTURE: A VISION FOR REVITALIZATION

Six decades after the River was first channelized, the City of Los Angeles faces an unprecedented opportunity to reverse the past and re-envision the River with promise and determination. The LARRMP presents a bold vision for transforming the River over the next several generations. Like Daniel Burnham’s ambitious plans for Chicago at the turn of the last century, this Plan acknowledges that great and transformative change may not be accomplished in one lifetime; it must remain in the minds of the people who will carry it forward. This Plan includes bold, long-term visions in addition to a series of practical and nearer-term steps that would make the River a much better place for today’s Angelenos. The vision for the River’s revitalization includes four core principles:

REVITALIZE THE RIVER

The Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan provides opportunities to address a renewal of the River’s environmental qualities that can catalyze change in diverse communities throughout its 32-mile corridor. As a long-term goal, the River’s ecological and hydrological functioning can be restored through re-creation of a continuous riparian habitat corridor within the channel, and through removal of the concrete walls where feasible. If one completely restored the River to a naturalized condition throughout its entire length, it would be very difficult to achieve flood control requirements and maintain current urban development. However, bold thinking and big ideas can guide the realization of this kind of long-range vision.

In addition to restoring ecological function, revitalizing the River includes storing peak flows to reduce flow velocities in the channel in order to facilitate ecological restoration and access. The changes can enable the development of multi-benefit green spaces within the River channel that simultaneously provide open space and water quality benefits, and further provide examples of revitalization features that can be applied throughout the watershed.

GREEN THE NEIGHBORHOODS

This second idea focuses on creating a green ribbon through the City, with green strands extending the River’s influence into adjacent neighborhoods in order to reconnect communities to the River and to each other. A continuous River Greenway would link a reliable network of “green connections,” bikeways, and pedestrian paths to the River and to public open space; “repurposing” schoolyards, vacant lots and educational campuses could help serve open space and recreation needs, as well as hold and clean stormwater. The River’s identity could be strengthened with signature elements, such as new signage, bridges, and gateway entrances.

CAPTURE COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES

Since the City’s early years, neighborhoods have turned their backs to the River. Now the people of Los Angeles have the opportunity to enjoy the River as a safe, accessible, healthy, sustainable, and celebrated place. The opportunities that emerge would vary from neighborhood to neighborhood, but in all cases new benefits can be created that would encourage neighborhood enhancement, empowerment, and reinvestment where appropriate. The Plan’s multi-purpose recommendations also address important environmental justice issues by targeting brownfields for redevelopment, offering opportunities for non-vehicular commuting, and encouraging the creation of new recreational spaces for people of all ages. Further, natural spaces and trails would provide outdoor fitness and environmental education opportunities in neighborhoods that currently lack these amenities.

CREATE VALUE

This Plan’s vision is also about creating value—improving the quality of life for residents, increasing the attractiveness of the City as a place to live and work, and increasing economic prosperity. Core elements of this idea include empowering communities by encouraging participation and consensus-building, creating opportunities for sustainable, economic reinvestment, and adding value and providing an equitable distribution of opportunities to underserved neighborhoods along the River.
As a symbol of a renewed, green City, the revitalized River would foster community identity and civic pride, thereby bringing communities together. As a recreational and commuter bikeway, the revitalized River would lead to a healthier lifestyle for many, reducing dependence on the automobile. As a functioning ecosystem, the revitalized River would provide habitat value and nature’s services. As a living river, the revitalized River would play a role in educating young people about water, plants and animals. And, as a linear park, the revitalized River would provide park frontage and park access, inducing new residential, commercial, and “eco-industrial” development with its associated economic benefits.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REVITALIZING THE LOS ANGELES RIVER

The long-term vision for the River involves restoring a continuous, functioning riparian ecosystem along the River Corridor. This would involve restoring riparian vegetation to support birds and mammals, and ideally, developing fish passages, fish ladders, and riffle pools to allow for restoration of steelhead trout habitat.

In the short-term, channel walls can be modified to provide green landscaped terraces for wildlife habitat, water quality treatment, and increased public enjoyment. A system of pathways and overlooks can provide safe public access. Accomplishing long-term improvements would involve expansion of channel capacity and reduction in flow velocity. These can be achieved through a combination of flood storage outside the channel, underground flow diversions, and, over the long-term, land acquisition including purchase of private property to allow for channel widening.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GREENING THE NEIGHBORHOODS

A major element of reconnecting neighborhoods to the Los Angeles River is the transformation of the River Corridor into a continuous River Greenway that functions as the “green spine” of the City. Safe, pedestrian-friendly connections to the Greenway can be provided via a system of arterial and local “green streets” that are bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly, and paseos with wide sidewalks and shady tree canopies. To improve habitat connectivity, specific recommendations are presented to aid in the restoration and creation of habitat linkages throughout the River Corridor.

As this system develops, signature elements—gateways, bridges, paseos, plazas, and other landmarks—can be added to reinforce the River’s identity. Building on past efforts, public art can be a major component of this system. Within neighborhoods, underused or vacant space, as well as existing public spaces such as schoolyards, can be refurbished and made a part of the emerging green network and enhanced cultural landscape.
One revitalization strategy critical to realizing the goals of the Plan is the implementation of early examples that can exhibit cross-cutting development possibilities. To demonstrate opportunities made possible with a revitalized River, 20 “Opportunity Areas” were identified along the River corridor to illustrate what might be feasible through implementation of various River improvement scenarios. The Opportunity Areas also represent approaches to address conditions that recur along the River; for example, constriction of the River corridor by rail lines, limited right-of-way (ROW) through residential neighborhoods, and physical barriers in areas of industrial development.

Five of the Opportunity Areas were selected for more detailed development of revitalization concepts, including economic analysis:

**Canoga Park:** Creation of a community park and restoration of the River’s ecological function, including naturalization of the concrete channel, and a ponded area extending from Canoga Avenue to Owensmouth Avenue.

**River Glen:** Restoration of riparian habitat and creation of a large water quality treatment wetland at the confluence of the River with Verdugo Wash. An alternative scenario also incorporates parkland and a portion of the proposed River Greenway.

**Taylor Yard:** Restoration of riparian habitat, naturalization of the River channel, and creation of a large water quality treatment wetland.

**Chinatown-Cornfields:** Realignment of the River channel to create a naturalized diversion channel and riparian island that would allow ponding water for recreation, along with a large community park on an opposite bank. An alternative scenario creates a more urban river edge featuring a pond area with promenades and overlooks.

**Downtown Industrial Area:** Creation of three street-end parks on the east side of the River, connecting the Boyle Heights community and the emerging Arts District to the water’s edge with terraces. An alternative scenario would create more urban plazas and promenades along the eastern edge of the River. A ponded area would be established in both alternatives.

The drawings that illustrate these ideas are intended to be conceptual in nature and to represent a range of possibilities. Improvements that may be proposed for individual neighborhoods will be developed through an extensive Community Planning process with active involvement of neighborhood residents.
CREATING VALUE: THE BENEFITS OF REVITALIZATION

Making the River green and accessible is expected to transform an undervalued asset into a valued amenity. Revitalization offers the opportunity for communities to engage in development that leads to an improved natural environment while also attracting investment that leads to new jobs, increased property values, more livable streets, and sustainable growth.

To assess the potential benefits of revitalization and to illustrate possible design ideas, different land use possibilities were explored for some of the Opportunity Areas and developed into hypothetical designs and three-dimensional models. Each of these models retains existing significant buildings, and proposes building typologies and massing that are realistic in the prevailing market. The Taylor Yard Opportunity Area’s analysis was devoted primarily to natural and open space considerations. This Area presents great promise as an early example of concrete removal that can result in significant water quality, habitat, and recreation benefits. Additionally, the Area’s close proximity to a planned high school makes it an ideal location to create outdoor classrooms and other environmental education features.

Estimates of economic benefits accruing to the proposed revitalization concepts for the selected Opportunity Areas (combined, at full build-out) range from $2.7 to $5.4 billion in new development, 11,000 to 18,000 new jobs, and a long-term tax revenue increase ranging from $47 to $81 million, annually.

A COMMUNITY PLANNING FRAMEWORK FOR REVITALIZATION

Implementation of this Revitalization Master Plan would take place within the existing City planning and zoning context. An important next step, following adoption of this Plan, would be to update existing Community Plans in areas that include the River, through an inclusive community involvement process. The City’s established community planning process is the most appropriate way to formalize revitalization proposals because it gives each unique neighborhood an opportunity to tailor River developments to the sentiments expressed by local stakeholders. Zoning changes may also follow these Plan updates.

To complement the Community Plan process, a River Improvement Overlay (RIO) district would be created, with three important functions:
- Establish a high-quality interface between private property and the River;
- Increase open space and improve environmental quality; and
- Create active pedestrian streets leading to the River.

A MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE FOR A REVITALIZED RIVER

A three-tiered structure is proposed for managing a revitalized Los Angeles River. Because of the multiple public entities with jurisdiction over various aspects of the River, the management structure must be comprehensive, flexible enough to allow these entities to work in collaboration, and comprehensive enough to proceed independently when necessary.

The Plan’s proposed River management structure includes three elements:
- **Governmental**: The Los Angeles River Authority, a joint powers authority (JPA) that includes the City of Los Angeles, the County of Los Angeles, and through a memorandum of understanding (MOU), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The JPA would serve as the principal entity with authority and responsibility for River reconstruction, right-of-way management and maintenance, assuming responsibilities for public liability, permitting, and land development.
- **Entrepreneurial**: The Los Angeles River Revitalization Corporation would be a not-for-profit entity charged with directing public and private financing for River-related and neighborhood revitalization projects.
- **Philanthropic**: The Los Angeles River Foundation would be a not-for-profit body established by private individuals to support the Plan’s revitalization goals.

This new management structure would enable the City and its partners to maintain a long-term focus on River revitalization in order to ensure that the River remains a priority for future generations.
The Los Angeles River begins at the confluence of the Arroyo Calabasas and Bell Creek in Canoga Park (2006)
The River is the original source of life for the City of Los Angeles. Once plentiful with wetlands and marshes, filled with willows, alder, sycamore, steelhead trout, and grizzly bears, it was home to the Tongva people for thousands of years. The Spanish arrived in 1542 when Juan Cabrillo visited the area. On August 2, 1769, the first recorded words about Los Angeles were written by Father Juan Crespi, the diarist for the Spanish expedition to find sites for Franciscan missions between San Diego and San Francisco. The expedition, led by Captain Gaspar de Portola and Father Junipero Serra, entered what is now Los Angeles through Elysian Park after crossing the Arroyo Seco. Since the first two days of August marked the annual feast of Our Lady of the Angels of Porciúncula, the valley and the River were named “El Rio y Valle de Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles de la Porciúncula” (“The River and Valley of Our Lady the Queen of the Angels on the River Porciúncula”). The River’s name came to be known as “Rio de Porciúncula,” but thereafter became known as “Rio de Los Angeles.” (De Graaf, et al., 2001)

The River’s early settlers were culturally diverse. In 1781, a group of 46 Spanish and Mexican settlers established the Mission Nuestra Señora Reina de los Angeles along its banks. Records indicate that 26 of these original settlers were of African or part-African ancestry.

The River’s early settlers were culturally diverse. In 1781, a group of 46 Spanish and Mexican settlers established the Mission Nuestra Señora Reina de los Angeles along its banks. Records indicate that 26 of these original settlers were of African or part-African ancestry.

The new pueblo grew slowly at first. Even in 1820, as the largest civilian community in Spanish California, it had only 650 residents. The Gold Rush of 1849, however, brought large numbers of people to California, including the southland, and in 1850, the City of Los Angeles was incorporated. This changed the character of the River dramatically, as it provided the water and transportation route that allowed the City to grow. Railroads arrived when the Southern Pacific completed its line to Los Angeles in 1876 and were typically aligned along the along the River—they remain a significant characteristic of the River’s environment.

Industrial land uses began encroaching upon the River following the alignment of many of the rail lines. With extensive building in the growing City and the encroachment into the River’s floodplain came the inevitable damage due to extreme flood events. Homes and businesses were flooded on numerous occasions in the first half of the 20th Century. Especially in the 1910’s and again in the late 1930’s, devastating flooding prompted the Los Angeles County Flood Control District to request federal support for flood damage reduction along the River. In 1936, Congress directed the United States Army Corps of Engineers to construct the concrete-lined channel that now conveys the River for most of its 51-mile length.

Looking eastward, just south of Elysian Park in 1887 (Los Angeles Public Library Photo Archives; used by permission)
Los Angeles River is the original source of life for the City of Los Angeles. It is where the Tongva and, later, the Spanish built the City’s first settlements and where, today, ethnically diverse neighborhoods prosper. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the river powered the City’s industry and served as an important transportation corridor, creating economic value and growth. As development encroached upon the river’s floodplain, eventual flooding destroyed homes and property, harming people and wreaking havoc on some of the City’s most significant original settlements.

Channelization of the River was intended to provide armor against the floods, but while limiting the potential for damage outside the channel, it also ended up increasing the force of the water, causing even more powerful flows within the channel. Channelization also divided neighborhoods from each other and from nature. By taking the River’s water away from the City, wetlands and other habitats were dried up and the River’s ecological functions were lost.

Over time, with the establishment of railroads, warehouses, and other industrial uses that line the River’s edge, the River has become both literally and figuratively isolated from people and communities. Most people cannot even see the River, let alone enjoy it as a valuable public resource and symbolic place of origin for the City. In the six decades since the River was paved, it has been treated as an unwelcome guest in many neighborhoods.

Like many railroads, the River travels through the undesirable and neglected parts of the City—the back of everything—including backyards, warehouses, trash dumps, power lines, and freeways—certainly not the rich and thriving ecological environment that once existed.

The Los Angeles River - Past to Present

1868 (A. L. Bancroft and Co.) 1894 (Semi-Tropic Homestead Company) 1909 (Birdseye View Publishing Company) 2006 (City of Los Angeles)
“After traveling about a league and a half through a pass between low hills we entered a very spacious valley, well grown with cottonwoods and alders, among which ran a beautiful river from north-northwest, and then, doubling the point of a steep hill, it went on afterward to the south.”

Father Juan Crespi, upon entering what is now Los Angeles through Elysian Park in 1769.
5,000 B.C.E. - 1700’s - Tongva and Yangna Indian villages along the River

1769 - Gaspar de Portola and Father Juan Crespi name the River

1781 - El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Angeles is founded where Olvera Street now exists

1825 - A massive flood cuts a new path south of the pueblo to San Pedro Bay

1850 - Los Angeles incorporated as a City

Mid 1800’s - Development boom results in homes and businesses being built in the floodplain

1910 - City passes ordinance prohibiting dumping in the River

1910-1933 - Many of the historic bridges are built, while levees are built along more than a third of the River

1914 - Major flood causes widespread damage

1918 - Increasing industrialization along the river’s banks

1921 - Flood control construction moves the mouth of the river one mile east

1934 - Massive flooding occurs causing Congress to authorize concrete channels

1935 - Army Corps begins channelization

1938 - Most devastating flood on record

1941 - Sepulveda Dam is completed

1979 - Sepulveda Basin Wildlife Reserve is established

1979 - Legislation to establish Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC) (Jan 1, 1980: SMMC born)

1985 - Group of artists and poet Lewis McAdams found the Friends of the Los Angeles River (FoLAR)

1989 - Mayor Tom Bradley establishes first task force on the River to look at potential river improvements

1990 - County of Los Angeles River Task Force is formed and restoration efforts begin

1992 – Proposition A: County receives open space assessment district funds to provide new river access through parks and bike trails (with additional funding occurring in 1996)
The reality of the River today and the motivation for its revitalization stem from an understanding that it is the City’s very heart, and that the City, in turn, is essential to the River’s ultimate restoration. This relationship is eloquently summarized by noted American conservationist, forester, philosopher, educator, writer, and outdoor enthusiast, Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), who believed that, “the way we treat rivers reflects the way we treat each other.”

Over the past several years, Los Angeles communities, with many local, state, and federal agencies, and nongovernmental organizations, have begun efforts to revitalize the Los Angeles River. The City of Los Angeles has invested in bikeways, bridges, parks, bike paths, public art, and street improvements. The County of Los Angeles developed the Los Angeles River Master Plan (adopted by the County Board of Supervisors in 1996), and has established important landscaping and signage guidelines for the River. Currently, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is engaged in several studies to restore a functioning ecosystem within selected areas of the channel. The recently completed Valleyheart Greenway suggests that regional solutions to improve stormwater runoff quality are most cost-effective when constructed adjacent to the River and combined with River revitalization efforts. Many grants have been received for trees, pocket parks, bikeways, and other features that contribute to the greening of the River corridor.

Many nonprofit groups, including the Friends of the Los Angeles River (FoLAR), Tree People, North East Trees, The River Project, the Arroyo Seco Foundation, The Coastal Conservancy, and the Trust for Public Land have also worked tirelessly over the past two decades to raise public and civic awareness of the River’s potential, and to sponsor and implement revitalization projects, including pocket parks, landscape improvements, and water quality treatment areas. In particular, TreePeople produced the Sun Valley Watershed Management Plan (with the County of Los Angeles) and the Hull House demonstration site; North East Trees has developed numerous greenway parks and with the Arroyo Seco Foundation produced the Arroyo Seco Watershed Management Plan; the River Project produced Tujunga/Pacoima Watershed Management Plan as well as earlier studies and planning efforts for Tujunga Wash, Taylor Yard and, with the County, implemented the Valleyheart Greenway. Also through sponsorship of public education programs, River cleanups, monitoring studies, and physical improvements, groups such as these have long-carried the torch for revitalizing the River.

There are several additional significant efforts focused on the watershed, and particularly along the rivers in the basin. Organizations such as the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority and its partner organization, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, along with the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, and the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council are all engaged in planning, designing, and building community, neighborhood, open space, parks and trails along the River and throughout the County. These projects demonstrate that greening publicly-owned, underutilized lands provides an important environmental education function that increases awareness of the value of rivers and their relationships to the entire watershed.
THE AD HOC COMMITTEE ON THE LOS ANGELES RIVER

In June of 2002, the Los Angeles City Council established the Ad Hoc Committee on the Los Angeles River. The Council Committee coordinates and partners with other stakeholders on major revitalization efforts, identifies linkages between projects and communities, recommends policy changes, and creates a City role for River revitalization. Chaired by Councilmember Ed Reyes, the Committee has focused on major revitalization issues, including opportunities for parks, bicycle paths and pedestrian trails, recreation, nature, neighborhood identity, jobs, community development, tourism, civic pride, neighborhood redevelopment, water quality and supply, revaluing neglected space, and fostering a sense of place along the River throughout the City. Membership of the Committee includes Council representatives from Districts 1, 4, 9, 13 and 14, through which the River flows.

In addition to this Plan, the Ad Hoc Committee has spearheaded the following efforts contributing to the River’s revitalization.

Policies

- Adoption of City Guiding Principles for the Los Angeles River
- Recommended expansion of the High Speed Rail Corridor Study Area
- Los Angeles River Revitalization is now part of the City’s legislative agenda
- Promotion and creation of a City Task Force with the plastic industry to address plastic litter in the River in support of water quality TMDL (total maximum daily load) requirements.

Plans and Studies

- The City is in partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to work jointly on a River-wide feasibility study that will complement the City’s revitalization plan.
- Through the efforts of the Thirteenth Council District and the Department of City Planning, the Silver Lake Specific Plan has been amended and now designates certain zones, land uses, and conditions along the River for open space, frontage, and access.
- Establishment of a Los Angeles River Planning Unit within the Department of City Planning

Public Outreach and Education

- A Los Angeles River web site (www.lariver.org) was established for Committee activities and Revitalization Master Plan updates, and has received over 50,000 visits every year.
- The Committee sponsored five design workshops that worked with communities to create new designs for three different reaches of the River. These workshops were called “Great Outburst Of Design Initiatives” or GOODIs.
- The annual Los Angeles River Day memorializes past works, supports future efforts, and increases public awareness of the River.
- Over 20 community partners assisted in coordination of the 2005 “The Future is Now” Los Angeles River campaign, poster, and calendar.
- The Bureau of Sanitation created “Linking Us Together”—an eight-minute video promoting a vision for Los Angeles River revitalization.
- Anti-litter campaigns and plastic recycling programs are currently underway.

2004 - County Master Plan Advisory Committee establishes official landscape and signage guidelines for the River and the Right-of-way.
2004 - First Los Angeles City River Appreciation Day is celebrated.
2005 - Silver Lake/Echo Park/Elysian Valley community plan was adopted in 2004. Also, the “mile marker” pilot program became fully operational in 2005.
2005 - City of Los Angeles approves and completes official river signage and mileage markers program for the River.
2005 - A portion of the Zanja Madre, the “Mother Ditch,” the original water system for the city, is discovered during Metro Gold Line construction in the Comfields.
2005 - Catch basins inserts and covers are the first project funded by Prop O that would install 8000 inserts and 6000 covers to prevent trash from flowing into the Los Angeles River and Ballona Creek.
2005 - Los Angeles River and Ballona Creek trash TMDL were revised and adopted.
2005 - Plastic Bag Taskforce for the City of LA is established to address plastic litter in the Los Angeles River.
2005 - The City issues a RFP for the Revitalization Master Plan and Tetra Tech Consultant Team is selected to develop the Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan.
2005-2007 - As part of the LARRMP, 20 public workshops are held to encourage community input.
2006 - Los Angeles River Planning Unit is established in the Planning Department.
2006 - City of Los Angeles’ Integrated Resources Plan is approved.
2006 - City signs an agreement with US Army Corp of Engineers to cosponsor the Los Angeles River Ecosystem Restoration Study valued at 10 million dollars.
2006 - Integrated Regional Water Management Plan is approved for the region.
2006 - First Youth Workshop on the Los Angeles River takes place. Over 500 students attend.
2006 - California State Historic Park opens at the Comfields.
Funding and Resources
- The Ad Hoc Committee’s most significant activity in regard to funding was the introduction and support for the passage of the $500 million Proposition O measure for Clean Water, Ocean, River, Beach, Bay, and Storm Water Cleanup, in 2004.
- The City was successful in obtaining $25 million for the region and has continued to pursue state-level funding through California State Proposition 50 (the Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002) and federal legislation.
- Federal legislation was introduced by Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard and Senator Barbara Boxer.
- The City’s recent budget includes a list of over 50 River-adjacent projects in planning, design, or construction valued at over $650 million dollars, including proposals for parks, transportation, and water quality projects.

Riverwide Projects
- Councilmember Wendy Greuel (Second Council District) completed the Los Angeles River Greenway Project in her district’s Studio City neighborhood.
- Councilmember Tom LaBonge (Fourth Council District) initiated the North Atwater Riverside Park adjacent to the River, which is currently being designed.
- Councilmember Eric Garcetti (Thirteenth Council District) initiated work on the Elysian Valley Bikeway, which is expected to be completed in 2007.
- Fifteen River bridges are in various stages of design and construction.
- The State Department of Parks and Councilmember Ed Reyes (First Council District) worked together to establish two state parks: Los Angeles State Historic Park and Río de Los Angeles.

Management and Partnerships
Established by the Ad Hoc Committee in 2003, the Los Angeles River City Department Task Force, chaired by City Engineer Gary Lee Moore, ensures that the City’s various departments share information, collaborate on projects, and explore other opportunities for River revitalization. Work completed to date includes:
- Partnerships with the County, State Conservancies, and the Army Corps of Engineers
- Development of a Los Angeles River Emergency Response Signage System
- Development of a Los Angeles River identification signage program
- Enabling the City’s NavigateLA River Mapping Section to provide the River’s project status information
- River-adjacent project review coordination between the Department of Building and Safety and the Department of City Planning
- Acting as the City’s staff review forum for the Revitalization Master Plan process
- Leadership in integrating the River into the City’s Integrated Resources Plan (IRP) and the County of Los Angeles’ Integrated Regional Water Management Plan (IRWMP)

The City’s recent collaboration with the County of Los Angeles helped complete the application for projects under the Integrated Regional Water Management Program (Proposition 50, Chapter 8) for State funding of projects with watershed-scale benefits. The collaboration proved successful in bringing $25 million to the region and demonstrated the City’s increasing ability to form regional partnerships for future funding and legislation in support of the River and its watershed.
MASTER PLAN SCOPE AND PLANNING HORIZON

SCOPE
The Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan (hereafter the Plan) provides both a long-term vision and implementation guidance for revitalizing the River. It is intended as a framework, establishing the vision and guidelines for implementation, yet allowing substantial latitude for the details of specific projects to be crafted through community and neighborhood planning processes.

Developed through an extensive community involvement process, the vision represents what residents value about the River, and what they would like to see it become. Specific recommendations for realizing this vision are provided in three areas:

- Physical improvements within the River channel and connecting to adjacent neighborhoods;
- Improvements to current policies for managing public access to the River and for ensuring public health and safety; and
- Governing and managing the River as an amenity and asset.

The Plan also provides recommendations at three geographic scales:

- Improvements within the River channel and the existing right-of-way;
- Improvements within adjacent neighborhoods, to provide safe access to the River and its new amenities and to encourage creation of more neighborhood-scale green space; and
- Capturing community opportunities along the River and opportunities for making the River the “front door” of the City.

REVITALIZATION PLAN AREA
The Plan area includes all 32 miles of the River as it flows through the City of Los Angeles, from its “point of origin” at the confluence of Arroyo Calabasas and Bell Creek in Canoga Park, to the City limits south of downtown. The Plan recommends improvements along the entire 32 miles, and for five Opportunity Areas which are examined in greater detail.

RELATIONSHIP TO CURRENT AND PAST PLANS
The Plan complements and reinforces the many water resource and waterway planning efforts that have been completed within the watershed that concern issues such as flood storage, water quality, ecosystem restoration, and recreation. The many documents that have been reviewed to prepare this Plan are listed in the references section.

PLANNING HORIZON
Restoring the ecological function of the River and transforming it into a public and civic amenity will take time. The Plan acknowledges that implementation of the long-term vision for revitalization will require an adaptive, phased approach:

- Near-term opportunities that improve access, recreational value, water quality treatment, and non-motorized transportation that could be realized in a 5 to 15-year time horizon.
- Longer-term and more far-reaching changes that revitalize the River’s natural functions could take 25 to 40 years or more to achieve.

While realizing that the overall vision may take time, it is important to remember that even incremental River changes are associated with beneficial outcomes. For example, a buy-back policy to acquire land adjacent to the River to support channel widening and restoration of a riparian corridor might take decades to complete. In the meantime, individual parcels could be acquired in the near-term that could selectively become recreational parkland providing water quality features for urban runoff treatment.