

Date of Hearing: April 18, 2023

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Rebecca Bauer-Kahan, Chair

AB 833 (Luz Rivas) – As Introduced February 14, 2023

SUBJECT: State parks: Rio de Los Angeles State Park: expansion plan: Los Angeles River

SUMMARY: Requires the Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) to develop a plan to expand the Rio de Los Angeles State Park on lands along the Los Angeles (LA) River in collaboration and coordination with the County of Los Angeles, the City of Los Angeles, other cities along the Los Angeles River, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, and the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (Rivers and Mountains Conservancy).

EXISTING LAW: Establishes the California state park system and vests State Parks with control of the state park system and responsibility for administering, protecting, developing, and interpreting state parks for the use and enjoyment of the public (PRC § 5001 *et seq.*).

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This bill is keyed fiscal.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** This bill requires State Parks to coordinate park development and expansion along the LA River corridor. According to the author, “the Los Angeles River and its tributaries offer a great opportunity to improve park equity across Los Angeles County. In the last 20 years, many public agencies have planned and developed park space along the River or its tributaries, but the division among those agencies creates inequitable access to parks along the River. [This bill] allows State Parks to demonstrate its leadership in building collaboration with and among local public agencies to create a plan, or a vision, for riverside parks throughout the LA River’s watershed.”
- 2) **Background.** The LA River is 51 miles long, contained entirely within the County of Los Angeles, and passes through 13 cities, including 32 miles that stretch across the City of Los Angeles. The LA River, formed by a large watershed that drains the Santa Susana Mountains, the San Fernando Valley, and the San Gabriel Mountains, played an important role in the formation of the Los Angeles basin. Until the Los Angeles Aqueduct brought water from the Owens Valley, the LA River was the primary water source for the Los Angeles Basin. The town became a thriving farming community, growing corn, wheat, grapes, and orchard fruits irrigated by the LA River and its tributary streams. Because the river’s flows varied from a gentle trickle to violent, debris-laden floods, the LA River never cut a deep channel like many other rivers. The river flowed over a wide area of braided channels and changed its path to the Pacific Ocean. As Los Angeles grew, development occurred all along the river’s natural floodplain. Numerous catastrophic floods caused the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to stabilize the river in the late 1930s by constructing concrete walls to contain flood waters.

The communities along the LA River are some of the most underserved and most environmentally burdened in the State of California, as determined by CalEnviroScreen 4.0, which compares environmental conditions and social factors in communities across the state.

Industrial land uses, which are often incompatible with river park uses and community health, can cause increased pollution and are common along the river in many neighborhoods. The land surrounding the LA River is owned and maintained by various jurisdictions. The flood control channel is operated by Los Angeles County Flood Control District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Adjacent lands are owned by the County of Los Angeles, the City of Los Angeles, other public agencies, and private land owners.

This bill requires State Parks to collaborate with, and coordinate the efforts of, a number of state and local agencies to create a plan for parks along the entire LA River and its tributaries. This bill proposes that those parks would be an expansion of the Rio de Los Angeles State Park.

Rio de Los Angeles State Park. The existing Rio de Los Angeles State Park is located along the LA River north of downtown Los Angeles in the neighborhood of Glassell Park, Los Angeles. The park includes restored wetlands featuring native plants as well as sports fields, a children's playground and a recreation building. The park was built on Taylor Yard, an abandoned freight-switching facility used by the Union Pacific and later the Southern Pacific railroads from the 1920s until 1985.

In 2003, State Parks began working with the community to develop the Rio de Los Angeles State Park General Plan and environmental impact report for the site, to serve as a guide for future parkland development. Concurrently, they began a joint planning process with the City of Los Angeles to design the first 40-acre phase of the park, which opened in 2007 as Rio de Los Angeles State Park. This phase is classified as a state recreation area, and is currently managed in partnership with the City of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation.

The Rio de Los Angeles State Park General Plan contemplates future expansion of the 40 acre site, but primarily in the areas adjacent to the existing park property. The park is considered an important component of the regional goal to link open space in such a way as to enhance the aesthetic, recreational, and habitat values of the park, the LA River corridor, and the existing regional open space.

Related efforts. The 100 Acre Partnership is an agreement between city and state agencies to collaborate on revitalizing 100 acres of the former Taylor Yard railyard into a contiguous public green space along the LA River. The 100 acres is comprised of:

- Rio de Los Angeles State Park (40 acres);
- The Bowtie (G-1): an 18-acre parcel owned by California State Parks;
- G2: A 42-acre property, with 12 acres owned by the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) and 30 acres owned by the City of Los Angeles, that requires environmental remediation; and
- Paseo Del Rio: 100 Acre Partnership collaborative project which will provide for approximately one-mile of walking trail and greenway that will run along the river and across both the Bowtie and G-2 parcels.

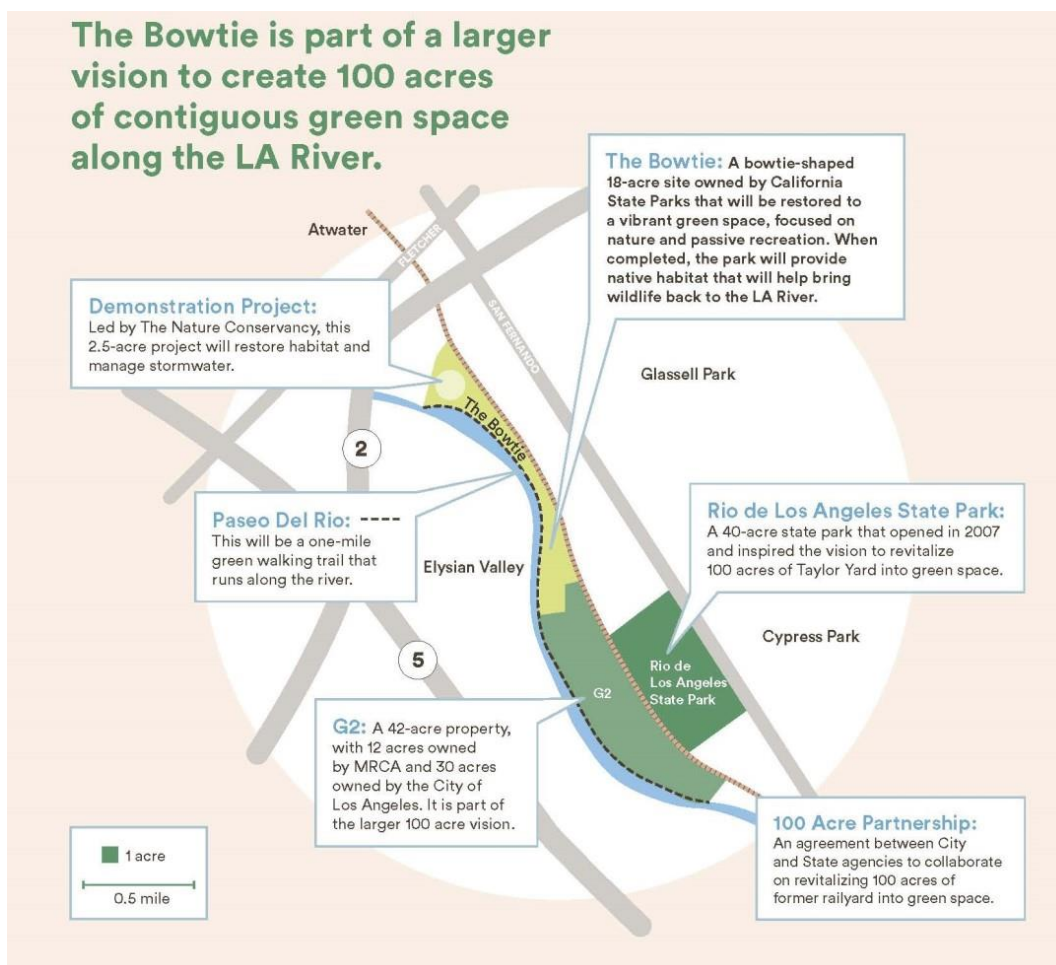


Figure 1: Map showing the larger vision to create 100 acres of contiguous green space along the LA River. Source: https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=30530

Other plans. In the early 1990s, the County of Los Angeles began a process that, after considerable input from stakeholders and community outreach, resulted in the Los Angeles River Master Plan in 1996. The master plan vision includes four core principles: revitalizing the river's ecological and hydrological functions while maintaining its flood control requirements; creating a green ribbon through the city with green strands extending the river's influence into adjacent neighborhoods; capturing opportunities to benefit neighboring communities; and, creating value by improving the quality of life. The master plan focuses primarily on the main stem of the river. The 2022 Los Angeles River Master Plan is an update of the 1996 Master Plan, and is available at <https://larivermasterplan.org>.

The Los Angeles City Council established its own ad hoc committee on the river in 2002 and the City's Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan was released in 2007. Continuing the long-term goals of the county master plan, the Revitalization Master Plan also promoted the river as a multi-benefit solution to addressing and enhancing water quality and flood control while enabling safe access to the river and restoring a functional river ecosystem. The 2007 plan is available at <https://tayloryardriverprojects.lacity.org/la-river/la-river-revitalization-master-plan>.

Other recent studies, reports, and plans for the LA River include:

- 2018 and 2022 County of Los Angeles Parks Needs Assessments, at <https://lacountyparkneeds.org>.
- 2020 Upper Los Angeles River and Tributaries Revitalization Plan, by Upper Los Angeles River and Tributaries Working Group, staffed by Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, and LA County Department of Public Works, at <https://www.upperlariver.org/>.
- 2018 Lower Los Angeles River Revitalization Plan, by Lower Los Angeles River Revitalization Working Group, staffed by Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, and LA County Department of Public Works, at <https://lowerlariver.org/>.

- 3) **Suggested committee amendments.** The committee may wish to add language to specify elements that State Parks should consider as part of the plan; include the tributaries of the LA River under the plan; add MCRA as a collaborating entity; specify that development of the plan shall include public input; and require State Parks to incorporate existing planning efforts when feasible, as follows:

5006.43. (a) (1) The department shall collaborate and coordinate with the County of Los Angeles, the City of Los Angeles, other cities along the Los Angeles River, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, *the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority*, and the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy to develop a plan to expand the Rio de Los Angeles State Park on lands along the Los Angeles River *and its tributaries*.

(2) *The plan shall consider all of the following at a minimum:*

(A) *The development of multi-benefit parks and recreation spaces that are climate resilient and increase park equity;*

(B) *An assessment of the present and future demand for parks and recreation spaces along the Los Angeles River and its tributaries;*

(C) *How to prioritize implementation of the elements of the plan; and*

(D) *Recommendations for future funding needs.*

(b) *The department shall include opportunities for public input and engagement in the development of the plan.*

(c) *The department shall coordinate the plan with existing plans, studies, and reports, when feasible.*

- 4) **Arguments in support.** Los Angeles Waterkeeper writes in support, stating that “embarking on a planning process to expand the Rio de Los Angeles State Park would be a vital step to ensure disadvantaged communities near the River have access to greenspace and much needed recreational amenities. Parks along the River would also be instrumental in reducing flood risks in the River and adjacent communities.”
- 5) **Related legislation.** Various recent budget bills include a total of \$154.2 million from the General Fund to establish a new Statewide Urban Rivers and Waterways Program. This

program will fund state and local park facilities and partnerships and will prioritize under-resourced, underserved, or park-poor urban communities with a connection to the rivers, waterways, and water systems.

AB 466 (Bocanegra), Chapter 341, Statutes of 2017, establishes the Upper Los Angeles River and Tributaries Working Group within the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy to develop a revitalization plan for the Upper Los Angeles River and certain of its tributaries, as prescribed.

SB 1374 (Lara), Chapter 486, Statutes of 2016, authorizes the formation of the Lower Los Angeles River Recreation and Park District.

AB 2534 (Nazarian) of 2016 would have established the Los Angeles River San Fernando Valley Regional Access and Economic Sustainability Working Group with specified responsibilities. AB 2534 died in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 530 (Rendon), Chapter 684, Statutes of 2015, establishes the Lower Los Angeles River Working Group composed of numerous stakeholders to develop revitalization plans for the river south of the City of Los Angeles.

AB 1251 (Gomez), Chapter 639, Statutes of 2015, establishes the Greenway Development and Sustainment Act, and allows for the creation of a greenway easement, which must be considered when assessing land values for the purposes of property taxation.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**Support**

Los Angeles Waterkeeper

Opposition

None on file

Analysis Prepared by: Keith Cialino / W., P., & W. / (916) 319-2096