



WHITTIER NARROWS NATURAL AREA

A PROPOSAL TO INVESTIGATE DEVELOPMENT AND RESTORATION ALTERNATIVES

PREPARED BY

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Whittier Narrows Natural Area: A Proposal to Investigate Development and Restoration Alternatives



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Friends of the Whittier Narrows Natural Area
ATTN: Jim Odling, Chair
P.O. Box 3522
South El Monte, CA 91733

Dear Mr. Odling

We present to you and your board this project proposal for the Whittier Narrows Natural Area. As a project group in the 606 Studio of the Master of Landscape Architecture program at the California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, we represent the latest group of multi-talented students to take on projects of great importance like the one we propose herein. 606 Studio projects have made their impact on the Southern California landscape and beyond, tackling projects concerned with everything from watershed health and ecological function to recreation opportunities for underserved urban communities.

Our individual backgrounds and talents vary widely making our team a better whole. We are former geologists, fashion designers, liberal arts scholars, and environmental designers. Our backgrounds have helped us define our individual and common interests in Landscape Architecture and we share a strong work ethic.

We've developed an understanding of the basic issues of the project as defined on the Friends of the Whittier Narrows Natural Area website. Our understanding of the project has led us to develop the proposal presented here complete with a detailed task outline, schedule and cost estimate.

We ask that you carefully review our proposal and share it with the other officers of the Friends of the Whittier Narrows Natural Area. If there is any additional information we can provide, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Best Regards,

Rachel Booher, Michele Montano, Johnathan Perisho, Devon Santy

Executive Summary

Strong civic development grows from combined passions, investments, and visions to be celebrated over generations. The proposed San Gabriel River Discovery Center has been controversial, making evident the imperative for more thorough community engagement and site exploration. The brightest future for the Whittier Narrows Dam Basin must be clearly articulated to best enrich the interconnected communities to which we belong.

The Whittier Narrows represent rich history, ecology, and community; ancestral lands of the Gabrieleno/Tongva people, site of the original San Gabriel Mission, rare alluvial sage scrub habitat connected to the San Gabriel River corridor, and natural open space in a community recognized as park deficient by City of Los Angeles standards. This is one of few remnants of a fundamentally altered ecological network that could once again bridge communities. The significance and sensitivity of this seminal habitat highlights the importance of careful planning for only the most suitable land use.

This proposed one-year study is intended to evaluate current plans and develop strategies for minimal environmental impact from social demands. Meeting stakeholder, community, and ecological interests will be essential in best cultivating the rich heritage of the natural area. In the scope of this work we intend to investigate local and regional user needs and values, species habitat, ecological function, educational opportunities, accessibility, and infrastructure provisions.

We envision clearly informing a way forward with comprehensive analysis and suitability assessments, empowering the community through stakeholder cooperation, outlining a combined vision in master planning design, and investigating protection with historic landmark designation to properly celebrate for generations to come.

The estimated cost of realizing this study is projected at \$126,406.

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Introduction

A plan has been approved for an educational and recreational facility prepared by the San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority (the "Authority"). The Authority is made up of a governing board whose members represent local water districts, the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, and the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy.

We understand that the Friends of the Whittier Narrows Natural Area (the "Friends") as well as other public organizations are unsatisfied by the plans approved for the San Gabriel River Discover Center. The Friends approached faculty of the Landscape Architecture Department at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona to suggest this as a 606 Studio project. As outlined on their website (<http://naturalareafriends.net/home>), the Friends are displeased with the expensive plan and the planned disturbance to the habitat provided by the 419 acre Whittier Narrows Natural Area. We, the potential 606 Studio group, are particularly interested in the project for its regional implications from both sociological and bio-physical standpoints. The project presents a unique opportunity to address conflicts of interests between formal public agencies who have accepted the plan for the San Gabriel River Discovery Center and a community based non profit organization opposed to the plan.

We present the following sections in this proposal: background, goal and objectives, issues, plan / scope of work / methods, list of tasks, schedule, budget, deliverables, and summary / significance. In the background we present knowledge of similar projects and relevant literature, and generally demonstrate our understanding of the project. Our goal and objectives section outlines the broad scale motivations for completing the project. We demonstrate our understanding of the specific matters of concern related to this project in the issues section. The plan / scope of work section outlines the overall process we will go through both standard for the 606 studio as well as specifically tailored to the Whittier Narrows Natural Area project. This is followed by a detailed list of the tasks we'll complete to complete the process described in the plan. We then present a budget that estimates the cost for each task and the project as a whole, followed by a schedule that estimates the amount of time we will spend on each task. Our penultimate section describes the final deliverables we will present at the end of the project. Finally, our summary / significance section clarifies the importance of this project and highlights the most significant elements of this proposal.

Background

Whittier Narrows Dam Basin is located at the southern boundary of the San Gabriel Valley, in Los Angeles County, California. It is part of the gap in the Puente Hills, at the diversion point of the San Gabriel River and the Rio Hondo (one of the tributaries of the Los Angeles River). The site is bordered by the cities of South El Monte, Rosemead, Pico Rivera, Montebello, Whittier, and the City of Industry.

The Pomona Freeway (State Hwy 60) and Rosemead Boulevard (State Hwy 19) are major arteries of travel that provide access to the Basin. They also bisect the Basin in all directions cutting access between all of the different zones making it difficult to travel between activities within the site.

San Gabriel Boulevard, Santa Anita Ave., Peck Road, and Durfee Ave. are the local access roads. Santa Anita Avenue offers bus service and has stops in close proximity to the Basin. Buses are also accessible on Rush St., which is located in the northern edge of the site, along with Garvey Ave., which is a bit further to the north.

The cities surrounding Whittier Narrows Dam Basin are smaller communities, whose populations range in size from 20,116 residents (South El Monte) to 62,942 (Montebello, Pico Rivera) according to the census data from 2010. The median annual incomes in these communities are in the range of \$40,000 to \$50,000. With the exception of Rosemead, over 75% of residents in these communities are of Hispanic origin. The surrounding communities lack adequate green space for residents. These communities only provide 1.5 to 2.5 acres for each 1,000 residents on average. This is below Los Angeles County's level of service standards of 4 acres per 1,000 people for local parks and 6 acres per 1,000 for regional parks. (Green Visions Plan, (2007) The recreation facilities at Whittier Narrows Dam Basin serve a regional population, but they are also an equally important component of these local communities.

The Basin is owned by the Federal government and operated and managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It was constructed in 1957 as a flood risk management measure. The Corps of Engineers lease approximately 1,258 acres to the L.A. County Parks and Recreation, and 120 acres to the City of Pico Rivera. The site is also a groundwater replenishment location, and is home to a significant number of birds and wildlife.

The Basin is a transitional zone that creates an important connection between the Angeles National Forest and mountains to the north, to the Pacific Ocean on the south. Because the Rio Hondo and San Gabriel Rivers are important migration corridors for a number of species it creates a significant "ecotone" and habitat area.

Founded by the Audubon Society in 1939 and designated a wildlife sanctuary, it forms a crucial part of both an Audubon Society Important Bird Area and of the county's Whittier Narrows Significant Ecological Area.

The Whittier Narrows Natural Area offers important habitat for plants, birds and wildlife. It is part of a larger ecologically significant region that many environmental organizations say must be protected. The Audubon Society believes Whittier Narrows to be an Important Bird Area. Within this IBA, the Natural Area helps to provide habitat for more than 300 bird species, many of which are threatened, endangered, or of special concern. The Natural Area also helps to provide a wildlife corridor for coyotes and bobcat. It helps to connect the San Gabriel Mountains, the Montebello Hills and the Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor.

Whittier Narrows provides one of only two remaining rare Coastal Alluvial Fan Sage Scrub plant communities on the San Gabriel River. According to the San Gabriel Mountains Regional Conservancy, "Rare and endangered plants, birds, and other wildlife species inhabit these unusual habitat areas."

The Basin is an important feature of the local public green space system. It has the potential to connect over 1500 acres of parks and open space along the Rio Hondo and San Gabriel Rivers, providing 10 under served communities within the Los Angeles County much needed public open space.

Whittier Narrows Recreational Area is also a large multi use facility, which contains Center Lake, North Lake, and Legg Lake. There is an area where remote controlled model speedboats can be operated in Legg Lake. A rifle and pistol shooting range, softball and soccer fields, equestrian trail, archery, fishing, picnic areas, a paved airstrip for radio controlled hobby aircraft, and a connector trail between the Class I Rio Hondo bicycle path and the San Gabriel River bicycle path are all offered to whomever chooses to visit.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers conducted and published a Whittier Narrows Flood Control Basin Historic Resources Survey in the late 1970's in which its researchers believed that "Serious consideration should be given to creating a Whittier Narrows State Historical Park . . ."

The survey also pointed to the site of the original San Gabriel Mission, along with the location of one of the last battles of the Mexican War in 1847.

The historical and cultural significance of The Natural Area, larger Whittier Narrows Recreation Area, San Gabriel River and Rio Hondo cannot be underestimated. The Gabrieleno/Tongva people lived in the region for centuries before the arrival of Europeans. This importance should be recognized. The architecture of the Discovery Center, built in the 1950's is unique and is loved by many of the residents and volunteers. There is a feeling that its preservation is key, and would serve as a model of reuse... going hand in hand with the philosophy of the Whittier Narrows Nature Center which is to "Restore, Renovate, and Recognize".

Goal

Reevaluate the plans for the construction of a new community visitor center and investigate potential alternatives to new development.

Objectives:

Objectives

Identify key environmental and ecological issues and processes associated with the Whittier Narrows Natural Area.

Understand similar wants and needs expressed by opposing points of view

Understand differing wants and needs expressed by opposing points of view

Synthesize biophysical and sociocultural inventories with stakeholder wants and needs

Develop a revised set of design and programming opportunities to maximize educational potential and stewardship for the Whittier Narrows Natural Area.

Ensure that recommendations address the concerns of the Friends of the Whittier Narrows Natural Area, the local government and municipality agencies, the San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority, and public opinions.

Issues

Conflicts of interest amongst different stake holder groups are at the forefront of the issues surrounding the Whittier Narrows Natural Area. The agencies and organizations behind the proposed San Gabriel River Discovery Center have approved a plan that if constructed would disturb an area well beyond the current visitor center footprint. They require adequate meeting space in the venue for meetings.

The Friends see the proposed project as a threat to the ecological function of the site, and an excessively expensive project funded by tax payer dollars. They see the current visitor center as an opportunity for renovation, rather than something to be displaced and forgotten. The Friends value the site and its history as worthy of designation as a National Historic Landmark.

Local Native American Tribes, the Tongva and the Gabrieleno, are displeased with the proposed development plan claiming that it will understate the importance of the anthropological heritage archaeological significance.

Each group's specific concern has merit and deserves proper recognition. Additionally, this site plays valuable ecological roles given its position within wildlife corridors, and its position within both the Rio Hondo and San Gabriel River watersheds. The regional impact of this site in both sociocultural and biophysical capacities presents an exciting opportunity for this project to make an impact well beyond the project site boundaries.

Scope of Work

1) Background Research

In order for a vision plan to be successful, it is important that the team has knowledge of the site. During the research stage, the design team will seek out information on Whittier Narrows and the surrounding region that will guide all subsequent stages of work. An understanding of the region will allow the team to make appropriate decisions that consider a variety of external factors that may have a critical effect on subsequent decisions (geomorphology, hydrology, et al.) The design team also will need to be informed of the social factors involved with the project, such as economic trends, demographics, and planning initiatives that are already underway. Another important aspect of research is examining precedents. As the design team becomes more familiar with the conditions of the watershed, the wildlife and surrounding areas they will be better equipped to tackle some of the more complex issues present. Through both background research and the next stage – site inventory, they will also review similar projects that have been carried out and implemented. This process can provide the team inspiration or caution, depending on the outcomes of those projects.

2) Site Inventory

Site inventory allows the design team to become intimately familiar with the existing conditions of Whittier Narrows. By consulting with the client, they will determine if there is a specific area within the site that are more suitable for the discovery center. Through a series of site visits and collecting information from secondary sources, aerial imagery, archives, and interviews, the team will gain more specific insight on physical and cultural conditions, adding to what they learned through the background research. Engaging members of the community through workshops, surveys, or other methods will provide first-hand local knowledge that cannot be acquired through other sources. The site inventory will help identify the spaces that are not being fully utilized and the programs that are missing from contributing toward the sustainability of the community.

3) Analysis & Evaluation

The design team will begin the second phase of the project, by organizing the comprehensive collection of information regarding the background and current conditions of the Whittier Narrows Basin. They will then conduct a series of analyses with this information to determine the opportunities and constraints that exist for converting the site into sustainable and beneficial aspects of the community. The design team believes that their strength lies in their ability to address a broad range of issues, they may lack some of the specific, technical knowledge that will be necessary to resolve some issues. Therefore, consulting with experts may become an integral part of this stage. The next part is to develop a strategy to increase the project's positive impacts. Key issues will be identified and prioritized, with the client and community playing key roles in these decisions. Additionally, the team will evaluate the resources that will be required to address each issue, and what resources are currently available. At the end of this stage the design team will present the results from the research, inventory, and analysis to

the client and community stakeholders.

4) Synthesis & Design

With the key issues identified and prioritized, the design team can begin brainstorming solutions. Through meetings with the client, community workshops, and expert consultations, the “best” solutions—those that are the most appropriate to the site and issue, can be implemented realistically, and will achieve the greatest net benefit—will be selected. The team will then outline a phased plan for implementing the solutions following a realistic timeline, and will develop maintenance guidelines for those solutions that require maintenance for longevity. During the course of development for the vision plan, as information is gathered and ideas are formed, the work may diverge from the original vision plan goal and objectives. The design team will evaluate the effectiveness of the solutions for meeting the goal and objectives. If inconsistencies do exist, the team will revise the solutions or goal and objectives to ensure the client’s and team’s intentions are being carried through.

5) Prepare for Vision Plan Implementation

In order to set the stage for implementation after the completion of the proposed vision plan, during this stage the design team will identify potential funding sources and write proposals for the grants. Grant availability may cause the team and client to revise their areas of focus – for example, they may qualify for funding for a low-impact development project, but be unable to find suitable funding for a community garden. Projects that have the greatest chance of implementation should be prioritized.

6) Plan Evaluation

The final step in developing the proposed vision plan will be to create a strategy for the community to evaluate the success of the project after implementation. Tracking the successes and failures of this project will quantify its benefits and help inform the community as to how to best utilize their energy and resources in future development projects.

Task List

Site Reconnaissance (bulk resource collection)
Obtain project site base map
collect relevant sociocultural resources
collect relevant biophysical resources
Literature Review
Precedent Research
Identify similar projects
Read / understand strengths / weaknesses of existing projects
Inventory Collection
Orderly compile sociocultural and biophysical information
Retain subcontractors for special investigations
Soil sampling
Soil testing
Ecologist to study native plants and habitat value of project site
Determine landscape units
Prepare map of landscape units
Program - collect information from stakeholders, client, related parties
Hold community meetings
conduct interviews with client
conduct interviews with stakeholders
Breakdown of information into potential program elements
Analysis
Capability Analysis
Compatibility Matrix - compare program elements against each other
Suitability Matrix - Compare program elements against landscape units
Define Opportunities
Define Constraints
Map Opportunities and Constraints
Develop Goal and Objectives
Planning
Compose vision plan for project site
Create maps illustrating the vision plan
Design
Individual "site scale designs"
Prepare design graphics
Report
Draft text
Edit text
Design document layout
Compile images and supporting graphics
Format final report
Secure printing services for report
Print final report

Cost Estimate

Direct Costs

Travel 25 trips to/from site	\$4,000	
Research Trips	\$2,000	
Travel Subtotal		\$6,000

Inventory Program and Analysis Direct Costs

1) Printing / Copying	\$10,000	
2) Office Supplies	\$6,000	
3) Consultant Fees	\$7,000	
4) Community Meetings	\$3,000	
5) GIS Data, Photographs, Maps	\$4,000	
I.P.A. Costs Subtotal		\$30,000

Personnel

Student Labor Minion (est. \$16/hr ~ 660 hours ea.)	\$42,240	
Student Labor Minion Contingency (10%)	\$4,224	
Faculty Advising (est. \$175/hr ~ 150 hours)	26250	
Faculty Advising Contingency (10%)	2625	
Personnel Subtotal		\$75,339

Indirect Costs

20% on Base of Personnel Costs (\$75339)	\$15,068	
Indirect Cost Subtotal		\$15,068

Total Costs

\$126,407

Schedule

Tasks	2012					2013						
	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	July
Contact Negotiation												
Initial Client Meetings												
Background Research												
Site Inventory												
Site Visits												
Programming												
Public Outreach												
Analysis												
Expert Consultations												
Clients and Stakeholder Meetings												
Presentation												
Community and Client Feedback												
Design												
Plan Evaluation												
Draft Report												
Final Report Production												
Conclusion of Contract												

Deliverables

Master Plan/Vision Plan:

- Suitability Assessment
- Research & Analysis Report
- Risk Assessment
- Recommendations

Proposal for Historic Landmark Designation

Presentation of project and results to the Friends of the Whittier Narrows Natural Area and the San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority governing board members.

Summary and Significance

Whittier Narrows Natural Area is one of the last large open natural spaces left in the ever encroaching urbanism of Los Angeles County. At 419 acres, it serves as a wildlife sanctuary for many species, including some endangered species, and as a place of educational opportunity for young and old.

For more than 70 years, the Whittier Narrows Natural Area has brought together a large community that is spread out and divided by miles and miles of roads and highways. It also offers recreational opportunities that are unparalleled by any other open space in the region, all of which contribute to the health and happiness of all of its users.

Recently, development plans have been created that propose the replacement of the original nature center with a new 14,000 sq. ft. building and a parking lot for 116 vehicles. Since its release in the early 2000's, the plan has been faced with opposition from members of the community and local organizations for its potential impacts on the environment and wildlife.

The actions suggested in this proposal seek to investigate and address the concerns of all involved parties, including the stakeholders, the community and local organizations. The goal of the final product will be to create a vision plan and design that can serve as a foundation for collaboration between all entities, which will ensure that the Whittier Narrows Natural Area continues to be a viable resource for both the wildlife and community that it serves.

References

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Appendix A - 606 Studio Description

Appendix B - Faculty Profile

Dr. Susan J. Mulley BSc/BA, MA, MLA, PhD

Susan J. Mulley has a BSc, a B.A. (History), a MA in History, a Masters of Landscape Architecture, and a PhD in Rural Studies. Her postdoctoral fellowship in Land Resource Science was at the University of Guelph where she researched best management practices for stewardship and conservation of rural areas in Southern Ontario which informed the creation of a Southern Ontario Agricultural Greenbelt. She is currently a professor of landscape architecture at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, and teaches in both the graduate and undergraduate programs with a focus on environmental planning and design, advanced ecosystem design, community design, social and environmental justice, research methods and historic landscapes. Her research deals with linked (coupled) human and natural systems (CHANS) including design for human health, ecological and social function of urban, rural and wildland interface landscapes, conservation and stewardship attitudes and behavior, urban agriculture and food security, and participatory action research. Her students have won top national level awards in research and design from the American Society of Landscape Architecture (ASLA) and the International Association for Landscape Ecology (IALE). She is director of a new interdisciplinary research and applied practice center at Cal Poly Pomona, the California Center for Land and Water Stewardship (CCLAWS). CCLAWS will enable community and academic collaboration to examine critical issues facing California today, will develop new and innovative projects, and will encourage interdisciplinary community collaborations and creative methods to examine and solve environmental and social issues in the State of California.

Appendix B - Student Profiles

Johnathan Perisho

Johnathan received his Bachelor of Landscape Architecture degree from Ball State University where he was awarded the 2009 Student Honor Award by the Indiana Chapter American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA). He is now continuing his professional development as a Masters of Landscape Architecture student with an academic and professional focus on native plant communities and natural systems. His interdisciplinary experience stems from a variety of community projects such as community charettes and planning at Ball State, developing Haiti relief systems with The Center for Maximum Potential Building Systems (CMPBS), improving classroom space with the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Design Voice, consulting on an American Youthworks landscape with Austin Community Design and Development Center (ACDDC), and developing recommendations for TreePeople projects. In his undergraduate thesis he developed urban nature preserve recommendations with the Red Tail Conservancy in Muncie, IN with a focus on optimizing human restoration in the naturalized environment. Further, he has comprehensive native and ornamental landscape management experience from the Minnetrista Cultural Center, Walt Disney Horticulture, independently contracting, and volunteering with respected environmental institutions such as The Ladybird Johnson (LBJ) Wildflower Center, Theodore Payne Foundation, and Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Gardens. Lending to opportunities to engage in research and implementation he has also been able to enrich understanding studying through 23 countries across four continents in addition to extensive travel across the United States.

Appendix B - Student Profiles

Marie “Michele” Montano

This will come later, there has been a hold up in the process, technical malfunctions inhibited the completion of this biography. Now its time for cookies. Here’s the recipe: Eye of a newt, testicles of a catfish, a dash of chihuahua blood, and a sacrificial goats ear. Mix thouroughly with 2 eggs, 1 tbsp of baking soda, 1/2 tsp of baking powder, 1/2 cup sugar, 1/2 cup brown sugar, 2 sticks of butter, and 1.5 cups all purpose unbleached flower and voila! Nasty ass cookies!

Rachel Booher

Rachel Booher received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Liberal Studies in 2008 and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Comparative Religion in 2010, both from California State University, Fullerton. According to her mother, Rachel has been incessantly asking why since the day she was born. While this may not be completely accurate, it is true to say that the question of “why?” has been fueling her quest for knowledge and understanding her entire life. Coming from a liberal studies background, Rachel focuses on the interconnectedness of things. Realizing that the physical world, such as the landscape, does not whole exist on its own, but instead is connected to such things as society, historical context, culture and religion.

Devon Santy

Devon received a Bachelor of Science degree in Geology in 2007 from the Earth and Planetary Sciences Department at the University of California Santa Cruz. Specific interests in geology include sedimentary geology and stratigraphy, hydrology, and geomorphology. Following completion of his undergraduate career, Devon was employed as a Staff Geologist with the geotechnical engineering firm, Miller Pacific Engineering Group of Novato, California. Devon's position required him to conduct and supervise field work including subsurface exploration, and construction observation for quality assurance. In the office, Devon drafted construction documents, composed official business letters, and prepared geotechnical reports and feasibility studies. After nearly 3 years of employment, Devon left Miller Pacific Engineering Group to pursue his Master of Landscape Architecture degree as of June, 2010. His particular interests in Landscape Architecture range from ecological restoration to applications of urban agriculture. Devon found further inspiration in public recreation when he spent the summer of 2011 as a Landscape Architect Intern in Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming. This employment opportunity exposed Devon to the challenges and rewards of working on real world projects that must account for all foreseeable users and regulatory agencies.