Principles

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A successful planning process demands the communication of intent, not just recommended actions, to guide decision making and implementation. A unified vision is essential to guide current and future planning efforts, in order to ensure that the plan can respond to and accommodate changing conditions.

Building upon the Conceptual Plan and discussions with the Citizen's Advisory Committee, the following seven principles emerged and were tested in public workshops and meetings. These principles are the guiding ideas that express the essential elements of the San Diego River Park, describing the intent and role of the Park in the city and in the region. While recommendations may change as conditions change in the future, the principles do not, and are the guide against which all future decisions are tested. These principles are:

Principle One: Clean-up and restore hydrologic function to the river

Principle Two: Reclaim the valley as a common

Principle Three: Unify fragmented lands

Principle Four: Emphasize a continuum of experience

Principle Five: Reveal the valley history

Principle Six: Reorient development toward the river

Principle Seven: Create a synergy of people, water, wildlife

The gorge in Mission Trails Regional Park

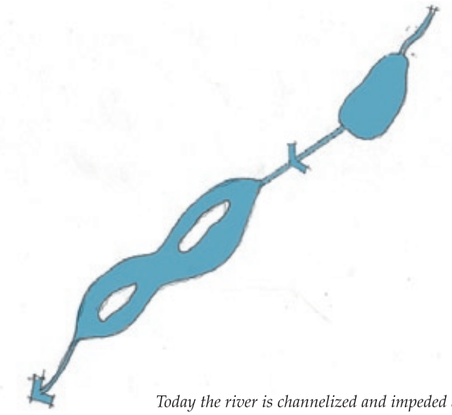
The river passes through dense urban development in Lower Mission Valley

San Diego River Estuary in the Southern Wildlife Preserve

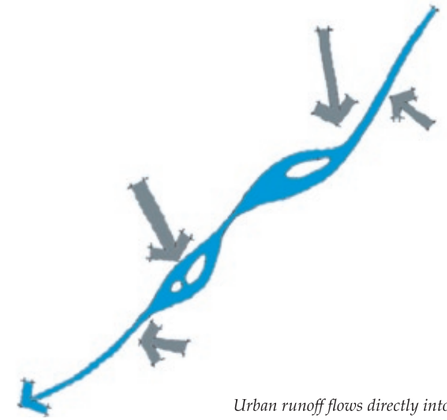
Existing pond near Friars Road

Existing outfall along river

Free flowing stream above Old Mission Dam



Today the river is channelized and impeded by ponds



Urban runoff flows directly into the river

The San Diego River of the future

Principle One: Clean up and restore hydrologic function to the river.

Human activity has dramatically altered the river's natural hydrologic regime. Originally an ephemeral watercourse, river flows ranged from seasonal high flow events in the wet season to no surface flow in the dry season. Flow varied from season to season and year to year, sometimes inundating the entire valley under floodwaters. Damming has further altered the river's functioning; the El Capitan and San Vicente dams have essentially broken the river into multiple watersheds and isolated the upper watershed from the lower river valley. Water contained within these reservoirs serves the City of San Diego.

The river now flows perennially, most notably augmented by urban runoff. Beyond changing the natural fluctuation of river flows, urban runoff can also bring a large number of pollutants that range from mildly to highly toxic. Water from precipitation sources is critical to diluting urban runoff.

Substantially-sized ponds, a result of adjacent mining activities, interrupt the river channel. Ponding and channelization present two opposing impacts on the river. Ponds decrease flow velocity and impede sediment transport, the river's self-flushing mechanism. The reduced flow leads to an increase in water temperature encouraging the growth of non-native aquatic vegetation. Channelization favors a straightened river alignment; the removal of meander decreases the actual length of the river. This shortening of the channel length has three deleterious effects:

- It concentrates more water in less space, resulting in increased flow velocity and erosion.
- It reduces filtration and ground water recharge.
- It reduces the river's contact with riparian vegetation, to the detriment of that habitat.

While the river cannot return to a truly natural flow state, a properly managed condition can restore a large degree of the river's hydrologic function. The San Diego River Park effort will recognize the existing hydrologic condition as the baseline. Management should focus on controlling the pattern of flow, improving water quality, improving sediment transport and increasing groundwater recharge. Wherever possible and appropriate, management activities can also provide opportunities for additional research, monitoring, public education and enjoyment.

Principle Two: Reclaim the valley as a common.

As recently as the 1950's the San Diego River valley was farmland and open pastures. As the valley land uses changed from agriculture to shopping malls and offices, a sense of open space was lost. Creating the San Diego River Park offers the potential to again have the river corridor be a place that residents of the city can come to enjoy the experience of nature. By seeking to assemble open land within this river corridor and restore the river's riparian integrity, people can be reconnected with nature, and a distinct and identifiable River Park will be created.

The valley as a *place* must be identifiable. The River Park should present a consistent character that sets it apart from its urban surroundings and speaks to visitors of a separate place, a vast and complex system that invites exploration but defies specific definition. Consistent character does not mean homogeneous character; it means a landscape that knits together harmoniously and authentically. The River Park should express a spectrum reflecting the change in river ecology and function; the river's character as it joins the Pacific is not the same as its character where it originates in the mountains.

Key to establishing a river *identity* is defining an appropriate corridor. The river corridor must be wide enough for natural landscape expression, provide common space for people, and integrate with the surrounding community.

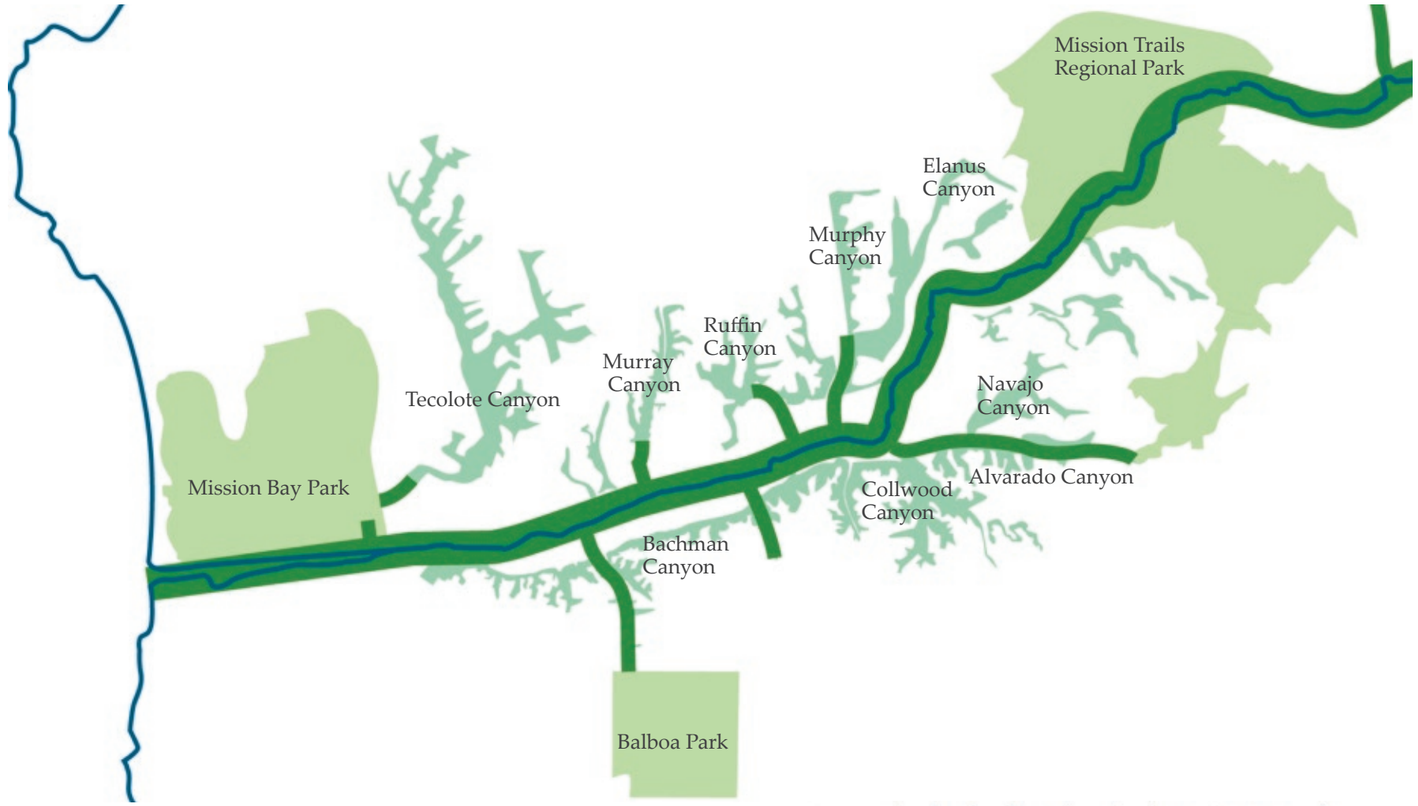
The valley as a Common must be *accessible* and *continuous*. The river corridor should have multiple points of access. It should accommodate a wide variety of users, from walkers to runners to bikers. The river corridor must also offer continuity, both visually and functionally. Visually, landscape transitions should be natural and logical, not abrupt juxtapositions of conflicting uses. Even highway and utility rights-of-way can be aggregated and vegetated to contribute "borrowed space" to the river corridor. Functionally, users should be able to experience the entire length of the river, unbroken by trail and facility disconnects.

Creating the River Park presents the opportunity to educate the public about the value of this place to the settlement of the region, about the preciousness of clean water and about becoming stewards of this land.

FSDRIP Trail

Mission Valley Common

An example of an urban edge along Guadalupe Creek



Principle Three: Unify fragmented lands.

The river passes through and near significant open space in Mission Bay Park to the west and in Mission Trails Regional Park to the east. The lands between these two points, however, are a patchwork of developed and undeveloped areas. These lands are critical to preserving and expanding the continuity of native landscapes. Creating a continuous transect of native plant communities from riparian to upland is essential to encouraging the movement of wildlife from the canyons and Mission Trails Regional Park into the river valley. Knitting the river corridor together through landscape and use expands the sense of the river valley as a whole.

Of key importance are those lands at the fringes of development and infrastructure, highway rights-of-way and infrastructure easements. By planting these areas in native plant species, by making the infrastructure itself part of the beauty of the valley, the overall extent of habitat, connection and visual character can be significantly expanded.

Significant undeveloped land also remains in canyons extending north and south from the valley, specifically Tecolote, Murray, Ruffin, Murphy, Elanus, Bachman, Collwood, Alvarado and Navajo Canyons. Portions of the valley walls are also undeveloped. Some of this land is identified as open space in community plans, yet is disconnected from the river valley by roads and development. By linking these lands at every opportunity, open space can be aggregated on a scale that is appropriate to the urban environment surrounding the valley. These links can also create visual and physical benefits for people. Connecting disparate trail segments can lead to a greater city wide trail system offering a variety of experience and landscape. Linking these open lands also allows for wildlife movement and population increase through greater habitat area.

Existing open spaces are fragmented

Link parks, open spaces and trails along the river and canyons with the river valley

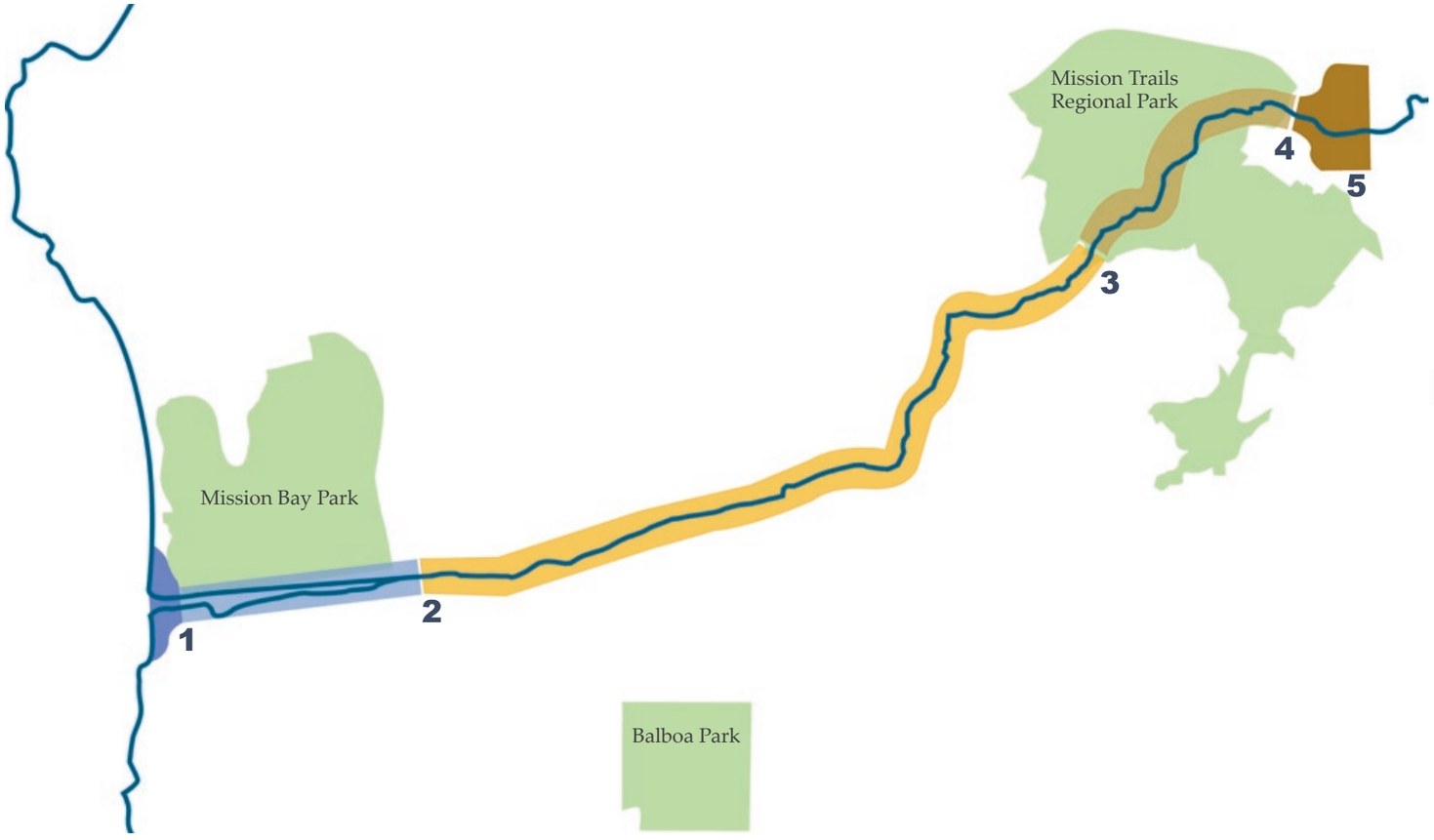
Like most canyons, Ruffin Canyon no longer reaches the river valley

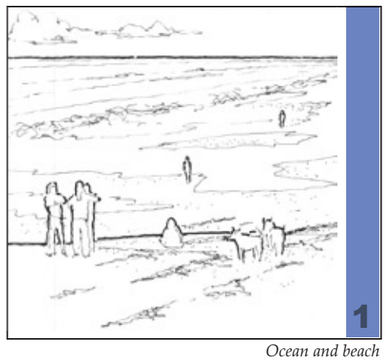
Principle Four: Emphasize a continuum of experience.

The experience of the landscape is diverse and changes throughout the valley. A visitor senses expanse at the estuary and coastline, the rampart of the coastal terrace at the Presidio's, walled shelter moving into the throat of the valley, the broad Mission Valley stretch, the constriction of the soaring walls in the gorge and again open vistas of the plateau above Mission Trails Regional Park.

Continuity is essential to engaging users with this kaleidoscope of experience, and it is equally important to express the unique physical and cultural qualities of each community throughout the valley. As indicated in the preceding principle, undeveloped land within the valley is limited. Land acquisition and open space easements are two ways to rejoin the valley and allow unbroken passage along the river's length.

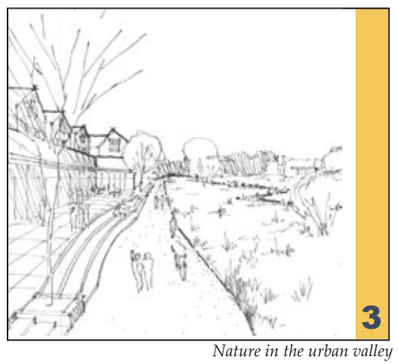
The river's character extends not just east-west following the valley, but also radiates north and south into adjacent canyons and communities. Visual continuity couples with physical continuity as an integral piece of the sense of the valley as a place. The San Diego River Park should seek opportunities to enhance both kinds of continuity.



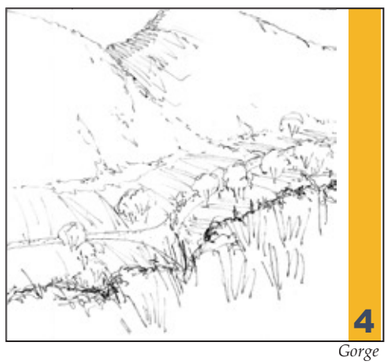


Ocean and beach

Estuary

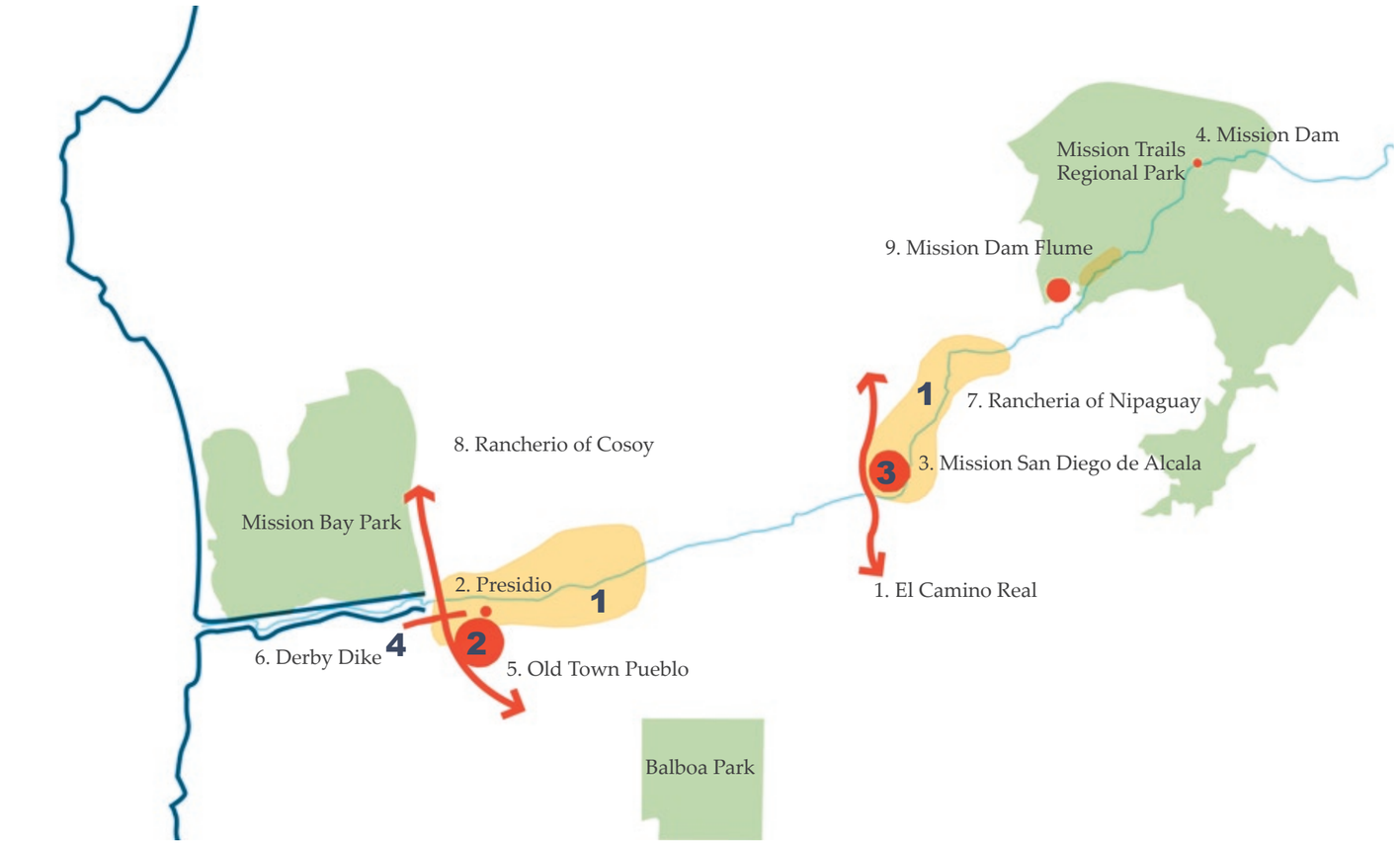


Nature in the urban valley



Gorge

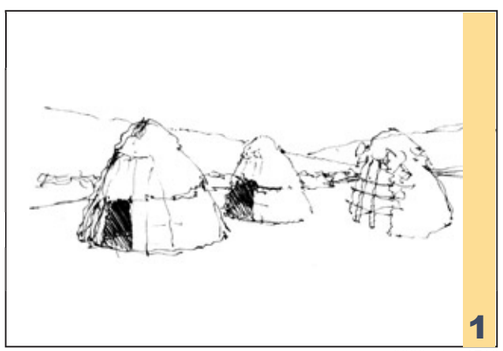
Plateau



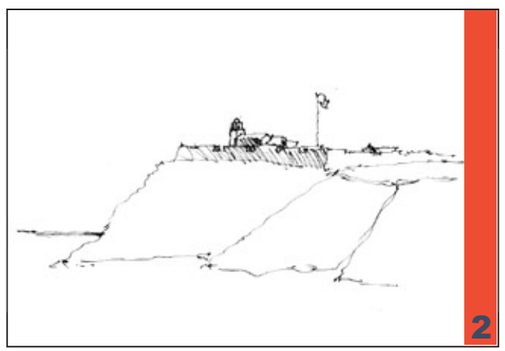
Principle Five: Reveal the valley history.

The valley has long been central to the settlement of the San Diego region. The presence of water was the impetus for the earliest native peoples to move into the area. Although much of the evidence of this history has been lost, a number of artifacts and sites remain, and major sites can be found in Mission Trails Regional Park. Presidio Park, Old Town San Diego State Historic Park and Mission San Diego de Alcalá. These sites have particularly vivid and visible histories that can be further interpreted.

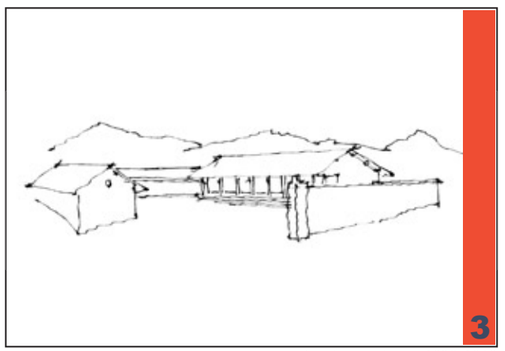
The San Diego River Park Trail is an opportunity to link these locations, stimulate public interest in the River's history, and expand the public's knowledge about the prehistoric and historic people and land uses within the valley. Increased public interest and knowledge benefits these sites by instilling a sense of responsibility for their preservation and care. Increased visitor traffic, however, can also have its negative effects and careful evaluation of a site's ability to support visitor traffic is critical prior to opening a site. Some sites may be too sensitive to be exposed and should remain closed to the public.



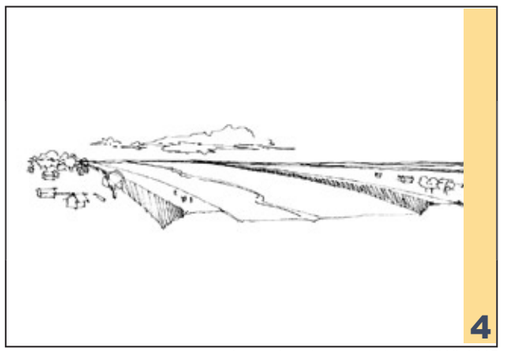
Kumeyaay Village 8000 BC - 1760



Spanish Period 1760-1820



California Period 1820-1848



Derby Dike American Period 1848-1945

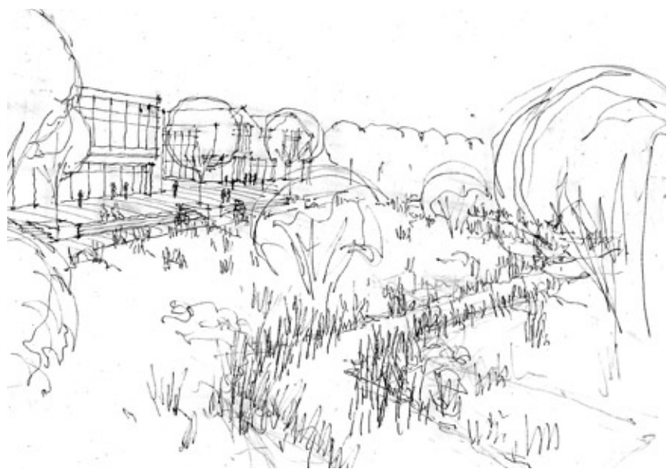
Principle Six: Reorient development toward the river.

Today nearly all development within the valley turns its back to the river. Parking lots, dumpsters, roads, storage yards and mining border the river between Riverwalk Golf Club and Mission Trails Regional Park.

The River Park should be a 'front door', an amenity to celebrate. Planning efforts should work with property owners to seek ways to draw the River Park character into current uses. New development should face the river, taking design cues from the forms and materials lining the river, scaling and orienting new buildings to complement, not compete with, the River Park.

Focusing on the river is not limited to river*front* development. Development further inland should seek opportunities to connect with the river. These links may be achieved through elements such as sight lines, design elements, materials, or even physical connection. To restore and protect the River, we must understand the impacts of land use decisions, urban development, and hydromodifications on water quality.

Example of an urban edge at Guadalupe Creek River Park



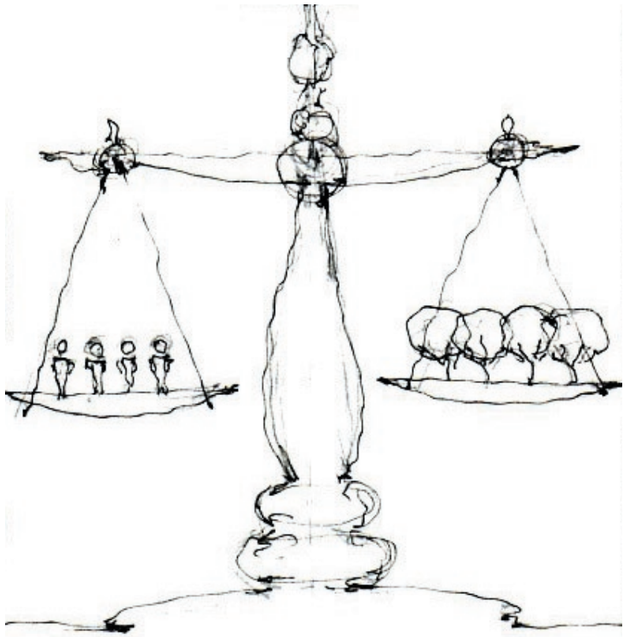
The riparian woodland of the river can link to the city by connecting people with nature, creating access, and unique development opportunities facing the River Park.

The River Park edges can provide access, water quality filtration, and pleasant outdoor spaces.

Principle Seven: Create a synergy of people, water, wildlife.

Key to the success of the San Diego River Park is to build a synergy that best serves all the valley and its many inhabitants, including people, animals and plants. Each of these interests have a place within the multi-faceted system that is the river valley and the San Diego River Park must be designed for and welcome all of them. The river system today is very much out of balance. Water quality is severely degraded, the river pattern is constrained by culverts and channelization and interrupted by mining and ponds.

Creating a synergy for the river requires a swing in the balance toward recovery, protection, preservation and prevention of further degradation. Reestablishing the ecologic health of the river and the habitats that adjoin it is essential to creating the San Diego River Park. There are places where development is appropriate and places where undeveloped land may best serve the broader community as open space. There are places that are essential to establishing habitat continuity, and others that are essential to linking trails and recreation. The potential of the River to serve as an educational tool overlays all of these different places. Such delineations must be made fairly and equitably. A successful San Diego River Park will satisfy these diverse concerns.



Achieve a synergy and a balance

The unique and cherished Dog Beach

Free flowing stream above the gorge

Rich wildlife of the Southern Wildlife Preserve