

## Confluence

**Intent:** The Confluence reach is the area between I-15 and Friars Road Bridge. It is where Murphy Canyon, Alvarado Canyon and two minor canyons once joined the San Diego River as it turned west to the Pacific Ocean. This place is not only a confluence of canyons and creeks, but a confluence of people and activity throughout the history of San Diego. This is where the El Camino Real met the east-west transportation route following the San Diego River near the Mission San Diego de Alcalá. There is opportunity to reveal this junction of canyons and streams in a



*Grantville Redevelopment Study could encourage improvement of property adjacent to the river*



*Gravel mine ponds below Friar's Road bridge*

way that celebrates the cultural, ecological, and historical significance of each. This reach also acts as gateway to multiple destinations, allowing users to access Murphy Canyon, Alvarado Canyon, Collwood Canyon, Navajo Canyon and the San Diego River valley.

**Condition:** This reach is partially enclosed by the steep wall of the knob topped by Mission San Diego de Alcalá. Encroaching development on the east and Interstate 8 on the south further emphasize the sense of enclosure.

The river corridor is also constrained by a series of old gravel mine ponds below the Friars Road Bridge; these ponds impede the normal hydrologic activities of the river system. The narrow vegetated corridor is inadequate to separate stream flow from these ponds and the size and depth of the ponds makes filling impractical. Extensive exotic vegetation infestation is present both in the ponds (*ludwigia*) and in the river (*arundo donax*). As the river turns west it is isolated by highway infrastructure, private property, and difficult physical terrain. The dense *arundo* further adds to the river's inaccessibility.

### Recommendations:



*River is choked by invasive vegetation*

- Create a continuous multi-use path and connecting trails
- Create a connection with Alvarado Canyon and on to Collwood and Navajo Canyons.
- Acquire land or establish easements.
- As the site specific development plans for the River Park and for adjacent land are prepared, establish an appropriate open space and habitat corridor width that follows the existing floodplain, varying in width. The open space and habitat corridor should provide adequate width to re-contour the river channel to allow for increased river length and meander and to expand native riparian habitat.
- River corridor is narrow and constrained above the bend. Past sand and gravel operations have resulted in relatively deep ponds. Separating the stream channel from the ponds is recommended, but additional land is likely necessary to achieve this.
- Acquisition of land adjacent to the river corridor is recommended. Trail connection through this narrow corridor will be difficult due to steep side slopes if additional land is not acquired.
- Trail easements to provide connection to Mission San Diego de Alcalá at each end of the Confluence Reach is recommended.
- Coordination with the Grantville Redevelopment Study presents the potential opportunity for the San Diego River Park to positively influence redevelopment as well as to benefit from new activities along the river corridor.

The Grantville Redevelopment Study, now in its early stages, may provide the tools to change the river landscape in the Confluence. By engaging owners of under utilized property on the east edge of the river corridor, the study may create opportunities for the acquisition of land, or establishing easements that could increase corridor width. A wider corridor would allow the river to be separated from the ponds, and offer space to develop a trail corridor. Once the ponds are separated, a complementary action might be improving them for more intensive recreation activity such as fishing and boating.

If the open space corridor in these areas can be expanded to the east, the San Diego River Park Trail can be best accommodated on the east side of the river. The west side of the river is steep and narrow, and does have possibilities for trail construction, however cantilevered construction may be necessary and could have a significant impact on the river.

There is significant potential to recreate an important wildlife habitat connection between the river valley, Murphy Canyon and Alvarado Creek. Such connection would represent a meaningful first step toward reestablishing the physiographic origins of the valley. A trail and habitat/open space connection along Alvarado Canyon Road will link Navajo Canyon with the river, further unifying the valley's recreational and interpretive resources.

**Key Sites:**

**Enhance Confluence with Alvarado Creek**

Alvarado Canyon combines with Navajo and Collwood Canyons to form the largest tributary canyon system linked to the San Diego River valley within the City of San Diego. However, today this connection is nearly invisible because of the scale of highway infrastructure and development that have choked the canyon throat at the confluence. Replacing culverts with bridges and gaining adequate land to reduce the channelization of Alvarado Creek will reestablish the visual continuity of the canyon system with the valley. A green connection will also benefit the river by providing natural filtration of surface runoff, increase riparian habitat and allow space for trail connections to communities and open space to the east.

**Key Points**

- Critical location for reconnecting San Diego River with its most significant tributary canyon within the City of San Diego.
- Although beyond the bounds of this Plan, daylighting and dechannelizing Alvarado Creek is an important component of connecting the river valley to the canyon, providing potential space for expanding and connecting habitat and trail to the canyon, San Diego State University and upland neighborhoods. Similar to enhancing Murray Creek, such improvements are a model for the treatment of all canyons that connect to the San Diego River.



Channelized Alvarado Creek above Grantville Post Office



Channelized Alvarado Creek behind Medical Center



100' Min.  
*A naturalized Alvarado Creek and its Greenway can be at the heart of the Grantville redevelopment*