

# San Diego River Park Master Plan



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**The City of San Diego**

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# San Diego River Park Master Plan Amendments

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The San Diego River has long been a source of life and vitality in the San Diego region. The water and the rich alluvial floodplain drew the Native Americans to the valley thousands of years ago. As recently as the 1950's, the San Diego River Valley provided green relief from the surrounding urban environment as a rich agricultural plain that offered a place for a quiet stroll or leisurely bicycle ride.

Since then, the river has suffered under the region's increasing development pressure. Commercial, residential and industrial uses have expanded into the valley, pushing ever closer to the water's edge. Extensive mining operations have excavated the river bed for sand and gravel. The proximity of current development threatens the integrity of both the river and the wildlife habitat it supports. Yet, despite the proximity, the river and the land uses adjacent to it are disconnected; the river is no longer the focus of the communities through which it flows.

The San Diego River Park Master Plan provides the vision and guidance to reverse this condition, to restore a symbiotic relationship between the river and surrounding communities by creating a river-long park, stretching from the San Diego River headwaters near Julian to the Pacific Ocean at Ocean Beach. This plan is the result of the grass roots community efforts led by the San Diego River Park Alliance and the San Diego River Park Foundation working in partnership with the City of San Diego.

This master plan is closely aligned with the City's General Plan goals for land use, mobility, urban design, economic prosperity, public facilities, recreation, conservation and historic preservation. The San Diego River Park vision, principles, recommendations and implementation strategy included in this master plan provides the City with a strong policy document for the future development along the river. The major components of the master plan are described below.

## VISION AND PRINCIPLES

Creating the San Diego River Park requires a new and innovative vision. This vision must form a comprehensive and integrated approach to addressing physical needs, such as improving water quality and river health, expanding wildlife habitat, as well as harder-to-quantify social and cultural opportunities, such as revealing the river's rich history and bringing people to the river. The vision for the river park is:

***Reclaim the valley as a common, a synergy of water, wildlife and people.***

This vision is supported by the five principles that are the guiding ideas against which future design and implementation decisions will be measured. The five principles for the master plan are:

- Restore and maintain a healthy river system
- Unify fragmented lands and habitats
- Create a connected continuum, with a sequence of unique places and experiences
- Reveal the river valley history
- Reorient development toward the river to create value



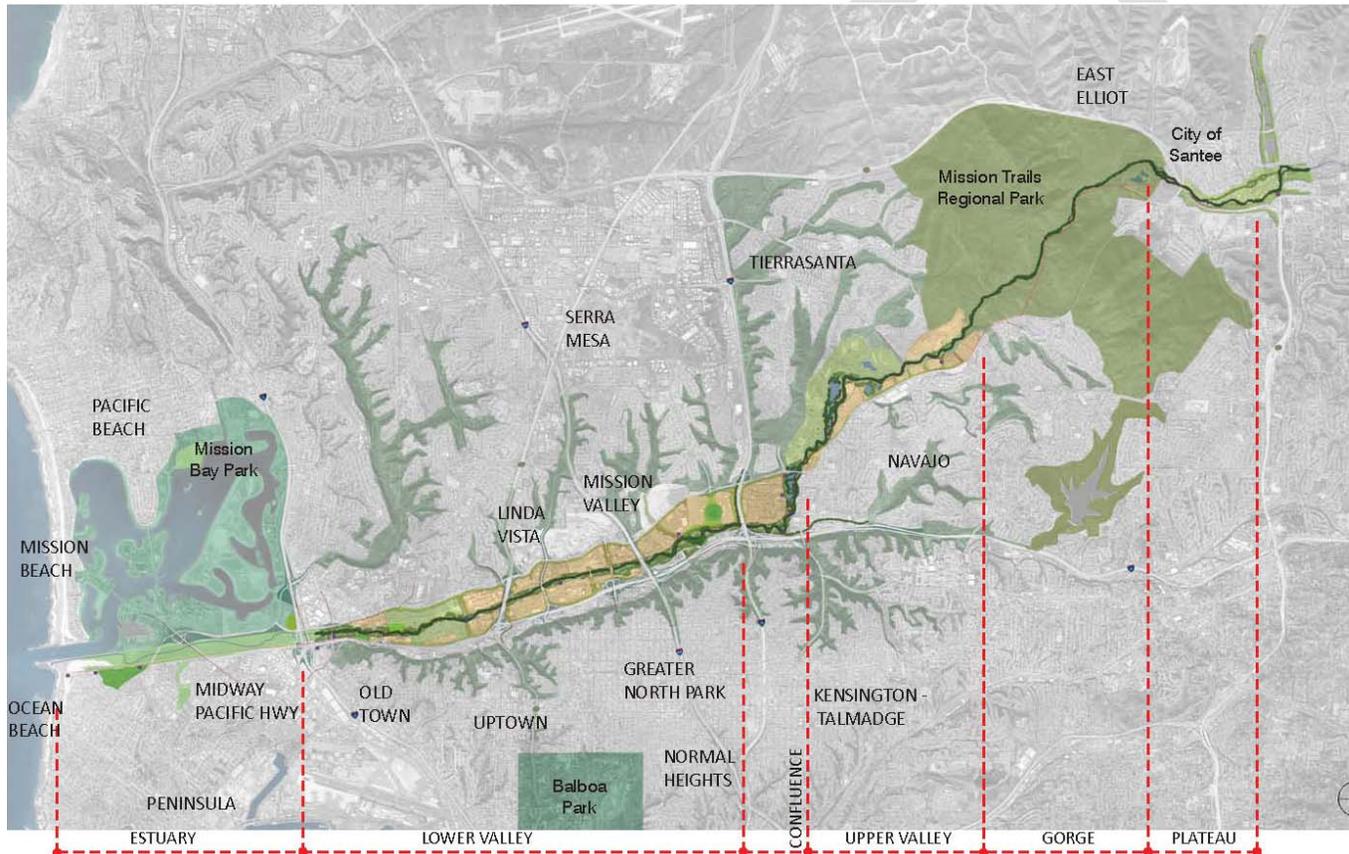
Unique places create opportunities to engage with the river



Mission Trails Regional Park offers opportunities to explore both nature and the history of the region

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The master plan’s recommendations are divided into general recommendations for the entire river park area and specific reach recommendations for the six distinct geographic areas of the river (Estuary, Lower Valley, Confluence, Upper Valley, Gorge and Plateau). General recommendations for the entire river park are organized as they relate to each of the five principles. The specific reach recommendations provide an overview of the area and recommendations on how to achieve the principles. Within some reaches, key sites are identified where special opportunities exist or where conditions define the site as a critical component to the implementation of the master plan.



The river is comprised of six distinct reaches

## DESIGN GUIDELINES

The purpose of the Design Guidelines is to provide written and graphic information to support the master plan's vision, principles, and recommendations and to support the development regulations of the City's Land Development Code and the community-specific regulations: the Mission Valley Planned District Ordinance, the Community Plan Implementation Overlay Zone for the Navajo Community, and the Mission Trails Design District Ordinance. The Design Guidelines apply to the River Corridor Area and the River Influence Area only. The River Corridor Area is the 100-year Floodway (as mapped by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA), plus 35 feet on both sides of the floodway to accommodate a pathway corridor. The River Influence Area extends 200' beyond the River Corridor Area on both sides of the river. The Design Guidelines for the River Corridor Area focus on the site planning of the floodway and the 35 foot-wide pathway corridor, the design and materials for trails and the river pathway, recreational amenities within the pathway corridor and appropriate plant materials. Within this section of the guidelines is a discussion on how the River Corridor Area interfaces with the City's Multi-Habitat Preserve Area (MHPA), Wetland Buffer overlay and what takes precedence. For the River Influence Area, the guidelines provide information on building requirements such as building setbacks, building orientation, type of access to the river park from adjacent development, building transparency and reflectivity, location for off-street parking, equipment and storage areas, and appropriate plant materials.



A continuous pathway will link from the ocean to Mission Trails Regional Park and to the City of Santee



A pathway corridor will be established adjacent to the 100 year floodway

## IMPLEMENTATION

Along the 17.5 miles of the San Diego River within the City of San Diego are private and public land owners. Implementation of the master plan will rely on both private and public investment in the river valley. The implementation strategy includes an implementing framework, implementation tools, maintenance, management and security strategies, and public outreach/education methods to make the river park a success. The implementation framework looks at how the five principles have been implemented in the six reaches of the river and identifies areas where improvements are still needed. Federal, state and local funding sources, development tools and the required government approvals are discussed within the implementation tools. The maintenance, management and security section provides strategies for the future that could include a maintenance assessment district, a ranger program, an 'Adopt the River' program and the creation of a conservation corps or neighborhood youth corps program. In addition, public outreach and education that will foster stewardship of the river valley is also discussed as a means to implement the river park.

## REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The San Diego River Park is the policy document upon which all land use decisions along the river will be based on. In addition, the river area is also governed by Federal, State and Local agencies, their policies and permits. The Regulatory Framework Section of the Master Plan provides details on the different agencies and how they interact with each other.

### **Applicable City of San Diego policy documents include:**

- General Plan
- Community Plans and Specific Plans
- Park Master Plans
- Multiple Species Conservation Program Subarea Plan
- San Diego River Watershed Urban Runoff Management Plan
- Bicycle Master Plan Update
- San Diego Pedestrian Master Plan

Local, state and federal agencies also have direct or indirect involvement with the land planning, resource protection and permit approvals for the San Diego river area. Depending on the type of project proposed within the river valley, these agencies will need to be consulted and in some cases permits will be required.

**Applicable Agencies:**

- United States Army Corps of Engineers
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service
- California Coastal Commission
- California Department of Fish and Game
- Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Surface Mining and Reclamation Act of 1975
- City of San Diego Municipal Code and Land Development Code

## **LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM**

The California Coastal Act of 1976 established a Coastal Zone Boundary and mandated that all jurisdictions within the boundary prepare a Local Coastal Program (LCP). The LCP brings the jurisdiction’s planning process into conformance with the 1976 Coastal Act.

The west end of the San Diego River Park is located within the coastal zone. The boundary line starts at the existing train tracks of the Union Pacific Railroad immediately east of Interstate 5 and ends at the Pacific Ocean. This part of the San Diego River Park is also within the boundaries of the Mission Bay Park Master Plan Local Coastal Program. The Mission Bay Park Master Plan includes planning and development standards to protect and preserve the state's coastal resources pursuant to the adoption and certification of the City of San Diego’s LCP. The Mission Bay Park Master Plan provides recommendations for public access, recreational and visitor-serving facilities, community park and recreation areas, preservation of water, marine and biological resources, beach and bluff preservation, impact of build-out on coastal access, visual resources and public works. By addressing these subject areas, the San Diego River Park Master Plan is in compliance with and supports the Local Coastal Program for Mission Bay Park.