

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

S.1 INTRODUCTION

Rio de Los Angeles State Park is located in northeast Los Angeles, approximately 2.5 miles north of downtown. The park is located next to the former Union Pacific Rail Yard called the Taylor Yard complex, between the Elysian Park Hills on the southwest and the Repetto Hills to the northeast. On September, 11 1996 southern Pacific transportation Company merged with Union Pacific Railroad, who assumed ownership of the entire Taylor Yard Complex. It is physically bounded to the north by State Route 2 (SR 2), on the east by San Fernando Road, on the south by Interstate 5 (I-5), and on the west by the Los Angeles River. The Taylor Yard complex and park site is one of the largest undeveloped areas along the Los Angeles River.

The park and vicinity are part of the communities of Northeast Los Angeles. The neighborhoods surrounding the park include Cypress Park, Glassell Park, Elysian Valley, Atwater Village and Mount Washington.

The 247-acre Taylor Yard rail yard complex was historically divided into ten parcels, some of which were further subdivided for sale purposes, and two of which – Parcels D and G-1 – were purchased by the California State Parks for Rio de Los Angeles State Park. The 40-acre Parcel D, acquired in 2001, is located between an active rail line and San Fernando Road; and the 17-acre Parcel G-1, acquired in 2003, is juxtaposed between the river and an industrial development. The two parcels are not physically connected, and pedestrian access between the sites is currently not provided due to the active railway line along the western boundary of Parcel D and private property between the railroad and Parcel G-1. The lone remaining parcel still serving as an active component to the Union Pacific Railroad's operation is designated as Parcel G2, consisting of approximately 42 acres, and abuts the Los Angeles River.

The park sits within an intensely urbanized setting that is characterized by a mix of land uses, from high-density residential districts to industrial factories and manufacturing. Several parcels at the complex have been developed with industrial uses, including a Federal Express (FedEx) shipping facility, Metrolink maintenance yard, business parks, and several warehouses. The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) plans to construct a high school on Parcel F-1.

The potential to restore the natural resources of 57 acres on the Los Angeles River in the Glendale Narrows was one of the key considerations of California State Parks to purchase the land at the Taylor Yard rail yard complex. The land is also one of the largest undeveloped contiguous parcels along the Los Angeles River. Public ownership will protect and allow the land to reestablish and attract avian wildlife from throughout the region by providing protective cover, water, and forage for a variety of species, such as red-winged blackbird, northern rough-winged swallow, and mallard as they travel up and down the river valley within the Pacific Flyway. California State Parks also was committed to increasing wildlife habitat, open space, flood storage, and recreational space in one of the nation's most park-deficient urban regions – metropolitan Los Angeles. The area surrounding the park provides less than 1.3 acres of public open space per 1,000 people, well below the City of

Los Angeles (City) objective to provide 4 acres per 1,000 people (City of Los Angeles 2001b), and significantly below the 6.25 to 10.5 acres per 1,000 people recommended by the National Recreation and Park Association (Wolch, Wilson, and Fehrenbach 2001). The park is viewed by many as key to the future Los Angeles River Greenway, a series of riverfront parks and trails extending from the San Fernando Valley to the Pacific Ocean along the river corridor. The park sits atop a unique feature along the Los Angeles River, where in spite of the channelization, soft bottom riparian characteristics prevail in a very urban area. Native species and migratory birds Los Angeles basin thrive and rely on the valuable natural resources that occur in this section of the regional Los Angeles River natural open space network.

The Department has prepared this General Plan and Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to serve as a guide for future development, parkland acquisition, and connections to trails, parks, and other public facilities on the 20 acres of Parcel D being developed by the State and the 17-acre Parcel G-1. The General Plan is a conceptual/programmatic blueprint that will set forth a vision and guide to implement natural, recreational, and cultural activities for the surrounding communities and the citizens of California. The City, with the Department, has prepared its own CEQA and NEPA documentation to analyze the potential environmental impacts on the City-leased 20-acre portion of Parcel D, which is not a part of this General Plan.

S.2 THE GENERAL PLAN

S.2.1 THE GENERAL PLAN PROCESS

Existing conditions and preliminary issues analysis were presented at a public workshop held in October 2004 to inform the public about the general planning process and to explore different visions for the park's future. Two alternatives were developed for the General Plan, which were presented to the public and resource agencies in November 2004 for their review and feedback.

The Preferred Alternative reflects statewide interests, agencies' relevant rules and regulations, the park's purpose and vision, and environmental constraints and resources. Input from the local community and resource agencies were also important considerations during the alternative selection process. The Preferred Alternative has been refined into the goals and guidelines presented in this Final General Plan.

S.2.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE GENERAL PLAN

To ensure a correct understanding of, and response to, those factors affecting the future of Rio de Los Angeles State Park, an iterative process of evaluation and analysis was undertaken to underpin the requirements of the General Plan. To establish the baseline conditions upon which the Plan was to be established, a thorough inventory of the existing condition of the natural and physical features of the park was undertaken. This was followed by an evaluation of pertinent issues affecting the park's development. The issues were compiled based on input from the public, analysis of the physical conditions and location constraints, and knowledge of the site's industrial past and setting. The General Plan is designed to convert the existing parcels to useable park space, as desired by the public.

S.2.2 INVENTORY OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

A thorough analysis of existing conditions was undertaken as a part of the general planning process (Chapter 2). The Department, the City, and other interested agencies, along with individuals and nonprofit groups, provided input regarding the existing nature of the park parcels. Additional research and fieldwork was undertaken to determine the baseline conditions for physical and social parameters, such biological species, cultural significance, geology, demographics, and hazardous materials. Where feasible, this information was compiled spatially through a geographic information system (GIS), which was used to help make informed decisions regarding environmental constraints to development.

S.2.3 SURVEY OF KEY ISSUES

Chapter 3 contains a survey of the key issues anticipated to affect the park's development. These issues include connectivity between the disjunctive park parcels, and the need to address the needs of a diverse visitor base that spans language and age groups, differing accessibility levels, and various interests. Easy local and regional access to the park is critical to establishing the new park as a popular destination. The park enjoys a significant potential to enhance and celebrate the natural resources and diverse cultural heritage of the area, but needs to achieve this while balancing the effects of conservation and adjacent recreation activities. Opportunities for education and interpretive programs abound, but will need to be carefully developed and managed in an effective manner. Likewise, as a new park, operational facilities will be needed and issues related to public safety will need to be addressed. The park represents an excellent opportunity to provide critically-needed open space, but the diversity of stakeholder expectations regarding the nature of uses of park space will need to be carefully managed to ensure maximum utility of the site. Fiscal challenges associated with ongoing park operations and maintenance, as well as future acquisitions, are also discussed in this chapter.

S.2.4 DEVELOPMENT OF THE PARK PLAN

Having established the baseline conditions and key issues affecting the park, Chapter 4 discusses the principles on which the future park will address these issues through the General Plan. The General Plan introduces these principles for the park that range from the overarching concept for the design and development of the park to the ongoing operation of the park.

This chapter also introduces a set of elements which will govern the uses and facilities permitted in different areas of the park. Under the preferred alternative, these elements allow Transitional Open Space on Parcel D, which will buffer the active uses on the City's 20-acre portion of the Parcel from the Naturalized Open Space which encompasses most of Parcel D. Parcel G-1 will be zoned entirely as Naturalized Open Space. A Railroad Landscape Buffer would separate each parcel from the adjacent railroad uses, while the Interpretive Element and Multi-Use Trail Element allow flexibility for interpretive and trail features, respectively, as the park is developed. Precise facility and trail locations would be determined when each is evaluated at a project level. Implementation of any proposed project or facility development would also trigger managerial consideration of funding sources for the project and the corresponding personnel and equipment that may be needed.

The goals and guidelines section directly addresses the issues raised in Chapter 3, by discussing the appropriate direction and policy for the use of opportunities available at the park. These include the enhancement of natural resources to attract wildlife back to the Los Angeles River, use of environmental education and interpretation to inform citizens of the park's natural and cultural heritage, enhancement of aesthetic values, capture of recreational opportunities, and protection of natural and cultural resources. Additional issues of parcel connectivity, sustainable design, and management of visitor capacity to ensure the protection of park values are also addressed.

In order for the park to benefit the greatest number of people, partnerships with federal, state and local non-profit agencies will be needed. A number of such organizations have expressed a strong desire to work with the California State Parks, and, already having a local presence, have credibility within the community and established protocol for operations in the area. Public input and participation on the operation of the park is critical to its ability to meet the needs of park users. Furthermore, connectivity of the park with other local areas of open space is essential to the success of the Los Angeles River's restoration efforts. This includes physical, conceptual, and organizational links with California State Parks' other new Los Angeles park, the nearby Los Angeles State Historic Park.

A number of additional plans and further work are needed to better understand and direct future management of the park. It is recommended that plans for environmental education/interpretation, natural resource preservation and re-vegetation, and invasive species plans be developed.

S.2.5 ANALYSIS OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Environmental review of the General Plan, pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), is required for all Department actions. Consequently, this General Plan includes an Environmental Impact Report (Chapter 5), which analyzes the proposed Plan and evaluates its anticipated impacts, providing mitigation measures where needed. The CEQA process also provides opportunities for public review and comment on the *Preliminary General Plan/Draft EIR*.