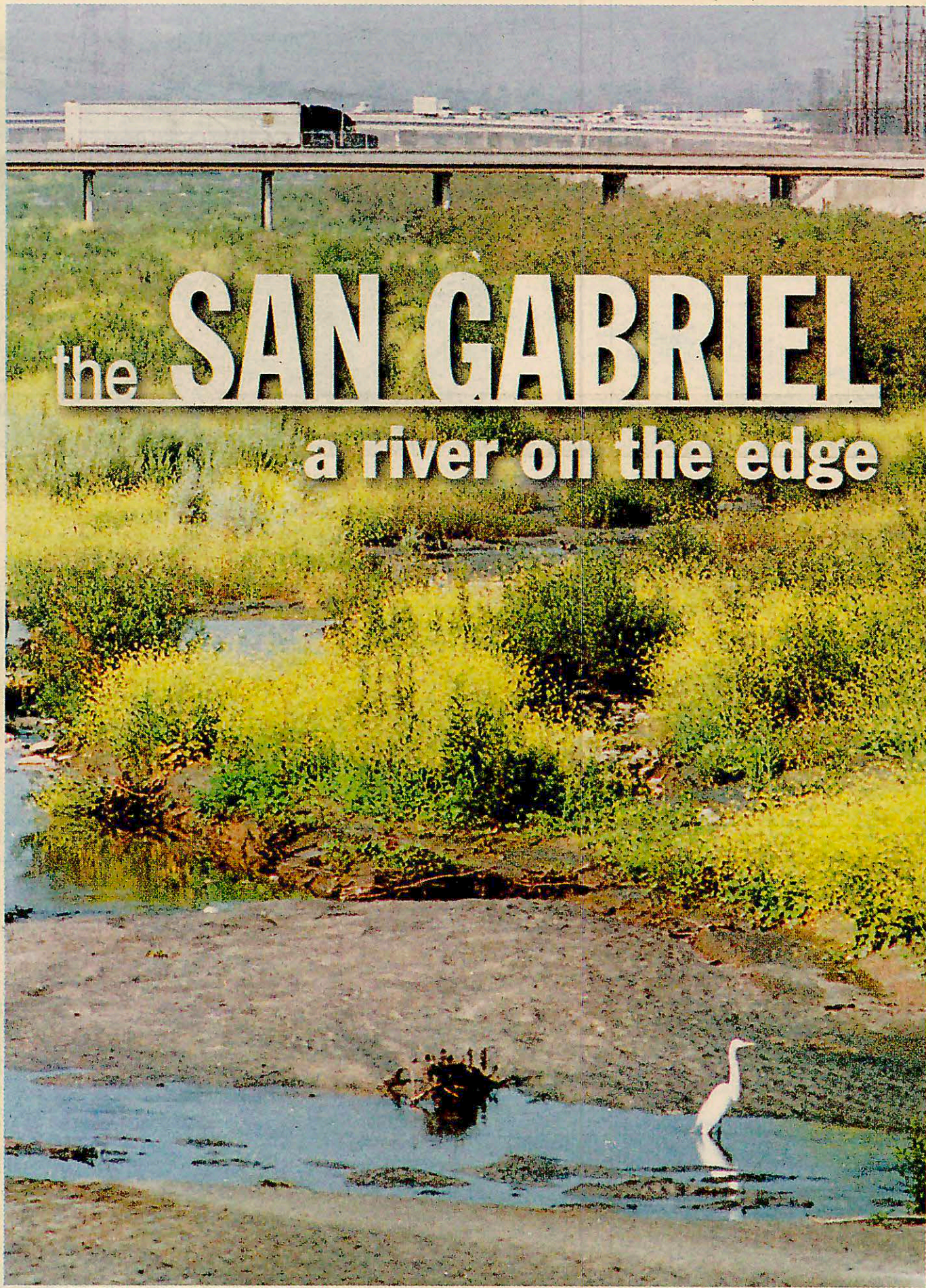


**SPECIAL REPORT**

AUGUST 27, 2000



the **SAN GABRIEL**  
a river on the edge

PASADENA STAR-NEWS    SAN GABRIEL VALLEY **TRIBUNE**    WHITTIER DAILY NEWS



**From the editors**

**I**n a Valley that's full of diversity, the San Gabriel River serves as a common thread that connects our communities.

*It's a tie that binds.*

*For years, the river has been ignored by many, forgotten by some, and underrated by nearly all the communities it flows through.*

*In the mountains it's the stream that provides fishermen and outdoorsmen with a nearby wilderness experience.*

*In our Valley, it's the place to take a walk, pedal a bike or ride a horse to get away from the cacophony of city noise.*

*In some ways it's one of the area's best-kept secrets.*

*The river is now getting some of the attention it deserves — and needs. Several groups and government agencies are coming up with big plans for the San Gabriel.*

*Will this recent action be the last chance to do something special for the river? No, but it may be its best chance.*

*This series, six months in the making, is a look at the past, present and future of our precious resource. We hope you like it.*

*And we hope this special section raises awareness about the waterway that affects us all.*

*After all, it's our river.*

**CONTENTS**

**A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT 3**

After years of neglect and relative obscurity, the San Gabriel River is beginning to get the attention it so richly deserves.

**IN THE BEGINNING 6**

Where does it begin? We go directly to the source, the source of the river, that is.

**FLOW CHART 8**

The water has to get through a series of dams before it makes it to the flatlands.

**A ROCKY RELATIONSHIP 13**

What role does geology play in our area and the San Gabriel River?

**BEYOND THE VALLEY 16**

What happens to the San Gabriel River when it leaves the San Gabriel Valley? We follow it to the ocean.

**TESTING THE WATERS 17**

Checking out the quality of the water in the San Gabriel River is a complex mix of sampling and analyzing.

**THE HIDDEN GIANT 19**

Many people living in the San Gabriel Valley give little thought to the river that runs through their communities. Why is that?

**WATER WARS 20**

The legendary rows over rights to the river may not have escalated to bloodshed, but they did influence the formation of agencies such as the Covina Irrigating Co.

**JUSTICE ALONG THE RIVER 21**

Which law enforcement agencies are responsible for patrolling the river?

**RIVER DWELLERS 24**

All sorts of people live along the river, ranging from the homeless, to people with pride of homeownership, to folks who live in the mountains.

**AN UNTAMED RIVER 26**

The San Gabriel River has more than once roared down a mountainside to leave its mark on the communities below. It's a river rich in history.

**GOLD FEVER 27**

There's still gold in them thar hills, and there are still people with dreams of finding it.

**INDIAN HERITAGE 28**

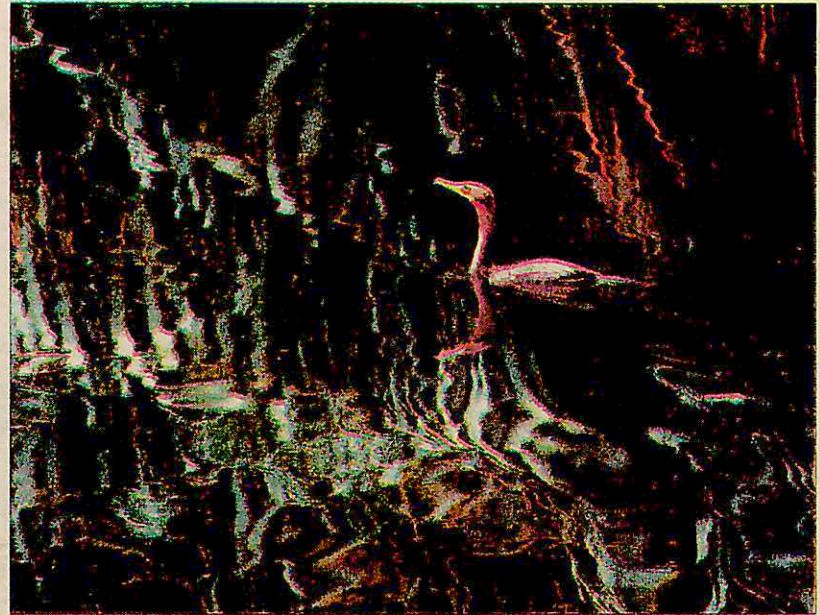
The San Gabriel River was a life force for a peaceful Indian nation.

**IN THE SPIRIT 30**

Why do people like to go for walks along the river? What is it about the great outdoors that has a calming effect?

**PRIDE IN THEIR WATERWAYS 31**

Several cities nationwide have made their rivers showcases.



Staff photo by WALT MANCINI

An egret, one of 296 species of bird that can be found along the river, swims in the San Gabriel. See Page 43.

**THE RIGHT PATH 34**

A paved pathway stretches along the river from the top of Azusa to Long Beach.

**HORSING AROUND 35**

Horseback riders find their great escape along the San Gabriel River. Equestrian centers and stables flourish among the hundreds of miles of trails.

**THE THRILL OF SPORT 37**

The San Gabriel River is the backdrop to a variety of recreational opportunities, ranging from bungee jumping, to bike riding, to fly fishing.

**A WILD TIME 42**

It's no secret that the San Gabriel River is a haven for birds, plants and animals. You may be surprised to learn of the variety that call the river home.

**FAMILY SPIRIT 44**

Families enjoy the great outdoors, making the San Gabriel River a family recreation spot.

**TOO MUCH LITTER 46**

People use the river but don't leave it like they found it. And oftentimes they leave a mountain of trash in their wake.

**IT'S TWILIGHT TIME 48**

When the sun goes down, the San Gabriel River takes on a whole new life.

**WORKING FOR A LIVING 49**

The San Gabriel River helps quench the thirst of a Valley of 1.4 million residents.

**THE HOLE THING 51**

What will Irwindale do with its quarries once they are mined out? And will their plans complement the San Gabriel River?

**MIND YOUR BUSINESS 51**

Many cities use property along the San Gabriel River as a place to conduct business.

**FORMING A CONSERVANCY 53**

State Sen. Hilda Solis went through some battles to create the San Gabriel & Lower Los Angeles Rivers & Mountains Conservancy.

**A MASTER PLAN 56**

The county Department of Public Works is on its way to completing a master plan for the San Gabriel River.

**A CLASS ACT 57**

Graduate students from Cal Poly Pomona are commissioned to come up with a plan for the river.

**THE OTHER RIVER 58**

The Friends of the Los Angeles River have set up a small museum in the former Lawry's Center.

**ONLY A DREAM? 58**

Seventy years ago there was an ambitious plan that kept development away from the San Gabriel River.

**THE PLAYERS 60**

Many environmental groups have plans for the river. Are their plans part of a concerted effort, or a mishmash of independent thinking?

**MORE THAN A RIPPLE 61**

What is the relationship of the San Gabriel River to the other rivers in our area?

**SAY "HI" TO THE MISSUS 62**

Find out why some people call Gayle Scott "Mrs. San Gabriel River."

**FLOWING THOUGHTS 63**

Editorial page editor Steve Scrauzillo, shares his thoughts about the river.

**On the cover:** A great egret stands in the San Gabriel River just south of Santa Fe Dam. In the background, Live Oak Avenue and the San Gabriel River (605) Freeway symbolize the mix of wildlife and humanity coming together in the San Gabriel Valley.

Staff photo by TIM BERGER



# A MOST REMARKABLE JOURNEY

*After a decade  
of indifference,  
the river is flowing  
from relative  
obscurity  
into the spotlight*

By **Laurence Darmiento**  
Staff Writer

**W**hen the first drop of storm water falls this winter on the lonely, rock-strewn peaks of the San Gabriel Mountains, it will begin a remarkable journey.

Cascading down the steep slopes of the majestic range that defines the Valley's northern border, it will join other runoff to form the clear streams that feed the head of the 58-mile-long San Gabriel River.

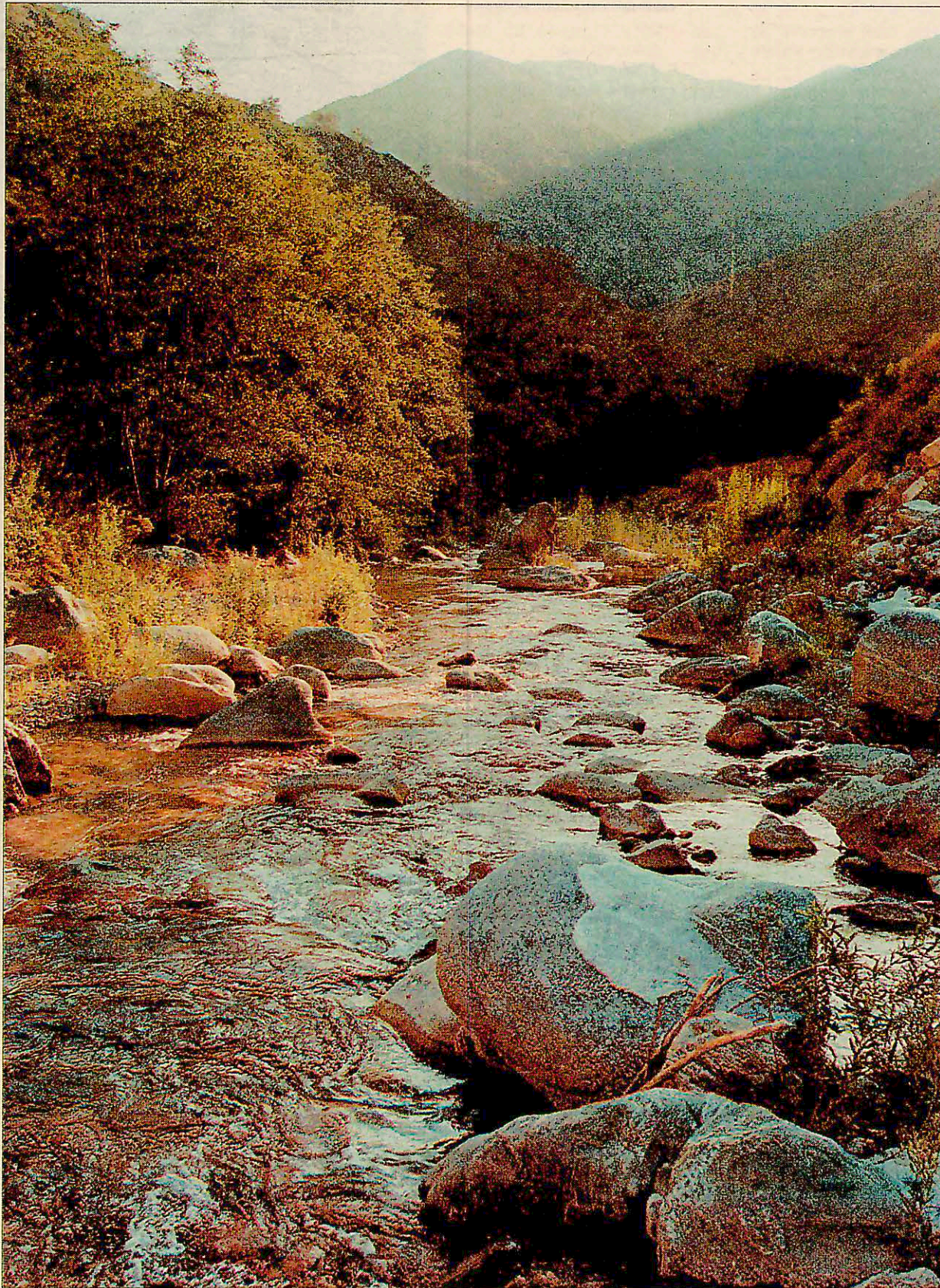
But from there, deep in San Gabriel Canyon, it may take days, weeks or even years to reach the Pacific's waters near Long Beach, as it navigates an obstacle course of man-made diversions.

Along the way, it may bathe a hot swimmer on the river's popular East Fork, or serve as a water stop for one of hundreds of birds passing through the Whittier Narrows.

More likely, though, it will lie still for months in one of a trio of canyon dams built to tame what had once been an unruly waterway that regularly flooded the Valley below.

And even when released, the water may find itself diverted yet again, this time hurried along to spreading grounds, where it will be absorbed into the Valley's vast aquifer and wait to be pumped to the tap.

Indeed, while the San Gabriel River is no Mississippi in its length, breadth or grandeur, its waters have done nothing less than breathe life into the Valley that



Staff photo by BERNARDO ALPS

Please turn to **OVERVIEW / 4**

The East Fork, along with the North and West forks, are three mountain streams that make up the San Gabriel River.



**THE OVERVIEW**

Continued from page 3

bears its name.

For more than a century, it has been our primary source of water, irrigating orange groves and other crops that were the Valley's first engine of growth.

And as the economy boomed after World War II, it sustained the endless tracts of homes and businesses that plowed the groves under, while vast stretches of freeway were built from the rocky sediments the river deposited on the Valley floor.

But for all that the river and its watershed gave and still give to the San Gabriel Valley, it has been a poor stepchild of the very people it serves.

Dammed, channeled and a destination for industrial wastes and human debris, the river is no longer the wild beast that generations before tirelessly sought to tame.

Not only neglected, it has even faded from the consciousness of many who live within sight of its banks.

But, today, for the first time in decades, there are those who are thinking about how to give a little back to the river.

A river conservancy has been formed and experts have joined together to study the very river that has served to bind the Valley both physically and in thought.

"This river was one of the four sacred rivers of our people. It was treated with respect and dignity because it was a life-giving force. Then you see things dumped into it," says Mark Acuna, a Tongva Indian who advocates the river's restoration.

"We've been watching the renewed interest, and it warms our hearts to see someone else come to appreciate its greatness and want to bring it back to what it once was."

In this special report, this newspaper looks at all aspects of the river — from its history, to its current state, and, perhaps most importantly, to its future.

Take a trip back through time to learn about the geologic and human history of a river that cut through the fast-rising San Gabriel Mountains millions of years ago, sustaining human settlements for at least 2,000 years, beginning with the Gabrielinos.

Join the many families, including many Latinos, who crowd the

East Fork on hot weekends, seeking a respite from urban neighborhoods, among miners, no less, still seeking to strike gold. Or try the hunting, fishing and other recreational activities enjoyed up and down its span.

Discover how the river's invaluable water supply once led to fisticuffs and worse — when it wasn't flooding the early settlers — but is now tamed and conserved through massive public works projects and legal judgments.

Take a hike with us up to the headwaters of the river to the wind-twisted limber pines, where civilization can still be left behind and people seek spiritual solace. And on your way back down, visit Morris Dam, a monument to human ingenuity built seven decades ago with more than half a million cubic yards of concrete.

Then get on your bike and enjoy the 37-mile bike path that hugs the river from the mountains to the sea, but make sure you stop at the Whittier Narrows Nature Center. What you'll be astounded to learn is a bird watchers paradise with a national reputation.

You'll also discover how the river supports hundreds of businesses — from quarries to nurseries — but how urban life also has damaged what was once a pristine waterway with litter, chemical contamination, homeless encampments and even crime.

But then you'll be able to take heart that many dedicated citizens, professionals and elected leaders are now taking a closer look at the San Gabriel.

Graduate students at Cal Poly Pomona have just finished a study commissioned by a local conservation group that suggests ways to improve and better integrate the river into our daily lives.

The county Department of Public Works and the Army Corps

of Engineers are conducting separate studies on river land use, parks, open space and watershed management.

And in probably the most significant development, the new San Gabriel & Lower Los Angeles Rivers & Mountains Conservancy is starting its work, hiring an executive director and ready to begin setting priorities for \$15 million it has set aside for parks and open

space.

But, like all human affairs, it's not necessarily going to be clear sailing for river advocates, as a variety of interests stake their claim to the future of a waterway with a very long past.

And finally, we hope this series will better inform you on how you can take part in the noble goal of restoring a river that has silently served us all. □



Staff photo by KEITH DURFLINGER

The San Gabriel River looking north from the Foothill (210) Freeway.



# We are the Friends of the San Gabriel River



## *Changing the Way We Look at Our River*

The San Gabriel River lies at the heart of our region, bringing us the water, vegetation and wildlife that enrich our valley. Our river is central to the geography and economy of our region, but too often it has been ignored and abused.

Now the San Gabriel River is making a comeback. Communities are looking to the river for revitalization and to restore the natural beauty that has drawn so many to this area. Residents are reevaluating it for the fun and environmental awareness it can give. And throughout its length, people are rolling up their sleeves to carve out pocket parks, restored streams, bike and hiking trails, and nature centers.

With the new Joint Rivers and Mountains Conservancy and enhanced state funding for parks and rivers, we have the tools to restore the majesty of the San Gabriel River.

## *Bringing Our Communities Together*

From high in the San Gabriel Mountains all the way to the Pacific Ocean, the San Gabriel River unites our communities in a unique way.

The Friends of the San Gabriel River is working with residents from throughout the San Gabriel Valley and South Los Angeles County. Our goals are

- To educate residents and energize communities
- To serve as an advocate and catalyst for effective action
- To clean up and restore the river
- To protect water quality
- To celebrate the natural splendor of the river

## *Here's how you can get involved:*

- Sign up to learn more about the Friends of the San Gabriel River
- Volunteer to help restore and enhance the river
- Report acts of pollution
- Tell your friends and organizations about the campaign to renew the San Gabriel River

## *Upcoming Events*

### **Join us for a reception honoring Mary Angle**

**Executive Officer of the newly established Joint Rivers and Mountains Conservancy**

Sunday, September 24, 2000 / 3:00-5:00 p.m.

Pio Pico State Historical Park  
6003 S. Pioneer Blvd., • Whittier

(just east of the Whittier Blvd. offramp, 605 fwy)

Refreshments • Entertainment

### **16th Annual California Coastal Cleanup Day**

Join us with El Dorado Nature Center

Saturday, September 16, 2000 / 9:00 a.m. - 12 Noon

5320 Olympic Plaza • City of Long Beach

(by Ocean Blvd. & Termino Ave. intersection)

**MANY KIDS ACTIVITIES**

Should we have a citizen monitoring program?

### **Workshop on Surface Water Quality and the Watershed**

Saturday, October 14, 2000 / 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

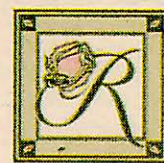
#### **AGENDA**

- What is happening in our watershed?
- Biological Evaluation of our Waterways
- Citizen Monitoring Groups Report their Findings

Pre-Registration required

Register at [www.sangabrielriver.org](http://www.sangabrielriver.org) or call (562) 908-6449

Sponsored by:



THE ROSE FOUNDATION  
For Communities & The Environment

**People joining together to take care of our river because it takes care of us**

## JOIN FRIENDS OF THE SAN GABRIEL RIVER

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Please send me information about Friends of the San Gabriel River

Here's a contribution to help Friends of the San Gabriel River

Count me in as a member. Enclosed is \$25.

I would like to volunteer. I am interested in:

Fundraising  Water Quality Monitoring  Office Help

Pollution Watchdog  Tabling  Education  Outreach

Other \_\_\_\_\_



Mail to: Friends of the San Gabriel River, P.O. Box 3725 South El Monte, CA 91733

(562) 908-6449 / FAX (562) 695-8248

[www.sangabrielriver.org](http://www.sangabrielriver.org)



**THE ORIGIN****WHERE  
IT ALL BEGINS***The life of the waterway  
starts with a trickle*

By Katherine Drouin-Keith

Staff Writer

**U**p here in the Angeles National Forest, above the culverts and the dams and the concrete retaining walls, is where it all begins.

Rain slices through wind-twisted stands of limber pines. Blankets of snow drape spiky-leafed live oaks. Manufactured on high, these drops of moisture journey from far out over the Pacific Ocean, or sometimes the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean, and join up in the skies above the upper reaches of the San Gabriel Mountains, where they revisit the ground.

The moisture may settle meekly into the earth, or roar down steep-sided gullies, dragging boulders and tree trunks. Thousands of feet below, the drops converge to form a single waterway: the San Gabriel River.

Up here at the sources of the San Gabriel, there are a few hints of what the river will become. A dripping spring seeps from a hillside. Tea-colored pools stand alone in sandy stream beds. Water-loving wildflowers nod over a roadside trickle.

Cupped in a 212-square-mile drainage area in the Angeles National Forest, the main sources of the river come from three compass directions, with the fourth point, the river itself, leading south away to the Pacific. The West, North and East forks, in turn, are fed by hundreds of smaller streams and gulches that gather snowmelt and rainfall and ferry it into the river's main sources.

"It's not a single spot where it comes out of the ground," said Vic

Andresen, a hydrologist with the Angeles National Forest. "There's a lot of little springs and drainages that come from a variety of locations. They slowly accumulate into the river."

The various forks are nestled high in the back country of the San Gabriel Mountains. The sources of the East Fork are about 15 miles north and 5,000 feet up from Claremont, in the Sheep Mountain Wilderness Area, where access is limited to people on foot or horseback.

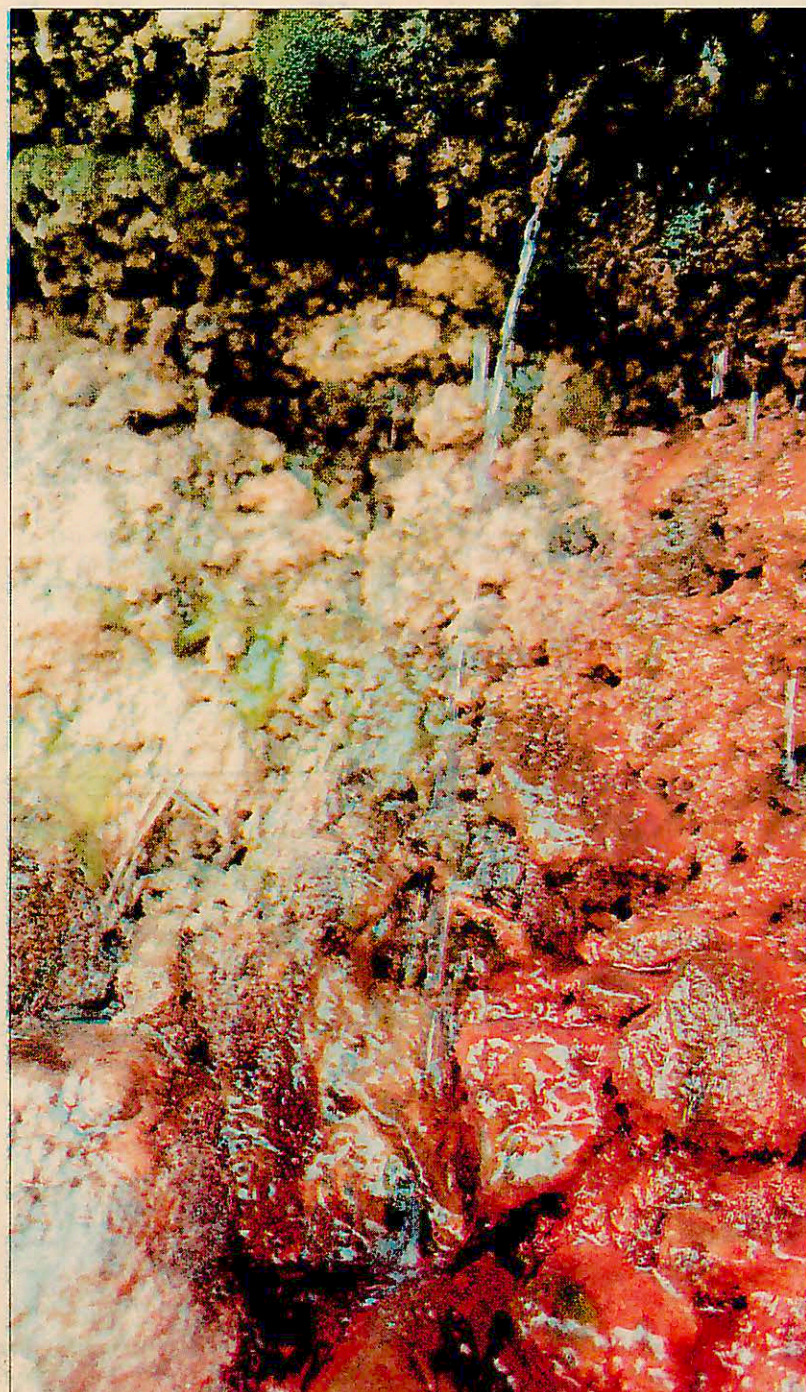
Eight miles northeast of Pasadena and about 4,000 feet up is the West Fork, just south of the San Gabriel Wilderness Area, draining from northeast of Mount Wilson.

The North Fork, sandwiched between the two wilderness areas, is 13 miles north of Glendora and about 4,000 feet higher, originating in and around Crystal Lake, the heart of the popular recreation area.

The country around the forks is sacred land not only to hydrologists, but to hikers, horseback riders, mountain bikers and bird-watchers.

On a recent morning in June, members of the Pasadena Audubon Society tread quietly, even reverentially, along a path near the San Gabriel's West Fork. Early morning fog lapped against the lower reaches of Mount Wilson and a clear blue sky arched above, filled with the twitters of birds and the scent of pine.

"A lot of mountain birding is listening," said Ron Cyger, who leads an annual trip to the West Fork to



Staff photo by JOSH ESTEY

Water trickles out of the mountainside, feeding plants near the Guffy Campground in the Angeles National Forest. This is the easternmost part of the river's source.

catch up on birds who nest in the area. "A lot of mountain birding is waiting in open areas in proper habitat and hoping something comes through."

Cyger pointed out a honking birdcall to the binocular-wielding group — the sound of the acorn woodpecker.

"They always sound like they're laughing. And if you get a good look at them, they have sort of a clown face."

Heads swiveled as watchers

sought the source of the call, which competed with the zoom of cars on the Angeles Crest Highway above the trail.

Birds love the area for its vegetation, solitude and the seasonal water supply of the little streams that feed into the West Fork. An especially ambitious bird might follow the fork all the way to the expanse of the Cogswell Reservoir, or even beyond, where the West

Please turn to **ORIGIN / 7**



**THE ORIGIN**

Continued from page 6

Fork joins with the North Fork at the Rincon ranger station, seven miles north of Glendora. There it creates a single stream. A mile east, this stream meets up with the East Fork, and there the river is born.

The river flows into two reservoirs, the San Gabriel and the Morris, and basins and dams check its flow even further before it emerges from the mountains north of Azusa. It dumps into the Pacific Ocean at Seal Beach.

"Usually the San Gabriel is a tame stream, but when the flooding hits, it's a raging torrent," said John W. Robinson, a Fullerton resident and author of "Trails of the Angeles: 100 Hikes in the San Gabriels" and "The San Gabriels," a human history of the range.

Gauges at Crystal Lake, Mount Wilson and the San Gabriel Dam collect an average of 33.5 inches of precipitation a year.

Much of the precipitation seeps into the ground, percolating through soil and granite bedrock to re-emerge as the river, according to Andresen, who monitors the water quality of the San Gabriel River in the national forest.

Despite Los Angeles' world-renowned air pollution, the San Gabriel's water quality is good, at least in its upper reaches, Andresen says: The storms that bring precipitation to the mountains at the same time sweep air pollutants out to sea. The water that emerges is tinged faintly with minerals but otherwise pure.

But the San Gabriel's sources do have foes, Andresen said: fire and trash.

The wildfires that roar periodically through the mountains strip away vegetation that keeps soil firmly rooted to earth. With the next rain, the riverbeds fill with sediment that turns the water a chocolate brown.

Then there are the visitors who head upstream every weekend to spend time in the cool mountain air near refreshing streams.

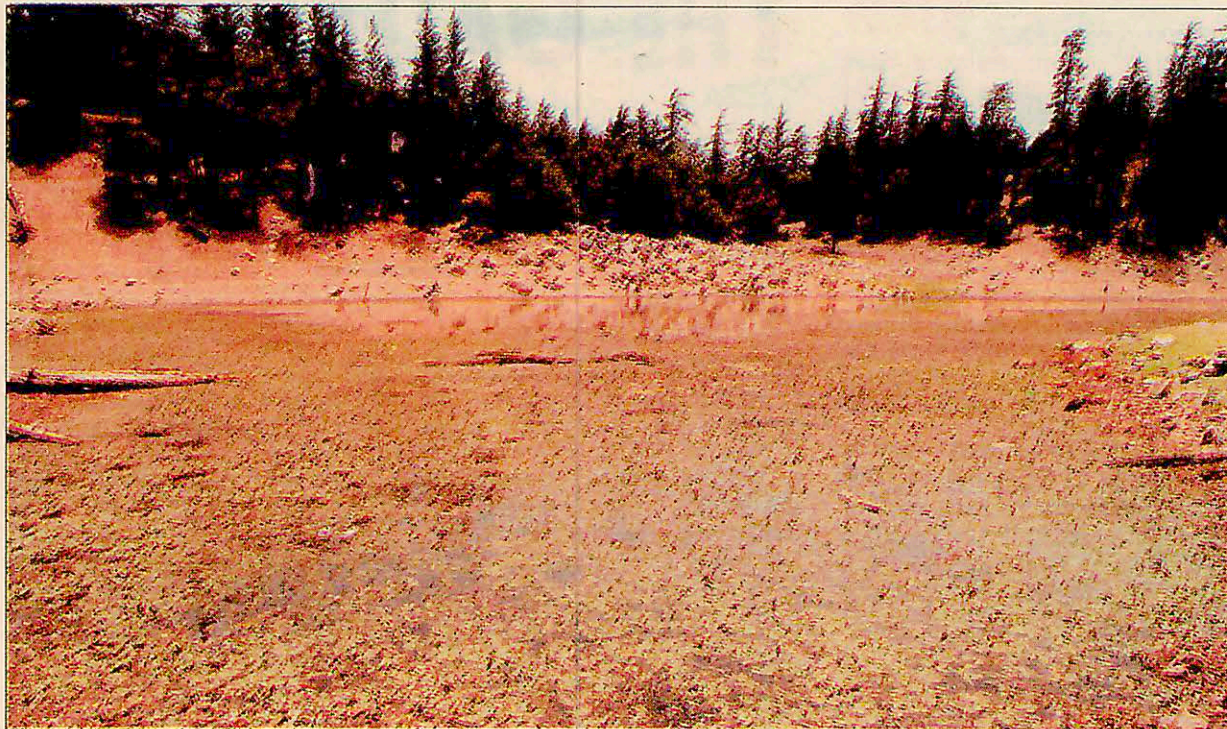
They often leave behind piles of rubbish. It's so bad, the U.S. Forest Service is under state orders to clean it up.

"The major challenge, particularly for the San Gabriel, is it's being loved to death," Andresen said. □



Staff photo by BERNARDO ALPS

This wash, which is dry in July, collects snow runoff from Pine Mountain and forms the Prairie Fork, which becomes the East Fork.



Staff photo by BERNARDO ALPS

Crystal Lake, near the top of Highway 39, collects an average of 33.5 inches of precipitation annually.





Staff photo by MIKE MULLEN

Dam operators Arthur Diaz, left, and Jim McGowan in one of several tunnel systems that run inside the huge Morris Dam. The dam was built by the city of Pasadena in the '30s.

**A**s you pass from bright sunlight into near darkness, you sense, rather than see, the massive mountainous wall you have stepped inside.

A near-vertical stretch of stairs leads upward, and a faint light glows from beyond.

From deep within, there is the sound of water moving.

You have just entered Morris Dam, an 800-foot-long, 245-foot-high monolith built from nearly 514,000 cubic yards of concrete.

Completed in 1935, the \$7.6 million project was funded by the city of Pasadena to provide water for the city but is now a vehicle for water conservation and flood control for the Valley.

Today, Morris Dam remains one of the San Gabriel Valley's most impressive feats of engineering. But standing in the center of the structure, among the catacomb-like floor plan while leakage flows steadily through small ditches, can be unnerving.

"People always ask if the dam leaks. Well, all dams leak," dam operator Arthur Diaz doesn't mind admitting.

Unlike William Mulholland,

# THE GATEKEEPERS

*A series of dams protect our Valley from flooding*

By **Stephanie Cain**  
Staff Writer

who built the doomed St. Francis Dam in San Francisquito Canyon in 1926 and is said to have spoken similar words shortly before it gave way in 1928, killing more than 500 people, Diaz's words hold water; Morris Dam has stood the test of time.

Originally called Pine Canyon Dam, the structure received its final name in honor of Samuel B. Morris, Pasadena's water engineer, chiefly responsible for the dams construction.

The past still lingers in the form of a mammoth steel pipe running

through the San Gabriel Mountains, connecting the reservoir to Pasadena, but the pipe is defunct.

Pasadena relinquished the dam to the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California after it no longer needed the water supply.

And in 1995, the dam was transferred to the county's Department of Public Works.

As one of only a few remaining manual dams in operation today, Morris requires a daily commitment from its operators. Until an

overhaul planned for sometime in the next several years is completed, Diaz and assistant dam operator Jim McGowan will continue checking water flow and turning the valves by hand.

Water levels in the reservoir are decided by Public Works officials who evaluate data sent to them electronically. Using that information, they determine how much water will be released on a given day to spreading basins on the Valley floor.

Normal leakage, which on one day in mid-July was about 20 gallons per minute, is for the most part diverted outside to mix with the water released intentionally.

When the valves can't keep up with the inflow, as during a severe storm, the spillway can release a maximum of 80,000 cubic feet of water per second.

The spillway was last used during the 1996-1997 storm season, but the operators make a point of trying to hold back as much water as possible to aid in water conservation.

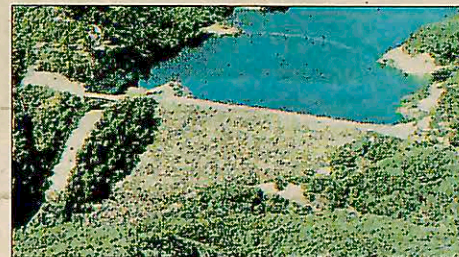
As the eyes and ears of the dam,

Please turn to **DAMS / 10**



## Holding back the water

The San Gabriel River water-conservation system begins in the river's watershed within the San Gabriel Mountains. Water from runoff created by rain and snow is collected in the reservoirs of Cogswell, San Gabriel and Morris. Water is released in controlled flows to the San Gabriel Canyon Spreading Grounds and farther downstream to the Santa Fe Spreading Grounds, north of Santa Fe Dam. Water that reaches the dam can be diverted downstream into the Peck Road Spreading Basin and the start of the Rio Hondo's water conservation system. At the Whittier Narrows Dam, remaining water can be captured by the San Gabriel Coastal Spreading Grounds, the Rio Hondo Coastal Basin Spreading Grounds or by the San Gabriel River itself, which is soft-bottomed until Florence Avenue. Small rubber dams slow the flow. All in all, about 80 percent of all runoff is captured, recharging the aquifers, with the remaining reaching the ocean.



**1 COGSWELL DAM**  
**Purpose:** Flood control & water conservation  
**Type:** Rockfill with concrete cutoff wall  
**Elevation:** 265 feet  
**Construction began:** 1932  
**Construction completed:** 1934  
**Cost:** \$3.1 million



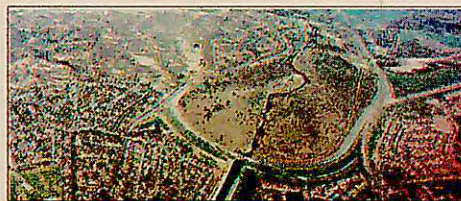
**2 SAN GABRIEL DAM**  
**Purpose:** Flood control & water conservation  
**Type:** Compacted earthfill and rockfill with concrete cutoff wall  
**Elevation:** 310 feet  
**Construction began:** 1932  
**Construction completed:** 1939  
**Cost:** \$17 million



**3 MORRIS DAM**  
**Purpose:** Water conservation & flood control  
**Type:** Concrete gravity  
**Elevation:** 245 feet  
**Construction began:** 1932  
**Construction completed:** 1935  
**Cost:** \$7.6 million

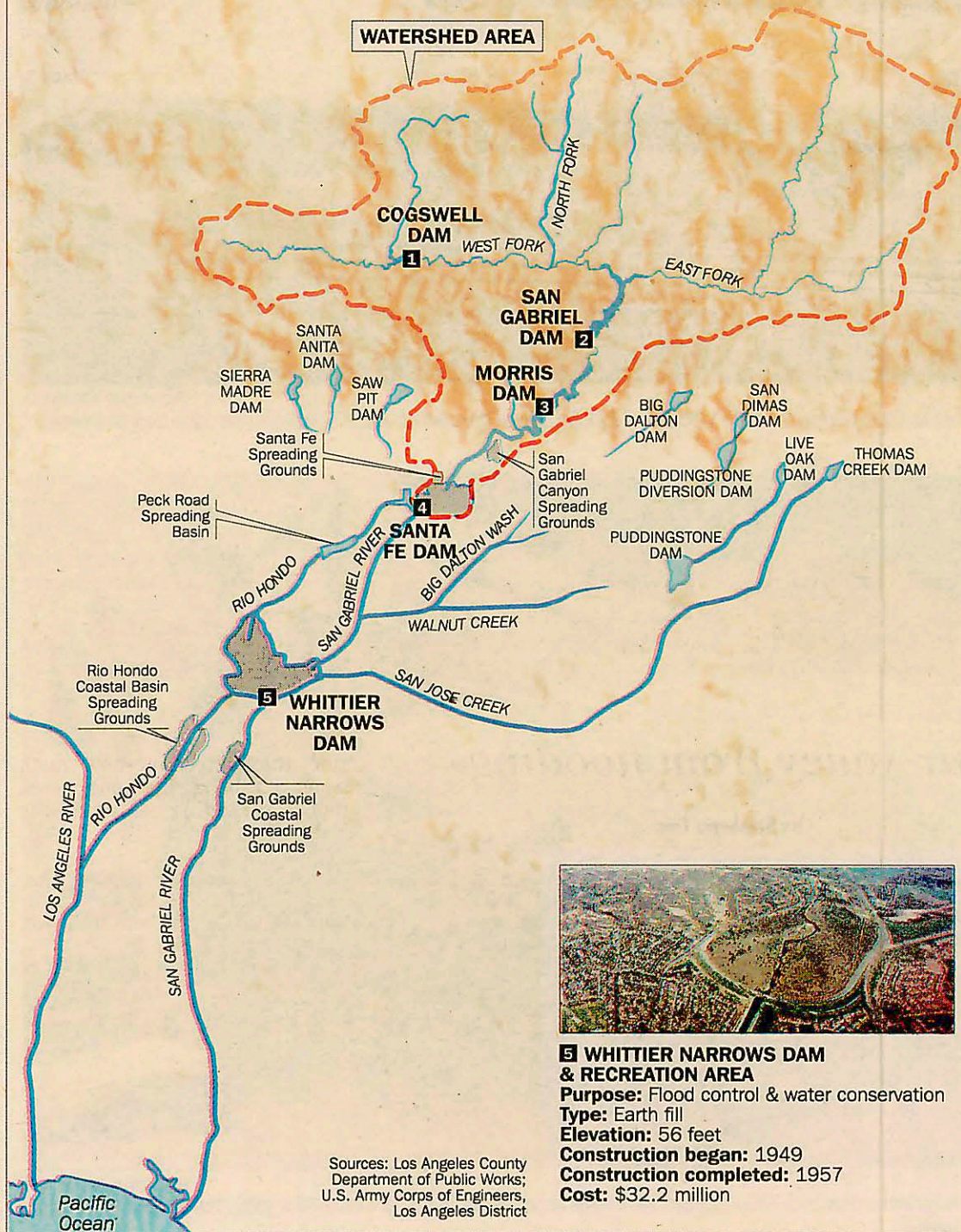


**4 SANTA FE DAM & RECREATION AREA**  
**Purpose:** Water conservation  
**Type:** Earth fill  
**Elevation:** 92 feet  
**Construction began:** 1941  
**Construction completed:** 1949  
**Cost:** \$12.6 million



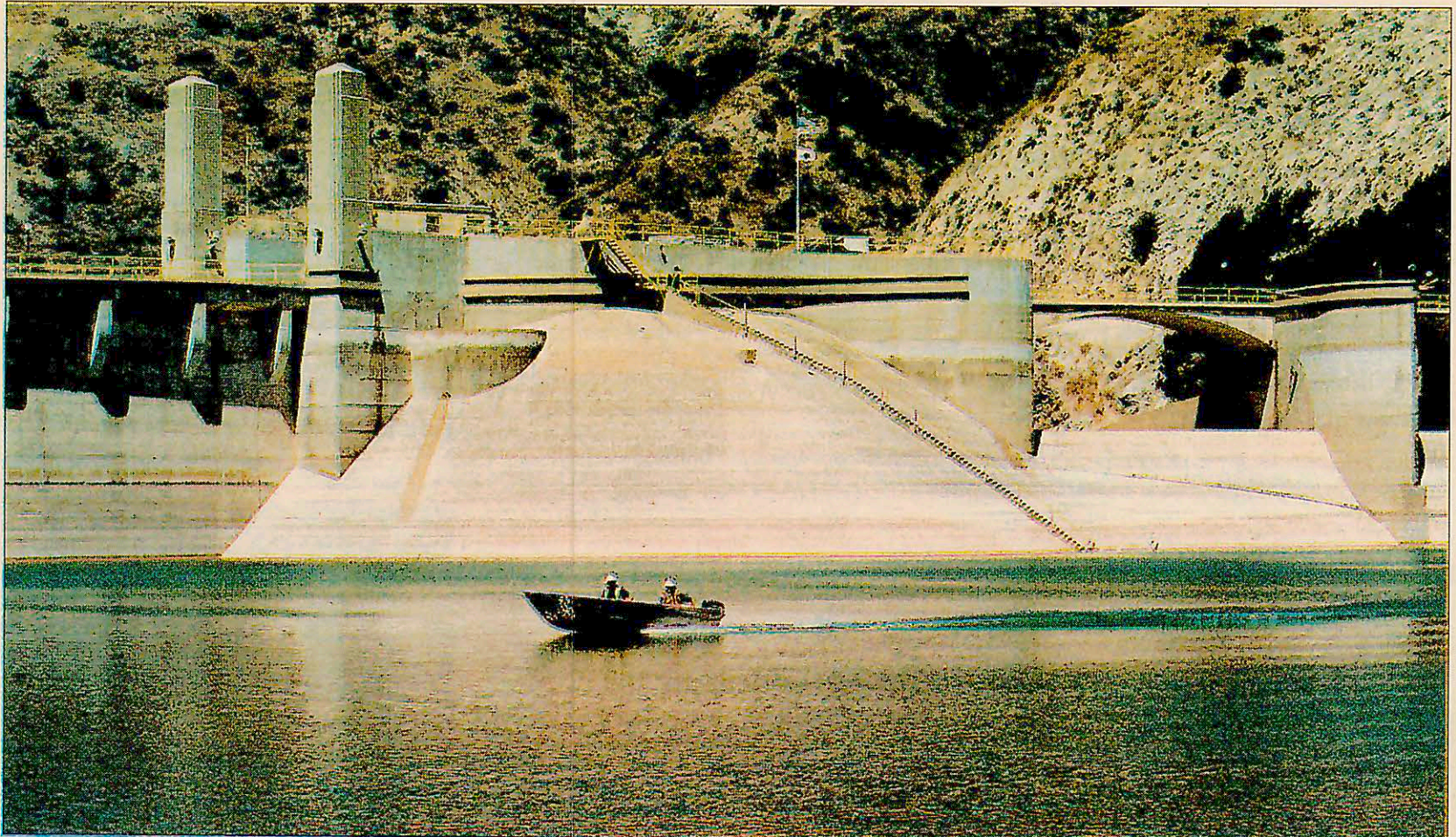
**5 WHITTIER NARROWS DAM & RECREATION AREA**  
**Purpose:** Flood control & water conservation  
**Type:** Earth fill  
**Elevation:** 56 feet  
**Construction began:** 1949  
**Construction completed:** 1957  
**Cost:** \$32.2 million

Sources: Los Angeles County Department of Public Works; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles District



Staff graphic by LANCE H. MARBURGER





Staff photo by MIKE MULLEN

Morris Dam operators use a small motorboat to survey the dam and surrounding shores. For 50 years, the Navy leased the dam for secret operations, including torpedo testing.

## THE DAMS

Continued from page 8

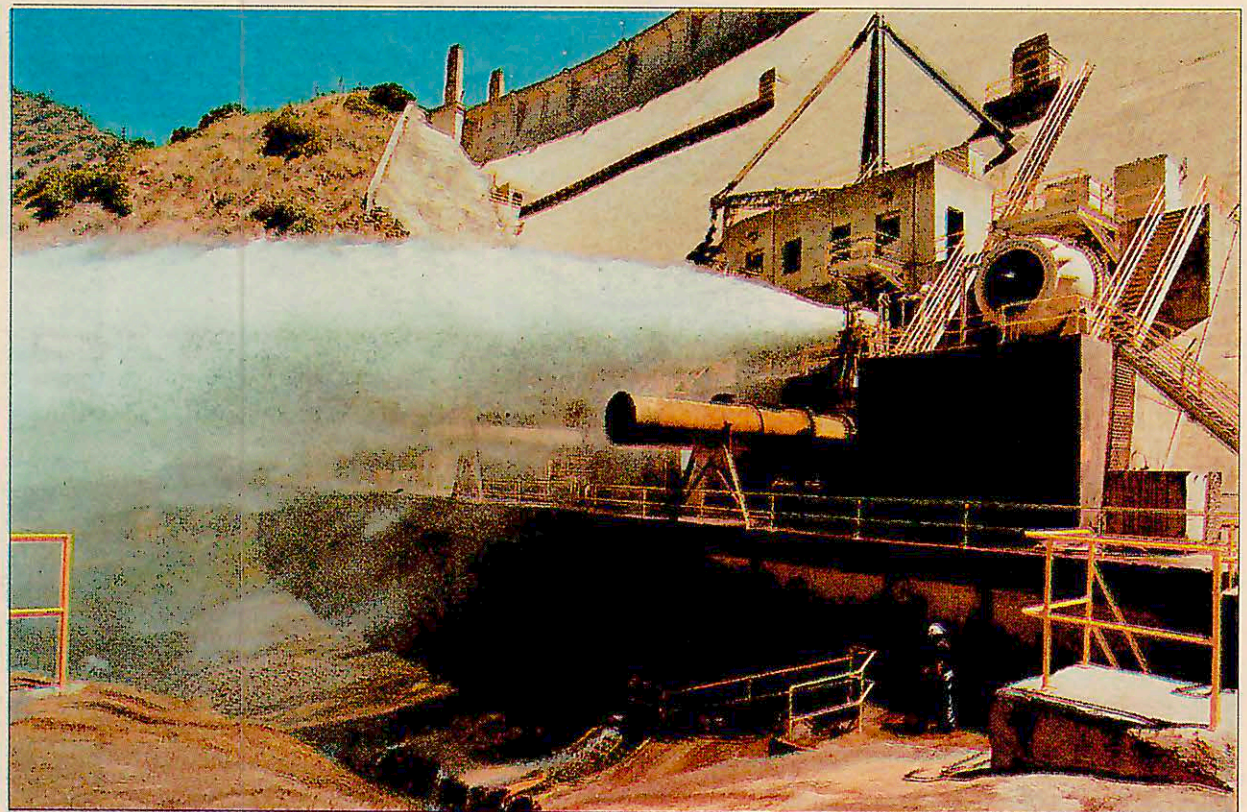
Diaz and McGowan motor around the reservoir in a small, converted rowboat to inspect the structure.

"There's a lot of places we can't visually see from the highway," Diaz said.

Morris was the second of three dams completed in the upper reaches of the canyon in the 1930s, part of a flurry of construction largely attributed to the flood of 1914. That disaster caused more than \$10 million in property damage and was the impetus for the creation of the Los Angeles County Flood Control District.

The district was responsible for controlling and conserving flood, storm and other waters. In 1995, its personnel merged with other county engineering departments to form the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works.

Construction on the three dams began the same year, in 1932, but they were ultimately completed years apart.



Staff photo by MIKE MULLEN

Please turn to DAMS / 11

Morris Dam operator Arthur Diaz is dwarfed by a stream of water shooting out from a 32-inch release valve. The valve to the right is 72 inches in diameter.



# A LITTLE HELP

*Inflated rubber dams play a big role in the water flow*

By **Stephanie Cain**  
Staff Writer

They're the little dams that can. While the San Gabriel River has a series of concrete monuments that help control flood waters, a series of smaller but arguably as important dams help in the fight for water conservation.

They are the rubber dams, alien-looking oddities that appear as overgrown black slugs slurping their way across the water.

Thirteen of them are situated along a three-mile stretch of the San Gabriel River's lower reaches. Installed in the mid-1980s, they are considered permanent solutions to the labor-intensive, hand-built levees and berms formerly used to hold back and divert water.

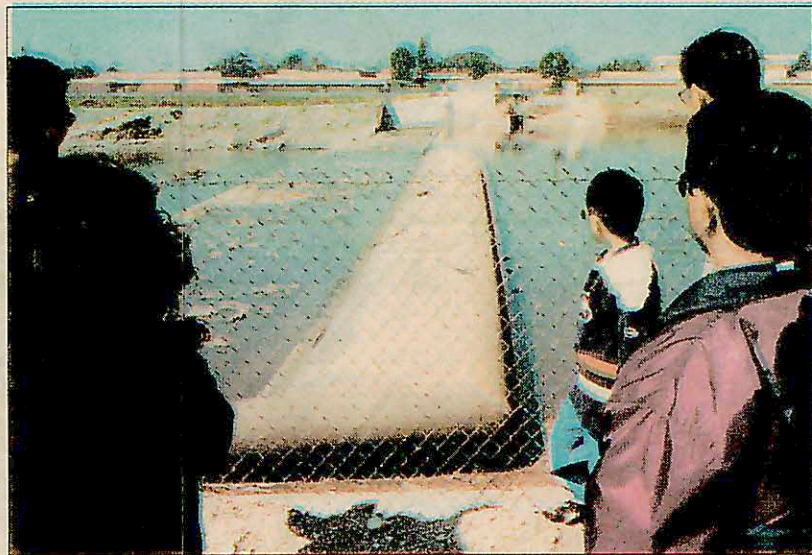
"They used to have to have a major crew go in and put in boards and slots to control the flow, which not only takes more time but can be very dangerous," said Sam

Pedroza, spokesman for the Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District. "Now they just pump up these rubber dams."

From storm runoff to discharges from nearby tributaries, the dams control the water that remains after running through the other, larger dams high in the San Gabriel Mountains.

Inflatable bladders made of thick, reinforced rubber, the dams help slow the water flowing downstream and divert it to places where it can percolate into the water table. This equals more water for everything from drinking to irrigation.

The dams are inflated at low pressure — 6 psi, compared with a car tire's 32 psi — with an electric pump in a process that takes about 20 minutes, said Gary Hildebrand, head of flood control and water



Staff photo by MICHAEL HAERING

One of 13 rubber dams that are inflated along the San Gabriel River.

conservation for the county's Public Works Departments.

Each rubber dam costs about \$1 million, including installation, but annually helps conserve about 2.3 million gallons of water, the equivalent of about \$252,000 worth of water if it were imported from outside sources.

So far, the department's biggest headache maintaining the dams has not been wear and tear, but vandalism.

"It's been a big problem," Hildebrand said. "They've been shot at, they've suffered puncture wounds, and I just heard we had someone who was seen driving a piece of metal through it with a hammer."

The inch-thick rubber can handle a certain amount of abuse, Hildebrand said, adding the more serious types of vandalism can usually be fixed like a tire puncture. □

## THE DAMS

Continued from page 10

Cogswell Dam, a rock-filled structure, took \$3.1 million and two years to complete. It rises 265 feet above the original streambed and is 585 feet long at its crest. It is used both for flood control and water conservation and is 22 miles north of Azusa in San Gabriel Canyon.

San Gabriel Dam, which serves a similar purpose, took builders seven years and \$17 million to complete. It rises 310 feet above the original streambed and is 1,500 feet long at its crest. The compacted earth- and rock-fill dam is seven miles north of Azusa.

The Cogswell Dam and San Gabriel Dam were built by the Flood Control District and are now operated by the Los Angeles County Public Works Department. Without the dams, destruction in the Valley would be fast and furious.

"With the size of the storms that can occur in that watershed, without the dams there you're going to have tremendous flooding potential," said Gary Hildebrand, chief



Staff photo by MICHAEL HAERING

Morris Dam is one of the San Gabriel Valley's most impressive feats of engineering.

of flood control and water conservation for Public Works.

In addition to preventing damaging floods, the dams serve an essential function in water conservation. Water captured from storm runoff and snow melt falls to the reservoirs and from there is divert-

ed to downstream spreading grounds.

Water in the spreading grounds, vast open acreage with little vegetation, is readily absorbed in the underground water basin that is the Valley's primary water source.

Hildebrand said the dams will

remain viable as long as they are properly maintained.

But just as important as the integrity of the structure itself is the removal of sediment that accumulates behind the dams, which is generally accomplished by sluicing, or draining the reservoir, through a bottom gate and flushing the sediment out.

"If we don't, in 50 or 60 years the thing will totally silt up and we'll have no space for water anymore. Those San Gabriel Mountains, they're some of the most erosive mountains in the world," Hildebrand said.

In 1998, Public Works hired the federal Bureau of Reclamation, which owns numerous dams, to evaluate Morris Dam's valves and to recommend upgrades as well as a sluice channel, said Keith Lilley, a supervising civil engineer with Public Works.

The design for the project is expected to be completed early in 2001 and the changes should be completed the following year, he said. □



# Looking beyond TODAY



**A** new program to acquire and maintain native habitat in the Whittier-Puente Hills area was established as a result of the expansion of the Puente Hills Landfill.

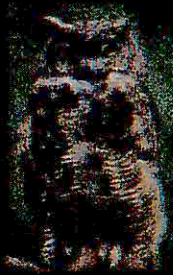
The idea was initiated by the Sanitation Districts' Board of Directors. The new program is directed by the Puente Hills Landfill Native Habitat Preservation Authority or "Landfill Habitat Authority" for short. The Landfill Habitat Authority was established in January 1994 by the Sanitation Districts, the County of Los Angeles and the City of Whittier. The Authority has a four-member board of directors, which, in addition to a representative of each agency, also includes a member of the Hacienda Heights Improvement Association. The funding comes from a fee on waste disposed at the Puente Hills Landfill.

In the short time the authority has been in existence, \$10.4 million has been spent to preserve a number of significant properties. These properties are important because of the habitat they contain as well as their value to the regional wildlife corridor, which crosses through the Authority's jurisdiction.

The first and largest acquisition to date is the 500-acre Powder Canyon property. Although this property has long been considered a "significant ecological area," a long development battle had been waged since the late 1980s, by the previous owner, to turn the property into a country club and golf course.

The map shows the location of the more than 849 acres so far acquired by the Landfill Habitat Authority. In addition, the Landfill Habitat Authority manages 225 acres of dedicated open space from the Puente Hills Landfill property known as Canyons 6, 7 and 8, and maintains 1,400 acres owned by the City of Whittier in the Whittier Hills area.

During the expected operating life of the Puente Hills Landfill, through the year 2013, more than \$74 million could be provided to the Habitat Authority for property acquisition and maintenance.



Puente Hills Landfill  
Native Habitat Preservation Authority

<http://www.lacsd.org>



## THE GEOLOGY

**W**here's an odd thing about the San Gabriel River: If you want to understand its waters, you need to understand its rocks.

For if there's anything written in stone — indeed in countless tons from deep within the Earth — it's the river's geologic pedigree.

To put it simply, 6 million years ago there was no river, but then the San Gabriel Mountains, at the vortex of some of the greatest forces on Earth, began their great lift upward.

"The river is there today, because the mountains are rising today," said Lawford Anderson, chairman of USC's Department of Earth Sciences.

"It is at the boundary of the two largest plates on Earth, and we are sitting right at that boundary."

Geologists believe the San Gabriel Mountains were formed when a bend formed in the region where the Pacific Plate and the North American Plate rub up against each other.

According to the theory of plate tectonics, the Earth's continents and oceans are cradled by a number of vast plates that move across the surface of the globe.

Normally, the two plates slide against each other, but the bend created friction that forced the edge of the North American plate upward, creating not only the San Gabriels but a downward fold that was the origin of the Valley.

Moreover, geologists believe the San Andreas Fault once traced right across the mountains before abandoning that line to move northward, leaving behind the San Gabriel Fault.

A fault line allows erosion by water to occur more readily. That erosion is believed to have led to the creation of the East and West forks of the San Gabriel River, which sit right atop the fault.

Then, sometime several millions of years ago, the forks began to feed a single primary route south to the Valley below — a route of unsure geologic origin that eventually turned into the San Gabriel River.

"It might have just took that course at random and then as the mountains continued to elevate it continued to down cut," said Mike Johnson, the chief geologist with the county's Department of Public Works.

"It's nothing that has been

# AN UNDERGROUND MOVEMENT

*Area has a rich, evolving geology*

By Laurence Darmiento  
Staff Writer

proven. Geology is not an exact science."

But for geologists, the origin of the river is not nearly as interesting as the subsequent processes: a tremendous crumbling and erosion of the mountains exceeded only by the tectonic pressure that makes them one of the fastest-rising ranges in the world.

"At the rate of erosion in a million years they eroded 5,000 feet. Now they are 10,000 feet at their maximum elevation, but maybe would have been 15,000 feet," Johnson said. "It is staggering."

And the implications for the river?

In short, it means a river that runs largely underground.

The bedrock fold that forms the base of the San Gabriel Valley is now thousands of feet below

ground at points, covered with the mountain's rocky crumbings, what geologists call alluvium.

That alluvium forms the Valley's 167-square-mile aquifer, or ground-water reservoir, which can hold 2.8 trillion gallons and is the Valley's primary drinking water supply.

"It's very porous, which means the water can just percolate into the ground," said Rick Sase, an engineer with the Main San Gabriel Basin Watermaster, the agency that regulates pumping in the basin. At the south end of the Valley at the Whittier Narrows Recreation and Natural Areas, the geologic records indicate the Puente and Montebello Hills rose after the river had already made its way out to sea.

It then proceeded to cut its way

through hills, forming the gap thousands of motorists ride through today without a second thought.

"The river actually predates the hills, which is why it didn't attempt to flow around them. Water takes the path of least resistance," said Steven Lipshie, an engineering geologist with the county.

But elsewhere, and even during the time of European settlement, the shallow river altered its course from time to time.

"If you look at maps from 1860, the San Gabriel River then used to move into the L.A. River well north of the harbor. It probably moved back and forth over the years," Lipshie said.

Today, the river's course is set, literally in concrete banks, while debris basins in the foothills above expensive tract homes attempt to catch the rocky soil that still sloughs off the mountain slopes.

An attempt is clearly still the operative word.

Records kept by county Public Works show that the mountains can rain down 360,000 tons of debris in one year, which the department dutifully cleans out of its basins with dozers and other machines.

Tons of silt also accumulate in the three great dams in San Gabriel Canyon, silt the department has tried to eliminate for years with heavy equipment and sluicing, or draining, of the reservoirs.

Anderson said the mountains are some of the fastest eroding in the world. He has a pithy way of saying it: "The higher they stand the quicker they fall."

Over the millennia, great floods have carried boulders and smaller rocks to the Valley floor. Generally, the heaviest rocks are left in the canyons or close to them while the lighter ones get carried further away.

Some say the river may lack the respect it deserves, only because we have not seen its full power in generations, a force that has left tell-tale signs far from mountain canyons.

"Sometimes you'll see these huge boulders," said Oliver Galang, a supervising civil engineer for Public Works. "We haven't seen the worst of what these mountains are capable of sending down the river." □



Staff photo by JAMES KU

Geologists believe the San Gabriel Mountains were formed when the Pacific Plate and the North American Plate grinded up against each other forcing one plate to rise.



If your loved one needs us, we'll come and get them.

# “Anyone. Anywhere. Anytime.”

Deputy Terry Ascherin has been a member of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department swift water rescue team since its conception in 1992.

“There were those who said swift water rescue couldn't be done using helicopters because it's the most tricky type of rescue you get involved in,” Deputy Ascherin said, “but with the right attitude and a team working together we proved it could be done.”

Since we started the program fatalities have been reduced by two-thirds or more, according to Ascherin. “Education and the help of the media showing the danger swift water can be has contributed to the significant drop in swift water deaths.”

The program started with a directive from the county supervisors who wanted to eliminate fatalities in the San Gabriel River.

“Where the swift water rescue team was and where it has come to is phenomenal,” said Capt. Cathy A. Taylor, captain of the Sheriff's Special Enforcement Bureau, which includes the deputies who participate in swift water rescue. Two sergeants and 15 deputies make up the swift water rescue team.

Capt. Taylor is justifiably proud of her swift water rescue team. “They take their job seriously. They train hard and work hard as a team. They are a small group of elite, highly trained deputies,” Taylor said. “When they go on a rescue mission, they put on their game faces and just do it.”

Ascherin, who has been in rescue for 26 years, says helicopters have really made a difference in swift water rescue. “A helicopter is a viable rescue tool in moving water,” he said. “It gave us the ability to extract people from moving water — the most dangerous of all rescues.”

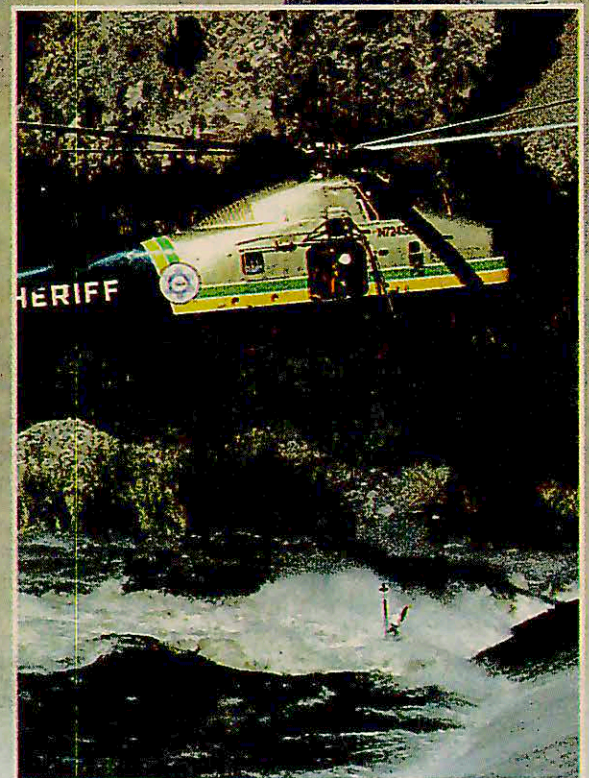
Ascherin was part of the team in 1991 that rescued a 6-year-old boy named Angel from the San Gabriel River in the Angeles National Forest.

“He was under water for 35 minutes,” Ascherin said. “I was on the line to retrieve him and he washed downstream three and a half miles and ended up on a rock with 15 miles per hour water moving over him. He was in the hospital 25 minutes without a pulse and he survived. That's a miracle.”

That's pretty much what the Sheriff's Department swift water rescue team does — perform miracles.



Capt. Cathy A. Taylor,  
Captain of the Special Enforcement Bureau





**“We do an average of 800 rescues a year, cars going off the side, motorcycle accidents, lost hikers...with the ‘Sea King,’ we can lift more, go higher, go faster and carry more people.”**

**—Leroy D. Baca, Sheriff**

Foreseeing an increasing role for airborne rescue services, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Aero Bureau has upgraded its fleet of helicopters. Four Sikorsky SH-3H "Sea King" helicopters have replaced the older Sikorsky SK58-Ts. The new helicopters are larger, more durable and more cost efficient than their predecessors. The helicopters will be used to support law enforcement activities and in search and rescue operations and casualty evacuations.

The Sheriff's Department recently acquired the helicopters from the United States Navy with assistance of Sen. Diane Feinstein. These aircraft were completely reconditioned and are configured with modern navigation equipment, a state-of-the-art medical interior and improved rescue hoist. Compared to what the Department had, the new helicopters have greatly improved our

medical capabilities from a basic rudimentary system of stretcher application and portable equipment carried by paramedics to three fully self-contained life support systems for care of up to three people instead of just one person as before.

Another highly important feature of the "Sea Kings" is that it gives the Sheriff's Aero Bureau the ability to do two missions at the same time, medical evacuation and transport personnel such as SWAT members.



The Aero Bureau's search and rescue operation, known as "Air Rescue 5," provides air rescue services to all of Los Angeles County.

The Air-5 flight crew consists of two deputy pilots, a paramedic crew of two, staffed by the Emergency Services Detail (ESD) and an ESD sergeant acting as crew chief and hoist operator. The rescue paramedics can rappel or be lowered by hoist from the helicopter as it hovers.

# Join The Very Best

## Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

### 1-800-A-DEPUTY

[www.lasd.org](http://www.lasd.org)







Staff photo by LEO JARZOMB

A woman walks her Dalmatian on the San Gabriel River Trail near Wardlow Road in Long Beach. It's here where the concrete banks give the river an urban feel.

# FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE SEA

*The changing faces of the waterway as it leaves the Valley*

By **Michael Dean Clark**  
Staff Writer

**C**ontrary to what some people in the Valley might think, the San Gabriel River does extend beyond the Whittier Narrows, creating relationships unique to the communities it passes through.

As it winds south toward the Pacific Ocean, the San Gabriel River undergoes several major changes in appearance, shifting between natural plant life and graffiti-stained concrete before emptying in marshy wetlands near Seal Beach.

As the appearance of the river changes, its purpose to the communities it runs through does as well.

"The upper stream is more the natural habitat ... while downstream is more flood control and protection against pollution," said Ann Croissant, founder of the San Gabriel Mountains Regional Conservancy, which is seeking to preserve river habitat.

South of the Whittier Narrows the river continues as a grassy, sand-bottomed creature until it

reaches the Downey area.

Anaheim resident Jeremy Fancher, who rides the bike path along the river for exercise, said he finds the environment just south of the Whittier Narrows much prettier than the waterway's northern stretch.

"The river doesn't mirror its surroundings," Fancher said. "When you're in the industrial area, it's really more natural. But when you're in a residential area the river is more like an aqueduct."

Much of the river is bordered by properties with stables and pens holding horses, cattle, goats, sheep and even an ostrich here and there. Those properties are broken up occasionally by parks and newer condominium complexes.

A few miles beyond the Narrows, the river is entirely lined with concrete and takes on a more urban feel.

Down here, most people are hardly aware that the river is near except when it rains or at the end of each month when they have to pay their federally mandated flood

insurance, said Assemblywoman Sally Havice, D-Artesia.

But threaten to take out that concrete to return the river to its natural state and residents in her district, which is two-thirds in the river's flood plain, will protest loudly, she said.

As the river cuts through Long Beach and out to its eventual end at Seal Beach, it becomes a marshy wetland with various birds and plants reflecting its proximity to the ocean.

Officials at the outlet of the river are very concerned about the pollution that runs through storm drains along the river and is flushed into the ocean after each storm.

"We're essentially the end of the line for everyone else's trash that floats down from the storm drains," said Steve Badum, director of Public Works for Seal Beach. "And that's very expensive."

The city spends close to \$250,000 a year to clean up and maintain a beach that gets 1.2 million visitors each year.

Most of that maintenance is cleaning up the Christmas trees, shopping carts, toys, Styrofoam cups and oil, among other things, that travel down the river, Badum said.

"If it's dropped into a storm drain or even just left out it will end up down here," Badum said. "Everyone who lives near the watershed needs to know they are responsible for stopping pollution." □

## THE FLOW



Staff photo by JOSH ESTEY

Glendora resident Denesa Chan paddles a kayak in one of the many harbor channels in Seal Beach.





Staff photo by JOSH ESTEY

Laboratory technician Bill Furlong uses a bucket to collect water samples along the San Gabriel River once a month for the San Jose Creek Water Reclamation Plant.

**H**esting the waters in any situation takes courage and risk.

But when it comes to testing the waters of the San Gabriel River, it takes even more than that.

No one group is responsible for sampling and analyzing all of the river's water; some cities contract with private engineering firms while other agencies do it themselves.

Surface water is tested weekly for some things, monthly for others, quarterly or longer for yet others. And not all groups monitor the same chemicals or pollutants.

And since the river snakes its way from the Angeles National Forest through urbanized, industrialized cities, the surface water is affected in different ways.

But there is one thing many people agree on: The water quality of the river is not up to snuff.

"Definitely, it needs to be

# A DELICATE MIX

*Our water is neither better nor worse than other rivers*

By **Nicole M. Campbell**  
Staff Writer

improved," said Jacqueline Lambrichts, founder of Friends of the San Gabriel River, a group designed to preserve and restore the waterway.

Both the California Water Code and the federal Clean Water Act mandate standards for surface water, which are not being met.

The largest problem may be trash, especially the litter that visitors and others dump into the

waterway and its surrounding areas. The problem is so bad that the U.S. Forest Service is under orders by the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board to clean it up.

The regional board recently published a "State of the Watershed" report concerning the surface water quality of the San Gabriel River.

According to the report, everything from ammonia, to algae, to

banned pesticides is found in the river and its tributaries. Also a problem is coliform, the generic term for bacteria that is an indicator of fecal contamination.

"From a human health standpoint, the coliform would be the worst of the problems, but the coliform isn't going to be a problem unless people are swimming in the river," said Shirley Birosik, the board's watershed coordinator.

As for wildlife, nutrients such as ammonia can kill fish if it's high enough, while nitrates can inspire algae growth. And while that doesn't seem as threatening, it's unsightly and can deplete dissolved oxygen.

It also begins to smell when it dies off and has posed a problem at Legg Lake, part of the Whittier Narrows Recreation and Natural

## THE POLLUTION

Please turn to **WATER / 18**



## THE POLLUTION

Continued from page 17

Areas.

DDT, a pesticide banned in the United States 30 years ago, is present in Puddingstone Reservoir in San Dimas, a popular local fishing spot, where it accumulates in bottom-feeder fish.

"DDT is found virtually everywhere, so that's not surprising," Birosik said. "It takes a long time to break down and it's very persistent, so that's why it was banned."

Lambrichts said abnormalities in the water further south toward the ocean affect marine fish such as halibut.

"There appear to be impacts, meaning some of their fins may be missing or they may have tumors," she said.

Metals — such as mercury, lead, copper, silver and arsenic, all of which are found in the river and its tributaries — can

be harmful to humans and animals.

"It's more a problem for a long-lived organism like a human than a short-lived organism like a fish," Birosik said.

Lambrichts said she believes as impairments go, the worst is nitrogen.

"And the biggest source of that is the sewage treatment plants," she said.

The Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts treats sewage at several plants that discharge into the river. These plants produce reclaimed water that has been highly treated and is even spread into the ground to recharge the water basin.

But like any business that discharges into the waterways, the sanitation districts need a permit to do their work, making sure any water they put back into the river cannot be toxic.

Water samples taken from 15 sites are taken back to the lab and analyzed. Different kinds of vertebrates, invertebrates and plants are placed in the water to see how they are affected regarding repro-

duction, growth and life expectancy.

"It's pretty good," said Jay Bottomley, the districts' lab supervisor. "If it wasn't we wouldn't be discharging."

Bottomley said there are many other dischargers to worry about.

"If you're in Cerritos, you might get (discharges) from dairies. They have a lot of dairies there. If you're in Whittier you might get industrial. If you're in a residential area, you might get a lot of pesticides. In El Monte, with all the horses, they wash the horses off and it gets into the sewers," he said.

But even with all that, Birosik said the San Gabriel River falls right in the middle in terms of water quality, about the same as the Los Angeles River and better than the Dominguez Channel, which flows through the western part of Los Angeles and dumps into L.A. Harbor.

And there are solutions to the water problems.

One of them is the federally mandated Total Maximum Daily Load program.

Required by the Clean Water Act since 1979, TMDLs are calculations of the maximum amount of pollution, on a pollutant by pollutant basis, that waterways can handle and still meet the act's guidelines.

"It's a holistic approach to watershed improvement," Lambrichts said.

Dischargers are categorized two ways: point sources, such as factories, and non-point sources, such as neighborhood storm drains and residents hosing down their driveways.

Non-point sources are a major focus now, but Birosik said the task of finding out the source of pollution is labor intensive and may only be alleviated by community-wide efforts.

Lambrichts said installing catch basins at points along the river can prevent surface water from being polluted, while a citizens monitoring program can strengthen contamination prevention efforts. □

*"... If you're in Whittier, you might get industrial. If you're in a residential area, you might get a lot of pesticides. In El Monte, with all the horses, they wash the horses off and it gets into the sewers."*

— Jay Bottomley  
Lab supervisor,  
county sanitation districts

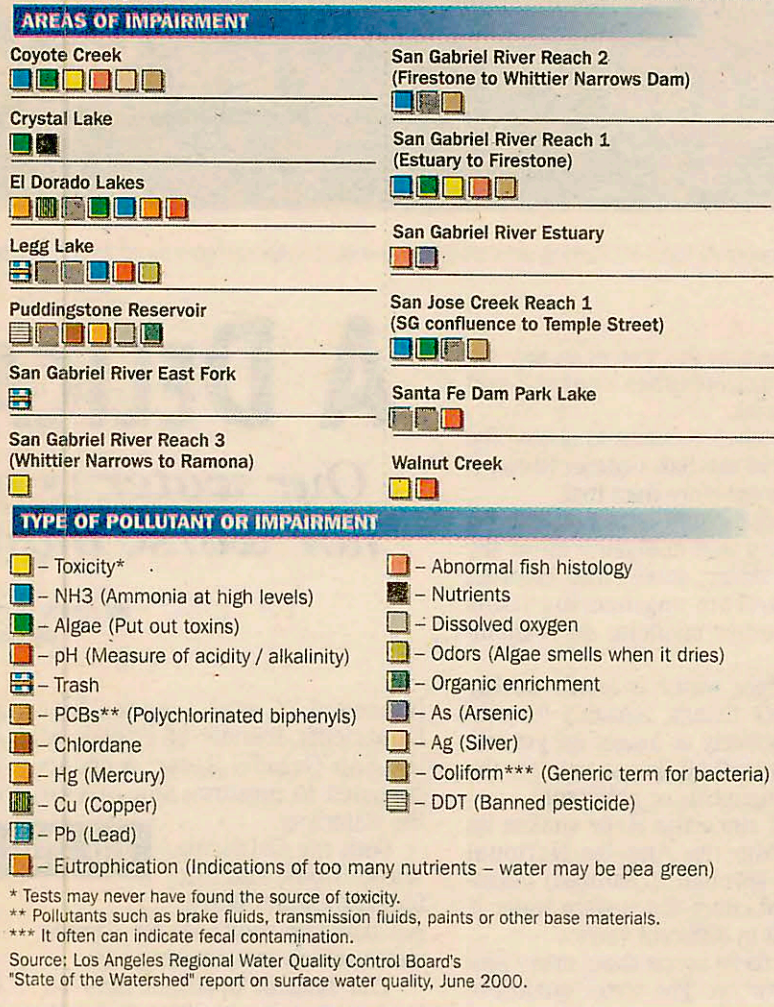


Staff photo by JOSH ESTEY

Carlita Matias, a laboratory technician at the San Jose Creek Water Quality Laboratory in Whittier, demonstrates a water hardness analysis. This test is one of many the water goes through in order to ensure that treated water from the facility is fit to be put back into the San Gabriel River.

### Current water-quality impairments

The following is a list of pollutants and impairments found in the San Gabriel River.



Staff graphic by MANUEL AMAYA





Staff photo by JAMES KU

The bike paths run down the side of the San Gabriel River and do not really indicate where you are while traveling along them.

# A SILENT PARTNER

*Some cities embrace the river while others appear to ignore it*

By **Nicole M. Campbell**  
Staff Writer

**I**t runs silently through the San Gabriel Valley, almost unnoticed.

While many people pack up the car and travel to the San Gabriel Mountains to spend the weekend along the river, many Valley residents rarely visit the waterway that flows through their own back yards.

And a trip along the bike path down the river can turn into an adventure filled with mystery, as few, if any cities, post signs telling people where they are or what roadway they are passing.

Indifference sometimes seems to be the greatest response to the river, perhaps summed up best by Bob Griego, the former city manager of Irwindale, a city dominated by quarries created eons ago by river storms carrying rocky sediment to the Valley.

"It's kind of a channel with concrete," Griego said. "I don't know what kind of amenities could be added, but with some good plan-

ning, anything could be turned into an asset."

Even some of those for whom the river and its water are their life work have an indifferent perspective on the San Gabriel River.

"It's not actually a river," said Jay Bottomley, lab supervisor for the Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County, which treats sewage for a majority of the coun-

ty's cities.

"It's only a river in the winter-time when there's a storm. It's stagnant."

## THE IDENTITY

But there are exceptions and advocates trying to change that perspective. Azusa perhaps is most closely aligned with the river, since it is closest to the mountains and the river's water source.

"This is 'The Canyon City' and through the canyon runs the San

Gabriel River," Mayor Cristina Madrid said.

In fact, Madrid said, the city derives its name from a native Indian word meaning "place of sacred waters."

"I think the river is very meaningful for all of us, and I think there's a lot of commitment to create a natural environment around the river," she said. "It's a big part of our history and our identity."

John Fasana, Duarte city councilman, said his constituents most certainly have a connection with the river, a bond fostered and strengthened by the opening about 10 years ago of the Puente Largo Bridge as a pedestrian thoroughfare.

"I know a lot of people (who) walk along there to look at bird life and plant life, and they're quite involved with it," he said. "And this time of year, there's not a lot of water in it, so it's really amazing."

Please turn to **IDENTITY/ 20**



# COMPANIES SPROUTED OVER WATER RIGHTS

**W**hoever said whiskey is for drinking and water is for fighting over must have been in the San Gabriel Valley in the late 1800s.

The legendary rows over rights to San Gabriel River's water may not have escalated to bloodshed, but they did lead to fisticuffs and influence the formation of agencies such as the Covina Irrigating Co.

Today, the nonprofit company sells water to more than a dozen communities and corporations around the Southland. It's come a long way from its formation in 1898, when water needs centered on irrigation.

But necessity begets creativity, and the Covina Irrigating Co. has a bit of both in its beginnings.

First established as the Azusa Water Development and Irrigating Co. in 1882 to distribute water to stakeholders and settlers in the Valley, the company fought several battles to gain rights to the river.

Insisting the water belonged to them, some of the earliest settlers drove home their point through sabotage, emptying trenches of water.

"History tells us there weren't any gunfights, but there were some fistfights up there when they found they were damming up the river," said David De Jesus, general manager of the Covina Irrigating Co.

In what later came to be known as the Brunson Case, the company in 1884 filed a suit for a determina-

## *Irrigation played a key role in river's transformation*

By **Stephanie Cain**  
Staff Writer

tion of rights.

"The farmers back in the 1800s started this company, but the state wasn't interested then," said Howard Hawkins, a 50-year company board member and former Covina mayor.

"Then it became clear there was going to be a shortage of water, so they stepped in and made a law that said the water belonged to the people of California and allocated it to the people that were spreading the water.

"Everybody wanted more water so they could farm more, but the San Gabriel River is very temperamental. But in dry years there wasn't enough, and in years of floods nobody wanted it anymore," he said.

The Covina Irrigating Co. has four employees — a general manager, two field operations superintendents and a secretary. As a wholesaler, it directly serves six water suppliers who then pipe it to the tap.

Forty-two percent of its stock is owned by Covina — and thus the largest share of its water supply — with the rest divided among

Suburban Water Systems, Southern California Water Co., Valley County Water District, Valencia Heights Water Co. and the city of Glendora.

The company's water treatment plant clarifies and chlorinates up to 12 million gallons of surface

water per day from the canyon and produces more than 3.3 billion gallons of water per year, said Steve Sherman, field operations superintendent for the company.

Primarily, the treatment process removes potentially harmful bacteria and viruses, resulting in water that costs less than a fourth of water imported to the Valley from northern California and the Colorado River.

If not for the river, there would be no Covina as we know it, De Jesus maintains.

"The old adage of 'build it and they will come' is so true," he said. □

### THE IRRIGATION

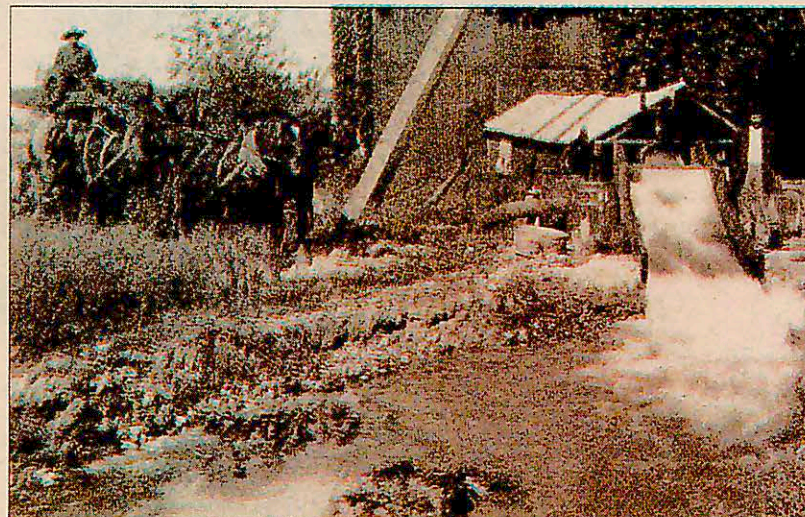


Photo courtesy of COVINA IRRIGATING CO.

In this photo from the 1880s a man pulls up in a wagon to fill his barrels with water at an irrigation site along the San Gabriel River in the Azusa area. -

### THE IDENTITY

Continued from page 19

Still, outside of Azusa and Duarte, the river's essence can get muddied.

Even a lifelong resident of the East San Gabriel Valley like 67-year-old Norma Rowley, who has visited the river since she was a child, has a limited view of it.

"I can say I have never been to the river except up San Gabriel Canyon," said Rowley, who lives in Glendora. "Unless someone has been drug out of (the river) in the rainy season, I have never given it much thought unless it's in our own back door here."

And downriver on the waterway, it's hard to even identify where the river is passing through.

Take South El Monte as an

example.

Wild sunflowers crop up on the riverbank next to faded beer packaging. The quack of ducks is drowned out by the buzzing of overhead power lines. An unobstructed bike path fades into the horizon while trucks zoom by on Durfee Avenue and the whistle of nearby freight trains pierces the air.

But there are no signs indicating where the city's limits begin and end.

Jacqueline Lambrichts, founder of Friends of the San Gabriel River, which is seeking to preserve and restore the waterway, said a big

*"I think there's a lot of commitment to create a natural environment around the river. It's a big part of our history and our identity."*

— **Cristina Madrid**  
Azusa mayor

obstacle to personally identifying with the river is indeed the lack of signage and urban landmarks along its path.

A group of master's students from Cal Poly Pomona's landscape architecture department who were hired by the San Gabriel Mountains Regional

Conservancy to study how to better integrate the river into community life included a call for more signage in their recommendations.

The county is preparing a master plan for the river and its adjoining lands, which could bring about such changes, officials said.

Advocates also hope improvements in hiking and equestrian trails and bike paths will draw more visitors to the river in all cities, thereby increasing a connection with the San Gabriel.

Rosemead Mayor Margaret Clark, a board member of the new San Gabriel & Lower Los Angeles Rivers & Mountains Conservancy, said the opening of the Bosque del Rio Hondo Park has increased community identification with the waterway.

The park, at San Gabriel and Rosemead boulevards, has picnic sites and a footbridge.

"It's very pretty," Clark said. "I think now that there's people who identify a lot more with the river. Before that it was just a channel."

Staff Writer **Dave Melendi** contributed to this story. □



# ENFORCEMENT ALONG THE RIVER

*Policing duties are shared  
by several agencies*

By **Ruby Gonzales**  
Staff Writer

**H**he San Gabriel River is not only a witness to crimes but also a victim.

At times, it's even a suspect.

The homeless set up lodgings by the river while others take potshots at small animals, drink alcohol or commit assault. The river also doesn't escape abuse, getting its share of garbage and vandalism.

By itself, it can be deadly, especially during the rainy season. Anyone who falls in runs the risk of drowning in the fast-moving water.

But officers point out that the areas by the river aren't awash in trouble.

"It's not a crime-ridden area," said Los Angeles County sheriff's Deputy Larry Tack, whose beat in the forest includes the river. "For the most part, there's not much crime. Most of the people who come up here are pretty well-behaved."

When crime does happen, which agency handles the case depends on location, location, location. No one law enforcement agency has sole responsibility for keeping an

eye on the river.

Several agencies overlap jurisdictions in the Angeles National Forest. And as the river moves past the mouth of the canyon and onward to the Pacific Ocean, crimes and rescues are handled by the police, sheriff's and fire departments of the communities it winds through.

None of the various departments actually has a black-and-white dedicated to just patrolling

the river in their areas. The river, be it in natural form or trapped in a concrete wash, is usually included as part of a patrol beat.

## UP IN THE MOUNTAINS

### THE LAW

In the forest, there's the Sheriff's Department, the U.S. Forest Service, the Los Angeles County Fire Department and the California Highway Patrol.

The forest draws a lot of people who live in the communities below

it. The river is part of the attraction.

"Much of the activity is by the roadway. Much of the roadway is within a stone's throw of the river," said Chuck Shamblin, law enforcement coordinator for the U.S. Forest Service.

"Many of the problems in the forest originate with people who come. It happens between people who know each other," he added.

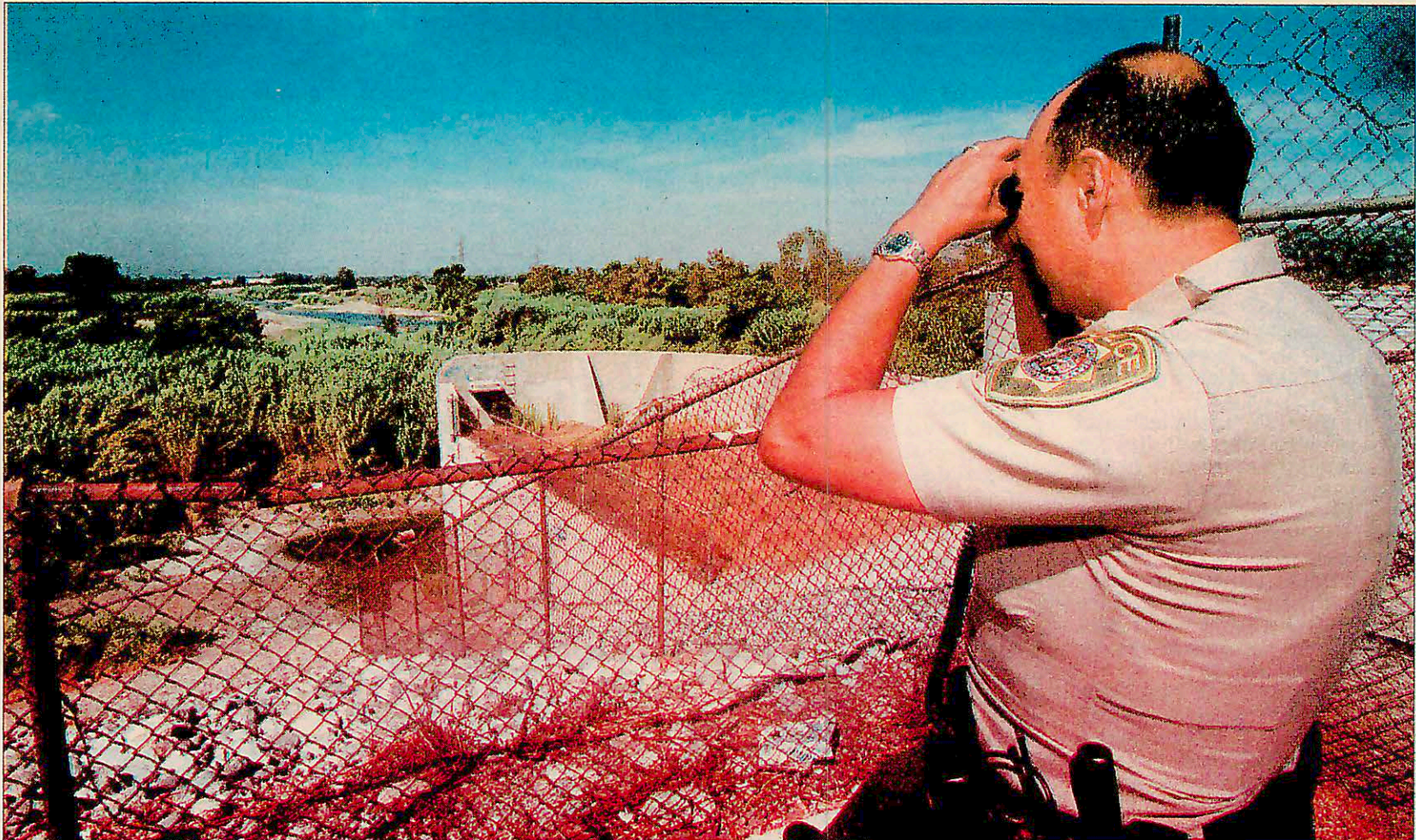
The Forest Service has its own law enforcement division. Shamblin said they work with other agencies on illegal pot farms in the forest and enforcing highway safety. And they can cite people for fish and game violations such as using nets to fish.

He said the biggest problem in the forest is intentional destruction of property, ranging from graffiti on rocks to bullet-riddled signs.

Murders, stolen cars, robberies and other such crimes in the forest are handled by the Sheriff's Department.

The sheriff's San Dimas Station patrols the mountain from the

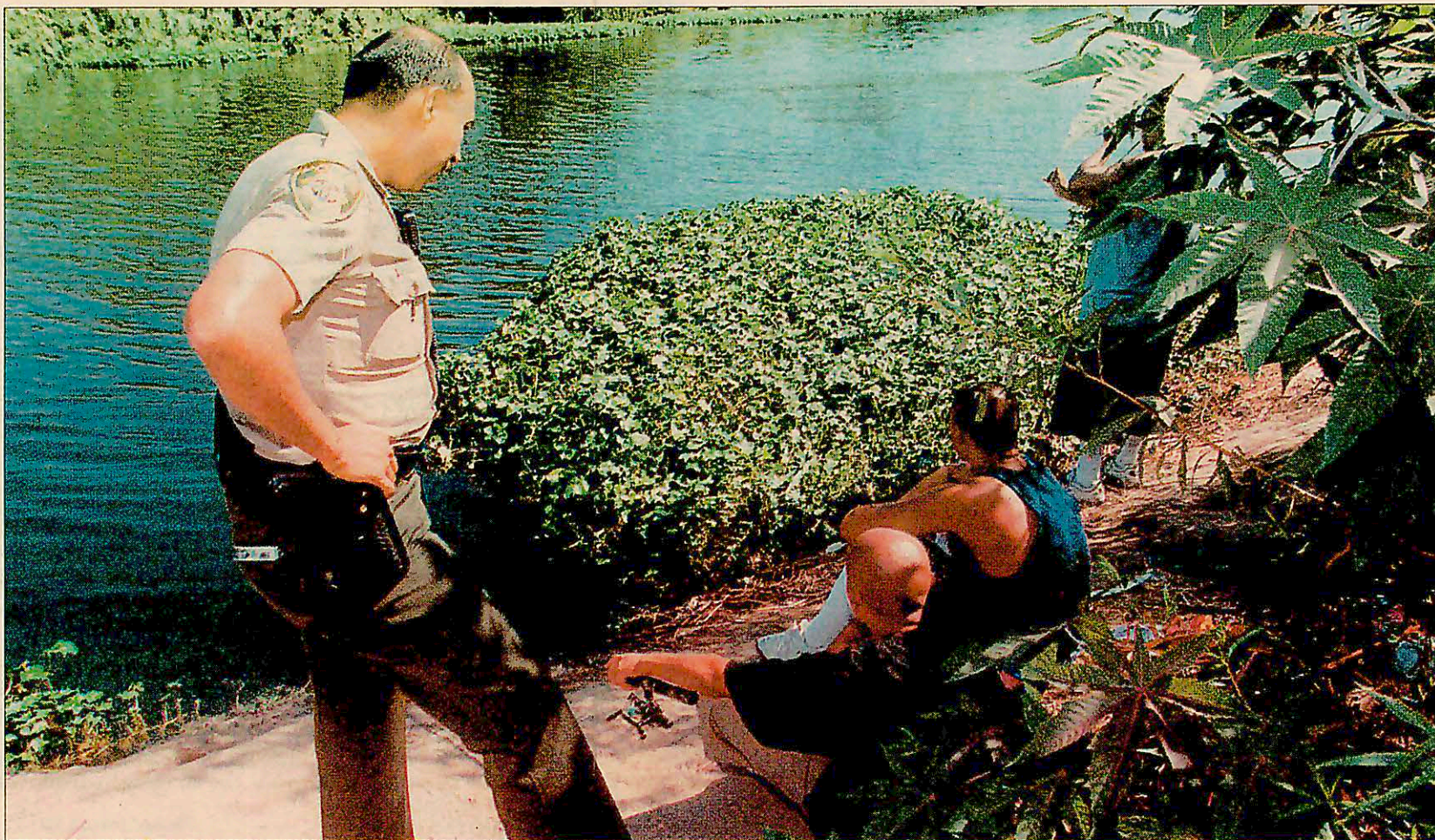
Please turn to **LAW / 22**



Staff photo by KEITH DURFLINGER

As part of his regular patrol of the river, county police Officer Jose Carrillo uses binoculars to scan the area of the San Gabriel River at Whittier Narrows near Pico Rivera.





Staff photo by KEITH DURFLINGER

County police Officer Jose Carrillo notifies fishermen that they cannot fish in this portion of the San Gabriel River.

## THE LAW

Continued from page 21

canyon to the border between Los Angeles and San Bernardino Counties.

The more commonly occurring crimes are drinking in public and drug use, said Sgt. Dave Rash, who is in charge of the mountain patrol cars. He is also a co-coordinator of the San Dimas Mountain Rescue Team.

The Sheriff's Department also has primary responsibility for search and rescue calls in the mountains. They're the ones who look for missing hikers. County fire is the secondary agency in such cases.

But when it comes to emergency medical calls, the county Fire Department takes primary role. The Sheriff's Department becomes the secondary agency.

It was a slow day for Tack during a recent shift. He shooed a swimmer from Crystal Lake, telling him that swimming isn't allowed there.

Sundays and holiday weekends are the busiest days in the forest,

said Larry Brown, a fire prevention officer with the Forest Service. The canyon can accommodate 3,000 parked cars at one time.

It's Brown's job to keep his eyes peeled for people using fireworks and illegal campfires. He's worked in the forest for 25 years.

"It's a balancing act here of protecting resources and providing recreation to people. You do it by education and enforcement of rules," he said.

While he can call for armed law enforcement to back him up if needed, Brown hasn't done that.

"I personally believe it's how you handle the situation," he said.

### IN THE FLATLANDS

Azusa police patrol the riverbed because there are residences that back up to the waterway, police Lt. Jeff Reed said.

Traffic generated by motorists heading to the forest during weekends and holidays is a problem for this foothill community.

"The traffic problem we get is folks coming back, primarily people being turned (away) because the place is full," Reed said.

"Especially in the summer months, people like to go to the canyon."

Sometimes those who can't get into the forest decide to hold their picnics or barbecues by the riverbed below the canyon. There have been rescues and open campfires.

El Monte police use a helicopter, regular patrol, bicycle team and officers on motorized dirt bikes to keep tabs on the river and its surroundings, according to Bill Ankeny, assistant police chief for El Monte.

"We do it because it's the right thing to do. The safer the area is, the safer our citizens are," he said. "It's not a bad place but it bears watching."

Ankeny said officers on horseback every once in a while would patrol the area too. The department's Problem Oriented Policing team also heads there because of the homeless encampments.

Another problem that has cropped up from time to time involves men having sex with men in public, he said.

There are residential properties that back up to the horse trails. Ankeny said a burglar can get in

and out of houses without being seen from the streets, another reason why they patrol there.

And there's the potential of suspects fleeing into the wash to elude police or runaways using it as a hideaway, he said.

The river, for the most part, poses no problem for the sheriff's Industry Station, according to Lt. Charles Schultz.

It's also quiet in Pico Rivera. There used to be a small group of homeless who set up a camp by the trees by Beverly Boulevard several years ago, said Sgt. Henry Garza of the sheriff's Pico Rivera station. That was until the county flood control staff leveled the brush.

Gang members whose back yards faced the riverbed used to run there to escape. The gang members were arrested in the mid-1990s. Bike riders, joggers and runners now constitute the traffic there, he said.

"It's quite safe and the public is quite comfortable going there," Garza said.

The sheriff's Temple City

Please turn to LAW / 23



**THE LAW**

Continued from page 22

Station which covers South El Monte, shares patrol responsibilities with the Los Angeles County Office of Public Safety for the section of the river near the Whittier Narrows Recreation and Natural Areas.

There are lots of homeless people along the riverbed and brushy area, said sheriff's Lt. Richard Shaw.

The homeless camping by the river is a frequent problem, according to Mike O'Shea of the county public safety office. The county police keep an eye on the county's trails, parks, hospitals and welfare offices.

"They can conceal themselves in the brush," he said. "Right now it's pretty quiet. We haven't had much call for service there."

The last encampment they cleared was a year and a half ago, O'Shea said.

And like El Monte, Shaw said they've had complaints from park users about lewd conduct.

"Because of the fairly constant complaint of lewd conduct, we patrol it on a fairly regular basis. Every three months or so in conjunction with vice, we do operations down there," Shaw said.

Horseback riders have been robbed by the river although that isn't a common occurrence, according to O'Shea.

He said people also disregard the no-drinking, no-fishing, no-swimming and no-shooting-at-the-animals rules. The raccoons, squirrels, birds and small rodents living by the river find themselves within target sights.

"Some people do it for sport," O'Shea said. "We've caught people with crossbows, handguns, BB guns."

In Santa Fe Springs, the river is accessible from every major cross street, according to Whittier police who patrol the city. They also use officers on bicycles to watch the river.

The railroad trestles that goes underneath the Slauson Avenue overpass is used as a footbridge by gang members to get into the city and Pico Rivera, according to Whittier police Lt. Rick Gilliland.

It's a spot the cops check.

For a while, Gilliland said there was a problem with thieves jumping onto trains as it negotiated the bend by the river. The thieves would throw their loot off the train and then jump off later. Police teamed up with the railroad police, conducted



Staff photo by KEITH DURFLINGER

Los Angeles County Fire Capt. Larry Collins, second from left, leads a swift-water rescue drill with members of the Urban Search and Rescue team in the San Gabriel River in Azusa. The team practices their techniques before the rainy season begins.

stakeouts and made arrests.

In Norwalk, a woman jogging on the bike path on May 18 was attacked by a man who tore off her top before she got away. Two hours later, a 14-year-old girl was raped by a man matching the same description. The teen was attacked on the path near Firestone Boulevard. The next day, deputies arrested a man on suspicion of the attacks. While the wash is off-limits to the public that hasn't stopped trespassers.

"It's fairly common to find two-three kids slip in. It's kind of inevitable. They use it to cut across, hop fences and play there," said fire Capt. Larry Collins. "Sometimes when it rains, they're caught unawares."

Plucking victims out of the wash is most likely a task for the county Fire Department. But before 1982, Collins said there was no swiftwater rescue program.

Collins, who helped develop the department's program in the '80s, said a person could fall into the river and not be seen by rescuers.

Now, all of the 3,000 county firefighters are trained in swiftwater rescue.

As part of its pre-planning, the fire department created maps of all rivers and tributaries in the county showing where firefighters will be posted in case of a rescue. □

**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Rivers, Trails and Conservation  
Assistance Program**



*Technical assistance for  
locally led conservation.*

**Southern California 323-226-9264  
San Francisco 415-427-1446**



*For some along the river, there's no place like home*



Staff photo by KEITH DURFLINGER

Guadalupe Rodriguez, who lives with friends in a Pico Rivera home that backs up to the San Gabriel River, hangs her laundry in the late morning.

# LIVING ON THE WATER'S EDGE

By **William Dauber**  
Staff Writer

*"I need the sun to let me grow, the serenity of the river and waterfalls. It's quiet and there's no crime, and my son gets to fish and chase butterflies instead of playing video games all day. That's why I live here."*

— **Dawn Yarnell-Pechinko**  
Camp Williams resident

**M**oses Gonzalez stands alone on a railroad bridge near Slauson Avenue in Santa Fe Springs. He's on his way to downing a 12-pack of Miller while listening to rock 'n' roll and watching the wildlife pass him by.

The Pico Rivera resident, dotted with three "lone-wolf" tattoos, has been coming to the same spot above the San Gabriel River for 12 years.

"I'm a loner by nature," the 33-year-old Gonzalez said, cooling to Neil Young music on a warm summer day. "I just come to relax here, take in the scenery — man, it's beautiful out here."

Gonzalez points out the long-necked cranes and the ducks and says he has spotted red-tail hawks and even a California condor. Down below there's been the occasional fox or two.

Gonzalez is a part-time welder who lives in a Pico Rivera apartment that's a five-minute bike ride from the bridge. His observations are reserved for the wildlife and he keeps a safe distance from the human inhabitants of the area.

"This is a great place to see the animals and nobody bothers you," he said. "It's like you're in your own world with the cranes and the foxes."

The reserved Gonzalez is not much different from many of those who live on or near the San Gabriel River in their own world.

Some live next to the river as an escape from a congested city life, others to keep their distance from police and some, like Gonzalez, just for the solitude.

Meanwhile, the homeless popu-

lation along the river seems to grow each year, but nobody seems to know their numbers.

They live below freeway passes, under railroad bridges and other places that provide shelter. Their camps are equipped with makeshift tents, mattresses, radios and usually feature a home-made hibachi.

"They choose to live here because nobody bothers them," said David Ortiz, who rents a home along the river with a few friends in Santa Fe Springs. "The cops don't come by here too much, and I think they like that. They don't really bother nobody unless they are making a lot of noise at night. But you kind of get used it."

Ortiz, 39, said the homeless enjoy the freedom they wouldn't

## THE DWELLERS

Please turn to DWELLERS / 25



## THE DWELLERS

Continued from page 24

have in a city, where police are always on alert and usually confine the homeless to a single area. He also said he's not sure that all of them are as down and out as they first seem.

"I think they either go to a relative's home to shower or they go to a shelter," Ortiz said.

Ortiz's family, like a few in Pico Rivera, live along the river because housing is affordable.

It's the same reason that Francisco Lopez, 31, moved into the city. He lives with his two brothers, wife and two children in a three-bedroom home.

Unlike the apartment they previously lived in, Lopez said they can enjoy a backyard barbecue on Sundays, have a place to hang their laundry and now have the pride of home ownership.

But there are some drawbacks.

"We liked it because it was a home and it was a good deal," said Lopez, whose home backs up to the river on Pico Vista Road. "The only problem is that sometimes it gets noisy at night and in the summer the river stinks."

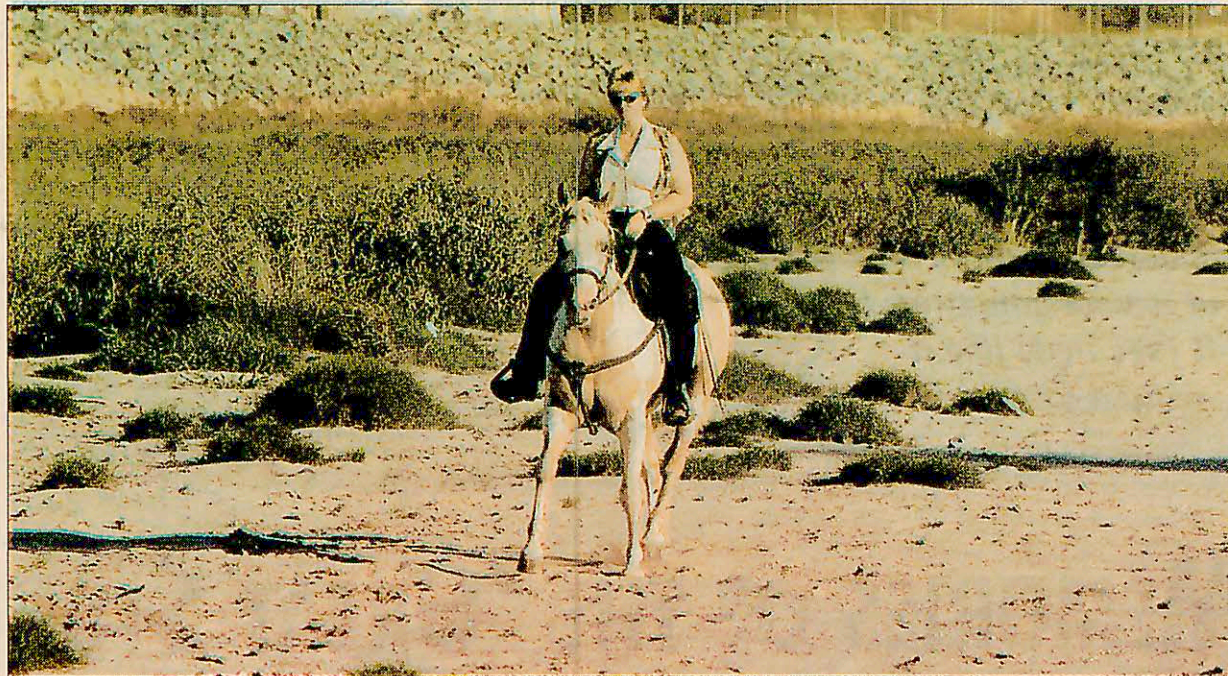
Lisa Cox, 32, will admit to a few foul smells on the river but wouldn't live any other place. She was raised near the San Gabriel by her mother since she was 8 years old and now lives in a Rowland Heights home that backs up to a waterway.

"This is a different world," said Cox, who also teaches at the Santa Fe Springs Equestrian Center. "In fact, we call this place 'the island' because we don't notice the freeway traffic when you head down the river on horseback."

The instructor said she has seen her island get smaller, with the closing of many horse stables up and down the river and the proliferation of more homes. She remembers taking horse rides down to Long Beach, but now the trails to the beach have long since been fenced off to horses.

Jodi Jenkins has always been attracted to a life surrounded by nature and a sense of tranquility. That's why the 63-year-old hairdresser said she's enjoyed living in mountain canyons above Azusa for nearly 15 years.

"I spent a lot of time, as a young person, with my parents up here," said Jenkins. "I used to tell my parents that one day I was going to have a place up here. And I did it sooner than later."



Staff photo by KEITH DURFLINGER

Lisa Cox of Rowland Heights rides "Lacy," who she has in training along the San Gabriel River. Cox first began riding along the river at the age of 8 on a pony named "Raspberry" in her favorite area above Beverly Boulevard.

Jenkins is one of many residents — including families and retired people — living in Camp Williams Mobile Park, less than 25 minutes above the San Gabriel Valley foothills.

The residential community is neighbored by a campground and restaurant, as well as the sound of the flowing San Gabriel River.

"I enjoy the tranquility of the river. I can go down there and meditate or just think," Jenkins said. "You can also just sit and watch the animals run or fly by."

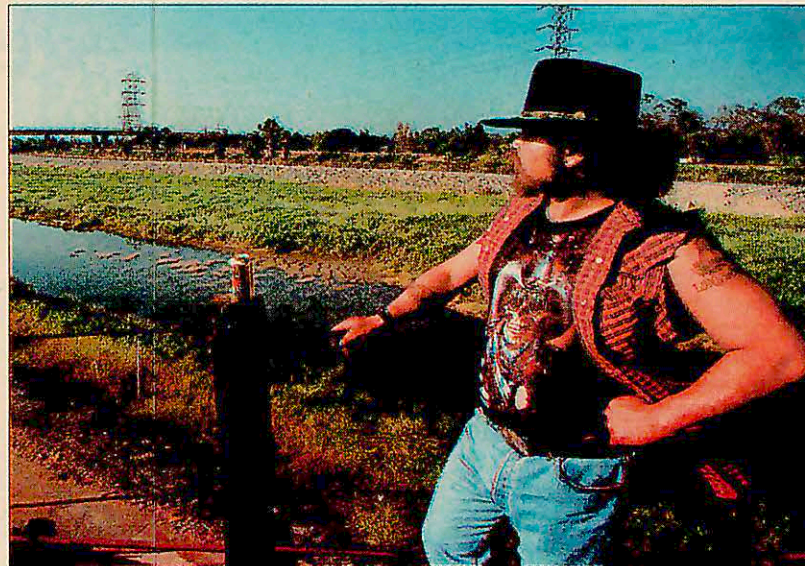
Mountain residents do experience their occasional inconveniences, "like in the winter when the roads are out or when you lose electricity," said Jenkins.

But the mishaps are not enough to push them away. Neither are such challenges as supermarkets and gas stations so far away that shopping requires advance planning.

"It's 22 miles to the closest gallon of milk," said Dawn Yarnell-Pechinko, who also lives at Camp Williams. "I go down the hill once a week and get as much as I need."

The Rev. Jim Homer of the Little Chapel of the Canyon said many of the people who live in the mountains and along the river are fleeing from more traditional lives.

"Residents who live here to a large degree are running from something, whether it be an ex-spouse, bill collector, the law or pimps. And there are a lot of people who come up here ... to a large degree, to find God," he said.



Staff photo by KEITH DURFLINGER

Moses Gonzalez of Pico Rivera stands on a train trestle south of Slauson Avenue, watching for wildlife along the San Gabriel River.

"They are looking for a change in their lives. There's a percentage who come and leave better people than when they came in."

Yarnell-Pechinko, 40, said her family's move to the Angeles National Forest came when her youngest son, Zachary, was in his early years in elementary school.

The family has lived in Rancho Cucamonga, but the "hustle and bustle" of stop-and-go traffic could not compete with their love for the outdoors.

"I need the sun to let me grow, the serenity of the river and waterfalls," Yarnell-Pechinko said. "It's quiet and there's no crime, and my

son gets to fish and chase butterflies instead of playing video games all day. That's why I live here."

Yarnell-Pechinko and Jenkins said their neighbors and other canyon residents have jobs in the city, of course, concluding their day back home by the river. And Jenkins believes that's a personal reward.

"There's something about going up and down the highway and seeing the beautiful water from the dam," she said. "That (freeways) is not my idea of living. This is."

Correspondent Araceli Esparza and Staff Writer Phil Drake contributed to this story. □



*“I just remember hearing the humming. There was so much humming. And it wasn’t heavy rain, but it was constant. It (seemed) like it rained forever.”*

— Adolph Solis



Photo courtesy of BALDWIN PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

This 1914 flood in Baldwin Park was one of many that ravaged the San Gabriel Valley.

# MEMORIES OF THE ‘GREAT STONEY RIVER’

*San Gabriel rich in history with stories of gold, Indians and water wars*

By Michelle Rester and Debbie Pfeiffer Trunnell

Staff Writers

**I**hey say it was once a wild river that could unleash a wall of liquid fury, making it as deadly as it was beautiful.

If it only had a voice, what amazing stories the San Gabriel River would share.

It might speak volumes on natural and man-made violence: of enormous boulders crashing down the San Gabriel Canyon during thunderous storms, devastating floods, oppression of native people and water wars that prompted ranchers to dynamite each other’s dams.

Then came the taming of the river. The construction of monumental concrete and rock-fill dams built to control flooding. Water rights sorted out in courtrooms, not the canyon floor.

But the controversies continue today with fights over pending housing developments on its banks at the same time the new San Gabriel & Lower Los Angeles Rivers & Mountains Conservancy begins its mission to protect and restore what is left.

River advocates say the past, as always, offers its lessons.

“We need to understand how it was before people were here,” said Margaret Clark, Rosemead mayor and conservancy board member.

“It was a raging torrent at times

— not at all the peaceful meandering creek some people imagine.”

Here is a brief rundown of some historical highlights.

## TONGVA INDIANS

“We knew it as the Great Stoney River,” said Mark Acuna, a member of the Tongva Indian Tribe which at one time had villages along the banks of the river from Azusa Canyon to the Pacific Ocean.

It was like the abundance of impressive boulders and stones that still tumble forth out of Azusa Canyon that may have inspired the name.

The roughly 2,000 remaining Tongva Indians, often called Gabrielinos, offer one of the longest looks back at the river’s ancestry, which for them consists of everything life-affirming.

“To me, (the river) represents the past in a very special way,” Acuna said. “It always reminds me of what the world once was — a land of flowing rivers, fish, and a land of people visiting village to village, city to city, and as a place of commerce. It was also a place for people to come together, a place for joy, picnics and canoeing and just a lot of activities.”

The river served as the vehicle of trading, as the Indians traveled

in reed canoes to far-away villages such as the major economic center of Puvungna, which is now Cal State Long Beach, said Margaret Hammon, Santa Fe Springs cultural arts administrator.

The Tongva Indians also consider the San Gabriel River one of four sacred rivers in Southern California, Acuna said. The others are the Los Angeles, Rio Hondo and Santa Ana rivers.

“We believe all living things were considered sacred and holy and should be treated with respect and dignity because they were life-giving forces,” Acuna said.

Today, visitors to Heritage Park in Santa Fe Springs can take a glimpse at a re-creation of a Tongva home that would have appeared in that area in what was once the Chokiishingna Village.

## GOLD

Fish and water weren’t the only precious gifts given to river denizens.

Word of gold in the foothills and

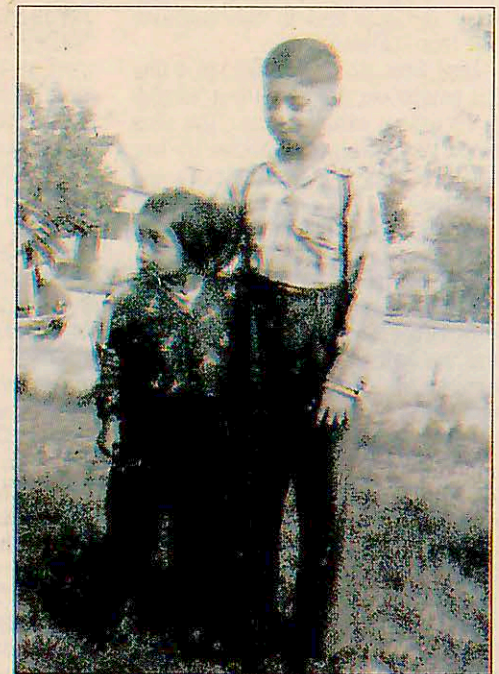


Photo courtesy of ADOLPH SOLIS

1939 photo of Adolph Solis, 8, and his cousin, Rose Perez, 2, in front of Solis’ Azusa home:

canyons of the San Gabriel Mountains began to spread in the 1830s. The first nuggets were reportedly discovered in San Gabriel Canyon’s East Fork in 1838, according to historian John

Please turn to HISTORY / 27



## THE HISTORY

Continued from page 26

Robinson.

The violence of the river later cast its wrath on gold-searchers in the form of a wicked flood that washed away the historic Eldorado Mining Town in January 1862. The town sprang up along the San Gabriel River at Cattle Canyon in 1858.

It was that 1862 flood that ended the boom days, Robinson said, sending the miners elsewhere. One of them, a German named Jacob Waltz, left for Arizona and immortality as the discoverer of the legendary Lost Dutchman Mine.

### DEVELOPMENT

Along with gold-thirsty Americans, the land around the San Gabriel River was populated with other settlers.

First there were the Spanish, who built the first mission here along the San Gabriel River. Historians say their attempt to baptize the natives into Christianity led to Indian work camps.

Meanwhile, there were an increasing number of European settlers who created cattle and citrus ranches — all the while, the fighting continued to tame the rushing floods and over the rights of the necessary river water for drinking as well as irrigation.

### WATER WARS

As more people began to settle near the San Gabriel River, the need to find an orderly way to share the water increased.

The war over water rights ranged from dynamite fights to shoot-outs and later courtroom battles that eventually led to the Compromise Agreement of 1889.

What followed was the creation of what today is known as the Committee of Nine or, more formally, the San Gabriel River Water Committee, which has the only legal right to divert water from the river.

Original committee members included men from the Old Users Contract Water Co., Azusa Irrigating Co., Duarte Mutual Water Co., Agricultural Water Co., Beardslee Water Ditch Co., Azusa Water Development & Irrigating Co. and Vosburg-Neil.

"Before this, it was something you'd see in an Old West movie," said Don Berry, whose official title

Please turn to HISTORY / 28



Staff photo by JOSH ESTEY

Bob Broach keeps an eye on his high-banker dredge while his nephew Tommy Marsh uses the pump to bring up debris from the river bed in their attempt to find gold on the East Fork of the San Gabriel River.

# DREAMS OF GOLD

*Miners still seek the mother lode in the mountains*

By Roseli Ilano

Correspondent

**I**f for some people there are still dreams of gold in the San Gabriel River.

The hope of striking the mother lode continues to captivate hobbyists and professional miners who, Ron Hoagland estimates, find 50 to 75 pounds of gold a year in the East Fork of the river.

Hoagland owns Azusa Gold, one of four mining outfitters in all of Southern California.

"Every person from every walk of life wants to hit the big strike," Hoagland said. "I see doctors, lawyers, and even computer programmers."

The biggest recent strike he knows of is one man who collected 14 ounces of gold over two weekends, something anyone has a shot at. A book, pan, sieve, and a permit to park in the Angeles National

Forest can be had for only \$25.

It was in the San Gabriel Mountains where the first recorded gold strike took place in 1838.

"It's getting out into the forest and seeing glitter at the bottom of my pan that keeps me mining," said Barret Wetherby, secretary and treasurer of the California Trail Users Coalition.

"There's always the chance that you will be at the right place at the right time."

As well as an entertaining pastime, gold mining can be a rewarding career.

Hoagland began as an avid backpacker, read a book on panning for gold, and has been hooked ever since. He has mined for 33 years, spending more than \$100,000 on technical mining equipment, but it has paid off.

"It became a passion and a family business," he said. "It's also been a good way to make a living." □

### ALL THAT GLITTERS

Got gold fever and a taste for adventure? Here are a couple of local gold-mining suppliers who can send you on your way.

#### Azusa Gold

Roland "Ron" Hoagland  
615 N. Azusa Ave.,  
Azusa, CA 91702  
(626) 334-2596  
<http://www.azusagold.com>

#### Marconi's Mining Supply

Al and Janice Marconi  
23400 East Fork Road  
Azusa, CA 91702  
(626) 910-1388



# TONGVA INDIANS FLOURISHED ALONG THE WATERWAY

By **Juliet Chung**  
Correspondent

**T**he San Gabriel River ties the past to the present for the Gabrielino Tongva, the scattered descendants of a peaceful Indian nation that called the Los Angeles Basin home.

The San Gabriel River is one of four rivers — the others being the Los Angeles River, the Rio Hondo and the Santa Ana River — the Gabrielinos' lives revolved around, according to Mark Acuna, a Tongva Indian and retired Mount San Antonio College professor.

"It was treated with great respect and dignity because it gave life," he said. "It's sacred now because it's a reminder of the world that was taken from us."

Apart from being their primary

source of food and transportation, the rivers also served as a site for their villages. But their prominence in the Gabrielinos' lives was destroyed when Spanish missionaries enslaved the nation in the 1770s to build the San Gabriel Mission, he said.

"A culture that was one of the most extensive and most powerful in all of California was completely wiped out in one generation," Acuna said, citing changes in language, clothing and religious practices.

"Six thousand of the Tongva

*'The world that was taken from us'*

Indians were buried in 50 years in the missions. Genocide is exactly what it was."

Following Mexico's independence and the secularization of the missions, the Gabrielinos continued to work, first for Mexico and

then for the ranchos after California became a state.

Today, Anthony Morales, chief of the Gabrielino Tongva nation, estimates that roughly 2,000 Gabrielino Tongva exist. Estimates at the tribe's peak of population in the 16th century place the numbers as high as 7,000.

The village structure, comprised of democratic and independent villages, has been replaced with a number of tribal units that focus on preserving and celebrating traditions.

The units generally support the efforts to renovate the San Gabriel River, Morales said, but have not yet actively participated.

And while much of what characterized the Gabrielino Tongva has disappeared, their respect for the rivers that defined their lives persists.

"In our hearts and in our minds, we still respect and honor those waterways because our ancestors lived on those waterways," Morales said. □

## THE HISTORY

Continued from page 27

is zanjero, a Spanish word for "keeper of the ditch."

"One rancher would build a dam to divert water for his cattle, then his neighbor downstream would find out and blow up the dam with dynamite. It was vicious."

### FLOODS

Although he was only 7 years old at the time, Azusa City Clerk Adolph Solis said he can still remember the flood of 1938 — one of several that caused millions of dollars in property damage and separated the San Gabriel Valley from Los Angeles.

Hundreds of Azusa families in the town of about 4,000 scrambled for safety to the old Lee Elementary School — the highest ground in the city and on property that was also the original site of pioneer Henry Dalton's first ranch house.

"I just remember hearing the humming," Solis said. "There was so much humming. And it wasn't heavy rain, but it was constant. It (seemed) like it rained forever."

The Solis home on the brush-filled and open San Gabriel Avenue suffered no major damage that year, but a few homes close to the

river did, he said.

It wasn't until land around the river became developed that floods really became an issue.

"If it had been paved like it is now, it would have been a real mess," Solis said.

Earlier settlers were not as fortunate. An 1868 flood wiped out most of the adobe mansion in Whittier owned by Pio Pico, the last Mexican governor of California.

According to Robinson's book "The San Gabriels," large floods also hit the area in 1884, 1914, 1938 and 1969. Some Baldwin Park residents also still remember the 1938 flood.

"In 1938, there was no Santa Fe Dam and it looked like all Baldwin Park would end up in the Pacific Ocean," Aileen Pinheiro said. "Of course that didn't happen, but it did do a lot of damage."

### DAMS

Taming the water beast came with the construction of dams beginning in the 1930s.

April 1934 marked the completion of the first dam, Cogswell, followed by Morris, San Gabriel, Santa Fe and later Whittier Narrows in 1957.

"The dams are very critical to flood control and water conservation," said Joe Hsu, director of Azusa Light and Water and

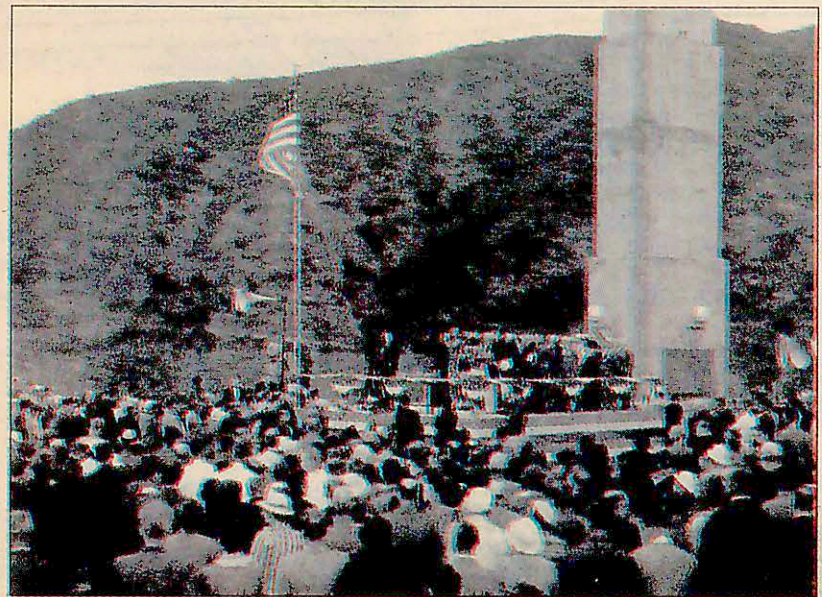


Photo courtesy of LOS ANGELES COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

Former President Herbert Hoover dedicates Morris Dam on May 26, 1934.

Committee of Nine member.

"Before dams, things would flood every year because the river was never controlled," Solis said. "So we were always at the mercy of the river and all that runoff from the spring thaw. Thankfully, we don't really have to worry about that now."

Former President Herbert Hoover attended the May 26, 1934, dedication of Morris Dam, and offered these words:

"On behalf of those far-seeing leaders of this community, the engineers whose skill has brought this plan to practical realization, and the community which has given to them their loyal support, I dedicate the Morris Dam to service of a hundred generations of Americans who will receive the blessings."

Morris Dam also played a part in the war effort. For many years the Navy would test torpedoes in the lake. □



The Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District is responsible for providing water to supplement the local groundwater supply. While rainfall and natural runoff from our local mountains provide much of the San Gabriel Valley's water supply, not all of its water needs can be met this way. The Valley must import about 20% of the water it uses, with most purchased through the Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District.

# PARTNERSHIPS Make It Happen



Larry Glenn of the WQA, Ken Manning, President the Upper District, boardmember Tony Fellow, Congressman David Dreier, Congressman Matthew Martinez, and boardmember Frank Forbes, working together to pass H.R. 910, a bill to provide \$85 million for groundwater cleanup.



President Ken Manning presenting a check on behalf of the Upper District to the La Puente Valley County Water District towards the construction of one of the most advanced groundwater treatment facilities in the United States.

## GROUNDWATER CLEANUP

The Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District is working closely with the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority, the Main San Gabriel Basin Watermaster, and our elected officials to cleanup the contaminated portions of the groundwater basin.

## ADDRESSING SAN GABRIEL RIVER ISSUES

The Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District co-sponsored "Celebrate the River" along with State Senator Hilda Solis and the Sierra Club to bring about awareness of issues affecting the San Gabriel River. One of the guest speakers included Secretary Mary Nichols who chairs the newly created San Gabriel and lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy.



President Ken Manning addresses the audience at the "Celebrate the River" event held at the Santa Fe Recreation Area.

## WATERSHED RESTORATION ACTIVITIES

The Watershed Restoration Program began in 1991 from an innovative partnership between the Upper District and the U.S. Forest Service. The program was developed as a means of restoring and preserving the watershed in the San Gabriel Mountains, which directly impacts the local groundwater supply. The program includes the use of volunteers of all ages to help collect acorns and native seeds as well as planting tree samplings in the local mountain area.



Director Frank Forbes gives a water education presentation to the Arcadia Historical Museum



Students looking at the finished product from the San Jose Water Reclamation Plant, where Upper District's water for the San Gabriel Valley Recycled Water Demonstration Project is purified.



Volunteers collecting acorns.

## EDUCATION

The Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District has partnered with several high schools and senior centers to provide water education bus tours. The tours focus on issues pertaining to local, imported, and recycled water.



UPPER SAN GABRIEL VALLEY  
MUNICIPAL WATER DISTRICT

Please feel free to contact District staff or your elected representative if you have any questions or comments.

**(626) 443-2297**

Visit the Upper District Homepage

**www.usgvmwd.com**

- Division 1:** Dr. Anthony R. Fellow  
(El Monte, South El Monte, Rosemead, Temple City)
- Division 2:** Frank F. Forbes  
(Monrovia, South Pasadena, San Gabriel, Arcadia)
- Division 3:** Kenneth R. Manning  
(La Puente, Industry, Bassett, Hacienda Heights, Valinda)
- Division 4:** R. William "Bill" Robinson  
(Baldwin Park, Covina, West Covina, south Azusa)
- Division 5:** Marvin J. Cichy  
(Duarte, Irwindale, Bradbury, portions of El Monte, Monrovia, and Baldwin Park)





Staff photo by WALT MANCINI

Ernie Salas, 68, a Tongva, waves feathers of a red-tailed hawk over smoke from burning sage in an abalone shell as he blesses the water.

**W**hony Benavidez rides his bike 10-12 miles a day along the river.

Sure, it's about exercise, but it's also about clearing his mind.

"I think about a lot of things out here," the 56-year-old El Monte resident said. "It's great.

"I think about God," the truck driver said. "I think about everything, a lot of spiritual things. That helps me out a lot out here."

It's no secret that people go to the wide open spaces for something more than just physical exertion.

The Little Chapel of the Canyon is a tiny church on a hillside in Follows Camp, in the mountains above Azusa. It's there where the Rev. Jim Homer preaches to a small flock of parishioners.

"There seems to be something about mountains, streams or what, that gives them a chance to relax," Homer said. "I think when they go up here they find something they didn't think they would find. That's true for a lot of people.

"Any time we get close to nature there is always a sensation we are getting close to God. Nature is one of the many Michelangelos that God has produced. It is one of his many masterpieces."

# TAPPING INTO A SPIRITUAL SIDE

*Many flock to the river, outdoors to cleanse their soul*

By Phil Drake and Usha Sutliff  
Staff Writers

Alan Padgett, a professor of theology and the philosophy of science at Azusa Pacific University, has a similar perspective.

"Water in general has always had a certain spirituality to it for all kinds of people," he said. "It's flowing and moving and gives us life. In the Jewish tradition it's a cleansing element. There's been a lot of spirituality associated with water. It's a symbol for life and peace."

Padgett said most people probably could not talk about what they feel spiritually as they walk along the water and mountains.

"Maybe they feel it, but don't know how to say it. That is often how it is. You probably couldn't put it into words if you tried," he said. "That's what poetry is for, but I am not a poet."

The Little Chapel's worship hall itself seems to have undergone a spiritual renewal. Homer said the

building was once a brothel in the gold-mining days of the 1800s.

At the base of the San Gabriel Mountains above Azusa passers-by can see a white statue behind the Rainbow Canyon Stables. Many think it's the Virgin Mary, but it's not. It's a female Buddha.

Statues of Buddha dot 30 acres where Buddhist monastery members hope to build a temple. More than 300 patrons and as many as 1,000 others come there for meditation and cultural ceremonies.

Karl Le Maire, the manager and caretaker, said members like the location because of "the sound of the river for meditation purposes, and of course, the scenery."

Farther south, David Jallo, natural areas supervisor at Whittier Narrows, said many religious groups, including several comprised of Native Americans, still use the surrounding area for their spiritual practices.

Tongva Indian Ernie Salas said his ancestors lived "a spiritual life, a happy life," along the river before the Spanish came in the late 1700s.

"They would thank Mother Earth for having water run right through here because where there's water, there's life," Salas said. □



a river on the edge

# THE MAKING OF A MECCA

*Some cities turn waterways into a tourist destination*

By **Mary Schubert**  
Staff Writer

**C**ities have always had a way of growing up around rivers and other bodies of water.

Then, populations often move outward, and the waterway that flows through a town becomes little more than something to monitor during the stormy season to ensure it doesn't overflow its banks.

But the urban river is now regaining its prominence in many regions, where cleanup and development have transformed what were utilitarian flood control channels into charming, peaceful Meccas for strolling, dining, shopping, cycling and even taking a gondola ride.

There's no telling whether the San Gabriel River will evolve into something like that, but however ambitious or modest the plans, those deciding its future have many examples from which to borrow.

In San Antonio, the boutiques, outdoor cafes, footbridges, benches and cobblestone paths that line both banks of River Walk draw tourists who, in another era, may have visited the Texas town only to see the Alamo.

Also known as Paseo del Rio, the 2.5-mile walk was built by the Work Projects Administration as a Depression-era civic improvement. It was designed by San Antonio architect Robert Hugman and funded by a local bond measure and a federal WPA grant. It opened in 1941.

Now River Walk features boat rides, an outdoor live theater, seasonal festivals, "floating" parades, and riverside eateries including the Hard Rock Cafe and Planet Hollywood.

"It's just been fabulous for San Antonio," said Patti Larsen, a spokeswoman for the local chamber of commerce.

Meanwhile, in Rhode Island, three rivers — the Woonasquatucket, the Moshassuck and the Providence — converge in the capital city. A beautification project called Riverwalk began in 1987 and, upon completion a decade later,

turned the waterways into a showplace.

Under the project, four-acre Waterplace Park became the western end of a riverfront walkway. Providence River Park, also along the route, was created by actually relocating parts of the three rivers and removing the roadway that had sealed them off for years.

Rhode Island architect William Warner designed the \$60 million river revitalization project, which some have dubbed "the Venice of New England."

The waterway has been spruced up with such amenities as cobblestone sidewalks, benches, old-fashioned street lights, nautical-style railings and anchor emblems on the footbridges that stretch from one bank to the other. Most of the funding came from the Federal Highway Administration and the state's Department of Transportation.

Back in Southern California, Azusa officials are thinking about how to improve an 8-mile stretch of the river between the Angeles National Forest and the Santa Fe Dam.

"We want to preserve the serenity and beauty that the river has. It's a wonderful chunk of wilderness, of nature in a pristine state," Azusa Mayor Cristina Madrid said.

One advantage is that, for much of its route, development hasn't encroached — but in its current state, the area surrounding the river could use some enhancements, Madrid believes.

"There's no shade. There's no benches," she said. "We would like to make it more user-friendly, and we'd like to return as much of the banks to the natural slope as we can."

Stanley Young, spokesman for the state's Resources Agency, said waterways have a way of connecting communities.

"It's the river that binds them together. The only problem is, until now, we have been turning our backs on the river," he said. "We've been putting it in concrete and behind barbed wire." □

## THE NATION

Providing communities with aggregates for homes, schools, churches, hospitals, streets and highways, and providing Community Activities and Educational Programs

Habitat Restoration



Cajon Creek

Addressing Community Concerns



San Diego River

Vulcan takes great pride in its river restoration projects and is committed to working with the San Gabriel River Conservancy to enhance the San Gabriel River

Learning Can Be Fun Too



Educating Children

Rewarding Relationships



Partnering with Schools and Communities

Background photo:

Reclaim Land Provided to Ecological Reserve

Frank Island, San Joaquin River



(Materials Company) 3200 San Fernando Road, Los Angeles, CA 90065 (323) 258-2777  
ROCK AND SAND - READY MIX CONCRETE - ASPHALT



# Along the river

The San Gabriel River is the largest watershed of the San Gabriel Mountain drainage system. It consists of three forks and a number of significant tributarial streams. The San Gabriel River once flowed uninterrupted to the Pacific Ocean, and hosted a wide variety of fish. The river was changed forever when the first reservoirs were built in the 1930s to control flooding and provide irrigation for the sprawling agriculture in the Valley below the canyon.

### San Gabriel Mountains

**Angeles National Forest:** Inland from the ocean, Los Angeles is bordered on most sides by rugged mountains which provide the only barrier to the continued expansion of its sprawling suburbs. The northern aspect is dominated by the San Gabriel range. There are several peaks over 9,000 feet, the highest being Mount San Antonio (aka Mount Baldy) at 10,064 feet.

### San Gabriel Reservoir

**Elevation:** 1,481 feet  
**River basin:** San Gabriel River  
**Nearby city:** Azusa

### The San Gabriel River (605) Freeway

**Total distance:** 27.4 miles  
The San Gabriel River (605) Freeway, extends from the Foothill (210) Freeway near Monrovia to the San Diego (405) Freeway near Long Beach. The 605 Freeway started construction in 1964, and was completed to the new 210 freeway in 1971.

### Whittier Narrows Nature Center

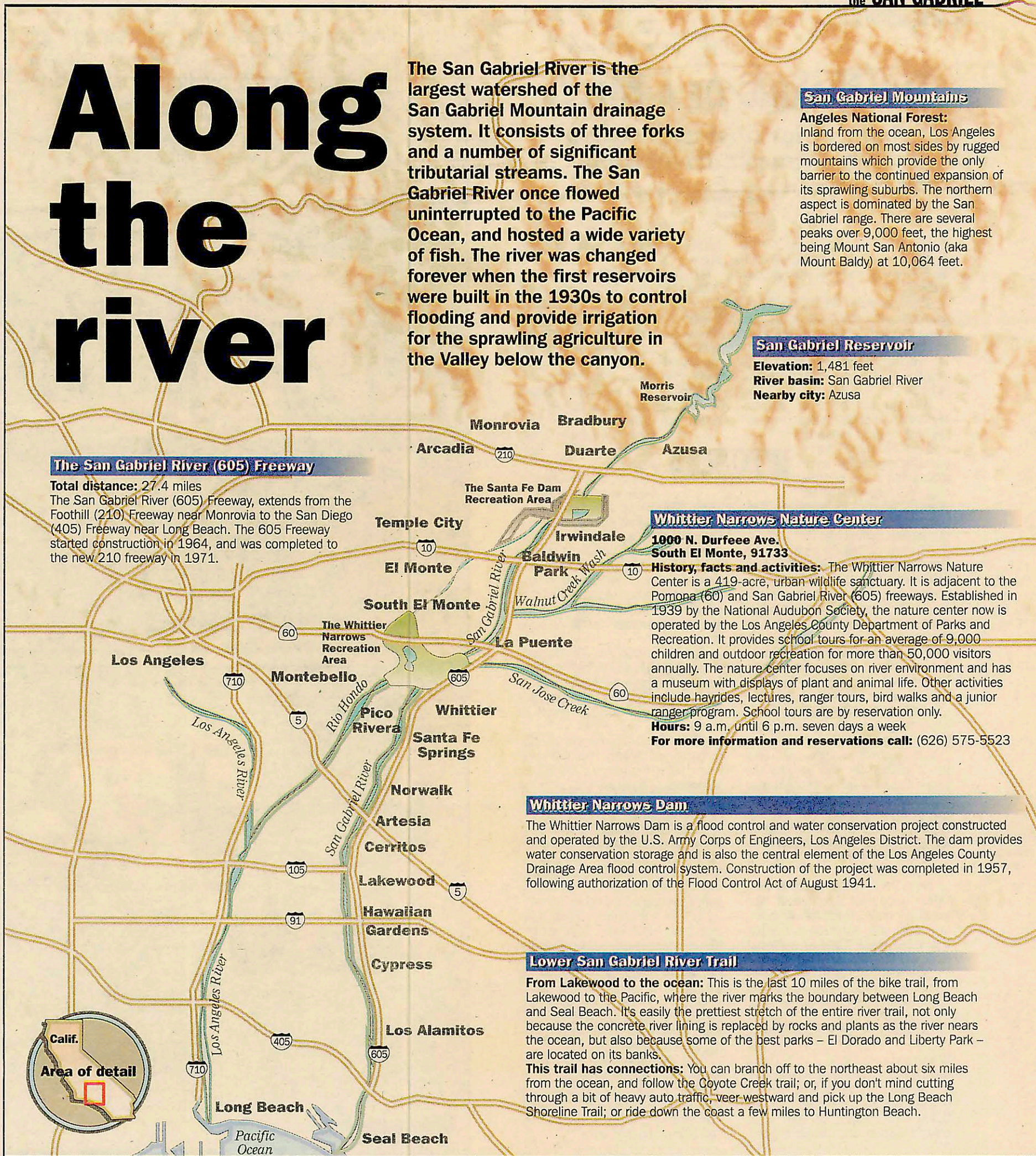
**1000 N. Durfee Ave. South El Monte, 91733**  
**History, facts and activities:** The Whittier Narrows Nature Center is a 419-acre, urban wildlife sanctuary. It is adjacent to the Pomona (60) and San Gabriel River (605) freeways. Established in 1939 by the National Audubon Society, the nature center now is operated by the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation. It provides school tours for an average of 9,000 children and outdoor recreation for more than 50,000 visitors annually. The nature center focuses on river environment and has a museum with displays of plant and animal life. Other activities include hayrides, lectures, ranger tours, bird walks and a junior ranger program. School tours are by reservation only.  
**Hours:** 9 a.m. until 6 p.m. seven days a week  
**For more information and reservations call:** (626) 575-5523

### Whittier Narrows Dam

The Whittier Narrows Dam is a flood control and water conservation project constructed and operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles District. The dam provides water conservation storage and is also the central element of the Los Angeles County Drainage Area flood control system. Construction of the project was completed in 1957, following authorization of the Flood Control Act of August 1941.

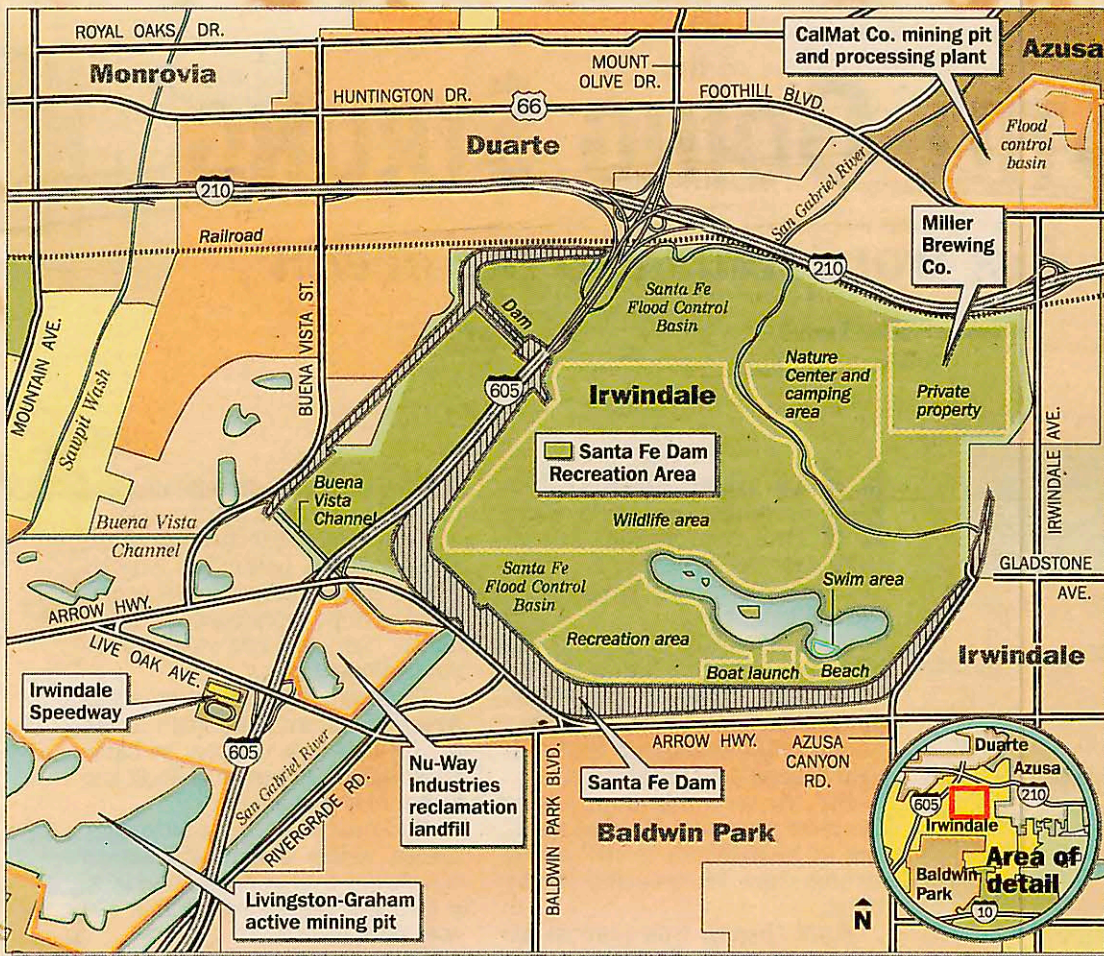
### Lower San Gabriel River Trail

**From Lakewood to the ocean:** This is the last 10 miles of the bike trail, from Lakewood to the Pacific, where the river marks the boundary between Long Beach and Seal Beach. It's easily the prettiest stretch of the entire river trail, not only because the concrete river lining is replaced by rocks and plants as the river nears the ocean, but also because some of the best parks - El Dorado and Liberty Park - are located on its banks.  
**This trail has connections:** You can branch off to the northeast about six miles from the ocean, and follow the Coyote Creek trail; or, if you don't mind cutting through a bit of heavy auto traffic, veer westward and pick up the Long Beach Shoreline Trail; or ride down the coast a few miles to Huntington Beach.





a river on the edge



## Santa Fe Dam Recreation Area

15501 E. Arrow Highway, Irwindale

### Rules and regulations

#### Park hours:

Summer hours— 6:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. (May 1 to Sept. 30)  
Winter hours— 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. (Oct. 1 to April 30)

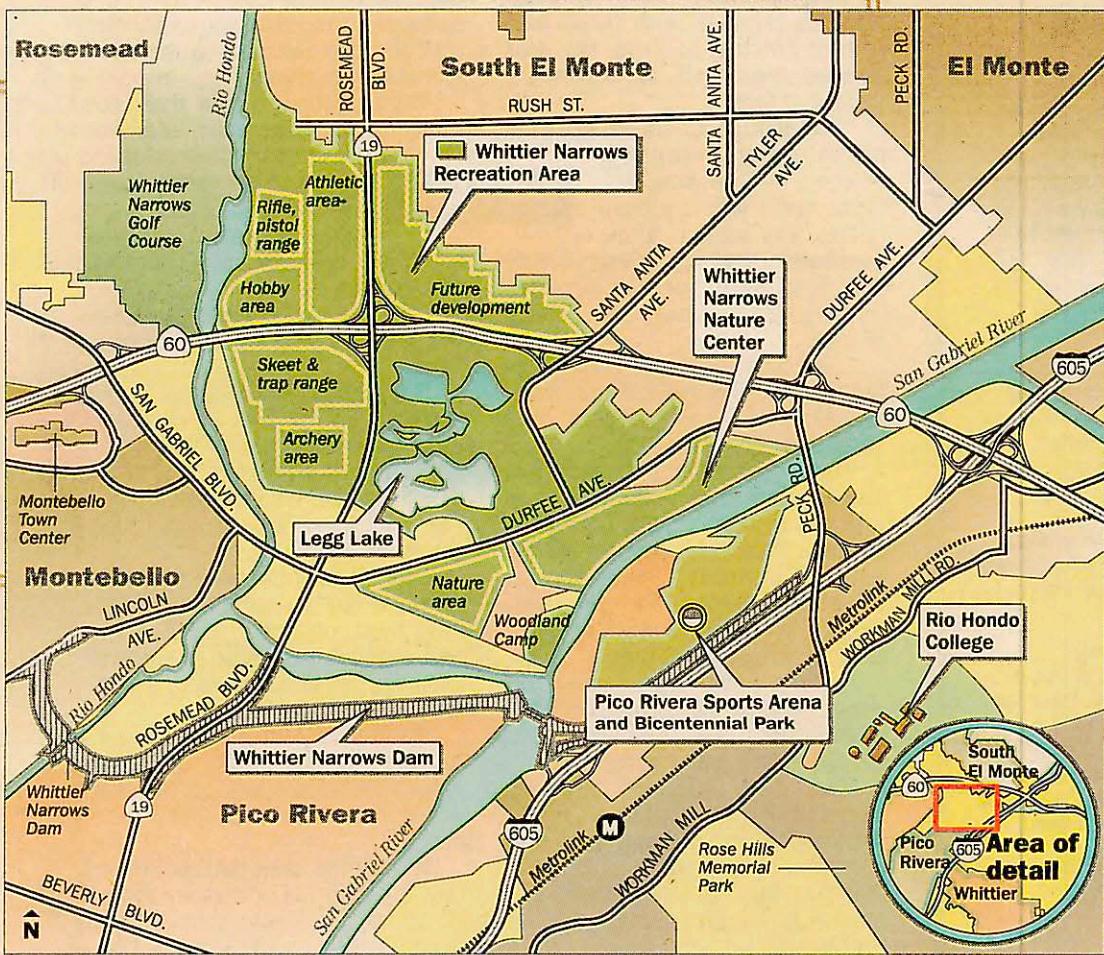
#### Park fees:

Daily boat permit	\$6
Vehicle entrance fee (year-round)	\$6
Senior citizens (65 or over) or disabled persons	
Weekdays only (excluding holidays and weekends)	\$3
R.V., trailers over 20 feet no senior discount	\$10
Bus	\$20
Annual vehicle permit	\$90
Senior/disabled annual vehicle permit	
Weekdays only (excluding holidays and weekends)	\$45
Unlimited boat annual	\$80

**Boating:** All boats must be at least 8 feet to be permitted on Santa Fe Dam waters. No gas-powered boats are permitted on the lake. Current registration and stickers must be displayed on the boat. Fire extinguisher (marine type) and wearable personal floating devices are required for each person on the boat. Float tubing is now allowed. All boating equipment must be Coast Guard approved.

**Waterplay:** This is the newest feature to the park. The little tots waterplay area has a height limit of 52 inches for all children. The cost is \$1 per person per session. Each session is 90 minutes. Waterplay is open June through September. Dates are subject to change.

**Reservations:** May be made for any day of the year except holiday weekends. Areas are available for large family/company picnics, overnight camping (youth organized groups only) and baptisms. For information on reservations (626) 334-1065. No alcoholic beverages allowed.



## Whittier Narrows Recreation Area

750 S. Santa Anita Ave., South El Monte

### Rules and regulations

**Park hours:** Monday through Sunday  
6 a.m. to 30 minutes after dusk

#### Park fees:

Vehicle entrance fee (year round)	\$3
R.V., trailers over 20 feet	\$5
Bus	\$10
Monday through Friday there is no park fee	

**Equestrian:** The Whittier Narrows Equestrian Center provides guided rides along the park. Reservations are required for large groups. There is a weight limit of 240 pounds per rider and children must be at least 7 years of age. For information and reservations (626) 575-5600.

**Boat and bicycle rentals:** Boats and bicycle rentals are available near the lake at Alfredo's Family Fun Centers. The following rates are as followed: For information (562) 434-6121  
Boats are \$10 an hour Bicycles are \$8 to \$25 an hour  
Four-wheel bicycles that seat several people are \$25 an hour.

**Swimming:** There absolutely is no swimming permitted at any time.

**Athletic areas:** The area located along Rosemead Boulevard provides soccer, softball and baseball, as well as a full BMX bicycle racecourse.

**Animals:** All animals must be kept on a leash no longer than 6 feet and under control of the owner at all times.

**Reservations:** May be made for any day of the year. Areas are available for large families, company picnics or birthday parties and may include barbecue pits and playgrounds.

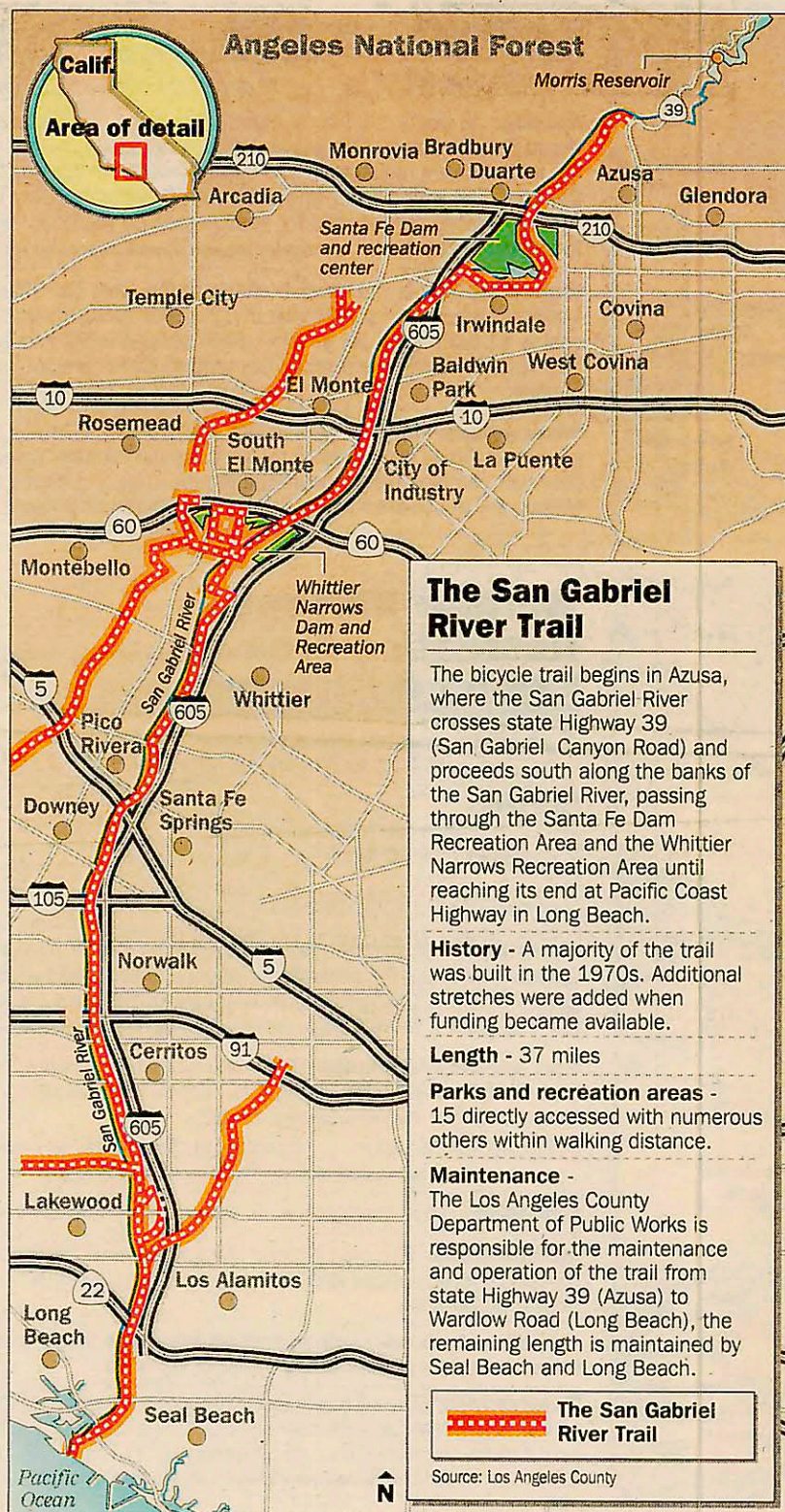
For information and reservations (626) 575-5600.



# BIKE PATH STILL GOING STRONG

*Paved trail stretches from Azusa to the ocean*

By **Debbie Pfeiffer Trunnell**  
Staff Writer



## The San Gabriel River Trail

The bicycle trail begins in Azusa, where the San Gabriel River crosses state Highway 39 (San Gabriel Canyon Road) and proceeds south along the banks of the San Gabriel River, passing through the Santa Fe Dam Recreation Area and the Whittier Narrows Recreation Area until reaching its end at Pacific Coast Highway in Long Beach.

**History** - A majority of the trail was built in the 1970s. Additional stretches were added when funding became available.

**Length** - 37 miles

**Parks and recreation areas** - 15 directly accessed with numerous others within walking distance.

**Maintenance** - The Los Angeles County Department of Public Works is responsible for the maintenance and operation of the trail from state Highway 39 (Azusa) to Wardlow Road (Long Beach), the remaining length is maintained by Seal Beach and Long Beach.

**The San Gabriel River Trail**

Source: Los Angeles County

Staff graphic by MANUEL AMAYA

Two silent cyclists glide down the San Gabriel River Trail from its start just off Highway 39 where the road descends out of the rugged San Gabriel Mountains.

It's almost idyllic here at the bike path's beginning in Azusa, even though it's just a short distance from the mining and other human encroachments that will soon become only too obvious.

But the trail that runs beside the river for some 37 miles to its end at Seal Beach is still going strong since its creation in the 1970s.

Back then it was seen as an alternative form of transportation for long-distance commuters, and it remains popular with those who prefer getting around the Los Angeles megalopolis on two wheels instead of four.

"We wanted to encourage people to use it, because it extends such a long distance and there are businesses and schools along the route," said Bill Winter, a civil engineer with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works.

"And most cities are very receptive to the bike trails. Some, such as Lakewood, have created bike lanes that access the path."

Today, the river bike path has access points at all major streets as it passes through Azusa, Irwindale, Baldwin Park, Industry, El Monte, South El Monte, Pico Rivera, Whittier, Santa Fe Springs, Norwalk, Bellflower, Cerritos, Long Beach and Seal Beach.

Fifteen parks and recreation areas also can be accessed off the winding path, and numerous others are within walking distance.

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Works is responsible for maintenance and operation of the trail from Azusa to Wardlow Road in Long Beach. The remaining length is maintained by Seal Beach and Long Beach.

Public Works spends about

\$700,000 each year maintaining and upgrading the path, Winter said.

And with the formation of the San Gabriel & Lower Los Angeles Rivers & Mountains Conservancy, there is hope more benches, informative signs and rest stops will be put in along the way.

There are three access points in Azusa, the start of the path at the mouth of Azusa canyon, at Lario Park and at the corner of Todd and Sierra Madre avenues.

The trail is used by bicyclists, hikers, in-line skaters and has an equestrian trail running beside it. It is closed during storms that can pose flood hazards.

Pico Rivera Mayor Garth Gardner said his city, at the path's halfway point, also put in its own trail through the city, on the opposite side of the river.

"More people use it than you might expect," he said "And we

want to make sure there is an area where there can be hiking and bicycling without interference from vehicles and a chance to observe nature."

Like the urban areas it passes, the path has seen its share of problems.

During the last decade, police reported an increase in crime on bike paths throughout Los Angeles and Orange counties, including along the San Gabriel River Trail. The trail goes through some high-crime areas.

Graffiti is common but graffiti removal is also aggressive. There have been complaints of bike thefts and verbal harassment, so pathway travelers are encouraged to use the trail with companions.

Homeless people can be seen huddled on the banks in underpasses or wide spots on the trail where there are trees and vegetation.

But for the most part, police say only a handful of crimes are reported and cyclists have more to fear from animals on the loose or holes in the paved path. □

## THE PATHS



# A HAMLET OF HORSE TRAILS

*Riders exercise their steeds along the banks*

By **Karen Rubin**  
Staff Writer

**W**inston Churchill once said: "There is nothing like the outside of a horse for the inside of a man."

And that's something that Jose Flores, whose well-muscled pinto stood one recent Sunday tied to a tree in front of his Pellissier Place home in Industry, will testify to.

Stepping in place, legs prancing high, the 6-year-old horse looks like an athlete in peak condition, a fact Flores takes constant pleasure in.

Welcome to horse country, a nearly parallel world to the bustling Valley where a hitching post is as common as a mailbox and trucks hauling hay to backyard stalls are as important as filling the car with gas.

On any given day, scores of workers wash down these animals weighing more than half a ton, clean stalls, rake aisles or feed them alfalfa cubes.

Here horsemen in Stetson hats tend to well-conditioned Tennessee walkers, quarter horses, Morgans, Missouri fox trotters, pintos, Arabians and Shetland ponies.

Riders exercise their steeds along the muddied and cobbled banks of the San Gabriel River's Lario Trail.

"You can ride for three hours and never cross the street," said Evelyn Stafford, a veteran horsewoman and coordinator for Corral Three of the Equestrian Trails Inc., a nonprofit organization that started in 1944 protecting the county's horse and hiking trails.

This hamlet of horse trails, stables, backyard stalls, wranglers and skilled horsemen — trained in the charro, or Mexican rodeo — is the hub of horse country, surrounded by 400 miles of horse and bike trails.

"We have three-horse garages here," said one merchant along

Red Hat Lane in Pellissier Village, whose convenience store has pay telephones next to a hitching post. "Horses have been here since 1940. All you do is walk around and smell them."

Bounded by Peck Road to the northeast, the San Gabriel River to the southeast, Siphon Road to the southwest and Durfee Road to the northwest, the area boasts five large commercial stables, each with 60 to 100 horses. It stretches into Whittier, Pico Rivera and South El Monte.

"Once you get into the driveway you are in a different land," said Anne Andrews, owner of Rawhide Stables & Ponies at 12622 Rush St. in South El Monte. "It's our own little world down here. It's nothing but ropers and wranglers. I raised my kids in this clean dirt."

A seasoned horsewoman, Andrew's says she and her family are the largest breeders of the American Shetland ponies on the West Coast, which are distinguished by black and white markings on their coats.

At the Whittier Narrows Equestrian Center, adults and children alike learn the sport of horseback riding. Those who stable their animals here are a close bunch of riders.

"You should see the tears around here when you have to put a horse down," Stafford said.

This 20-acre site with almost 100 horses and almost 300 miles of trails is in a bucolic setting near the Whittier Narrows Recreation and Natural Areas. During the summer, riders can travel across the shallow river and through the tall clusters of bamboo that grow in pools every winter.

Meanwhile, on any given day at Horseman Park on Peck Road, trainers run horses in a large ring



Staff photo by GREG ANDERSEN

Equestrians cross the San Gabriel River north of the Pomona (60) Freeway.

either breaking the animal or training their steeds for riding and jumping.

"It relieves stress," said Raul Miramontes, who was riding his horse Goldie. "It gives you peace of mind. You focus on riding, not work."

On the northern stretches of the San Gabriel River the public can take riding lessons at the Rainbow Canyon Ranch on San Gabriel Canyon Road in Azusa. Seasoned riders learn to jump there next to novice horseman.

But horse enthusiasts say their way of life is being threatened.

Bridal trails shrink as paved bicycle trails expand, while big holes and boulders are the rem-

nants of sand mining by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers behind the Whittier Narrows Equestrian Center.

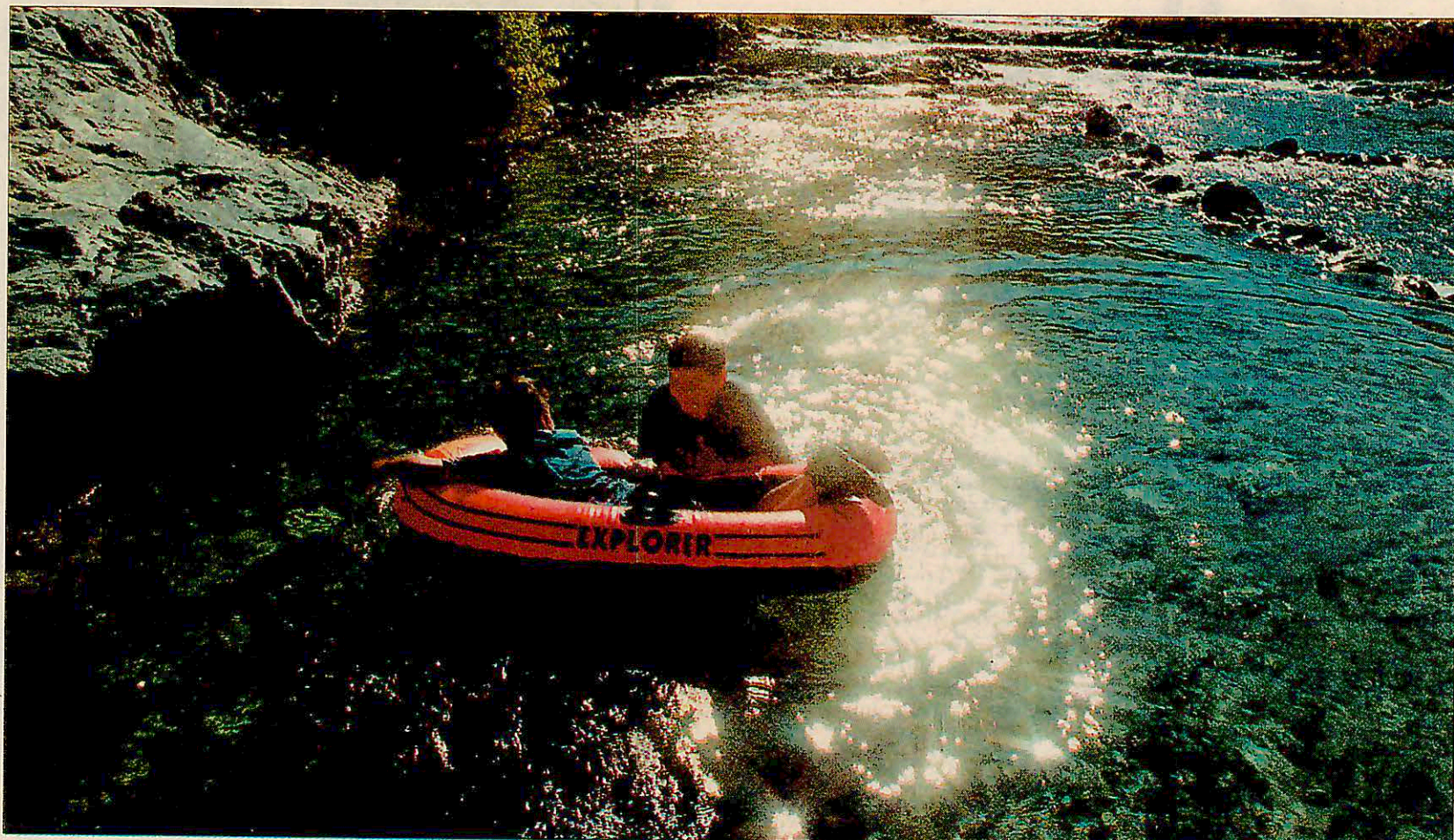
"The horse trails are badly narrowed," Stafford said, adding dirt bikes tear up the ground and spook the horses. "This terrifies the horses and puts the riders at jeopardy."

Still, horsemen like Luis Gonzalez skillfully wade Lady, a blonde Arabian, across the San Gabriel River. The truck driver from La Puente parks his big rig after work and saddles up for a leisurely ride.

"This is how we get the stress out of us," he said. "We are out of the city with the fresh air and water, relaxing." □

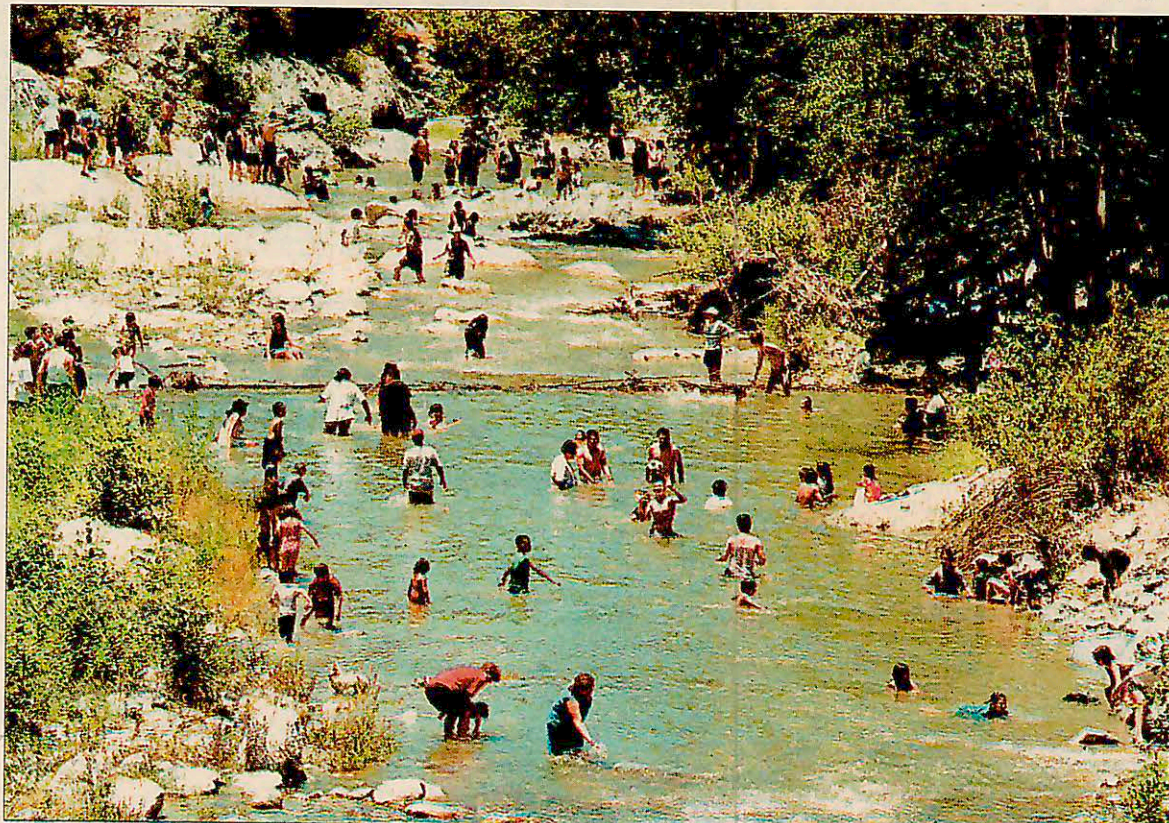
## THE TRAILS





The East Fork of the San Gabriel River beckons visitors into its cool waters. Brothers Estaban, 12, and Ismael Brado, 9, play on the river.

Staff photo by JOSH ESTEY



To cool off, crowds gather in the East Fork of the San Gabriel River near the Cow Canyon Bridge.

Staff photo by LEO JARZOMB



Staff photo by KEITH BIRMINGHAM

Erik Gunderson trains at the Triple B Ranch in South El Monte for the World Junior Shotgun Championships.





Staff photo by KEITH BIRMINGHAM

Eric Scholte of Artesia takes his first bungee jump off the Bridge to Nowhere. The bridge, located about 20 miles from Azusa, makes a great jumping-off point for fun on the river.

# THE REALLY GREAT OUTDOORS

By Keith Lair  
Staff Writer

*There is a world of fun  
for everyone along the river*

**A**s a 10-year-old, Fritz Schmitt and his friends spent their Saturdays on the West Fork of the San Gabriel River.

They would hike to favorite fishing holes and then down to the Rincon Ranger Station to call their parents to come pick them up.

Twenty-eight years later, the West Fork still continues to draw visits from the Arcadia resident. And Schmitt isn't the only Southern Californian to make repeated trips to the scenic canyon. The river's allure draws up to 50,000 Southern Californians each weekend.

"People come hundreds of miles to get here, and it's right in our back yard," said backpacker Brian Gladhill of Monrovia.

People head for the canyon and its miles downstream to camp, fish, hike, picnic, swim, ride bicycles, horses and motor vehicles, shoot at targets, hunt, view wildlife, bungee jump and play golf, soccer, baseball

and softball.

"It's essential that there is recreational space in urban sprawl," said Patrick Reynolds, a landscape architect associate with the Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation Department.

The river may cut through the middle of the L.A. basin, but its heart is at its headwaters, in the Angeles National Forest.

California Trout executive director Jim Edmondson and Department of Fish and Game senior fisheries biologist Dwayne Maxwell have called the area's high country the best trout fishing in the state. The Pasadena Casting

Club considers itself defenders of the West Fork, especially the Wild Trout section, where only catch-and-release fishing is allowed.

Author John Robinson says the area's more than 50 trails are some of the hardest, most rugged and beautiful in the state. The Pacific Crest Trail — which stretches from the Mexican border to the Canadian border — runs along the northern edge of the watershed. The area is also home to the San Gabriel and Sheep Mountain wilderness areas, where no motorized vehicles or machinery are permitted.

"It's the most rugged and beauti-

ful country in the world," Pasadena outdoorsman Loren Lutz said.

"It's a beautiful landscape," said Jerry Sirski, the forest's San Gabriel River Ranger District recreation officer. "You have year-round water and a lot of access to it. There are a lot of pools and sandy areas to use. There is no other body of water like this that can accommodate a lot of people like this area does."

Hikers can view deer, Nelson bighorn sheep, black bear, mountain lions, coyotes, squirrels, rabbits, rattlesnakes, red-tailed hawks, dove, quail, blue jay, owls, and other small game.

On a busy weekend, the canyon can become so jammed that the road will be closed after 4,000 cars have entered it.

And leaving the canyon does not mean Southern Californians sud-

## THE RECREATION

Please turn to RECREATION / 38



## THE RECREATION

Continued from page 37

denly are at a loss for recreational activities. Fish and Game regularly stocks trout and catfish in lakes at Santa Fe Dam Recreation Area, Peck Road Park, Whittier Narrows Recreation and Natural Areas and Downey Wilderness Park. The lakes also have bass and sunfish.

"There's not a whole lot to do in the inner city," said Jackie Kourassis, the department's Fishing in the City specialist. "(The lakes are) a place for people to go to. Children can hike or go fishing. It's the opportunity to go outdoors close to home."

While horseback riders have the option of riding on hundreds of dirt trails, cyclists can partake in the bike trail that runs 37 miles from Azusa to the ocean. Shooters can dream of Olympic glory while taking aim at clay targets; there are six golf courses nearby; weekend athletes participate in team sports at dozens of parks; and hikers can meander along the river's banks.

A look at various recreational opportunities:

### BUNGEE JUMPING

"Five-four-three-two-one, bungee!" Bungee America! president Ron Jones screams.

In the Narrows section on the East Fork is a cement two-car-lane bridge. The nearest road may be five miles away, but the Bridge to Nowhere is a star attraction. Bungee America! has a 99-year contract to send hikers bungee jumping 10 stories below.

"I get such an incredible rush," said Brett Beck of Placentia, making his fourth trip to the bridge to bungee jump recently. "I've gone sky diving and whitewater rafting. I get more of a high jumping here than anywhere else."

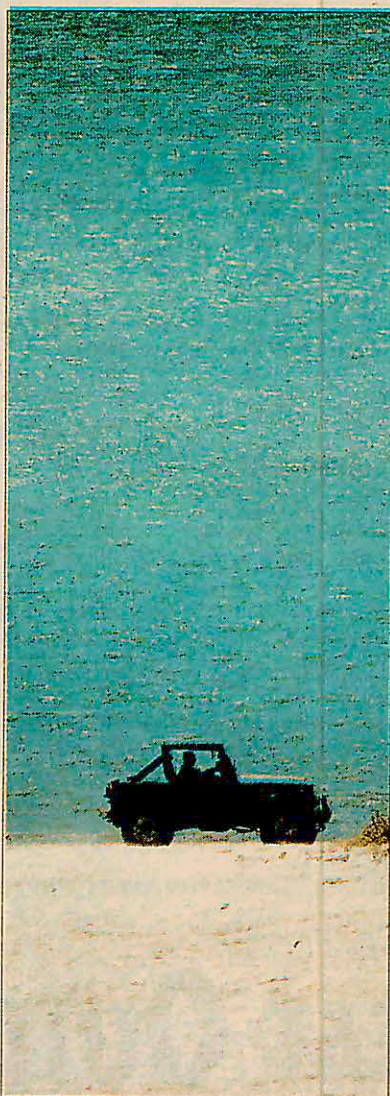
"You can go bungee jumping anywhere, but you can't do that from any bridge," Beck said. "By coming here, you make a whole day of it."

Bungee jumpers have made multiple jumps off the bridge — one of only two in the country that allows regular jumps — for 11 years.

"This is a historic bridge and it's beautiful here, too," Jones said.

### CAMPING / HIKING

There are more than 40 trails in the canyon's watershed and estab-



Staff photo by JOSH ESTEY

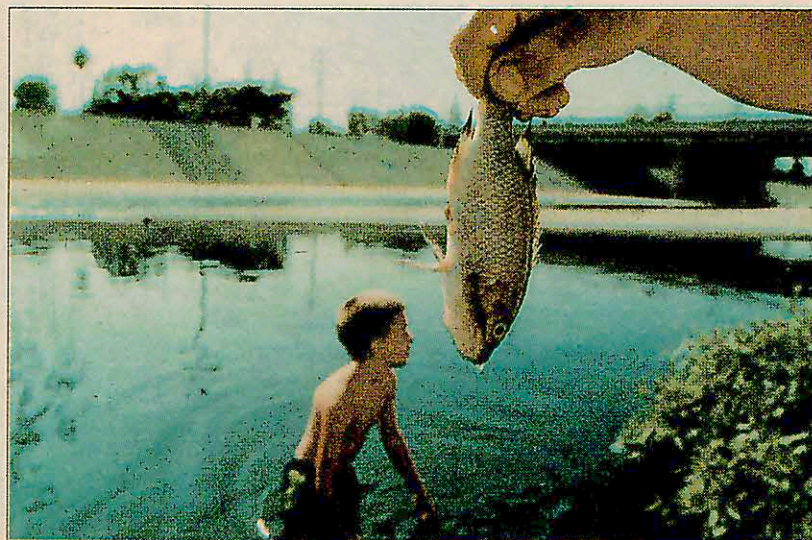
Looking down from the East Fork bridge into the bed of the San Gabriel River, a four-wheel drive vehicle crosses in the designated off-road vehicle area.

lished camps can be found along paths or at established drive-up sites like Follows Camp on the East Fork or Crystal Lake, up the North Fork.

Campers in the two wilderness areas need fire permits, but day hikers do not need permits to enter the areas. Follows Camp and Crystal Lake are fee campgrounds, Follows operating on private land and Crystal Lake operated by a state concessionaire.

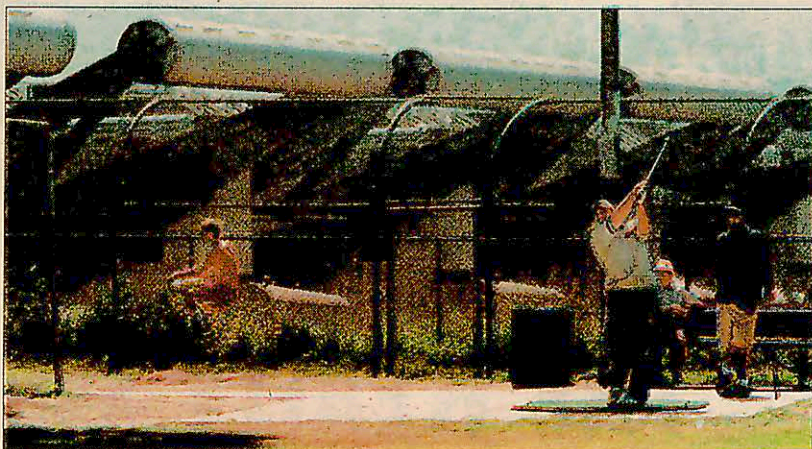
"The area has the most beautiful high country," said Robinson, whose pocket book "Trails of the Angeles National Forest" is considered a bible for area hikers.

"It's also the most rugged area in Southern California. You have the deepest gorge in Southern California (East Fork), one of the prettiest waterfalls (Fish Canyon) and an area with a lot of wildlife."



Staff photo by JOSH ESTEY

Richard Haggstrom holds a fish retrieved from the San Gabriel River while brother James Haggstrom takes a swim.



Staff photo by KEITH BIRMINGHAM

River Ridge golf course in Pico Rivera has a backdrop of the Whittier Narrows Dam and the San Gabriel River along with a bike path that runs from the San Gabriel Mountains to the beach. Peter Amaya of West Covina swings away on the course as Alan Alexander of Norwalk rides his bike past the course.

Robinson, who lives in Orange County, says he prefers the upper reaches of the canyon, like Mount Hawkins, Mount Islip and Mount Baden-Powell, because of their high-country beauty.

But many hikers find beauty in the lower portions of the canyon, too.

"There is nothing like trails like this," said Canyon Country resident James Gerbus, who takes out-of-town friends to the Bridge to Nowhere.

Gerbus convinced his brother, Bob, who was visiting from Omaha, Neb., to stay an extra day just to hike the canyon.

"I do a lot of hiking in the Angeles National Forest and these are just great trails," said another hiker, Jeff Streicher of Redondo Beach.

Bungee America's Jones is on

the East Fork trail at least twice a week.

"It's an absolutely gorgeous area," he said. "It is the essence for coming here."

### CYCLING

Cycling may be just as popular as hiking along the river. Traditional cyclists can ride the 37 miles of trail between Seal Beach and the canyon's mouth, others continue up Highway 39 and even more take the six-mile paved road up the West Fork to Cogswell Dam. Some take to the dirt trails.

"A short ride gets you out of the city," Glendora's Brian Bushatz said of his mountain bike forays.

And then, others ride right on the dirt practically in the city, at

Please turn to RECREATION / 39



## THE RECREATION

Continued from page 38

the Valley's only BMX track, Whittier Narrows FasTrack.

"I stay out of trouble, I have a lot of fun, meet a lot of people and it's easy to get to," 15-year-old Danny Vargas of La Puente said.

### EQUESTRIAN

Moonlight trips are not uncommon where the Puente Hills meets the river's bank.

"Equestrian areas are disappearing right and left, so it's extremely important to have places to ride," said Azusa's John Fenton, president of the Mounted Assistance Unit for the Whittier Narrows area.

Trails from Whittier Narrows to Schabarum Park in Hacienda Heights, horse property in Avocado Heights and the Village, separate bike and equestrian trails along the river and the convergence of two tributaries, Walnut and San Jose creeks, make the area a vital equestrian center with more than 100 miles of trails.

"There are great places to ride here," Fenton said. "Everybody loves to come here at night."

Sherry Martin of the Whittier Narrows Equestrian Center says that within five minutes, she can be away from the maddening freeway noise and hustle and bustle of the Valley.

"I train a lot of horses and do a lot of circle riding," she said. "Getting on the trails beats circle riding. The trails are beautiful."

### FISHING

Trout, bass, catfish, bluegill and carp are fish caught in the canyon and four downriver lakes, Santa Fe Dam, Peck Road Park, Legg and Downey Wilderness. Fish and Game seasonally stocks trout in all these waters and catfish in the lakes.

For the first four miles below Cogswell on the West Fork, anglers must practice catch-and-release fishing only. The area's wild trout section — one of only two in Southern California — is a pet project of the Pasadena Casting Club.

California Trout's Nick DiCroce calls the stream a Southern California heritage.

"To go to a wild trout stream that is catch-and-release and it's not seven hours away, it's two minutes," said DiCroce, who frequent-

ly fished the West Fork when he lived in Redondo Beach.

"With the number of flyfishers who live here, it's paramount that they have a place to fish. It's important to keep the wild trout wild and for the habitat to be in good shape."

The river became a Pasadena Casting Club and Cal Trout cause because of a previous unregulated release of water from Cogswell.

"It's an extremely important resource for today and tomorrow," said Arcadia's Schmitt, a board member of the Pasadena Casting Club. "It's a wonderful watershed and it's something I want to eventually enjoy with my children."

The East Fork is just as valuable as the West Fork, anglers also say. It's the only Southern California stream without a dam at its source. The DFG's Maxwell calls the upper reaches of the fork the best flyfishing in the state.

"If you hike down from Wrightwood, it's one of the most rugged parts of the country and the fishing is absolutely fabulous," Pasadena's Lutz said.

"Anglers have action all day long," DiCroce said of the fork.

Down river, anglers have a shot at hatchery-raised trout. Anglers also have a chance to catch hatchery-raised catfish and go for bass and sunfish.

"You can ride your bike (to the lakes) and fish," Fish and Game's Kourassis said. "When we were children, we would ride our bikes to go fishing and recreate all day long."

### HUNTING

Mountain lion depredation has certainly hurt wildlife counts, but the upper reaches of the canyon still hold some game, hunters say.

"You have to get up in the high country and back by the desert," Covina deer hunter Bob Odell said. "There may not be quantity, but there is quality."

Bill Rivas Jr. practically grew up in the canyon, convincing his father to take him hunting from their Hacienda Heights home.

"It's very rugged and not many people can get up there, which means there can be a lot of deer," said the Vancouver, Wash., resident who has a nationally syndicated hunting television show.

Please turn to RECREATION / 40

# WANT TO HAVE FUN?

Some phone numbers for recreational activities

### BOATING

**Santa Fe Dam Recreation Area**, Irwindale  
(626) 334-1065

### BUNGEE JUMPING

**Bungee America!**  
(310) 322-8892

### CAMPING/HIKING

**Angeles National Forest, San Gabriel River Ranger District**, Glendora  
(626) 335-1251

**California Canine Hikers**  
(626) 798-3912

**Crystal Lake**, San Gabriel Canyon North Fork  
(626) 910-1149

**Follows Camp**, San Gabriel Canyon East Fork  
(626) 910-1144

**REI**, Arcadia  
(626) 447-1062

**REI**, San Dimas  
(909) 592-2095

**Sierra Club, Angeles Chapter**,  
(213) 387-4287

**Sport Chalet**, Glendora  
(626) 335-3344

**Sport Chalet**, La Canada  
(818) 790-9800

**Whittier Narrows Nature Center**  
(626) 575-5523

### CYCLING

**Covina Cycle Club**, Covina  
(626) 331-3294

**Foothill Cycle Club**  
(626) 448-2985

**Glendora Schwinn**, Glendora  
(626) 963-2312

**Hacienda Bikes**, Hacienda Heights  
(626) 333-6106

**Incycle**, San Dimas  
(909) 592-2181

**REI**, Arcadia  
(626) 447-1062

**REI**, San Dimas  
(909) 592-2095

**Sport Chalet**, Glendora  
(626) 335-3344

**Sport Chalet**, La Canada  
(818) 790-9800

**Whittier Narrows BMX FasTrack**, South El Monte  
(626) 575-5521

### FISHING

**Crystal Lake**, San Gabriel Canyon North Fork  
(626) 910-1149

**Department of Fish and Game**  
(562) 590-5151

**Department of Fish and Game**, Fishing in the City (562)  
590-4824

**El Monte Fishing Club**  
(626) 580-2259

**Fly Fishers Club of Orange County**,  
(714) 578-0422

**Glendora Rod and Reel Club**, Glendora  
(626) 303-0763

**L.A. County Fish and Game Commission**  
(213) 683-8730

**Pasadena Casting Club**  
(626) 356-7406

**San Gabriel Valley Fly Fishers**, South El Monte  
(626) 963-4149

**Santa Fe Dam Recreation Area**, Irwindale  
(626) 334-1065

**Sport Chalet**, Glendora  
(626) 335-3344

**Sport Chalet**, La Canada  
(818) 790-9800

**Turner's Outdoorsman**, Pasadena  
(626) 578-0155

**Turner's Outdoorsman**, West Covina  
(626) 917-8368

**Whittier Narrows Recreation Area**, South El Monte  
(626) 575-5525

### GOLF COURSES

**Arcadia Par 3 Course**  
(626) 443-9367

**Azusa Greens**, Azusa  
(626) 969-1727

**California Country Club**, Whittier (626) 333-4571

**River Ridge**, Pico Rivera  
(562) 692-9933

**Rancho Duarte**, Duarte  
(626) 357-9981

**Whittier Narrows**, South El Monte  
(626) 288-1044

### HORSES

**Bicentennial Equestrian Center**, Pico Rivera  
(562) 463-6308

**Encanto Equestrian Center**, Duarte  
(626) 358-8855

**Whittier Narrows Equestrian Center**, Whittier  
(562) 699-5911

**Woodland Stables**, La Puente  
(626) 961-1821, 968-9004

### HUNTING

**Angeles National Forest, San Gabriel River Ranger District**, Glendora  
(626) 335-1251

**Department of Fish and Game**  
(562) 590-5132

**L.A. County Fish and Game Commission**  
(213) 683-8730

**Sport Chalet**, Glendora (626)  
335-3344

**Sport Chalet**, La Canada  
(818) 790-9800

**Turner's Outdoorsman**, Pasadena (626) 578-0155

**Turner's Outdoorsman**, West Covina (626) 917-8368

### MOTOR SPORTS

**Angeles National Forest Off-Road Vehicle Area**  
(626) 910-1235

**Irwindale Speedway**, Irwindale  
(626) 358-1100

### SHOOTING

**Burro Canyon Shooting Park**, San Gabriel River East Fork  
(626) 910-1344

**San Gabriel Valley Gun Club**, Duarte  
(626) 358-9906

**Sport Chalet**, Glendora  
(626) 335-3344

**Sport Chalet**, La Canada  
(818) 790-9800

**Triple B Clays**, South El Monte  
(626) 579-5201

**Turner's Outdoorsman**, Pasadena  
(626) 578-0155

**Turner's Outdoorsman**, West Covina  
(626) 917-8368





Staff photo by GREG ANDERSEN

S.C. Sung of Alhambra fishes the San Gabriel River north of the Pomona (60) Freeway. Fishing is allowed along the river unless signs are posted telling people otherwise.

## THE RECREATION

Continued from page 39

"I hunted there exclusively for 15 years with a bow. It's really rugged. But when you get in there, hunting can be excellent. The average guy may not veer too far off the roads and it's not as good there."

### MOTOR SPORTS

If it's off-roading or racing, there's opportunity in the national forest and on a former Irwindale landfill.

One of three national forest off-highway vehicle areas is at the East Fork bridge.

About 500 off-road enthusiasts each busy weekend day take their motorcycles, three- and four-wheel ATVs and four-wheel drive vehi-

cles through the 160 acres of sand and mud behind San Gabriel Dam.

More organized racing is downstream a bit at Irwindale Speedway.

The half- and third-mile ovals offers a Saturday night racing program where drivers from throughout Southern California compete.

In addition, there is a Race Training Center for those interested in learning how to race, there are go-kart practices and this month, the speedway will start building an eighth-mile drag strip.

"Our goal is to make this a motor sports complex," track general manager Bob DeFazio said.

DeFazio and track employees have discussed an off-road racing venue and a jet-skiing area in nearby gravel pits.

"We're almost a natural for that," he said.

### SHOOTING

Two Olympians, Pasadena's Josh Lakatos and El Monte's Kim Rhode, train at Triple B Clays in South El Monte.

"It's definitely the premier range in the U.S.," skeet shooter Ken Vail of Covina said. "It's fabulous that we have this here."

Bruce Barsotti bought Triple B a year ago. He says by the end of the year he expects the facility to have fired more clay targets than any other range in the nation.

"From one to 10, this place is a 10," said Barsotti, who moved from Sacramento to the San Gabriel Valley when he purchased the facility.

Shooters say that the park facilities keep homes at a distance and nearby freeways make for easy accessibility; it is less than 15 miles

from downtown L.A.

Burro Canyon flows into the East Fork, but more importantly to shooters, the national forest has established the area as one of the two ranges in the forest. Shotguns may be the only firearms available for use at Triple B and the San Gabriel Gun Club in Duarte, but everything but automatic firearms and sawed-off shotguns may be used at Burro Canyon.

"Anything that is legal to own," concessionaire Joe Cavanaugh said.

The range is also home to law enforcement training. Agencies like the area's open space.

"We have an advantage (over the other facilities) because we're different. You don't get any club-member types," Cavanaugh said. "You can shoot practically anything." □





Staff photo by JOSH ESTEY

Looking down the East Fork of the San Gabriel River, families camp in designated areas.



Staff photo by KEITH BIRMINGHAM

Ron Jones, president of Bungee America!, congratulates Jamie Fiktarz of Downey after she made her first jump off the Bridge to Nowhere.



Staff photo by GREG ANDERSEN

Elvia Rosales and Ernesto Wong, carrying the ice chest, head toward their car after a day swimming, fishing and picnicking along the San Gabriel River in South El Monte.



Staff photo by JOSH ESTEY

Hector Avina, recreation service leader for the Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation Department, takes a drive through the Whittier Narrows Nature Center, pulling a load of hay and Cub Scouts from Pack 243 of Pico Rivera.



*"In our effort to get the river out to sea, we've changed it. And we changed the diversity of the wildlife that lives in the river."*

— **Michael Long**  
Wildlife biologist



A swallowtail butterfly.



With an insect in its bill, a tiny house wren sits on a yucca leaf on the West Fork of the San Gabriel River.

Staff photos by BERNARDO ALPS

# AN ABUNDANCE OF WILDLIFE

*Mammals, birds and fish thrive along the river*

By **Karen Rubin**  
Staff Writer

**G**iant pines rise in a forest filled with maple, spruce and elms. Rabbits skitter in the same brush that camouflage a flock of bushtits flittering between brown grasses.

A red-tailed hawk spirals to perch atop a pine and then spreads its wings, sailing to lower grounds. A fat garter snake lies in a swamp of reeds while reptiles like the side-blotched lizard bake in the sun. This is the surprising abundance of wildlife supported by the San Gabriel River at the Whittier Narrows Recreation and Natural Areas.

A 277-acre habitat that thrives despite its proximity to a pair of bustling freeways, neighborhoods and factories, it's home to no less than 296 species of birds, 230 types of plants and 24 kinds of animals.

"We have the highest number of birds compared to any other

coastal inland area," said Ray Jillson, a Whittier Narrows wildlife naturalist. "I don't know of any other place that draws as many birds as we do."

This unique swatch of lakes, land and river is bounded by Peck Road to the northeast, the San Gabriel River to the southeast, Siphon Road to the southwest and Durfee Road to the northwest.

Naturalists say the wildlife is drawn from the coast and the mountains, with the natural area well situated in between with plenty of water from the Rio Hondo and the San Gabriel rivers.

Though it may not look like much, the wildlife and fish thrive along the rivers with their coffee-colored currents and eddies where old tires and rusting shopping carts are unceremoniously dumped.

The number of mammals along the cobbled riverbanks, swamp-like jungle and airy open space tend to be of the small variety: squirrels, rabbits, moles, feral cats, mice, coyotes, raccoons, skunks and weasels.

But construction to expand recreational facilities has had an impact on food sources.

The mule deer has disappeared and one rarely sees any sightings of the gray fox, said Michael Long, a county wildlife biologist.

"The highest disturbance has been to animals," Long said. "The jack rabbit has disappeared because they need wide open spaces and the red fox is rarely seen. The animals have slowly died off. There's not enough space for them."

Still, the vast numbers of birds and waterfowl has brought the

area a national reputation.

Warm dry summers and mild, wet winters support the ebb and flow of migrating birds who feed, mate and nest on shrubs, berries, trees and plants.

The bird life is so varied that on any given day executives from back East still in their business suits have driven in to see the black phoebe, a member of the flycatcher family that is never seen on the East Coast, Jillson said.

"It's our only year-round resident," he said. "It seems odd. The bird is everywhere. It's a beautiful bird, but we consider it a trash bird — like Spam. But to them it's a treasurer, something they don't see."

Indeed, each bird is considered a treasure, from the daily sightings of the common house finch, a

## THE WILDLIFE

Please turn to WILDLIFE / 43



**THE WILDLIFE**

Continued from page 42

mockingbird or a dove spring to rare sightings of the bald eagle, a Least Bell's vireo or a Swainson's hawk.

On a recent Sunday, 14 wildlife lovers gathered around a naturalist for the weekly bird walk that begins at 8 a.m. at the Whittier Narrows Nature Center. The event attracted an assortment of folks: a retired lumber worker, a father and his two boys and a food biologist.

Bird-watchers can expect to see between 35 and 40 species on these three-mile strolls that offer up a mosaic of butterflies, snakes, frogs and rabbits. One veteran bird-watcher saw 101 species in one day, Jillson said.

The number of birds is so plentiful and varied, it sometimes takes the group almost an hour just to get out of the parking lot where the bird-watching begins.

Veteran bird-watcher Ed Barajas knows the territory well. Three days a week he walks through the trails.

Barajas, who records bird sightings and nestings, has spotted 150 species of birds. He helped with the recording of the spring nestings of 14 different species, including the Nuttall's woodpecker, Downey woodpecker and the Allen's hummingbird.

"The Allen's hummingbird has never nested here and now they are," Barajas said. "We have six males and three females."

Barajas said he watched for five days as a pair of Lesser goldfinches built their nest. Attached to the rough side of a large sycamore leaf, the nest — which is slightly larger than a thimble — is barely discernible even with a pair of binoculars.

But Barajas' trained eye focuses quickly on details. "You use your eyes and ears."

But the Whittier Narrows is certainly not the only place where wildlife finds a home on the San Gabriel River.

Up in the river's upper drainage area in the Angeles National Forest, where creeks feed the river, live the majestic bighorn sheep and mountain lions.

And a little bit downstream on the river's West Fork you can find black bears, gray foxes, bobcats, weasels, the rarely seen ring-tailed cat and mule deer, along with smaller neighbors like mice, kangaroo rats and gophers, Long said.

**Birdwatching along the river**

The following is a list of the birds found in the Whittier Narrows area.

- C=Common
- P=Permanent Resident
- FC=Fairly common
- WV=Winter Visitor
- U=Uncommon
- SV=Summer Visitor
- O=Occasional
- M=Migrant
- R=Rare
- Vag=Vagrant
- PV=Permanent Visitor

- Acorn Woodpecker: R,WV
- Allen's Hummingbird: U,M
- American Avocet: O,WV
- American Bittern: U,WV
- American Coot: C,P
- American Crow: C,P
- American Goldfinch: C,P
- Anna's Hummingbird: C,P
- American Kestrel: FC,P
- American Pipit: FC,WV
- American Redstart: Vag
- American Robin: U,WV
- American Tree Sparrow: Vag
- American White Pelican: U,WV
- American Wigeon: C,WV
- Ash-throated Flycatcher: FC,M
- Baird's Sandpiper: R,M
- Bald Eagle: R,WV
- Baltimore Oriole: Vag
- Band-tailed Pigeon: R,M
- Bank Swallow: R,M
- Barn Owl: U,P
- Barn Swallow: U,M
- Bell's Vireo: R,SV
- Belted Kingfisher: FC,WV
- Bewick's Wren: U,P
- Black and White warbler: Vag
- Black-bellied Plover: R,WV
- Blackburnian Warbler: Vag
- Black-chinned Hummingbird: U,SV
- Black-crowned Night-Heron: C,WV
- Black-headed Grosbeak: C,SV
- Black-legged Kittiwake: R,M
- Black-necked Stilt: C,M
- Black Phoebe: C,P
- Black Skimmer: Vag
- Black Swift: R,M
- Black Tern: R,M
- Black-throated Blue Warbler: Vag
- Black-throated Gray Warbler: U,M
- Black-throated Green Warbler: Vag
- Black-throated Sparrow: Vag
- Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: FC,WV
- Blue Grosbeak: U,SV
- Blue-winged Teal: R,WV
- Bobolink: Vag
- Bonaparte's Gull: U,WV
- Brant: R,M
- Brewer's Blackbird: C,P
- Brewer's Sparrow: Vag
- Broad-winged Hawk: R,WV
- Brown-headed Cowbird: C,PV
- Brown Pelican: R,V
- Brown Creeper: R,WV
- Bufflehead: U,WV
- Bullock's Oriole: C,SV
- Burrowing Owl: R,WV
- Bushitt: C,P
- California Gull: C,WV
- California Gnatcatcher: R,WV
- California Quail: U,P
- California Thrasher: U,P
- California Towhee: C,PV
- Canada Goose: U,WV
- Canvasback: U,WV
- Caspian Tern: U,M,WV
- Cassin's Finch: Vag
- Cassin's Kingbird: FC,M
- Cassin's Vireo: U,M
- Cattle Egret: U,WV
- Cedar Waxwing: U,WV
- Chimney Swift: R,M
- Chipping Sparrow: R,M
- Cinnamon Teal: C,P
- Clapper Rail: Vag
- Clark's Grebe: O,WV
- Clay-colored Sparrow: Vag
- Cliff Swallow: C,SV
- Common Goldeneye: R,WV
- Common Ground-Dove: Vag
- Common Loon: R,WV
- Common Merganser: R,WV
- Common Tern: R,M
- Common Yellowthroat: C,P
- Common Moorhen: U,WV
- Common Poorwill: R,M
- Common Raven: O,M
- Common Snipe: FC,WV
- Cooper's Hawk: U,P
- Costa's Hummingbird: U,M
- Dark-eyed Oregon Junco: U,WV
- Dark-eyed Slate-colored Junco: Vag
- Double-crested Cormorant: C,WV
- Downy Woodpecker: FC,WV
- Dunlin: R,WV
- Dusky Flycatcher: R,M
- Eared Grebe: U,WV
- Eastern Kingbird: Vag
- Eastern Phoebe: Vag
- Eurasian Wigeon: R,WV
- European Starling: C,P
- Ferruginous Hawk: R,WV
- Forster's Tern: FC,M,WV
- Fox Sparrow: U,WV
- Gadwall: U,WV
- Glaucous-winged Gull: R,WV
- Golden-crowned Kinglet: R,WV
- Golden-crowned Sparrow: U,WV
- Golden Eagle: R,M
- Grasshopper Sparrow: R,SV
- Gray Flycatcher: R,WV
- Great Blue Heron: C,P
- Great Egret: FC,WV
- Great Horned Owl: U,P
- Greater Pewee: Vag
- Greater Roadrunner: R,P
- Greater Scaup: R,WV
- Greater White-fronted Goose: O,WV
- Greater Yellowlegs: U,WV
- Green Heron: U,P
- Great-tailed Grackle: R,WV
- Green-tailed Towhee: R,WV
- Green-winged Teal: FC,WV
- Groove-billed Ani: Vag
- Hairy Woodpecker: R,WV
- Hammond's Flycatcher: R,M
- Harris' Sparrow: Vag
- Heermann's Gull: R,WV
- Herring Gull: R,WV
- Hermit Thrush: FC,WV
- Hermit Warbler: U,M
- Hooded Merganser: R,WV
- Hooded Oriole: U,SV
- Horned Grebe: R,WV
- Horned Lark: R,WV
- House Finch: C,PV
- House Sparrow: FC,P
- House Wren: U,SV
- Hutton's Vireo: R,M



Great Blue Heron

- Killdeer: C,P
- Lark Bunting: Vag
- Lark Sparrow: R,M
- Lawrence's Goldfinch: R,WV
- Lazuli Bunting: U,M
- Least Sandpiper: R,SV
- Least Sandpiper: U,WV
- Lesser Golden-Plover: FC,P
- Lesser Nighthawk: R,M
- Lesser Scaup: O,WV
- Lesser Yellowlegs: O,WV
- Lewis' Woodpecker: R,WV
- Lincoln's Sparrow: U,WV
- Loggerhead Shrike: U,P
- Long-billed Curlew: R,M
- Long-billed Dowitcher: C,WV
- Long-eared Owl: R,WV
- MacGillivray's Warbler: O,M
- Magnolia Warbler: Vag
- Mallard: C,P
- Marbled Godwit: R,M
- Marsh Wren: U,WV
- Mew Gull: R,WV
- Merlin: R,WV
- Mountain Bluebird: R,WV
- Mountain Chickadee: O,WV
- Mourning Dove: C,P
- Nashville Warbler: U,M
- Northern Cardinal: FC,P
- Northern Harrier: U,WV
- Northern Mockingbird: C,P
- Northern Parula: Vag
- Northern Pintail: C,WV
- Northern Red-shafted Flicker: C,P
- Northern Rough-winged Swallow: C,M
- Northern Shoveler: C,WV
- Northern Waterthrush: Vag
- Nuttall's Woodpecker: U,WV
- Northern Yellow-shafted Flicker: R,WV
- Oak Titmouse: R,V
- Olive-sided Flycatcher: U,M
- Orange-crowned Warbler: FC,M
- Orchard Oriole: Vag
- Osprey: U,WV
- Pacific Loon: R,WV
- Pacific-slope Flycatcher: U,M
- Palm Warbler: Vag
- Pied-billed Grebe: C,P
- Pine Siskin: U,WV
- Pectoral Sandpiper: R,M
- Peregrine Falcon: R,M
- Phainopepla: U,M
- Plumbeous Vireo: U,M,WV
- Prairie Falcon: R,WV
- Prothonotary Warbler: Vag
- Purple Finch: U,WV
- Purple Martin: R,M
- Red breasted Merganser: R,WV
- Red-breasted Nuthatch: R,M
- Red-breasted Sapsucker: R,WV
- Red Crossbill: Vag
- Redhead: U,WV
- Red-naped Sapsucker: R,WV
- Red-necked Phalarope: R,M
- Red Phalarope: R,M
- Red-shouldered Hawk: FC,P
- Red-tailed Hawk: C,P
- Red-throated Loon: R,WV
- Red-winged Blackbird: C,P
- Ring-billed Gull: C,WV
- Ring-necked Pheasant: O,P
- Rock Dove: C,P
- Rock Wren: R,WV
- Rose-breasted Grosbeak: Vag
- Ross' Goose: R,WV
- Rough-legged Hawk: R,WV
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet: C,WV
- Ruddy Duck: C,P
- Ruddy Turnstone: R,WV
- Rufous-crowned Sparrow: R,V
- Rufous Hummingbird: U,M
- Sabine's Gull: Vag
- Sandhill Crane: Vag
- Savannah Sparrow: U,WV
- Say's Phoebe: FC,WV
- Scissor-tailed Flycatcher: Vag
- Semipalmated Plover: R,WV
- Sharp-shinned Hawk: FC,WV
- Short-billed Dowitcher: R,WV
- Short-eared Owl: R,WV
- Sora: U,WV
- Snowy Egret: C,WV
- Snow Goose: O,WV
- Snowy Plover: R,WV
- Solitary Sandpiper: R,M
- Song Sparrow: C,P
- Spotted Dove: U,P
- Spotted Sandpiper: FC,P
- Spotted Towhee: C,PV
- Summer Tanager: R,M
- Swainson's Hawk: R,M
- Swainson's Thrush: U,M
- Swamp Sparrow: Vag
- Tennessee Warbler: Vag
- Thayer's Gull: R,WV
- Townsend's Solitaire: R,WV
- Townsend's Warbler: U,M
- Tree Swallow: U,M
- Tricolored Blackbird: R,SV
- Tropical Kingbird: R,M
- Trumpeter Swan: R,WV
- Tundra Swan: R,WV
- Turkey Vulture: U,M
- Varied Thrush: R,WV
- Vaux's Swift: FC,M
- Vermilion Flycatcher: R,WV
- Vesper Sparrow: R,M
- Violet-green Swallow: C,M
- Virginia Rail: O,WV
- Virginia's Warbler: Vag
- Warbling Vireo: U,M
- Western Bluebird: R,WV
- Western Grebe: U,WV
- Western Gull: R,WV
- Western Kingbird: FC,M,SV
- Western Meadowlark: U,P
- Western Sandpiper: FC,M
- Western Screech-Owl: R,WV
- Western Scrub-Jay: C,P
- Western Tanager: FC,M
- Western Wood-Pewee: U,M
- White-breasted Nuthatch: R,WV
- White-crowned Sparrow: C,WV
- White-faced Ibis: R,M
- White-tailed Kite: U,P
- White-throated Sparrow: Vag
- White-throated Swift: U,WV
- White-winged Dove: Vag
- Willie: R,WV
- Whimbrel: R,M
- Willow Flycatcher: R,M
- Wilson's Phalarope: R,M
- Wilson's Warbler: C,M
- Winter Wren: R,WV
- Wood Duck: O,WV
- Wood Stork: R,M
- Wren: R,V
- Yellow-billed Cuckoo: R,SV
- Yellow-headed Blackbird: U,M
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: Vag
- Yellow-breasted Chat: U,SV
- Yellow-rumped Audubon's Warbler: C,WV
- Yellow-rumped Myrtle Warbler: R,WV
- Yellow Warbler: U,M

Source: "Birds of Whittier Narrows Recreation Area." Michael Long

Staff graphic by LANCE H. MARBURGER / Staff photo by WALT MANCINI

The West Fork also is one of only five wild-trout streams in Southern California, and one of only two in Los Angeles County. But they are not doing so well.

"The native fish are taking a real beating," he said. "There is hardly anything left."

Fish kills result from contamination and dams that control the waters and leave many on parched ground. Bulldozers used for flood control scrub out nutrients from

the riverbed that fish feed on.

"The wholesale bulldozing of the river bed has completely modified and changed the river channel," Long said. "It changes the whole flow and strips the vegetation." Even fires in the San Gabriels and along the West Fork, choke the fish, covering their spawning beds with silt and ash. At the lower elevations of Whittier Narrows, folks still fish for salmon, rainbow trout, channel catfish and

black and brown bullheads.

Carp, flathead minnow, mosquitofish, and largemouth Bass are just a few of the types of fish in the lakes, with the green sun fish and the bluegill added to promote fishing, Long said.

Still, human activity has forever altered life around the river.

"In our effort to get the river out to sea, we've changed it," Long said, "and we changed the diversity of the wildlife that lives in the river." □





The Balacios family enjoys a meal next to the San Gabriel River in the Angeles National Forest. The East Fork is nicknamed Barbecue Alley.

Staff photo by JAMES KU

**C**armen Lopez and her family returned one recent weekend afternoon to the same picnic spot along the San Gabriel River they have enjoyed for more than two years.

They have yet to tire of their choice, even though their Covina home is probably not much farther away from some other popular recreation destinations in the San Gabriel Valley.

"This is totally different from our home, that's why we spend the day here," Lopez said. "It's calm, there's not a lot of people."

Up here in the San Gabriel Canyon, the Lopez family is far from alone, especially during those weekend days of summer.

For generations, Latino families have whiled away weekends enjoying the river in its natural state while barbecuing and relaxing. The East Fork has even earned the nickname, Barbecue Alley.

Azusa City Clerk Adolph Solis, 69, used to come up here six decades ago as a child.

"I used to love to go up there and sit, it was almost euphoric — I guess now they call it meditation or some darn thing," he said.

"Every spring there was a thaw,

# LOVING TRADITION

## *Generations of Latinos find solace along the river*

By **Fiona Williams**  
Staff Writer

it was freezing, but I would love to go swimming though I nearly froze to death. We used to swim naked, though not now because of all the people up there."

Though it's not so quiet in the canyon anymore, people still come for its attractions: clear running water, canyon walls that climb toward the sky and a feeling of freedom that just can't be had in the city.

According to a Public Policy Institute survey on Californians and the environment released in June, Latinos tend to be more concerned about state environmental problems than the general population.

Some say Latinos enjoy going to

the mountains because of cultural reasons, but also because the price is right.

"You'll see Latino families out there kicking a ball around. A lot of these families can't drive to the beach. They can't afford the parking. It's the closest refreshing spot around here," said Sam Pedroza, spokesman for the Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District.

"On the weekend you'll see Latinos enjoying (the river) more than any culture."

But with use, some say overuse, comes problems. The canyon road can become jammed with cars and the litter problem is so bad the

Forest Service is under a state order to clean it up.

Farther south on the Valley's plain, Jorge Menjivar and his family go to another popular river spot, Marrano Beach — a small strip of the river banked with sand in the Bosque del Rio Hondo Natural Area near Whittier Narrows.

"I prefer a river than park or beach. It has small paths, trees, there aren't too many people. It's like living as a farmer," said Compton resident Menjivar.

"I want my kids to learn how to live in the countryside, learn how to walk here — it's different than in the city," Menjivar said.

The Bosque has been used since the 1930s. It was renovated and cleaned up in 1997 and now has a visitor center and bike trails.

County Supervisor Gloria Molina helped restore the Bosque and has happy memories of going there as a child.

"This river was our community's beach, a place we could go enjoy the company of family and friends," she said. "I am hopeful that people who used to enjoy this beautiful place are returning and sharing good times and memories with their children and grandchildren." □

### THE FAMILIES



# What We Do Today

# Can Help

# Save the

# Seashore for

# Tomorrow

## The Ocean Begins at Your Front Door

What we do in our daily lives impacts the surrounding environment, as far as 50 miles away! Urban runoff is a significant contributor to ocean pollution. Debris in street gutters, catch basins, and storm drains can make its way to the beach untreated. Did you know that plastic bottles and disposable diapers can take up to 450 years to break down (bio-degrade) in the environment, and a styrofoam cup can last up to 50 years?

Local rivers, beaches, and coastal waters are important recreational, environmental, and economic resources. You can make a difference in protecting and improving these local water resources by following these simple steps:

### Practice these good habits:

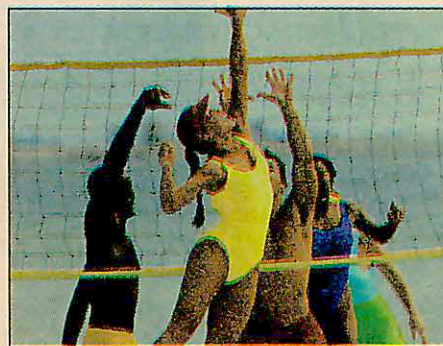
- Place waste in its proper place to keep trash and household chemicals out of the gutter or storm drain.
- Use household hazardous waste collections centers and used oil recycling programs. For more information call (800) 98-TOXIC.
- Sweep up debris on driveways and sidewalks instead of hosing them into the street.
- Clean up after your pets.
- Avoid runoff from over-watering lawns.
- Use herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers sparingly or select environmentally friendly options.

### Get involved in some of these local events:

- ★ Seal Beach Sandcastle Contest - September 9, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Proceeds benefit "Save Our Seals" campaign  
For more information call (562) 799-0179 or [www.sealbeachchamber.com](http://www.sealbeachchamber.com)
- ★ California Coastal Cleanup Day - September 16  
For more information call Surfrider at (800) 743-SURF or [www.surfrider.org](http://www.surfrider.org)
- ★ Inner-Coastal and Watershed Cleanup - September 16  
For more information call Trails4All (714) 834-3136 or [www.trails4all.org](http://www.trails4all.org)
- ★ Seal Beach Chamber of Commerce San Gabriel Riverbed Cleanup  
November 4, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
For more information call (562) 799-0179 or [www.sealbeachchamber.com](http://www.sealbeachchamber.com)
- ★ Friends of the San Gabriel River - Water Quality and the Watershed Seminar  
For more information call (562) 908-6449 or [www.sangabrielriver.org](http://www.sangabrielriver.org)



Supporting good environmental practices  
with residents of inland and coastal communities



### Recreation

Enjoy recreational activities such as: jogging, biking, wind surfing, volleyball, fishing, and sandcastle building.



### Business

Enjoy a leisurely stroll down the pier or Main Street. Dine at local restaurants and cafes. Shop at many unique stores.



### And Fun

Enjoy a relaxing day at the beach.



# WAGING A WAR ON TRASH

*Forest Service  
and others  
are in a battle  
with Public Enemy  
No. 1*

By Dave Melendi  
Staff Writer

Along with deer, hundreds of species of birds and a host of small animals, San Gabriel River visitors can find tons of trash, including thousands of empty beer bottles, graffiti and even discarded sofas.

"You will find all kinds of things in there," said Terri Grant, supervising civil engineer for the county's Department of Public Works.

"People find some interesting things. I've seen shopping carts, and furniture's not too uncommon."

You might say that trash along the river is Public Enemy No. 1.

Barret Wetherby of the Azusa-based Public Lands for the People coordinated the 22nd annual Operation Super Canyon Sweep in June. Hundreds of volunteers picked up 3 tons of garbage along 15 miles of the river and forest land, including thousands of pounds of metal, he said.

Wetherby, whose nonprofit organization tries to preserve public access to public lands, blames the problem on weekend picnickers.

"These are the people that have not been educated on how to take care of their land," he said. "They don't have a clue about how to treat their forest."

Jerry Sirski, the forest's San Gabriel River Ranger District recreation officer, said much of the frustration in dealing with the trash is financial.

"We do not have the money to hire the personnel to take care of it," he said. "It just overwhelms the resources we have."

Those resources amount to a pair of rangers who patrol the river, assisted by such volunteer efforts as the canyon cleanup.

"Unfortunately, we need an effort like that every week," Sirski said.

Rangers rarely are able to cite litterbugs, who face a \$50 fine, because they have to catch the person in the act.

The litter problem disgusts Rosemead Mayor Margaret Clark, a board member of the new San Gabriel & Lower Los Angeles Rivers & Mountains Conservancy.

Clark wants programs educating children about the dangers of littering to be instituted at schools, and an increase in the number of school field trips to the river.

"As children learn to appreciate nature, then they will be less apt to graffiti and trash it," she said.

But Patrick Reynolds, a landscape architect with the county's Department of Parks and Recreation, said youths aren't the problem.

"The young kids have these great education programs about the environment," he said.

"They're the ones that kind of drag the parents and the older ones along to make them do what they traditionally have not done. The younger kids are the hope here."



A sign on the fence at Santa Fe Dam in Irwindale reminds us all of the need to be responsible citizens.

Staff photo by TIM BERGER

Reynolds' agency cleans the 800-acre Whittier Narrows Recreation and Natural Areas. He said the 20,000-30,000 people who visit the park each weekend leave behind "monumental trash."

"It takes us three, four days to get it ready for the next weekend," he said, dolefully. "It's cyclical. It's a weekly thing that we're constantly on top of."

Reynolds said more maintenance staffers and trash containers would be a big boost to fighting the litter problem.

Sirski said he would like to see more forest rangers patrolling the area, more portable toilets for visitors to use, and more trash bins and signs letting people know where to dump their garbage.

"Our hope is change behavior of users and provide more presence in river areas, and (have) more places where they can take their trash. That combined, we can lick this," Sirski said.

The problem is so severe that the East Fork is under a Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board order to get the trash cleaned up. That order is meant to eliminate all trash by 2003.

The Forest Service has applied for a grant through the federal Environmental Protection Agency to help fund programs to meet the order.

Mark Acuna, a retired professor and a Tongva Indian, said he and



Staff photo by JAMES KU

Trash collecting in the North Fork of the San Gabriel River.

others have been saddened by the pollution, development and degradation of the river.

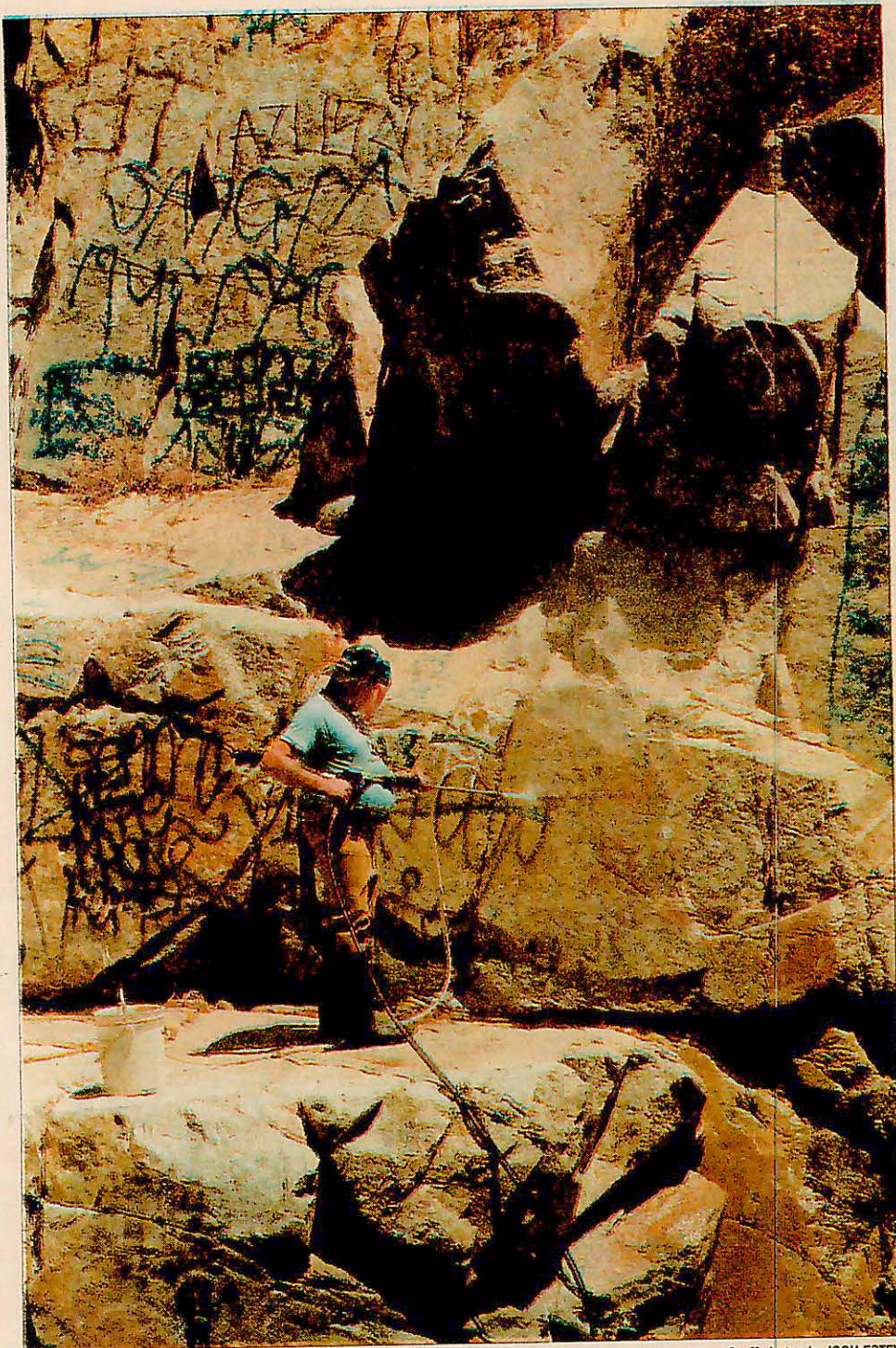
"You don't respect the river or consider it a living thing when you dump shopping carts and used condoms in it," Acuna said. "Once rivers are gone, you don't make a new river."

But there are some other efforts under way. For the past five years, summer Forest Service volunteers known as the Eco-team, have passed around extra trash bags and educate people about littering and water quality.

"As long as I've been with the program, I've noticed the river is cleaner . . . It's just drilling in the message about being clean. When (visitors) see us coming up, it motivates them to clean," Eco-team member Claudia Ayala said.

Staff Writers Fiona Williams and Phil Drake contributed to this story. □





Volunteer Karl LeMaire sandblasts graffiti off rocks on the West Fork.

Staff photos by JOSH ESTEY



Rene Marquez of Azusa, West Fork stream coordinator for the Fisheries Resource Volunteer Corps, sandblasts graffiti off rocks.

# TACKLING A DEMON

*Volunteers spend weekends cleaning up along the river banks*

Sure it's a dirty job, but somebody has to do it. On June 10, Operation Super Canyon Sweep 2000 plucked 3 tons of garbage from along 15 miles of the river. About 275 volunteers fanned out in teams along the forks. The event is sponsored by Public Lands for the People, an organization dedicated to preserving public access of public lands. Not only do the volunteers pick up trash, they remove graffiti as well. The sweep is one of many efforts to keep the river clean. Officials said over the past three years, forest crews have hauled out 40,000 pounds of litter.

## THE CLEANUP

The problem is so severe that the East Fork is under a Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board order to get the trash cleaned up. That order is meant to eliminate all trash by 2003. Barret Wetherby, of the Azusa-based Public Lands for the People, coordinated the 22nd annual Operation Super Canyon cleanup, call Public Lands for the People. *FOR MORE information, call Wetherby at (818) 957-1445, fax (818) 957-6431, or e-mail BHWetherby@aol.com. □*

Debra Wehrly, a recreation adviser for Adventure County Park in Whittier, helps collect bottles along the West Fork. Wehrly was one of 300 volunteers participating in "Operation Super Canyon Sweep"





# A WHOLE NEW LIFE

*A different personality  
comes out at night*

By **Rodney Tanaka**  
Staff Writer

**A**ngel Quintero casts his fishing line into the water as sunlight fades into darkness.

The fish are jumping and the mosquitoes are buzzing, making the evening a perfect time to troll for fish in the San Gabriel River.

At night, the river takes on a whole new life.

Although power lines cross overhead and freeway traffic echoes nearby, the 32-year-old El Monte resident has escaped to a different world. He watches birds while sitting on the riverbank, and occasionally a turtle pops its head up. The river allows him to relax amid nature.

"While concentrating on the river, you forget everything else," he said. "Instead of watching TV or sitting in a room, you can come here and watch the fish jump. You forget about the city, for a little while at least."

Quintero came to the river from Thienes Avenue in South El Monte, but night activities are found up and down the banks.

Nighttime on the river allows city dwellers to escape the daily grind by fishing, riding horseback, camping and enjoying the natural surroundings.

David Jallo, natural areas supervisor at Whittier Narrows, said coyotes, foxes and great horned owls all visit after dark.

Also, nine species of bats are active along the river at night, reducing the number of mosquitoes and other insects.

People also find the river appealing at night.

"With hot summers, I think it's definitely more pleasant to go hiking in the evening," Jallo said. "Daytime temperatures could be

oppressive. I've been out here on the trails at night, and it's kind of serene because of the fact that there are less people, less noise. The quietness of it all is very nice."

The Whittier Narrows Nature Center is closed at night, but people use the equestrian and bicycle trails that run through its grounds, he said.

Gerson Barboza, 35, whose back yard on Parkway Drive opens onto the river, said he rides his young stallion, Excalibur, as late as 11 p.m. The horse needs daily exercise in order to keep him calm and controlled.

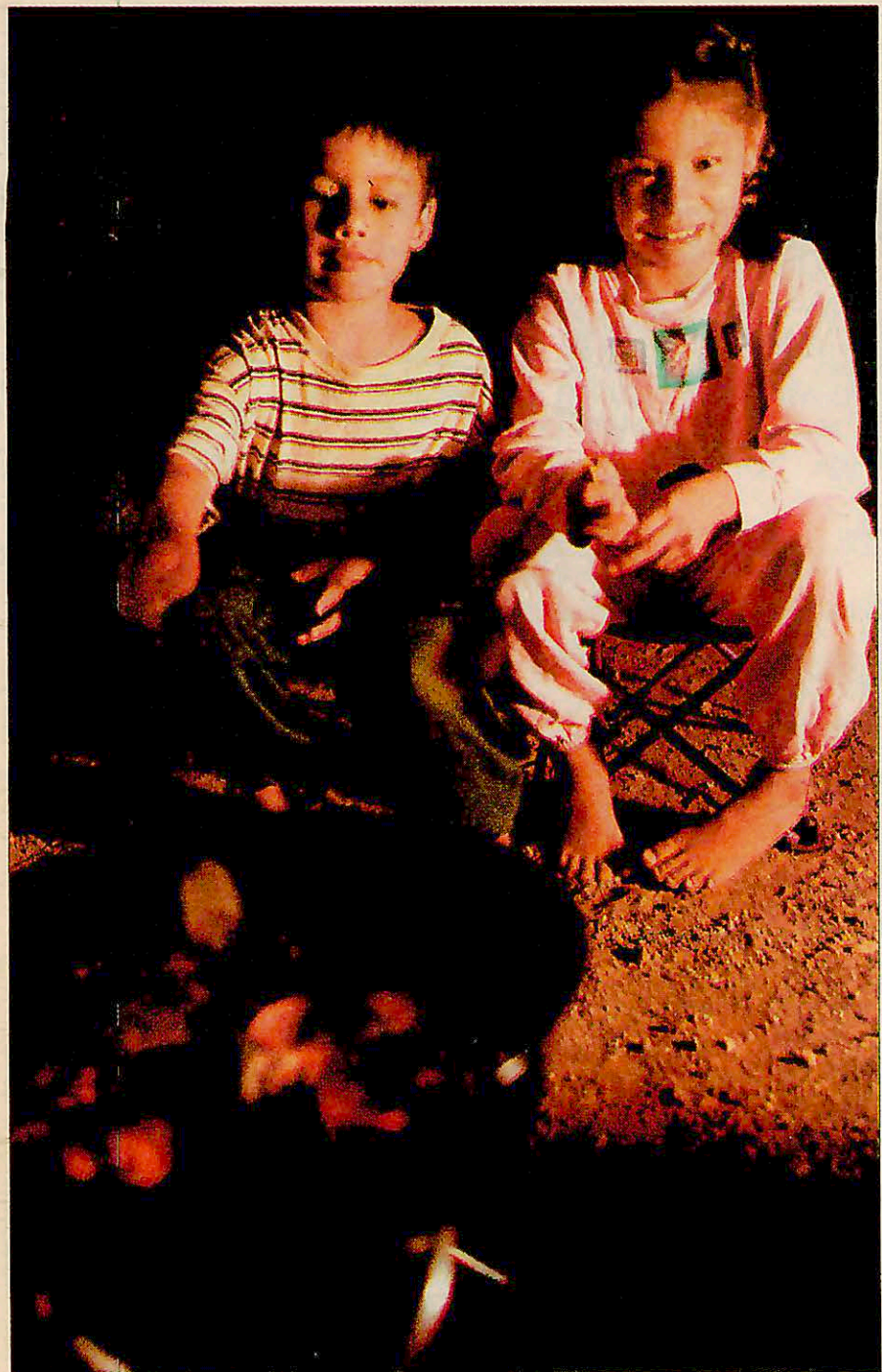
Barboza usually rides for two or three hours but is not worried about problems along the way, despite running into drunken men stumbling along.

"If anything happens, I'm ready to take off," he said. "I've not had a bad experience."

Although building a campfire is illegal, many families still enjoy camping along the banks, especially during long weekends. Some choose established campsites, such as at the Santa Fe Dam — open to Scouting troops and other groups by reservation — and Follows Camp in the Angeles National Forest.

Others pick their own sites, as evidenced on a recent long weekend. Campers found choice spots along the river off East Fork Road in the forest, with tents pitched near the water.

Desiree Kline, 18, recently spent



Staff photo by GREG ANDERSEN

Alex and Abby Grigg toast marshmallows during their campout at Follows Camp.

a weekend with her friends, who graduated in June from El Rancho High School in Pico Rivera. They camped under a bridge that offered easy access to the river, and enjoyed swimming, barbecuing and roasting marshmallows.

Nearby Follows Camp booked all of its 200 campsites, literally a stone's throw from the river, during a holiday weekend this year.

"Instead of being down there in the city, getting flustered with everything that goes on down there, you just come here to relax," said Grace Martinez, visiting

Follows Camp with her family. "(The river) soothes you at night when you're sleeping."

Norwalk resident Alice Garcia said she has camped along the river for 40 years, before Follows Camp existed. Her family reserved 11 spots and expected 40 to 50 people to visit during the weekend.

She wakes up in the morning to the sound of the river, thinking it's 9 a.m. when it's only 6:30.

"This is the best place to come and relax, enjoy yourself and forget about time," she said. "If anyone has a watch, we tell them to take it off." □



# A VERY KEY WELL

*Baldwin Park lot holds the answers to Valley water supply*

By Laurence Darmiento

Staff Writer

**W**he San Gabriel River spans 58 miles from its head, deep in the upper reaches of the Angeles National Forest, to its mouth near Long Beach.

But if you want to understand how the river quenches a thirsty Valley of some 1.4 million residents and their businesses go no farther than a narrow, weed- and litter-strewn lot on Scott Place in Baldwin Park.

There, amid a working-class neighborhood, where residents are still comfortable hanging their clothes out to dry, is a water well marked up by graffiti and surrounded by a rusted chain-link fence.

Though it may not look like much, its importance is denoted by its name: the Key Well.

Indeed, it's a key to understanding a complex water delivery system that has evolved over nearly 200 years, starting with a simple ditch dug in 1821 by the fathers of the Mission San Gabriel.

Since then crews have laid miles of pipeline, dug spreading basins out of the earth, sunk scores of wells, and built five large dams — mostly to capture an estimated 65 billion gallons of water produced in an average year by the river and its watershed.

The Key Well tells all simply by its very existence — that ground water, not surface water is the Valley's primary drinking water source — and even more for those who can read its numeric tale.

Though the river has served as an important surface-water supply since the 1800s, most of its flow is underground and absorbed by the earth, where it lies in the 167-square-mile main San Gabriel Basin, aquifer.

The Key Well reaches hundreds of feet down the porous, alluvial soil of the Valley, where it serves as a hydrological dipstick, measuring the water table's depth, and thus its volume.

Each foot of well water is the equivalent, basinwide, of 2.6 billion gallons.

"If you understand that well, you understand how the basin

operates," said Stephen Johnson, an engineering consultant for the Main San Gabriel Basin Watermaster, which manages the Valley's water supply.

The main basin, which stretches from the base of the San Gabriel Mountains to the Puente Hills and from Claremont to South Pasadena, can hold 2.8 trillion gallons of water.

But under a 1963 legal judgment that established the distribution of the river's water supply from Azusa to Long Beach, Valley pumpers try not to draw the water table down to less than 200 feet above sea level, as measured by the Key Well.

Using more than that would lessen the supply for residents south of the Whittier Narrows, a less-than-2-mile opening between the Whittier and Montebello hills under which the underground supply flows out toward the sea.

Locally, drinking water is pumped from about 200 wells sunk from one end of the water basin to the other, an operation managed by the Watermaster, based in Azusa and established after a 1973 legal judgment that allocated water rights within the Valley's main aquifer.

The Watermaster uses Key Well data to calculate the safe annual draft amount in total and for each of the basin's 35 water purveyors and assorted other pumpers, including companies with water rights.

Unlike many other areas of Los Angeles County, which have to import drinking water from elsewhere in the state, or the Colorado River, ground water and

surface water here supplies close to 90 percent of the Valley's needs.

And it does so for a lot less money.

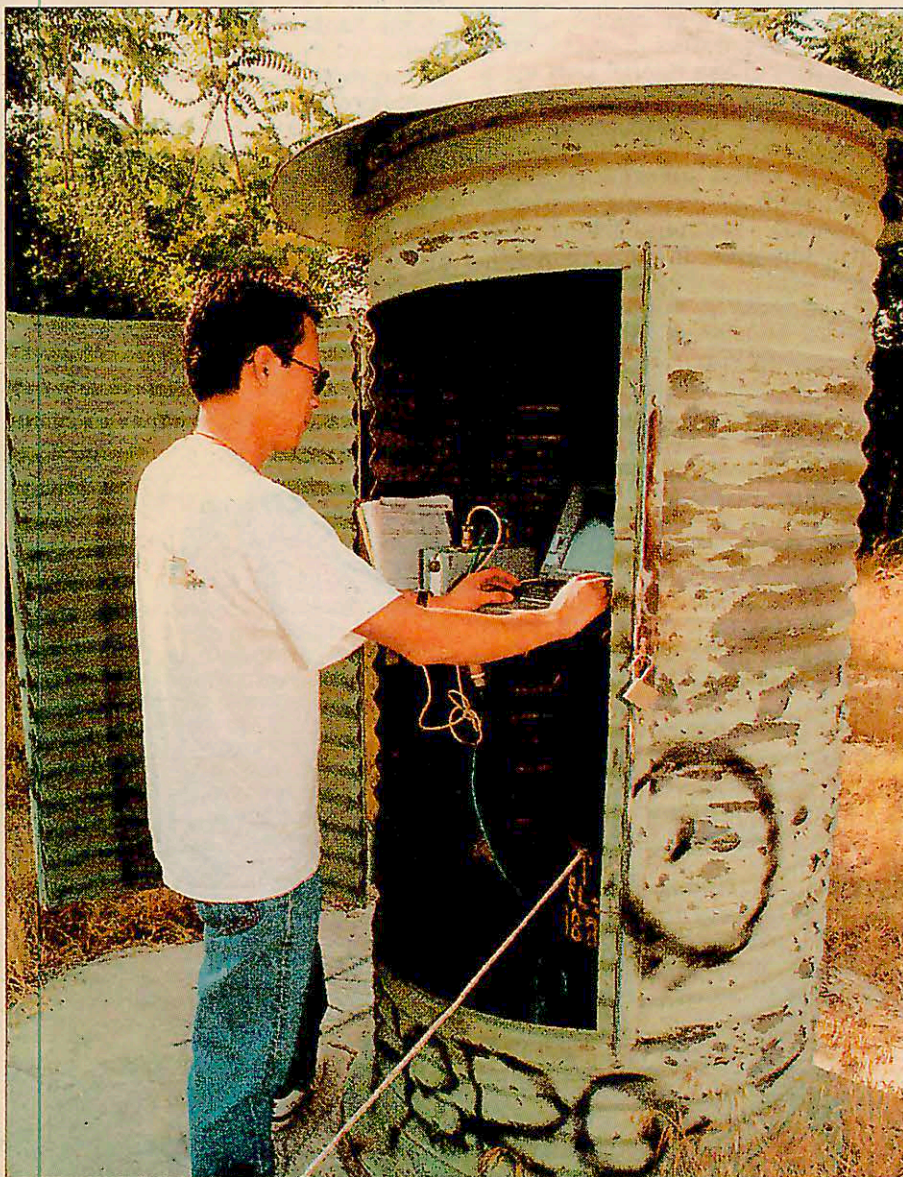
It can cost \$100 per acre foot or less to pump, treat and deliver an acre-foot of ground water to the tap. Compare that to the \$450 per-acre-foot cost of water imported from the Colorado River or

Northern California by the Metropolitan Water District.

An acre-foot is roughly equivalent to a football field covered foot-deep with water — about 325,000 gallons — an amount considered adequate to satisfy the needs of one or two average families over a year.

Please turn to WORK / 50

## THE WORK



Staff photo by RICK SFORZA

Steven Lu, from Stetson Engineers of West Covina, downloads information from a datalogger recorded every three hours from a sounding device in the key well onto his laptop. The key well, surrounded by homes on a residential street in Baldwin Park, is used to determine the level of the 167-square-mile main San Gabriel Basin aquifer.



**THE WORK**

Continued from page 49

However, costs have risen as producers have had to close dozens of wells and treat some remaining water more intensely as the result of contamination by industries and businesses.

That contamination caused portions of the basin to be added in 1984 to the nation's Superfund list of most polluted sites.

But members of the San Gabriel Basin Water Committee, commonly referred to as the Committee of Nine, a designation referring to its nine original members, don't have to worry about that.

They have a guaranteed take of all surface waters diverted from the river at San Gabriel Dam via a tunnel and piping dug out of the side of San Gabriel Canyon starting in 1895.

The waters are collected at the bottom of the canyon and distributed via pipeline to the existing five members of the committee, including two water companies Azusa controls, Monrovia Nursery and a division of the California-American Water Co. that serves Bradbury and Duarte.

"It's some of the most pristine water anywhere," said David De Jesus, general manager of the Covina Irrigating Co., a water wholesaler and the committee's fifth member, which owns nearly 30 percent of the committee's share, the single largest portion.

"We take it very quickly out of the canyon before it has a chance to build up any contaminants."

But with 1.4 million people in the Valley and millions more in the coastal plain relying on the river and its watershed, it takes more than just surface diversions and wells to keep the Valley from going thirsty.

Without human intervention, the San Gabriel River would rage with flood waters after winter storms, but nearly dry up in the semi-arid region's rainless summers, as it did for eons.

But the billions of dollars of flood control and water conservation projects imposed on the Valley landscape prevent that, allowing lush summertime lawns to flourish without drying up the tap.

In 1934 Cogswell Dam was built on the West Fork of the river in San Gabriel Canyon, followed in quick succession by Morris Dam in 1935 and San Gabriel Dam in 1939, the latter two just a few miles north of Azusa.

The dams work on a simple principle, holding back winter storm waters captured by the river's 212-square-mile watershed in the Angeles National Forest, waters that otherwise, for the most part, would wash out to sea.

During the winter, county Public Works crews, the dams operators, hold as much water as possible, releasing it in controlled amounts so it can be absorbed into the earth in spreading basins.

Directly at the mouth of the canyon are the San Gabriel Canyon Spreading Grounds, two former mining pits hundreds of feet deep used since 1914 to spread canyon water.

Water not diverted there can be sent just a few miles downstream to the Santa Fe Dam, which was completed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1949 largely to prevent flooding.

At the dam's north end, Public Works inflates rubber dams that divert storm waters into the Santa Fe Spreading Grounds on the east and west side of the San Gabriel River (605) Freeway south of the Foothill (210) Freeway.

These are the primary spreading grounds in the Valley, capable of absorbing 180,000 gallons per second into the soil, where it percolates into the ground-water basin.

"It's like a rice paddy. It's an old idea, but there have been advances in it," said Oliver Galang, a civil engineer with the Los Angeles County Public Works Department.

"We can conserve about 80 percent of the water produced by the mountains, and the more we conserve, it keeps water rates down."

What water is not captured there, is sent to Santa Fe, where the Army Corps in a cooperative arrangement with Public Works, holds back water for additional spreading downriver as long as it does not interfere with the dam's primary flood-control duties.

There's another rubber dam near Valley Boulevard where water is collected in a 76-acre pool, using the soft-bottomed river to percolate the water into the soil.

More water is sent down to the Whittier Narrows Dam, which again the Army Corps operates cooperatively with public works to fill spreading grounds on and off the river to Florence Avenue in Downey.

But even with all these efforts, more must be done to supply that last 10 percent to 20 percent of the Valley's annual water needs, which are close to 100 billion gallons.

Two separate water agencies, the Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District and the

San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District, were formed by cities about 40 years ago to import water to the Valley.

The Upper District, the larger of the two, supplies imported water directly to some local purveyors, but most of the water it imports is released into the river via a pipeline with an outlet directly below Morris Dam.

Water producers who use more than their allotted share of water each year must buy imported supplies to make up for it, the water spread into the ground like storm water and credited to each producer.

The San Gabriel Valley district, composed of Alhambra, Azusa, Monterey Park and Sierra Madre, performs a similar function for its members via another pipeline with separate outlets.

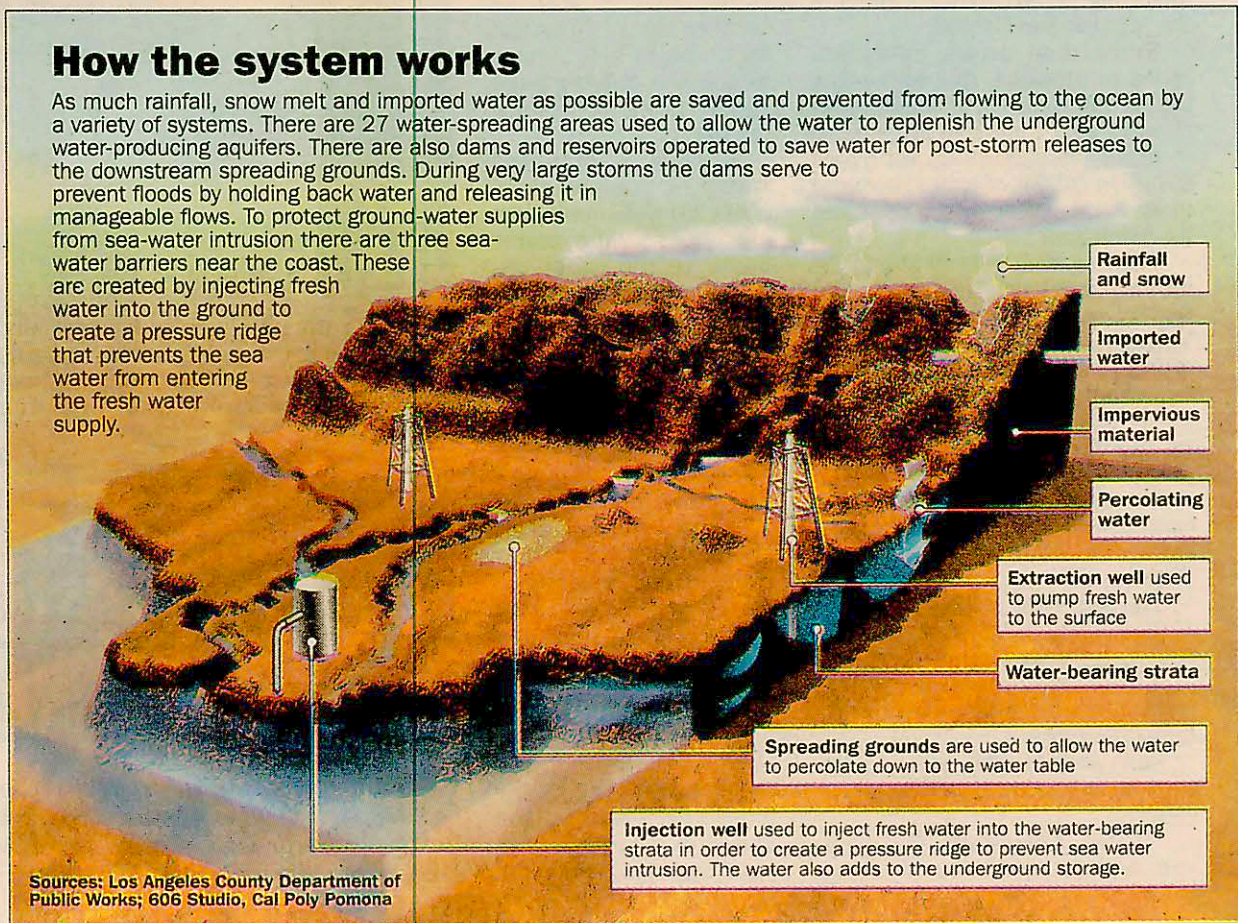
In addition, south of the Whittier Narrows, sewage treated at two reclaimed water plants operated by the Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts is released into the river, where it is spread into the ground.

The Upper District is seeking to pipe about 3.3 billion gallons of reclaimed water annually to just south of the Santa Fe Dam, where it would be released into the river to percolate into the ground.

State health officials have yet to approve the project. □

**How the system works**

As much rainfall, snow melt and imported water as possible are saved and prevented from flowing to the ocean by a variety of systems. There are 27 water-spreading areas used to allow the water to replenish the underground water-producing aquifers. There are also dams and reservoirs operated to save water for post-storm releases to the downstream spreading grounds. During very large storms the dams serve to prevent floods by holding back water and releasing it in manageable flows. To protect ground-water supplies from sea-water intrusion there are three sea-water barriers near the coast. These are created by injecting fresh water into the ground to create a pressure ridge that prevents the sea water from entering the fresh water supply.



Sources: Los Angeles County Department of Public Works; 606 Studio, Cal Poly Pomona

Staff graphic by LANCE H. MARBURGER





Staff photo by JOSH ESTEY

A view of the San Gabriel Valley from one of Vulcan Materials Co.'s CalMat division rock sorting machines in Irwindale.

# REALLY PLUGGED IN

*Edison and  
other businesses  
flourish along  
the river*

By Virginia McCrum  
Staff Writer

**W**he battle between civilization and nature is alive and well along the San Gabriel River, and finding a balance is key to many area business owners, chambers of commerce executives and community development leaders.

Rosemead-based Southern California Edison has the greatest presence on the river as it owns 370 acres of riverfront property in the San Gabriel Valley and Whittier areas and leases its land to about 50 businesses.

"SCE is a prominent landowner in the San Gabriel River corridor," said Robert Reid, SCE water and waste programs manager. "Through our involvement in organizations considering the future of the river, we are hoping to help develop win-win solutions that will serve the interests of preserving green space and our duty to leaseholders, customers and shareholders."

Reid represents SCE as an alternate member of the San Gabriel and Los Angeles Watershed Council board of directors.

SCE owns land in every city, except Azusa, along a 19-mile stretch south of San Gabriel Canyon, said Rick Greenwood, licensing manager of Southern California Edison Corporate Real Estate.

The limited areas SCE uses but does not own are pretty much

Please turn to **BUSINESS / 52**

# THE HOLE PICTURE

**W**hether it's lakefront hotels and restaurants, a regional park or commercial sporting goods center, many officials think developing Irwindale's quarries could bring people to the San Gabriel River.

U.S. Forest Service futurist George Duffy said developing the quarries could be 25-50 years away, but his eyes still light up when he talks about the opportunities.

"Try to picture a situation where all around the sides of one of these quarries is a specialty shopping center for recreation activities," Duffy said.

"Somebody could go to a mountain bike shop, get a mountain bike, go right out the front door and find a series of mountain bike trails that went around the quarry area."

Irwindale is home to 17 mining pits, and six are still active.

Perhaps the jewel when officials talk long-term development is the 470-acre Hanson Aggregates pit at Live Oak Avenue and the San Gabriel River (605) Freeway.

It includes a large lake formed by the river and ground water just west of the San Gabriel River that

*What  
do you do  
with closed  
quarries?*

By Dave Melendi  
Staff Writer

## THE QUARRIES

is visible from the freeway.

Use that quarry for Duffy's imagined shopping center and stores selling fishing equipment, canoes or kayaks. That would allow customers to test products before they buy them.

"You could really create a whole new concept in outdoor recreational marketing," Duffy said.

But Hanson and the city aren't looking to try something that unusual. They are trying to work

out a deal to put lakefront hotels and restaurants at the quarry, not exactly a small dream either.

"For Irwindale, it's an exceptional opportunity if there can be development around the water," said interim City Manager Joe Guzzetta. "Water is such a valued commodity and valued asset."

"Typically, the development around rivers or lakes or streams more highly increases property values, aesthetics and the ability of the city to attract high-quality development."

Guzzetta thinks the lakes could be used for boating, recreation and as a backdrop to hotels and shops. There could be a beach if buildings were placed overlooking the water.

Dave Hummel, Southwest Division president of Hanson Pacific, said development could occur while mining continued and a deal with the city is expected "sooner rather than later."

Jock Scott is vice president of Vulcan Materials Co.'s CalMat Division, which owns a 334-acre pit on Los Angeles Street just east of

Please turn to **QUARRIES / 52**



## THE QUARRIES

Continued from page 51

the 605 Freeway.

Vulcan, which expects to mine sand and gravel there up to 30 more years, is looking ahead to perhaps converting its quarry into a park when it has been fully depleted, given the rising value of open space, Scott said.

Bob Griego, Irwindale's city

manager for three years before resigning in April, thinks the pits could be used as parks when mining is done. He said much else could be difficult, and he's also pessimistic about development along the river.

"It seems like the river would need quite a few more treatments," said Griego, now general manager of the Otay Water District in San Diego.

Reuben Arceo, Irwindale's planning director, said the river has

always been looked at as something to overcome, control, get around or hide under concrete. He said he'd like that to change.

"The river has not really been considered as part of a grand scheme for recreational opportunities. For the most part in Southern California, the rivers just have not been envisioned that way unfortunately," he said.

"Most rivers really have been an unutilized resource. I don't like to look at rivers and other terrain

issues as impediments."

With Irwindale's proximity to freeways, Arceo thinks many of the pits will eventually be used for commercial developments.

He also wants the city to study how best to develop near the river in its next general plan, due out next year. But one of the challenges is developing without fear of a flood.

"We are within a basin," Arceo said. "That's why you need a Santa Fe Dam. You have to think about a flood." □

## THE BUSINESS

Continued from page 51

vacant, unless the owners are using the land, too, Greenwood said.

He said the most common usages are horticulture and agriculture. There are also greenhouses and the duck farm — Woodland Farms Inc. — in Industry.

"We actually bought that property from them, and as part of the purchase, there was an agreement that they would remain there," Greenwood said.

A few horse stables, golf courses, storage facilities, landscapers and many nurseries also lease SCE property along the river.

The majority of businesses leasing land from utility companies and agencies along the river are surface businesses, which only use topsoil or can be easily relocated — such as horse stables — and do not require much foundation work.

SCE said it does not restrict construction, as long as its operations aren't obstructed and are permitted by law, whether zoning or permit regulations.

Greenwood said Edison puts businesses on the property to reduce maintenance expenses, such as clearing weeds and other nuisances, and it generates revenues so Edison can offset its rates.

Nursery wholesaler Gallo's Nursery, which has been in business 16 years, leases about 12 acres from SCE at its South El Monte headquarters.

"We're pretty happy here, and we'll stay as long as they'll let us, but if the rents get too high, we'll have to move," said the nursery's manager, Gustavo Gallo, the nephew of owner Ramon Gallo.

Large plots of land and good weather attracted the company to the region, said Gallo, adding the nursery uses city water instead of river water to nurture its plants.

"The San Gabriel Valley is the best for growing plants," Gallo said.

Steve Conroy, SCE media relations manager, confirmed that SCE leasing rates are on the rise as property values go up with the increased truck traffic creating major thoroughfares in the area.

In addition to its participation on the watershed council, SCE has worked behind the scenes on the future of the San Gabriel River by supplying a \$21,000 grant to the San Gabriel Mountains Regional Conservancy to finance "Reconnecting the San Gabriel Valley River," a Cal Poly Pomona study.

A couple of SCE employees, in their roles as city council members, also serve on the San Gabriel & Lower Los Angeles Rivers & Mountains Conservancy board of directors. They are Lara Blakely of Monrovia and Hector de la Torre of South Gate.

Edison does not have the monopoly when it comes to doing business along the river. Several cities have plugged into promoting commerce there as well.

Irwindale, which has about 1,190 residents and is primarily industrial, has more than 150 businesses adjacent to the San Gabriel.

The businesses vary in size, including some major corporate facilities such as the former Hughes Distribution Center and the San Gabriel Valley Corporate Center, which houses Lucent Technologies and the San Gabriel Valley Economic Partnership. There also are rock quarries, the Irwindale Speedway and a man-made lake at the Hanson Aggregates wet mining site.

Other businesses include Miller Brewing Co., Grandview Nursery, Nu-Way Live Oak Landfill and Cal-Soil, a green-waste recycling company, to name a few.

Irwindale officials envision the city's future with more developments along the freeway, which parallels the river, and recreational uses, said JoAnn Camperi, executive director of the Irwindale

Chamber of Commerce.

Irwindale's General Plan development update will start in September, and its vision for the San Gabriel River (605) Freeway corridor will be evaluated, said Reuben Arceo, Irwindale's planning director.

"It's the intent of the Planning Department to look at the river as a natural resource and to protect that resource, and whenever a development is proposed, any potential impacts to the river should definitely be carefully evaluated," Arceo said.

Another major company bordering the river in Irwindale is Jacmar Foodservice Distribution, whose parent company is Alhambra-based Jacmar Cos., which owns 19 Shakey's and several other restaurants.

Specializing in distributing food, paper and janitorial supplies to pizza stores, Italian restaurants and delis, the privately held company serves about 800 eateries in Southern California, including 60 in the San Gabriel Valley, said its president, Frank Visvikis.

Unlike Irwindale, most of the cities along the 19-mile stretch only have a city border facing the river, including Duarte, Baldwin Park, El Monte, South El Monte, Industry, Whittier, Pico Rivera and Santa Fe Springs.

Among the many businesses along the stretch are four golf courses, including the Azusa Greens Country Club, the Rancho Duarte Golf Course, the California Country Club in Whittier and the River Ridge Golf Course in Pico Rivera.

"The whole city is within a half mile of the river," said James Riker, Pico Rivera's associate planner. "But there are no real businesses in the city that are interested in developing or trying to incorporate a theme of the river, except perhaps the golf course on the north end of town that changed its name to River Ridge and is adjacent to the river."

The city primarily has industri-

al zones along the river, with manufacturing plants, trucking and meat processing companies, warehouses and vacant properties, Riker said.

The city-owned, nine-hole executive golf course under the authority of the city's Recreation Department changed its name from Pico Rivera Municipal Golf Course a year ago to distance itself from the municipality and appear more like a privately owned facility.

The name change, together with a \$150,000 face lift, boosted the quality and quantity of clientele at River Ridge.

The facility has had an annual average of about 80,000 rounds of golf for the past few years, and the numbers are on the rise, said Ruth Raheb, golf course manager.

The course, which opened in 1969, now is a lighted facility with banquet facilities, a full bar and cafe/restaurant, a pro shop and covered driving ranges.

"It's one of those things that is self-sufficient," she said.

In Azusa, where the river stretch begins, there are a lot of rural areas, with mostly industrial uses, such as quarries, said Roy Bruckner, community development director.

"There used to be a processing plant, but that's moved, and in its place will be a 15-acre National Guard armory," he said.

Residents in Azusa have offered opinions through committees and forums about beautifying the river and creating more recreational opportunities, such as adding trails and educational nature centers.

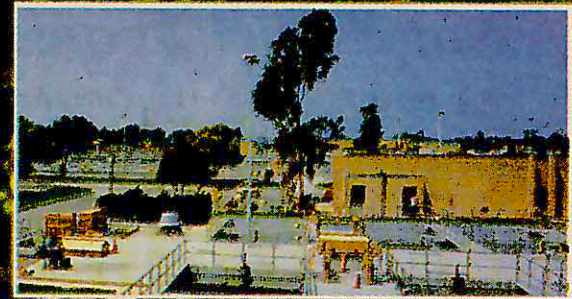
"I think we need to be aware of what is natural to our area," said Vera Mendoza, executive director of the Azusa Chamber of Commerce, who said she was born and raised in the area.

"The river has always been a part of our lives. We have such a beautiful area, and we need to conserve it and know how to appreciate it and protect it," she said. □

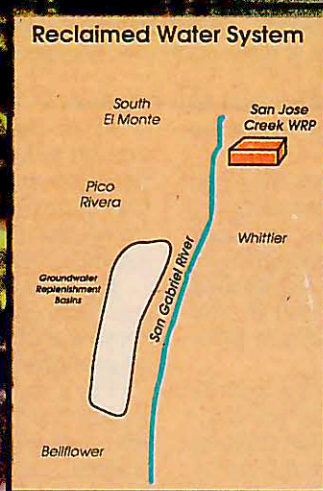


# Water Reclamation and Reuse

by the Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County



The San Jose Creek Water Reclamation Plant in Whittier provides water to the San Gabriel River.



Water reclamation and reuse is an integral part of the water picture for Los Angeles County. Hundreds of sites across the county are receiving reclaimed water in lieu of drinking water for a variety of non-potable applications.

Reclaimed water provides a water environment along river bike trails for the local population in an otherwise normally dry river system. The Districts' tertiary treatment system produces water that meets "unrestricted recreational use" criteria in California and drinking water standards.

The idea of reclaiming useful water from wastewater is not new. The Sanitation Districts began planning for a network of water reclamation facilities as far back as 1948.

The Districts' water reclamation plants also supply 45 million gallons each day (50,000 acre-feet per year) of the water used to replenish the groundwater basin underlying a major portion of southeast L. A. County. This water has supplemented the drinking water supply for the surrounding areas for the past 38 years. This is presently the major component of water reuse in the Districts' system.

The Districts' Health Effects Study, conducted in cooperation with the State Department of Health Services, conclusively demonstrated that reclaimed water has no measurable adverse impacts on health. Subsequent Rand Corporation studies in 1996 and 1998 confirmed these results.

**"The Sanitation Districts' plants are the second largest water source for the San Gabriel River, second only to rainfall."**





# THE BIRTH OF A NOTION

*San Gabriel conservancy is a result of compromise*

By Laurence Darmiento

Staff Writer

**W**hen Sen. Hilda Solis heard that colleague Tom Hayden was crafting legislation that would help bring the Los Angeles River back to life, her immediate thought turned toward its sister waterway, the San Gabriel.

Still clear in her memory were the magical summer days of her childhood when her father would take her to play in the clear waters of the river's tributaries in San Gabriel Canyon.

Time had come, she decided, to preserve what had been untouched by development and to restore what could be reclaimed from man.

"We used to have picnics with our family. We used to go to the creek and sit in the water. We would make our little swimming pools there," the El Monte Democrat recalled. "It was so natural. It's something I grew up with, and what our future generations should have."

As it turned out, Solis didn't get very far two years ago with that first attempt, which would have created a joint Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers conservancy under the auspices of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.

It ran into a phalanx of opposition from local interests suspicious of the Malibu-based Santa Monica conservancy, despite Solis' assurances her interests were in the San Gabriel Valley.

Local environmentalists saw it as a Westside power grab, San Gabriel Valley cities worried over the conservancy's power to condemn private land and down river cities feared flood control would be given short shrift.

"It was not based in the San Gabriel Valley and that bothered us a lot," said Rosemead Mayor Margaret Clark. "I grew up on the

Westside, and for us (back then) the San Gabriel Valley was some place in the boonies."

Not one to be easily deterred, Solis tried again in January 1999, this time introducing her own legislation to create a San Gabriel River conservancy, with no powers of condemnation or authority over city zoning laws.

Still it wasn't easy.

But, nine months later, after a series of rewrites and intense last-minute negotiations, Solis' bill and a second companion bill by Assemblywoman Sally Havice, D-Artesia, passed the Legislature, creating the San Gabriel & Lower Los Angeles Rivers & Mountains Conservancy.

Solis also got \$700,000 to start it up, and \$15 million included for land acquisition and other capital projects in a state parks bond that later was approved by state voters.

"We are now, in fact, the largest urban conservancy in the state of California," Solis said. "The will of the people helped see this through."

But the mouthful of a name reflects the arduous compromises that went into it.

From its original conception as a river conservancy, the legislation was expanded to include the mountains that comprise part of the river's watershed.

And with the Rio Hondo River branching off to the Los Angeles River — hydrologically connecting it to the San Gabriel — the lower portion of the Los Angeles River south of Vernon also was included.

Those compromises didn't please everyone, including Azusa Mayor Cristina Madrid, who questions how effective the conservancy can be without powers of eminent domain.

Those powers give government



Staff photo by MICHAEL HAERING

State Sen. Hilda Solis, D-El Monte, remembers playing along the river as a child. She views the riverbed just south of the Santa Fe Dam Recreation Area.

agencies authority to buy land at fair market value under the threat of condemnation.

"They had to do what they had to do to get it passed, but why are we creating powerless entities? Just because they're fashionable?" said Madrid, whose spearheaded an Azusa drive to preserve and improve the city's riverfront property.

"Our city just formed a little joint powers authority for helicopter (patrols) and it has eminent domain. Here we have an entity that needs to have the power to create a land bank. They need to pay fair market value, not hold-out, extortion prices."

Clark, who ultimately was appointed to one of two seats representing Valley cities on the new conservancy, disagrees. She likes the final product.

"You get a much better project when you have a buy-in from all the stakeholders. Eminent domain means you can go and buy property from an unwilling seller," she said.

But by far the biggest conflicts, and compromises, revolved around two axes: upper vs. lower river, and local vs. state control, the bugaboo of California politics.

Havice wrote up her bill shortly after Solis introduced hers, but if Solis was driven by environmental concerns, Havice made no bones about hers: protecting and enhancing flood control, while adding some nice urban parks in the

process.

"I've lived in this area long enough to know that the river does flood into the streets. And before it was controlled, there were people killed and there was property damage done," Havice said.

Havice's bill wrote her concerns into law, specifically limiting the conservancy's authority over flood control projects.

But it was the local control issue in the end that almost torpedoed the conservancy. Local officials wanted a majority of seats on the board, but Gov. Gray Davis, citing the state largess, said that was a deal-breaker.

A few days before a September legislative deadline last year, a deal was brokered by State Resources Secretary Mary Nichols that satisfied all parties: a majority of the 13 member board would be appointed out of the Sacramento, but four of those would have to be drawn locally.

The conservancy conducted its inaugural meeting in February, and was advised by veterans of other state conservancies that in order to accomplish anything the spirit of compromise would have to prevail.

Nichols, who as a statutory board member is serving as the conservancy's chairwoman, said she has been pleasantly surprised that that spirit has appeared to prevail so far.

Please turn to BOARD / 55

## THE BOARD



**THE BOARD**

Continued from page 54

"I was fearing that the upper and lower river people would have such diverse views that there would be arm wrestling on who would go first with projects," she said. "It hasn't just been civil. It's been cooperative."

Nichols noted that in the conservancy's first major decision, choosing an executive director, unanimity was reached in Mary Angle, who had previously led the Save-The-Redwoods-League.

Also, Long Beach Councilman Frank Colonna and Monrovia Councilwoman Lara Blakely were consensus choices to share the agency's vice chairmanship, she said.

But, the conservancy is still in its infancy. Before it can even spend a dime of the \$15 million, it must develop an open-space and parkway plan

laying out its priorities.

That is likely when the first real battles will be fought.

Angle, who served as a state park ranger and administrator for years, said she thinks that in the end, sound environmental criteria rather than politics will dominate the selection of projects.

"I believe that when we develop this open space plan there will be a well-thought-out set of criteria to look at the needs of the area," said Angle, who started work in June.

"I think it's important when you do watershed management, you want to promote diversity. You have to look at the whole thing. I believe that we can all work together to come up with a single plan that will be good for both watersheds."

Staff Writer Michael Dean Clark contributed to this story. □

**San Gabriel River Master Plan**

**Be a part of the process.  
Be a part of the solution.  
Be a part of the future.**

Come to our next informational meeting

Monday  
**August 28, 2000**  
1:30 pm  
or

Monday  
**September 25, 2000**  
1:30 pm

At the Los Angeles County  
Department of Public Works Headquarters  
900 S. Fremont Ave. in Alhambra



For more information  
call (626) 458-4330

or visit us at our website  
<http://dpw.co.la.ca.us/pln/sgrmp>

*Working to Preserve a  
Healthy Environment...*

THE SAN GABRIEL VALLEY MOSQUITO & VECTOR CONTROL DISTRICT STRIVES TO PROVIDE HIGH QUALITY, ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND MOSQUITO & VECTOR CONTROL SERVICES. THROUGH PUBLIC EDUCATION, DISEASE SURVEILLANCE, AND DIRECT PREVENTION AND CONTROL MEASURES, WE GREATLY REDUCE THE POTENTIAL FOR DISEASE TRANSMISSION TO OUR RESIDENTS.

*A vector is an insect or animal capable of transmitting disease or causing discomfort to humans. Protect your family by eliminating food, standing water, and shelter that attracts vectors such as mosquitoes, rats, and Africanized honey bees to your home. When visiting the great outdoors, do not feed or handle wild rodents. Avoid contact with mosquitoes and ticks by wearing light colored pants and shirts with long sleeves. Insect repellants are effective when used according to label directions.*



*San Gabriel Valley Mosquito  
& Vector Control District  
1145 N. Azusa Canyon Road  
West Covina, CA 91790  
(626) 814-9466*



# CHARTING A COURSE

County drafting a master plan expected by 2003

By **Andy Samuelson**  
Staff Writer

**L**ong focused mainly on flood control and water conservation along the San Gabriel River, the county's Department of Public Works is now leading an effort to restore and improve the long-neglected waterway.

A San Gabriel River Master Plan is being created to preserve the river's ecosystem, as well as maximize open space and recreation areas, said Scott Schales, a supervising civil engineer for the department and the plan's project manager.

To prepare the document, a San Gabriel River Master Plan Committee that includes 35 government agencies, city officials and conservation groups is meeting monthly.

"We want to give people a broad understanding so all the stakeholders are informed — so they know what the other person does," Schales said.

The county Board of Supervisors approved the formation of the committee in 1999, three years after completion of the Los Angeles River Master Plan, which is expected to serve as a blue print.

Earlier this year, committee members took a bus ride to Morris Dam in the mountains above Azusa. From there, they followed the trail of water to Santa Fe Dam

Recreation Area and down to Whittier Narrows.

Denis Bertone, a San Dimas councilman and a member of the San Gabriel Mountains Regional Conservancy, said the Master Plan is needed to unite people with different interests in the river.

He said the document should have been prepared years ago.

"The San Gabriel Valley is kind of a forgotten part of Los Angeles County," he said. "People, until recently, have not thought of saving anything."

While the River Master Plan will focus on the main stem that runs 58 miles from the San Gabriel Mountains to the Pacific Ocean, another study on the watershed could eventually tie-in a more comprehensive plan for the river basin, Schales said.

Public Works and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are preparing the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Study. The emphasis of the study is to create a data base on the rivers' land uses as well as to formulate a layered geographical map.

Dan Young, the assistant chief of planning for the Army Corps of Engineers, said the information can be used to find similarities among land uses as well as identify

problems and opportunities.

The final report is expected to be finished by the end of the year, and can be used to help finish the San Gabriel River Master Plan. The latter is not expected to be completed until 2003.

Schales said a consultant will be hired by November to move things along, but Dorothy Green, president of the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council, said the plan is taking too long to formulate.

She believes it will be overshadowed by the new San Gabriel & Lower Los Angeles Rivers & Mountains Conservancy.

The conservancy, which is represented on the Master Plan steering committee, has a commission to acquire and preserve open space in the area. It has a \$15 million war chest to do so, and \$700,000 to develop its own master plan.

"The world is going to pass them by," Green said of the River Master Plan Committee. "This study will be left behind in the dust."

Jacqueline Lambrichts, the founder of Friends of the San Gabriel River, is also concerned the committee is repeating the same mistakes made in Los

Angeles by not including tributaries in the Master Plan.

Lambrichts said the plan will not identify recreational or preservation opportunities in the east-west tributaries or water quality issues in Coyote Creek, the southern most tributary of the river.

"I think there is an institutional unwillingness to change," Lambrichts said. "They have a preconceived idea of what they want to accomplish with this."

Schales said if the Master Plan was any more comprehensive it would take years to formulate.

"That has been a sore point for many people," he said. "The way we will work together, the Master Plan, will be an integral part to a more comprehensive watershed plan."

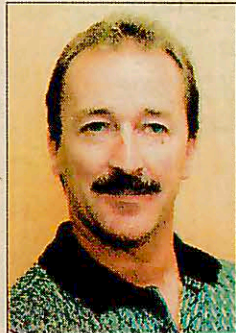
Despite the criticisms, many people are optimistic about the Master Plan and what it will accom-

plish. At the very least, people are talking together about their issues for the first time.

The old way of thinking is gone, Madrid said. The different parties know they have to find a balance between flood control, ecology and economics.

"I think everyone is aware the previous thinking created a lot of problems. We are all in the mode of thinking this through." □

## THE MASTER PLAN



**Scott Schales**  
Los Angeles County Public Works  
Department



**Dorothy Green**  
Los Angeles and San Gabriel  
Rivers Watershed Council

## San Gabriel River Master Plan Steering Committee List of Represented Agencies

Angeles National Forest  
California Dept. of Fish and Game  
California Dept. of Parks and Recreation - Angeles District  
California Dept. of Transportation (Caltrans)  
California Dept. of Water Resources  
City of Azusa  
City of Downey  
City of Lakewood  
City of Long Beach  
City of Long Beach - El Dorado Nature Center

City of Norwalk  
City of Seal Beach  
County Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County  
Equestrian Trails Inc.  
Fly Fishers Club of Orange County  
Friends of the San Gabriel River  
Gateway Cities - Council of Governments  
Los Angeles/San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council  
Los Angeles City Bicycle Coalition  
Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition

Los Angeles County Dept. of Public Works  
Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board  
North East Trees  
San Gabriel Mountains Regional Conservancy  
San Gabriel River Watermaster  
San Gabriel Valley - Council of Governments  
San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District  
Sand and Gravel Industry

San Gabriel & Lower Los Angeles Rivers & Mountains Conservancy  
Sierra Club  
Trust for Public Land  
Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers - Los Angeles District  
U.S. Forest Service  
Vulcan Materials/CalMat Division

**Project Team Members**  
Los Angeles County Dept. of Public Works  
Los Angeles County Dept. of Parks and Recreation  
Los Angeles County Dept. of Regional Planning  
National Park Service - Rivers, Trail, and Conservation Assistance Program

Note: There are 45 members on the committee; some agencies have double representation.





Photo by RICHARD LUI

Members of the Cal Poly Pomona 606 Studio are, from left, Kristina Barker, Phil Pregill, Kiburn Sung, Doug Delgado, Jay Brown, Jeff Stevens, Jeffrey Olson, and Joan Woodward. Brown, Delgado, Stevens and Sung are students, the others are professors.

# A PLAN FOR ACTION

## *Cal Poly class completes study for improvements*

By Michael Dean Clark  
Staff Writer

**W**hen they look at the Valley's leg of the San Gabriel River, members of the San Gabriel Mountains Regional Conservancy see a wilderness resource that, strangely enough, need to be both protected and popularized.

The river, as they see it, is being degraded not so much from overuse, as neglect.

So, to generate some ideas on how to overcome that, the group commissioned four master's students in Cal Poly Pomona's landscape architecture department to complete a study costing more than \$30,000.

The result is a plan that would add amenities like shade trees and benches to the river's banks to make it more user-friendly while taking care to protect the indigenous plants and wildlife, many of which the report concludes are suf-

fering from urban development.

"The main thing we were trying to do is see if we could develop a regional wildlife corridor," said student Jay Brown. "(The conservancy) wants to develop that while it's still possible."

In the report, "Reconnecting the San Gabriel Valley," Brown and his partners Douglas Delgado, Jeff Stevens and Kiburn Sung, describe the San Gabriel River as "the backbone of the watershed" that "connects more readily to all the other natural features in the area."

It is also considered the best chance for a large, uninterrupted north-south natural corridor in the Valley.

The river has a bike path stretching its entire length and many other recreational attractions could be improved to draw more people. As such, they chose to focus their study on the northern

section of the river from the Azusa Canyon to the Whittier Narrows.

To raise the profile of the river, the report suggests that recognizable gateways be developed where it runs through cities. Also parks could be expanded and improved.

And while the report calls the bike path a strength, it also says that "unfortunately, the path provides no amenities, no signage and almost no shade — except for the occasional freeway overpass."

To remedy that, it recommends enhanced bike stops with racks, seating, shade and water. Plus, vendors could sell products to people at the stops. Better signs also could be added to the trail to alert users to attractions and their location.

To do all this, however, will take a concerted effort on the part of all the agencies that control the river to agree on a course of action and follow through with the work to carry it out, Brown said.

"First and foremost, any preservation efforts must overcome the indifference that pervades the region about its own natural resources," the report states. "Second, regional preservation efforts must build consensus."

Cal Poly's 606 Studio, where the San Gabriel River study was completed, is the culmination of the school's landscape architecture master's degree program. Students are hired by organizations to complete a study, a process that runs from September to June of their final year.

Jeff Olson is one of four landscape architecture professors who oversee the projects. While the work benefits the client, he believes the hands-on educational experience students gain through completing the study is invaluable.

Conservancy officials are now looking for ways to implement the improvement plans contained in the report.

Adding signage, trees and bike shelters to the bike path are top priorities, said Ann Croissant, the conservancy's founder.

Edison International is also getting involved in planning for the river's future by rethinking how its utility corridor could be more compatible with the study's recommendations.

Meanwhile, Caltrans officials are contemplating the creation of tunnels for animal research along the San Gabriel River (605) Freeway corridor as a way to restore their habitat as well.

The conservancy also has been contacted by a student at Colorado State University who wants to focus her doctoral dissertation on applying phytoremediation — using plants to collect toxic materials from the ground — along the San Gabriel River.

The most important thing now, however, is finding the money, and the agencies that distribute that money, to pay for it all, Croissant said.

"There is plenty of money out there, it's just a matter of having groups go out and get it," she said. "The missing piece is the lobbying effort to bring in those funds." □

### GET WITH THE PLAN

To order a copy of the "Reconnecting the San Gabriel Valley," send a request to: SGMRC, P.O. Box 463 Gleadora, CA 91740, or fax it to SGMRC at (626) 335-1771.



**W**he San Gabriel River is far from the only regional waterway drawing attention these days.

Just west of the Valley, environmentalists are trying to change the perception of the Los Angeles River as little more than a concrete drainage ditch. They envision a ribbon of aqua water sliding past grassy banks in urban communities from mountains to sea.

"The Los Angeles River is an incredible opportunity to connect disparate communities with a common thread," is how Bill Corcoran of the Sierra Club's Angeles Chapter puts it.

Corcoran was among river enthusiasts who lobbied for money to reclaim urban land along the river for a series of "pocket parks" that will one day dot the river's path from Tujunga Wash to Long Beach, if all goes as planned.

A master plan for improving the

# THE 'OTHER' RIVER

## Restoration efforts going on in L.A.

By **Gina Keating**  
Staff Writer

Los Angeles River began evolving in the early 1990s, when city public works and parks officials sat down with the county to determine how to carve out more green spaces for urban neighborhoods.

The idea was to reclaim some of the shuttered factories along the riverbank and to make them into parks, said Belinda Faustino, chief deputy director of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.

The heart of the river restoration effort is the Los Angeles River Center and Garden, an unexpected green oasis in an asphalt-bound industrial district that was once home to the Lawry's Foods' bottling plant.

The lovely, hacienda-style River Center in the Elysian Valley showcases the nearby 11-mile stretch of river between the Arroyo Seco and Burbank where native plants and animals still thrive.

Efforts to rehabilitate the river began in earnest in 1986, with the formation of Friends of the Los Angeles River.

The efforts got a big boost this year from state lawmakers and Gov. Gray Davis, who approved \$130 million for parks along the river, including a 61-acre former railroad facility near downtown called Taylor Yard.

The legislation, sponsored by Assemblyman Antonio Villaraigosa, D-Los Angeles, also designates the river as a state park — the Los Angeles River Parkway.

Championed by Villaraigosa and approved by voters in March, Proposition 12 provides \$2.1 billion to build and improve urban parks throughout the state.

Plans are also under way for a hike-and-bike trail that would follow the river's 51-mile course, said Kathleen Bullard, director of the Los Angeles River Center & Gardens. □

### THE L.A. RIVER

# A LOST OPPORTUNITY

## 70 years ago, an ambitious plan for river preservation stalled

By **Rodney Tanaka**  
Staff Writer

**I**magine traveling along the San Gabriel River from the ocean to the forest, with homes and businesses kept 1,000 feet from the water's edge.

The river, allowed to naturally flood during the rainy season, is part of a network of park land stretching throughout Los Angeles County.

Sound far-fetched?

It could have happened.

This was the vision of the renowned design firms of the Olmsted Brothers and Harland Bartholomew and Associates in 1930.

Of course, reality hasn't been so kind.

Their plan of an integrated series of parks and recreation areas for the Los Angeles region has been replaced with limited green space, concrete levies and urban developments up to the river's edge.

In the late 1920s, a committee spun from the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce hired the firms to plan and design parks, beaches and other open recreation areas.

Chamber elite and powerful locals such as movie mogul Mary Pickford believed time was slipping away for comprehensive and ambitious landscape planning, said

Caltech professor and Pasadena resident William Deverell.

Deverell co-wrote the book "Eden By Design: The 1930 Olmsted-Bartholomew Plan for the Los Angeles Region," which analyzes and reprints the plan.

"The committee told Olmsted and Bartholomew to think big and plan big, and they did exactly that," Deverell said. "It's a comprehensive and rather remarkable plan for the whole county and then some."

The plan, "Parks, Playgrounds and Beaches for the Los Angeles Region," noted the area has many natural charms and outdoor opportunities. These assets, the report stated, are on the verge of disappearing, but could be easily preserved by concerted action.

The plan was comprehensive, incorporating baby parks and athletic fields all the way up to a parkway system, integrating into one fluid system of protection of lands

for public use.

Total cost to buy and develop the entire system of parks and recreation areas as recommended in the plan was estimated at \$224 million.

The planners believed the San Gabriel and Los Angeles rivers could be part of an attractive landscape system featuring all sorts of trees and vegetation, walking and bridle paths, buffering parks, and even roads.

The Olmsted-Bartholomew plan, originally set for a print run of several thousand, was reduced to less than 200 copies. There was fear such a system would require establishing a parks board with broad jurisdiction, he said.

"There's a feeling the creation of a sophisticated parks plan would create a jurisdictional body that would have at least as much power as they do," Deverell said, of the chamber. "They kill it."

### THE DREAM

The plan called for open space on either side of the riverbank, allowing natural flooding to occur, said Patrick Reynolds, Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation Department landscape architect.

But now the San Gabriel River rushes to the sea between largely concrete embankments instead of flooding out to plains.

"The plan was probably idealistic in some of its vision, but as a master plan it was a great, workable approach to preserving that habitat and the waterways' natural courses," he said.

The plan presents too many challenges to be implemented today and parts of it are dated, but there's no reason why even now some sort of similar comprehensive plan shouldn't go forward, Deverell said.

But he still bemoans what could have been.

"It's poignant to read it and realize it never really had a chance. It's not perfect, and I wouldn't refer to the landscape as an architectural bible, but it's a quality report of great ambition, absolutely," he said. □

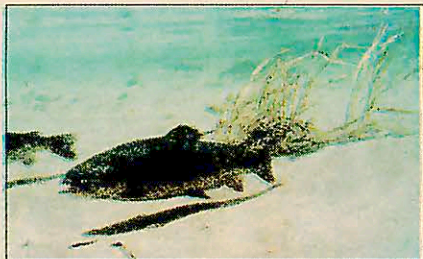
#### TO KNOW MORE

##### Eden by Design

By Greg Hise and William Deverell  
314 pages. University of California Press. Los Angeles, CA

"It's poignant to read it (the plan) and realize it never really had a chance." — William Deverell, Co-author "Eden By Design"





A rainbow trout gets used to its new home.

## THE FISH TALE

The Department of Fish and Game stocks the river every two weeks between December and May. The fish are trucked from Fillmore, where they grow from fry to about a half pound in a year.

### THE STOCKING

They are placed into the river at spots along each fork by DFG employees when the water conditions are close to ideal.

Anglers favor using a dough bait formula to catch the fish; similar to what they are fed at the hatchery. Money to run the hatchery comes from state sport fishing license fees, which anglers must pay before they go fishing. □



Randy Sawyer throws a net full of rainbow trout into the East Fork of the San Gabriel River.



Staff photos by JOSH ESTEY

Larry Glenn throws some rainbow trout into the East Fork of the San Gabriel River. Glenn is a fish and wildlife technician for the Department of Fish and Game. The department stocks the river every two weeks during the Southern California planting season that goes from December through May.



**O**ne river, many voices. If the care and fate of the San Gabriel River appear lost in a jumble of rhetoric by the groups purporting to safeguard it, that wouldn't be far from the truth.

But change could be in the offing. With the state's formation of the San Gabriel & Lower Los Angeles Rivers & Mountains Conservancy, groups for the first time are being asked to come together for a mutual good.

How well they work toward consensus is yet to be seen. For 50 years groups have worked in relative isolation, abiding by a Valley tradition of local autonomy.

On one point, there is agreement: Education is key to bridging conflicting visions and suspicions among river boosters.

"If we can all find the common ground for the importance of the future of the Valley, we'll be fine," said Ann Croissant, founder of the San Gabriel Mountains Regional Conservancy. "If we revisit the turf war approach, we will make no progress whatsoever. It's as simple as that."

"We've got to get our act together in the Valley over the next 10 years," Croissant added. "The stakes are too high if we don't do it."

Answers aren't expected to come easily. The river is political grist for players ranging from developers and recreation buffs to environmentalists and, only recently, elected leaders.

The questions are many. At what point can recreation and development not jeopardize natural habitats? How can the river remain viable under the continuing urban crush?

At Cal Poly Pomona, a group of landscape architecture graduate students completed a wide-ranging study into the 58-mile-long river, a dissertation that is expected to serve as a foundational document for dialogue.

"What it has done essentially is pull together all the documents, all the sources," Croissant said. "This will save a huge amount of time."

Croissant, whose group got the grant for the Cal Poly study, said this plan should be used to determine the future of the river.

"This captures the vision of what I've been thinking about," she said. "It is 15 years of work that

# VESTED INTEREST

## Several groups have agenda to improve waterway

By **Andrew Fought**  
Staff Writer

has been able to be put into an actual study."

Still, Croissant and others recognize that even with all the planning, money will be needed to put these visions into effect.

And time is definitely of the essence, river supporters say.

Jacqueline Lambrichts, a member of the Friends of the San Gabriel River advocacy group, has frequently called the San Gabriel a "river on the edge,"

denoting a void in the public consciousness when it comes to river health and its precarious urban setting.

One of her biggest fears is stormwater runoff and the fact that water often has nowhere to go but the river. Lambrichts said runoff is made easier because urbanization has left the region paved over with miles of concrete and asphalt.

Consequently, everything from pesticides to oil emitted by cars to dog feces runs into the San Gabriel and threatens its ecosystem, Lambrichts said.

She said public relations is key to preserving the river.

"I think there needs to be education and banging on doors," she said. "Some of the newer rising politicians might be more willing to take on some of these issues or maybe see them as important to their communities. I think there's work to be done."

Lambrichts said there are challenges because much of the East San Gabriel Valley is industrial-based and not river conscious.

The Cal Poly study poses a similarly ominous specter.

Most people in the San Gabriel Valley, according to the report, seem to be unaware that anything worth protecting exists in the region, much less that anything is imperiled.

"It cannot be surprising then that landowners and developers, who are better organized and better financed, continue successfully to persuade city governments to allow them to plunder the scant remains of the region's natural treasures," the study reads, noting that "political inertia" has set in.

Observers say Azusa is a case in point. Had a state conservancy been in place sooner, much less a unified voice among local advocacy groups, the city wouldn't have likely approved a plan to build 300 high-end homes near the river.

Barret Wetherby, who owns a cabin in San Gabriel Canyon and is a member of the Azusa-based Public Lands for the People, isn't ready to sacrifice river recreation, even though trash frequently clutters the San Gabriel's banks.

"I think we are all in agreement we shouldn't go around and abuse it," he said. "Then we get into an argument about what constitutes abuse."

Some critics allege any river use could be considered abuse. Wetherby, meanwhile, doesn't think swimming or picnicking should be outlawed, although he does preach responsibility when it comes to disposing of trash and using off-road vehicles.

He routinely picks up trash along the river, but his actions haven't always resonated because there are few receptacles for people to toss their garbage into.

At the state level, the San Gabriel & Lower Los Angeles Rivers & Mountains Conservancy is looking at issues of open space, developing recreation opportunities and wildlife corridors, said Mary Angle, the conservancy's executive officer.

The conservancy has at least \$15 million of state money available to spend once its open space plan is completed, Angle said, adding she expects its plan to be completed within a year.

Even the water industry is getting pulled into the discussion. Sam Pedroza, Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District spokesman, said officials are in a "watch and see" mode.

In the past, water providers have been suspicious of environmentalists, Pedroza said, because environmentalists have wanted water to flow freely down the San Gabriel River's often dry bed.

The water providers maintain they must keep much of the water behind Morris Dam north of Azusa because it is needed as drinking water for tens of thousands of households.

Letting the water flow for aesthetic and habitat reasons would require importing water to serve the Valley, a cost that would be passed on to consumers, Pedroza said.

"There hasn't been a lot of talk about how that's going to be accomplished," he said. "Some of the talk that's out there now is perhaps increasing reservoir capacity in the canyons so we can have more water to throw down. The goal is to have it look more like a river and bring some habitat in there."

Other river advocates are trying, when they can, to buy land to hold immune from development.

Cynthia D'Agosta of the Wildlands Conservancy said many of the groups operate on shoestring budgets with limited staff and minimal political leverage. As a result, awareness sometimes comes too late.

D'Agosta said that until a common voice is reached, vacant land will continue to be in jeopardy.

But D'Agosta also remains optimistic about the river's future, especially with disparate viewpoints now coalescing into constructive dialogue.

"People are getting accustomed to what one another's missions and goals are," she said. "I think we're in the very beginning stages of working out those things. I have a great deal of confidence."

Staff Writer Mike Sprague contributed to this story. □

### THE PLAYERS



**Ann Croissant**  
San Gabriel Mountains  
Regional Conservancy



**Sam Pedroza**  
Upper San Gabriel Valley  
Municipal Water District



# MORE THAN COUSINS

*Waterways play big role in overall scheme of the Southland*

By **Juliet Chung**  
Correspondent

**W**hen the head waters of the San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers may be miles apart and their courses distinct, but a glance back in time reveals the waterways were once more than cousins.

Not very long ago, the rivers' courses actually intertwined before untangling in one of the many shifts prompted by the flood waters that once dominated their flow.

## THE OVERALL

"The rivers have great historical similarities," said Blake Gumprecht, author of "The Los Angeles River: Its Life, Death and Possible Rebirth."

"The lower part of the Los Angeles River used to be called the San Gabriel River before it shifted its course in the 1800s," he said.

In 1854, torrential winter rainfall caused the San Gabriel River to splinter and the Rio Hondo River was born.

Now, the Rio Hondo connects the two rivers, allowing water to flow downstream from the San Gabriel through the Rio Hondo and into the Los Angeles River.

The Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers are region streams, differing from rivers like the Mississippi by their varying nature, Gumprecht said.

Region streams change course often because their shallow, wide nature prevents their carving out a channel.

Eastern rivers, on the other hand, flow over bedrock, are deep and narrow and flow year-round.

The two local rivers flow over land comprised of alluvium, or the sand, dirt and gravel that washes off mountains — the San Gabriels, in this case — which allows water to penetrate beneath the surface. □



Staff photos by JOSH ESTEY

Students learn about the environment. From right to left, Vanessa Jimenez, 10, Corrie Sutton, 10, Tatiana Noguera, 10, kneel at the edge of the river bank on the West Fork of the San Gabriel River with clear plastic cups containing a tiny rainbow trout.

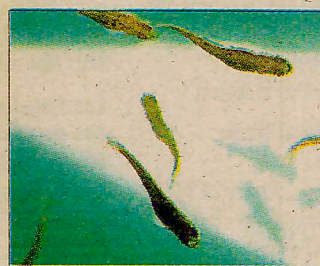


Students of teacher Kathy Ashmore's at Elwin Elementary School in El Monte listen to her talk about the rainbow trout they are about to release.

## THE RIVER TEACHES

It's a program that teaches city kids a little something about life. Students in Kathy Ashmore's fifth- and sixth-grade classes at Elwin Elementary School in El Monte participated this year in the Trout in the Classroom program sponsored by the Fly Fishers Club of Orange County. The students raise the rainbow trout eggs provided by the Mount Whitney Hatchery in mid-April and release them into the West Fork of the San Gabriel River in June. Ken Reed, who oversees the program for the fly fishers club, says it's his hope that the program teaches kids about protecting the environment. His club did 60 Trout in the Classroom programs last year. He said very few of the fish released last very long in the river. "The (food-chain) pyramid is really small and their chances of survival are slim," he said. "The next biggest thing is going to eat them." □

### THE SMALL FRY



Small fry prior to release.



# 'MRS. SAN GABRIEL RIVER'

*Gayle Scott cared before it was fashionable*

By **Anissa Vicente-Rivera**  
Staff Writer

**W**hen Gayle Scott reaches far back in her memory, indeed as far as she can go, still the river is there.

The third child of a Boston school owner and a ship builder who settled in Azusa in 1914, she was born in 1924 in a big yellow house surrounded by citrus trees, three miles from the San Gabriel River.

Growing up among orange groves on Citrus Avenue, where Azusa Pacific University stands, the river was Scott's playground. As a child, she loved to be alone with nature.

She would watch the water run over rocks, study its patterns and practice telling which direction the wind blew.

"The river was amazing and beautiful," Scott said. "In the 1940s, we had 20 white horses at the school my mother owned. I would ride my horse and we would take the high road to the mouth of the river, where the gun club is now in Duarte, and stop and look around. Some people don't notice nature. I was really lucky to."

A passion for nature is what has kept Scott, 76, close to the waters.

Informally known as "Mrs. San Gabriel River," she is considered by many locals to be one of the original and most vocal spokespersons for it.

"She speaks from the heart," said Ann Croissant, founder of the San Gabriel Mountains Regional Conservancy. "Most people think the river is a very uninteresting body of water, but Gayle knows its history. I truly admire her unwavering dedication to really working to see something through and her persistence for the good of everyone."

Azusa City Clerk Adolph Solis has known Scott for more than 25 years.

"She's very committed to what she believes in and the environment is No. 1 on her list," he said.

Scott graduated from the Mabel Scott Rancho School in Azusa, a private boarding school for girls that her mother owned on the corner of Alósta and Citrus avenues. She attended USC and earned a degree in education before teach-

ing at Monrovia Junior High School and Arcadia schools.

She retired in the late 1970s and lived in Arcadia before moving in with her son, George Scott Piper, in Azusa. It was then that the river cut into her life again.

Scott heard about and followed proposed development on the San Gabriel. She embarked on a personal mission to study whatever affected the river, from over-development to neglect to chemical contamination.

Scott attended city council meetings and river safety councils and read everything from federal ground water reports to environmental studies on homes encroaching the river.

"I feel it's not right for me to have knowledge and not do anything about it," she said. "Mostly I don't have the answers. I just have a lot of questions."

One of them is figuring out a very fundamental question about how to transform the river back to its former state.



Staff photo by JAMES KU

Gayle Scott, also known as "Mrs. San Gabriel River," has been crusading for preservation of the waterway.

"It should be restored," Scott said. "But how do we restore the beauty and naturalness of it?"

She said she understands the demands on the river, such as the rock quarries and recreation sites it supports.

Although she now lives in Los Angeles, Scott said she will always care about the waters of her youth. Reading the waters of the future, she sees hope.

"I think one person can only make a difference if they listen to other people. I don't believe in hierarchies. We need a round-table discussion about the future of the river and we must remember not any one of us knows what we need to know," she said.

"We've got to see we all have something to give. Every one of us has a little part of the jigsaw puzzle to put together." □

## THE PROTECTOR

## RIVER CONTACTS

The following is a list of contacts for anyone who wants to know more about future and ongoing river projects.

### San Gabriel & Lower Los Angeles Rivers & Mountains Conservancy

Mary Angle  
(626) 458-4315  
E-mail: mangle@pfg.ca.gov  
www.ceres.ca.gov/sglarmc

### U.S.D.A. Forest Service

701 N. Santa Anita Ave., Arcadia, CA, 91006  
(626) 574-5200  
www.rs.fs.fed.us/angeles

### San Gabriel Mountains Regional Conservancy

P.O. Box 963, Glendora, CA 91740  
Drs. Gerald and Ann Croissant  
Phone/fax (626) 335-1771  
www.sgmrc.org

### Friends of the San Gabriel River

P.O. Box 3725, South El Monte, CA, 91733  
Jacqueline Lambrichts  
Phone (562) 908-6449; Fax (562) 695-82848.  
www.sangabrielriver.org  
E-mail: sangabrielriver@aol.com

### Main San Gabriel Basin Watermaster

725 N. Azusa Ave., Azusa, CA 91702  
Carol Williams, executive officer  
(626) 815-1300 or fax:  
626-815-1303  
www.watermaster.org

### Los Angeles County Department of Public Works

P.O. Box 1460 Alhambra, CA 91802-1460  
Scott Schales, planning division  
(626) 458-4119  
http://dpw.co.la.us/pln/sgrmp/sgrmp.cfm

### Los Angeles County Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council

111 N. Hope St., Suite 627, Los Angeles, CA 90012  
Dorothy Green  
Phone: (213)367-4111  
Fax: (213)367-4138  
www.LASGRiversWatershed.org

### San Gabriel Valley Mosquito and Vector Control District

1145 N. Azusa Canyon Road, West Covina, CA 91790  
P. Sue Zuhlke, district manger or  
Kenn K. Fujioka, assistant manager  
Phone: (626)814-9446  
Fax: (626)337-5686  
www.sgvmosquito.org (presently under construction)

### Whittier Area Audubon Society

P.O. Box 548, Whittier, CA 90608-0548  
Jean Beaton, president  
(562)869-6545  
E-mail: Jeanbigby@aol.com

### San Gabriel Valley Conservation Task Force (Sierra Club)

1622 Adalia Ave., Hacienda Heights, CA 91745  
Jeff Yann, chair  
(626) 968-4572  
E-mail: jyann99@aol.com

### Department of Parks and Recreation

Whittier Narrows Recreation and Natural Areas.  
750 S. Santa Anita Ave. South El Monte, CA 91733  
Velia Rosales, superintendant  
(626) 575-5526  
www.parks.co.la.ca.us



**W**he San Gabriel River has been written off, in the same way sports fans have dismissed the Clippers.

The river exists, the Clippers play basketball, but no one expects much of either.

How can we get the 1.4 million residents of the San Gabriel Valley to care about restoring the river? Can such a dream — one that includes riverfront greenbelts and open space, boating in the Irwindale pits, lawn concerts and maybe even “a riverfront district,” a la San Antonio or New Orleans — ever be more than figments rolling around the imaginations of local environmentalists?

We can't really say for sure if any of this will come true. But the hope of such a transformation can only begin when we open our eyes and see the river as it is right now.

Instead of a place to drive over, or a place a freeway is named after, let's pull up the oleander bushes that screen the river from San Gabriel Canyon to Long Beach and let everyone in on the secret.

It may sound cliché, but through our communities, a river really runs through it.

The first order for a community project is getting hit square in the face by the problem, or in this case, an underutilized asset we've dismissed like a last-place basketball team.

Because faith comes by seeing, by hearing the sounds of wildlife and by standing on the river's clay banks with your eyes closed and imagining what is yet unseen.

Seeing what is possible is believing.

• • •

I've been going to the river and writing about it in my columns for more than 10 years, and during that time the concept of faith never came up.

My wife, Karen, and my boys, Matt and Andy, now 10 and 8, got to know the bike paths, the horses and riders who cross the river, the snowy egret who lives along the banks near Whittier Narrows, the woody scent that rises off the stagnant pools.

When we ride our bicycles, Matt and Andy, always the competitors, like to be the first one to sight a



**STEVE SCAUZILLO**

red-tailed hawk circling the scrub grass for her prey. “Hawk! Right up there!” one would shout.

Our favorite bird, however, is the great blue heron, whose wing span as displayed in flight still drops us to our knees in awe. All is evidence of God's creation, though seen through the glass darkly, as St. Paul wrote.

# THE SAN GABRIEL

## *It's a river worth saving*

For a little closer look, last month I strolled the upper portion between Duarte and Azusa with botanist and plant physiologist Ann Croissant of Glendora. Croissant is an advocate of river restoration and she's moving the stakeholders in that direction.

It was George Whitcomb, founder of Glendora, who called the place where we stood “Boca Negra,” or black mouth, because the upper vegetation was so deep as compared to the lighter shaded alluvium that colors the river's banks.

Native Americans drew life from the river then, before it was dammed and controlled in the 1930s. Croissant points to the mule fat, or Indian arrow plant, which the Indians used as a water indicator.

Even today, with Vulcan's mining of the mountain at nearby Fish Canyon and miles of active conveyor belts transferring rock to crushing machines marring the river view, some native plants still thrive.

As we walked toward her car in the parking lot of a nearby Duarte park, we could see the willows rising from the river's middle. The trees' colors were like a page from a New England tour guide: torch red, rust orange, mustard yellow. But Croissant said the trees are distressed by a lack of water, by too

much silt and possibly by toxins in the river from mining, their beautiful colors masking something terribly wrong like a colorful sunset shining through a smoggy L.A. sky.

Still, despite the tremendous obstacles, Croissant spoke of the steps toward river restoration:

A more reliable water flow is necessary. The removal of non-native grasses that choke out the natural flora (arundo, the giant reeds, for example). Better signs directing people to the wonderful bike paths along the river. More nature centers like the one created recently in the Whittier Narrows. Better use of lands underneath the high-tension wires that follow the freeway and the river.

The list goes on, but at the top of the list is awareness.

Right now, the new San Gabriel & Lower Los Angeles Rivers & Mountains Conservancy is readying for the task. For them to

be successful, local people need to get involved, she said.

The first step for political involvement is walking along the river and seeing what we have.

“We've got to quit putting barriers around it,” she said, literally and figuratively. “Those who say ‘keep it hidden’ believe the myth that there is nothing worth saving here.”

That myth is perpetrated across the state.

Croissant has heard the snickering in Northern California and on L.A.'s west side, where people see the rivers and natural areas of Northern California and the Santa Monica Mountains as more deserving of preservation than inland-area habitat. Local foundations support the rain forests in Washington and in South America instead of putting their money to work at home.

“Look at what we've got here. It is worth saving, yet no one knows about it, no one cares about it,” she said.

“Public outrage is the most effective tool. We still live in a democracy.”

*Steve Scauzillo is the editorial/opinion page editor of the San Gabriel Valley Newspaper Group. Write him at 1210 N. Azusa Canyon Road., West Covina, CA., 91790, or you can e-mail him at [tribune@earthlink.net](mailto:tribune@earthlink.net). □*

### PROJECT EDITORS

**Phil Drake**  
**Lance H. Marburger**  
**Tim Berger**  
**Laurence Darmiento**

### Ron L. Wood

San Gabriel Valley Newspaper Group  
publisher

### Talmage Campbell

Executive editor

### Jim Lawitz

Managing editor

### Contributing writers

Bill Bell, Stephanie Cain, Nicole M. Campbell, Juliet Chung, Michael Dean Clark, William Dauber, Katherine Drouin Keith, Araceli Esparza, Andrew Faught, Ruby Gonzales, Roseli Ilano, Gina Keating, Keith Lair, Virginia McCrum, David Melendi, Debbie Pfeiffer-Trunnell, Michelle Rester, Anissa Vicente-Rivera, Karen Rubin, Steve Scauzillo, Jason Schaff, Mary Schubert, Andrew Samuelson, Michael Sprague, Usha Sutliff, Rodney Tanaka, Fiona Williams

### Photographers

Bernardo Alps, Greg Andersen, Keith Birmingham, Keith Durlinger, Josh Estey, Michael Haering, Leo Jarzomb, James Ku, Walt Mancini, Mike Mullen, Rick Sforza

### Graphic artists

Manny Amaya, Susana Sanchez

### Copy chief

Michael Coates

### Support staff

Gema Duarte, Isabel Gaspar, Louise Grijalva, Pat Pahel, Debbie Seeber

### We would like to thank the following people for their assistance:

Joe Blackstock, Ann Croissant, Margaret Clark, Arthur Diaz, Ron Fremont, Gary Hildebrand, David Jallo, Jacqueline Lambrichts, Richard Liu, Roy Murphy, Denise Noble, Scott Schales, Angela Vasquez.

### Want more?

**Copies of this special report are available for \$1 each. To order, mail your request to:**  
River Project c/o Circulation Dept.  
San Gabriel Valley Tribune  
1210 N. Azusa Canyon Road  
West Covina, CA 91790.  
Or call our Circulation Dept. at:  
1-800-788-1200



**WARNING:** Leaving a fast food container on the ground spoils more than the street. It attracts rats and spreads disease. So put trash in a can, not the curb, and keep your community clean.



PROJECT  
*Pollution*  
PREVENTION

For more pollution prevention tips, call (888) CLEAN-LA (County of L.A.) or (800) 974-9794 (City of L.A.)