IV. Master Plan

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PLAN ALTERNATIVES

Through the analysis of the existing conditions, community input, and meetings with focus groups (including resource agencies), two fundamentally different approaches emerged for the program distribution within the San Luis Rey River Park.

Alternative 1, Biological Resource Emphasis, maximizes protection of the river corridor's biological resources by accommodating active recreation needs on upland sites, away from the most sensitive habitat areas - separating to the extent possible recreation areas from preservation areas.

Alternative 2, River Park Emphasis, sensitively integrates park programming into the floodplain, adjacent to the sensitive riparian zone - fostering interaction between recreation areas and preservation areas.

These two alternatives were presented to the public to demonstrate two opposing points-of-view that had emerged. The intention in presenting these alternatives was to stimulate discussion regarding different possible relationships between recreation and preservation that could be created within the River Park. The Final Plan represents a compromise between the two perspectives represented within these alternatives.

BIOLOGICAL RESOURCE EMPHASIS - Alternative 1

The Biological Resource Emphasis alternative aims to maximize protection and expansion of sensitive resources within the riparian corridor. By focusing recreational programming on upland sites, out of the river corridor, it separates recreation from preservation, and creates a series of loosely-connected upland parks. This alternative took the following approach to recreational program distribution within the River Park:

Tier A Sites

Locate Tier A sites in areas that are disturbed, agriculture, or with the least sensitive vegetation.

Locate Tier A sites outside the 100-year floodplain.

Tier B Sites

Minimize the number of Tier B sites in the riparian zone and the most sensitive vegetation.

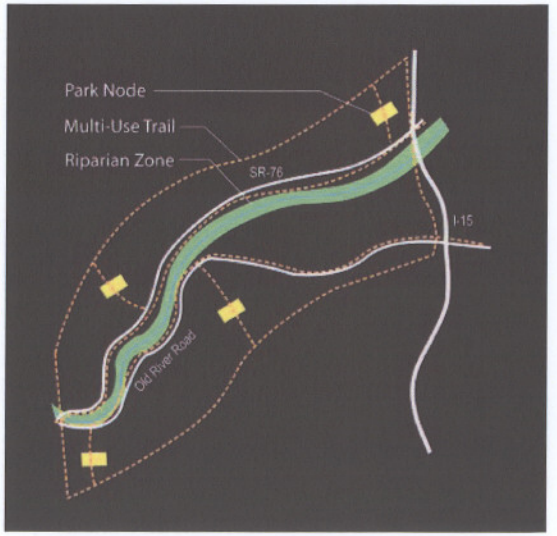
Locate Tier B sites on slopes with non-sensitive vegetation and views of the river corridor.

Locate Tier B sites outside of the 10-year floodplain.

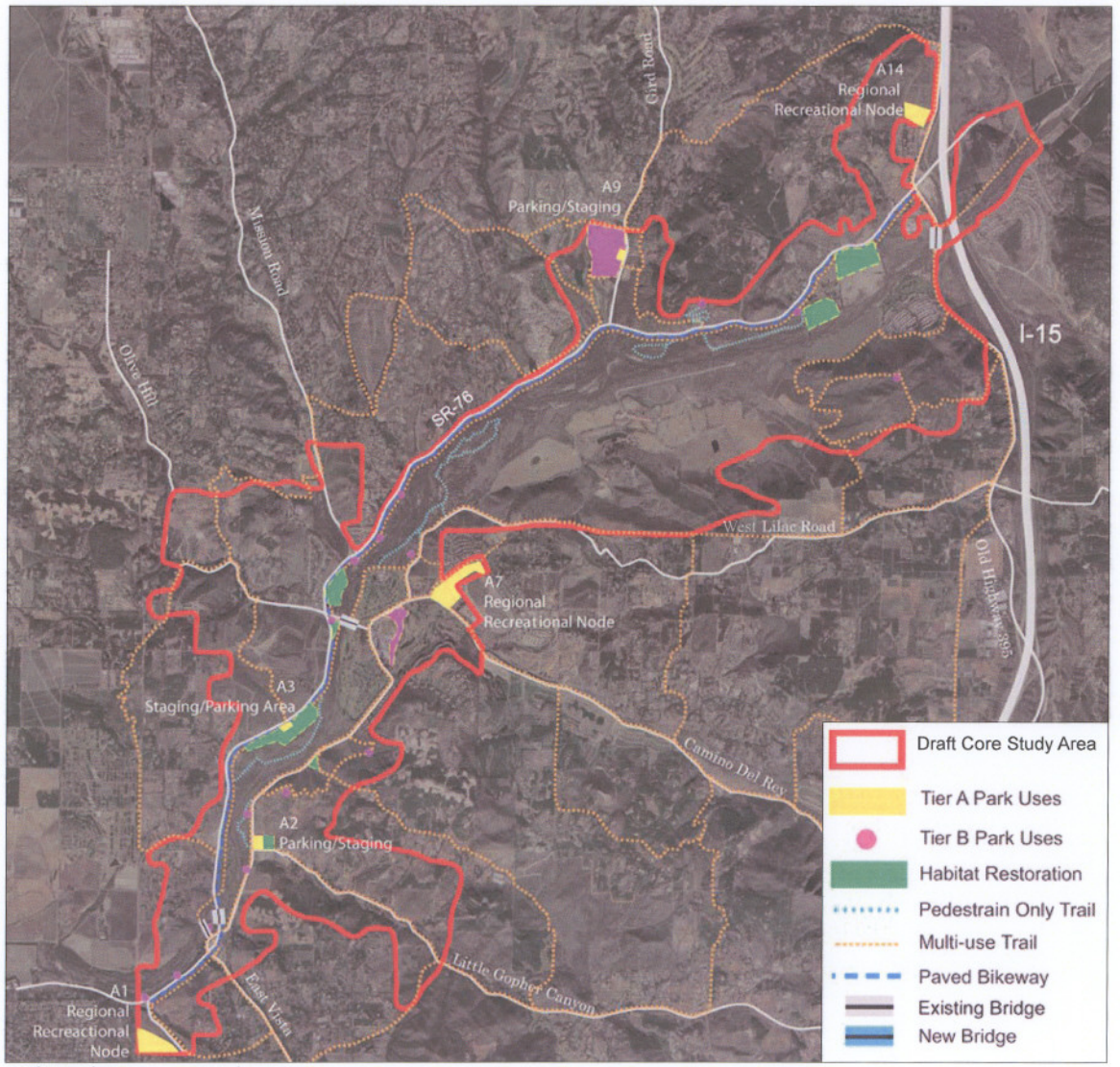
Tier C Trails

Optimize slopes and non-native vegetated areas for trails locations, while minimizing impacts on sensitive vegetation communities and critical habitat.

Focus trails within upland areas and along the periphery of riparian areas parallel to roadways.



Biological Resource Emphasis Conceptual Diagram



Biological Resource Emphasis

RIVER PARK EMPHASIS
Alternative 2

The River Park Emphasis alternative serves the community's needs for active recreational park development and their desires for a trail system integrated with the riparian zone. This alternative encourages interaction with the river corridor's diverse biological and cultural resources by taking the following approach to recreational program distribution within the River Park:

Tier A Sites

Avoid the most sensitive vegetation communities, including wetlands and rare upland communities.

Minimize encroachment into the 10-year floodplain, yet allow park development in the 100-year floodplain as long as it doesn't raise the river more than 2/10 of a foot.

Locate active recreation near population densities to accommodate community needs and utilize only disturbed, agricultural, or non-sensitive vegetation areas for park development. By locating active recreation sites near population densities, transporation issues and traffic may be reduced.

Locate staging areas at both ends of the Core Study Area as well as in the middle in conjunction with active recreation development.

Tier B Sites

Locate Tier B sites along the trail system to encourage observation and appreciation of the river dynamics and habitat.

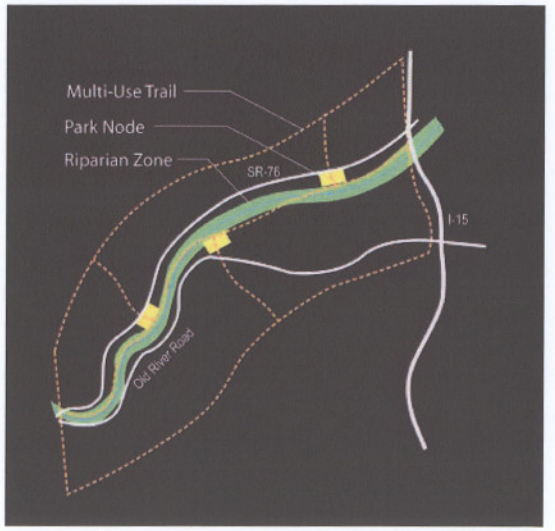
Locate Tier B sites on disturbed areas in the riparian zone and upland slopes with views of the river corridor.

Tier C Trails

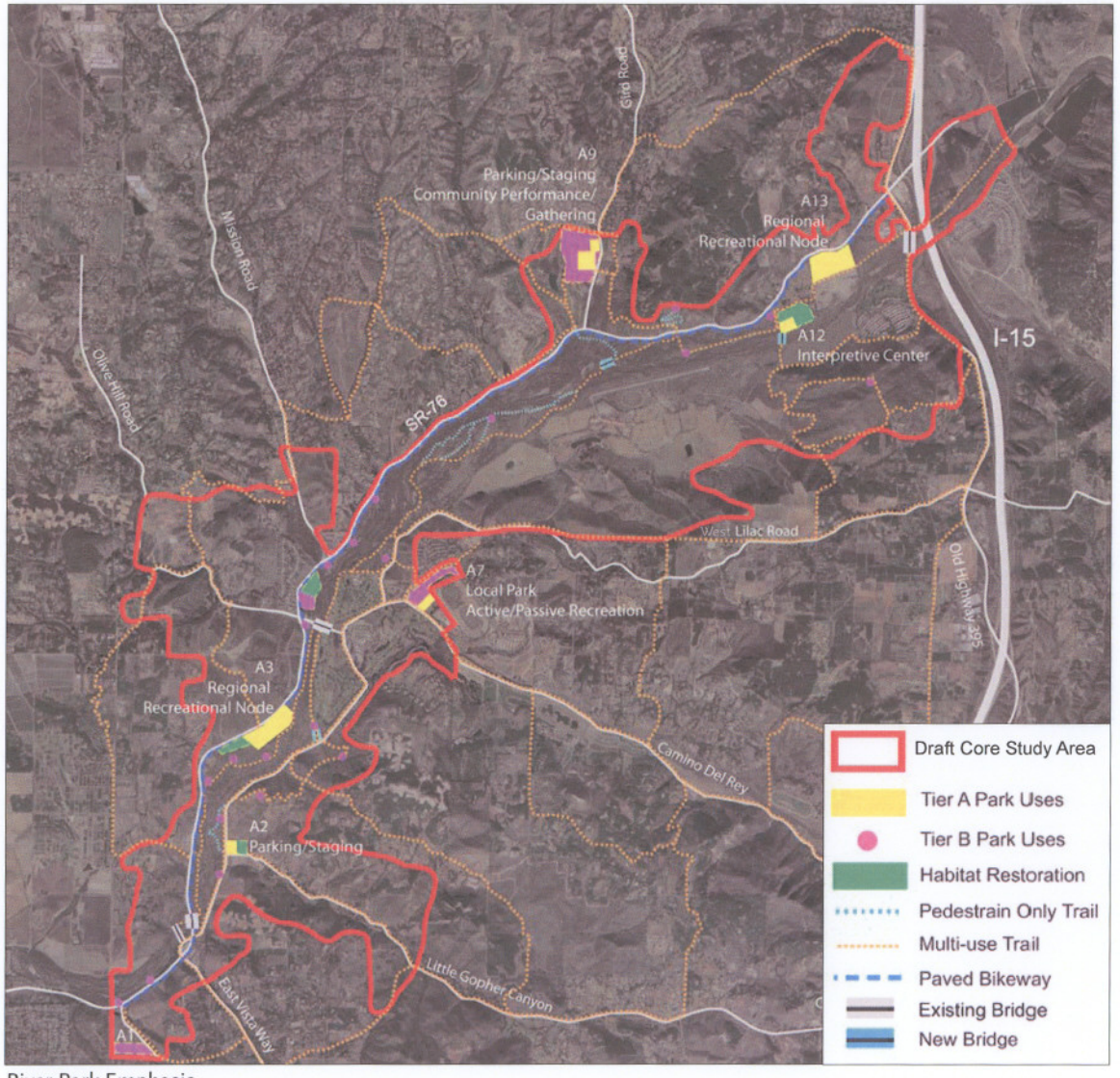
Establish one or two (where possible) continuous multi-use trails through the riparian zone, with additional upland trails.

Locate trails along presently disturbed, unofficial trial locations, minimizing disturbance, but allowing for interaction and observance of river resources.

Incorporate two to four river crossings (trail bridges) into the trail system to allow thorough accessibility to park amenities.



River Park Emphasis Conceptual Diagram



River Park Emphasis

PARK PROGRAMMING ZONES

Based upon the County and community input regarding desired programming, access points and traffic circulation within the CSA, and surrounding population densities, the Planning Team established three program zones, each with unique defining characteristics and opportunities. Within each program zone the Planning Team sought to balance recreational needs with preservation/ restoration goals. The following pages contain conceptual plans indicating potential park program distribution on each potential Tier A site, and across the River Park as a whole.

Zone 1

Zone 1, at the northeastern end of the CSA, is defined by its proximity to I-15 and relatively high existing/ planned population density east of the freeway: a new housing development south of the river and additional large housing developments proposed north of SR-76. Due to this residential density and the fact that many park users will arrive from I-15, Zone 1 represents the most significant active recreational demand. Two large potential Tier A sites were identified within Zone 1; the San Diego County Water Authority Site (A13) north of the river, and the Vessels East Site (A15) south of the river. Parking would be required in proportion to active recreation.

A minimum of one trailhead/ staging area within Zone 1 would be required to provide access to riparian and upland trails. A trail bridge would be required to connect the Vessels East site to the rest of the park, if it were developed for park uses.

Riparian restoration and arroyo toad habitat creation are proposed on or adjacent to both potential Tier A sites, expanding the relatively narrow riparian corridor and ensuring adequate toad migration corridors between upland and riparian habitats.

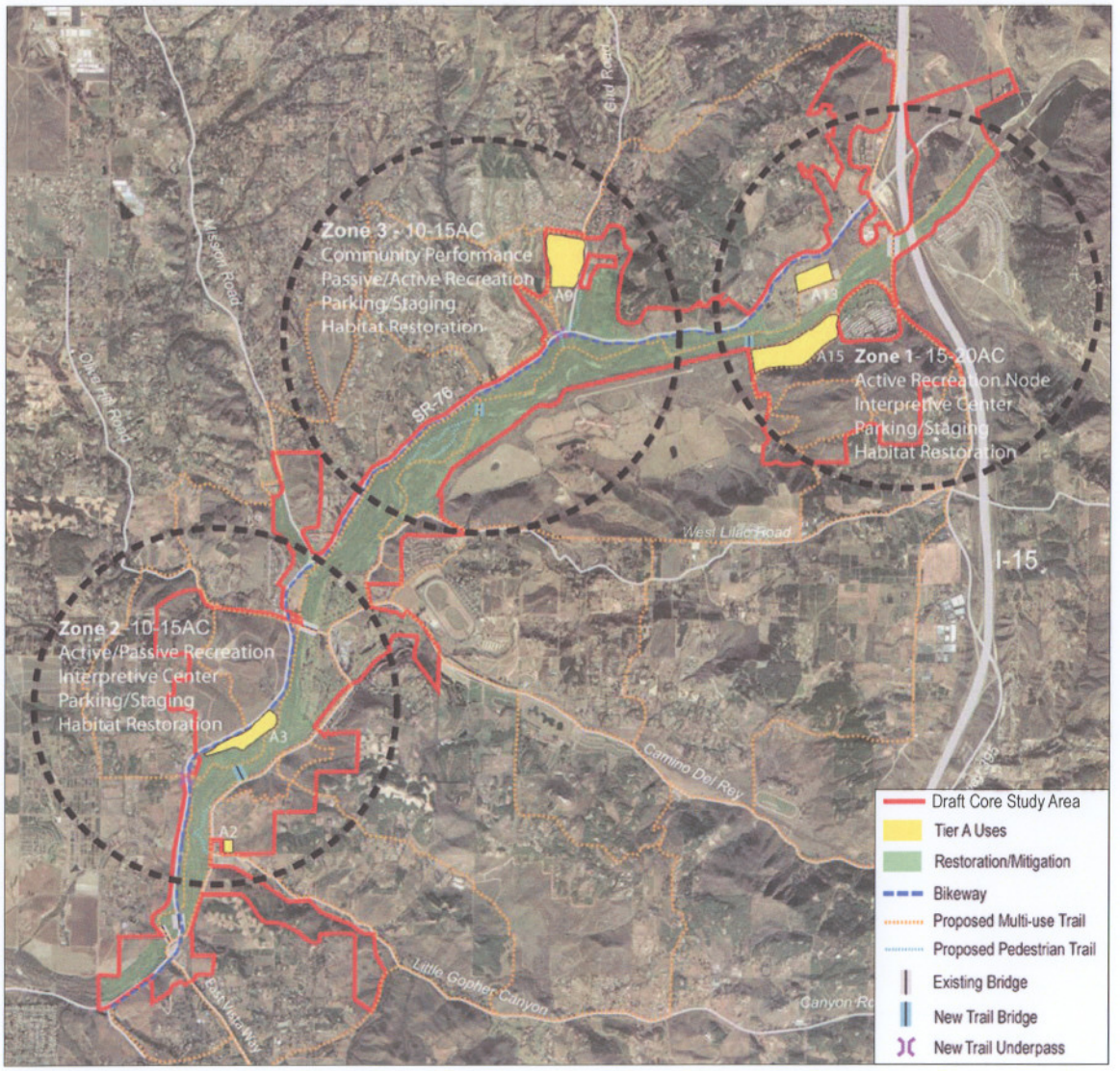
An Interpretive Gathering Area and Interpretive Gardens were also considered desirable on the +/- 54-acre Vessels East due to the amount of available land, the proximity of non-sensitive cultural resources, and proximity to the large protected riparian habitat reservoir in the center of the CSA.

Zone 2

Zone 2, the southwestern end of the CSA, is close to the Bonsall School and Community Center and the Oceanside boundary. These populations create a significant demand for active recreation, and by locating an active park node close to both ends of the CSA, park-related traffic congestion along SR-76 would be minimized. Bonsall school children could utilize sports fields when the school field is unavailable. The Model Airplane Site, is the only large Tier A park opportunity in Zone 2.

Parking would need to be provided in proportion with recreational amenities. A minimum of one trailhead/ staging area within Zone 2 would be required to provide access to riparian and upland trails. The Little Gopher Canyon Site, A2, would be an ideal location for a trailhead/ staging area because the access to the trail network south of the river. A trail bridge south of the Model Airplane Site would allow critical cross-channel circulation.

Another appropriate location for an Interpretive Gathering Area and Interpretive Gardens would be on the +/- 26-acre Model Airplane Site, due to its large size, strong connectivity to riparian resources, and connections to the trail network. Programming would include riparian restoration as an interpretive element. The historic Old Bonsall Bridge, one of the most visible cultural resources within the CSA, is also located in Zone 2.



Program Zones

Zone 3

Zone 3, in the center of the CSA, contains the widest floodplain and the largest, most isolated, riparian habitat area. The riparian zone in this area is contained by SR-76 and steep slopes to the north and Vessels Ranch to the south. The Planning Team determined that Tier A uses should not be located adjacent to this important riparian habitat area.

The only potential Tier A site identified in Zone 3, the +/- 42-acre Fallbrook High School Site, is located on a ridge overlooking the river corridor. This large site is suitable for a small node of active recreation, (designed to serve the local community) and a community gathering/ performance area with dramatic views of the river corridor as its backdrop. Its centrality within the CSA increases its suitability as a community gathering area.

A trailhead/ staging area on this site would provide great access to northern upland trails and to this large central riparian area.

SLR River Park Vision
The Master Plan outlines the creation of a dynamic open space legacy balancing recreation and preservation/ restoration/ interpretation of the San Luis Rey River's outstanding biological and cultural resources.

Planning Process
The Final Plan is the product of data gathering and analysis, coordination with other ongoing initiatives, extensive public input (MPAG, focus groups, surveys, public meetings), an evaluation of park program, site assessments, and discussions with current property owners.

River Park Components
The goal of the SLR River Park is to provide three fundamental components: +/-1600-acre open space preserve, +/- 40 acres of active recreational amenities, and a network of multi-use trails that stitch the park together internally while linking it to surrounding communities.

Final Plan

Open Space Preserve
The goal of the SLR River Park is to provide a +/- 1600-acre open space preserve, protecting in perpetuity a contiguous section of one of the County's biologically-richest river corridors, and providing critical habitat for several threatened and endangered species.

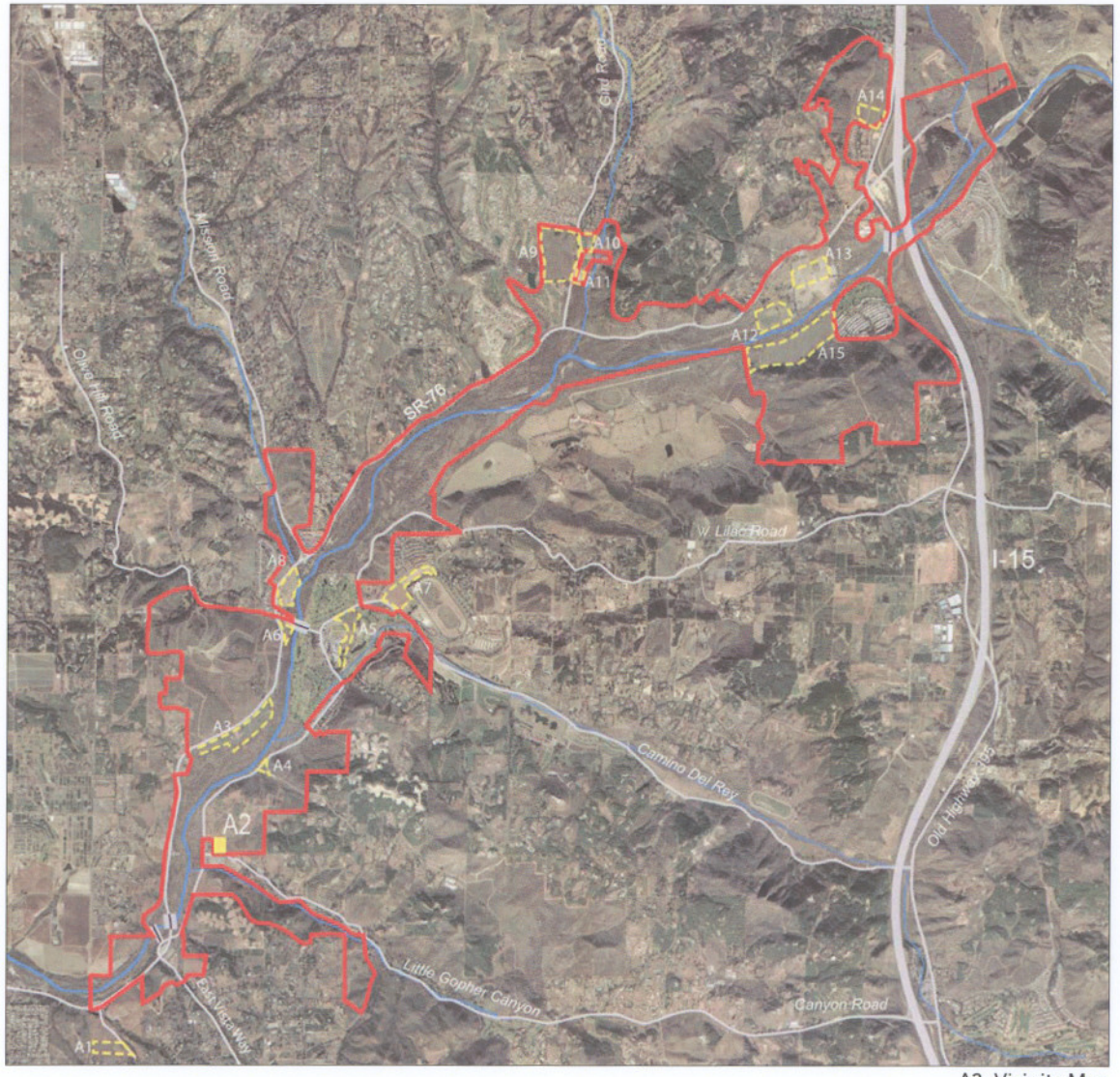
Recreational Amenities
The goal of the SLR River Park is to provide approximately +/- 40 acres of active recreational park development distributed between four Tier A park sites, in addition to numerous opportunities for smaller passive park nodes.

Multi-use Trail Network
A network of multi-use trails will provide thorough access to the park's diverse resources and amenities. Trail bridges will allow year-round circulation within the river corridor, while (a) trail underpass(es) enhance connectivity between riparian and upland areas.

Final Plan

A2- LITTLE GOPHER CANYON SITE

Site A2, the Little Gopher Canyon site, is one of the smallest Tier A sites, at approximately 4 acres. It is located near the intersection of Little Gopher Canyon Road and Old River Road. The existing conditions on site vary: the front half of the site is flat (next to the road) while the back half slopes up towards the hills. The front half is partially disturbed and partially vegetated with non-native grasslands, while the back has scrub/ chaparral vegetation. The site is outside of the 100-Year floodplain and contains no known cultural resources.



A2- Vicinity Map

A2- Concept Design

Because the Little Gopher Canyon site is isolated from the river corridor, it provides a good opportunity for a dog park (unleashed dogs are not compatible with sensitive habitat areas), combined with picnic and passive park facilities.

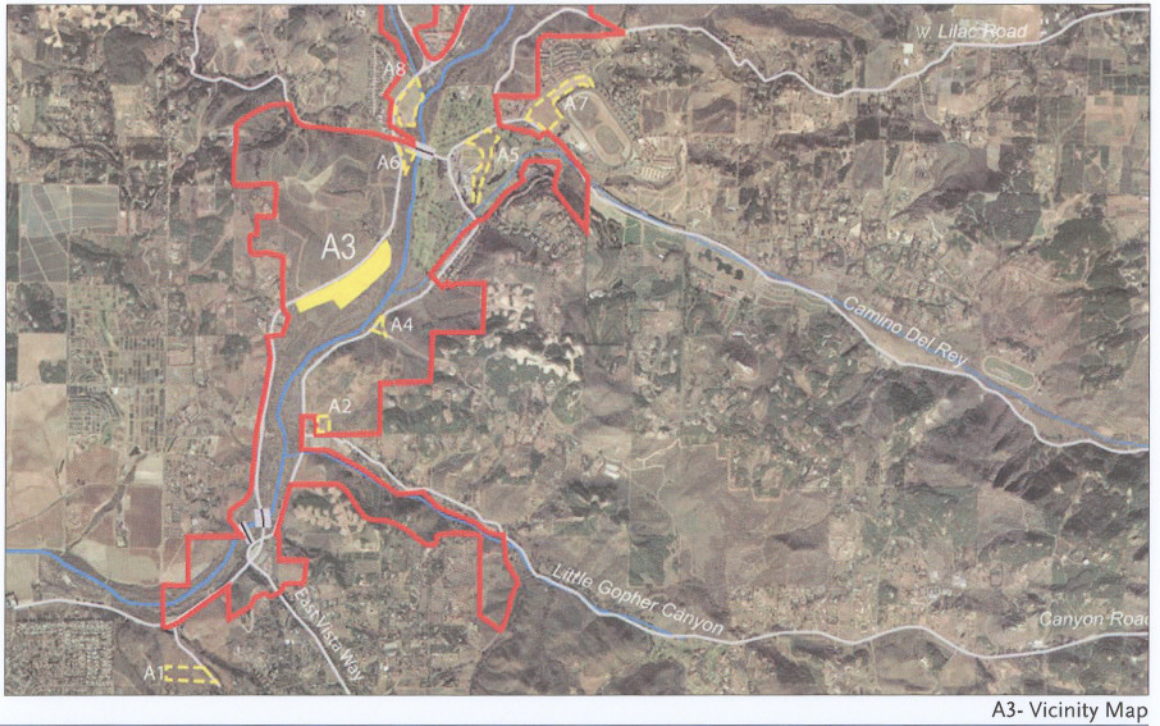
Located at the intersection of Old River Road and Little Gopher Canyon Road, this site also could be a very convenient trailhead and parking/ staging area for trails along the south side of the River Park. Many equestrians live and/ or board their horses along Little Gopher Canyon Road, making a parking/ staging area a logical use for a portion of this site.

Across Old River Road is the abandoned Walnut Grove Site, an ideal location for Tier B park uses such as a picnic area, adjacent to the riparian zone.

The Planning Team recommends possible habitat restoration along the east half of the site as an expansion of adjacent habitat areas.

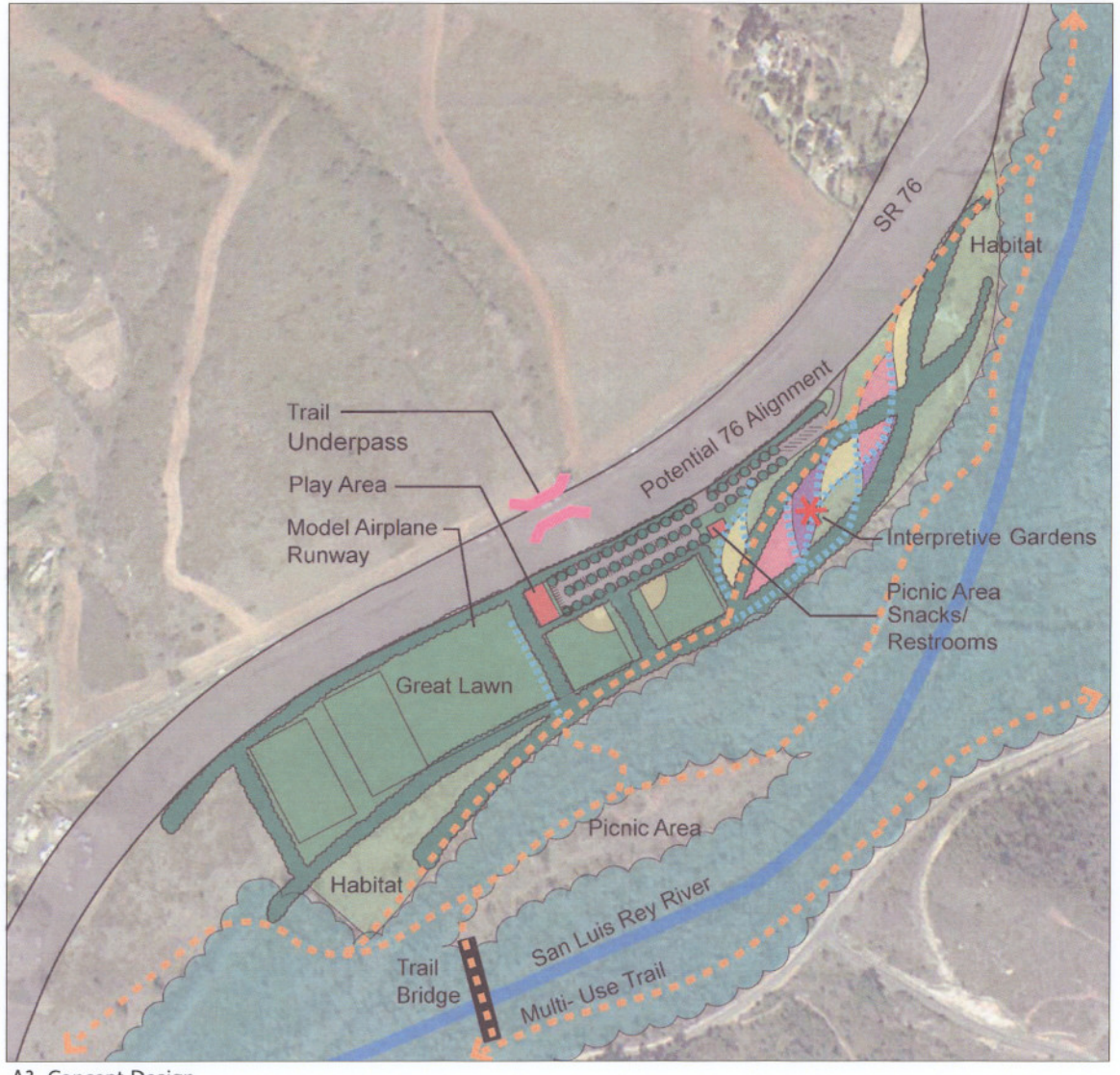
A3- MODEL AIRPLANE SITE

Site A3, the Model Airplane Site, is a proportionately long and narrow +/- 27-acre site, partially within the 100-year floodplain. The site is covered in non-native grasses and it is periodically mown to retain its disturbed condition. It is a relatively flat site (less than 10% slope) and is located both near the Bonsall School and Oceanside, at the southern end of the CSA. Currently, part of the site is used for model airplane flying.



A3- Vicinity Map

A3- Existing Site Conditions



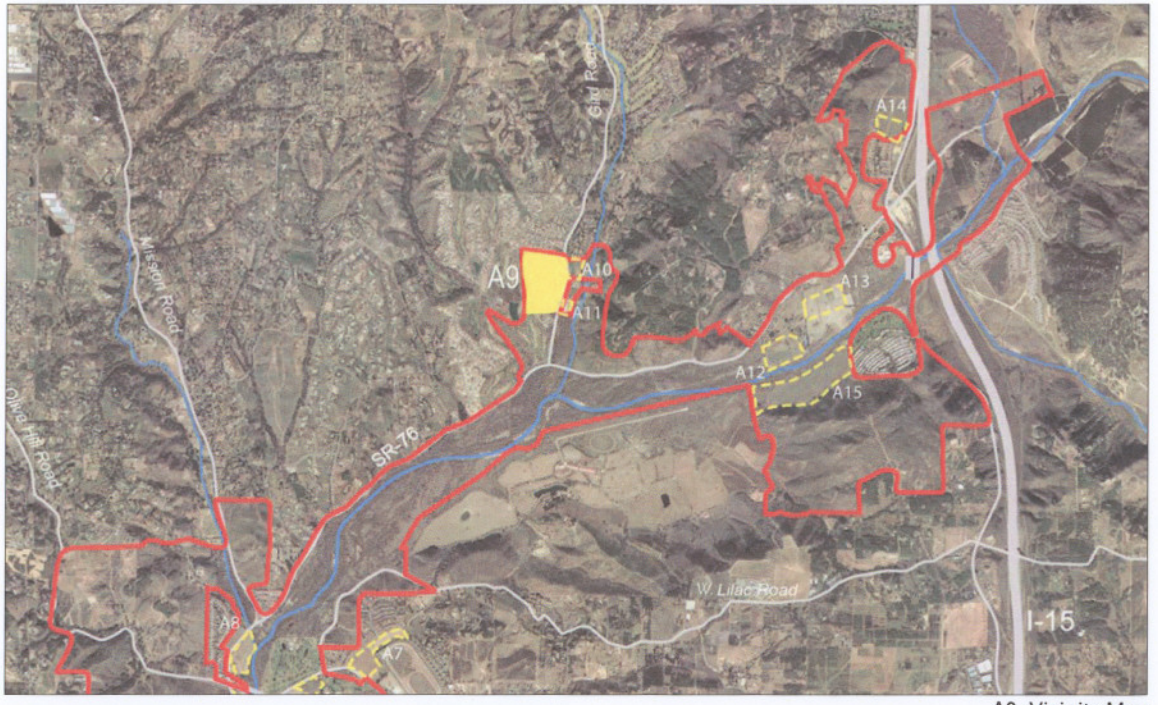
A3- Concept Design

Located between the river and SR-76, Site A3 has great access from both the road and the river trail system. Because it is partially within the 100-year floodplain, it is a prime location for park development. The lack of sensitive vegetation, cultural resources, and shallow slope gradients allow for many programming possibilities. Site A3 would be a prime location for a significant active recreation node and staging area because of its proximity to the Bonsall School and the residences of the southern end of the CSA.

Primary park spaces are defined by a series of sinuous interwoven tree ribbons which reference the shifting riverbed as it moves across the broader floodplain. This concept design accommodates two baseball fields and up to three soccer fields. The multi-use Great Lawn could be used for gatherings, informal sports, and model airplane flying. Additionally, an Interpretive Gathering Area and Interpretive Gardens would be well located on this site due its great access to the river resources and the trail network. Significant riparian habitat restoration would also be possible along the northeast edge of this large site, with the Interpretive Gardens buffering it from the active recreational fields.

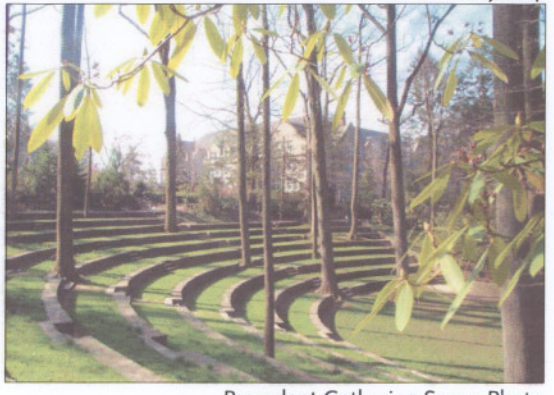
A9- FALLBROOK HIGH SCHOOL SITE

Site A9, the Fallbrook High School Site, is presently owned by the Fallbrook High School District, although they have determined that is not well suited for the development of a new high school. The +/- 42-acre site is covered in non-native grasses punctuated by peripheral groves of eucalyptus and oak trees. The site straddles a flat ridge overlooking the river corridor (completely out of the 100-year floodplain). It is located along Gird Road, approximately 1/3 mile north of SR-76. While most of the site is under 10% slope, the site's southern edge, defined by a series smaller ridges and valleys, is significantly steeper. The spectacular views and shallow rolling topography distinguishes this site from all other potential Tier A sites while providing unique programming opportunities.



A9- Vicinity Map

A9- Existing Site Conditions



Precedent Gathering Space Photo

A9- Concept Design

The flattest northwest corner of the site provides a good opportunity for two football/ soccer fields framed by tree rows (part of the existing site vocabulary) that block winds while retaining views over the river corridor. Parking for the sports fields should be provided along the north edge of the site.

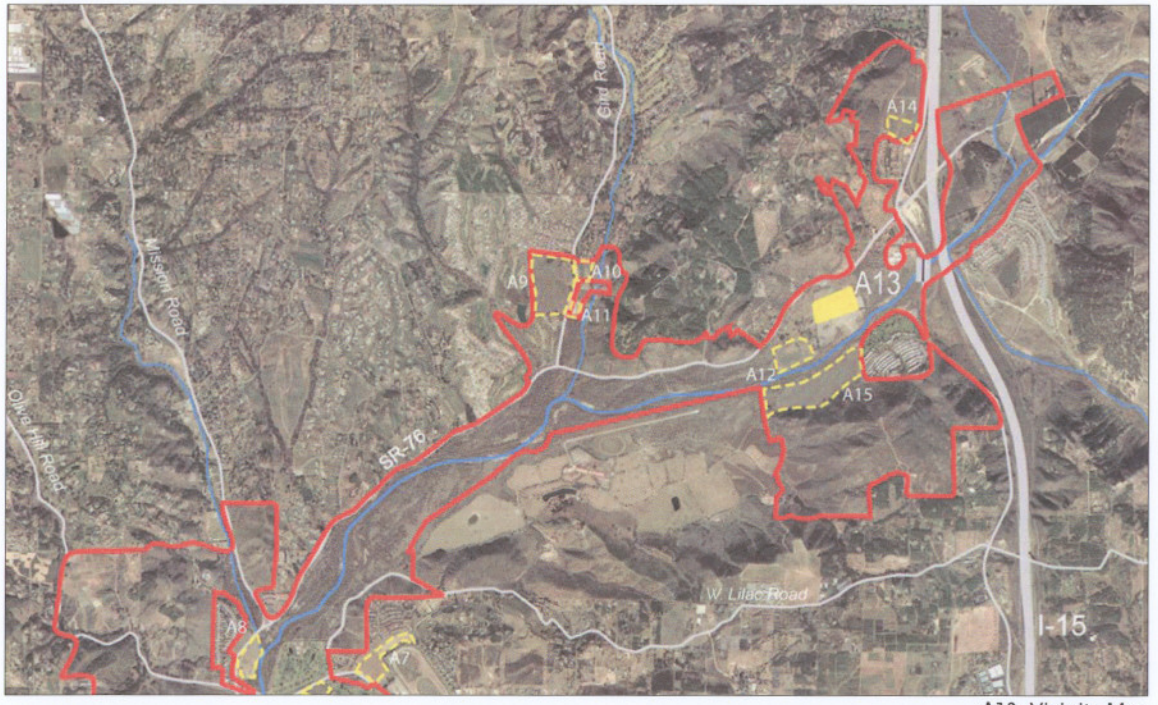
The proposed community gathering area would naturally fit into one of the site's shallow southern valleys. The gathering area would be planted with a loose grove of shade trees, and terraced to maximize views. The site would be protected from sun (shade trees) and winds (topography), while commanding spectacular views over the river corridor. The site's location in the center of the CSA would make it easy to access from either end of the River Park. The community gathering area could accommodate diverse performances and small events such as local plays or Native American gatherings, while also serving as a shaded picnic grove for smaller groups. A separate parking/ staging area along the Gird Road provides necessary gathering area parking and access to the northern upland trail system.

The majority of the site should be preserved/ restored as open grassland habitat with nominal additive improvements such as trail improvements and park benches.

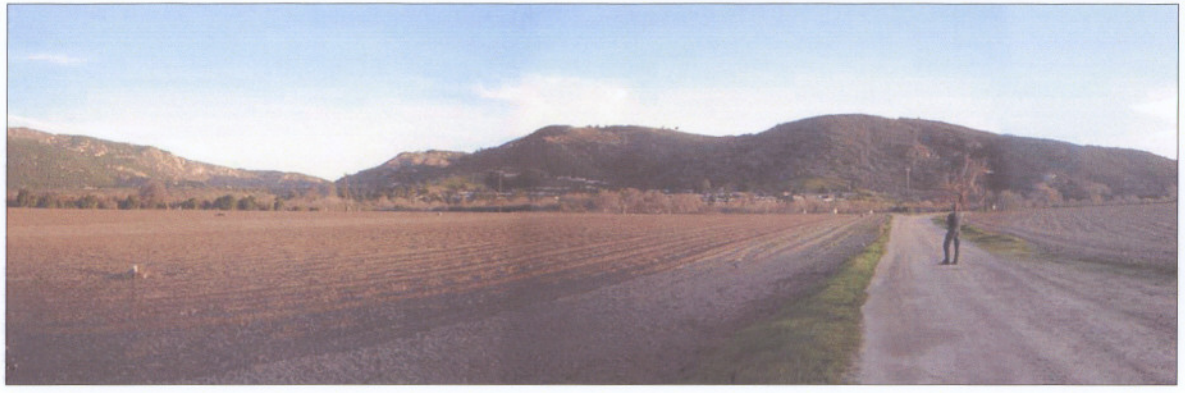
A13- SAN DIEGO COUNTY WATER AUTHORITY SITE

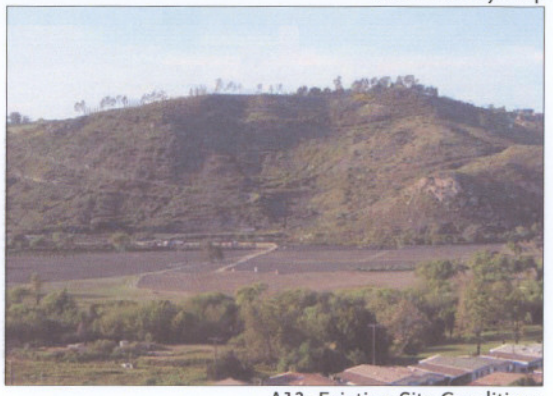
Site A13, presently owned by the San Diego County Water Authority, is a +/- 10-acre agricultural site adjacent to both SR-76 and the river corridor. Located near the SR-76/ I-15 intersection, this is the most visually prominent and easily accessible of the potential Tier A sites. For these reasons, Site A13 could serve as an effective and dramatic park gateway for the larger River Park.

The site is gently sloped towards the river and would not require significant grading to accommodate recreational fields and other Tier A programming.



A13- Vicinity Map





A13- Existing Site Conditions

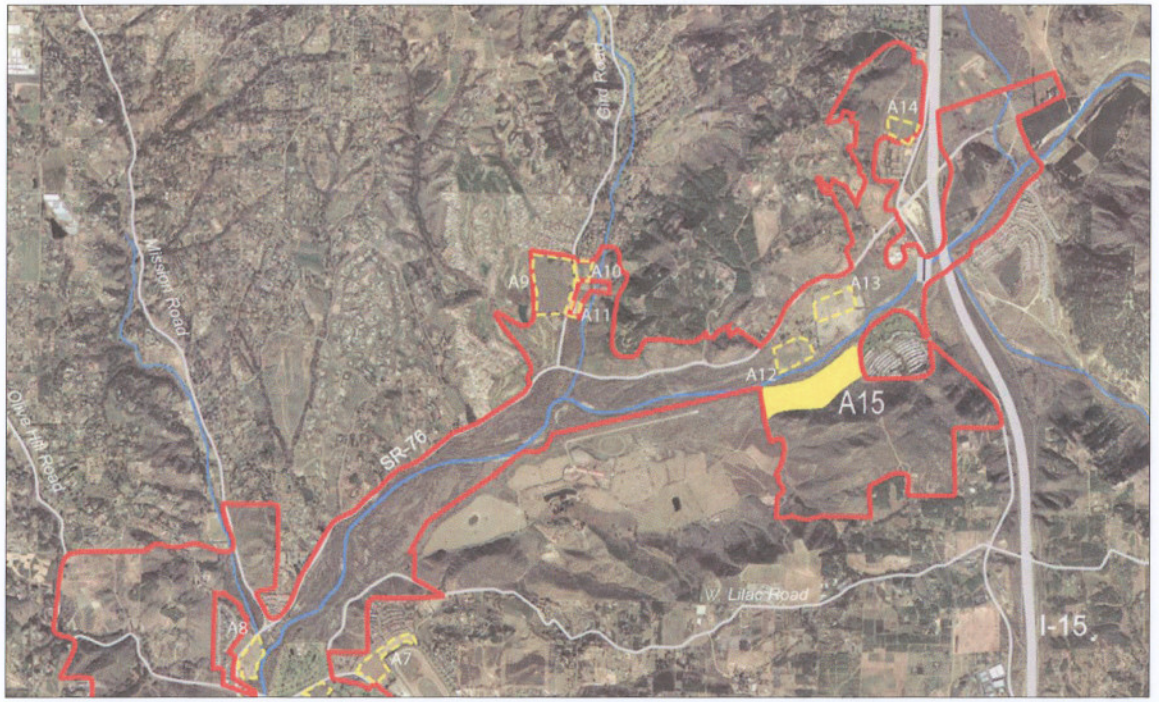
A13- Concept Design

Located at the northeast end of the CSA, Site A13 could support sports fields, parking, and a staging area as well as considerable riparian restoration and arroyo toad habitat creation. The concept plan indicates overlapping multi-use sports fields: two adult soccer fields, one football or kids soccer field, and two baseball fields. The sports fields are surrounded by a tree buffer to block winds and provide a greater degree of light containment. Recreational amenities would especially benefit park users living near this end of the CSA as well as those arriving to the park from I-15. Park-related traffic along SR-76 will be minimized by locating park amenities at both ends of the CSA.

The Planning Team positioned this park node far enough away from existing SR-76 to allow for the potential expansion/ realignment of the highway. In the event that the highway is not relocated southward, the concept design could be moved closer to the existing highway, allowing more room for riparian restoration. Parking lots, permanent architectural structures, and utilities should be outside of the 10- year floodplain, to minimize flood-related maintenance. The consolidated parking/ staging area will include horse trailer parking at one end. Multi-use park trails are located outside of the tree buffers or away from fields to separate horses from areas of high activity.

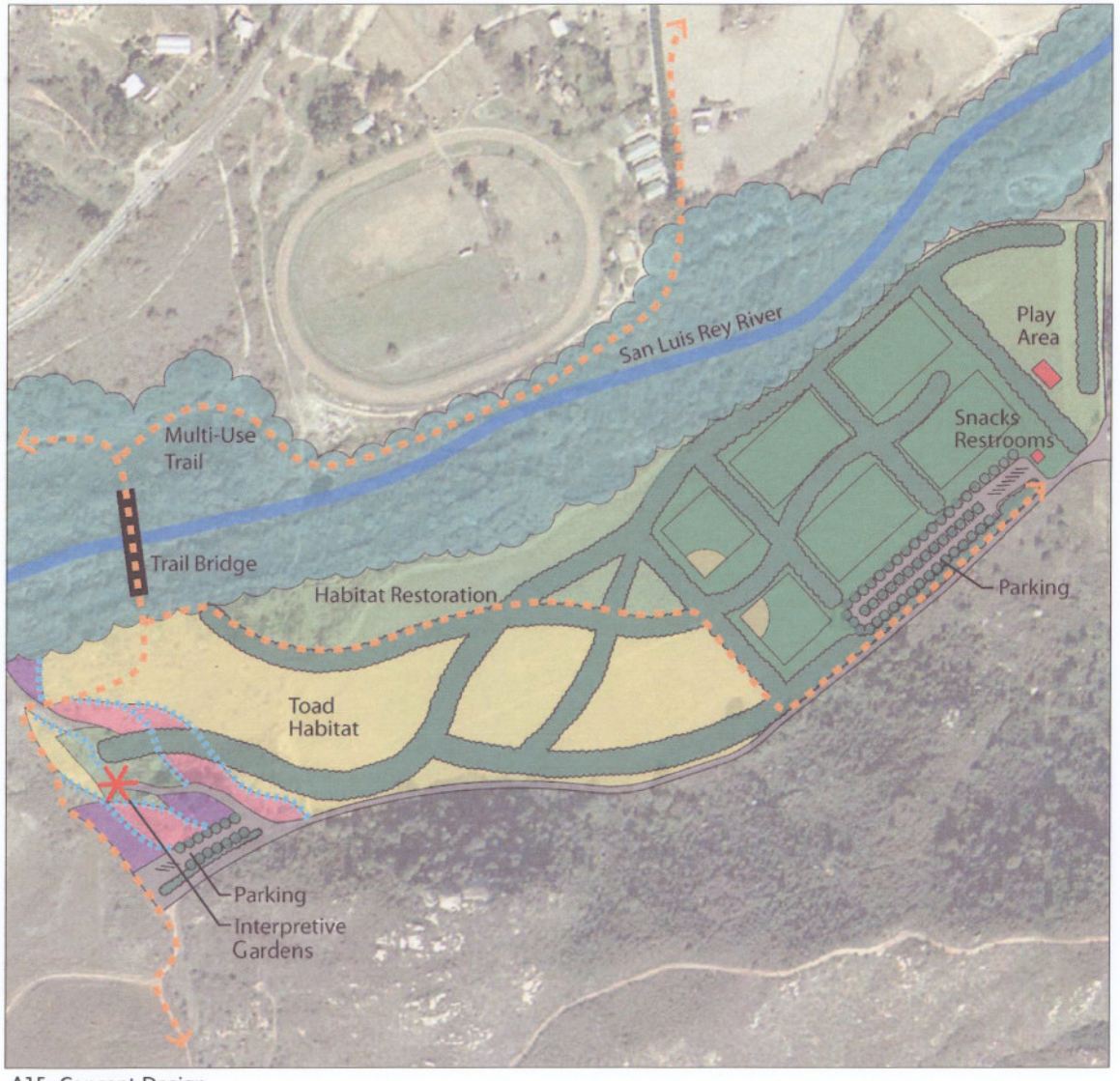
A15- VESSELS EAST SITE

At +/- 54-acres, Site A15, Vessels East, is the largest potential Tier A site. It is presently owned by Frank Vessels Family Trust and is categorized as agricultural land. It is regularly mown to retain its disturbed condition. The northern half of the site falls within the 10-year floodplain. Access to the site would be provided from Old Highway 395. The site is relatively flat, making it an ideal site for Tier A park programming.



A15- Vicinity Map

A15- Existing Site Conditions



A15- Concept Design

The Vessels East site is large enough to accommodate a variety of Tier A park uses, including a significant node of active recreation. The concept design shows four soccer fields and two baseball fields set within recreation rooms framed by sinuous bands of trees which provide sideline spectator shading while containing night lighting. A passive play and picnic area on the east edge of the site, also framed by shade trees, separates the retirement community from active recreation.

An Interpretive Gathering Area and Interpretive Gardens would be well located on the western end of the site, closest to the widest riparian zone in the center of the CSA, and isolated from surrounding residential development and noise/ light from I-15. Between the active recreation and interpretive areas, riparian restoration and a toad habitat corridor are proposed. In this configuration, the concept design balances recreational and interpretive needs with habitat restoration and creation.

Combined tree-shaded parking/ staging areas are set along the south side of the site, on higher ground out of the 10-year floodplain. If this site were developed with park uses, a trail bridge would be necessary to connect it other River Park resources.

ACTIVE RECREATIONAL NODES

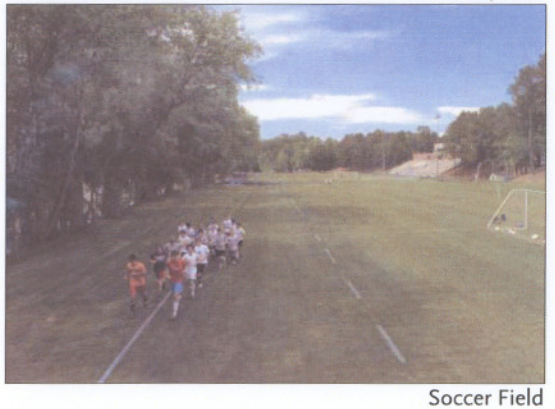
The type of material used for the sports fields in the San Luis Rey River Park should take into consideration that natural grass fields need downtime to recover from intense use period. Field closures for recovery should be rotational so that each recreational node has several fields in operation. These field closures should be factored into decisions regarding numbers of fields to include within each active recreation node.

Multiple-field park nodes are recommended as they can share utilities, service, access, and parking facilities while accommodating tournaments. Multi-use fields (overlapping fields) more efficiently accommodate a wider range of activities within a smaller area, but tend to require more maintenance and more frequent closures due to intense/ frequent year-round use.

Additional amenities that should be considered at active recreational nodes are night lighting, parking and bathrooms. Snack bars, picnic tables, and play areas were other amenities that were frequently requested by community members in association with active recreation. Sustainable materials and systems should be utilized whenever possible.

Play area

Bathroom



Soccer Field

Baseball Player

PARKING AND STAGING AREAS

Parking and staging areas for the San Luis Rey River Park shall be integrated into the park landscape utilizing natural light-colored surfaces (to reflect heat) and semipermeable paving (to increase infiltration), and shade trees to create a more pleasant environment. Vegetative drainage swales and/or detention areas may be used to filter and infiltrate surface runoff. Combined parking/ staging areas should be located close to access roads and out of the 10-year floodplain. To facilitate horse trailer access, these lots should have diagonal pull-through parking stalls at one end. The number of required parking stalls within each Tier A park site is proportional to qualities of park program on each site. Approximately 66 parking spots should be provided for a single soccer field. For each additional field on the same site, the number of additional required stalls per field decreases.

Parking and Staging Area Precedent

Horse Trailer

Parking next to Restored Habitat

TRAILS

Multi-use trails within the San Luis Rey River Park will conform to County standards: 8'-width with a crushed stone or stabilized dirt surface. To the extent possible, the River Park trail network will implement the intention of the County Trails Master Plan. In most locations there will be two multi-use trails within the floodplain, one to the north of the river and the other to the south. A paved bike path along the south side of SR-76, and several small hiker-only trail loops will supplement primary multi-use trails. Official improved trails will follow, where possible, established paths of existing unofficial trails and desire lines.

One or more trail underpass(es) (under SR-76) may be desirable to connect riparian trails with upland trails to the north. If Site A3 is purchased for the River Park, then an underpass at this location would be appropriate. A trail underpass should be tall enough to accommodate a mounted horse and rider. Trail-sharing etiquette should be posted on multi-use trails and enforced by rangers.

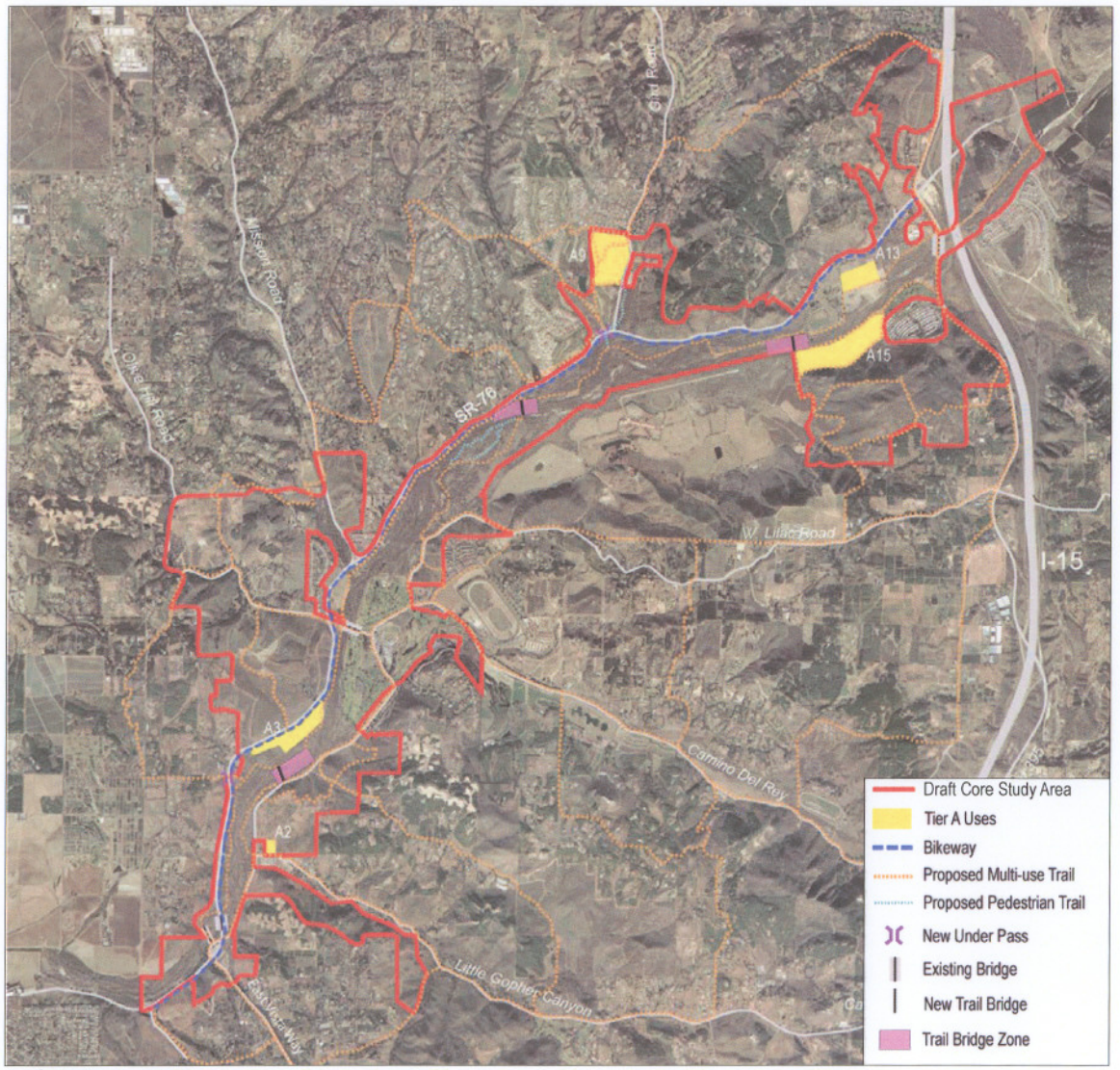
As negotiations with property owners unfold, sensitive species locations are assessed, and park nodes are developed, conceptual trail locations will be solidified. In some locations, fencing may be requested by adjacent property owners or required due to the sensitivity of adjacent habitat.

Trail Precedent . credit: www.imba.com

Trail Bridge Precedent

Trail Precedent

Trail Bridge Precedent



Trail Bridge Locations

To accomplish the primary goal of providing continuous year-round access throughout the CSA, two or three trail bridges will be required. Most of the river's edge throughout the CSA is shrouded by dense riparian vegetation, and is largely invisible to park users. Trail bridges will allow park users to get out over the water and view the actual floodway and riparian edge, and could become key locations for interpretation and appreciation of the river resources.

The diagram (left) indicates the three best locations for trail bridges, considering park program distribution, desired circulation, access locations, and property ownership. If Site A15, Vessels East, is not acquired by the County, then the bridge near this site would not be necessary. Pre-fabricated modular steel truss bridges would be the most cost effective and least intrusive bridge design. This type of bridge design can span up to 250'. Bridges over the river's broad and shallow floodway would likely need to be several hundred feet long, thus requiring at least one central reinforced concrete support column. The bridges would be constructed above the 100-year flood level, although stair/ ramp access points would be within the 10-year flood zone and would likely need maintenance/ cleaning after significant storm events.

PARK IMPLEMENTATION

Land Acquisition
After completion of the Draft SLR River Park Master Plan Document, and before approval of the final Master Plan, the County must complete a programmatic Environmental Impact Report. During this process, the County will begin negotiations with land owners to acquire high priority Tier A sites. The County will only acquire properties from willing sellers. The owners of only five of the fifteen potential Tier A sites identified within the Master Plan are currently willing to discuss the sale of their properties to the County. The acquisition of Tier A sites should be the County's first priority as the park moves toward implementation; only these sites can accommodate the community's active recreational needs. The County has begun to survey two of these Tier A sites to asses value and the appropriateness of acquisition.

Park Improvements
After acquisition of property, the County could begin detailed design of park improvements. Public participation will be an important component of the detailed design of any significant park improvements. With the exception of the Fallbrook High school site, finalization of the design of Tier A sites should not occur until Caltrans solidifies plans for the expansion/ relocation of SR-76.

As negotiations with property owners proceed, sensitive species locations are assessed, and Tier A park nodes are developed, conceptual trail locations will begin to solidify. If the owners of properties conceptually identified for park trails are not interested in selling, the County should pursue trail easements through those parcels. If trail easements are not possible through a piece of land, trail locations will need will need to be adjusted to go around unavailable parcels. The goal of creating continuous trails throughout the riparian zone may be only incrementally achievable over a long time period.

Ongoing Coordination
As plans for the San Luis Rey River Park continue to evolve, it is important that the County continues to coordinate with Caltrans regarding the expansion SR-76. It is the County's intention that Caltran's required mitigation will be integrated into the open space portion of the SLR River Park. The San Luis Rey River Park planning process should also continue its coordination with the North County MSCP (Multiple Species Conservation Program) to ensure that the River Park adheres to, and helps realize, the conservation objectives of the NCMSCP.

CONCLUSION

The San Luis Rey River Park will be an outstanding recreational and open space legacy for San Diego County residents. The park balances accommodation of the recreational needs of surrounding communities with the establishment of a large open space preserve, protecting one of the most biologically-diverse segments of the SLR river corridor, and critical habitat for several threatened and endangered species.

Encouraged interaction with the park's wealth of cultural/ biological resources will instill park users with an broad understanding and appreciation for the river's dynamic natural systems and the ecological richness that attracted Native Americans to inhabit the corridor thousands of years ago.

Recently the "Groves" site (pictured left) was identified as a possible Tier A site. If acquired by the County of San Diego, a portion of the site will be developed as a park and a portion will be protected as preservation land.

The above image represents the current Core Study Area Boundary, as of November 30, 2007.