

Attachment 3

Statewide, National and Global Significance

Statewide Significance

The San Diego River is a highly valued natural, historical, cultural, archeological, recreational, and economic resource of statewide significance. The San Diego River Area is the “Birthplace of California” and holds the key to the State’s heritage. The Area transcends regional boundaries for numerous reasons, but primarily due to its enormous historical and archeological significance. With human inhabitants for approximately 10,000 years, the San Diego River Area boasts no less than twenty-nine State Historic Landmarks, three State Parks, rich archeological resources, and many California “firsts” (see list below). In 1769, Father Juan Crespi wrote about the San Diego River in a letter reporting back to Spain on his travels, “If the River is permanent, it may prove in time to be the best of those discovered in all of California”. Today the San Diego River Watershed is home to over one-half million people, including five Native American tribes, and at least twenty-five state and federally listed endangered and threatened plant and animal species.

The San Diego River is also of significant economic value to the State. In 2003 alone, the San Diego River and vicinity welcomed over twenty-six million visitors (compared to two million visitors to Lake Tahoe and vicinity) helping to support an annual tourism industry in San Diego of over five billion dollars. San Diego tourism, which is the third largest industry in San Diego (following manufacturing and the military), contributes to the overall state economy.

National Significance

The enabling statute which created the San Diego River Conservancy found the San Diego River to be of recreational, scientific, educational and cultural value to “*California and the nation*”. The San Diego River and vicinity is considered the “Plymouth Rock” of the west coast due to its national and state historical significance. There are four National Historic Landmarks within the San Diego River vicinity (Old Mission Dam and Flume, Mission San Diego De Alcala, San Diego Presidio) and much of the upper watershed is in the Cleveland National Forest.

Also of great importance are the numerous state and federally listed Endangered or Threatened species residing in the vicinity of the San Diego River. This is critical habitat for the endangered coastal California gnatcatcher, least Bells vireo, the arroyo toad, and the southwestern pond turtle, among approximately 20 others.

In addition, segments of the River have also been designated as “impaired” pursuant to the federal Clean Water Act Secion 303 (d). Accordingly, the San Diego River has been ranked relatively high for corrective / restorative action.

The San Diego River & Cedar Creek are currently being considered for designation as a federal Wild and Scenic River. Furthermore, there are portions of the headwaters which have been proposed for federal wilderness designation. These two federal designations will recognize the remarkable natural environment of the San Diego River watershed which should be protected for

the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Global Significance

The San Diego River and vicinity is (part of) one of only five “Mediterranean Ecosystems” on the planet. Occupying only 2% of the land surface but harboring some of the richest (if not the most) biodiversity on earth, the Mediterranean Ecosystem is considered more rare and threatened than the Tropical Rainforest Ecosystem.

The San Diego River and vicinity is also (part of) one of the world’s twenty-five “Ecological Hotspots”. Also known as “Biodiversity or Endemism Hotspots”, these areas are so designated because they are (1) reservoirs of “extraordinary biodiversity” with large numbers of endemic species (i.e., species found nowhere else in the world); and (2) face extreme threats from human activities having already lost at least 70 percent of their original natural vegetation. These twenty-five areas are the earth’s highest conservation priorities whose protection is of critical global importance.

Furthermore, San Diego is also a world-renowned tourist destination, attracting millions of visitors annually from around the globe and generating in excess of five billion dollars in tourism revenue.

In summary, the San Diego River and vicinity is a highly valued natural, historical, cultural, archeological, recreational, and economic resource of statewide significance:

- Birthplace of California
- “Plymouth Rock” of the west coast due to its historical national and state significance
- (Part of) one of only five “Mediterranean Ecosystems” on the planet¹
- (Part of) one of twenty-five “Ecological Hotspots” in the world²
- 29 State Historic Landmarks connected with the San Diego River
- 4 National Historic Landmarks connected with the San Diego River
- 3 State parks (Old Town State Historic, Cuyamaca Rancho, Anza Borrego)
- 1 Cleveland National Forest in the headwaters (includes waterfalls)
- Native Americans have lived along the River for 10,000 - 11,000 years
- First presidio / European settlement in California and the west coast of the United States

¹ Mediterranean Ecosystems: <http://www.interenvironment.org/med-5>

² Ecological Hotspots: <http://biodiversityhotspots.org/hotspots/home>

- First mission in California (originally located in present day Presidio Park; currently located upstream of original location)
- First dam in California
- First engineered irrigation system (6-mile flume from dam to mission)
- Rich in archeological resources
- First (or one of first) American Flag raising in California
- First unofficial capitol of both “upper and lower California” and residence of first Mexican Governor of California
- First transcontinental mail route started/ended along the San Diego River
- First church in California
- Oldest commercial trail (La Playa Trail runs along San Diego River to Old Town State Historic Park)
- Oldest cemeteries in California of European origin are along the San Diego River
- Anchor of the statewide mission chain
- Life blood for early residents (from all origins)
- Six local jurisdictions in watershed today
- Highest human population of any watershed in San Diego County (approximately 509,000)
- Home to five Native American reservations today (Inaja, Cosmit, Barona, Viejas, Capitan Grande)
- Home to at least 25 federal and state endangered or threatened listed species today
- State Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP) / San Diego Multiple Species Conservation Plan (MSCP) is currently being implemented within the SDRC jurisdiction. Hundreds of millions of local, federal, and state dollars have been invested in NCCP/MSCP land, regulatory reform, and conservation.
- 52-mile long San Diego River from Julian (historic gold mining town) to the Pacific Beach; Approximately 67 named tributary streams to San Diego River plus numerous additional unnamed tributaries. Watershed drains approximately

440 square miles.

- San Diego River Watershed is tributary to the Pacific Ocean and one of California's most popular beaches (water quality impacts recreation and habitat beneficial uses).
- Beneficial uses of the San Diego River and its tributaries include municipal and domestic supply (MUN); agricultural supply (AGR); industrial supply (IND); industrial process supply (PROC); contact and non-contact water recreation (REC-1 and REC-2); warm freshwater habitat (WARM); cold fresh water habitat (COLD); wildlife habitat (WILD); and rare, threatened, or endangered species (RARE). The beneficial uses at the River mouth include REC-1; commercial and sport fishing (COMM); estuarine habitat (EST); WILD; RARE; marine habitat (MAR); migration of aquatic organisms (MIGR); and shellfish harvesting (SHELL).
- Portions of the San Diego River, River mouth, Forrester Creek, and Famosa Slough are water quality impaired, i.e., currently designated on the Clean Water Act Section 303(d) list as not meeting state water quality standards for one or more of the following pollutants: bacteria, low dissolved oxygen, phosphorus, total dissolved solids, pH, and eutrophic conditions. Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) calculations for bacteria are currently under development to restore beneficial uses and achieve bacteria water quality objectives in the San Diego River, River mouth, and Forrester Creek.
- San Diego River Watershed includes five water storage reservoirs of over 200,000 acre-feet, including the largest in San Diego County.
- The Santee/El Monte Aquifer, below the San Diego River, is the largest aquifer in San Diego County. The storage capacity of the Santee/El Monte Aquifer is more than 50,000 acre-feet. Storage capacity of the Mission Valley Aquifer is 40,000 acre-feet.
- Largest fire in the State's recorded history – the October 2003 Cedar Fire burned 74% of the San Diego River Watershed.
- 26.4 million tourists (from around the world) visited the San Diego River and vicinity in 2003 (Compared to 2 million visitors to Lake Tahoe Conservancy Area).
- \$5.3 billion generated in San Diego tourism revenue in 2003. San Diego tourism, which is the third largest industry in San Diego, contributes to overall state economy.