

Ballona Creek Renaissance
(we call ourselves "BCR")
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Culver City Ballona Creek Bikeway Project

Culver City plans to transform a section of the Ballona Creek bikepath from a barren corridor of concrete, asphalt and dirt into an attractive venue, with benefits for the environment, recreation and education.

The project stretches from Overland Avenue west to the pedestrian bridge (about 960 feet). It adjoins the L.A. County Library and Farragut Elementary School playground and will feature these amenities:

- Permeable pedestrian path, ADA (handicapped) accessible
- Native, drought-tolerant trees & plants
- Decorative river rock retaining wall
- Bike path repair or repaving
- A metal tube fence between the bikepath and creek channel to preserve views of the creek
- Drainage devices and a "swale" (a shallow depression in the ground) to capture storm run-off
- Interpretive signage and other educational displays
- Safety and directional signs, lighting, emergency "call-boxes," and security cameras
- Decorative custom metalwork entrance gate. The gate will be moved eastward toward Overland Avenue from its current location bisecting a heavily graffiti'd mural. The mural is being considered for restoration in a separate project.



Artist's conception of entrance area from Overland Avenue next to Library.

Three public agencies own or control the property-- Culver City Unified School District, LA County Public Library, and LA County Dept. of Public Works/Flood Control District. Culver City is generally responsible for cleaning, repairing and otherwise maintaining the service road/bikepath.

The project began in July and August, 2007, with a series of three public workshops led by Lawrence R. Moss & Associates, Landscape Architects.

The first two workshops offered participants the opportunity to walk the site, take photos with disposable cameras, note its good and bad features, and provide comments and recommendations. Representatives from Culver City Police and Public Works Departments were on hand to answer questions. For the third workshop, the consultant team brought back some suggested conceptual designs for participants to review and provide further comments. Several BCR boardmembers participated, offering comments and insights based on our familiarity with the entire creek and similar waterways in other parts of California. City staff and the design team also worked closely with the School District and LA County, soliciting their input.

This first phase of the project-- planning, design, construction documents and a safety/security review by the Culver City Police Department-- was funded by a \$60,000 grant from Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, using funds from California's 2002 Proposition 50 River Parkways provisions.

In September, the City Council of Culver City unanimously approved the conceptual design, authorizing staff and the consultant team to apply for a grant of



A current view shows chain link fencing and barren, eroding sprayed concrete banks.

\$948,693 by October 19 to fund the construction and five years of maintenance and operations. Grant awards are expected in June, 2008. Anticipating success, the team will begin construction drawings immediately. The project timeline calls for awarding the construction contract in August, 2008; beginning construction in August or September, and completing it by early 2009.

The new pedestrian bridge between Overland Avenue and Sepulveda Blvd and the entrance area at Centinela Avenue were the first public-oriented improvements on the bikepath. Both contain seating areas and native and drought-tolerant plants. Both are popular and appreciated. The bridge was a City of Culver City project (see our February and August 2004 newsletters, available on our website). The Centinela entrance area was constructed by the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) two years ago (see our June 2005 newsletter). More MRCA bikepath entrance improvements are in design stages for McConnell Avenue, Inglewood Avenue and Sepulveda Blvd, all within the City of Los Angeles.

For more information on the Culver City project, contact John Rivera by email at john.rivera@culvercity.org or by phone at 310.253.5616.



Same view after, artist's conception

(See these photos in color in the online edition on our website.)■

Cleaning Runoff at Oros Street

At my home and probably also yours, water from sprinklers, hoses, and sometimes rain runs off the grass and driveway, down the street into the storm drain, out to Ballona Creek or other large storm channels and ultimately to the ocean. The runoff carries lawn chemicals, oil and grease from vehicles, trash, animal wastes and other pollutants, damaging the habitat of marine plants and animals, shorebirds, and human swimmers.

Oros Street is a tiny two-block residential street in the Elysian Valley, between the Golden State Freeway and the Los Angeles River, ending in little Steelhead Park, abutting the pedestrian trail and service road along the river. Stormwater and dry-weather runoff used to run directly into a drain at the end of the street and then into the river. Now an extensive demonstration project by North East Trees (NET) captures the runoff and removes trash and other pollutants as the water percolates into the ground beneath the park.

Parkways between the street and sidewalks were excavated and perforated pipes installed beneath the soil to capture rainwater. Sidewalks were rebuilt to drain water into the parkways. More pipes were installed beneath the streets. Drains were installed in the streets and smaller drains in the sidewalks in front of private driveways to capture runoff coming from homes and yards.

All this water was directed into Steelhead Park, which was excavated to a depth of eight feet to put in the water treatment system. Traps allow the system to be cleaned of trash and large particles. Polluted water flowing into the park is cleaned by bacteria which develop to feed on oil, grease and other pollutants as the water seeps from perforated pipes and percolates downward through gravel, sand and soil. Some of the water is taken up by the park's trees and plants. The design and testing indicate that the system can handle an inch of rain over a 24-hour period, more than most storms in L.A. Anything



Perforated pipes below the soil and plants collect rainwater.

over that can run over into the old drain system. Steelhead Park was redesigned and improved in the process with few external signs of what's going on eight feet below.

The Oros Green Street Project was a collaboration between North East Trees and the City of Los Angeles, county, state and federal agencies as well as neighborhood residents. It was funded through grants and services from the California Water Quality Control Board (over \$500,000) and the City of Los Angeles' Proposition O Bond Act (\$385,000) with close coordination and services from the Los Angeles Department of Public Works, Bureau of Street Services, Bureau of Sanitation and Bureau of Engineering. Council President Eric Garcetti and member Ed Reyes helped expedite the permitting process. This project also marks the first Proposition O-funded project to be completed, celebrated in a dedication ceremony on July 26, 2007.



Metal grating captures runoff from the driveway.



North East Trees describes itself as a nonprofit environmental and youth education organization dedicated to "restoring nature's services to improve the quality of life in resource-challenged communities". Founded nearly 20 years ago, North East Trees has planted over 30,000 trees, created over 35 pocket parks and other landscape improvements along the Los Angeles River and engaged, trained and employed thousands of local youth to achieve its mission. Similar projects are under consideration for Ballona Creek.

Runoff is cleaned 8 feet below little Steelhead Park as it percolates down into the soil.

Pacific Protection Initiative: Legislative Update

Our last issue, June 2007, featured five bills then in the California legislature collectively dubbed the "Pacific Protection Initiative." Strongly supported by Heal the Bay, they contained provisions to reduce certain kinds of pollution which cause enormous environmental damage to our oceans. Here's an update:

AB 258 (Krekorian) ("Nurdles") promotes zero discharge of tiny preproduction plastics referred to as "nurdles" from plastic industry facilities.

Status: The bill passed both houses of the legislature and was signed by the governor!

SB 898 (Simitian) was intended to address lost and abandoned fishing gear in the oceans.

Status: This bill was passed by the Senate, the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee and the Assembly Natural Resources Committee. But then it was gutted and amended in Assembly Appropriations so that it no longer addresses derelict fishing gear. Heal the Bay is now looking for a new vehicle for the bill in hopes of keeping it alive as a 2-year bill.

SB 899 (also Simitian) targets toxic additives to plastics such as Bisphenol-A which mimics the sex hormone estrogen and would phase out these toxics.

Status: The bill was passed by the Senate and the Assembly Natural Resources Committee but was not heard in the Assembly Environmental Safety and Toxics Materials committee. It's now a two-year bill.

AB 904 (Feuer) requires that food service packaging be either compostable or recyclable.

Status: The bill reached the Assembly floor but was not voted upon, so it also becomes a two-year bill.

AB 820 (Karnette) This bill would prohibit the sale or distribution of expanded polystyrene ("Styrofoam") food containers at state facilities after January, 2009.

Status: AB 820 was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee for cost reasons and did not make it out for a floor vote, so it's dead for now.

The LA County Board of Supervisors also postponed considering a ban on plastic bags proposed by its own staff. Heal the Bay asks us to urge the Supervisors to pass it and offers information and a petition at http://www.healthebay.org/actionalerts/2007_08_27_plasticbaghearing/default.asp

Summary: one success, one failure, and four to work on next year.

Restoring a Channelized Stream

People look wistfully at the 1920s photo of Ballona Creek and ask if concrete can be removed and vegetation planted to make it look more natural.



That photo of the creek makes us think nostalgically of a simpler era, but in fact during storms, the creek often flooded adjacent properties. Curves, rocks, and vegetation slowed the flow, causing water to back up until it poured over the banks. In the 1930s, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began straightening the creek and enclosing it in concrete to speed the flow of stormwater runoff into the ocean. Unsightly but effective.

Although many consider the concrete channels to be an unattractive necessity, a few projects have emerged which embody a more natural way to provide both flood protection and a place of beauty for relaxation and recreation. Vista's Creek Walk Park in north San Diego County is one such place. Five BCR boardmembers visited Vista in August for a meeting and stopped off to see their lovely project, built in 2001, where one long block of the Buena Vista Creek channel became a park with a natural creek bottom, curves,

vegetation, rocks, walkways, grass and sitting areas. Standing on the bridge across the creek one can see, on one side of the bridge, the channel embedded in concrete and, on the other side, a relaxing, natural-looking park. (See photos below.) Buena Vista Creek is much smaller and narrower than Ballona Creek, but the same principles apply.

But what happens when a substantial rain arrives? In this case, stormwater rushes over the improvements, leaving silt and trash and possibly damaging some of the vegetation. When it dries out, it must be cleaned up. Bill Fortmuller of Vista Parks and Community Services says "Surprisingly, after a couple days of cleanup the view is pretty close to [normal]. Our biggest maintenance problem is silt buildup in the creek." If construction is not planned properly, the torrent could also "scour" the natural bottom away, leaving holes that could undermine the structures.

One alternative is to construct underground side channels for the excess flow, bypassing the improved area. The stormwater flows into the side channels and rejoins the creek beyond the improved area. This is feasible from an engineering standpoint but very costly to retrofit an existing channel.

A second method of providing top-of-bank amenities without decreasing water volume capacity is to terrace the sloped bank. This approach was suggested in the 2003 Culver City Ballona Creek and Trail Focused Special Study.



Buena Vista Creek looking upstream...



and downstream

Around the Watershed

Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook Update

Our February 2007 issue featured the building of the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook park. Here is an update from Barney Matsumoto of California State Parks:

- The project is 55-60% complete, and project completion date has been extended to Spring 2008, due to a few construction items.
- Major concrete work and most of the roof structure has been completed on the three buildings.
- Electrical work is being installed, along with other mechanical systems.
- The entry road from Jefferson Blvd up Hetzler and to the Visitor Center has received its first asphalt cover, creating a smooth access road with curbs, gutters, and storm drains. The final asphalt cover will be applied at the end of the project.
- The entire trail system has been graded, and the central climbing trail with recycled concrete steps is being installed.
- The utilities work along Hetzler Rd. and Jefferson Blvd. has been completed. Soon the project will begin tapping into the water line in the adjacent residential neighborhood.
- Upcoming work includes the glazing/storefront and internal improvements on the Visitor Center. Exhibit designs are roughly 30% completed.
- Landscape plantings have been growing under contract for the past 9 months and are ready to be shipped to the site when the irrigation system is completed.

IKEA's Battle Against Plastic Bag Proliferation

The LA Times reported in July that IKEA, the Swedish home products retailer, now charges 5¢ for each plastic bag at checkout and also offers a large reusable tote bag for 69¢. Signs at the cash registers explain the environmental reasons and note that every nickel spent on the bags is donated to American Forests, a nonprofit group in Washington, for the planting of trees to offset carbon dioxide emissions.

Predictably, customer reaction is mixed, with some irritated that they now have to pay for something that formerly was free and others applauding the move. (Customers are free to use shopping carts to transport purchases to their vehicles without using any bags, if they wish.)

According to IKEA as quoted in the Times article, Americans use about 100 billion polyethylene plastic bags a year, and fewer than 1% of them are recycled. The company's goal in the U.S. is to cut its customers' annual plastic bag consumption by at least 50% in the first year of the program to 35 million. After IKEA introduced its program in Britain last year, bag use plunged 95%.

Seemingly unnoticed are two facts: (1) sometimes you can get by without any bag, and (2) paper and plastic bags are reusable if you bring them back to the store when you shop. It's legal to use Trader Joe's bags at Ralphs (and vice-versa), and you needn't feel embarrassed. Re-using is even better than recycling.

Annual Creek Cleanup held September 15

About 250 community volunteers took part in Culver City's 18th annual Ballona Creek cleanup. Echo Horizon School, BCR, and Kiwanis organized volunteers near bike path entrances at Duquesne and Overland Avenues and Sepulveda Boulevard, respectively. Heal the Bay representatives also helped inform people about urban runoff and cleanup issues. According to Cathi Vargas of Culver City Public Works, volunteers assisted by City trucks collected 6.75 tons of trash. Countywide, 11,000 volunteers at inland sites and beaches removed over 80,000 pounds of trash, coordinated by Heal the Bay.

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You can receive the BCR newsletters by e-mail as a PDF file (requires Adobe Acrobat reader) instead of hard copy. Advantages: photos are in color, web links are clickable, and we save money on printing and postage. If that's your preference, send your request to secretary@ballonacreek.org

Reaching Out

Two of BCR's primary functions are outreach and advocacy. We fulfill them in part with our booths of educational materials about the creek and watershed at public events and presentations at meetings of community, business and environmental organizations.

Our booth at Culver City's annual Fiesta la Ballona in August was enjoyable for both visitors and staff. In addition to informative materials, photos, and copies of our newsletters aimed at adult visitors, we also had little activities appropriate for young visitors. At the two-day event, almost 50 visitors signed up for continuing contact by BCR.



Friend of the Creek Doris Davis introduces her granddaughter to birds of the creek at BCR's Fiesta booth.

Milton Street Future Linear Park

Two State agencies, the Mountains and Recreation Conservation Authority (MRCA) and the Baldwin Hills Conservancy, have acquired a strip of vacant land along Ballona Creek for a proposed linear park, a passive recreation site with educational elements regarding the environment of the creek. The land lies between Milton Street and the creek bikepath, immediately west of the rest area and entrance to the creek bikepath at Centinela Avenue, created by the

MRCA in 2005. The parcel is a narrow strip, 40+ feet deep and very roughly 1000 feet long, encompassing 1.2 acres.

Here, the bottom of the creek is no longer concrete but natural. The mixture of fresh water flowing downstream and tidal waters creates a brackish estuary that supports many plant and animal organisms and species of birds that feed on them. One sometimes sees hundreds of coots (chicken-sized black birds with white beaks) paddling in the stream.

The project might also incorporate techniques to allow rain to sink into the ground, recharging groundwater instead of running off into storm drains, another educational opportunity.

Native Plants in Kenneth Hahn Recreation Area

The 47th Assembly District (Rep. Karen Bass) Environmental Commission sponsored a tour of the native plant garden at Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area on Saturday, October 20. This project demonstrates the benefits of using native plants in landscaping to attract butterflies, other insects and birds, which feed on the seeds, nectar, fruit or leaves and build nests. A 2001 assessment by the Natural History Museum listed 166 bird species known to have occurred in the Baldwin Hills (158 natives, 8 naturalized non-natives.)

The garden emerged in the spring of 2006 as a joint project of L.A. Audubon Society, California Native Plant Society, Baldwin Hills Conservancy, non-profit Friends of the Baldwin Hills and many volunteers. Student interns have provided maintenance such as weeding. The garden is being expanded by removing invasive plants, such as Pampas Grass and Fennel, which crowd out natives and otherwise adversely affect the soil or shade. This hard work is provided by volunteers and community service groups. It's an ongoing, never-ending project.

Restoration expert Margot Griswold described to the audience the challenges of reintroducing plants and animals into a changed environment. L.A. Audubon Society also provides an educational curriculum for school groups. Email Garry George, Executive Director, at garrygeorge@laudubon.org for information.

Editor: Bobbi Gold

La Ballona Creek Renaissance Program is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Our Tax ID # is 95-4764614. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. Please mail contributions to Ballona Creek Renaissance, P.O. Box 1068, Culver City, CA 90232. For address corrections, additions or deletions, please call (310) 837-3661 or email secretary@ballonacreek.org.



P.O. Box 1068 Culver City, CA 90232

Address correction requested

OCTOBER 2007 NEWSLETTER

BALLONA CREEK RENAISSANCE invites you to become a Friend of Ballona Creek!

\$1,000 \$500 \$250 \$100 \$50 \$25 \$ other

I would like to volunteer my time I would like to join the board of directors/advisory council

I would like to donate goods, materials or services (such as office or storage space, computer or office equipment, food for special events, printing, etc.)

Other _____

Name/Title _____

Organization/Firm: _____

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