



Legislation Text

File #: 23-0581, **Version:** 1

Recommendation to adopt resolution in support of the formation of the Lower San Gabriel River Recreation and Park District; direct City Clerk to file the resolution with the Local Area Formation Commission - Los Angeles (LAFCO-LA); and, authorize City Manager to approve the final District Boundary Map on behalf of the City. (Citywide)

Parks provide many community benefits such as encouraging physical activity, improving health and fitness, mitigating against urban heat effects and air pollution, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions through trees and greenery. However, according to the CalEnviroScreen 4.0, many census tracts along the Lower San Gabriel River - largely defined by the Whittier Narrows Dam on the north and the Pacific Ocean in the City of Long Beach (City) to the south - are categorized as “disadvantaged communities” due to disproportionate exposure to poor air quality resulting from congested freeways such as the I-605, I-5, SR-91, and the I-405. Furthermore, many disadvantaged communities along the Lower San Gabriel River suffer from a severe lack of access to recreational opportunities and outdoor park space. Within City limits, every census tract abutting the Lower San Gabriel River north of Pacific Coast Highway contains less than one acre of park space per 1,000 residents.

The single greatest barrier to new park space along the Lower San Gabriel River is lack of funding and resources to maintain and operate those parks. The recently approved State water bond (Proposition 1) provides funding opportunities for the revitalization of the Lower LA River watershed, including a \$30 million direct allocation to the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) and funds for urban creek restoration. However, these resources are strictly limited to acquisition and development of facilities and cannot be used for operations or maintenance of park facilities. A lack of local resources often means that parks cannot be developed, let alone properly maintained.

While the Lower San Gabriel River serves an important purpose as a flood protection and control channel, it also presents a unique opportunity to introduce new parks and recreation space and revitalize natural habitats. Furthermore, the Lower San Gabriel River also presents an opportunity to enhance the micro-mobility system. Currently, the San Gabriel River features a Class-I bike path that connects to numerous points of interest. Enhancing the micro-mobility system in the Lower San Gabriel River will create a more diverse, convenient, and accessible transportation network, while reducing congestion and promoting new economic activity.

Lower San Gabriel River Recreation and Parks District

As a regional challenge, lack of park space and access to the Lower San Gabriel River

requires a regional solution. Recognizing the myriad challenges jurisdictions face in coordinating park projects and funding, in 2021, Senator Bob Archuleta authored [Senate Bill 268](https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220SB268) <https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220SB268> authorizing Los Angeles County cities along the Lower San Gabriel River to form the Lower San Gabriel River Recreation and Parks District (District). The purpose of the District would be to advance park developments and activities along the San Gabriel River that exceed the boundaries of the individual cities.

The District Board would be comprised of 15 members in total. This includes the eleven cities along the Lower San Gabriel River: Artesia, Bellflower, Cerritos, Downey, Hawaiian Gardens, Lakewood, Long Beach, Norwalk, Pico Rivera, Santa Fe Springs, and Whittier. Additional members would be appointed to the Board, including two members of the public appointed by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors; the executive officer of the RMC; and one representative of a nonprofit organization that serves the Lower San Gabriel River region and specializes in open space public education and outdoor activities appointed by the initial board of directors. District boundaries are anticipated to extend one mile from the river following major roadways. A draft map is attached, and the final boundary map for the District will be presented to each member City for approval. The City Manager or an appointee would be authorized to approve that map.

The City of Pico Rivera will serve as the lead city applicant for the formation of the District. Senator Archuleta identified the City of Pico Rivera as the most suitable agency to lead the establishment of the District due to the City's leadership in developing a comprehensive framework to expand access to parks and open space along the San Gabriel River and the Rio Hondo. The City of Pico Rivera, in partnership with the RMC, have been actively engaging and informing local city managers, public works directors, and parks directors along the Lower San Gabriel River about the overall background, intent and purpose, and next steps associated with SB 268.

The District is intended to help promote the development of open space and parks for the benefit of communities along the Lower San Gabriel River by increasing interjurisdictional coordination and resources. By providing a District to assist with advancing recreational opportunities along the river, there will be greater access to funding and the burden of organizing activities, ensuring public safety, and developing additional facilities will be shared or in some cases lifted from individual cities. While most existing funds for parks are limited to acquisition or development, the District could bring more flexible resources to use for ongoing costs.

Staff recommends the City Council approve the attached Resolution supporting the formation of the District through the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) process. The City will be one of the first cities to support following the City of Pico Rivera's lead on the formation of the District.

Staff further recommends that, once the Board is formed, the City advocate for Board

representation to be weighted according to population and geographic territory represented along the Lower San Gabriel River. The initial Board would comprise 15 members, each with one vote, as described above. Since the City represents roughly one-fifth of the Lower San Gabriel River area and a significant portion of the population in the District, the City should request to have a more equitable vote structure, whereby votes on key issues like those that have a direct fiscal impact on the member jurisdictions would require both a majority vote of the Board members and a weighted-vote based on geographic territory and population in order to be adopted.

This matter was reviewed by Deputy City Attorney Anita Lakhani on May 18, 2023, and by Revenue Management Officer Geraldine Alejo on May 2, 2023.

The RMC is currently in the process of forming the District through LAFCO. While the City's Resolution is not a requirement for the establishment of the District, it is recommended that the City submit the Resolution in support of RMC's efforts prior to completion of the LAFCO process, anticipated later this year.

This recommendation is to adopt a Resolution in support of the formation of the Lower San Gabriel River Recreation and Park District and approve the district boundaries on behalf of the City. The long-term fiscal impacts of District Board participation are unknown. The Board, initially consisting of 15-member representatives, would be responsible for developing the District's funding plan. Overall funding needs and sources will be based upon the amount and types of services to be provided by the District. The District would have authority to apply jointly for funds, solicit private donations and potential public-private partnerships for funds to operate and maintain parks, and leverage funding by fee assessment or tax transfer of the entities within the District service area.

It is not expected that the Board will recommend a fee assessment, as the cities in the District boundaries have not expressed an interest in leveraging this funding mechanism. Furthermore, voter approval would be required for any taxes applied within the District. The Department would return to the City Council for land use approval on any future projects recommended by the Board within the City's boundaries. This recommendation has no fiscal impact beyond the budgeted scope of duties and is consistent with City Council priorities. There is no local job impact associated with this recommendation.

Approve recommendation.

BRENT DENNIS
DIRECTOR
PARKS, RECREATION & MARINE

APPROVED:

THOMAS B. MODICA
CITY MANAGER