

BACK TO NATURE: Master Plan Sets Forth Goals for Historic Lower Arroyo Park

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LOU MACK / Los Angeles Times

The view south of Lower Arroyo Park, its natural wooded area sliced by concrete flood control channel.

BACK TO NATURE

Master Plan Sets Forth Goals for Historic Lower Arroyo Park

By SUE AVERY *Times Staff Writer*

PASADENA—For centuries a quiet little stream meandered undisturbed through lush native plants in the Arroyo Seco. Small animals roamed the ravine.

Now a concrete flood control channel lines the creek bed. The stream is dry and the plants are dead or dying. Graffiti abounds.

Welcome to Lower Arroyo Park, a 2-mile-long, 34-acre haven for equestrians, joggers, archers, fly-casters, picnickers, nature lovers and vandals.

Eight years ago, the city declared the park, which extends from the Holly Street bridge to the South Pasadena boundary, a historic landmark. Two years ago, the city declared—through the establishment of a master plan for the area—its intention to eradicate some man-made eyesores and return the park to a more wilderness-like state.

\$67,000 Grant From State

The first step will come this summer when trails and the adjacent stream bed will be repaired with a \$67,000 grant from a state agency, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.

Long-range plans include screening the channel fence with native shrubs, limiting new recreational uses and cleaning up a casting pond. The master plan states that a total restoration of the lower Arroyo to its former natural state is impossible because of such factors as the concrete channel.

Meanwhile, the city is encouraging groups that use the park to do their part in maintaining the area. A 6-year-old umbrella organization, the Friends of the Arroyo Committee, is about to incorporate as a nonprofit organization and hopes to coordinate citizen participation.

To educate the public about the park, its uses and the renovation plans, the committee will sponsor a picnic from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. April 13 in the park's only parking lot.

Mayor Encourages Participation

The committee has been encouraged by Mayor William Bogaard, who represents the portion of the city that includes most of the lower arroyo.

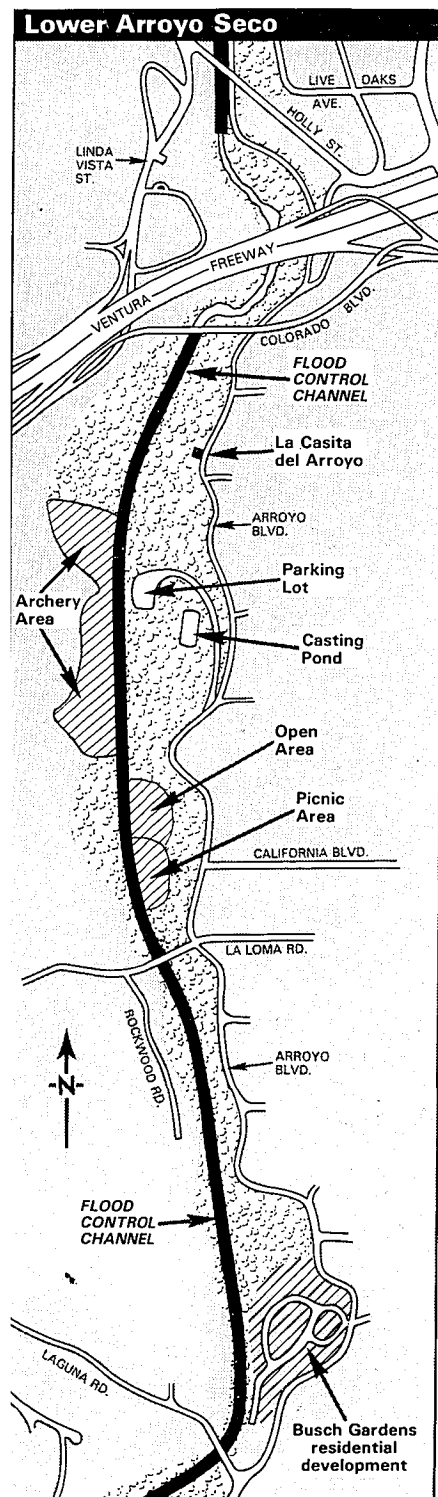
"Groups used to be active only when there was a crisis" involving the park, Bogaard said, "but we need the continuity of a permanent organization".

In the past, said Riley Caudill, the city arboriculturist who is overseeing restoration, each group of park users was interested only in preserving its use of the park. But he said that in recent years, the groups have reached a consensus on keeping the area natural.

One of the most active organized groups at the park, and a member of Friends of the Arroyo, is Equestrian Trails Inc., a statewide organization interested in the acquisition and preservation of riding and hiking trails.

The group patrols the park and a portion of the surrounding wilderness area under an agreement with the

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DON CLEMENT / Los Angeles Times

Pasadena has developed a master plan for Lower Arroyo Park, which stretches from Holly Street on north to South Pasadena city limit.



LOU MACK / Los Angeles Times

Bob Morales of Pasadena uses Lower Arroyo Park to practice his archery technique.

ARROYO: A Back-to-Nature Master Plan

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Police Department, looking for vandalism, fires and accidents, said spokesman Charles Moore. The riders carry two-way radios so they can call police for assistance.

The main equestrian trail runs the length of the lower arroyo along the eastern edge of the flood control channel.

Vandalism has become an increasing problem with the proliferation of gangs, Moore said. The vandalism includes graffiti and destruction of picnic tables and benches.

The park is perhaps the most undeveloped portion of the Arroyo Seco area, which stretches from the San Gabriel Mountains to the Los Angeles River at the junction of the Golden State and Pasadena freeways. Portions of the arroyo are in South Pasadena and Los Angeles.

The Arroyo Seco was home to the Hahamog-na Indians before it came under the domain of the San Gabriel Mission in 1771, according to an article in a recent newsletter of Pasadena Heritage, a private historic preservation group. The article said that after secularization of the missions, the arroyo had a succession of owners, including Dr. John S. Griffin, who sold portions of the area to the San Gabriel Orange Grove Assn. in 1873. The early ranchers and citrus farmers used the arroyo for water and wood.

In 1912 Pasadena, Los Angeles and South Pasadena bought 14 miles of the arroyo to be set aside as wilderness parkland.

Lower Arroyo Park itself includes La Casita del Arroyo, a city-owned house that has been adopted by the Pasadena Garden Club as a project to improve and maintain. South of the house is the parking lot. The park also includes the casting pond and the archery ranges.

"That area is the most congested (in the lower arroyo) and needs help the most," Caudill said. "We are trying to get any group with interest in the area to adopt that part of the park."

South of the casting pond and

parking lot is a natural area that has picnic tables but is used mostly by equestrians and joggers. And just north of the South Pasadena boundary is Busch Gardens, a private residential development and one of the few areas of the lower arroyo where there are homes.

City officials and park users generally agree that the element most incongruous with the natural setting is the concrete flood control channel, built in stages during the 1930s and 1940s after a major flood swept through the area.

Ironically, the name Arroyo Seco means "dry stream" in Spanish. But until the creek bed was put in concrete, there was water in the stream during the winter, historians say.

Impossible Costs

The consensus is that the channel is not necessary and should be torn out, but project costs—estimated as high as \$10 million—appear to make the move impossible, Mayor Bogaard and other city leaders said.

John Crowley, a city director who was chairman of the city's Cultural Heritage Commission when the area was designated an official city landmark in 1977, said interest in preserving the natural setting of the park has come about only in the past decade.

The designation of the park as a

historical landmark means that no structural changes can be made without city permission, Crowley said.

City officials and others interested in the area say they hope to find sources of funding, get people interested in volunteer work and even establish a docent program to take park visitors on tours.

Bogaard said, "In the future it is important to enhance the area as a natural recreation preserve. We are now taking the first step in improving a neglected area of the city."