

Testimony of Tim Brick, Managing Director, Arroyo Seco Foundation Regarding the USACE Arroyo Seco Watershed Feasibility Study

I offer this testimony in support of funding in the amount of \$600,000 for Fiscal Year 2007 for the General Investigations Account of the US Army Corps of Engineers for the Arroyo Seco Watershed Feasibility Study.

Southern California's Most Celebrated Canyon

The Arroyo Seco, Southern California's most celebrated canyon, represents an outstanding opportunity to demonstrate a collaborative, integrated approach to the management of vital natural resources in a dry, densely populated urban area. The 46.7 square watershed begins high in the San Gabriel Mountains in the Angeles National Forest of Los Angeles County and flows through the communities of La Cañada Flintridge, Altadena, Pasadena, South Pasadena and Northeast Los Angeles to meet the Los Angeles River just north of downtown Los Angeles.

The Arroyo Seco watershed combines the elements of a rough mountain watershed with an urbanized streamzone surrounded by half a million diverse residents. Home to Jet Propulsion Laboratory, the Rose Bowl, Southwest Museum, the Los Angeles River Center and dozens of other geographic features, the Arroyo Seco is an environmental, cultural, and recreational oasis for all of Southern California. The Arroyo Seco Watershed is also a major source of local water providing about 50% of the supplies for the communities in the upper watershed.

Periodically fierce storms race down the Arroyo Seco out of the San Gabriel Mountains and onto the urban plain of southern California. This phenomenon played a pivotal role in the founding of the City of Los Angeles in 1781 as settlers carefully sited their pueblo out of the range of the confluence of the Arroyo Seco and the Los Angeles River to avoid these floods. The most devastating flood occurred in 1914 killing 45 people and leading to the construction in 1920 of Devil's Gate Dam at the base of the foothills, the first flood control dam in the County of Los Angeles. Later in the 1930s and 1940s most of the stream course was lined with concrete channels to tame the steam and to make room for the construction of the first freeway in the west.

Recent Momentum for Improved Watershed Management

In recent decades, the agencies and residents of the Arroyo Seco watershed have worked hard to protect and restore our wonderful watershed. Up and down the Arroyo, citizens, neighborhood groups and governmental agencies are collaborating to better manage our watershed for nature and for people and to pass on its splendor and riches to future generations.

In recent years there has been a series of studies conducted to assess and improve the management of the Arroyo Seco Watershed. These include:

- **Arroyo Seco Watershed Restoration Feasibility Study** – a cooperative project of North East Trees and the Arroyo Seco Foundation, this report was released in May, 2002.

- **USACE Arroyo Seco Watershed Reconnaissance Study**, November 2002 – evaluates watershed conditions and determines there is a federal purpose in Arroyo Seco work.
- **City of Pasadena Arroyo Seco Master Plan & EIR**, (2003) – identifies a comprehensive series of projects and improvements for the five mile stretch of the Arroyo Seco lying within Pasadena.
- **Angeles National Forest Master Plan** - US Forest Service (2005) – defines the plan for the management of the upper mountain watershed of the Arroyo Seco.
- **Arroyo Seco Watershed Coordination Program** (Arroyo Seco Foundation) (2005-ongoing) - builds the capacity of local groups to cooperate and collaborate in watershed management.
- **AS Watershed Management and Restoration Study** (North East Trees), 2006 – reviews water quality and habitat restoration data and prioritizes projects for water quality improvements.

USACE Arroyo Seco Watershed Study

In 2001 the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) initiated a watershed study of the Arroyo Seco. The Reconnaissance Study Section 905(b) (WRDA) Analysis, completed in November, 2002, determined:

“The future or without project condition of the Arroyo Seco Watershed is a serious concern to the public and the LACPW (Los Angeles County Public Works). The limited and fragmented open space and habitat along the Arroyo Seco corridor, especially in the lower watershed, will result in the continual decline of the environmental and aesthetic quality in the Los Angeles Region. In addition, natural groundwater recharge in the watershed is an important component to water conservation in the Raymond Basin. It is the goal of the watershed study to develop the necessary baseline data and analytical tools, and a realistic set of objectives that will encourage management decisions that help reverse negative trends or enhance positive trends to maintain or improve the health of the watershed. Without environmental restoration in the Arroyo Seco Watershed, the problems identified by the public and local sponsor will continue unabated, these problems include:

1. Water supply and water quality, both for surface and groundwater
2. Loss of water conservation in the Raymond Basin
3. Fragmented and degraded habitat along the Arroyo Seco corridor
4. Localized flooding
5. Erosion and sedimentation issues
6. Limited and fragmented open space and recreational opportunities in the lower portions of the watershed.”

The Reconnaissance Study identified a strong federal interest in the Arroyo Seco watershed.

“In accordance with current administration policy, there is a federal interest in watershed based studies that provide a holistic approach to evaluating water resource problems and opportunities leading to the development of a watershed management plan that effectively balances the need for sustainable economic development with the need for

protection of watershed natural resources. Since environmental restoration is a likely output of the watershed study with a high budget priority and environmental restoration, water quality, flood control, and other related issues are integral to any comprehensive watershed plans that would be evaluated in the feasibility phase, *there is a strong Federal interest in developing a feasibility study for the Arroyo Seco Watershed*. There is also incidental Federal interest in other benefits resulting from the study such as recreation and water conservation/supply that could be developed within existing policy. Based on the preliminary screening of alternatives, there appears to be potential watershed plan alternatives that would be consistent with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers policies, benefits, and environmental impacts.”

A Blueprint for Watershed Management

In May of last year, the USACE released the Project Management Plan for the study with a revised, trimmed budget of \$2.7 million dollars and a scope of work that would develop a comprehensive watershed management plan including implementation projects for the entire watershed from the San Gabriel Mountains to downtown Los Angeles. The plan will include water resources, ecosystem restoration, flood management and recreational elements.

Key watershed functions and purposes to be studied include:

1. Ecosystem Restoration
2. Flood Peak/ Damage Reduction
3. Water Supply and Re-Use
4. Passive Recreation
5. Surface & Ground Water Quality
6. Public Education

On August 9, 2005 the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved their participation as the lead local sponsor, pledging to provide half the funding for the study along with other local sponsors, including the cities of Pasadena, La Cañada Flintridge, South Pasadena and Los Angeles. Local agencies and community based organizations will also participate in the study through the Council of Arroyo Seco Agencies (CASA) and the Council of Arroyo Seco Organizations (CASO), two institutional vehicles that have been formed to facilitate and coordinate watershed management.

On October 26, 2005 there was terrific excitement at La Casita del Arroyo in Pasadena as USACE, Los Angeles County and other local sponsors hosted the kick-off meeting to provide an opportunity for agencies and community members to learn about ASWRS. The meeting was attended by more than 80 stakeholders who demonstrated enthusiastic support for the project. The public, agencies, and organizations submitted data and information pertaining to the study, including past and present activities within the watershed, environmental conditions, potential issues, and project alternatives that can be addressed in the Feasibility Study. Participants describe the project as a “legacy” project for our region.

Two weeks later, however, we were discouraged to learn that, despite growing momentum for ASWFS, the project only received a \$100,000 appropriation in the Energy and Water

Development Appropriations Act of 2006 approved by Congress on November 9, 2005. This funding setback has significantly delayed the progress of the study and setback efforts to better manage and restore the Arroyo Seco Watershed. The proposed federal budget for FY2007 eliminates funding for this vital study.

The Arroyo Seco and Southern California Need Federal Assistance

The Arroyo Seco Watershed and Southern California in general face formidable challenges to sustain a viable economy in the face of serious curtailments on all three of its major sources of imported water supply. The Quantification Settlement Agreement, signed by Secretary of Interior Gale A. Norton on October 16, 2003, commits Southern California to ending its reliance on surplus supplies from the Colorado River and reducing California's take to 4.4 million acre feet, a 15% reduction from recent usage. The City of Los Angeles has already substantially reduced its use of water from the Eastern Sierra Nevadas to protect environmental values in Mono Lake and the Owens Valley. Water supplies from the California Water Project have also been reduced because of environmental strains on the delicate San Francisco Bay/Sacramento Delta ecosystem. To meet these challenges, the cities of Southern California must emphasize water-use efficiency, conservation, recycling and better management of local resources.

This renewed emphasis on conservation and local water resources is in no way incompatible or inconsistent with protecting and restoring the natural values of Southern California's watershed. Indeed it seems clear that watershed protection and restoration is the key to better management of water resources in Southern California.

The communities of the Arroyo Seco Watershed – Los Angeles, Pasadena, La Canada Flintridge, Altadena and South Pasadena, and all the cities of Southern California – need the support and help of the federal government to assist us in the “development of a watershed management plan that effectively balances the need for sustainable economic development with the need for protection of watershed natural resources” that the Arroyo Seco Reconnaissance Study prescribes.

The USACE ASWRS charts the course for that balanced watershed management plan. As a high profile watershed with tremendous natural riches, the Arroyo Seco can be an important model of watershed planning and management for cities and watersheds throughout Southern California and the Southwest.

We urge the House Energy & Water Appropriations Subcommittee to put the Arroyo Seco Watershed Feasibility Study back on track. For the economic health of our communities and for the protection of the great natural riches of our watershed, we urge you to support the County of Los Angeles' request for \$600,000 of funding for FY 2007 so that the Arroyo Seco Watershed Feasibility Study can be completed in a timely fashion.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

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