

# CITY TO RELEASE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT FOR ARROYO SECO MASTER PLAN

By Vince Farhat

The City of Pasadena has released a summary project description for the Arroyo Seco Master Plan. The summary project description is available on the City's website at <http://www.ci.pasadena.ca.us/planning/ASMP/Summary.asp>. This 60-page document summarizes the complete list of projects under consideration by the City. The Arroyo Seco Master Plan itself is almost complete and will be made available later this month.

In addition, the City is preparing a Master Environmental Impact Report ("Master EIR") for the Arroyo Seco Master Plan. The Master EIR will be released sometime in May. Residents will have the opportunity to comment on both the Master EIR and the Arroyo Seco Master Plan during a 30-day comment period.

## Background on the Arroyo Seco

The phrase "Arroyo Seco" means "dry gulch" in Spanish. Connecting the San Gabriel Mountains with the Los Angeles River, the Arroyo Seco is a 22-mile stream linking together La Cañada Flintridge, Pasadena, South Pasadena, and Los Angeles. Settlers founded Los Angeles near the end of the Arroyo, and a hundred years ago the Arroyo Seco was the artistic and cultural center for all of Southern California. Within its sycamore-shaded canyon, poets, painters, and photographers gathered to interpret life "in the Southland." During the Great Depression, the Arroyo also became the site of the region's first freeway, the Arroyo Seco Parkway. Known by most people today as the Pasadena or 110 Freeway, the Parkway winds through the Arroyo's canyon on its way from Pasadena to downtown Los Angeles. (Source: Urban & Environmental Policy Institute.)

Recreation in the Arroyo Seco has an extensive history dating back to 1884 and the then-famous Switzer's Camp. The premier wilderness resort in the range though the 1930's, Switzer's Camp and Falls were accessed by foot, horse or burro from the Upper Arroyo Seco. Starting in 1913, the City of Pasadena began acquiring land in the Arroyo Seco. In 1917 and 1918, the City initiated plans to preserve the Arroyo Seco. Emil T. Mische, a landscape architect, and Myron Hunt, head of the Arroyo Seco Park Committee, recommended that the Lower Arroyo Seco be preserved, restricted to walking and bridle paths, and planted only with native plants.

In the early 1920's, development of parks and fields continued in the Arroyo Seco, including an outdoor amphitheater, built in the Central Arroyo Seco in 1924, and the Rose Bowl, built by the Tournament of Roses in 1926. The City of Pasadena completed its acquisition of public lands within the Arroyo Seco by 1927. City acquisition of these lands conserved these areas for public recreation. Through the 1950's, the Arroyo Seco was one of the most popular vacation spots in the San Gabriel Mountains. (Source: Draft Executive Summary, Arroyo Seco Master Plan.)

In October 1990, the Pasadena City Council passed the Arroyo Seco Public Lands Ordinance. This ordinance created certain guidelines and restrictions for activities in the Arroyo Seco. (For more information regarding the Arroyo Seco, please visit the following websites: <http://www.uepi.oxy.edu/arroyo/event.htm> and <http://www.arroyoseco.org>.)

## The Arroyo Seco Master Plan

The Arroyo Seco Master Plan area includes three sub-areas known as Hahamonga Watershed Park (approximately 300 acres), the Central Arroyo Seco (approximately 550 acres encompassing the Rose Bowl), and the Lower Arroyo Seco (approximately 150 acres).



The Upper Arroyo Seco, which includes Hahamonga Watershed Park, is an approximately four-mile stretch and is bounded on the north by the Angeles National Forest and to the east by the community of Altadena in the unincorporated area of the County of Los Angeles. The Upper Arroyo is bounded on the south by the Foothill Freeway and Devil's Gate Dam and to the west by the City of La Cañada Flintridge.

The Central Arroyo Seco, which includes the Rose Bowl facilities, is an approximately 2.5-mile stretch, and is bounded on the north by the Foothill Freeway, and to the east by the City of Pasadena. It is bounded to the south by the Colorado Street Bridge and to the west by the City of Pasadena. The Central Arroyo is near the City's western boundary, shared with the City of Los Angeles community of Eagle Rock and the City of Glendale.

The Lower Arroyo Seco, an approximately 1.75-mile stretch, is bounded on the north by the Colorado Street Bridge, to the east by the City of Pasadena, to the south by the City of South Pasadena, and to the west by the City of Pasadena. The Lower Arroyo is near the City of Pasadena's western boundary with the City of Los Angeles communities of Eagle Rock and Highland Park, and the City of South Pasadena.

Beginning in approximately 1995, the City began developing separate master plans for Hahamonga Watershed Park and Pasadena's Central and Lower Arroyo areas. The Lower Arroyo Master Plan was approved in concept by the City Council in February 1997. The Hahamonga Watershed Park Master Plan was conceptually approved in February 2000, and the Central Arroyo Master Plan was conceptually approved in January 2001.

The goal of the Arroyo Seco Master Plan is to provide facilities for passive and active recreation that support Policy 9.2 of the City's General Plan. The Arroyo Seco Master Plan consists of the following five components: (1) Hahamonga Watershed Park Master Plan; (2) Central Arroyo Seco Master Plan; (3) Lower Arroyo Seco Master Plan; (4) Rose Bowl Operations Company Use Plan; and (5) Design Guidelines for the Arroyo Seco. The Arroyo Seco Master Plan is being developed by the combined efforts of the City's Planning and Development Department and the Public Works and Transportation Department. The implementing department for the completed Arroyo Seco Master Plan will be the Public Works and Transportation Department.

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## **The Master EIR**

Under state law, the Council cannot approve any of the separate Arroyo Seco plans until City staff prepares and circulates environmental impact reports. In November 1997, the Council voted to consolidate the separate environmental impact reports for the Hahamonga Watershed Park Master Plan, the Central Arroyo Master Plan and the Lower Arroyo Seco Master Plan. Since the Arroyo Seco is an integrated ecosystem, the City determined that it would be difficult to conduct separate and distinct environmental studies for each area. Moreover, it would have been much more expensive to conduct multiple environmental studies for each area, because the analysis for one area would overlap and duplicate the analysis for the other two.

The Master EIR will study the impacts of the various projects and proposed uses contained in the Arroyo Seco Master Plan. The Master EIR also will include any necessary mitigation measures, a mitigation monitoring program and related documents required by the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA"). As required by CEQA, the Master EIR will evaluate alternatives to the Arroyo Seco Master Plan. The CEQA documents also will analyze and record the environmental impacts of implementing the three plans that comprise the Arroyo Seco Master Plan.

When it consolidated the Arroyo environmental studies, the City Council also authorized a portion of MTA bike grant funds to be expended on improvements to current bike lanes from north of the Colorado Street Bridge on paved streets to the Devil's Gate Dam area. The Council also sought additional funds to extend bike

lanes on designated areas south of the Colorado Street Bridge to South Pasadena city limits.

A new bike path through the Arroyo Seco was included in the original draft master plan, generating considerable controversy and significant community opposition. At the direction of the City Council, the Master EIR will contain two alternatives. Plan "A" will not include the bike path, and Plan "B" will include the bike path. The WPRA board has serious concerns about the proposed bike path and will participate in the public comment process for the Master EIR.

## **The Upcoming Process**

As noted above, the City has released a summary project description for the Arroyo Seco Master Plan. The Arroyo Seco Master Plan itself is almost complete and will be made available later this month. In addition, the Master EIR will be released sometime in May. Residents will have the opportunity to comment on both the Master EIR and the Arroyo Seco Master Plan during a 30-day comment period.

The WPRA is continuing to monitor Arroyo Seco issues, and will inform residents when the Master EIR is released. If you want to receive e-mail updates regarding the Arroyo Seco and other issues affecting our neighborhood, please send your e-mail address to [Vfarhat@earthlink.net](mailto:Vfarhat@earthlink.net). For more information regarding the Master EIR, please contact City Planner Joshua Hart at (626) 744-6725 or [JoshuaHart@ci.pasadena.ca.us](mailto:JoshuaHart@ci.pasadena.ca.us).