



West Pasadena Residents' Association **NEWS**

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THE ARROYO RESTORED

by *Tim Brick*

It has cut a deep gorge through West Pasadena and chiseled a lasting place in the culture of Southern California. Now can we restore the natural grandeur of the Arroyo Seco that has inspired successive generations of settlers in our region?

That is the subject of a trail-blazing yearlong study now being completed by the Arroyo Seco Foundation and North East Trees, "the Arroyo Seco Watershed Restoration Feasibility Study." The watershed study is developing a comprehensive, long-term plan to restore our grand canyon from the top of the San Gabriel Mountains all the way to the Los Angeles River.

California Secretary of Resources Mary Nichols and Art Baggett, chair of the California Water Resources Control Board, have recently recognized the Arroyo Seco by naming it a pilot watershed for California. Their two state agencies will study governance and management of the Arroyo Seco along with nine other watersheds in the state to prepare a comprehensive list of recommendations for improved management of California's watersheds.

This is the area that Teddy Roosevelt once declared would make a great national park. Despite the efforts of visionaries like Myron Hunt and Charles Lummis to preserve and protect the Arroyo, three major facilities have dramatically altered its hydrology and habitat: Devil's Gate Dam (1920), the flood channel (1934-1947) and the Arroyo Seco Parkway (1940). Still today two remaining natural stretches, beneath the dam and between the three bridges (Holly Street, 134, and Colorado Street), stand as irrefutable witnesses that a more natural approach is possible.

Encasing streams and rivers in concrete was once the preferred approach to flood protection, but now new environmental and water quality requirements are driving a more natural approach called watershed management. There is a growing recognition that a comprehensive, integrated approach to environmental planning on a watershed-wide basis is the most efficient way to protect water and natural resources.

In Pasadena the call for the return of a natural stream in the Lower Arroyo was first highlighted in an historic exhibit at Baxter Gallery at Caltech in 1985. Three years later the Master Plan for the Lower Arroyo called for a natural stream to replace the sterile concrete channel that has choked the vitality of the

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stream zone below the Colorado Street Bridge. Finally, after years of planning, the Browning Ferris Industries-sponsored low-flow stream restoration project was installed in the Lower Arroyo in 1997. Dense patches of cottonwoods and willows now flourish in constructed rivulets that run beside the flood channel. The project is an interesting experiment, but is it the best that can be done? Can a naturally functioning stream again flow in the Arroyo?

The experts who have made up the Arroyo Seco watershed study project team think that it can and should. The watershed study goes beyond Pasadena's Arroyo planning studies to technically evaluate flood and stream management, its benefits and consequences. Their report also evaluates the related potential for habitat restoration, water resources and recreational opportunities. The watershed study, a joint project of two non-profit organizations, the Arroyo Seco Foundation and North East trees, has been funded by the California Coastal Conservancy and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. Its technical analysis has been guided by twelve governmental agencies with management responsibilities in the Arroyo Seco, including the US Forest Service, the three cities the Arroyo runs through and Los Angeles County Department of Public Works.

We encourage you to learn more about the Arroyo Seco watershed and to get involved in the planning process. For more information about the study, including major documents, recommendations and a dynamic slide show, please visit the Arroyo Seco Foundation's website at: <http://www.arroyoseco.org/>. You can also join an email list there for regular updates of Arroyo Seco events and issues.

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