San Diego River Conservancy

COMMENTS ON SAN DIEGO RIVER PARK DRAFT MASTER PLAN

July 26, 2004 (Revised August 3, 2004; Finalized August 6, 2004)

The San Diego River Conservancy's (SDRC's) comments on the San Diego River Park Draft Master Plan (Master Plan) are organized into three sections: (I) Comments by the SDRC Governing Board Members; (II) Comments by the Executive Officer; and (III) Overarching Recommendations (Summary).

Water Quality is Common Theme

Water Quality (and related topics such as urban development, pollution prevention, and wetlands) was a common theme mentioned by several Board Members in their remarks regarding the draft Master Plan (see Section I). As discussed in the Executive Officer's Comments (Section II), the San Diego River's value depends on its water quality since it is the quality of the water that allows the River to support all of the beneficial uses (such as recreation and wildlife) that the San Diego River Park will offer and enhance. In Section II, I have provided significant information that the City may wish to consider incorporating into the Master Plan to address many of the Board Member's concerns.

I. COMMENTS BY THE SDRC GOVERNING BOARD MEMBERS

The following comments on the draft Master Plan were made by the Governing Board Members of the San Diego River Conservancy at their public meeting on July 9, 2004.

1a. DONNA FRYE, Vice-Chair:

Include "No Development" Alternative: Entire Qualcomm Stadium Site Should be a Park

There are no parks in Mission Valley. So all the people that live in Mission Valley have no place to recreate. On page 60 of the Master Plan, it bothers me a lot that we're not looking at a vision that is an entire park. That's probably how Balboa Park and Mission Bay Park came about. Somebody said, let's make this area a park. It's very disappointing to me that there is not a fourth alternative that does not include development and that shows a greater vision for San Diego River Park that includes a park…another great park for our City with open space and possibly urban agriculture, that brings all the Principles in.

To me, a vision is to go beyond what we normally think. What I'm seeing is not reflected here. My vision is much different than any of those visions. My vision is something that is not based on development. My vision is based on the beauty of a River park. We're talking about approximately 160 acres. To include development for the Chargers (to make assumptions based on something that does not exist) and not include the "no development" vision, to me, is not very visionary. I would like to see a park, a fourth alternative, that recognizes what it is we really do here…which is a park. We are San Diego River Conservancy. It's not necessarily to create development as I see it. I want to see a fourth alternative that includes the entire Qualcomm site as a park that would serve the larger community. It's more visionary. I can concrete over things and build more development all day long. But a visionary could figure out a way to get the money to make the whole area a

park.

1b. DONNA FRYE, Vice-Chair:

Water Quality Recommendations Should be Augmented to Include Beneficial Uses, Water Quality Standards, and Pollution Prevention

Regarding Principle Three and the General Recommendations on Hydrology and Water Quality on page 39, it's a wonderful intent, but the recommendations in my opinion do not go far enough to address the water quality issues. Simply saying adopt programs to reduce or remove non-point source loads of pollutants is not enough. My understanding of our task is larger than that, as far as water quality is concerned because the water quality issues drive everything else. The different basic standards that are required under Clean Water Act include all the recreational uses…they include swimming, fishing, habitat, and fish, and all the uses that are part of this plan. So this particular section should better reflect that from standpoint of water quality. This section needs more "meat" as far as what were trying to do under water quality and the different standards and the different uses that it supports. So include something about the beneficial uses required here because that really captures all the other issues and drives everything else.

Also "Adopt programs to reduce/remove non-point source loads" leaves out a very key issue…to prevent. Prevent the pollution, not just remove or reduce it after it's gotten there. The first thing you want to do is prevent it.

MARK JOHNSON, Civitas:

Maybe we can put together a matrix which ties these recommendations to the array of water quality regulations. It is a complicated mix of regulations.

DONNA FRYE, Vice-Chair:

It's complicated to a point, but preventing pollution is pretty simple. Certain words, like prevention, are pretty key and pretty simple.

1c. DONNA FRYE, Vice-Chair:

Include a Principle on the Foolishness of Developing in the Floodplain

The recommendation on page 40 "Expand the Floodplain"…that's a wonderful idea. But if we expand the floodplain we might also want to have a principle that talks about the foolishness of continuing to over-develop and develop in the floodplain because that's not addressed. Every year the news goes out of flooding in Mission Valley and people say how did this happen. We don't understand how this happened. It's because you built in the middle of a River. That's how it happened. Fairly simple, again common sense.

1d. DONNA FRYE, Vice-Chair:

Resolve the Conflict regarding the Area of the River that the Master Plan calls

"Estuary" but City of San Diego calls "Land"

On page 51under Recommendations, Support the Goals of Mission Bay Park…I think that is very very important. But there is an issue that eventually must be addressed. In a survey of the Mission Bay Park area, the City of San Diego has declared, made a determination rather foolishly, that the area that you're calling the estuary is actually called land, a large portion of it. This issue still has not been addressed and I think it needs to be addressed. It is clearly not land. It's clear that it's wetlands. But there is that hanging issue where the City, on maps, is calling things what they are not…calling the middle of a River, land. So we need to get that conflict resolved, how the middle of a River actually ended up being called land. I personally think that the reason it was done was to enable the City to increase the amount of commercial development in Mission Bay Park because they were running out of land. So that was the tact that was taken. But I think it is in conflict with this particular Master Plan and we need to see that the issue gets resolved and I'll be happy to work with you on that, I have all the maps.

MARK JOHNSON, Civitas:
The area between the levees which we call the River is actually part of Mission Bay Park.

DONNA FRYE, Vice-Chair:
Yes, it's also a navigable waterway subject to Clean Water Act. Maybe I can get it to council committee to get it resolved. I've been unsuccessful for three years, maybe the fourth year's a charm.

1e. DONNA FRYE, Vice-Chair:

What does Recommendation E7S Mean?

Regarding Estuary Short Term Recommendation, E7S on page 53, I don't know what the Recommendation or the Implementation statements mean. This area is part of the Mission Bay Master Plan and I just want to make sure that it is not in conflict with the Mission Bay Master Plan.

MARK JOHNSON, Civitas:
Given the way we govern land use in the state and in the city, we don't have a tool to put a boundary around this river and call it a place. What we have is an overlay of all these systems with all the Community Plans. So the Community Plans are governing what happens along the River. So from a legal and procedural point of view we don't have the ability to take a pen and draw a line and say, this is the San Diego River Park. Because that Park doesn't exist. In E7S, were bumping up against that conflict. We are writing a plan for something that isn't real, not in any technical terms. So as we put recommendations in here, we're trying to be a little bit cautious of recommending things in here that could be in conflict with the Mission Bay Park Master Plan.

Several people think there could be a Visitor's Center on this site to tie the River and Mission Bay Park together, to introduce the whole system and interpret ecology and history.

But to put it in here, we're publishing something and asking you and planning commission, and council to approve that we don't have the technical tools to approve.

DONNA FRYE, Vice-Chair:
So we just keep it more vague, which is probably a good idea.

MARK JOHNSON, Civitas:
I wish we could do more. I'd like to get all the best minds in the City thinking about this. What could we do to put some more teeth into this? Today our only choice would be to go amend every Community Plan. Once you start amending Community Plans, it's hard to stay focused on the one issue you want to amend it for.

2a. SUSAN HECTOR, Board Member:
Emphasize Connectivity with Presidio Park
I would like to request that the Master Plan add or emphasize connectivity with Presidio Park. My disclosure is that I'm on the City's Presidio Park Council and we believe that Presidio Park is actually a very important node in the San Diego River Park because it's on western end, it's the site of first presidio, and it's the original location of the mission. So when you're talking about interpreting the culture and history of the San Diego River, we think it's critical that Presidio Park be included as a key element. In the Master Plan maps, Presidio Park is either in tiny print or it's left off altogether. We feel there is a great opportunity to link it up with the River Park.

2b. SUSAN HECTOR, Board Member:
Mission Dam Flume still Exists and Pieces are Continually being Discovered
The Mission Dam flume still exists all the way down to the area that is actively being mined. Bits and pieces of the flume are continually being found. So there are interpretive opportunities. Also we should be aware of the flume when we're planning trails.

MARK JOHNSON, Civitas:
Yes, we're well aware of that. The flume has been subject to vandalism. Like any archeological site, we are very careful not to highlight it.

SUSAN HECTOR, Board Member:
That's very wise.

3a. JACK MINAN, Board Member:
The Conservancy's Focus is on Programs, not Master Plans or General Plans
At a previous meeting, the San Diego River Conservancy adopted a strategy of not getting too involved in local plans, community plans, master plans, but to focus on programs. I

don't want the Conservancy to be too far deflected from its established agenda that we compromise our immediate objectives.

DICK MURPHY, Chairman:
Yes that is correct. Ultimately the San Diego City Council will adopt this plan. But this is such an important group, that it is important for us to provide input to this decision-making. Because if there isn't some buy-in by the Conservancy, it will be harder to convince the Conservancy to help support funding of acquisitions, etc.

3b. JACK MINAN, Board Member:
Must Have a Management Plan to Ensure Exotics are Not Reintroduced
Regarding the Recommendation on page 42 to "Eliminate invasive plant species and reintroduce native species" is only half of the task. To deal effectively with exotic species, you must also assure they are not reintroduced. So not only is the removal important, but the assurance that there is a management plan to prevent their reintroduction. You don't want to remove all the Arundo in year one, only to have to do it again in year three.

3c. JACK MINAN, Board Member:
Work with the Golf Courses to Implement Pollution Prevention
Following up on Donna's comment, there are several golf courses on the River and golf courses use huge amounts of fertilizers. The watering and fertilizing practices of golf courses result in significant discharges of fertilizers to the River causing eutrophication and other adverse effects. I see this up-close and personal when I golf. Work with the golf courses to prevent fertilizer and other pollutant discharges to the River (e.g., copper from blue stones).

3d. JACK MINAN, Board Member:
Give Non-Golfing Public Access to the River Through Golf Courses
The River is a public resource. I'm not sure if it's feasible, but it would be wonderful if we could acquire options or easements to give the non-golfing public greater access to the River through the private golf courses.

MARK JOHNSON, Civitas:
There is a renegotiation of the Carlton Oaks Golf Course lease beginning. We are interested in seeing if we can get public access. There is a maintenance path on the edge of the golf course that is totally walkable that separates the golf course from the River, but it's not publicly accessible today. So we've put that question on the table for the renegotiation.

At Admiral Baker, we have done some drawings and the Navy has looked at a possible reconstruction that would dramatically change public access and enjoyment of the view of the golf course as much as of the River. It is fairly cost intensive. It would require the management of Admiral Baker to make a policy shift and find the money. But it could also improve the golf experience as well as improving a lot of things for the public.

4a. JIM PEUGH, Board Member:

Tie Everything Together / Look at the River as a Whole / Link Canyons to Valley Floor

I had a very intense emotional experience to the concepts in Principles One and Four, Reclaim the valley as a common and Unify fragmented lands. The opportunities are very limited and it is not every day when someone tries to cram the whole River down our throats all at once. We should tattoo the Principles on our left hands so we can remember this moment. The only way to protect the River is to treat it as an entire connected whole system. Reestablish the lost connections.

4b. JIM PEUGH, Board Member:

Look for Synergism between People, Water, and Wildlife; Not Balance

I am concerned about Principle Seven, Balance people, water and wildlife, and I recommend we look more for synergy than balance. I've worked on a number of developments where we tried to combine all three…where we tried to make water quality, habitat, and people improvements all in one project. I hope we will look for opportunities for synergism, rather than have a problem solving each one. (Synergy: joint action; when taken together, produce or enhance an effect, or increase each other's effectiveness.)

4c. JIM PEUGH, Board Member:

Improve Hydrologic Junction Between Fresh Water and Salt Water at the Mouth

Include this potential project in the Master Plan. There are dams that have been put in place for some time and cause standing water year round (resulting in major infestations of Brazilian Pepper and Myaporum). We need to look for potential hydrologic improvements for the freshwater/saltwater connection.

4d. JIM PEUGH, Board Member:

Remove 1.5 Acres of Cobble Fill South Side of Channel Under Interstate 5

Include this potential project in the Master Plan. There are tons of cobble fill covering about 1.5 acres in the south side of the channel under the I-5 (was probably used for staging trucks). It's a restoration project trying to restore itself. The vegetation on both the west and east ends is trying to make its way through the cobble. It's the cheapest restoration project we could ask for; all we have to do is be clever enough to remove the cobble.

4e. JIM PEUGH, Board Member:

Create Backwaters off the Estuary in Mission Bay to Provide Refuges for Wildlife and Vegetation

We should create backwaters off the estuary like Famosa Slough (but Famosa Slough is too fragmented to do the job), to serve as wildlife refuges. The backwater refuges will allow some portion of the wildlife and vegetation to survive a major flood (like in 1983) so that it can re-establish itself in the estuary after the flood. This will provide major hydrologic benefits.

The mouth of the River today is an incredible wildlife sanctuary with every kind of marsh

vegetation present and thriving. It looks healthier than all the Fish and Wildlife versions of the same habitat. But in 1983 when we had a major flood, all of that vegetation was lost because there were no backwater refuges. It's all grown back in last 20 years.

4f. JIM PEUGH, Board Member:

Replace all Culvert Crossings with Bridges to Allow Passage of Wildlife and Water

Most all of our River crossings today are "third world" culverts. We should replace all of our

culverts with bridges to allow the natural passage of wildlife and water. This is our finest River in America's finest city. Replace the "Arizona crossings".

5a. GARY STEPHANY, Board Member:

I agree with Several of Donna's Points on Pollution Prevention and Water Quality.

My comments are from a water quality perspective…

5b. GARY STEPHANY, Board Member:

The Plan should be Balanced in Favor of the Ecology

I thought it was an excellent plan as far as balancing goes, but the problem is it's out of balance already. The cities have already allowed so much construction to go on that it should be balanced in the favor of the ecology. Not balanced in favor of both sides equally. Every time you build another house, or road, or put more asphalt down, you can have all the prevention in the world but the pollution is still going to run right into the River. And all the imported water we throw in there is going to cause a problem.

Regarding golf courses, in '41 when the valley was all dairies and truck farms, we had more pollution going into the River than we do today from golf courses. Never-the-less we can't allow pesticides and fertilizers to discharge to the River.

5c. GARY STEPHANY, Board Member:

Ask All Cities to Implement a Building Moratorium within One-half Mile of the River

The fact is, if we're really going to be serious about this and if I had a magic wand, I would say cities, every one of you, put a building moratorium on the River, anything within one-half mile on each side of the River. That's what you really need to do to get a balanced approach. Balancing it today with all the condos and shopping centers and stadiums down there… we have a major problem. I don't see it stopping. I realize you don't stop progress. But playing devil's advocate, I'm saying it's not too late; but it is too late.

6a. DICK MURPHY, Chairman:

Bring the Master Plan to the Full Council / Bypass Rules Committee

For Ellie Oppenheim, in this case let's bypass the Rules Committee and go right to the full council. I think everybody needs to see where we're at and provide input. It would be typical to go to committee first then go back for the environmental report, but in this case let's just go to the whole council.

6b. DICK MURPHY, Chairman:

Common / Connectivity of Entire River Valley with Canyons and Open Space is Important

Most of us have always seen the River as connecting Mission Bay Park to Mission Trails Regional Park, but I'm not sure we've all thought as expansively enough to look at the River's connectivity to the canyons and Presidio Park. There has been a real disconnect here and the Master Plan would change our thinking on this. I think it's very important that we look at the River that way, as a common.

6c. DICK MURPHY, Chairman:

We Need an Explicit Vision for the Pathway from Dog Beach to Inaja Memorial

I think the pathway is important and we're going to need to be very specific as to where we envision the pathway to be located because it is so easy for the pathway to get pushed aside and not really done. We need to have an explicit vision and take the position that some time in the next couple of decades, we're going to make sure that the pathway happens so there isn't weaseling for example when a golf course is redeveloped and the pathway gets moved way off the River. I think that not only has development damaged this River for all time, but we've missed so many opportunities we could have had if we had had an explicit vision. I see your explicit pathway on page 54 in the western area and I saw it also in the Mission Trails area, although I will share with you my struggle to try to move the pathway closer to the River through Mission Trails Park. It's near the River for a while, but then the pathway goes south and it's quite a ways from the River in some places. I've been down in the Arundo trying to see where a pathway could go. We've got a lot of Arundo to get rid of before we can clear a pathway.

I'm just saying that we need an explicit plan for the pathway so that all of us can sit here and say we're gonna make this happen, and as each little development opportunity happens, including Donna's moratorium, we can say, we're going to insist that there be this pathway. We're not going to compromise this and that's the only way that we're going to get where we want to be in the next couple of decades.

MARK JOHNSON, Civitas:

We don't really have a jurisdictional tool to use. I think it's great if it goes to full council. To date we've been working with Planning Office staff and Park and Rec. staff. The idea of a specific drawing that says the path goes here would allow the Development staff to say there's supposed to be a path right here when you come in with your development plans. But the problem is we don't actually have a way to give that teeth right now. We can arm twist. But we don't actually have a tool.

DICK MURPHY, Chairman:

I was City Council person at time we adopted the Master Plan for the Mission Trails Regional Park. Mission Trails is half in the Navajo Community Planning Area and half in the Tierrasanta Community Planning Area. Fortunately both planning areas were in the

Council District I represented. We adopted the Mission Trails Master Plan and we basically said, this is the Plan in the Park. That is the amendment to the Tierrasanta and Navajo Community Plans so we didn't have to go back and amend the two Community Plans per se. We amended them with the Mission Trails Regional Park Master Plan. So it seems to me if we adopt a San Diego River Park Master Plan, we would be in effect amending every Community Plan that is affected by the San Diego River Park Plan. That's what we did in the 1980s in Mission Trials and nobody has ever challenged that and we used that as a guideline.

MARK JOHNSON, Civitas:
Balboa Park, Mission Bay, and Mission Trials Park are all Community Planning areas. So the Master Plan for Balboa Park is the Community Plan for Balboa Park, so there is no overlap between the Community Plan and the Master Plan. One way to address the problem of creating the Park boundary that I talked about is to create it as a Community Planning area and then it would be opted out of the other Community Planning areas.

DICK MURPHY, Chairman:
That sounds somewhat accurate except that there was never any formal action. We just told Tierrasanta and Navajo that the Mission Trails Park was now its own planning area and we are adopting a Master Plan. They had a lot of input on what the master plan looked like. But once it was adopted we just said, this is now the planning area for Mission Trails Regional Park. This will be harder for the River, but it's something we need to be thinking about, then we know where to have the moratorium.

JACK MINAN, Board Member:
You've been saying that there isn't a legal tool to do this…draw the boundary of the San Diego River Park. I'm not persuaded. I haven't heard the legal argument as to why there isn't a legal tool. The General Plan of the City of San Diego is the constitution for development. The local Community Plans are subservient to that. So I don't know why the General Plan isn't the legal authority to do precisely what you'd like to do. I agree with the Chairman, we as a society should not be constrained from making good decisions and implementing them and if there are some legal obstacles, some creativity ought to be used.

MARK JOHNSON, Civitas:
I won't go into it now. There are a number of strategies that you can use. I could map out different ways. The tools are available but there is not a process in place to get there. The two fundamental problems of every western river are:

1) The river has no land use authority. The river itself has no boundary that defines its realm; and
2) The river never owns its water. Everybody else owns the water. The river does not own any water. So when you look at making the hydrologic improvements, you bump into all kinds of significant water rights issues that get very complicated when so much return flow is involved.

1f. DONNA FRYE, Vice-Chair:

Reorder the Principles: Move Principle Two to the End (Make it Principle Seven)

Reorienting development toward the River doesn't seem like Principle Two to me. Put that Principle at the end. In terms of priorities, it's much more important to clean up the River than to orient development towards it. If you clean it up first, you might want to orient something towards it in the future. Water Quality should be Principle Two. Reorienting development should be Principle Seven.

1g. DONNA FRYE, Vice-Chair:

Modify Language of Current Principle Seven: Balance People, Water, Wildlife

The language of Principle Seven needs to be modified to reflect the fact that the system is not balanced. As Mr. Stephany and Mr. Peugh pointed out, the balance is very out of whack now and Principle Seven needs to recognize this.

7a. KAREN SCARBOROUGH, Board Member:

What was Conclusion of Bay-to-Bay Study?

Chair Murphy responded that the study was done to explore a Bay-to-Bay hydrologic connection and the conclusion was that it was not a feasible idea either economically or hydrologically. The alternative, to look at pedestrian pathway connections instead will be pursued. Ms. Frye added that the focus the Bay-to-Bay Study was on connecting the two bays, not on connecting the bays to the San Diego River.

7b. KAREN SCARBOROUGH, Board Member:

Consider Adding Kayaking Down the River as a Visionary Goal of the Master Plan

In Sacramento, people actually kayak and boat down the American River. Consider adding kayaking down the River's length as a great new visionary goal in the Master Plan. Our goal should be to have a water level and a water quality level that will allow us to recreate on the River from the mountains to the ocean.

7c. KAREN SCARBOROUGH, Board Member:

Rivers can be a Community Identifying Element / Put Out a Community Challenge

From a statewide perspective, other conservancies use their water resource as a community-identifying element. In Tahoe, they use water clarity as the identifying element on what people need to do around the edges to keep Lake Tahoe clean. Ms. Scarborough puts out a challenge to each of us to engage the adjacent communities to keep the River clean. For example at Qualcomm stadium, if we end up developing it, we could use a new paving surface that is pervious so the runoff from it would be cleaner. The paving surface would be unique and identify that the stadium is next to River. We should turn the backs of the development into the front of the development and embrace the River as the heart of the City (that is the benefit of this Conservancy).

II. COMMENTS BY THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER

My overall comment about the draft Master Plan as a whole is that it is well written, very informative, and the principles and recommendations are generally good. Although I have a few minor comments and questions about what is written, the bulk of my comments below concern what is *not* written.

First and foremost, I want to convey my strong agreement with and support for each of the comments made by the SDRC Governing Board members at their July 9, 2004 public meeting and as documented in Section I above. From their detailed and insightful comments, it is clear that the Board Members had thoroughly reviewed and considered the draft Master Plan. It is my hope that you will strongly consider incorporating of each of their comments into the final version of the Master Plan. My comments below support and build upon the comments of the Governing Board.

1. **The Importance of Water Quality Must be Emphasized in the Master Plan**

   The value of the San Diego River is dependent on its water quality. It is, after all, the quality of the water that allows the River to support all of the beneficial uses that the River Park will provide and celebrate such as recreation, wildlife/aquatic species, and wildlife/aquatic habitat. The enabling statute that created the San Diego River Conservancy correctly recognized this fact when it identified "protection and maintenance of the quality of the waters in the San Diego River for all beneficial uses" as one of the basic purposes for which the Conservancy was created.

   Because the value of the River and the River Park is dependent on its water quality, I strongly believe that the Master Plan should emphasize (in a much greater way) the need to protect and improve water quality through a variety of tools. If the water quality continues to deteriorate as it has in the lower reaches of the River, the River Park will never be the shining jewel of the City that we all envision for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

   The Master Plan (and the Park itself) presents an outstanding opportunity to educate municipal land use planners, elected officials, private land owners (e.g., golf courses), and the general public about the critical role that they each play in degrading or protecting the River's water quality and hence the River's ability to provide human enjoyment and support wildlife. In order to effectively communicate the water quality message, I believe the Master Plan needs to address at a minimum the following topics/issues:

2. **Urban Development and Hydromodification Have Caused Serious Water Quality Degradation**

   As a result of extensive urban development and hydromodification (i.e., structural flood control), the lower San Diego River is probably the most degraded and altered river system in

the San Diego Region. To restore and protect the River, we must understand the impacts of land use decisions, urban development, and hydromodifications on water quality.

3. **There is a Direct Link Between Land Use and Water Quality**

A fundamental concept that is often overlooked is the direct link between land use and water quality. Land use practices during the past fifty years (commercial, residential, transportation, and industrial) have had profound and adverse impacts on the health of the San Diego River. The Master Plan needs to explain the direct long-term consequences of land use decisions on water quality including the basic concepts below.

4. **Urban Development Increases Pollutant Load, Volume, and Velocity of Runoff**

During urban development two important changes occur. First, natural vegetated pervious ground cover is converted to impervious surfaces such as paved highways, streets, rooftops, and parking lots. Natural vegetated soil can both absorb water and remove pollutants providing a very effective natural purification process. Because pavement and concrete can neither absorb water nor remove pollutants, the natural purification characteristics of the land are lost.

Secondly, urban development creates new pollution sources as human population density increases and brings with it proportionately higher levels of car emissions, car maintenance wastes, municipal sewage, pesticides, household hazardous wastes, pet wastes, trash, etc. which can either be washed or directly dumped into the San Diego River.

As a result of these two changes, the runoff leaving the developed urban area is significantly greater in volume, velocity, and pollutant load than the pre-development runoff from the same area.

5. **Water Quality Degradation Increases with Percent Imperviousness**

The increased volume and velocity of runoff from developed urban areas greatly accelerates the erosion of downstream natural channels and increases flooding potential. Numerous studies have demonstrated a direct correlation between the degree of imperviousness of an area and the degradation of its receiving water quality. Significant declines in the biological integrity and physical habitat of streams and other receiving waters have been found to occur with as little as a 10% conversion from natural to impervious surfaces. (Developments of medium density single family home range between 25 to 60% impervious).

6. **All Three Phases of Urban Development Impact Water Quality**

Because all three phases of urban development have a profound impact on water quality, the Master Plan should provide recommended actions to reduce impacts during each phase.

(a) Land Use Planning Phase for New Development: Because land use planning and zoning is where urban development is conceived, it is the phase in which the greatest and most cost-

effective opportunities to protect water quality exist. When a local government incorporates polices and principles designed to safeguard water resources into its General Plan and development project approval processes, it has taken a far-reaching step towards the preservation of the water resources for future generations. In addition controlling the contribution of pollutants in urban runoff discharges in the early planning stages of land development is significantly more cost effective than retrofitting existing development to later remove pollutants.

(b) Construction Phase: Siltation is currently the largest cause of river impairment in the United States. Sediment runoff rates from construction sites (or sediment disturbing industrial activities) greatly exceed natural erosion rates of undisturbed lands causing siltation and impairment of receiving waters. Pollutants from construction sites can be effectively reduced through the use of pollution prevention, source control, and treatment control best management practices (BMPs).

(c) *Existing Development*: Local monitoring results confirm substantial pollutant loads to San Diego receiving waters in runoff from existing urban development. A combination and range of pollution prevention, source control, and treatment control best management practices provide the most effective means of reducing pollutants from existing development.

7. **Pollution Prevention is Key to Improving Water Quality**

The Master Plan should specifically recommend Pollution Prevention as a high priority for protecting the San Diego River. Pollution prevention is defined as the initial reduction/elimination of pollutant generation at its source. It is the best and most cost effective "first-line of defense" and should be used in conjunction with source control and treatment control BMPs. Pollutants that are never generated do not have to be controlled or treated.

8. **Source Control and Treatment Control BMPs Supplement Pollution Prevention**

Source Control BMPs (both structural and non-structural) minimize the contact between pollutants and flows (which carry pollutants to receiving waters) or which retain polluted runoff on-site (and out of receiving waters). The Master Plan should recommend that pollutants be identified and eliminated at their source. Treatment control (or structural) BMPs remove pollutants from urban runoff and are typically the least cost-effective BMP alternative.

9. **Impacts of Hydromodification and the Loss of Wetlands**

When the natural wetlands associated with the San Diego River system are filled, we lose the wetland's critical ability to filter pollutants (before they enter the River), provide habitat, provide flood protection, and support numerous beneficial uses. When the River itself is channelized, confined, dammed, or otherwise altered, its morphology, natural flow regime, and function are significantly and adversely modified. Because the River is now segmented, straightened, shortened, and parts of the natural river bed and bank substrate/vegetation have

been replaced with impervious surfaces, erosion of downstream natural channels is accelerated, and flooding potential is increased. The River's natural ability to assimilate pollutants, provide habitat, support beneficial uses, and replenish beach sand are also permanently reduced or lost.

10. **Explain the Watershed Concept**
As more pollutants are contributed from diverse sources along the River's length, the cumulative pollutant loading, volume and velocity of urban runoff intensifies as it travels through the watershed on its journey to the ocean. It is important to understand that inland sources of pollutants contribute to coastal impairments many miles away, and for this reason, the most effective to way to protect receiving water quality is on an overall watershed basis. I was disappointed that the Master Plan did not explain the basic concept and significance of a watershed. Understanding the concept and acknowledging that neither the San Diego River nor urban runoff recognize political boundaries (as they flow downhill), is key to understanding how best to resolve the water quality impairments.

11. **Master Plan Should Provide the Regulatory Framework**
The Master Plan should provide an overview of the regulatory framework in which the River Park will be conceived, built, and operated. The Clean Water Act and the California Porter Cologne Water Quality Act are the primary federal and state water quality statutes. In the San Diego River Watershed, these statutes are administered by the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board, a key state regulatory agency.

12. **Explain Beneficial Uses, Water Quality Objectives, Water Quality Standards, and the Basin Plan**
The Master Plan should include a definition and description of the beneficial uses and water quality objectives designated for the San Diego River and its tributaries. Pursuant to the governing statutes, water quality objectives are established at levels necessary to protect designated beneficial uses such as fishing and swimming. Together the beneficial uses and water quality objectives comprise the legally enforceable water quality standards applicable to the River.

There are numerous varied beneficial uses for the San Diego River that range from municipal drinking water supply; agricultural supply; and recreation to commercial fishing; and habitat for rare, threatened, or endangered species.

Beneficial Uses and Water Quality Objectives are designated in the Regional Board's Basin Plan for the San Diego Region. The Basin Plan is a very important Water Quality Control Plan which is applicable to the entire San Diego Region and is adopted by the Regional Board in a formal public hearing. The Basin Plan also includes broad discharge prohibitions applicable to the San Diego River Watershed. The Basin Plan should be discussed in the Master Plan.

13. **San Diego Municipal Storm Water NPDES (MS4) Permit**

The single most significant state regulatory permit governing water quality in the entire San Diego River Watershed is the Regional Board's San Diego Municipal Storm Water NPDES permit, Order Number 2001-01. The Municipal Storm Water Permit directs municipalities to implement an urban runoff management program on a jurisdictional and *"watershed-level"* that, at a minimum, includes the five following fundamental requirements: (1) Prohibit non-storm water discharges into its storm water conveyance system; (2) Implement best management practices (BMPs) to reduce pollutant discharges into the storm water conveyance system to the maximum extent practicable (MEP); (3) Ensure that discharges from the storm water conveyance system do not cause or contribute to an exceedance of water quality objectives in receiving waters; (4) Identify (actively find) and eliminate sources of illicit discharges; and (5) Enforce local municipal water quality-related ordinances and permits. A very important part of the BMP requirement is public education.

It is important to note that the Municipal Storm Water Permit holds municipalities responsible for the long-term water quality consequences of their land use decisions. Furthermore the Permit specifically directs the municipalities to protect water quality on a "*watershed-basis*" and to *conduct land use planning on a "watershed-basis"*. Land use planning on a watershed scale enables multiple jurisdictions to work together to plan for both development and resource conservation that can be environmentally as well as economically sustainable. To underscore the importance of and need for municipalities to work on a watershed scale, I recommend that the Municipal Storm Water Permit be reissued on a watershed-basis when it comes up for renewal in 2006.

14. **The Clean Water Act Section 303(d) List of Impaired Waters**

When the designated water quality objectives of a waterbody are violated and its beneficial uses are no longer protected, the Regional Board is required to add the waterbody to the Clean Water Act Section 303(d) List of Impaired Waters. The Master Plan should explain the significance of the Section 303(d) list and provide the listed waterbody segments / pollutants and extents of impairment within the San Diego River and its tributaries.

The lower 20 miles of San Diego River, mouth of the San Diego River at Dog Beach, Forrester Creek, and Famosa Slough are currently designated as "water quality impaired" due to one or more of the following pollutants: Fecal Coliform (bacteria), low dissolved oxygen, phosphorus, total dissolved solids, pH, and eutrophic conditions. Designation as "water quality impaired" means that the water quality objectives for these pollutants are being violated and that the beneficial uses are not fully supported or protected in these waters.

The Master Plan should also include a general discussion of the significance of biological assessments and a more comprehensive discussion of bioassessment results conducted in the San Diego River Watershed. Bioassessment data shows healthy aquatic communities in the

upper portion of San Diego River Watershed and significantly degraded communities in the lower Watershed.

15. **Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs)**
Under the Clean Water Act, the Regional Board is obligated to calculate a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for all waterbodies / pollutants on the Section 303(d) list of impaired waters. The purpose of a TMDL is to restore an impaired waterbody to health so that it will once again meet its designated water quality objectives and so its beneficial uses will again be supported and protected. The Regional Board is currently developing TMDLs for every bacteria-impaired waterbody in the San Diego Region including the San Diego River, Forrester Creek, and the mouth of the San Diego River. Following final TMDL adoption, the Municipal Storm Water Permit will be amended to include the TMDL prescribed numeric waste load allocations and reductions needed to ensure compliance with the bacteria water quality objective.

The Municipal Storm Water Permit (which is preventative) and TMDL program (which is restorative) are the two key water quality regulatory tools that will have the most profound impact on the future of the San Diego River. The Master Plan needs to recognize the role of these important regulatory mechanisms in the San Diego River Watershed and the River Park.

16. **Additional Statutes, Regulations, and Agencies**
The Master Plan should also describe the role and authority of the Department of Fish and Game and the US Fish and Wildlife Service in protecting wildlife resources and habitat. It should also provide a summary of applicable recommendations and regulations (e.g., all trails and signs must be a minimum of 100 feet from the drip line of riparian corridor). The Regional Board's Clean Water Act section 401-certification authority and applicability to the San Diego River watershed should also be discussed.

17. **Additional Planning Documents**
The Master Plan should also recognize SANDAG's Regional Growth Management Strategy. The Water Quality Element of the Strategy (SANDAG, 1997) outlines the types of programs that may be incorporated into the local planning and development review processes to improve the Region's water quality and comply with existing state and federal regulations.

18. **Master Plan Principles and Recommendations**
I strongly recommend that the Principles and Recommendations of the Master Plan reflect an understanding of the above concepts and regulatory framework. It is my hope that the Master Plan will move the Park in the direction of reducing water quality impacts due to land use decisions, urban development, and hydromodification. I also recommend that the Master Plan support a very strong educational component to teach San Diegans basic water quality concepts such as "you are part of the problem; here's how you can be part of the solution".

Consistent with the basic goals of the Clean Water Act, it is my vision that the San Diego

River will some day be fully fishable and swimmable; and from a very long-term perspective, kayakable. Consider adding a Principle that conveys these themes. Lastly, I recommend providing more explanatory text for each of the Principles and Key Recommendations (e.g., clarify the distinction between Principle One and Principle Four; why are they separate Principles?).

19. **Purpose or Objective Statement**
The Master Plan for the River Park should include a purpose or objective statement.

20. **Mission City Parkway Bridge – Recommendation L4L**
Since the Mission City Parkway Bridge was not approved and does not exist, it makes little sense in recommendation L4L to "improve the Mission City Parkway Bridge over I-8 to connect people to uplands" (pages 67, 127). Either delete the recommendation or clarify the meaning. Do you mean consider a pedestrian-only bridge?

III. OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATONS (SUMMARY)

The following section *summarizes* the Executive Officer's overarching recommendations for the San Diego River Park and Master Plan. Some of the recommendations also reflect comments made by individual SDRC Board Members and many of the recommendations are supported in the San Diego River Park Conceptual Plan (California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, 2002)[1]. The central theme for the overarching recommendations is to restore the San Diego River to a more unaltered condition and naturally functioning river system that supports recreation and wildlife.

> *"Maintaining the quality of water and the functional integrity of aquatic ecosystems is essential to the health, economic status, and long term survival of the human race."* [2]

1. **Improve Water Quality**
Because the River's value depends on its water quality, a concerted effort should be made to improve water quality in the San Diego River at every opportunity. It is the quality of the water that allows the River to support all of the beneficial uses that the River Park provides such as recreation and wildlife species and habitat. The Master Plan should discuss the beneficial uses and water quality objectives applicable to the San Diego River as designated in the Basin Plan for the San Diego Region.

2. **Limit Future Development in Floodplain**
Limit further development in the floodplain along Entire River length. Strengthen floodplain ordinances as necessary. Consider re-zoning the floodplain as open space. Discuss the direct link between land use planning decisions and water quality. Discuss the impacts of urban development on water quality.

3. **Make River-Sensitive Land Use Decisions**
   Consider modifications to the General Plan and Project Approval Process as required by the governing Municipal Storm Water Permit (San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board Order No. 2001-01) and recommended by SANDAG's Regional Growth Management Strategy (1997). Limit further conversion of natural ground cover to impervious surfaces. Conduct land use planning on a "watershed scale" (with neighboring jurisdictions) as required by the Municipal Storm Water Permit. Enforce numeric sizing criteria on new construction as required by the Municipal Storm Water Permit. Enforce the use of pollution prevention, source control, and treatment control best management practices at all existing development as required by the Municipal Storm Water Permit. Limit future resource extraction operations.

4. **Limit Future Hydromodification of River**
   Work with Regional Water Quality Control Board and Army Corp of Engineers to limit further hydromodification (i.e., structural flood control) of the San Diego River. Discuss the impacts of hydromodification on river function.

5. **De-Channelize / Remove Man-Made Flow Impediments**
   To the maximum extent practicable, consider removing, softening/naturalizing, or widening existing man-made channel structures. Remove man-made impediments to River flow. For example, replace culverts at all road crossings with bridges, eliminate flow constrictions, and remove cobble fill and dams at the River mouth, etc.

6. **Create or Expand Wetlands**
   Create or expand wetlands (natural, restored, or constructed) and backwater areas along entire River length. This will (1) greatly improve water quality by filtering and removing pollutants from urban runoff; (2) reduce flooding potential by acting as a sponge and releasing flood waters slowly; and (3) serve as a refuge for native flora and fauna, allowing them to survive and re-establish after major flood events. Discuss these important functions of wetlands.

7. **Remove and Prevent Reintroduction of Exotic Species**
   Implementing an ongoing management strategy to prevent the reintroduction of exotic species is just as important as the initial removal. To the extent possible, initiate exotic species removal efforts at the headwaters and move downstream over time. Replant with native species.

8. **Connect all Existing Parks, Open Space, Canyons, and Tributaries / Create New Parks**
   As recommended in the Master Plan, create connectivity (from a trail, habitat, and flow perspective) between the San Diego River and all existing parks (including Presidio Park), open space, canyons, and tributaries. Connectivity is wonderful for people and essential for animal biodiversity. Create new parks and maximum green-space at every opportunity.

Consider dedicating the entire Qualcomm Stadium site as a park (without new development).

9. **Use Pervious Surfaces**
   To improve water quality, use permeable surfaces (e.g., porous paving) throughout and adjacent to the San Diego River Park. To the maximum extent practicable, pervious surfaces should be used for all trails, parking lots, and other Park facilities. Encourage the use of permeable surfaces at new and existing developments adjacent to the River.

10. **Emphasize Education**
    The Master Plan and the Park itself represent outstanding opportunities to educate municipal land use planners, elected officials, property owners (e.g., golf courses) and the general public about the critical role that they each play in degrading or protecting the River's water quality and hence the River's ability to provide human enjoyment and support wildlife. The Master Plan and Park should teach:
    - Direct link between land use and water quality
    - Pollution Prevention
    - Best management practices (source control and treatment control)
    - Watershed concept
    - "You are part of the problem; here's how you can be part of the solution"
    - Stewardship of the River and its natural, cultural, and historical resources.

11. **Add a New Principle Focused on Water Quality Themes**
    Add a Principle (or two) that conveys the water quality, land use / urban development, watershed, hydromodification, fishable / swimmable / kayakable, naturally functioning river system, and "need for education" themes. These themes (as described above) are the basic foundation of everything else we hope to accomplish in the River Park.

12. **Relocate / Improve Sanitary Sewer System**
    As recommended on page 115 of the Master Plan, relocate sanitary sewers out of the riverbed; make sewers more accessible for maintenance and repair; and provide effective means for the physical containment of sewage spills. Until these changes are made, continuing sewage spills to the River are inevitable.

13. **Comply with Department of Fish and Game Recommended Buffer Zones**
    To protect wildlife habitat and species, comply with all Department of Fish and Game recommended core and buffer zones/distances.

14. **Provide Public Access / Use Spur Trails / Provide Water Access / Regulate Public Access**
    It is very important to provide easy and frequent public access to the San Diego River Park. The River is a public resource and every opportunity for public access should be considered, including access along private property and golf courses. Frequent use of spur trails, viewing platforms, and boardwalks for scenic and wildlife viewing will reduce off-trail traffic.

Pedestrian bridges across the River should be used to a lesser extent. Frequent direct access to the water for recreation (e.g., fishing, swimming, boating) should also be provided. As appropriate, regulate public access by spatial and temporal zoning restrictions, i.e., restrict access to specific sensitive habitat areas and/or during specific sensitive times of year (such as nesting season of endangered species).

15. **Use Solar Lighting**

To the maximum extent practicable, use solar lighting throughout the Park. For the protection of wildlife, the majority of the park (habitat areas) should not be lit at night. For the safety of people, selected urbanized areas of the park should be lit (restrooms, parking lots) using devices that reduce light from spilling into adjacent habitat areas.

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[1] For example Recommendation 2, "Limit Future Development in the Floodplain", is supported by a Board Member, recommended in the Conceptual Plan, and is also my recommendation.

[2] C. Dale Becker and Duane A. Neitzel, Water Quality in North American River Systems, p. 3 (1992).