Vision Statement

“To restore a natural river corridor that enhances environmental, recreational and economic opportunities while increasing community pride, connectivity and quality of life.”

Santa Ana River Task Force
Executive Summary
Introduction to the Santa Ana River

The headwaters of the Santa Ana River begin in the San Bernardino Mountains, traveling nearly 100 miles before it spills into the Pacific Ocean. The Santa Ana River Watershed is the largest in Southern California, covering approximately 3,000 square miles. The Santa Ana River drains portions of four of the five major mountain ranges that border the Los Angeles Basin. Mount Baldy in the San Gabriel Mountains, San Gorgonio Peak in the San Bernardino Mountains, San Jacinto Peak in the San Jacinto Range and Santiago Peak in the Santa Ana Mountains all serve as headwaters for the river or its tributaries. Geologic records from these ranges tell us that the river is at least 12 million years old, making it one of the oldest rivers in California.

In Orange County, the Santa Ana River traverses through seven cities, including the City of Santa Ana. Within Santa Ana, the Santa Ana River extends from SR-22 to MacArthur Boulevard. This corridor represents 116 acres of open space area within the City of Santa Ana. The City of Santa Ana is located near the bottom of the watershed; as a result of this location, this section of the River receives the runoff from the upper watershed. While the majority of the River has been channelized for flood protection, it also provides open space relief to the adjacent urbanized areas. Despite its channelized condition, there are regional riding and hiking trails along the River.

However, in terms of its open space potential, the River is largely underutilized. It was the vision to maximize the River’s recreational, educational, ecological, and economic potential that led the Santa Ana City Council to create the Santa Ana River Task Force.
Formation of the Santa Ana River Task Force

On November 15, 2004, the Santa Ana City Council approved the formation of the Santa Ana River Task Force to study the possibility of restoring natural habitat environments and expanding recreational opportunities along the River. In January 2005, the Park Development, Recreation Programs and Education Partnership Council Committee solicited membership applications from various governmental and community organizations with an interest in the future of the Santa Ana River to serve as Task Force members to develop a plan for the future of the Santa Ana River. Candidate applications were reviewed by this subcommittee and official appointment to the Santa Ana River Task Force were made by the Santa Ana City Council on April 4, 2005.

The Task Force, composed of neighborhood groups, environmental associations, private businesses, governmental agencies and civic leaders, was convened to identify the open space needs and priorities of the community. Through consensus building, a vision statement for the Santa Ana River Task Force was established. This vision statement provided direction to identify opportunities to enhance the River and established a basis for the formulation of goals to guide the realization of the open space potential of the Santa Ana River.
The Santa Ana River Task Force first met on October 11, 2005 to begin the task of examining existing activities along the River, identifying examples both within and beyond Santa Ana city limits to be re-searched, and determining short and long-term goals for both the Task Force and the River. In pursuit of formulation of these goals, Task Force members participated in various meetings over the next several months. The work of the Task Force began with a brainstorming exercise to identify key stakeholders; comprehensive discussions regarding the future of the Santa Ana River ensued. Task Force members also heard presentations on projects along various segments of the Santa Ana River as well as on other successful similar river improvement projects outside of the Santa Ana River Watershed.

Task Force Members also participated in two special meetings which consisted of all-day tours to locations along the Santa Ana River both within and outside of Santa Ana to view models of how other cities have treated the River within an urban environment. The Task Force also visited potential locations where Santa Ana has an opportunity to embrace and enhance this unique attribute. Sites visited within Santa Ana to demonstrate both areas of example and areas of potential included: the River View Golf Course, Forrest Paul Park, Edna Park, the 17th Street Site adjacent to Ferrellgas, Fairview Triangle, Pacific Electric Right of Way, McFadden Triangle, Centennial Park, Golden Loop Trailhead Site, Kappella Stables and Edinger Triangle. Tour of exemplary sites along the Santa Ana River in other Orange County cities included: Yorba Regional Park (Anaheim), Rubber Dam at Katella & Glassell (Anaheim), Cedar Grove Park (Tustin), Hicks/Peters Canyons Trails & bikeways (Orange), Talbert Park (Costa Mesa), Fairview Park (Costa Mesa), and Moon Park (Costa Mesa). These sites were selected to showcase the responses to the various recreational, educational, and environmental challenges that an urban river faces.
Goals of the Santa Ana River Task Force

Through consensus building, the Task Force identified the following goals for the Santa Ana River:

- Identify opportunity areas for land acquisition and for implementation of improvements that beautify the Riverfront, preserve natural habitat, and enhance environmental values while protecting privacy, flood control and public safety.
- Seek innovative methods to achieve the goals of the Santa Ana River Vision Plan while maintaining a balance between recreation, habitat restoration, and flood protection.
- Preserve and enhance ecological values along the Santa Ana River.
- Protect water quality and replenish ground water.
- Educate the public to reconnect to the Santa Ana River.
- Use the River to unite the community, to improve property values and to enhance the image of Santa Ana.
- Create trail linkages and staging areas to increase public access and links to other City, County and State open space resources and expand concessions to increase recreation opportunities for residents and visitors.
- Increase use of the Santa Ana River as a non-motor transportation system, promoting its status as a National Recreational Trail and enhancing the multiple uses of the River Trail.
- Ensure that future City projects and policies incorporate the goals of the Santa Ana River Vision Plan.
- Ensure long-term preservation and maintenance of Santa Ana River open space improvements.
- Identify opportunities to restore water to the Santa Ana River and to incorporate water features into open space areas along the Santa Ana River.

A New Beginning for the Santa Ana River

Santa Ana has one of the youngest populations in the country, living in an extremely densely populated urban environment. Santa Ana also has less than one-third of the State recommended open space per capita and only one-fourth the national average for cities of similar size. When considering the public health epidemic of obesity and Type 2 diabetes, the need for recreational open-space becomes even more important. In addition to open space and recreation considerations, the ramifications of future planning and uses of the Santa Ana River are intertwined with area transportation options, the image of Santa Ana, its property values and economic development opportunities.

The Santa Ana City Council, the City of Santa Ana and the Santa Ana River Task Force recognize that the Santa Ana River is more than a concrete avenue for our floodwaters. The location of the Santa Ana River provides the benefits of flood protection and water supply, but has not been fully utilized in terms of its potential for open space, recreational activities and wildlife habitat opportunities. The Santa Ana River Task Force has developed a plan that speaks well beyond the restoration and ecological aspects of the River. The Task Force has emphasized that the River has potential to serve as a “conduit for connectivity” and should be seen as “a uniter, not a divider” as it currently contains and has potential to create additional linkages - not just to recreational trails, but to join together a community once physically divided. A complete enhancement to the River will create partnerships, collaborations, and policies that ensure communication and coordination between entities, major stakeholders, and users to address all aspects of the Santa Ana River – environmental, recreational, and economic.

Ultimately, the Santa Ana River Task Force has strong wishes to see this Vision Plan implemented as a means to ensure the quality of life for residents along the River, its recreational users, and the natural environment.