



Mission Hills Canyon Enhancement Planning

Workshop 1, Notes

October 15, 2016; 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Francis Parker Middle School, 4201 Randolph St., San Diego, CA 92103

Stakeholder Attendees

San Diego Canyonlands Staff

Eric Bowlby – Executive Director

Lauren Kahal, a volunteer from RECON Environmental, provided the note taking

Mission Hills Canyon Stakeholders

Duke Doulphus

Daniel Peterson

Jasper Benke

Teddi Stafford

Patricia Rhow

Peter StClair

Gail Nifontoff

John Lomac

Henry Eimsfud

Gerry Nifontoff

Steve Huemmer

Barbara Nolan

Brett Hoen

John Braunstein

Carol Emerick

1. Introductory Comments & CEP Process:

- Canyon Enhancement Planning (CEP) Brief History
- 1) Build Stewardship Groups, 2) Assemble Existing Conditions Maps, 3) Outreach and Stakeholder Planning Workshops, Create Enhancement Action Plan, 4) Seek Support, Funding and Permits as needed, 5) Execute Action Plans/Projects

2. Opportunities and Constraints

- Most proposed enhancements will be on City of San Diego lands and will require agreement with and approvals from community stakeholders, planning groups, the Parks and Recreation Department (including the Open Space Division), Development Services Department, and City Council. Other land to be considered are Street Rights of Way (ROWs) and lands where there are public easements across private property.
 - Private property owners are important stakeholders, and if interested/willing, may involve their land; Acquisition of land from willing sellers may be recommended.

3. Land Jurisdiction and Regulatory Agencies

- The land in our canyons is Environmentally Sensitive Land and there are regulations designed to protect wildlife and the resource values that we will comply with in the planning and implementation. The resource agencies, such as the US Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Regional Water Quality Control Board, and the Army Corps of Engineers (where wetlands are involved), are stakeholders and may require permits for proposed enhancement projects.

4. Canyonlands Enhancement Plan Goals:

- Balance conservation of resources with open space enjoyment and nature educational opportunities;
- Provide public access to nature and connections to other trails or key destinations;
- Incorporate recreation in ways that are compatible with natural resources.

5. Stakeholder Introductions and Brief Comments

- Large interest in native plant and wildlife and biodiversity of the canyon
 - Wildlife spotted in the canyon includes: hawks, songbirds, coyotes, fox
 - Support for the use of the app iNaturalist when using the trails
 - How to help Monarch butterflies and other migratory wildlife? For butterflies, can they plant milkweed?
 - Eric answered that all planting or other projects need approval from the City Open Space Division.
 - Potential for cactus wren to come back and nest in cholla. Cholla could be planted because its native, but not within brush management zones.
- Much of the group would like to see coyotes living in Mission Hills Canyon again
 - Allen Canyon may have a coyote population
 - Though they can be issue for cat owners, coyotes may have an effect of deterring pet and feral cats in the canyons, which in turn can help the bird populations
 - General opposition to animal control's ability to trap and kill or poison coyotes,
 - There's lots of support for preservation of the natural lands
- Interest in assisting with restoration is strong
- Ice plant and other invasive species removal is important
- Mission Hills Canyon is labeled in Google Maps as Robins Egg Trail/Canyon, support voiced in changing its name to correct name
- Issues with trails – impacts to plant and wildlife, invites homeless/transient populations
- Safety and cleanliness concerns: need to discourage or create more transparency so that homeless/transients don't gather in the site (signage?)
 - SD River Park Foundation study indicates that 90% of trash pulled out of the San Diego River areas is likely a result of homeless camps
- Approach taken by the City: make contact with homeless often through posting notices; they cannot move their belongings because it is private property, but once homeless are noticed and they leave, then environmental services department can go in to clean up, often taking weeks to months.
- Importance of public vista points
- Erosion of trails makes it harder to walk the canyons
- Safety concerns with off-leash dogs; more signage indicated dogs must be leashed
- City sewer/infrastructure maintenance creating disturbance; some are better than others at re-vegetating following disturbance
- Mission Hills Canyon(s) was given the highest value by a city survey done on Uptown canyons in terms of value in archaeological, biological, water, etc. Florence Canyon was also ranked high in value. (1988 Upton Community Plan appendix)
 - Carol Emerick will provide the docs to Eric and he will send to the group
- Difficulty in bringing water and tools into some canyon areas, which can discourage volunteers to continue to come back to help with restoration

- Need City support for trash can installation and maintenance; City has been a big help with hauling brush management waste out
- Opinion voiced that the City does not treat canyon preservation as important, other than some individual rangers who show concern and give it their attention
- The Bradley Method: remove the non-natives only, and if there are surrounding native plants, the seeds can then naturally sprout and don't need to be watered to become established
- Concern with encroachment by development and existing neighbors who illegally cut trees and vegetation on City property
- Encroachment is a particular concern in the smaller Florence Canyon, which is designated by the City as Open Space but is not dedicated.
 - This is the only green space in Hillcrest, which is a concern especially with the new Community Plan allowing tall buildings along this corridor
 - Trail connectivity through community should be high priority
- Senior Park Ranger Jason oversees about 3,500 acres of open space including canyons. Noted sewer infrastructure, brush management, transient concerns. Open Space Division sees preserving these areas as a top priority, as well as passive recreation.
- The Fire Department also has a stake in brush management; brush management zones have restrictions on what you can plant within them (includes just a few woody species and requires some woody/taller plants to be spaced far apart) to reduce fuel for wildfire
- If you notice something going on in your canyon such as illegal dumping, transients, illegal tree cutting, etc., call Ranger Jason - 619-235-5262
- The southern part of Mission Hills Canyon is under Open Space Division and the northern portion is Community Park Division, which goes back to the 30's/40's. Lower portion of canyon was always private until 70's when all property owners petitioned against its development and organized to buy the canyon and dedicate it as public open space.

6. Review Existing Conditions Maps

- Anything over a 25% slope is considered environmentally sensitive land
- Areas of mapped erosion shown
- Trails should offer an escape to nature for residents in the city, (view-shed matters)
- Socio-infrastructure map may be incorrect where it shows the vacant private lots (in blue) where it is actually city owned Open Space
- The blue, triangle shaped lot below the school is also not correctly symbolized as it is owned by the school district
- Discussed social trails and whether we return most of them back to native habitat
- Eric discussed existing sewer access roads and easements for utility maintenance; and that some access to canyons is only through public rights-of-way through private property.

7. Review of Socio-Infrastructure Conditions (North to South) - Stakeholder Input

- Do we need any other access to Mission Hills canyon besides the access points that we have now?
 - There are social trails with other access points that people use in the south end
 - Eric noted that as a rule of thumb, if there is a trailhead within ¼ mile, you don't need another one.
 - Some social trails/trailheads may be good habitat restoration areas

8. Next Meeting & Stakeholder Field Trips

- Field Trip scheduled at November 5, 8:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. or so; Meet at the trailhead behind the tennis courts near Pioneer Park, corner of Randolph St. and Washington Place.
 - We will discuss issues, opportunities, and constraints for canyon enhancement