

## JOHNNY CARSON PARK REVITALIZATION

### Project Identity and Location

The Johnny Carson Park Revitalization project is the renovation of an existing 9.9 acre multi-use urban park located immediately north of the 134 Freeway and the Los Angeles River in Burbank, California.

### Purpose of Project

The City of Burbank initially wanted a renovation and energy-efficiency update of the various recreational amenities in this heavily used urban park. The scope of work included new pedestrian trails, a destination children's play area, expanded event stage, picnic areas, refurbished pedestrian bridges, and interpretive signage. Large mature trees that lined the perimeter of much of the park were to remain. During the conceptual design phase, we saw an important opportunity for improving water quality, flood control, and habitat restoration. We articulated a vision to the City for transformation of an existing concrete storm channel that bisects the park into a restored natural stream – actually, a historic water body: the Little Tujunga Wash, a tributary of the Los Angeles River that conveys a significant portion of urban runoff from Burbank into the river itself. Transforming this gutter into a natural system would provide not only local benefits of habitat restoration and aquifer recharge, but also regional benefits by lessening the demand on the Los Angeles River itself. We successfully convinced the City to add the creek restoration to the project scope.

### Role of Landscape Architect

The Landscape Architect took leadership in presenting to the City a narrative about its important contributions to improving the quality of water entering the Los Angeles River, as well as providing better recreational amenities to the community. As the Prime Consultant and Landscape Architect on this project, we successfully led a design team — which included civil, structural, and electrical engineers, an environmental graphics designer, and a stream restoration specialist—to achieve technical, environmental, functional and aesthetic design excellence. The Landscape Architect prepared demolition, hardscape, irrigation, and planting designs for the park. We also managed the design team through construction administration support during the year-long construction period.

### Significance

The project addressed four factors. First, the project is significant for its restoration of a tributary to the Los Angeles River. Water quality and water retention are critical for the Los Angeles region and were the drivers for the design. We uncovered Little Tujunga Wash creek, working with a stream restoration specialist and engineers to replace the existing concrete channel with a natural stream bed with native plants. Second, the creek restoration means more food and shelter for urban wildlife, which in turn connects people to nature. Wildlife in urban areas benefit human health, quality of life, education, and aesthetics. Third, we created a community place with more and better recreational amenities to provide a positive and healthy human experience of the city. Renovations of existing green spaces are important projects as building density and development within our cities increase and the availability of land for open space areas become scarcer. Fourth, the project is an example of the leadership role of landscape architects in the design of multi-functional open spaces that also benefit the greater watershed through improved water quality, groundwater recharge, and cleaning of the L.A. River.

### Special Factors

- By presenting a broader vision for the park renovation which benefits the Los Angeles River Watershed as well as Burbank citizens, the Landscape Architect enrolled the City to increase its project scope and budget to include the creek restoration. Subsequently, the City also decided to measure performance by monitoring the water quality.
- Throughout the park, visitors discover interpretive signage along a loop trail which provide ecological education in support of enhancing citizens' stewardship of the park and watershed.
- Before the renovation construction began, dozens of sycamore trees succumbed to the polyphagous shot hole borer beetle. We collaborated closely with the City Arborists to find appropriate replacements for the sycamores and other new trees for the park.
- The project reveals the evolving role of the Landscape Architect as park designer. Our profession is now called upon to consider conditions beyond the recreational or aesthetic value: e.g., the drought; limited number of public open space; pest infestations; multi-benefit spaces—and all within constrained budgets. As we did for the Johnny Carson Park Revitalization project, our profession must seize every opportunity to push forward sustainably designed landscapes which address performance, beauty, and functionality for multi-generational, multi-ability people to enjoy for many years to come.