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## **Public Access Guidelines**

Friends of the Los Angeles River (FoLAR) has an established legacy of earnest community engagement and effective grassroots advocacy for a more natural and accessible Los Angeles River. Our work has always endeavored to build towards a vision of a more restored, natural and ecologically sustainable River – of croaking frogs and cottonwood-shaded paths – as the lifeline to the best possible future for the Los Angeles region. Countless studies on public and mental health have already confirmed that access to natural space is integral to our well-being. In the context of highly-urbanized Los Angeles County, the relevance of river revitalization efforts to the quality of life of our communities is irrefutable. Consequently, the success of revitalization efforts will be heavily contingent on the public’s ability to access a reinvigorated River corridor.

Following is a list of recommendations FoLAR is proposing to strengthen Public Access as a core principle for existing and future LA River revitalization efforts. These recommendations prioritize public interest, equitable access and connection to this burgeoning natural resource, while providing multi-beneficial opportunities for ecological restoration.

Our recommendations are drawn from both FoLAR’s extensive body of work advocating for public access, our recommendations of best practices, and precedents set by jurisdictional managers. These can be broken down into **Four Public Access Objectives**:

### **1. Make Public Access PUBLIC**

The success of river-revitalization projects will depend on the availability of physical public access to and along the LA River Corridor and visual public access (views) to the LA River Corridor from other Public Spaces. LA River Corridor areas should provide clear connections to public rights-of-way, be related to the adjacent uses and be designed, build, and maintained in a way that indicates their public character. Public Access areas must be designed in a manner that “feels public.” The goal should be to design public access areas in a way that makes the LA River Corridor enjoyable to people from a wide range of demographics, ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds that reflect the diverse makeup of residents across LA County

River revitalization projects should:

- **Acquire vacant or under-utilized river-adjacent land to expand the River corridor.** Where appropriate and feasible, consider acquisition of or easements on

utility corridors and private property to expand public access. Encourage the development of vacant riverside land as public recreational space and improve public access by pathways. (1996 LARMP) (2007 LARRMP)

- **Create large regional destinations, parks, and open spaces along areas of the River.** Examples include Sepulveda Basin, Hansen Dam Recreation Area, Hahamongna Watershed Park, Taylor Yard (including G-2 and future state park), LA State Historic Park, Piggyback yard, Rio Hondo Confluence, Long Beach Wetlands Park. (1996 LARMP) (2007 LARRMP) (2011 FoLAR) (2013 ARBOR)
- **Create small local community-oriented access points along the river.** Develop “vista points” on street-ends adjacent to the LA River that serve as community access points and feature interpretative signage and native landscaping. River LA’s “Rio Vistas” project should be examined as a model for these access points. (1996 County LARMP)
- **Establish or expand a year-round safety and weather warning system** to advise visitors about changing conditions in the River. (2011 FoLAR)

## 2. Make Public Access USABLE

LA River Corridor Areas will be most enjoyed when they are designed and built to encourage diverse, River-related activities along the corridor. The varied conditions along the LA River Corridor and various historical, cultural, and natural attributes provide opportunities for creating projects with a “sense of place” and a unique identity (placemaking).

Public Access improvements should be designed for a wide range of users. While some river corridor areas are best suited for quiet and contemplative public spaces, other lend themselves to be used for large public gatherings, festivals, outdoor markets or exhibits. Within every river-adjacent project, public access should be designed to respect all visitors experiences and look for an opportunity to introduce and balance passive with active recreation opportunities such as kayaking, biking, fishing, and swimming where possible and appropriate.

River revitalization projects should:

- **Establish or expand safe routes to local cultural and civic places** (parks, schools, transit hubs, commerce & employment centers) adjacent to River corridor. (2003-2007 LA LARRMP)
- **Create trails, bikeways and walking paths that support a diverse and interconnected mobility network throughout the river corridor.** This

connectivity should support the diverse system of interconnected local parks and regional spaces. Provide safe, convenient access to and circulation along the river. Provide Green Arterial and Local Street connections to the River. (2014 RIO) (2003-2007 LA LARRMP).

- **Establish or expand recreational opportunities for non-motorized activities**, such as: swimming/wading, canoeing/kayaking, fishing, horseback riding, hiking, and bird-watching, where appropriate and feasible. (2011 FoLAR)
- **Establish or expand opportunities community programming spaces**, including public art (visual or performance art) in the River corridor. (2011 FoLAR) (1996 County LARMP)
- **Establish or expand opportunities for educational activities in the River corridor**, including collaborating with schools and nonprofit organizations. (1996 County LARMP)
- **Establish simple and transparent process for permitting should be required for specific events dependent on group size, location, and particular nature of the event.** A single permit application should exist for all uses, and the fee (which should be waived for educational purposes) must be reasonable and support River-related activities. (2011 FoLAR)
- **Establish and expand basic and uniform river signage at key access points.** Signage should be accessible to multiple languages, provide educational information, and delineate the acceptable limits of activities. (2011 FoLAR)
- **Allow business development opportunities along River corridor** including small entrepreneurial business such as food vendors and performers, where appropriate. (2007 FoLAR & NRDC)
- **Build linkages between river-adjacent communities** on different sides of the river corridor. (2012 CASP)

### **3. Maintain VISUAL QUALITY of the LA River Corridor**

The LA River is a scenic resource that contributes to the enjoyment and quality of life of communities throughout the LA County. As a potential 51-mile linear open-space and greenway, the LA River is unique in its ability to function as a visual unifying element for the entire County. The LA River has tremendous potential to provide unique views of a contiguous linear corridor connecting the mountains to the ocean, of diverse riparian ecologies that reflect the various natural histories of the region, and visual connection to and from communities within the river corridor. Visual access and aesthetics along the LA River Corridor are critical to providing relief from the built, concrete and often chaotic, urban landscape. The visual access to the LA River Corridor should be preserved, enhanced, and where possible expanded.

River revitalization projects should:

- **Locating buildings, structures, parking lots, and landscaping of new projects** in the river corridor to improve, enhance, or maintain views to and from the river corridor by orienting them towards the river.
- **Organize river corridor development** to avoid casting additional shadows on the river corridor, and allow views and access between buildings.
- **Designing bridges, viaducts, and other structures such as landmarks** to suggest the location of the corridor even if the LA River is not visible.
- **Designing public access so the visual aesthetic** of the LA River Corridor is not diminished by large nearby building masses, structures, or incompatible uses.

#### **4. Ensure Public Access is Compatible with River Ecology & Habitat Goals**

Even in its current state, the LA River functions as a critical habitat corridor for native and non-native wildlife. Access to wildlife and open space areas allows visitors to discover, experience, and appreciate our regions natural resources and can foster stewardship and public support for river revitalization. However, public access can also have an adverse effect on the river's ecological health. River revitalization plans aim to improve or enhance the health of river ecology. Accompanying public access should be designed to minimize potential negative impacts through siting, design, and management strategies.

River revitalization projects should:

- Planning public access in a way that balances the needs of ecology and people to the greatest extent possible/practicable/feasible.
- Employ appropriate siting, design and management strategies such as buffers, use restrictions, or seasonal periods, to reduce or prevent adverse human and wildlife interactions
- Providing visitors with diverse and satisfying public access opportunities to focus activities in designated areas and avoid habitat fragmentation, destruction of vegetation, and soil erosion.
- **Maximize use of Southern California native vegetation for habitat and landscaping elements** in support of revitalization ecological goals. (2003-2007 LA LARRMP) (2013 ARBOR)
- **Emphasize multiple-benefit landscape designs and infrastructure improvements** for water-quality, stormwater capture, groundwater recharge, and flood control protection where feasible. (2003-2007 LA LARRMP) (2013 ARBOR)

## References:

- 1992 – **FoLAR** *Environmentally Compatible and Long-Term Flood Control Alternatives* (re: LACDA)
- 1993 – **FoLAR & LACDPW** *Taylor Yard Multi-Use Study*
- 1996 – LA **County** Los Angeles River Master Plan (**LARMP**)
- 1999 – **FoLAR & Oxy UEPI** “Re-envisioning the River” Series
- 2001 – **FoLAR** Chinatown Yard Alliance, The Coalition for a State Park at Taylor Yard
- 2003-7 – City of **Los Angeles** River Revitalization Master Plan
- 2007 – **FoLAR et. al** Meeting of the Styles Arroyo Seco Mural
- 2007 – **FoLAR & NRDC** *D-Town Visions*
- 2010 – EPA Designation of the LA River as a Traditional Navigable Waterway
- 2011 – **FoLAR** Recommendations for Near-Term Recreational Access and Use of the LA River
- 2012 – **FoLAR** SB 1201
- 2012 – Cornfield Arroyo Specific Plan (**CASP**)
- 2013 – **FoLAR & River LA** *The Piggyback Yard Feasibility Study, Conceptual Designs*
- 2013 – Los Angeles River Ecosystem Feasibility Study (**ARBOR**)
- 2014 – River Improvement Overlay (**RIO**) Districts
- 2015 – Northeast Los Angeles Riverfront Collaborative (**NELA RC**) Housing and Urban Development Sustainable Communities Challenge Grant