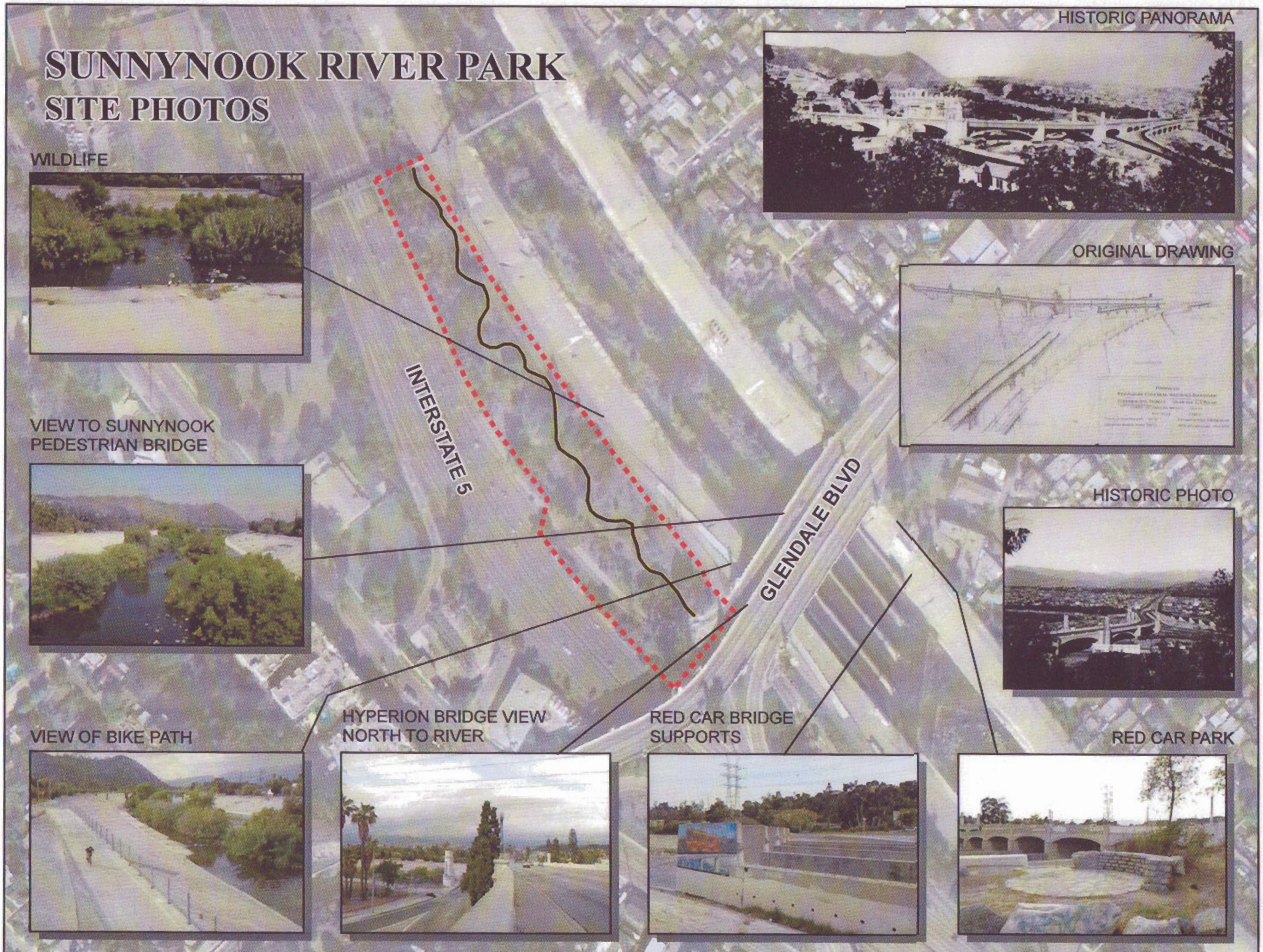
SUNNYNOOK RIVER PARK
SITE PHOTOS
WILDLIFE
VIEW TO SUNNYNOOK PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE
VIEW OF BIKE PATH
HYPERION BRIDGE VIEW NORTH TO RIVER
RED CAR BRIDGE SUPPORTS
RED CAR PARK
HISTORIC PANORAMA
ORIGINAL DRAWING
HISTORIC PHOTO
INTERSTATE 5
GLENDALE BLVD

FIGURE 4
Glendale-Hyperion Bridge Pedestrian Circulation
Alternative 1: Pedestrian Bridge Overcrossing
Glendale-Hyperion Bridge Improvements

Aerial image © Google Earth, 2007. Annotation by CH2M HILL, 2007.

CH2MHILL

6. General Criteria: Sunnynook River Park

A. Increased Mitigation and Enhancement

The Sunnynook River Park project proposed in this EEM Program grant application would significantly benefit from construction mitigation related to the seismic improvements to the Glendale-Hyperion Viaduct Complex by expanding and connecting the park footprint of the site, by restoring riparian and upland habitat next to the naturalized (soft-bottom) streambed of the Los Angeles River, by creating educational opportunities through interpretive signage, and by additionally mitigating existing impacts from the I-5 Freeway through the buffering of particulate matter via an expanded tree canopy in the park. Sunnynook River Park was identified as a priority project in the *Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan* (LARRMP) adopted by the Los Angeles City Council in May 2007. The LARRMP seeks to achieve the following broad goals:

- Improve the environment, enhance water quality, improve water resources, and improve the ecological functioning of the River.
- Provide public access to the River.
- Provide significant recreation space and open space, new trails, and improve natural habitats to support wildlife.
- Foster a growth in community awareness of the Los Angeles River, and pride in the Los Angeles River.
- Establish environmentally-sensitive urban design guidelines, land use guidelines, and development guidelines for the River zone that will create economic development opportunities to enhance and improve River-adjacent communities by providing open space, housing, retail spaces, such as restaurants and cafes, educational facilities, and places for other public institutions.
- Preserve and enhance the flood control features of the River.

Especially in concert with the mitigation for the seismic upgrades to the Glendale-Hyperion Viaduct Complex, the additional mitigation provided by Sunnynook River Park, achieves all of these goals:

- The project will create habitat that is more compatible with the existing adjacent riparian and in-stream habitat by reintroducing native plants and by creating functioning upland and riparian plant communities.
- With increased permeability facilitating on-site water infiltration, smart irrigation, and attention to drainage patterns when constructing the park, runoff to the River will be avoided reducing (1) the spread of polluted contaminants to the nearby wildlife area and (2) their cumulative addition to downstream flows.
- Trails through the park will directly connect Sunnynook Pedestrian Bridge and Griffith Park, the Los Angeles River Bikeway, Glendale Boulevard and Hyperion Avenue, and the new pedestrian over-crossing downstream of the Glendale-Hyperion Viaduct Complex.

- The project would add 3.4 acres of parkland connecting and enlarging the existing green, open space footprint of the area.
- The project would open up and improve a degraded, unsafe area that is currently off-limits to the public.
- The historic Glendale-Hyperion Viaduct Complex is a source of pride to the community, as expressed by many members of the Silver Lake and Atwater Village communities during public meetings on the proposed changes to it. In addition to providing enhanced access to the views of the naturalized River and the hills in Griffith Park, the proposed park will also provide a scenic vantage point for viewing the landmark bridge—an important symbol of local cultural heritage.
- Visitors to Griffith Park (over 10 million annually) will now have pedestrian access via the proposed park to the commercial and retail areas of Silver Lake and Atwater Village on Glendale Boulevard and Hyperion Avenue—and this can become a safe, familiar route for circulating through the community by nonvehicular means.
- Finally, all flood protection would be maintained at existing levels and the importance of the River's role in flood protection—enabling the City's urban development—would be highlighted in the educational displays.

These goals are also compatible with many of the state-wide priorities, listed below under Section 6 B.

Sunnynook River Park is not part of the mitigation for the seismic upgrades to the Glendale-Hyperion Viaduct Complex complex. However, it is associated with the mitigation for the bridge construction, as follows:

- Creation of a pedestrian bridge built on the historic Pacific Red Car railroad supports downstream of the Glendale-Hyperion Viaduct Complex will originate on the west bank of the River, span the River and provide views of the surrounding hills and naturalized River bed, and connect on the east side to Red Car Park.
- Restoration of the historic balustrades on the Glendale-Hyperion Viaduct Complex will improve pedestrian safety because many have been filled in with concrete since the bridges were first built, obscuring sight lines for pedestrians that use several of the bridge staircases. With the restoration of the balustrades, not only is the architectural integrity of the bridge restored, but it allows pedestrians to quickly ascertain if other people are already on the stairs leading to and from the bridge.
- Consolidation of sidewalks on the north sides of Hyperion Avenue and Glendale Boulevard with a new center crosswalk will serve to improve safe pedestrian circulation.
- Creation of a pocket park and bike access with the realignment of the I-5 off-ramp and related new crosswalks and traffic signals will aid pedestrians navigating Glendale Boulevard south of the Viaduct Complex complex.

Upon completion of these mitigation elements, a "River loop" will be completed, but the Caltrans easement portion of the project—upstream of the bridge project—will remain an unimproved and underutilized "gap" in the loop unless the park component of the project is fulfilled. The park component of the project—which is the subject of this application—will provide important recreational, environmental, and educational functions that will allow visitors to walk, sit, rest, and/or learn about the area, its nature, infrastructure, and other amenities. Without improvements to the park area, runoff problems will remain, an opportunity to provide critical River habitat connectivity and additional buffering of particulate matter from the I-5 Freeway will be lost, routes between the River and existing recreational facilities across the I-5 Freeway and into Griffith Park may go unrecognized, and information about the linkages between wider regional transportation improvements and River revitalization will not be shared.

B. Statewide Resource Priorities

This project will immediately serve the communities of Silver Lake and Atwater Village with a combined population of over 50,000 residents. This project will connect to Griffith Park that hosts over 10 million visitors annually. As mentioned previously, Sunnynook River Park is priority project identified in the City's *Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan,* which was adopted after an extensive public consultation process.

The project fulfills several statewide resource priorities, as discussed below.

One of the statewide and regional priorities is implementation of Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) for pollutants entering critical water bodies, including the Los Angeles River. These are a City priority—with some TMDLs already established and some under development. Trash and Metals TMDLs were approved by the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board in 2007; a Nutrients TMDL was adopted in 2004. A Bacteria TMDL for the Los Angeles River is currently under development with studies underway to identify sources of bacteria and where recreational uses are occurring.

This project will help meet the trash TMDL by converting a piece of unused vacant land frequented by homeless people that drains to the River into safe, verdant open space with regular trash pick-up and maintenance. While it will not directly reduce nutrient loading, interpretive signs will provide education about how reduced water, fertilizer, and pesticides usage can be achieved through the planting of native species. The park would serve as a demonstration to illustrate how low-impact gardening practices can benefit ecosystems and waterways.

The statewide priority of implementing Regional Water Quality Control Board Watershed Management Initiative Chapters, plans, and policies includes these priorities set by the Los Angeles Regional Board:

- Habitat loss/restoration
- Preservation of high quality habitats

Sunnynook River Park restores riparian and upland habitat next to the River, an area rich in biological diversity due to its natural streambed. *The Biota of the Los Angeles River* in 1996 identified 116 species of birds still utilizing the River. Recent fish surveys in 2007 by Friends of the Los Angeles River have revealed that fish are breeding in this stretch of the River. While the ecosystem cannot be fully complete with a concrete bank, this project helps re-weave the ecosystem of the River by providing nesting, roosting, and foraging habitat for birds; habitat for small mammals, reptiles and amphibians; and a wildlife corridor from Griffith Park along the River.

This project greatly increases recreational access by opening up Griffith Park to increased pedestrian access by the community and the creation of a loop trail system including Griffith Park, through the proposed Sunnynook River park, the Los Angeles River and Red Car Park. Griffith Park, the largest municipal park in the United States—with 4,217 acres—will now have another important non-motorized access point to and from the park and will better connect the local communities surrounding Griffith Park.

This project also addresses environmental justice since the surrounding communities of Silver Lake and Atwater Village are "minority majority" areas with the population being 55.9% Hispanic or Latino, and 17.0% Asian. While Griffith Park is "next door" to these communities, pedestrian access is not always easy and safe. This project will improve pedestrian access to the park through Sunnynook River Park.

Local Cash Contributions

As the project moves forward, it is expected that our non-profit partners on the River, such as Northeast Trees and Friends of the Los Angeles River, will contribute to planting the project. Experience has taught us to have trees and major shrubs planted by professional landscaping crews to avoid damage to nursery stock, but to have the community participate in the final planting of small shrubs, perennials and groundcovers. The value of this contribution is estimated at $2,500 (50 volunteers at $10 per hour for 5 hours).

C. Project Readiness

The Sunnynook River Park can be easily implemented according to the timetable outlined in the EEM Program Procedures and Criteria.

Conceptual Plans for the park have been prepared, and Caltrans supports the project. Detailed construction drawings will be prepared if and when EEM Program funds are granted for the project.

The Glendale-Hyperion Viaduct Complex transportation project is currently undergoing EIR preparation, which includes the mitigation for the project. Funds are fully appropriated for the project and construction drawings are at the 60% stage. Construction on the Glendale-Hyperion Viaduct Complex is expected to start in the third quarter of 2009.

Matching funds are expected to come from the result of using the Sunnynook River Park site as a construction laydown area and the requirement to restore it back to its previous condition. If this area is not used as such, other funds will need to be identified.

The implementation of the Sunnynook River Park will not require any permits or require a lengthy environmental process. It is expected that the park will be implemented under CEQA as a categorical exemption either under Class 4, "Minor Alterations to Land" which "consists of minor public or private alterations to the condition of land, water and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of mature, scenic trees except for forestry and agricultural purposes" or Class 1, "Existing Facilities" which "consists of the operation, repair, maintenance or minor alteration of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features, involving negligible or no expansion of use beyond that previously existing." A final determination regarding CEQA compliance will be made upon further scoping of the project as funding becomes available.

As noted earlier, this project is consistent and included in the City of Los Angeles *Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan.* Sunnynook River Park is also consistent with the goals and guidelines of the County of Los Angeles *Los Angeles River Master Plan*; the Resources Agency *Common Ground: Watershed Plan for the San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers Watersheds*; and *The Greater Los Angeles County Integrated Regional Water Management Plan,* and the Million Trees Initiative spearheaded by Mayor Villaraigosa.

7. Project Category Criteria—Roadside Recreation Projects: Sunnynook River Park

A. Need for the Project

The proposed Sunnynook River Park is just 3.4 acres in size, but its impact would extend far wider than its site footprint because of its potential reach into physically-separated communities and to serve as a high-profile destination along the planned 32-mile River greenway, and its ability to facilitate broad mobility improvements and wildlife connectivity. This project is considered by the City to be critically-needed and well-deserving of funding as discussed below.

In Los Angeles as elsewhere, there is tremendous need to develop easily-accessible parks, especially with safe circulation for non-motorized transportation. Griffith Park, while the largest municipal park in the United States at 4,217 acres and over 10 million visitors annually, only has space for 9800 parked vehicles. Obviously public transportation is one means of getting visitors to the park, but a better, physically healthier alternative is walking or biking so that the park experience begins with the journey from home—helping to demonstrate to visitors how their communities are physically connecting to important natural resources.

Sunnynook River Park will enable pedestrian access into and out of Griffith Park for a new group of visitors and will make a vital Griffith Park-Los Angeles River connection. Combined with the improvements to the Glendale-Hyperion Viaduct Complex and the mitigation for its construction, Sunnynook River Park will complete a recreational loop trail, and provide critical links for visitors between Griffith Park and the communities of Sliver Lake and Atwater Village. Sunnynook River Park can potentially serve a population of much more than 52,393 (the combined total of Silver Lake and Atwater Village communities). If just 1 percent of the annual visitors to Griffith Park use Sunnynook River Park, then we can assume an additional 100,000 people may utilize the new park annually. This represents a unique opportunity to realize the vision of the Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan—bringing people to the River for a high-quality park experience while learning about and experiencing nature.

Sunnynook River Park would also complement several other parks—one upstream near Los Feliz Boulevard and an existing golf driving range, one on the other side of the I-5 Freeway, one planned as part of the Glendale-Hyperion Viaduct Complex mitigation, the Red Car Park, and several State parks and facilities downstream that will eventually be connected by the planned 32-mile River bikepath.

Sunnynook River Park is situated at the northwest corner of the Glendale-Hyperion Viaduct Complex. On the southwest corner a new pocket park and additional bike path access is planned as part of the realignment of the I-5 off-ramp. Red Car Park is across the River on the southeast corner and was built several years ago.

With the Glendale-Hyperion Viaduct Complex improvements and mitigation, a pedestrian could walk from Griffith Park, south through the proposed trails in Sunnynook River Park, under the Viaduct Complex to the new pocket park, and go across the new pedestrian bridge to Red Car

Park. Heading north under the Glendale-Hyperion Viaduct Complex and walking on the greenway northeast of the bridge, one could then take Sunnynook Pedestrian Bridge across the River and go back into Griffith Park. Sunnynook River Park is critical to complete this loop and at this point in time, only funding from the EEM Program can build the park. Via the bikepath, directly adjacent to Sunnynook River Park, this park will link to numerous pocket parks along the way, Rio de Los Angeles State Park, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy Los Angeles River Center and Gardens, and eventually, the state-owned Cornfields Park, currently under design.

With the Glendale-Hyperion Viaduct Complex planned for the start of construction in the third quarter of 2009, it would be a greatly missed opportunity not to build Sunnynook River Park at the same time. In addition to all the benefits discussed above, the completion of Sunnynook River Park would result in an historically-important cultural landmark surrounded by open green parks harkening back to its early days of development. There are very few opportunities to create projects with so large an impact on regional and local recreation, and create a positive impact for an important piece of public infrastructure.

B. Sustainability

Sunnynook River Park will be maintained and operated by the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks, which has extensive experience in operating numerous park and recreation facilities. In addition to its maintenance staff, it has a staff of Park Rangers headquartered nearby at Griffith Park. The Department offers access to parks, beaches, mountain trails, campgrounds and historical sites. The Department of Recreation and Parks maintains over 15,710 acres of parkland with 390 neighborhood and regional parks, 9 lakes, 176 recreation centers and 372 children's play areas, 13 golf courses, 287 tennis courts, 9 dog parks, 59 swimming pools, 7 skate parks, 7 museums, 24 child care facilities, 30 senior centers, 2 beaches and an urban forest of one million trees. The Department also has a volunteer program that helps with maintenance and interpretation; there are currently over 11,000 volunteers that serve the parks.

Sunnynook River Park will echo much of nearby Griffith Park that still has significant acreage of natural open space. A carefully-designed plant palette derived from the County of Los Angeles *Los Angeles River Master Plan Landscape Guidelines* will be employed in Sunnynook River Park that creates the appropriate riparian and upland plant communities so that the vegetation is largely self-sustaining. After an initial period of irrigation for plant establishment, it is anticipated that plants will be sustained by natural rainfall. Careful attention will be paid to any need for brush clearance for fire safety and to maintain sight lines for park users.

Park Rangers and landscape maintenance workers will incorporate this Sunnynook River Park into their regular patrols to ensure safety for visitors and that trash and recyclable materials are picked up and disposed of properly.

Benches, trash cans, recycling stations, and interpretive signs will employ vandal-resistant materials based on the extensive experience of the use of these materials in other parks around the City. Building the park is anticipated to involve local volunteers from a variety of organizations. Not only does this help in defraying costs, more importantly it creates a sense of ownership and pride in the community and graffiti and vandalism are greatly reduced, if not eliminated.

C. Other Benefits and Community Participation

The Sunnynook River Park fulfills many of the objectives under the Project Categories of *Highway Landscape and Urban Forestry Products* and *Resource Lands Projects* also.

Under the category of Highway Landscape and Urban Forestry Products, Sunnynook River Park will use a plant palette that will be sustainable once established with little or no supplemental irrigation. The trees anticipated to be used include California Sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*), (Western Cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*) Coast Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*), California Bay (*Umbellularia californica*) and Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*). These will be planted so that the riparian trees are closest to the River (Sycamore and Cottonwood) with the other species uphill of these, as would be found naturally. The species upslope of the River are also closest to the I-5 Freeway and are tolerant of conditions (wind, particulates) near the freeway. It is anticipated that California Black Walnut (Juglans californica) will also be planted as it is often observed on north-facing slopes, but as it has proven hard to establish, this will not be planted extensively.

The tree palette is native to Southern California, and thus these species should provide sufficient diversity to ensure that the landscape is most resistant to insects and diseases, while providing adequate habitat for the birds, small mammals, amphibians and reptiles that are expected to colonize the site. Except for California Black Walnut, which has a greater chance for survival when planted in small sizes, all trees will be in 15 gallon containers or greater. Larger containers do not necessarily translate into better survival, but will be used to create a canopy of trees of differing ages and sizes as would be found in nature. A planting pattern to mimic nature will also be employed with groupings of trees and open areas. Trees will be planted a minimum of 5 feet apart to ensure adequate room for growth and development. Maintenance by the Department of Parks and Recreation will ensure that any trees that fail will be removed. The occasional failures can be replaced with stock maintained by the Department.

Unfortunately, reclaimed water is not yet available for this site, but as the reclaimed water system in Los Angeles expands, it is anticipated that the potable water currently needed for irrigation will be replaced with reclaimed water. Capturing runoff and treating it for irrigation was explored for the project, but since the site is upslope of the Los Angeles River and the I-5 Freeway, this option is not practicable at this time.

Sunnynook River Park also has many elements of Resource Lands Projects. There is a wildlife corridor from Griffith Park and along the entire length of the River, and by restoring the native plant communities on the site, this important wildlife corridor will be strengthened. By having an appropriate tree canopy and understory, it is anticipated that nesting, roosting and foraging habitat will be increased for the 116 species of birds that utilize the River. Nearby Griffith Park is a refuge for many species of flora and fauna including several that are of special concern. By extending the native landscape, it is hoped that these species could colonize the new park.

Additional benefits that this project would provide include the following:

- Self-guided nature walks utilizing interpretive signs at entry points and throughout the trails
- As used in all City parks, separate bins for trash and recycling
- "Volunteer Days" to help periodically clean and replant senescent species.

Lastly, the project would be consistent with the Griffith Park Master Plan Working Group's conception of fostering an "urban wilderness identity" as well as the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy's interest in seeing the River designated as an "urban wildlife refuge."