
Findings of Fact and Statement of Overriding Considerations

San Gabriel River Discovery Center
at Whittier Narrows

Final Environmental Impact Report
(Sch No. 2006081154)

Lead Agency

San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority
100 North Old San Gabriel Canyon Road
Azusa, CA 91702

January 2010

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), (Public Resources Code Section 21080) and the CEQA Guidelines (Title 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15063) state that if it has been determined that a project may or will have significant impacts on the environment then an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) must be prepared. Accordingly, an EIR has been prepared by the San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority (Authority) to evaluate potential environmental effects that may result from the proposed San Gabriel River Discovery Center at Whittier Narrows (Discovery Center or proposed project). The Authority is a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) consisting of the Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District, the Central Basin Municipal Water District, the County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation (LADPR), and the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC). Representatives of these bodies make up the Authority's Governing Board (Board).

The Authority is approving the 14,000 square foot (sf) alternative evaluated in the Draft EIR (Section 5.4.3), referred to herein as "the project."

1.1 CERTIFICATION

In accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15090, the Authority, as lead agency for purposes of CEQA, certifies that:

- (a) The Final EIR has been completed in compliance with CEQA;
- (b) The Final EIR was presented to the Board of the Authority, and the Board of the Authority, as the decision making body, reviewed and considered the information contained in the Final EIR prior to approving the project; and
- (c) The Final EIR reflects the Authority's independent judgment and analysis.

The Authority has exercised independent judgment in accordance with Public Resources Code Section 21082.1(c) in retaining its own environmental consultant directing the consultant in preparation of the EIR as well as reviewing, analyzing, and revising material prepared by the consultant.

These Findings of Fact (Findings) and Statement of Overriding Considerations have been prepared in accordance with CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines. The purpose of these Findings is to satisfy the requirements of Public Resources Code Section 21081 and Title 14 California Code of Regulations Sections 15090, 15091, 15092, 15093, and 15097 of the CEQA Guidelines, in connection with the approval of the San Gabriel River Discovery Center at Whittier Narrows.

Before project approval, an EIR must be certified pursuant to Section 15090 of the CEQA Guidelines. Prior to approving a project for which an EIR has been certified, and for which the EIR identifies one or more significant environmental impacts, the approving agency must make one or more of the following findings, accompanied by a brief explanation of the rationale, pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21081 and Section 15091 of the CEQA Guidelines, for each identified significant impact:

- (1) Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.
- (2) Such changes or alterations are within the responsibility and jurisdiction of another public agency and not the agency making the finding. Such changes have been adopted by such other agency or can and should be adopted by such other agency.
- (3) Specific economic, legal, social, technological, or other considerations, including provision of employment opportunities for highly trained workers, make infeasible the mitigation measures or project alternatives identified in the Final EIR.

The Authority has made one or more of the specific written Findings above regarding each significant impact associated with the project. Those Findings are presented here, along with a presentation of facts in support of the Findings. Concurrent with the adoption of these Findings, the Authority adopts the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program as presented in Chapter 4 of the Final EIR and Chapter 9 of these Findings.

Section 15092 of the CEQA Guidelines states that after consideration of an EIR, and in conjunction with the Section 15091 findings identified above, the lead agency may decide whether or how to approve or carry out the project. The lead agency may approve a project with unavoidable adverse environmental effects only when it finds that specific economic legal, social, technological, or other benefits of the project outweigh those effects. Section 15093 requires the lead agency to document and substantiate any such determination in a “statement of overriding considerations” as a part of the record. The Authority’s Statement of Overriding Considerations is presented in Chapter 8 of these Findings.

As required by CEQA, the Authority expressly finds that the Final EIR for the San Gabriel River Discovery Center at Whittier Narrows Project reflects the Authority’s independent review and judgment. In accordance with the provisions of CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines, the Authority adopts these Findings and Statement of Overriding Considerations as part of its certification of the Final EIR. A brief explanation of the rationale for each finding is provided in Sections 4, 5, 6 and 7.

1.2 ORGANIZATION OF CEQA FINDINGS OF FACT

The content and format of these CEQA Findings are designed to meet the latest CEQA statutes and Guidelines. The Findings are organized into the following sections:

Chapter 1, Introduction outlines the organization of this document and identifies the location and custodian of the record of proceedings.

Chapter 2, Project Description describes the location, overview, objectives, and the required permits and approvals for the project.

Chapter 3, CEQA Review and Public Outreach describes the steps the Authority has undertaken to comply with the CEQA Guidelines as they relate to public input, review, and participation during the preparation of the Draft and Final EIRs.

Chapter 4, Impacts Determined to be Less than Significant provides a summary of those environmental issue areas where no reasonably foreseeable impacts would occur and those impacts determined to be below the threshold of significance without the incorporation of mitigation measures.

Chapter 5, Less Than Significant Environmental Impacts with Mitigation provides a summary of significant environmental impacts for which implementation of identified feasible mitigation measures would avoid or substantially reduce the environmental impacts to less than significant levels. This section also provides specific written findings regarding each potentially significant impact associated with the project.

Chapter 6, Significant Environmental Impacts provides a summary of significant environmental impacts for which no feasible mitigation measures are identified or for which implementation of identified feasible mitigation measures would not avoid or substantially reduce the environmental effects to less than significant levels. This section also provides specific written findings regarding each significant impact associated with the project.

Chapter 7, Findings Regarding Project Alternatives provides a summary of the alternatives considered for the project.

Chapter 8, Statement of Overriding Considerations provides a summary of all of the project's significant unavoidable adverse impacts. In addition, this section identifies the project's substantial benefits that outweigh and override the project's significant unavoidable impacts, such that the impacts are considered acceptable.

Chapter 9, Findings on Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program provides a brief discussion of the project's compliance with the CEQA Guidelines regarding the adoption of a program for reporting and monitoring.

Chapter 10, Findings Regarding Changes to the Draft EIR and Recirculation provides a summary of the changes to the Draft EIR in response to public comments received and findings that changes to the Draft EIR does not require recirculation of the Draft EIR for public review.

1.3 RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

The documents and other materials that constitute the record of proceedings upon which Authority project approval is based are located at 100 Old North San Gabriel Canyon Road, Azusa, CA 91702. The San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority is the custodian of such documents and other materials that constitute the record of proceedings. The record of proceedings is provided in compliance with Public Resources Code Section 21081.6(a)(2) and California Code of Regulations Title 14, Section 15091(e).

CHAPTER 2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

2.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

2.1.1 EXISTING SETTING

The project would be located on an approximately 11.21-acre site (lease boundary). The project site is located at 1000 North Durfee Avenue in the Whittier Narrows community of unincorporated Los Angeles County. A small portion of the project site adjacent to Durfee Avenue is located within the City of South El Monte. The project site is bound by Durfee Avenue to the north, portions of the Natural Area to the east and south, and commercial/industrial uses adjacent to the site to the west. Construction of the project would involve disturbance of approximately 5 acres (construction impact area) within the 11.21-acre project site (lease boundary). Regional access to the site is provided by SR 60, which is located approximately one mile to the east. The project site is located less than a mile from I-605.

The lease boundary includes a 0.63-acre parcel owned by LADPR and currently occupied by the Whittier Narrows Nature Center (WNNC). The parking lot and pathways for the WNNC are located on land owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). The remainder of the 11.21-acre project site and the surrounding natural area is owned by the USACE.

Portions of the lease boundary are not located within the 100-year flood zone. These include the existing WNNC main building and outbuildings (restrooms and storage space), and the County Police Substation. The picnic shelter, maintenance garage, and storage building are located within the 100-year flood zone. All structures within the 100-year flood zone must be designed to flood (such as the picnic shelter) or constructed above the level of the 100-year flood (such as built on stilts or on a raised building pad). The majority of the lease boundary (including the outbuildings), with the exception of the existing WNNC, the restroom/storage facility and the County Police Substation, is located within the USACE “taking line.” The taking line is the floodplain elevation for the Whittier Narrows Dam. All activities occurring within the taking line are prohibited from reducing the flood capacity of the downstream areas of the Whittier Narrows Dam. This means that any new structures within the taking line must be built above the level of the flood elevation by backfilling the soil around the building pad to raise the structure above the flood elevation; conversely, any soil backfilled in the taking line must be removed from a nearby section of the floodplain such that the total capacity of the floodplain to hold floodwaters is not altered. In this way, the USACE is able to ensure a continuous level of flood storage capacity.

The USACE currently leases the majority of the Natural Area and the Recreation Area to LADPR, including the lease boundary, for recreational purposes. LADPR currently operates the WNNC and associated facilities within the lease boundary and adjacent areas to the west, south, and east.

The WNNC has a museum with displays of animal and plant life, a small gift shop, and a library in a building that is approximately 1,933 sf in size. Southwest of the WNNC main building is an approximately 899 sf outbuilding that contains restrooms and storage space. An approximately 1,000 sf picnic shelter is located farther to the south. School groups, consisting of approximately 60 students, often congregate here for outdoor programs.

Generally, the WNNC operates from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., 7 days per week, unless a nighttime event is planned. The grounds are open from dawn to dusk. A gate is drawn across the driveway to prevent access from dusk to dawn. The WNNC remains open until approximately 10:00 p.m. when a nighttime event is planned, such as the monthly moonlight hikes or stargazing. There is no fee to enter the grounds or park in the parking lot. Similarly, there is no charge to view the exhibits in the WNNC. Fees are charged for some current programs, such as the summer camp and spring nature camp. The WNNC and the Natural Area generally attract approximately 100 visitors per day during the week and approximately 120 visitors per day during the weekend. The existing estimated annual number of visitors to the WNNC and the Natural Area is approximately 60,400. The WNNC currently employs 2 full-time staff and 4 part-time staff. Approximately 10 volunteers work as docents at the WNNC.

The WNNC staff conducts recreational and educational programs such as lectures, ranger tours, and school field trips. On the weekends, the WNNC offers bird walks, nature walks, and full moon hikes. Nature walks are led by docents and bird walks are led by staff and volunteers. Full Moon Hikes are offered the first Saturday of each month. In addition to these programs offered by Nature Center staff, the Central Basin offers a water education program, called Water Squad Investigations, on Fridays throughout the school year.

The area between the WNNC and the parking lot is landscaped. The island within the existing parking lot, south of the WNNC, contains an isolated landscaped area of planted California native species. A small native plant garden adjacent to the WNNC annex contains many of the same native species. The undeveloped portion of the lease boundary fronting Durfee Avenue contains dense vegetation, including stands of walnut trees. The remainder of the lease boundary is dominated by weedy vegetation. A series of trails traverse the lease boundary, which are part of a trail system connecting WNNC visitors to the river and the adjacent portions of the Natural Area. A man-made wildlife pond is located west of the picnic shelter. It contains a fountain to circulate the water and attract wildlife, such as birds.

To the east of the WNNC is the approximately 893 sf Los Angeles County Police Whittier Narrows Substation, which is responsible for patrolling approximately 16 parks in the vicinity of the Recreation Area. Approximately 18 officers work out of this substation. There are 2 shifts (6:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. – 11:00 p.m.) with 9 officers per shift. Only during shift change and weekly training are all officers on site. The substation is used by the officers for administrative matters as it best works into their shift, and as such, there are no set hours of operation.

An approximately 726 sf maintenance building is located east of the driveway. This building is used to store oil to lubricate maintenance equipment and a major water pump, paint for touch up purposes, and gasoline for equipment, such as leaf blowers and mowers. There is also a 2-car garage of (approximately 100 sf in size) used to store a mower and the All Terrain Vehicle used by County Police to patrol the Recreation Area. The garage is also used to park some of the County Police's personal motorcycles during their shift. No vehicle maintenance takes place in this building.

The site also includes a 33-car surface parking lot (with 2 handicapped spaces) and 2 bus parking spaces. The County Police do not use the WNNC parking spaces for County or personal vehicles; instead, they park near the maintenance garage. Some large events, such as the annual cleanups, attract more visitors than can be accommodated by the existing parking lot. For large events, the WNNC enters into shared parking arrangements with the business to the west for decent parking.

There is nighttime building and security lighting of the existing WNNC and County Police Substation. There are no lighting features in the existing parking because access to the parking lot is closed at dusk. There are no lights along the pathways connecting the WNNC and other buildings to the parking lot.

2.1.2 SURROUNDING LAND USES

The lease boundary is bound by Durfee Avenue, South El Monte High School, and a restaurant and miniature golf course to the north. The Los Angeles County Assessor's office, a church, a hotel, some restaurants, and Peck Road are located to the east. Commercial/light industrial and multi-family residential uses are located to the west. The Recreation Area and Natural Area are located farther west. Santa Anita Avenue is located approximately 0.46 miles west of the lease boundary. Zone 1 Ditch channel (also referred to as Lario Creek) and the San Gabriel River parallels the site along the southern boundary of the Natural Area approximately 0.25 miles south of the lease boundary. Lario Creek was constructed to divert water from the San Gabriel River through the WNNC area to facilitate groundwater recharge into the Rio Hondo Spreading Grounds. Pico Rivera Sports Arena, Pico Rivera Bicentennial Park, and Pico Rivera Golf Course are located south of the San Gabriel River. The Whittier Narrows Equestrian Center and Horseman's Park are located directly south of the WNNC, east of the Pico Rivera Sports Arena. Portions of the Natural Area and Recreation Area located south and west of the lease boundary are unincorporated USACE-owned land. The developed land uses west, north, and east of the project site are located within the jurisdictional boundaries of the City of South El Monte.

The 300-acre Natural Area is located south and east of the lease boundary, and west of the adjacent commercial and residential properties. Within the 300 acres, there are approximately 27 acres of man-made lakes, a man-made riparian stream (the Robert S. Joe Commemorative Ditch), as well as marshland, riparian scrub, and riparian woodland. This area is referred to as the Whittier Narrows Nature Center and Wildlife Refuge by the USACE. It is considered vital habitat for wildlife in the region and is targeted by the USACE as a key restoration location. The components of the Natural Area are described below.

The Natural Area is maintained by LADPR for habitat, restoration, and recreational purposes. The Whittier Narrows Trails Project currently runs through the Natural Area south of the WNNC parking lot down to the river. It is 1,100 linear feet of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-compliant, 6-foot-wide multi-use trail consisting of rock dust. A water fountain, 2 informational kiosks, and native plants are located along the trail. A regional bike trail and equestrian path currently runs along the river and Siphon Road. Tubular steel and chain link fences separate the trail from Lario Creek and the river along the entire length of the Natural Area for safety purposes.

The Robert S. Joe Commemorative Ditch is located approximately 200 feet east of the lease boundary. This man-made ditch carries runoff from Durfee Avenue near the eastern portion of the lease boundary to discharge into the San Gabriel River. A culvert is located just south of Durfee Avenue. A pipe carries the runoff from the ditch over Lario Creek and into the river. The ditch does not carry water year round.

Southern California Edison maintains an easement that runs along the river south of the lease boundary and just west of the adjacent residential and commercial uses to connect with Santa Anita Avenue. A single 220 kilovolt electric power transmission line is currently located in this right-of-way. A second SCE easement is located near the western boundary of the Natural Area east of Siphon Road. This right-of-way contains a single 220 kilovolt electric power transmission line.

There are 4 man-made lakes located west of the lease boundary: a 2-acre lake, a 3-acre lake, a 20-acre lake, and the 1.6-acre Lake Aquatecos. The three larger lakes are dry most of the time to control for West Nile Virus. The fourth lake, Lake Aquatecos, is partially filled and provides a winter sanctuary for migrating waterfowl. The portion of the Natural Area located southwest of Siphon Road is designated raptor habitat. No facilities or easements are located in this area.

The City of Whittier operates 5 groundwater wells and owns a large parcel at the west end of the Natural Area just east of Siphon Road. The wells are used for pumping groundwater for the City's water supply. A gated maintenance road located off Durfee Avenue provides access to the wells and the City of Whittier parcel. This parcel is designated in the Whittier Narrows Master Plan as non-recreational lease and is not considered part of the Whittier Narrows Nature Center and Wildlife Refuge.

2.2 PROJECT OVERVIEW

LADPR proposes to lease and sublease the approximately 11.21-acre project site to the Authority as part of the project. As such, the project site is herein referred to as the lease boundary. Construction would occur on only 5 acres (construction impact area) within the lease boundary. The primary project features include a 14,000 sf interpretive center, parking lot, maintenance building, open air classroom, constructed riparian/wetland area, covered outdoor classroom, and connecting pathways from these locations. The balance of the site would be set aside for habitat preservation and restoration.

INTERPRETIVE CENTER

The existing WNNC and all existing outbuildings would be demolished in order to construct a new interpretive center in approximately the same location as the existing nature center building. The new one-story 14,000-sf interpretive center would be located on the western portion of the lease boundary along Durfee Avenue. The interpretive center would include a lobby, live animal exhibit areas, a classroom, multi-purpose room, support facilities, and administrative offices as described below. Any new structures within the taking line must be built above the level of the flood elevation. The finished floor for the interpretive center would be constructed above the taking line 100-year flood elevation at 232.3 feet above mean sea level, in accordance with USACE requirements for construction within the floodplain.

The interpretive center lobby would include a reception/orientation area, and sales area. The outdoor entry area would also serve as an area for orientation of groups. Information would be available for visitors, including maps, brochures, trail information, and linkages to cultural and historical information, wildlife corridors, sanctuaries, and other recreational and natural resources in the San Gabriel River Watershed. The sales area would provide education materials, retail merchandise related to the San Gabriel River, and other items. A combined office/storage area would also be located in the lobby.

Exhibit-related space would be provided, including interpretive programs, live animal exhibits, and an exhibit maintenance area. Exhibit spaces would be organized to create an interactive, engaging and non-linear experience designed to guide visitors in and out of the interpretive center, constantly reconnecting them with the Natural Area. A significant portion of the interpretive center would be dedicated to the exhibit interpretive program. Support and maintenance areas for exhibits would be located at the back of the main exhibit hall.

One wet classroom, sized to accommodate approximately 40 students, would provide space for educational uses inside the interpretive center. This room would also house the library resources for the center. The interpretive center would be able to accommodate small and large groups for watershed related events, conferences, and meetings. A more complete description of proposed programming is provided under the heading Project Operation below. This facility and surrounding area would only be used for an interpretive center and related activities. The proposed improvements are not intended as a location for events unrelated to watershed education, such as weddings, etc. The multi-purpose room would seat up to 150 people and could be partitioned to accommodate smaller groups, including concurrent school groups and breakdown of larger group sessions. Audiovisual equipment for presentations and speakers with multimedia capability would be available. A direct doorway connecting the multi-purpose room and the entry courtyard would allow for indoor/outdoor events and would ease circulation when large numbers of people are visiting the interpretive center.

The interpretive center would include space for staff and volunteers. Essential support spaces would consist of the restroom facilities. The restrooms would be sized to accommodate the numbers of visitors anticipated at the interpretive center.

The interpretive center would be constructed to meet the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED green building rating system, a voluntary national standard for developing and rating high-performance, sustainable buildings, often referred to as "green buildings." Green buildings are constructed to increase the efficiency of energy, water, and building materials. They are designed to reduce the impacts on human health and the environment through better siting, design, construction, operation, maintenance, and removal, considering the complete life cycle of building and landscape materials. From the outset of this project, members of the Authority have set out to create an innovative new interpretive center that embodies the forward thinking of their member organizations and would be certified by the U.S. Green Building Council at the highest level possible (Platinum). To that end, a project team was engaged to develop an advanced green building through an integrated design process and implementation of some of the most current green building approaches being utilized in the U.S. and abroad.

PARKING LOT AND MAINTENANCE BUILDING

A new 116-space ADA-accessible parking lot would be located on the east side of the lease boundary. The parking lot would accommodate 3 bus parking spaces (approximately 160 feet drop-off length). The parking lot would be constructed of semi-permeable material to allow filtration of storm water runoff into the ground. Additional runoff that cannot percolate into the ground would be channeled through the bioswales and an underground piping system to supply the membrane-lined portion of the constructed riparian/wetland area. Vegetated medians would separate different sections of the parking lot. The vegetated medians and parking lot planters would function as bioswales for storm water runoff and as visual buffers between the parking lot and the adjacent Natural Area. Only locally indigenous native vegetation would be used. Parking for bicycles would also be provided. The existing wooded area along the northern portion of the lease boundary would be maintained to provide a vegetative buffer along Durfee Avenue to obscure direct views of the parking lot from passing motorists and to protect this habitat type. A new vehicular entrance on Durfee Avenue east of the existing driveway entrance would provide the only vehicular access to the project site and would lead to the 116-space parking lot. Entry signs would welcome park visitors and direct them to the interpretive center. An entry gate would prohibit vehicular access into the site after regular operating hours. Bicycle and pedestrian access to the project site would be provided from the San Gabriel River trail system and from Siphon Road; however, bicycles are not allowed on the trails within the Natural Area.

An approximately 1,000 sf maintenance building would be located on the eastern end of the parking lot and would provide parking for maintenance vehicles and equipment, material storage including a code required container for combustible materials, and office space for site maintenance staff. Actual vehicle maintenance (oil changes, etc.) would not be conducted.

COVERED OUTDOOR CLASSROOM, OPEN AIR CLASSROOM, AND CONSTRUCTED RIPARIAN/WETLAND AREA

Two outdoor classrooms would be developed within the lease boundary. An open air classroom would be developed immediately south of the interpretive center and a covered outdoor classroom would be constructed to the west of the proposed parking lot.

The open air classroom would allow for seating of up to 120 people and would be approximately 700 sf in size. This would be a sloped, bowl-shaped space that blends into the surrounding landscape. Seating would be comprised of informal graduated terraces built of concrete. The area would include a stage equipped with a metal fire ring capable of being covered and locked when not in use. There would be programs conducted during the day and occasional nighttime programs as well. It is expected that the fire ring would be used approximately 3 or 4 times per year during ranger talks. There would be security lighting.

The covered outdoor classroom (approximately 1,000 sf) would be used for group gatherings, as well as outdoor classroom functions. Restrooms, storage space, and electricity would be provided within the same structure. Portable benches would serve as furniture. The structure would allow for a range of hands-on demonstration projects and would be used by schools or other groups as an outdoor classroom. Lighting would be provided in the covered outdoor classroom for nighttime activities.

A portable public address system would be located on-site for use in the covered outdoor classroom and open air classroom. The system would be portable and there would be no permanent wiring. It would only be used when necessary to project sound to a large group.

The constructed riparian/wetland would be approximately 29,158 sf (approximately 0.67 acres) in size. The riparian/wetland would replace the existing paved area of the parking lot at the WNNC. The island within the existing parking lot and the native vegetation planted therein would remain intact and apart from the constructed riparian/wetland area. A small constructed riparian/wetland area would serve two functions. First, it would provide a hands-on educational area. Second, it would filter and cleanse storm water from the interpretive center, covered outdoor classroom, open air classroom, parking lot, maintenance building, and driveway. A portion of the constructed riparian/wetland area would be membrane-lined and remain wet throughout the entire year; there would be a piped-connection from the new parking lot, outdoor and open air classrooms, and new interpretive center to channel runoff from these areas into the membrane-line portion of the constructed riparian/wetland area. Other parts of the constructed riparian/wetland area would not be membrane lined such that it would dry up in accordance with seasonal conditions. Supplemental water from the recycled water supply would be needed during summer months to maintain a minimum level of water in the membrane-line portion of the constructed riparian/wetland area for educational demonstration purposes. This water would be supplied from an existing recycled water main located on Durfee Avenue. A new connection to the site would be constructed as part of the proposed project.

HABITAT PRESERVATION/RESTORATION AREA

The remainder of the 11.21-acre lease boundary that is not developed with structures or associated features (approximately 8.34 acres) would be set aside for habitat preservation and restoration. All new landscaping that would be installed would be native vegetation indigenous to the Whittier Narrows area.

PROJECT OPERATION

The interpretive center would be open to the public from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., 7 days per week. The meeting room would be available for reservations and/or rentals from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., 7 days per week subject to availability. For groups focused on cultural and natural resources and watershed conservation wanting to meet outside of operating hours, only an operational fee would be charged for that time. These groups would be allowed use of the facility for meetings that provide programs open to the public. The remainder of the lease boundary and adjacent Natural Area would be open during daylight hours only, except for special programs such as stargazing and moonlight hikes. The grounds and parking lot would be open from dawn to dusk, with a gate at the driveway to prevent access from dusk to dawn, and until 10:30 p.m. if a nighttime event is planned.

The interpretive center would host a range of educational and recreational activities and would be utilized by several public agencies to deliver the message of cultural and natural resources and watershed conservation. A variety of activities would be expected to occur at the facility, such as family and senior citizen nature trail walks and bird walks, docent and volunteer training, summer camps, junior ranger and naturalist programs, moonlight and stargazing programs, and special clean-up events. LADPR would continue to operate its existing programs. A list of programs expected to be offered is shown in Table 2-1 below.

TABLE 2-1 PROPOSED PROJECT PROGRAMMING

Program Name	Age Range	Frequency	Size of group	Time of Day	Program Description
Docent Training	18 and over	Saturday (monthly)	15	12:30 p.m.-4:00 p.m.	Native flora and fauna
Family Program	Family	Saturday (monthly)	20	9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.	Plants and Animal identification
Outdoor Adventure Spring Nature Camp	7-14	Mon.-Fri. (Daily)	25	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.	Nature Education
Outdoor Adventure Summer Nature Camp	7-14	Mon.-Fri. (Daily)	25	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.	Nature Education
Outdoor Adventure Winter Nature Camp	7-14	Mon.-Fri. (Daily)	25	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.	Nature Education
Bird walks	16 and	Saturday	15	8:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.	Bird Counts

Program Name	Age Range	Frequency	Size of group	Time of Day	Program Description
	over	(monthly)			
Annual clean ups	16 and over	Quarterly	25-200	varies by project	Removal of invasive and non-native plants, trash and trail maintenance
Senior Bird Walk	55 and over	Twice a month	25	9:30 a.m.-11:30 a.m.	Flora and Fauna identification
Eagle Scout Projects	Family	Monthly	25	8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.	Community Service
Spring Nature Camp	7-14	daily for one week	25	9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.	Nature Education
Jr. Ranger Program - Morning	7-14	Saturdays	25	9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Nature Education
Jr. Ranger Program - Afternoon	7-14	Saturdays	25	2:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.	Nature Education
Jr. Naturalist Program	15-17	Monday & Wednesday	15	3:30 p.m.-5:30 p.m.	Nature Education
Jr. Naturalist Program	15-17	Tuesday & Thursday	15	3:30 p.m.-5:30 p.m.	Nature Education
Racky's Rangers	4 - 6	Monday & Wednesday	15	9:30 a.m.-12:00 noon	Nature Education
Racky's Rangers	4-6	Tuesday & Thursday	15	9:30 a.m.-12:00 noon	Nature Education
Moonlight Hikes & Stargazing	Family	1x/month	25	7:30 p.m.-9:30 p.m.	Physical Science
Preschool	4-5	1X/week	20	Mornings	Nature Education
Colleges - Spring	18 and over	3X/week	45	Mornings and Afternoons	Nature Education
Colleges - Winter	18 and over	2X/week	15	Mornings and Afternoons	Nature Education
School Field Trips	7-14	4 buses/week	60	10:00 a.m.-noon	Nature Education
Hikers/Walkers	All ages	Monday - Friday	100	Varies	Nature Education
Hikers/Walkers	All ages	Saturday - Sunday	120	Varies	Nature Education
Open House	All ages	Annually	30	10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.	Varies
Various Special Events	All ages	Quarterly	150	Varies	Varies

2.0 Project Description

Program Name	Age Range	Frequency	Size of group	Time of Day	Program Description
Water Squad Investigations	7-14	Varies	30	Mornings and Afternoons	Water Education
Upper District School Trips	7-14	Varies	35	Mornings and Afternoons	Nature and Water Education
Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County (LACSD)	7-14	Varies	60	Mornings and Afternoons	Nature and Water Education
Tours					
Central Basin	Varies	3X/year	45	Varies	Topics Vary
Upper District	Varies	1-2 days/month	35	Varies	Topics Vary
LACSD	Varies	8X/year	45	All day	Topics Vary
RMC Stakeholders	Adult	Annually	45	9:00 a.m. – noon	Topics Vary
Congressional Representative	Adult	3X/year	100	½ day	Topics Vary
Tours of the LEED facility and grounds	Adult	2X/month	10	9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.	Discussion of LEED Program
Meetings and Events					
RMC Board Meetings	Adult	bi-monthly	60	4-6 hrs	N/A
RMC Workshops	Adult	2-3X/year	40	4-6 hrs.	N/A
RMC Consultant Interviews	Adult	3-4X/year	20	N/A	N/A
RMC HSAP meetings	Adult	2-3X/year	20	4 hrs.	N/A
RMC IRWMP Quarterly	Adult	2-3X/year	20	1/2 day	N/A
RMC Federal/State Partners	Adult	6X/year	40	4-6 hrs.	N/A
RMC County Partners	Adult	2X/month	25	4-6 hrs.	N/A
SGR Master Plan Committee	Adult	Annually	70	4-6 hrs.	N/A
SGR Monitoring Group	Adult	4X/year	30	4-6 hrs.	N/A
Watershed Council	Adult	4X/year	60	4-6 hrs.	N/A
Upper District Special Events	Adult	2-3X/year	100	Midday, 4-6 hrs.	N/A

Program Name	Age Range	Frequency	Size of group	Time of Day	Program Description
Upper District Community Meetings	Adult	1-2X/year	40	Varies	N/A
Upper District "Protector del Agua" Landscape Classes	Adult	12X/year	70	Evenings, 2-3 hrs	N/A
Upper District Receptions	Adult	2-3X/year	80	Late afternoon or early evening 2-3 hrs.	N/A
Upper District Consultant Meetings & Interviews	Adult	3-4X/year	25	2-4 hours	N/A

Source: Colleen Mackay, Site Supervisor, WNNC, and Mickey Long, Natural Areas Administrator, January 2008; Valorie Shatynski, Project Manager, San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority, February 2008.

There would be no fee to enter the grounds or to park in the lot. Access to the exhibits would also be free. Some programs, such as the camps or special classes, may charge a fee to participants. The interpretive center and associated facilities would only be used for educational programs, exhibits, and events related to watershed education; other uses of the site, such as weddings, parties, etc., would be prohibited.

On weekdays, the interpretive center would accommodate school field trips (approximately 14,000 to 19,500 students per year) and formal school programs focusing on watershed education and/or natural area topics. Special events would occur some weekends, attracting approximately 225 to 300 visitors per day; however, most weekends would experience normal visitor levels of approximately 185 visitors per day. Expected annual attendance would range from 75,000 to 90,000 visitors.

Operation of the interpretive center is anticipated to require up to 12 full time staff. Throughout the day, approximately 20 to 25 docents/volunteers, with 10 to 12 in the morning and 10 to 12 in the afternoon, would be based out of this building.

The County Police Substation that is currently located onsite would be relocated within the vicinity of the Recreation Area. It not currently known if the County Police would rent space, use existing County facilities, or build a new facility. Should it be necessary to construct a new substation, a separate environmental review process will be undertaken at that time. Officers would continue to patrol the lease boundary and adjacent Natural Area.

SUSTAINABLE BUILDING DESIGN

The interpretive center would be constructed to meet the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED green building rating system, a voluntary national standard for developing and rating high-performance, sustainable buildings, often referred to as "green buildings." Green buildings are constructed to increase the efficiency of energy, water, and building materials. They are designed to reduce the impacts on human health and the environment through better siting, design, construction, operation, maintenance, and removal, considering the complete life cycle of building and landscape materials. From the outset of this project, members of the Authority have set out to create an innovative new interpretive center that embodies the forward thinking of their member organizations and would be certified by the U.S. Green Building Council at the highest level possible (Platinum). To that end, a project team was engaged to develop an advanced green building through an integrated design process and implementation of some of the most current green building approaches being utilized in the U.S. and abroad.

The first step in understanding the vision and goals of the owner group, the potential for green building approaches, and opportunities for LEED certification was to hold an eco-charrette. It was at this first team-building meeting that the initial LEED assessment and scorecard was created in order to determine which LEED credits would be attempted and what level of certification was possible. It was determined that LEED Platinum is achievable based on the current program and design approach.

Based on the eco-charrette and the schematic design phase, a comprehensive green building approach was developed in the building design that would result in a LEED Platinum building. This includes the site and landscape design, the building form and massing, the building envelope design, the proposed passive and active mechanical systems, water systems, and renewable energy systems. Together, these strategies would result in low-energy, durable building that would demonstrate an integrated approach to design and construction.

Currently, the project is on target for Platinum status (a minimum of 52 LEED credits), with 47 credits being "attempted," 15 points in the "possible" category, and 7 points in the "not attempted" category. During final construction design documents, the project team would ensure that the 47 credits can be achieved and evaluating which of the 15 possible credits are feasible.

Five cooling towers, one per bay, would be used to actively cool the interpretive center. The cool water for the chilled beams that runs through the towers is provided by a night sky radiation system. This system would operate at night by spraying water onto the roof and exposing it to the sky. As the water runs down the roof, it cools and is then collected in a storage tank for use during the day. A conventional chiller would provide back-up cooling for this water supply in case of insufficient natural cooling.

In the meeting rooms and classrooms, where occupant loads can be high and vary greatly throughout the day, cold water would be supplied through the concrete floor slabs to chill them. Conversely, warm water would be run through the concrete slabs in winter to warm them. Overhangs and shaded louvers on

windows would protect the interior from the sun and reduce energy costs during the summer months. Other energy saving strategies include the use of natural light from skylights (clerestories at the roof level) to illuminate exhibits.

A locally supplied source of recycled water is available to supply the restrooms as permitted by code, and would be used to supplement storm water for landscape irrigation and to keep a portion of the constructed riparian/wetland area wet year-round. There would be no net increase in the rate and quantity of storm water runoff from existing to developed conditions because storm water runoff would be treated and used to keep portions of the constructed riparian/wetland area wet. By reducing the generation of storm water volumes, the natural aquifer recharge cycle would be maintained and storm water volumes would not be conveyed to Lario Creek and the San Gabriel River.

A photovoltaic power system would be installed to provide back-up power to the interpretive center. All interior light fixtures would be fitted with energy saving lamps and energy saving protected electronic ballasts. Occupancy sensors would be used to automatically turn off lights when meeting rooms, offices, and restrooms are not in use. Light sensors would control dim lighting based on ambient light levels in the exhibit areas, hallways, etc. The building envelope would exceed the requirements of the California Energy Code for minimum thickness of roof and wall insulation. Windows would be glazed with double pane Low-E type and low solar gain coefficient glazing.

The west end of the interpretive center and the maintenance building would be constructed with low slope green roofs. The covered outdoor classroom would also feature a green roof. Green roofs are covered with vegetation and soil, or a growing medium, planted over a waterproof membrane. Green roofs reduce urban heat, offset carbon emissions, and reduce heating (by adding mass and thermal resistance value) and cooling (by evaporative cooling) loads on a building. They also reduce storm water runoff and filter pollutants from storm water runoff.

The existing buildings would be deconstructed to provide reuse of 10 percent of the building components within the interpretive center and associated facilities, and to provide salvage of an additional 50 percent of the demolished building materials for use outside the proposed project.

2.3 PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The project was initially proposed in 2000 as a cooperative project by multiple agencies and stakeholders to address the need for an interpretive nature center focused on the San Gabriel River watershed and watershed education. The interpretive center site design, facility layout and components, and indoor/outdoor exhibit areas were driven by the participating stakeholder organizations, to meet the educational needs of their respective constituencies. To accomplish this, Design and Display Committees were formed to work closely with the building and landscape architects and exhibit designers throughout the planning process. An integrated interpretive program was developed to meet the needs of the diverse partner/stakeholder group. Some members of the group included staff from LADPR; Whittier Narrows

Nature Center Associates docents; the National Park Service's River, Trails and Conservation Program; the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council; the Puente Hills Landfill Native Habitat Preservation Authority; the Amigos de los Rios; LADPW Watershed Management Division; and Hacienda Homeowners Association, to name only a few of the participants. This effort resulted in the Schematic Plan, from which the following project objectives were derived.

The basic objective of the project as originally proposed was to operate an interpretive center to educate the general and school-age population within a 25-mile radius of the project site about the San Gabriel River watershed at one accessible location that integrates indoor and outdoor exhibits and interpretive features. The following specific objectives further this basic objective:

- 1. Create an accessible interpretive center set in a unique regional setting, designed to educate the public about the San Gabriel River watershed through a combination of indoor exhibits, outdoor interpretive features, and educational programming.**

Explanation: The proposed project would provide a site where a comprehensive educational program about the watershed can be displayed in a single facility. The site and interpretive center together would deliver a program about all aspects of watershed education: geologic setting, natural history, water quality and conservation, human reliance on river resources, flood management, and river restoration. The watershed message would be presented in a single, comprehensive interpretive center that would lead visitors through each these topics utilizing multiple learning modes intended to appeal to a diverse regional urban audience. In order to meet project objectives, indoor exhibit design would link with and encourage visitors to experience the interpretive center grounds, where they can experience physical examples or regional watershed features illustrating concepts described in the indoor exhibits.

- 2. Provide an interpretive center that accommodates the K-12 school districts located within a 25-mile radius of the project site by providing standards-based grade-level appropriate educational programming through a wide range of accessible and free exhibits, classroom space, and hands-on outdoor experiences.**

Explanation: Currently, the Whittier Narrows Nature Center is estimated to serve approximately 9,600 school children annually. One of the primary objectives of the San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority is to develop a new interpretive center in order to increase accessibility and appropriate programming to reach 18,000 to 25,000 students annually. There are presently 2.8 million schoolchildren attending 1,823 schools located in 100 school districts within a 25-mile radius of the project site. No comparable interpretive center exists that can provide a similar level of watershed education to that proposed by this project. In order to effectively reach this underserved population, any new facility would include a comprehensive and accessible reference library, appropriately sized indoor and outdoor classrooms, as well as topical and live animal exhibits all tied to age-appropriate hands-on outdoor programming for

school children. An interpretive center designed to facilitate this objective and meets the needs of this culturally diverse population should be able to accommodate varying learning levels, language proficiency and age groups, and include a variety of delivery methods and learning modes.

3. Expand the public user base to the currently underserved, diverse urban population located within a 25-mile radius of the project site with economically and geographically accessible interpretive facilities that would enhance awareness and regional interest.

Explanation: To meet this objective, the San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority seeks to build an architecturally unique interpretive center that would attract visitors. By situating it in the unique Natural Area, the Authority intends for the facility to serve as gateway to the outdoors for the area's dense, primarily urban population. There is presently a substantial service gap for the 10 million people living within the 25-mile radius. Because the interpretive center costs would be fully supported by the San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority, there would be no entry or parking fees, making the interpretive center financially accessible to all residents. The site selection process considered the unique characteristics of the location, as well as the tolerance for travel distance and travel time for visitors who use public and personal transportation to access the interpretive center. The location is within 0.75-miles of the junction of two major area freeways: State Route 60 (SR 60) and Interstate 605 (I-5).

Economic and geographic accessibility is critical because 52 percent of the households within the 25-mile radius are disadvantaged, falling under the California Median Household Income of \$47,493 per year. Over 29 percent of these households have median incomes under \$25,000 per year. A very diverse population is located within a 25-mile radius of the project site. Over 45 percent of this population is Hispanic, 14 percent Asian Pacific Islander, and over 9 percent African American. Within one-quarter-mile of the project site, almost 85 percent of the population identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino. This is substantially higher than comparable statistics for the City of Los Angeles (46.5 percent), Los Angeles County (44.6 percent), and California (32.4 percent). A smaller proportion within the one-quarter-mile buffer are white (37.6 percent), and a much higher proportion are "some other race" (45.1 percent). By comparison, the proportion of the population identifying themselves as Hispanic or Latino within 25 miles of the project site is similar to the averages for the City of Los Angeles and Los Angeles County.

The proposed project would create an interpretive center that would be more noticeable and that would contain information focused on a wide range of interests, as well as providing meeting rooms that would draw visitors to the site for watershed related functions. Once at the interpretive center, visitors would be encouraged to view the exhibits and be attracted by proximity and curiosity aroused within the exhibit hall to become more aware of the values that still exist in the urban area and to see how these values can be protected and expanded.

4. Create an interpretive center capable of meeting the outreach and educational programming needs of a diverse range of Stakeholders and Partner agencies.

Explanation: The proposed project's integrated topical and live animal exhibits, outdoor interpretive areas, programs, classrooms, and meeting rooms would accommodate and convey the diverse messages of its many stakeholders and multiple partner agencies.

Each of the partner agencies is responsible for one or more components of the overall educational message of the interpretive center. Taken individually, these components do not tell the full story of the watershed. The proposed project would pool the resources of these diverse partners and their supporters to convey an integrated educational and interpretive program. The extensive displays have been created to link these topics together in a way that visitors can understand both how they interrelate, but can also understand how individual residents fit into this complex pattern and how their individual actions influence the health and well-being of the entire watershed.

The proposed project would also provide a local and regional watershed education facility that demonstrates sustainable practices and connects visitors to trails and recreation opportunities consistent with the following objectives:

5. Create a unique facility for the greater Los Angeles area focusing on watershed management for habitat, flood control, conservation, and water quality.

Explanation: By maximizing its location in the heart of the Los Angeles Basin, the proposed project would provide an interpretive center that is readily accessible to millions of residents and convenient to many local water agencies, USACE, the County of Los Angeles, and the RMC with the need to educate their constituents on the relationship between water, habitat, open space preservation, and recreation. This is a key objective of the SGRCMP.

Water education facilities are presently located out of the population center. Diamond Valley Lake is 65 miles and Pyramid Lake is 80 miles from San Gabriel Valley. Although these facilities provide excellent opportunities to learn about the complex system of watershed function and water facilities that supply domestic water to Southern California, their remoteness lessens their ability to disseminate this information to the region's largely urban population. The other museums in the vicinity, such as the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, do not address the issues of water and natural resources in an integrated manner. The other large interpretive facility in the area is the Aquarium of the Pacific, which focuses on marine ecology.

6. Create an access point and hub destination for the Emerald Necklace Park Network, as the only interpretive center in this 17-mile loop of parks, trails, and greenways.

Explanation: The Emerald Necklace alliance currently includes eight cities, Los Angeles County, the RMC, and several other parties signed on as formal members of the Emerald Necklace Park Network coalition, committed to its completion and maintenance. The Emerald Necklace Park Network is proposed as a connected network of trails and parks focused on the San Gabriel River and Rio Hondo River and their tributaries.

With its proximity to the San Gabriel River and the San Gabriel River bikeway, the project site is intended to serve as a new staging area and trailhead to the Emerald Necklace Park Network via a short trail connecting the exhibit hall to the bikeway. This trailhead would also provide an opportunity for users of the San Gabriel River bikeway trail, which extends from Azusa to Seal Beach and connects through Whittier Narrows to the Los Angeles Rio Hondo (Lario) Trail along the Rio Hondo River. Trail users would be able to stop in at the Discovery Center to gain further knowledge about the rivers.

7. Provide a gateway to exploration of other natural areas and recreational opportunities in the San Gabriel River watershed.

Explanation: Locating an interpretive center in Recreation Area, already the County's most visited park with 1.4 million visitors yearly, is a way to expose visitors to other recreational opportunities in the watershed region. The natural setting of the site offers a unique opportunity to draw people to this particular setting. It would provide a gateway to the Recreation Area and the County's larger park system, as well as other open space resources in the San Gabriel Watershed, such as the Angeles National Forest. The site is strategically located near the convergence of several area freeways to serve as a gateway to exploring other areas such as local city parks, the Santa Fe Dam Recreation Area, El Dorado Regional Park, Los Cerritos Wetlands, and the Aquarium of the Pacific.

8. Provide leadership in sustainable building and landscape design and operations by integrating these features of the project into the indoor and outdoor exhibits.

Explanation: The interpretive center would meet the U. S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Standards of the highest level (Platinum). The proposed project would provide a green building example to allow visitors to see how these features function and how they could be used in homes, workplaces, and landscapes.

Each of the Discovery Center's partner agencies is responsible for one or more components of the overall educational message of the Discovery Center. Taken individually, these components do not tell the full story of the watershed. The Discovery Center facilities would pool the

resources of these diverse partners to convey an integrated educational and interpretive program. The extensive displays have been created to link these topics together in a way that visitors can understand not only how they interrelate, but also how individual residents fit into this complex pattern and how their individual actions influence the health and well-being of the entire watershed.

2.4 DISCRETIONARY ACTIONS

The Authority is the lead agency pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15367. The Final EIR has been prepared as an informational document to inform decision-makers and the public about the environmental impacts of the proposed Project, and to disclose possible ways to reduce or avoid significant environmental impacts (Cal. Code Reg. Section 15121). The Final EIR will be used by the Authority as a decision-making tool for consideration of the San Gabriel River Discovery Center at Whittier Narrows Project (Discovery Center). The information in the Final EIR will also be used by other responsible agencies and other agencies with jurisdiction in deciding whether to grant permits or approvals to construct or operate the Discovery Center. Various permits and approvals are required in order to approve and implement the project. These include the following:

- San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority (certification of the EIR and approval of the Lease and Sublease between the County and the Authority)
- County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors (Approval of Lease and Sublease between the County and the Authority)
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles District (Approval of the Sublease)

The project site is owned in part by LADPR and USACE. As an underlying property owner, the USACE is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) for this project under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The NEPA and CEQA processes are being undertaken concurrently for this project in separate environmental documents.

Other regulatory agencies and local jurisdictions that may also require permits and approvals in order to construct and operate the project include, but are not limited to, the following:

- County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works (utility relocation, grading, drainage, and building permits, including review of green building components)
- California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Los Angeles Region (National Pollution Discharge Elimination System permit)
- California Department of Health Services (Review of water features and reuse of storm water runoff for irrigation and toilets)
- City of South El Monte (traffic control)

CHAPTER 3

CEQA REVIEW AND PUBLIC OUTREACH

The Authority has complied with CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines during the preparation of the EIR for the proposed project. The Draft EIR, dated June 2009, was prepared after soliciting input from the public, responsible agencies, and affected agencies through the EIR scoping process. The “scoping” of the EIR was conducted utilizing several of the tools available under CEQA. In accordance with Sections 15063 and 15082 of the CEQA Guidelines, a Notice of Preparation (NOP) and Initial Study were prepared and distributed to the California Office of Planning and Research (State Clearinghouse), responsible agencies, affected agencies, and other interested parties on August 31, 2006. The NOP was posted in the Los Angeles County Clerk’s office for 30 days. The NOP was also submitted to the State Clearinghouse to officially solicit participation in determining the scope of the EIR. In response to the NOP, seven written comment letters were received from various agencies, organizations, and individuals.

A public scoping meeting was held on September 27, 2006 at South El Monte High School. Approximately 10 citizens attended the meeting, and 6 people spoke at the meeting to express their concerns regarding the potential environmental effects of the proposed project.

The Draft EIR was circulated for public review and comment on June 5, 2009, initiating a 60-day public review period pursuant to CEQA and its implementing guidelines. The document and Notice of Completion (NOC) was distributed to the California Office of Planning and Research, State Clearinghouse. Relevant agencies also received copies of the document. A Notice of Availability (NOA) was distributed to over 240 interested parties and adjacent property owners and residents, which informed them of where they could view the document and how to comment. The purpose of the 60-day review period was to provide interested public agencies, groups and individuals the opportunity to comment on the contents and accuracy of the document. The document was available to the public at the South El Monte Library, El Monte Public Library, and the Pico Rivera Public Library. A copy of the document was also posted online.

Public meetings were held during the Draft EIR public review period on June 24, 2009 and July 18, 2009 at South El Monte High School. The purpose of these meetings was to seek input from public agencies and the general public regarding the adequacy of the Draft EIR. Approximately 56 people attended the meeting held on June 24, and approximately 42 people attended the meeting held on July 18. Five written comments were submitted at the meetings. In addition, public comments were received at the San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority Board meetings held on June 18, 2009 and July 16, 2009 during the 60-day public review period.

A Final EIR has been completed and includes written comments received by mail and electronic mail on the Draft EIR, verbal comments received at the Draft EIR public hearings, written responses to the written and verbal comments, and changes to the Draft EIR.

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CHAPTER 4

IMPACTS DETERMINED TO BE LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT

Based on the Final EIR and the record of proceedings, the Authority finds that the project would have no impact or less than significant environmental impacts associated with aesthetics, air quality (air quality management plan, odors, construction and operational emissions of criteria pollutants, localized emissions, sensitive receptors, and cumulative), agricultural resources, biological resources (wetlands, cumulative), cultural resources, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality (groundwater, construction water quality, drainage, surface runoff, flooding, tsunami, cumulative), land use and planning, mineral resources, noise, population and housing, public services, parks and recreation, transportation/traffic, utilities and service systems, and energy. Because the 14,000 sf Alternative would be smaller than the project as proposed, the impacts to these issue areas would be slightly reduced as compared to the proposed project. In addition, the 14,000 sf Alternative, similar to the project as proposed, would have less than significant cumulative impacts to aesthetics, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, hydrology and water quality, noise, and transportation and circulation (see Section 4.3 of the Draft EIR). Each of these issues, as well as the potential irreversible environmental changes and growth inducing impacts associated with the project are discussed in this section.

4.1 AESTHETICS

The project site is located 0.25 miles north of the San Gabriel River, the entire length of which is a County designated scenic resource. No buildings greater than one-story would be constructed. As under current conditions, parking lot and building lighting would be extinguished by 10:00 p.m. In addition, the project would implement low-intensity directional lighting focused away from open space areas and adjacent properties to minimize light spill. Further, all new structures would be constructed of non-reflective building materials. As such, the light and glare, shade and shadow patterns, and views from public vantage points adjacent to the project site would remain similar to existing conditions. The impacts would be less than significant (Initial Study, pp. 11 and 12).

There are no designated state scenic highways near the project site; the closest proposed scenic highway is located approximately 10 miles southeast of the project site off of SR 60 and the closest designated scenic highway is State Route 2 located approximately 20 miles northwest of the project site. Therefore, impacts related to scenic highways would be less than significant (Initial Study, pp. 11 and 12).

Implementation of the project would require demolition of the existing six on-site structures and would result in construction of four new structures, including the interpretive center, open air classroom, covered outdoor classroom, and maintenance building. In addition, the parking lot would be relocated and enlarged, trails and paths would be altered, and new landscaping would be installed, including a constructed riparian/wetland area. While the visual setting and quality of the lease boundary would

change as a result of the project, these changes would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the project site or the surrounding area for the staff, visitors, recreationalists, and passing motorists and pedestrians. The impact would be less than significant (Draft EIR, p. 5-21).

The main building would be constructed in roughly the same location as the existing WNNC. As with the existing building, the project would be one-story in height. The project, considered in combination with the four other related projects located within a 0.25-mile radius of the lease boundary, would not create a cumulative aesthetic impact. Any project located at a greater distance than 0.25 mile would not have a view of the project site. Four of the related projects are located within a 0.25-mile radius of the project site. These include the SCE easement, Tongva Village, Lario Creek Realignment, and the River Overlook. With the exception of the SCE project, the other projects are part of the San Gabriel River Corridor Master Plan (SGRCMP) and are intended to enhance the visual and recreational experience of this portion of the Natural Area. Although these projects may be visible from the project site, they do not involve the construction of intrusive structures and would not be out of keeping with the Natural Area. SCE proposes to upgrade its existing utility lines to 500 kV. The power lines are currently visible from the project site and are a consistent part of the surrounding visual environment. As such, this project would not result in visual impacts which would create a cumulative aesthetic impact when combined with the project. The cumulative impact to the visual character and quality of the area would be less than significant (Draft EIR, p. 4-9).

4.2 AIR QUALITY (AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT PLAN, ODORS, CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATIONAL EMISSIONS OF CRITERIA POLLUTANTS, LOCALIZED EMISSIONS, SENSITIVE RECEPTORS, CUMULATIVE)

The project is located in the South Coast Air Basin (SCAB), which is under the jurisdiction of the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD). A project is deemed inconsistent with air quality plans if it results in population and/or employment growth that exceeds growth estimates in the applicable air quality plan. The project is intended to provide a multi-disciplinary educational resource that interprets the ecology and history of the San Gabriel River watershed. The number of employees at the project site is not anticipated to substantially increase as a result of the project. In addition, the main building would be constructed to meet LEED Green Building Rating System standards, a voluntary national standard for developing and rating high-performance, sustainable buildings, often referred to as “green buildings.” Green buildings are constructed to increase the efficiency of energy, water and building materials. The project does not include any residential development, housing, or large local or regional employment centers and would not result in significant population or employment growth. The project would not conflict with or obstruct implementation of an applicable air quality management plan. No impact would occur (Initial Study, pp. 13 and 14).

Some objectionable odors may be temporarily created during construction activities, such as paving, tar, or diesel exhaust. These odors would not affect a substantial number of people and would only occur in localized areas during project construction. Impacts related to objectionable odors would be less than significant (Initial Study, p. 14).

The primary source of air pollutants during construction would be the engine exhaust from construction equipment and dust from grading and earthmoving operations. The operation of construction equipment and vehicles would result in emissions of reactive organic compounds (ROC), nitric oxides (NO_x), carbon monoxide (CO), sulfur dioxides (SO_x), particulate matter 10 microns or less in diameter (PM_{10}), and fine particulate matter ($\text{PM}_{2.5}$). Construction of the project would disturb approximately 5 acres. Criteria air pollutant emissions generated during construction of the project would not exceed the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) daily emissions threshold. The construction air quality impact would be less than significant (Draft EIR, p. 5-22).

Operational emissions come from area sources and mobile sources. Area sources include natural gas for space heating and water heating, gasoline-powered landscaping and maintenance equipment, consumer products such as household cleaners, and architectural coatings for routine maintenance. Mobile sources are vehicle trips that would be made by visitors and staff to the site. The project would be expected to serve approximately 14,000 to 19,500 students per year and annual attendance is expected to range from 75,000 to 90,000 visitors. Operational emissions calculated for the project would not exceed the SCAQMD daily emissions thresholds. The operational air quality impact would be less than significant (Draft EIR, p. 5-22).

The project would not expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations from on-site emissions of criteria pollutants, off-site emissions of CO, toxic air contaminants, or odors. The closest sensitive receptors to the lease boundary are the homes west of the western site boundary. The distance from the approximate center of the construction area to the homes is 200 feet. All emissions values would be less than the Localized Significance Thresholds (LST). The application of SCAQMD Rule 403 compliant dust control measures would prevent exposure of persons to harmful quantities of dust and particulates. The impact would be less than significant (Draft EIR, pp. 3.2-16 and 3.2-17).

There would be negligible on-site operational emissions of NO_x , CO, PM_{10} , and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ during operation of the project. The project would not create a CO hot spot. The local impact to sensitive receptors would be less than significant (Draft EIR, pp. 3.2-17 and 3.2-18).

The principal toxic air contaminant of concern for project construction is diesel particulate matter. Diesel particulate matter would be emitted in the exhaust of diesel engine construction equipment. During construction, there would be persons at the residential and commercial uses adjacent to the west of the lease boundary, and at South El Monte High School across Durfee Avenue to the north of the lease boundary. Short-term construction activities would result in less than significant impact related to exposure of sensitive receptors to substantial Toxic Air Contaminants (TAC) emissions. To further

minimize diesel particulate matter exposure, construction equipment staging areas would be located as far as feasible from the residences to the west of the site and from South El Monte High School. The project would not include any new significant sources of TAC emissions. Vehicles coming to the site would be a negligible source of TAC emissions. There would be an estimated 1,474 total daily trips to the site, most of which would be gasoline-engine powered, with a small fraction of diesel engines. This volume is small compared with the California Air Resources Board threshold value of 100,000 vehicles per day. Thus, short-term construction and long-term operational sources would not expose sensitive receptors to substantial TAC concentrations. As a result, exposure of sensitive receptors to substantial concentrations of pollutants would be less than significant (Draft EIR, pp. 3.2-18 and 3.2-19).

Construction and operation of the project would not result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the region is nonattainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard. The emissions generated by the project would not exceed the SCAQMD thresholds during construction or operation. The impact would be less than significant (Draft EIR, pp. 3.2-19 and 3.2-20).

The related projects list primarily includes the development of additional recreational facilities within the Natural Area, as well as upgrading Southern California Edison's existing utility lines and a warehouse expansion project. These related projects are considered relatively minor from a construction air quality perspective. The related projects would be required to comply with SCAQMD Rule 403. Because the project results in a less than significant regional impact during construction, it is anticipated that the related projects would also result in less than significant regional air quality impacts during construction. Therefore, the cumulative regional air quality impact would be less than significant. It is unusual for localized construction emissions to result in a significant cumulative impact because the impact is dependent on simultaneous construction of multiple projects in close proximity to each other. The project would not generate significant localized emissions. Therefore, it is unlikely that construction activity associated with a related project would occur within 1,500 feet of the lease boundary during the brief grading phase when the greatest amount of emissions would be produced. As such, the cumulative localized emissions would be less than significant (Draft EIR, p. 4-9).

The SCAQMD's approach for assessing cumulative operational impacts is based on the Quality Management Plan forecasts of attainment of ambient air quality standards in accordance with the requirements of the federal and state Clean Air Act. The SCAQMD has set forth regional significance thresholds designed to assist in the attainment of ambient air quality thresholds per the State Implementation Plan. The project would not result in a significant VOC, PM_{2.5}, PM₁₀, NO_x, or CO impact during operations. Therefore, the project would result in a less than significant regional cumulative operations impact (Draft EIR, pp. 4-9 and 4-10).

4.3 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

The 11.21-acre lease boundary includes open space as designated by the County of Los Angeles. The federally owned portion of the property is part of the Whittier Narrow Natural Area, which is part of the larger Whittier Narrows Recreation Area. The lease boundary was previously used for agricultural purposes before the federal portion (approximately 10.58 acres) was purchased by the USACE in 1937 for flood control purposes. The lease boundary has been used for educational and recreational purposes since 1958. No agricultural activities currently occur on-site. There is no designated farmland within the lease boundary; therefore, no impacts to Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance would occur. Similarly, no conflicts with existing zoning for agricultural uses would occur (Draft EIR, p. 4-1).

4.4 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES (WETLANDS, CUMULATIVE)

There are no jurisdictional wetlands located within the construction impact area or the lease boundary. The closest water body to the lease boundary is the Robert S. Joe Commemorative Ditch; however, this ditch is not located within the lease boundary or the construction impact area. Further, no construction activity would occur within 200 feet of the Robert S. Joe Commemorative Ditch at the closest point and no vehicles would be staged or construction materials stored or stockpiled in the vicinity of the ditch. Thus, no jurisdictional areas or protected wetlands would be directly or indirectly affected by construction of the project. The impact would be less than significant (Draft EIR, p. 3.3-25).

The project and the related projects listed in Table 4-1 of the Draft EIR that were considered in the cumulative impact analysis would restore large portions of the Natural Area and would establish suitable habitat necessary to support sensitive species. The project, along with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects, would have a long-term beneficial impact on biological resources. Therefore, the cumulative impact on biological resources would be less than significant. The project would not make a cumulatively considerable contribution to a significant cumulative impact (Draft EIR, p. 4-17).

4.5 CULTURAL RESOURCES

The six historic-era buildings located on the project site were photographed, documented, and evaluated. None of the existing buildings is eligible for listing on either the National Register or California Register. Thus, removal of these structures during construction of the project would not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource. The impact would be less than significant. Implementation of the project involves alteration of the landscape directly surrounding the WNNC main building, County Police substation, and outbuilding. Further, to construct the new parking lot, ruderal vegetation and some trees would be removed. None of these landscape features have been identified as having a historical significance. As such, alteration of the landscape would not result in a significant impact to historic resources. The Natural Area is associated with several early films. These include

portions of *The Birth of a Nation* and some of the Tarzan films. Due to construction of the dam, channelization of the river, and establishment of a museum and wildlife sanctuary, the landscape of the Natural Area was permanently changed from its appearance in *The Birth of a Nation*, *Son of Tarzan*, and *Tarzan and his Mate*. As such, the landscape conditions no longer exist and further alteration of the landscape would not result in a significant impact to historic filming locations (Draft EIR, pp. 5-24 and 5-25).

No archaeological resources are known to be located within the lease boundary. However, there is a chance that previously unknown resources could be uncovered during construction. The project would be required to comply with CEQA Section 15064.5 and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (36 CFR 800) in the event that previously unknown resources are discovered during construction. Implementation of the project would not create a significant impact to archaeological resources (Draft EIR, p. 5-25).

The project site consists of predominantly recent, unconsolidated alluvial material deposits by the San Gabriel River, which have low probability of containing paleontological resources. As such, paleontological resources are not likely to occur at the project site. If previously unknown paleontological resources are discovered in the course of excavation for project construction, the construction inspector shall have the authority and responsibility to halt construction until a qualified paleontologist or archaeologist can evaluate the significance and distribution of the materials, and identify future activities needed. The impact to paleontological resources would be a less than significant (Initial Study, pp. 16 and 17).

No known human remains are known to exist on the project site, and the project site is not designated nor has it been designated for use as a cemetery. If human remains are discovered in the course of excavation for project construction, the County Coroner shall be contacted and provisions of State CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5 shall be followed. The impact to human remains would be less than significant (Initial Study, p. 17).

The project would not result in cumulative impacts to historic resources in the area. The existing site structures do not qualify for listing as historic resources on either the National Register or the California Register. The project site is not located in a historic district. Thus, removal of these buildings in conjunction with other projects in the area would not create a cumulatively considerable impact to historic resources (Draft EIR, p. 4-18).

No archaeological sites were discovered or are known to exist within the lease boundary. However, the project site is located in an area likely used by Native Americans at one time. If resources are uncovered during construction activities, all construction would cease until the find is analyzed. As such, the project would not contribute to a significant cumulative impact to archaeological resources (Draft EIR, p. 4-18).

4.6 GEOLOGY AND SOILS

As with most of southern California, the project site is located in a seismically active region. The project site is not located within a fault rupture zone or within a currently established Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zone. There are no active faults that traverse the project site; however, several potentially active faults are located in the project vicinity: Newport-Inglewood, Raymond, Los Alamitos, Whittier-Elsinore, Sierra Madre-San Fernando, and San Gabriel faults. Although the potential for surface rupture at the site is low, the site could be subject to strong ground shaking in the event of an earthquake. As with all projects in Southern California, all project structures would be designed and constructed in accordance with the California Building Code, the Los Angeles County Building Code, and all other applicable local, state, and federal codes relative to seismic criteria. Compliance with existing regulations would ensure that neither people nor structures are exposed to potential adverse effects from fault rupture and strong seismic ground shaking (Initial Study, p. 18).

According to the Los Angeles County Seismic Safety Element, the project site is not located within an area identified by the California Division of Mines and Geology (CDMG) as having the potential for earthquake-induced landslides. In addition, the project site is not within an area identified as having a potential for seismic slope instability. There are no known landslide areas near the project site, nor is the project site in the path of any known potential landslides. The project site has a relatively flat topography, which precludes both landslide problems and lurching. Impacts related to landslides would not occur (Initial Study, p. 18).

The relatively flat nature of the site precludes it from being readily susceptible to erosion. However, construction of the project would result in ground surface disruption during grading and trenching that could create the potential for erosion to occur. Since the project site is greater than one acre, the construction contractor would prepare and comply with a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP), which would feature erosion control measures. In addition, the construction contractor would comply with the Storm Water Construction Activities General Permit and obtain a National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. Adherence to existing regulations and implementation of standard construction practices would ensure that soil erosion would be mitigated to a less than significant level.

Liquefaction is the process in which sediments below the water table temporarily lose strength and behave as a liquid rather than a solid. Liquefaction generally occurs in sand and silts in areas with high groundwater levels. Due to the presence of loose alluvium materials deposited by the San Gabriel River, the project site falls within a liquefaction hazard zone. Expansive soils are soils that swell when they absorb water and shrink as they dry. Pure clay soils and claystone are good examples of expansive soils. The hazard associated with expansive soils is that structural damage may occur when buildings are placed on these soils. Expansive soils are often present in liquefaction zones due to the high level of groundwater typically associated with liquefiable soils. As such, prior to the commencement of construction, a detailed project-specific geotechnical study shall be prepared by a Registered Geologist to

confirm the potential liquefaction-related hazards and design standards pursuant to the California Building Code and other regulations, plans and standards. All project structures would be designed and constructed in accordance with the California Building Code, Los Angeles County Building Code, and all other applicable local, state, and federal codes relative to liquefaction criteria. This would include the use of foundations designed to compensate for the reduced support provided by liquefiable soils. Compliance with existing regulations would ensure a less than significant impact (Initial Study, p. 19).

Land subsidence is the loss of surface elevation due to the removal of subsurface support. Land subsidence is caused by activities that contribute to the loss of support materials within the underlying soils, such as agricultural practices or the overdraft of an aquifer. The project may include constructed wetlands, which would be membrane lined and would not allow infiltration to the groundwater. Thus, the impacts associated with subsidence would be less than significant (Initial Study, p. 19).

The existing WNNC is currently using a sanitary sewer line with connections in Durfee Avenue. However, previous operations at the WNNC used a septic system. The abandoned septic tank is located between the WNNC main building and County Police substation. The project includes the removal of the existing septic system and upgrade of a sanitary sewer line that would be connected to the County's sewer system. As such, no impacts associated with use of a septic system would occur (Initial Study, p. 19).

4.7 HAZARDS AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

The lease boundary is not included on a list of hazardous materials sites. Construction and operation of the project would not require extensive or on-going use of acutely hazardous materials or substances. The occasional use of hazardous materials could include paints, aerosol cans, cleaning agents (solvents), automotive supplies (bi-products), and pesticides and herbicides. These types of materials are not considered acutely hazardous and would be used in small quantities. All hazardous materials used at the project site would be used, stored, handled, and disposed of in accordance with County, state, and federal laws that protect public safety. Due to the age of the existing structures, they could contain lead-based paint and asbestos-containing materials. In accordance with the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) requirements, the building would be evaluated for asbestos-containing materials and lead-based paint prior to the start of construction. All lead-based paint and asbestos-containing materials would be removed prior to the start of construction. Compliance with existing regulations would ensure a less than significant impact (Draft EIR, p. 4-2).

Construction and operation of the project would not require extensive or on-going use of acutely hazardous materials or substances. Construction activities would be short-term and one-time in nature, and would involve the limited transport, storage, use, or disposal of hazardous materials. Some examples of hazardous materials handling include fueling and servicing construction equipment on-site, and the transport of fuels, lubricating fluids, and solvents. These types of materials, however, are not acutely hazardous, and all storage, handling, and disposal of these materials is regulated by DTSC, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Occupational Safety & Health Administration, Los Angeles

County Fire Department, and Los Angeles County Health Department. Adherence to the regulations set forth by County, state, and federal agencies would reduce the potential for hazardous materials impacts to a less than significant level and would not pose a safety hazard to students and staff at South El Monte High School (Draft EIR, p. 4-2).

4.8 HYDROLOGY AND WATER QUALITY (GROUNDWATER, CONSTRUCTION WATER QUALITY, DRAINAGE, SURFACE RUNOFF, FLOODING, TSUNAMI, CUMULATIVE)

Potable water to the project site would be supplied by a new 3-inch water meter connected to existing water lines located in Durfee Avenue. No direct removal of well water is anticipated as part of the project. Some storm water collected at the project site would infiltrate into the ground; however, most of the wastewater and storm water would be reused on-site for non-potable water purposes (e.g., landscape irrigation). Implementation of this system would reduce the demand for water by reusing treated water on the project then allow it to percolate into the underlying groundwater basin. Thus, the project would not substantially deplete groundwater supplies or interfere with groundwater recharge. Impacts would be less than significant (Initial Study, pp. 23 and 24).

Construction activities that involve soil disturbance would temporarily increase the potential for soil erosion. During storm events, storm water runoff could carry disturbed sediments and spilled substances from construction activities, resulting in erosion and storm water pollution discharges to Lario Creek and the San Gabriel River. Thus, during construction of the project, the Authority would be required to comply with applicable storm water regulations and implement of storm water pollution prevention measures as specified under the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit requirements, a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP), and a Wet Weather Erosion Control Plan for construction during the rainy season. Compliance with these existing regulations would reduce sediment-laden runoff, prevent the migration of contaminants from construction areas to surface waters, and ensure storm water discharges do not violate applicable water quality standards. The impact would be less than significant (Draft EIR, p. 5-25).

The project would involve construction within the USACE taking line and the 100-year floodplain. Backfill would be used to elevate all portions of the interpretive center above the taking line. This material must be balanced from within the lease boundary providing on-site soils are structurally sound. All structures constructed within the floodplain and below the taking line would be designed to flood. As such, the project would have a less than significant impact on the flood plain (Draft EIR, p. 5-26).

Due to the distance of the project site to the Pacific Ocean (approximately 28 miles west of the project site) and the numerous structures between the project site and the ocean, there is virtually no risk of on-site hazard due to tsunamis (seismically-induced waves). The closest water body to the project site that has the potential to seiche is Legg Lake, which is located approximately 0.8 miles west of the project site.

Due to the distance to the nearest enclosed water body, the project site is not at risk of inundation due to a seiche. The project site is located approximately 0.2 miles north of the San Gabriel River, which is subject to mudflows. Due to the topography of the project site and vegetation currently and planned to be located between the project facilities and the river, it is unlikely that mudflows would reach the Discovery Center. Further, the project site is separated from the San Gabriel River by Lario Creek, which would act to dissipate mudflows in the project vicinity. Impacts from inundation of a tsunami, seiche, or mudflow would be less than significant (Initial Study, p. 24).

The one-mile cumulative project radius adequately captures the past, present, and probable future projects that would potentially contribute to cumulative hydrology and water quality impacts. Impacts to hydrology and water quality from the project would be mitigated to a less than significant level. The project incorporates design features that are intended to reduce the volume and speed of runoff from the project site. These include vegetated swales, bio-swales, a detention basin, and a constructed riparian/wetland area. Although the project would increase the amount of impervious surfaces on-site, no additional runoff would be discharged off-site. The related projects identified in Table 4-1 and other projects within the San Gabriel River Watershed would be required to comply with the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board Basin Plan, which is intended to develop, achieve, and implement a timely, comprehensive, cost-effective storm water pollution control program to reduce pollutants to the maximum extent practicable. In addition, the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board Basin Plan addresses water quality and water supply, flood and sedimentation, land use, and public outreach and education within the watershed. Implementation of NPDES permit requirements established by the EPA and the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board regional management strategies (i.e., Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board Basin Plan) would address site-specific and watershed-wide issues related to water quality and hydrology for the related projects. Further, all development within the floodplain and below the taking line would be required to comply with USACE standards. Accordingly, the project's impacts would not be cumulatively considerable when analyzed in conjunction with the related projects (Draft EIR, p. 4-18).

4.9 LAND USE AND PLANNING

A portion of the lease boundary is designated open space in the Los Angeles County General Plan Whittier Narrows & South El Monte Land Use Plan. The lease boundary is designated Natural Area in the USACE Whittier Narrows Dam Master Plan and Environmental Assessment (USACE 1996). Some of the lease boundary (approximately 7 acres) is located within the Whittier Narrows Dam Significant Ecological Area (SEA) No. 42, as designated by County of Los Angeles Department of Regional Planning (LADRP). Development of the project would be consistent with the adopted use in the General Plan and with the current use of the site as the WNNC. There are no residential uses within the lease boundary and no roadways would be closed as a result of the project. Accordingly, no communities would be physically divided as a result of the project. No impact would occur (Draft EIR, p. 4-3).

4.10 MINERAL RESOURCES

There are no known mineral deposits of economic importance underlying the lease boundary. Development of the project would not result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource. No impact would occur (Draft EIR, p. 4-3).

4.11 NOISE

There are no public airports or private airstrips in the project vicinity. Accordingly, the project would not expose people residing or working in the project area to aircraft noise. No impact would occur (Initial Study, p. 26).

The nearest sensitive noise receptors to the project site are the commercial and multi-family residences to the west, South El Monte High School to the north, office and institutional uses to the east, and recreational users within adjacent portions of the Natural Area. These sensitive receptors would experience increased noise levels during construction of the project compared to existing conditions. Noise dissipates with distance and the noise levels at these locations would be less than 78 dBA L_{eq} . This value is less than the noise ordinance limit of 80 dBA L_{eq} ; therefore, sensitive receptors would not be exposed to noise greater than the standard. The construction noise impact would be less than significant (Draft EIR, p. 5-26).

Operational noise sources on-site would include vehicles entering and leaving, voices of staff and visitors, large school groups at the facility in the covered outdoor classroom or open air classroom, landscape maintenance machinery, and mechanical equipment for the interpretive center. Operational activity would be similar to the proposed project. The noise from the first three sources would occur intermittently and at various locations throughout the lease boundary. These noises would rarely occur near the closest sensitive receptors, which are the commercial uses and residences to the west of the site. As such, the impact of visitor noise would be less than significant. Operational noise would also be generated by vehicles traveling to and from the site. Existing noise levels on-site were measured at 51 to 55 dBA L_{eq} during the mid-afternoon. With the noisiest hour of traffic, at a morning or evening peak hour, the existing loudest hour noise level would not be expected to exceed 57 dBA L_{eq} during operation of the project. This future noise level would be less than 66 dBA L_{eq} standard of Caltrans for park uses. As such, site visitors and staff would experience noise levels at acceptable levels for park uses. Future noise levels in the vicinity would also be consistent with state and County land use compatibility guidelines, in which 60 dBA is appropriate for single-family uses and other sensitive land uses. As such, implementation of the project would not increase vehicle noise in the vicinity above acceptable levels. The operational noise impact would be less than significant (Draft EIR, p. 5-26).

Given the distance in space and the timing of the related projects, concurrent construction activities would not have the potential to contribute to the short-term noise impact. Construction activities associated with the related projects are of sufficient distance from the sensitive noise receptors, and are not planned to

occur at the same time. As such, the project would not contribute to a significant cumulative noise impact during construction (Draft EIR, pp. 4-18 and 4-19).

Vibration impacts associated with construction activities are extremely localized because they are groundborne. Ground vibration generated by construction equipment spreads through the ground and diminishes in magnitude with increases in distance. As such, ground vibration associated with the project would not be heightened due to the related projects because of the distances between them. No cumulative impacts from vibration would result (Draft EIR, p. 4-19).

Traffic generated by the project would marginally increase traffic noise on adjacent streets, although the increase would be imperceptible. It is assumed that the related projects would generate an increase in the amount of traffic on local roads as well. However, due to the location and nature of the related projects, no substantial increase in area traffic would occur on local streets. When considered together, the project and the related projects would not create a significant cumulative impact on permanent ambient noise levels in the vicinity of the project site (Draft EIR, p. 4-19).

4.12 POPULATION AND HOUSING

The lease boundary is currently developed with the WNNC, associated facilities, and trails. There is no residential development within the lease boundary. No housing units or persons would be displaced as a result of the project, nor would the project necessitate construction of replacement housing elsewhere. Construction of the project would not generate a substantial number of new jobs, construct housing, or otherwise induce substantial population growth in the surrounding area. No impact to population and housing would occur (Draft EIR, p. 4-3).

4.13 PUBLIC SERVICES

The project is expected to increase the number of visitors to the site per year from approximately 60,400 visitors per year currently to approximately 75,000 to 90,000 visitors per year with the project. Police protection services would continue to be provided by the County Office of Public Safety from a County Police substation located within the Natural Area. Construction of the project would not generate a substantial number of new jobs, construct housing, or otherwise induce substantial population growth in the surrounding area. However, the project would increase the number of visitors to the site, which could increase service calls. The lease boundary would continue to be patrolled by County Police, as under existing conditions. Although additional County Police may be required to patrol the lease boundary, this is within their service capacities and would not cause a need to construct a new facility. The existing substation would be displaced by the project and the County Police would be relocated somewhere within their service area. The impact to police protection services would be less than significant (Draft EIR, p. 4-3).

Fire service would continue to be provided by the Los Angeles County Fire Department from Fire Station 90 in Pico Rivera. Fire sprinklers would be installed in the interpretive center and all site features would be constructed in accordance with Los Angeles County Fire Department requirements. Although the number of emergency calls for fire protection services may increase as a result of the project, the current staffing at the Pico Rivera Station can accommodate the new demand. As such, no new fire stations would be constructed or expanded as a result of the project. The impact would be less than significant (Draft EIR, p. 4-4).

No increase in school age children would occur from construction and operation of the project. As such, no new or expanded school facilities would be required. The impact would be less than significant (Draft EIR, p. 4-4).

4.14 PARKS AND RECREATION

The project would address a community need for enhanced educational and recreational facilities. The project would result in the continuing use of the lease boundary for passive recreational opportunities. Improvements to the existing recreational facilities have been planned as part of the project such that substantial physical deterioration of the project site would not occur. The impact would be less than significant (Draft EIR, p. 4-4).

4.15 TRANSPORTATION/TRAFFIC

The project would not result in a change in air traffic patterns or result in any air safety risks; no impacts to air safety would occur. Construction of the project would not generate a substantial number of new jobs, construct housing, or otherwise induce substantial population growth in the surrounding area that would increase air traffic. The project does not propose tall buildings that would require re-routing air traffic. No street closures are proposed as part of the project. In accordance with County Fire Department regulations, the project has been designed to provide adequate turning radii, lane widths, gate closures, and air space to accommodate emergency vehicles; the project is not anticipated to result in inadequate emergency access (Initial Study, pp. 29 and 30).

The project would include restoration of trail connections to the project site. Bicycle parking would also be provided on-site. Therefore, the project would not conflict with adopted policies, plans, or programs supporting alternative transportation (Initial Study, p. 30).

The project is expected to generate approximately 109 weekday morning peak hour trips and 39 weekday evening peak hour trips. This represents an increase of 81 weekday morning peak hour trips and 29 weekday evening peak hour trips compared to the existing WNNC trip generation. The addition of project traffic to existing conditions would not exceed the County's level of service thresholds. The anticipated project-specific increases in traffic at the study intersections would be less than significant (Draft EIR, p. 5-27).

The project includes an approximately 116-space parking lot. However, some special events currently occur at the WNNC, such as annual clean ups, and that would continue to occur at the site during some weekends. These events would be expected to attract approximately 225 to 300 persons. The WNNC typically makes arrangements with nearby businesses for additional off-site parking. Traffic police are used along Durfee Avenue to direct visitors to the appropriate parking lots and to stop through traffic to allow visitors to safely cross Durfee Avenue. These arrangements would continue to be made for the project during special events that require overflow parking. The impacts to parking supply would be less than significant (Draft EIR, p. 5-27).

4.16 UTILITIES AND SERVICE SYSTEMS

The project would be designed, constructed, and operated in accordance with the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) platinum level standards. This design approach increases the efficiency of energy, water, and buildings material use on-site. Water efficiency on the project site would increase by 40 percent compared to a similarly sized facility that was not constructed to LEED standards. This efficiency would be accomplished through the installation and use of low-flow fixtures and the reuse of water for landscape irrigation and other purposes that can use non-potable water. Although water consumption and wastewater discharge at the lease boundary would increase compared to the existing facility, the anticipated new demand can be accommodated by existing County water supplies. Upgraded water infrastructure is required to support the proposed project. This includes a new 8-inch concrete sewer line installed in Durfee Avenue and a new 3-inch domestic water line. With these upgrades, the project infrastructure would not exceed the capacity of existing facilities. Construction materials would be recycled to the maximum extent feasible. Further, in accordance with County regulations, the project would meet the requirements for recycling space and provide an easily accessible area serving the interpretive center that is dedicated to the separation, collection, and storage of materials for recycling. Although the amount of trash generated on-site would increase compared to existing conditions, it would not exceed the capacity of area landfills. The impact would be less than significant impact (Draft EIR, p. 4-4).

4.17 ENERGY

The existing buildings would be deconstructed to provide reuse of 10 percent of the building components within the interpretive center, and to provide salvage of an additional 50 percent of the demolished building materials for use outside the project. Five cooling towers would be used to actively cool the interpretive center. The cool water for the chilled beams that runs through the towers is provided by a night sky radiation system. This system would operate at night by spraying water onto the roof and exposing it to the sky. As the water runs down the roof, it cools and is then collected in a storage tank for use during the day. A conventional chiller would provide back-up cooling for this water supply in case of insufficient natural cooling. In the meeting rooms and classrooms, where occupant loads can be high and vary greatly throughout the day, cold water would be supplied through the concrete floor slabs to chill

them. Conversely, warm water would be run through the concrete slabs in winter to warm them. Overhangs and shaded louvers on windows would protect the interior from the sun and reduce energy costs during the summer months. Other energy saving strategies include the use of natural light from skylights (clerestories at the roof level) to illuminate exhibits. A photovoltaic power system would be installed to provide back-up power to the project. All interior light fixtures would be fitted with energy saving lamps and energy saving protected electronic ballasts. Occupancy sensors would be used to automatically turn off lights when meeting rooms, offices, and restrooms are not in use. Light sensors would control dim lighting based on ambient light levels in the exhibit areas, hallways, etc. The building envelope would exceed the requirements of the California Energy Code for minimum thickness of roof and wall insulation. Windows would be glazed with double pane Low-E type and low solar gain coefficient glazing. Bike racks would be provided on-site and most visitors to the site would be school children traveling on buses. Visitors would be encouraged to use nearby bus lines. With implementation of these design features and operational strategies, energy consumption (electricity and natural gas) at the project site would be reduced by 50 percent compared to a similarly sized non-LEED building. In addition, the proposed project would exceed Title 24 energy standards related to building envelope, outdoor lighting and signs, mechanical systems, performance approach, indoor lighting, and acceptance requirements (defined as the application of targeted inspection checks and testing to determine whether specific building systems conform to the criteria set forth in the standards and to plans or specifications). Although energy consumption would increase compared to the WNNC, the project would not exceed the capacity of local and regional utilities to supply natural gas and electricity. Further, the project would exceed California and County energy standards and sharply reduce consumption compared a traditional building of this size. As such, construction and operation of the project would not create a significant energy impact (Draft EIR, p. 4-5).

4.18 SIGNIFICANT IRREVERSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

Section 15126.2(c) of the CEQA Guidelines require that an EIR analyze the extent to which a project's primary and secondary effects would impact the environment and commit nonrenewable resources to uses that future generations would not be able to reverse (Draft EIR, p. 4-19).

Construction and operation of the project would result in the use of nonrenewable resources during construction, including fossil fuels, natural gas, and water and building materials such as concrete and steel. As part of the LEED certification process, building materials would be recycled and reused on-site to the maximum extent possible. In addition, the project would be designed to incorporate energy and water efficiency features. The project is not anticipated to consume substantial amounts of energy in a wasteful manner, and it would not result in significant impacts from consumption of utilities. Development of the project would represent a long-term commitment of the site to educational and recreation uses. Although irreversible environmental changes would result from the project, such changes would not be considered significant (Draft EIR, pp. 4-19 and 4-20).

4.19 GROWTH INDUCING IMPACTS

Induced growth is any growth that exceeds planned growth and results from new development that would not have taken place without the implementation of the project. Typically, the growth-inducing potential of a project would be considered significant if it results in growth or population concentration that exceeds those assumptions included in pertinent master plans, land use plans, or projections made by regional planning authorities. However, the creation of growth-inducing potential does not automatically lead to growth, whether it would be below or in exceedance of a projected level. The environmental effects of induced growth are secondary or indirect impacts of the project. Secondary effects of growth could result in significant, adverse environmental impacts, which could include increased demand on community or public services, increased traffic and noise, degradation of air and water quality, and conversion of agricultural land and open space to developed uses (Draft EIR, p. 4-20).

Implementation of the project is not considered growth inducing because the project would meet a community need for enhanced educational and recreational facilities. The project would improve upon the existing WNNC by constructing a new LEED certified interpretive center that would accommodate larger groups and reach a broader audience with modern exhibits. The project would not create new housing or residential land uses that would cause an increase in population, nor would it require the extension of new utilities or services to an unserved area. The project would not change development patterns in the vicinity since the surrounding areas are already developed or designated open space as part of the Natural Area (Draft EIR, p. 4-20).

CHAPTER 5

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS WITH MITIGATION

Based on the Draft EIR, Final EIR and the record of proceedings, the Authority finds that the project would have significant environmental effects associated with biological resources (sensitive species, wildlife migration, local policies, cumulative) and hydrology and water quality (operational water quality) that would be reduced to below the level of significance with implementation of specific mitigation. Each of these resource areas are discussed in this section. The Final EIR identified feasible mitigation measures to avoid or substantially reduce these environmental impacts. Based on the information and analysis set forth in the Final EIR and record of proceedings, project impacts would be less than significant with the identified feasible mitigation measures for biological resources and hydrology and water quality that are incorporated into the project.

5.1 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES (SENSITIVE SPECIES, WILDLIFE MIGRATION, LOCAL POLICIES)

Significant Impact: *The project would adversely affect, either directly or through habitat modifications, a species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) or United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), or any endangered, rare, or threatened species. As set forth in Section 5.4.3 of the Draft EIR, the project would disturb the existing vegetation within the lease boundary which provides habitat for birds and other wildlife species, including sensitive species. If the vegetation communities are occupied by sensitive species, including Cooper’s hawk, least Bell’s vireo, yellow-breasted chat, yellow warbler, and coastal western whiptail, when vegetation removal is conducted, sensitive species would be directly and permanently impacted. Temporary, indirect impacts due to construction activities, such as increased noise disturbance to birds during the breeding season, would affect all species within the lease boundary. Other construction impacts, such as increased human presence (i.e., construction workers), erosion and siltation, siltation into adjacent areas, and dust, would adversely affect all species. Permanent, indirect impacts due to project operation, such as parking lot lighting and increased human activity, would also adversely affect all species. Mitigation would be required to reduce these impacts to a less than significant level.*

Finding: The Authority finds that changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the EIR. Specifically, the following mitigation measures would reduce the significant effect to a less than significant level.

BIO-A Prior to commencement of project construction, a qualified restoration ecologist shall prepare a formal restoration plan to implement the replanting of walnut woodland. Impacts to walnut woodland (less than 0.01 acre) shall be mitigated at a ratio of 2:1. Impacts to disturbed areas of walnut wood (0.20 acres) shall be mitigated at a ratio of 1:1. Based on the ratios noted above, a total of 0.22 acres of walnut woodland shall be replanted in areas near or adjacent to the existing walnut woodland that are located outside of the construction impact area. Implementation of the restoration plan shall occur within one year of completion of project construction. A 3- to 5-year maintenance and monitoring program shall be conducted to ensure that a native plant cover is achieved and aggressive nonnative species do not out-compete the native species. If the lease boundary does not contain sufficient area for project mitigation, it is the responsibility of the Authority to obtain permission for replanting in an appropriate easement within the San Gabriel River floodplain. The proposed mitigation strategy is included in this report in Appendix C.

BIO-B Of the total 36 mature native and nonnative trees¹ that would potentially be impacted, 4 trees are salvageable. No more than 33 percent of the root matrix for each tree shall be removed during the transplanting process in order to assure or contribute to recovery and survival during and after the transplant process. No subsurface disturbance shall encroach the dripline extent of the tree (dripline is the furthest margin of the crown radiating out from the main stem [tree trunk]). For transplanting trees, pragmatic and practical concerns about handling ability (among other issues) become paramount in the transplant process. Therefore, for replanting relocated trees, no more than 2 to 3 feet of dripline encroachment shall occur to ensure root disturbance and impact is kept to a minimum. After replanting, the tree's root matrix shall be accessible 360 degrees and not asymmetrically obstructed (i.e., a tree abutting a wall or other structure), to prevent adequate rootball formation.

BIO-C The native trees (redwood, elderberry, etc.) 8-inch inches diameter at breast height (dbh or larger) in natural areas of construction impact area lost to project-related activities shall be replaced in-kind at a ratio of 2:1. These trees shall be replaced with a minimum 15-gallon tree replanted in clusters of 3 to 4. Each non-native mature tree (8-inches dbh or larger) removed from a landscaped area around the WNNC shall be replaced at a ratio of 1:1 with a 36-inch box tree of a species native and known to the floodplain of the San Gabriel River. The replacement trees shall be planted in small groupings (3 to 4 trees) within landscaped areas of the construction impact area near the interpretive center. Salvaged materials shall be used or supplemental plantings of native species appropriate to the site (occurring within the San Gabriel River floodplain and of local genetic stock)

¹ Mature trees are defined as those trees measuring 8 inches diameter at breast height or higher. Native trees are those indigenous to California.

shall be used if necessary. Post-construction monitoring shall be conducted by a qualified biologist to ensure 100 percent survival for the first year and 80 percent survival for the year after. Additional information for the proposed mitigation strategy is included in Appendix C of this EIR.

BIO-D Prior to the start of construction, a qualified biologist shall conduct focused pre-construction surveys for the coastal western whiptail. If encountered, the species shall be relocated to an approved location based on consultation with the California Department of Fish and Game.

BIO-E Should tree or other vegetation clearance and/or construction work need to occur during the breeding season for migratory non-game native bird species (generally March 1-September 1, as early as February 1 and as late as September 15 for raptors), weekly bird surveys shall be performed to detect any protected native birds in the trees to be removed and other suitable nesting habitat within 300 feet of the construction work area (500 feet for raptors). The surveys shall be conducted 30 days prior to the disturbance of suitable nesting habitat by a qualified biologist with experience in conducting nesting bird surveys. The surveys shall continue on a weekly basis with the last survey being conducted no more than 3 days prior to the initiation of clearance/construction work. If a protected native bird is found, the construction contractor shall delay all clearance/construction disturbance activities in suitable nesting habitat or within 300 feet of nesting habitat (within 500 feet for raptor nesting habitat) until August 31 or continue the surveys in order to locate any nests. If an active nest is located, clearing and construction within 300 feet of the nest (within 500 feet for raptor nests) shall be postponed until the nest is vacated, juveniles have fledged, and when there is no evidence of a second attempt at nesting. Limits of construction to avoid a nest shall be established in the field by a qualified biologist with flagging and stakes or construction fencing. Construction personnel shall be instructed on the sensitivity of the area. The results of this measure shall be recorded to document compliance with applicable state and federal laws pertaining to the protection of native birds.

BIO-F The Authority shall inform the construction contractor(s), prior to the bidding process, about the biological constraints of the project site. The construction contractor(s) shall be responsible for impacts to sensitive biological resources beyond those identified in this report that occur as a direct result of construction activities. All sensitive habitat areas to be avoided shall be clearly marked on project maps provided to the contractor by a qualified biologist. These areas shall be designated as “no construction” zones. The project biologist shall flag these areas prior to the onset of construction activities. Resources may need to be fenced or otherwise protected from direct or indirect impacts.

- BIO-G** The Authority shall implement a contractor education program to ensure that contractors and all construction personnel are fully informed of the sensitive biological resources associated with this project. This program shall focus on (a) the purpose for resource protection, (b) contractor identification of sensitive resource areas in the field (e.g., areas delineated on maps and by flags or fencing), (c) sensitive construction practices, (d) protocol to resolve conflicts that may arise at any time during the construction process, and (e) ramifications of noncompliance. This program shall be conducted by a qualified biologist.
- BIO-H** Construction in or adjacent to sensitive areas shall be appropriately scheduled to minimize potential impacts biological resources (i.e., outside of the nesting bird season and/or blooming periods of sensitive species with the potential to occur in the vicinity of the project site).
- BIO-I** Topsoil shall be stockpiled in disturbed areas presently lacking native vegetation. Stockpile areas shall be delineated on the grading plans and reviewed by a qualified biologist.
- BIO-J** Staging areas shall be located in disturbed area (i.e., within the grading footprint). Staging areas are prohibited within sensitive habitat areas. Staging areas shall be delineated on the grading plans and reviewed by a qualified biologist.
- BIO-K** Fueling of equipment shall take place within existing paved roads and not within or adjacent to drainages or native habitats. The construction contractor shall be responsible for inspecting construction equipment for leaks prior to operation and repaired as necessary. “No-fueling zones” shall be designated on construction maps and shall be situated a minimum distance of 50 feet from all drainages.
- BIO-L** Erosion and siltation into off-site areas during construction shall be minimized. An erosion control plan and a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan shall be required of the construction contractor prior to the start of construction. The Authority shall be responsible for ensuring that the erosion control plan is developed and implemented per the requirements to the County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works. The plan shall include the use of hay bales, silt fences, siltation basins, or other devices necessary to stabilize the soil in denuded or graded areas during the construction and revegetation phases of the project.
- BIO-M** All nighttime lighting from the project site shall be shielded. Parking lot lighting shall be located around the perimeter of the parking lot facing inward away from native vegetation located around its edges.

BIO-N Signs shall be posted near sensitive biological resources and sensitive habitat areas to educate staff and the public to avoid disturbance to these resources. The Authority shall post educational signage, both inside the interpretive center and at trail heads emphasizing the protection of all natural features of the Natural Area.

BIO-O In conjunction with the County, the Authority shall develop and implement a Resource Management Plan to guide all phases of Natural Area management and maintenance within the lease boundary. At a minimum, the Resource Management Plan shall include methods and provisions for: maintenance of roads, walkways, trails, and landscaping; invasive weed avoidance and removal; routine patrolling of the Natural Area for litter pick up and inspection for vandalism; and regular closure rotation of natural areas.

BIO-P Any redundant trails within the lease boundary shall be closed and restored.

BIO-Q If at any time disturbance to a sensitive habitat area is suspected, the interpretive center staff shall have the authority to temporarily or permanently close the area for rest or restoration.

Rationale/Supporting Explanation: Implementation of the project would result in less than one acre of permanent impacts to walnut woodland. Approximately 0.20 acres of disturbed walnut woodland would be permanently impacted by the project. The direct impact to walnut woodland would be less than significant because the walnut woodland community was determined to be nonnative, and therefore, is not a sensitive vegetation community (see EIR, Appendix C). However, for the purposes of a conservative analysis, mitigation measures were proactively developed by the Authority to reduce impacts to this vegetation type. Impacts to walnut woodland (i.e., 0.01 acres of walnut woodland and 0.20 acres of disturbed walnut woodland) would be mitigated at a ratio of 2:1 and 1:1, respectively. Based on these ratios, a total of 0.22 acres of walnut woodland would be replanted. To compensate for the loss of undisturbed habitat, mitigation shall include restoration of some areas of walnut woodland currently disturbed. It should be noted that these mitigation ratios were developed assuming that the walnut trees are native, and therefore, are rare and a sensitive vegetation community. As such, the mitigation ratios more than compensate for impacts to the walnut woodland community (Draft EIR, p. 5-23).

Implementation of the project would result in impacts to 1.87 acres of ruderal habitat, of which approximately 1.17 acres contains mature trees. Mature trees are defined as those trees measuring 8 inches dbh or higher. Due to the difficulty of distinguishing London planes from western sycamores and hybrid walnuts from California walnuts, the Authority has proactively chosen to treat all London plane and walnut trees as native species for the purposes of providing the most conservative impact analysis. As such, the project would require the removal of 19 mature native trees and 10 mature nonnative trees, the same number of mature trees that would be impacted by the project. The of the construction best management practices (see Section 2.8.2) requires that the Authority to protect the two large London plane trees on the main lawn south of the WNNC main building. This would reduce the number of trees

impacted by the 14,000 sf Alternative to 27, including 17 native trees and 10 nonnative trees. Additionally, the project would potentially damage 9 mature native trees and 3 mature nonnative trees due to root damage through soil compaction and/or trimming required to accommodate construction equipment. It was determined that 4 potentially impacted native trees within the construction impact area are salvageable. Salvage of these trees is described in mitigation measure BIO-B. In addition, mitigation measure BIO-C requires replacement of mature native and nonnative trees. Native trees (redwood, elderberry, oak, etc.) 8 inches dbh or larger would be replaced in-kind at a ratio of 2:1. Each nonnative mature tree would be replaced with a native species known to the floodplains of the San Gabriel River at a ratio of 1:1. With implementation of mitigation measures BIO-A and BIO-C, a total of 58 native trees would be replanted within the lease boundary to mitigate for impacts of up to 36 mature native and nonnative trees. With implementation of mitigation measures, the direct impacts to mature native and nonnative trees would be reduced to a less than significant level (Draft EIR, pp. 5-23 and 5-24).

Tree and habitat removal during construction of the project would significantly impact sensitive wildlife species that use the project site and migratory species. Thus, implementation of mitigation measures BIO-D and BIO-E would be required to reduce impacts to a less than significant level. Mitigation measure BIO-D requires focused pre-construction surveys for coastal western whiptail. If discovered, this species shall be relocated in consultation with CDFG. Mitigation measure BIO-E requires completion of weekly bird surveys for construction that is planned to occur during the breeding season (generally March 1 to September 1, as early as February 1 and as late as September 15). In addition, the project would be required to implement mitigation measures BIO-F through BIO-L during construction to ensure that construction impacts to sensitive biological resources are minimized. Implementation of mitigation measures BIO-M through BIO-Q would be required during operation of the project to minimize operational impacts associated with nighttime lighting and trampling in sensitive areas. The project would not result in significant impacts to the biological resources with implementation of mitigation (Draft EIR, p. 5-24).

Significant Impact: *The project would interfere with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites. As set forth in Section 5.4.3 of the Draft EIR, the project would directly and indirectly affect the migration of wildlife, resulting in a significant impact. Mitigation measures would be required to reduce these impacts to a less than significant level.*

Finding: The Authority finds that changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the EIR. Specifically, mitigation measures BIO-A through BIO-C and BIO-M through BIO-Q (see above) would reduce the significant impact to a less than significant level.

Rationale/Supporting Explanation: Tree and habitat removal during construction of the 14,000 sf Alternative would significantly impact sensitive wildlife species that use the project site and migratory species. Thus, implementation of mitigation measures BIO-D and BIO-E would be required to reduce

impacts to a less than significant level. Mitigation measure BIO-D requires focused pre-construction surveys for coastal western whiptail. If discovered, this species shall be relocated in consultation with CDFG. Mitigation measure BIO-E requires completion of weekly bird surveys for construction that is planned to occur during the breeding season (generally March 1 to September 1, as early as February 1 and as late as September 15). In addition, the 14,000 sf Alternative would be required to implement mitigation measures BIO-F through BIO-L during construction to ensure that construction impacts to sensitive biological resources are minimized. Implementation of mitigation measures BIO-M through BIO-Q would be required during operation of the 14,000 sf Alternative to minimize operational impacts associated with nighttime lighting and trampling in sensitive areas. These construction and operational impacts to sensitive wildlife species would be the same as the impacts created by the proposed project. As with the proposed project, the 14,000 sf Alternative would not result in significant impacts to the biological resources with implementation of mitigation (Draft EIR, p. 5-24).

Significant Impact: *The project would conflict with local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance. As set forth in Section 5.4.3 of the Draft EIR, the project would potentially conflict with Los Angeles County's General Plan policy for conservation of significant ecological areas (SEA) and the County Management Plan, resulting in a significant impact. Mitigation measures would be required to reduce these impacts to a less than significant level.*

Finding: The Authority finds that changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the EIR. Specifically, Mitigation Measures BIO-M through BIO-Q (see above) would reduce the significant impact to a less than significant level.

Rationale/Supporting Explanation: The project is intended to replace and improve existing WNNC, which is not located within the SEA. The project would directly impact less than 0.40 percent of the SEA with the associated facilities, such as the maintenance building, parking lot, open air and covered outdoor classrooms, and constructed riparian/wetland area. Nevertheless, as discussed in impact BIO-1, the project would attract additional visitors to the Natural Area, which is part of the SEA. As described in BIO-1 above, indirect impacts during operation would occur from the increased number of visitors to the site and adjacent portions of the Natural Area, nighttime lighting, and reduction in vegetative cover. However, consistent with the existing County Management Plan, visitors would be asked to stay on the existing trails and no dogs would be allowed off-leash within the lease boundary or within the Natural Area. School children and other groups would be led on guided nature walks. These activities would have an adverse effect on the SEA, including trampling, graffiti trash, increased noise, and other disturbances to wildlife species and plant communities. The project would not divide the whole of the SEA, impair its functions, or diminish its present character. With implementation of mitigation measures BIO-M through BIO-Q and compliance with the County Management Plan, the impacts would be reduced to a less than significant level (Draft EIR, p. 3.3-26 and 3.3-27).

5.2 HYDROLOGY AND WATER QUALITY (OPERATIONAL WATER QUALITY)

Significant Impact: *Operation of the project would violate a water quality standard or waste discharge requirement, or otherwise substantially degrade water quality.* As set forth in Section 5.4.3 of the Draft EIR, the project would potentially degrade the water quality during project operation, resulting in a significant impact. Mitigation would be required to reduce these impacts to a less than significant level.

Finding: The Authority finds that changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the EIR. Specifically, the following mitigation measures reduce the significant effect of Impact HYDRO-1 to a less than significant level.

HYDRO-A Biological or non-chemical means of controlling exotics and pests shall be utilized over pesticides where feasible. Should chemical pesticides or herbicides be required, less-persistent compounds shall be used in accordance with manufacturers' recommendations and general standards of use. Application of chemicals shall be restricted such that they are not used immediately before and during rain storms or within the 24-hour period in which rain is forecast to occur.

Rationale/Supporting Explanation: Implementation of the project would increase the amount of new impervious surfaces at the site compared to existing conditions. Additional impermeable and semi-permeable surfaces have the potential to result in increased runoff during a storm event. Due to the close proximity of the San Gabriel River, which is a 303(d) listed water body downstream of the site, impacts related to surface runoff would be potentially significant. As such, the project has been designed to include vegetated drainage swales in the island of the parking lot and the constructed riparian/wetland area would be used to capture and treat storm water runoff. Excess runoff from the parking lot and runoff from the interpretive center would be channeled by underground pipes to the constructed riparian/wetland area. No storm water would discharge directly into Lario Creek or the San Gabriel River. However, pesticides or herbicides could be used during operation of the project that would impact the quality of storm water runoff eventually percolating into the groundwater. Implementation of mitigation measure HYDRO-A is required to reduce the level of impact to less than significant (Draft EIR, pp. 5-25 and 5-26).

CHAPTER 6

SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The EIR determined that the project would have significant environmental effects related to global climate change. Even with implementation of mitigation measures, impacts would remain significant and unavoidable. As with the proposed project, the 14,000 sf Alternative (the project) would have a significant and unavoidable contribution to global climate change due to the increase in carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) emissions over existing conditions, albeit to a lesser extent than the proposed project. Even with implementation of project design features, impacts would remain significant and unavoidable.

6.1 GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

Significant Impact: *The project would contribute to a cumulative global climate change impact.* As set forth in Section 4.0 of the Draft EIR, the project would make a cumulatively considerable contribution to a significant unavoidable cumulative impact related to global climate change. Short-term sources of project-generated greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions would be the off-road construction equipment and on-road vehicles used for site preparation, grading, and construction of the site facilities. The combustion of gasoline and diesel fuel results in the generation of carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane, and nitrous oxide. As such, operation of the construction equipment associated with the project would generate emissions that would exceed existing levels and contribute to global warming impacts. Specifically, the proposed project would generate 364 metric tons of CO₂ emissions during construction. Buildout of the proposed project site would add approximately 1,096 net vehicle trips per day to the project area. If the total vehicular trips, as well as area-source and offsite stationary-source GHG emissions are considered, operation of the proposed project would generate total GHG emissions of approximately 2,409 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) annually for the lifetime of the project. The project would generate approximately 1,807 net new tons per year of CO₂e emissions than are currently generated by the WNNC. Operational GHG emissions generated by the project represent approximately 0.0003 percent of the statewide emissions in 2004 (Draft EIR, p. 4-14 and 4-16). Because the project involves a reduction in building square footage compared to the proposed project, the net new tons per year of CO₂e would be reduced compared to the proposed project.

The Authority has concluded, for the purposes of this project, that if the project would contribute more GHG emissions than were emitted in the baseline scenario, the project would make a cumulatively considerable contribution to a significant cumulative impact on global climate change (Draft EIR, p. 4-17).

Finding: The Authority finds that changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project which lessens the significant cumulative climate change impacts identified in the EIR. Specifically, the following measures will reduce the project's contribution to a cumulatively considerable impact on global climate change. To help reduce the project's contribution to GHG emissions during

construction activities, the existing buildings would be deconstructed to provide reuse of 10 percent of the building components, and to provide salvage of an additional 50 percent of the demolished building materials further reducing the project's contribution to GHG emissions during construction activities. Construction emissions would be short-term (Draft EIR, p. 4-14).

The interpretive center would be constructed to meet the U.S. Green Building Council's platinum level LEED standards. LEED is a voluntary, national standard for developing and rating high-performance, sustainable buildings, often referred to as "green" buildings. This design approach increases the efficiency of energy, water, and building material use on-site. Green buildings are designed to reduce the impacts on human health and the environment through better siting, design, construction, operation, maintenance, and removal, considering the complete life cycle. Some of the sustainable design features that would be incorporated into the interpretive center include rammed-earth walls, cooling towers, and use of renewable building materials. In addition, the project site is located along 2 bus routes. The project would be constructed to exceed Title 24 Energy Efficiency Standards, including the use of energy efficient lighting and appliances, among other provisions. The project would be required to meet County requirements for the separation, collection, and storage of materials for recycling. Although operation of the interpretive center would contribute to GHG emissions, project design features would limit the project's contribution (Draft EIR, pp. 4-14 and 4-15).

Nonetheless, the project's contribution to global climate change would remain cumulatively considerable. Specific economic, legal, social, technological, or other considerations make infeasible the mitigation measures or project alternatives identified in the Draft EIR.

Rationale/Supporting Explanation: Impacts related to GHG emissions during construction and operation would remain cumulatively considerable. As discussed above, the project has been designed to LEED platinum standards for energy efficiency and greenhouse gas emissions reductions. However, even with incorporation of these design features, the project would generate more carbon dioxide emissions than the existing WNNC. The Authority has concluded for the purposes of this project only that if the project would contribute more GHG emissions than were emitted in the baseline scenario, there would be a cumulatively considerable contribution to a significant cumulative impact on global climate change. This determination is the most conservative, as any increase over baseline is designated as significant. As such, operational emissions of GHG would be significant and contribute to a cumulative global climate change impact (Draft EIR, pp. 4-16 and 4-17).

CHAPTER 7

FINDINGS REGARDING PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

Chapter 5, Project Alternatives, of the Draft EIR discussed the alternatives that were considered, but rejected and the alternatives that were carried forward for detailed analysis in the EIR, which represent a reasonable range of alternatives to the proposed project. The alternatives carried forward for evaluation included: No Project Alternative, 14,000 SF Alternative, 10,000 SF Alternative, and 2,800 SF Alternative.

The Authority has determined the 14,000 sf Alternative is feasible, meets all of the objectives of the project, and would reduce several of the significant environmental effects compared to the proposed project. Specifically, impacts to air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, noise, and traffic would be reduced compared to the proposed project because of the reduction in building size, area disturbed during construction, and number of visitors that would be expected to travel to the lease boundary (Draft EIR, pp. 5-21 through 5-27). Therefore, the Authority is approving the 14,000 sf alternative evaluated in the EIR, referred to herein as “the project.”

7.1 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED

The project was initially proposed in 2000 as a cooperative project by multiple agencies and stakeholders to address the need for an interpretive center to provide watershed education. The site design, facility layout and components, and indoor/outdoor exhibit areas were driven by the interpretive programs each organization desired for their respective target audiences. The planning process evolved to include significant interface of the Design and Display Committees with the architect, landscape architect, and exhibit designers to provide an integrated interpretive program that meets the needs of the diverse partner/stakeholder group. This group included the National Park Service, River, Trails and Conservation Program, Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council, Puente Hills Landfill Native Habitat Preservation Authority, Amigos de los Rios, County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works (LACDPW) Watershed Management Division, Three Valleys Municipal Water District, and Hacienda Homeowners Association (to name a few, but not all of the participants). It should be noted that these entities worked collaboratively on this effort before the architect become involved (Draft EIR, pp. 5-2 and 5-3).

As part of the multi-year collaborative process, numerous alternatives were considered. The design of the site and building were driven by this collaborative process. The space and design requirements of individual and integrated educational exhibits were an integral part of the project design process. The Design and Display Committee carefully considered the design and size of the features and facilities needed to provide informative and educational exhibits and activities for schoolchildren and the general population in the service area. The outcome was the proposed project, located and sized to serve the watershed educational needs for the region by accommodating a 25-mile service radius for schoolchildren and the culturally diverse urban population. However, the Authority has determined that the 14,000 sf Alternative meets all of the objectives of the proposed project, and would reduce several of its significant environmental effects.

As part of the conceptual design process, the Authority considered on-site conceptual facility alternatives and off-site alternatives. The following sections present brief descriptions of the alternative sites and on-site conceptual facility alternatives (Draft EIR, p. 5-3).

7.1.1 ALTERNATIVE SITES

SANTA ANITA/DURFEE SITE

This alternative would place the interpretive center on a 4.5-acre parcel located on the northeast corner of Santa Anita and Durfee Avenues, within Whittier Narrows Regional Park. This site is currently developed with two holes for a Frisbee golf course and an open lawn setting with large shade trees. There is a large parking lot located in this area that currently provides parking for Whittier Narrows Regional Park visitors. A second parking lot in the area serves as a park and ride facility. The park and ride facility operates as a pay lot during the summer months and would provide an opportunity for shared parking with the proposed facility. The site could accommodate the proposed interpretive center and the open condition would allow for greater flexibility in building orientation and configuration (Draft EIR, p. 5-3).

However, there were several major drawbacks to this site. This alternate location is separated from the Natural Area by Durfee Avenue. Thus, the Santa Anita/Durfee site would not provide a seamless connection to the San Gabriel River, the key resource to be interpreted. Separating the facility from the river would decrease the time available for teaching children. School age children have a limited window of time for school field trips. The project was designed to maximize their time by providing a compact facility in close proximity to the resources being interpreted. By removing the facility from the Natural Area and separating it from the river by Durfee Avenue under this alternative, it would increase travel time to and from the Natural Area and the river, thereby reducing instructional time. In addition, it would remove the facility from the natural setting it is intended to interpret by taking it out of the Natural Area, which also includes existing trails, programming, staff, and maintenance (Draft EIR, p. 5-3).

A pedestrian overpass or crosswalk would be required to allow visitors to safely cross Durfee Avenue to access the Natural Area, the San Gabriel River, and the San Gabriel River bikeway. Therefore, the Santa Anita/Durfee site would not create an access point and hub destination for the Emerald Necklace Park Network. In addition, this site is located within the 100-year floodplain behind Whittier Narrows Dam. As such, a new building on this site would have to be raised approximately 5 feet above the existing grade to bring the finish floor above the 100-year flood elevation. To do so would require considerable more earthwork than is contemplated for the project and could result in greater environmental impacts related to construction air quality. Further, the proposed facilities would displace the existing park and ride lot, which would have to be relocated elsewhere in the Recreation Area. Events at this site could limit parking and access to the existing and nearby recreational facilities because this site would use an existing parking lot that serves the Whittier Narrows Regional Park. This alternative could create parking impacts during operation. The Santa Anita/Durfee site would not accomplish some of the specific objectives of the project. In addition, it would not reduce or avoid any significant impacts of the project (Draft EIR, p. 5-4). For these reasons, the Authority finds this alternative infeasible.

WHITTIER NARROWS EQUESTRIAN CENTER SITE

This alternative would place the interpretive center on a 6.3-acre parcel adjacent to the Whittier Narrows Equestrian Center. Although this alternative site is located close to the San Gabriel River, it would put the interpretive center next to an active equestrian facility with high daily use. These equestrian activities are considered an important part of the cultural heritage of the region. Equestrian uses are not compatible with an interpretative center. The purpose of the project is to provide focused watershed education and restoration of natural habitat of the Natural Area. It is not the purpose of the project to provide recreational opportunities of this type (Draft EIR, p. 5-4).

Further, this alternative site would not provide direct access to the San Gabriel River while utilizing existing nature trails, programming, staff, and maintenance. Separating the facility from the river would decrease teachable time. School age children have a limited window of time for school field trips. The project was designed to maximize their time by providing a compact facility in close proximity to the resources being interpreted. By removing the facility from the river, it would increase travel time to and from the resources to be interpreted and reduce instructional time. In addition, it would remove the facility from the natural setting it is intended to interpret by putting it next to an active equestrian facility (Draft EIR, p. 5-4).

The equestrian center site would require an 800-foot long bridge to cross the San Gabriel River and connect with the Natural Area trails and facilities. Therefore, this alternative would not create an access point and hub destination for the Emerald Necklace Park Network, as the only interpretive center in this 17-mile loop of parks, trails and greenways. In addition, the bridge would add approximately \$2.5 to \$3 million to the cost of the project. Further, the vehicle access to the equestrian center site is difficult due to the current road alignment and would conflict with truck traffic. This alternative could create additional traffic impacts that would not occur as part of the project. The equestrian center site would not accomplish some of the specific objectives of the project. In addition, it would not reduce or avoid any significant impacts of the project (Draft EIR, pp. 5-4 – 5-5). For these reasons, the Authority finds this alternative infeasible.

BOSQUE SITE

This alternative would place the interpretive center on the Bosque site, which is located east of Rosemead Boulevard north of Bosque del Rio Hondo. The Bosque site is approximately 3.11 acres and is located along the Rio Hondo River, not the San Gabriel River. As such, this alternative would not provide an educational facility that would interpret the San Gabriel River and the Natural Area. The Bosque site would remove the facility from the resources it is intended to interpret, which also includes existing trails, programming, staff, and maintenance. Thus, school children would not have the benefit of connecting the resources to the educational programs offered at the facility. Additionally, by removing the facility from the Natural Area and separating it from the river, this alternative would increase travel time to and from the Natural Area and the river, thereby reducing instructional time. This Bosque site would be located far from the Natural Area and Recreation Area (Draft EIR, p. 5-5).

Only a small facility could be constructed on a 3.11-acre site, thereby reducing the number of programs that could be offered. Thus, this alternative would not be able to accommodate K-12 school districts located within a 25-mile radius. The Bosque site would not be able to accommodate the projected visitor levels. Therefore, this alternative would not allow a facility capable of meeting the outreach and educational programming needs of a diverse range of stakeholders and partner agencies (Draft EIR, p. 5-5). For these reasons, the Authority finds this Alternative infeasible.

SNAIL BUILDING SITE

This alternative would locate the interpretive center on the site of the existing USACE visitor center (no longer in use). This site is approximately 2.89 acres and has an existing 30-car parking lot. The Snail Building site would not provide direct access to the San Gabriel River and San Gabriel River bikeway, thereby removing it from the resources it is intended to interpret, the San Gabriel River and the Natural Area. School children would not have the benefit of connecting the resources to the educational programs offered at the facility, which also includes existing trails, programming, staff, and maintenance. The Snail Building site is located over a half mile from the San Gabriel River. By removing the facility from the Natural Area and the river, this alternative would increase travel time to and from the resources being interpreted and reducing instructional time (Draft EIR, p. 5-5).

Only a small facility could be constructed on the Snail Building site, thereby reducing the number of programs that could be offered. Thus, this alternative would not be able to accommodate K-12 school districts located within a 25-mile radius. The Snail Building site would also not be able to accommodate projected visitor levels. Therefore, this alternative would not allow a facility capable of meeting the outreach and educational programming needs of a diverse range of stakeholders and partner agencies (Draft EIR, pp. 5-5 and 5-6). For these reasons, the Authority finds this alternative infeasible.

7.1.2 ALTERNATIVE BUILDING AND SITE LAYOUTS

Alternative building designs and site configurations were considered during the design process. Numerous alternatives for both the conceptual site master plan and building organization and appearance were considered. Throughout this process, the design varied greatly as interpretive objectives, site opportunities, and sustainable technology were understood and synthesized. Some designs emphasized certain aspects of the site, sustainable building features, or exhibit areas over others. These designs reflect the evolution of the exploratory and very interactive design process that enabled the stakeholders to form and clarify their priorities and needs. Later, building and site concepts replaced these alternatives with layouts that met the objectives of the stakeholders as the process evolved. At the conclusion of the design process, taking into account the types of educational programs, exhibits, sustainable features, administrative and maintenance spaces that were required and the population within the service radius, the proposed interpretive center emerged as the proposed project (Draft EIR, p. 5-6).

The site layout alternatives represent explorations for addressing the interrelationship of parking lot, trails, building location, and key interpretive features. These alternatives also show the possible realignment of Lario Creek and the creation of a constructed wetland as part of the site master plan. All three alternative site layout options would have been located at the project site. However, the project site

would be expanded from the approximately 11.21-acres under the project to approximately 40 acres. In these alternatives, the site would extend from Durfee Avenue south to the San Gabriel River and encompass the entire eastern portion of the Natural Area. Alternative site concepts 1, 2 3, and 4 show several, but not all of the numerous building masses that were explored as part of the ongoing, interactive process between the stakeholders and the architectural/exhibit design team beginning in early 2004 and continuing until March 2006 (Draft EIR, p. 5-6).

Alternative Site Concept 1 considers construction of an approximately 16,000 sf interpretive center in the same location as the proposed project. The parking lot would be located in the woodland area along Durfee Avenue. Under this site layout, the parking lot would provide 64 parking spaces. Overflow parking would be located on-site and would provide an additional 85 parking spaces (Draft EIR, p. 5-6 and Figure 5-1).

Alternative Site Concept 1 considers realigning Lario Creek through the center of the approximately 40-acre site to provide a water source for a demonstration wetland just south of the interpretive center. In addition, a large wetland would be constructed in the central portion of the site. This alternative would use the existing WNNC driveway. The County Police Substation would continue to be located on the site and would be moved to the east side of the driveway. A demonstration aquatic habitat area would be constructed south of a proposed interpretive archaeological exhibit recreating a Tongva Village southwest of the interpretive center. The Robert S. Joe Commemorative Ditch would be enhanced and revegetated under this alternative to provide a demonstration riparian habitat (Draft EIR, p. 5-10).

Alternative Site Concept 2 proposes an approximately 16,000 sf interpretive center in the same location as the proposed project within an approximately 40-acre site. As with Alternative Site Concept 1, this alternative involves reconfiguring Lario Creek to flow through the project site, a demonstration wetland located south of the interpretive center, creation of a Tongva Village, a large natural wetland in the southern portion of the site, and restoration of the Robert S. Joe Ditch into a demonstration riparian habitat. Under Alternative Site Concept 2, the driveway entrance to the site would be located near the eastern boundary of the site and the exit would use the existing WNNC driveway. The parking lot would be located just south of Durfee Avenue between the two driveways. It would provide approximately 114 parking spaces. As such, off-site overflow parking may be required when special events are held in the multi-purpose room. The County Police Substation would continue to be located on-site east of the driveway entrance under this alternative (Draft EIR, p. 5-10).

Alternative Site Concept 3 also proposes an approximately 16,000 sf interpretive center in the same location as the proposed project within an approximately 40-acre site and involves reconfiguring Lario Creek to flow through the site, a demonstration wetland located south of the interpretive center, creation of a Tongva Village, a large constructed wetland in the southern portion of the site, and restoration of the Robert S. Joe Ditch into a demonstration riparian habitat. However under Alternative Site Concept 3, the driveway to the site would be located near the eastern boundary of the site. The existing WNNC driveway would act as the service entrance and would not provide a connection to the proposed parking lot. The parking lot would be located just south of Durfee Avenue with driveway access located on the eastern boundary. It would provide 65 parking spaces with an overflow parking lot located to the east

providing an additional 50 parking spaces. As such, off-site overflow parking may be required when special events are held in the multi-purpose room. The County Police Substation would continue to be located on-site east of the driveway (Draft EIR, p. 5-10).

As discussed above, these three conceptual site layouts are a few of the many considered over several years, and reflect the evolution of the exploratory and very interactive design process that enabled the stakeholders to form and clarify their priorities and needs. Later building and site concepts replaced these alternatives with layouts that met the objectives of the stakeholders as the process and their understanding evolved. These alternatives considered substantially more site development (up to 40 acres) than the proposed project (Draft EIR, p. 5-10 and 5-11). Due to the substantial cost increase associated with developing a 40-acre parcel compared to an approximately 11-acre parcel, the Authority finds these alternatives infeasible.

Alternative Site Concept 4 proposes an 18,230 interpretive center in the same location as the proposed project. The overall building size was expanded to accommodate the educational programs and exhibit space required by the partner agencies and stakeholders. However, the site was reduced in size to approximately 8 acres because it was determined that buildout of 40 acres was not possible due to the cost associated with such a large scale project. Alternative Site Concept 4 includes a constructed riparian/wetland area, but does not involve realigning Lario Creek to flow through the project site. An open air and covered outdoor classroom would both be provided. In addition, a 150-space parking lot would be constructed near Durfee Avenue. This is the site plan that was used to depict the proposed project during the Initial Study and scoping process. Through the CEQA process it became clear that the location of the parking lot in the walnut woodland area would require the removal of a substantial number of mature trees compared to the proposed project. Thus, the impacts of this alternative would be greater than that of the proposed project regarding biological resources associated with tree removal. Further, the driveway in Alternative Site Concept 4 would not line up with the exit of South El Monte High School parking lot. This driveway alignment would pose a safety hazard when vehicles would exit the site and the high school parking lot at the same time. Although this alternative would meet the objectives of the proposed project, it would create additional environmental impacts compared to the proposed project (Draft EIR, p. 5-11). For these reasons, the Authority finds this alternative infeasible.

TWO-STORY BUILDING DESIGN

This alternative proposed construction of the interpretive center at the project site. However, a two-story option was presented to minimize the building footprint and envelope. The addition of a second story did not halve the project footprint. It also placed pressure on the project budget and reduced the overall efficiency of the facility. Although this alternative would reduce the building pad from 18,230 sf to approximately 14,500 sf, the overall size of the building would still be 18,650 sf because of additional stairwells, mechanical equipment, and an elevator (Draft EIR, p. 5-11).

Although the two-story alternative would meet the basic objective of the project, it was eliminated from further consideration because the additional circulation space and structural requirements required to achieve a multiple story building were cost prohibitive. In addition, the overall size of building was

larger due to vertical circulation required (elevators and two sets of stairs). The two-story building would have increased exit requirements for a two-story to allow for safe egress of the building's occupants. Two exit stairways for emergency egress would be required, in addition to an elevator and mechanical room to meet ADA barrier-free requirements. A ramp was considered in lieu of elevators. However, the ramp to exit a second story would be 175 feet long. It was determined that staff would need to be on same floor as the exhibit space for effective facility management. A two-story facility would create a physical separation of most of the staff from the day-to-day operation of the facility. The segregation of the building into visitors and administration floors would create management difficulties and run counter to the desire for increased staff involvement in the programs and activities offered at the facility (Draft EIR, pp. 5-11 and 5-15). For the reasons described herein, the Authority finds this alternative infeasible.

PAVILION AND TOWER BUILDING DESIGN OPTION

This alternative considered creating a series of pavilions to house the major gathering spaces, such as the lobby and multi-purpose room, on the same site as the proposed project. Meanwhile, the interpretive spaces, including the "River Ecology" portion of the proposed programming, would be located in a tower linked to the air exchange system. This alternative was eliminated because it was determined to be cost prohibitive; the cost of building numerous pavilions would be substantially more expensive than building a single facility to house the exhibit and gathering spaces (Draft EIR, p. 5-15). For these reasons, the Authority finds this alternative infeasible.

7.2 ALTERNATIVES CARRIED FORWARD FOR DETAILED ANALYSIS

Chapter 5.0 of the Draft EIR provides a detailed description of alternatives to the project as proposed. The following alternatives are briefly summarized below: No Project Alternative, 10,000 SF Alternative, and 2,800 SF Alternative. The 14,000 SF Alternative is described in Chapter 2, Project Description, of these Findings.

7.2.1 No PROJECT

According to the CEQA Guidelines (Section 15126.6(e)(3)(b)), the No Project Alternative is defined as the "circumstance under which the project does not proceed." The impacts of the No Project Alternative shall be analyzed "by projecting what would reasonably be expected to occur in the foreseeable future if the project were not approved, based on current plans and consistent with available infrastructure and community services." Under the No Project Alternative, the project would not be constructed nor would the existing structures be demolished or vacated. The WNNC and associated facilities would continue to operate on the project site as under current conditions.

7.2.1.1 ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

Potential impacts associated with the project would be avoided because no development would occur within the lease boundary under the No Project Alternative. Impacts related to aesthetics, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, hydrology and water quality, noise, and transportation and traffic would not occur. The existing WNNC would continue to operate as under existing conditions. Maintenance activities would occur as needed to maintain the existing facilities. However, no new or expanded programming would occur. The same number of LADPR employees currently working at the project site would not change. The exhibit and classroom space would remain the same and continue to limit the number of students that can be brought to the site at any one time. Thus, the potential benefits associated with the project, including increased watershed and conservation education and enhanced passive recreational opportunities for the population of the surrounding area and region would not occur. Further, although funding for habitat restoration (meaning restoration to the original type of habitat, most likely riparian), is not a certainty, one goal of the Authority members is to seek funding through greater awareness of the project to restore more habitat in other parts of the Natural Area, as well as within the immediate project vicinity. This opportunity would not occur under the No Project Alternative.

7.2.1.2 FINDINGS

While the No Project/No Build Alternative would not result in any significant environmental impacts, the Authority finds that specific economic, legal, social, technological and other considerations make the No Project alternative infeasible and less desirable than the project. Specifically, implementation of the No Project Alternative would not result in any of the improvements for the WNNC set forth in the Statement of Overriding Considerations. This alternative has also been rejected because it would not meet any of the specific objectives and would therefore not achieve the basic project objective.

7.2.2 10,000 SF ALTERNATIVE

The 10,000 sf Alternative consists of development of approximately 4.5 acres (construction impact area) within the 11.21-acre lease boundary. The project would develop a 14,000 sf interpretive center within an approximately 5-acre construction impact area. As such, the 10,000 sf alternative would reduce the size of the building footprint and associated parking lot thereby reducing the area of disturbance. All of the features of the proposed project are included in this alternative except where noted (Draft EIR, p 5-27).

Interpretive Center. Under this Alternative, the existing WNNC would be demolished and replaced with a new one-story, 10,000 sf interpretive center on the western portion of the site along Durfee Avenue. The reduced size of the building under this alternative would eliminate and/or reduce the size of many critical areas of the interpretive center as proposed (Draft EIR, p. 5-27). Additionally, two entire bays of the interpretive center - the administrative bay and the multipurpose room/classroom bay - would be eliminated to fit the overall building footprint within the 0.63-acre County-owned parcel. The space reductions required to achieve a 10,000 sf interpretive center would be accomplished by eliminating the following:

- Introductory theatre

- Topical exhibit areas
- Dry classroom
- Kitchen
- Dedicated library/meeting room
- JPA staff office space
- Parks staff office space
- Volunteer office space
- Visiting staff office
- Sales office/storage
- Dedicated copy room/storage
- Staff restrooms in Administrative area
- Exhibit Maintenance area (back of main exhibit hall)
- Sales area
- Janitor space off main exhibit hall

Additionally, significant reductions would occur in the size of the following areas:

- Lobby
- Main Exhibit hall
- Multipurpose room
- Restrooms

Elimination of the Administrative bay combined with elimination of the multipurpose room/classroom bay of the building results in:

- Loss of circulation area needed to move visitors and groups through the lobby area to the multipurpose room, exhibit hall and remaining classroom.
- Main exhibit hall space would be reduced to such an extent that it would no longer be able to house the range of themes and messaging to meet the objectives of the proposed project (see Schematic Design Report, Sections 6 Interpretive Goals, 7 Audience, 8 Interpretive Approach, 9 Schematic Floor Plan and Sketch Elevations for Exhibit areas, 10 Visitor Experience, and 14 Visitor Experience Matrix).
- Restrooms reduced significantl.
- It would no long be possible to partition the multipurpose room, eliminating the ability to use the space as a dry classroom concurrent with other group meetings.
- External entry/staging area which leads to the Lobby would no longer be accessible to the multipurpose room, as it would be moved to the outer (former) exhibit area bay.

- Parking to would be reduced from 150 spaces to 83 spaces and space for school buses would be reduced from three to two spaces.

These major changes to the 10,000 sf alternative result in critical limitations to scheduling of groups and the availability of docent volunteers and staffing to support the facility and grounds, as well as availability of staffing to lead groups through indoor and outdoor activities and carry out programs as required to meet the objectives of the proposed project. This alternative is not adequate to meet the project objectives.

The interpretive center and the site would be constructed to meet the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED Platinum level standards. Unlike the project, access to the interpretive center would be provided at the existing driveway location. Covered outdoor classroom, open air classroom, constructed riparian/wetland area, and walkways would be the same as described for the proposed project. However, the parking lot size to would be reduced from 150 spaces to 83 spaces. The 83-space parking lot would also accommodate parking for up to 2 buses (Draft EIR, p. 5-28).

On weekdays, the 10,000 sf Alternative would accommodate school field trips (approximately 12,000 to 14,000 students per year) and formal school programs focusing on watershed education. Special events related to watershed education would occur some weekends, attracting approximately 165 to 220 visitors per day; however, most weekends would experience normal visitor levels of approximately 135 visitors per day. Annual attendance would range from 60,000 to 72,000 visitors. This alternative would have the same operating hours as the project; however, the interpretive center would only be able to accommodate groups of 83 people for indoor special events. The covered outdoor classroom, open air classroom, constructed riparian/wetland area, and walkways would be the same as described for the project. The storm water drainage system would be the same as described for the proposed project with the exception of the additional detention area located south of the parking lot. Due to the reduced size of the parking lot proposed as part of the 10,000 sf Alternative, this additional detention area would not be necessary to accommodate storm water flows from the parking area. Storm water detention and filtration would be accommodated by the constructed riparian/wetland area and vegetated swales located within the parking lot median (Draft EIR, pp. 5-29 and 5-32).

Construction. Construction would occur only within the 4.5-acre construction impact area. No construction would occur within the woodland located south of Durfee Avenue. All existing site features within the 4.5-acre construction impact area would be demolished, including the WNNC building (2,000 sf), restroom and storage area (900 sf), picnic shelter (1,000 sf), County Police Substation (900 sf), garage (700 sf), and shed (80 sf). All mature trees would be replaced. The construction schedule would be likely be reduced by several months. It is anticipated that construction activities would occur between October 2011 and January 2013 (Draft EIR, p. 5-32).

7.2.2.1 ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

As discussed in Chapter 5.0 of the Draft EIR, the 10,000 sf Alternative would have similar impacts to aesthetics and hydrology and water quality as the project. Impacts to air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, noise, and traffic would be reduced compared to the project because of the reduction in

building size, area disturbed during construction, and number of visitors that would be expected to travel to the lease boundary (Draft EIR, p. 5-32 through 5-38).

Construction of the 10,000 sf Alternative would disturb approximately 4.5 acres. Thus, the amount of grading and type of construction activities would be reduced compared to the project. However, the same types of equipment would be used; thus, the peak emissions would be similar to the project. As with the project, criteria air pollutant emissions generated during construction of the project would not exceed the SCAQMD daily emissions threshold. Operational emissions are generated by area sources and mobile sources. The 10,000 sf Alternative would not accommodate as many daily and annual visitors as the project. In addition, the amount of energy required to power the 10,000 sf Alternative would be less than the project because of the smaller overall size. Operational emissions calculated for the project would not exceed the SCAQMD daily emissions thresholds (Draft EIR, p. 5-32 through 5-38).

Implementation of the 10,000 sf Alternative would result in less than one acre of permanent impacts to walnut woodland. Approximately 0.05 acres of disturbed walnut woodland would be permanently impacted by the 10,000 sf Alternative. Overall, a smaller area of walnut woodland and disturbed walnut woodland would be impacted by the 10,000 sf Alternative than the project. This vegetation community provides forage and cover for sensitive species such as the Cooper's hawk and coastal western whiptail, as well as migratory bird species. In addition, implementation of the 10,000 sf Alternative would result in impacts to 1.73 acres of ruderal habitat, of which approximately 1.17 acres contains mature trees. The 10,000 sf Alternative would require the removal of 14 mature native trees and 9 mature nonnative trees, the same number of mature trees that would be impacted by the project. These trees provide foraging habitat and cover for sensitive bird species, such as Cooper's Hawk, and nesting opportunities for migratory bird species. As such, removal of these trees would be significant. With implementation of mitigation measures BIO-A and BIO-E, the direct impacts from tree and vegetation removal would be reduced to a less than significant level (Draft EIR, p. 5-32 through 5-38).

No archaeological resources are known to be located within the lease boundary. However, there is a chance that previously unknown resources could be uncovered during construction. As with the project, the 10,000 sf Alternative would be required to comply with CEQA Section 15064.5 and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (36 CFR 800) in the event that previously unknown resources are discovered during construction (Draft EIR, p. 5-32 through 5-38).

Noise sensitive receptors would experience increased noise levels during construction of the 10,000 sf Alternative compared to existing conditions. However, the same types of equipment would be used and the durations would be similar to the project. Thus, peak noise conditions during construction would be similar to the project. Operational activity would be similar to the project. These noises would rarely occur near the closest sensitive receptors, which are the commercial uses and residences to the west of the site. As such, the impact of visitor noise would be less than significant. Operational noise would also be generated by vehicles traveling to and from the site. Existing noise levels on-site were measured at 51 to 55 dBA L_{eq} during the mid-afternoon. With the noisiest hour of traffic, at a morning or evening peak hour, the existing loudest hour noise level would not be expected to exceed 57 dBA L_{eq} during operation of the 10,000 sf Alternative. This future noise level would be less than the 66 dBA L_{eq} standard of

Caltrans for park uses. Further, mobile noise levels would be slightly less than the project because the 10,000 sf Alternative would not be able to accommodate as many visitors (Draft EIR, p. 5-32 through 5-38).

The addition of trips from the project and the related project would not create a significant cumulative traffic impact at any of the study intersections. There would be fewer vehicle trips generated by the 10,000 sf Alternative. Thus, the 10,000 sf Alternative would not create a significant impact at any of the study intersections (Draft EIR, p. 5-32 through 5-38).

As with the project, the 10,000 sf Alternative would have a significant and unavoidable cumulative contribute to global climate change due to the increase in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions over existing conditions. To date there are no local, regional, state, or federal thresholds to determine the cumulative impacts of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions on global climate change. Therefore, in the absence of established thresholds, the Authority has concluded for the purposes of this project only that if the project would contribute more GHG emissions than were emitted in the baseline scenario, there would be a significant cumulative impact to global climate change. In the absence of further guidance, this determination is thought to be the most conservative, as any increase over baseline is designated as significant. As such, operational emissions of GHG would be significant and contribute to a cumulative global climate change impact. When guidance is issued by the California Air Resources Board, the GHG emission generated by a project of this size may no longer be considered to meet the threshold to contribute to a cumulatively considerable impact (Draft EIR, pp. 4-10 through 4-17).

7.2.2.2 FINDINGS

As detailed in Section 7.2.3 above, the space reductions required to achieve a 10,000 sf Alternative would eliminate two entire bays of the proposed interpretive center building. This reduction would eliminate the introductory theatre, topical exhibit areas, dry classroom, kitchen, dedicated library/meeting room, office spaces for the JPA, Parks, volunteers, visiting staff and police. Eliminations would also include the sales office/storage, dedicated copy room/storage, staff restrooms in administrative area, exhibit maintenance area (back of main exhibit hall), the sales area and janitor space off main exhibit hall. Significant reductions would occur in the size of the Lobby, Main Exhibit hall, Multipurpose Room, and Restrooms.

Reduction in the lobby, sales area and administrative office spaces would significantly impact the ability of staff and docents to operate programs to meet the project objectives, reduce the lobby staging area for the main building, and reduce area for display of revenue-generating items to support the exhibits and programs. Reduction of the meeting room area would impact the ability of the project to meet the objectives of providing adequate space for watershed related programs for the public, and to provide a dry classroom area. The introductory theater and topical exhibit areas would be eliminated under this alternative, which would reduce the ability at the site to appropriately set the stage of the exhibit area for visitors and to accommodate special exhibits on items of current interest by stakeholders. Additionally, a reduced lobby area is too small to contain the interpretive exhibits planned for this area. The significant reduction in the main exhibit area would require the replacement of the interactive water exhibits with static displays and reduce the size of the exhibits on ecology and other critical messaging. The message

and continuity of the building exhibits were carefully designed to enhance visitor understanding of the topics, helping promote changes in visitor behavior as a result of this new knowledge.

The scope and attractiveness of the exhibits are expected to be one of the key attractions of the project, both for the permanent exhibits and the ability to present pertinent information on watershed-related topics being covered in the news. Examples of such current topics include the extent and nature of ground water contamination, implications of mosquito-borne diseases and how to guard against them, and topics related to funding and support for key restoration projects. By reducing the scope of the exhibits to the extent under this alternative, significant content associated with the objectives would be lost. The reduction in exhibit spaces would compromise the ability to adequately enhance open space preservation and habitat and recreation. There would be a critical loss of continuity of the message and stimulation of visitor interest by loss of crucial displays and the use static displays that require less room and circulation space. Visitors would likely be forced to bypass crowded exhibits. Reduction in both content and meeting space will reduce visitor use. This reduction would result in less ability for the exhibits to reach the diverse audience of the region. Interpretive exhibits take more space in this respect, as the messages are presented in a wider variety of ways (visual, auditory, context, languages, tactile, interactive, etc.). When exhibit space is reduced to this extent, some of these delivery methods would be lost, severely impacting the quality of the visitor experience and the ability to reach the intended audience. (See Schematic Design Report, pages 35, 38-43, 45 and 46 addressing requirements for a cohesive, focused experience.)

Only two spaces would remain for viable use by all staff and volunteers, one of which would be the Janitor closet/maintenance space in the proposed project layout. This limitation alone critically impacts the ability for staffing resources needed to support the project objectives. Janitor space off main exhibit hall would now be used for park staff and volunteers. Janitor/Storage/exhibit maintenance spaces would no longer be discrete areas, and would either need to be accommodated outside the building in some kind of storage unit.

This alternative would reduce the multipurpose room which would impact the ability of the project to meet the objectives of providing adequate space for watershed related programs for the public, and to provide a dry classroom area.

These major changes to the 10,000 sf alternative result in critical limitations to delivering the required quality and scope of messaging and programming intended by the project. Scheduling of groups and the availability of docent volunteers and staffing to support the facility and grounds, as well as availability of staffing to lead groups through indoor and outdoor activities and carry out programs as required by the project would be severely impacted. This alternative is not adequate to meet the project objectives.

Elimination of the Administrative bay combined with elimination of the multipurpose room/classroom bay of the building results in:

1. Loss of circulation area needed to move visitors and groups through the lobby area to the multipurpose room, exhibit hall and remaining classroom.

2. Main Exhibit hall space has been reduced to the extent that it would no longer house the range of themes and messaging to meet the objectives of the proposed project (see Section 6 Interpretive Goals, Section 7 Audience, Section 8 Interpretive Approach, Section 9 Schematic Floor Plan and Sketch Elevations for Exhibit areas, Section 10 Visitor Experience, and Section 14 Visitor Experience Matrix of the Schematic Design Report).
3. Restrooms reduced significantly.
4. Multipurpose room (no longer able to partition, thereby eliminating ability to use the space as a dry classroom concurrent with other group meetings).
5. External entry/staging area which leads to the Lobby would no longer be accessible to the multipurpose room, as it has been moved to the outer (former) exhibit area bay.
6. Reduction of the overall spaces would result in the inability to provide adequate space for the library resources within the remaining classroom and/or administrative areas in a meaningful way. The library resources are a critical resource for the project partners and stakeholders.

Elimination of the Administrative bay, combined with elimination of the multipurpose room/classroom bay in this alternative results in loss of critical space needed to: 1) house staffing and 2) operational/maintenance resources needed to meet the objectives of the project. Further, the quality of the visitor experience through the exhibits and programs intended by the proposed project are no longer feasible. See Section 5 of the Schematic Design Plan, "Facility Programming and Conceptual Schematic Design." This section provides a guide for how each specific space within the interpretive center is intended to be used to deliver the educational/interpretive programs, or for supporting staffing and operational/maintenance resources needed to deliver those programs, both inside the center and outside onsite in the natural setting.

Further, elimination of one of the classrooms would reduce the ability of the staff to work with students on watershed topics in a way that meets the California State Standards and Frameworks. The ability of guides/teachers to conduct classroom laboratory sessions in tandem with exposure to the constructed wetland and other aspects of the site is critical to meeting the state standards. The multi-purpose room would be too small to serve the needs of the Authority members. Further, this alternative would not deliver a comprehensive, well understood message about regional watershed issues, causing the 10,000 sf Alternative to become more one-dimensional with the potential loss of one or more project partners.

In addition to providing facilities for learning about the watershed, the public meeting rooms were designed as part of the project to expand the user base in a way that would bring the watershed message to visitors who might otherwise have limited interest in the topics covered, but who are attracted to the exhibits out of curiosity while attending a function or event at the project site. Elimination of some of these public spaces would both reduce the learning potential offered by the project and significantly reduce the number of casual visitors who might never, on their own, seek information about the conservation topics presented at the facility.

Because of the space reductions, this alternative would not provide sufficient space to present the range and type of exhibits required to present a comprehensive, well understood message to both the general and school age populations about regional watershed issues. Further, loss of the ability to effectively deliver the educational messages and serve the needs of the member agencies and stakeholders would cause the 10,000 sf Alternative to become more one-dimensional with the potential loss of one or more project partners. Figure 2-9 in the EIR includes images of the types of interpretive exhibits available at contemporary discovery centers that the Authority believes are essential to connecting visitors from the surrounding urban environment with the Natural Area. Reducing the project to 10,000 sf would render these types of exhibits infeasible. As such, the 10,000 sf Alternative would not meet the basic project objective to provide an interpretive center to educate the general and school-age population within a 25-mile radius of the project site about the San Gabriel River watershed at one accessible location that integrates indoor and outdoor exhibits and interpretive features. In reaching this conclusion, the Authority considered the following specific objectives, which the 10,000 sf Alternative would not meet to a sufficient degree and therefore would not achieve the basic project objective:

- Create an accessible interpretive nature center set in a unique regional setting, designed to educate the public about the San Gabriel River watershed through a combination of indoor exhibits, outdoor interpretive features, and educational programming.
- Provide an interpretive Nature Center that accommodates the K-12 school districts located within a 25-mile radius of the Discovery Center by providing standards-based grade-level appropriate educational programming through a wide range of accessible and free exhibits, classroom space, and hands-on outdoor experiences.
- Expand the public user base to the currently underserved, diverse urban population located within a 25-mile radius of the Discovery Center with economically and geographically accessible interpretive facilities that would enhance awareness and regional interest.
- Create a facility capable of meeting the outreach and educational programming needs of a diverse range of Stakeholders and Partner agencies.
- Create a unique facility for the greater Los Angeles area focusing on watershed management for habitat, flood control, conservation, and water quality.

Based on the rationale and substantial evidence discussed above, the Authority finds that specific economic, legal, social, technological, or other considerations make infeasible the 10,000 sf Alternative identified in the final EIR and rejects this Alternative.

Separate and apart from this finding, the Authority also finds the 10,000 sf Alternative infeasible because it is undesirable from a policy standpoint in that it would severely inhibit the Authority's interest in inspiring people to learn about the natural resources of the San Gabriel River region and how their daily actions impact the environment and engaging people in environmental learning opportunities designed to encourage enjoyment of the region's natural areas. Further, it would prohibit fulfillment of the Authority's stated purposes of: (a) increasing public knowledge of water-related environmental issues, including water conservation and natural habitat preservation and restoration; (b) increasing public

awareness of the rich and vibrant history of the San Gabriel River and the important role it has played in the social and economic development of the communities along its water course; and (c) raising public awareness of the importance of conserving and protecting ground water resources in the Main San Gabriel Basin and in the Central Groundwater Basin (San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority Joint Exercise of Powers Agreement (2005)). The Authority may rely on such policy considerations in rejecting an alternative (see *California Native Plant Society v. City of Santa Cruz* (2009) 177 Cal.App.4th 957; *City of Del Mar v. City of San Diego* (1982) 133 Cal.App.3d 401).

7.2.3 2,800 SF ALTERNATIVE

This alternative considers the replacement of only the WNNC building with a new single-story, 2,800 sf interpretive center. Only the existing WNNC building (1,917 sf) would be demolished as part of construction of this alternative. The new interpretive center would be constructed on 0.17 acres entirely within the 0.63 acre parcel of County-owned land above the USACE taking line. No USACE approval would be required to construct this alternative. Construction would take approximately 9 months to complete (Draft EIR, p. 5-38).

The 2,800 sf Alternative would include minimal exhibit space, no classrooms, no meeting room or other spaces provided for in the project, and administrative offices. No outdoor classroom, open air classroom, or constructed riparian/wetland area would be developed as part of the 2,800 sf Alternative. The programming would be similar to the current programming offered at the WNNC and visitor levels would be expected to increase only slightly from current conditions (Draft EIR, p. 5-38).

On weekdays, the 2,800 sf Alternative would accommodate school field trips (approximately 10,000 to 12,000 students per year) and formal school programs focusing on limited topics related to watershed education. Special events related to watershed education would occur on some weekends, attracting approximately 100 to 120 visitors per day; however, most weekends would experience normal visitor levels of approximately 120 to 140 visitors per day. Annual attendance would range from 60,000 to 62,000 visitors. This alternative would use the existing driveway and parking lot (Draft EIR, p. 5-38).

The 2,800 sf Alternative would operate the same programs as the WNNC and would not be expected to offer the range of programs and events as described for the project. No nighttime activities beyond the existing stargazing and moonlight hikes would be offered. There would be no meeting space to accommodate workshops and events related to watershed policy and education. As such, the 2,800 sf Alternative would have the same operating hours as the WNNC, which are generally 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. seven days per week. The grounds would be open from dawn to dusk (Draft EIR, pp. 5-38 and 5-41).

7.2.3.1 ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

Under the 2,800 sf Alternative, the visual setting would only marginally be altered. The trees would remain in place and construction of the new interpretive center would occur on nearly the same footprint at the WNNC. The 2,800 sf Alternative would appear newer and more modern than the existing structure. However, the existing trees and new locally indigenous native landscaping around the 2,800 sf

Alternative would screen most of the view of the building. The site would continue to retain its existing character as a nature center and the wooded setting immediately surrounding the WNNC (Draft EIR, pp. 5-41 through 5-45).

Construction of the 2,800 sf Alternative would disturb approximately 0.63 acres. The construction schedule would be reduced by half and fewer pieces of construction equipment would be required during peak periods. Thus, the amount of grading and type of construction activities would be substantially reduced compared to the project. Consequently, construction emissions would be reduced compared to the project. Mobile sources are vehicle trips that would be made by visitors and staff to the site. The 2,800 sf Alternative would accommodate approximately 20 percent more visitors than existing conditions because the facility would be only slightly larger than the WNNC. Compared to the project, the total number of annual visitors would be reduced and daily trips to and from the site would be reduced. As with the project, the future operational emissions associated with vehicle travel would not exceed the SCAQMD daily emissions thresholds (Draft EIR, pp. 5-41 through 5-45).

Unlike the project, implementation of the 2,800 sf Alternative would not result in the loss of habitat or land cover types. Implementation of the 2,800 sf Alternative would not result in impacts to walnut woodland or disturbed walnut woodland. This alternative would not be required to implement mitigation measure BIO-A. The 2,800 sf Alternative would result in the removal of 4 mature native and 1 mature nonnative trees in the landscaped areas. Implementation of mitigation measures BIO-C would be required to reduce the level of impact to less than significant. Tree removal and heavy equipment operation during construction of the 2,800 sf Alternative would significantly impact sensitive wildlife species that use the project site and migratory species. Thus, implementation of mitigation measures BIO-D and BIO-E would be required to reduce impacts to a less than significant level. In addition, the 2,800 sf Alternative would be required to implement mitigation measures BIO-F through BIO-L during construction to ensure that construction impacts to sensitive biological resources are minimized. Implementation of mitigation measures BIO-M through BIO-Q would be required during operation of the 2,800 sf Alternative to minimize operational impacts associated with nighttime lighting and trampling in sensitive areas. These construction and operational impacts to sensitive wildlife species would be the same as the impacts created by the project, but at a reduced scale and intensity (Draft EIR, pp. 5-41 through 5-45).

Similar to the project, the 2,800 sf Alternative would not significantly affect a historic resource. No archaeological resources are known to be located within the lease boundary. However, there is a chance that previously unknown resources could be uncovered during construction. As with the project, the 2,800 sf Alternative would be required to comply with CEQA Section 15064.5 and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (36 CFR 800) in the event that previously unknown resources are discovered during construction (Draft EIR, pp. 5-41 through 5-45).

The nearest sensitive receptors would experience increased noise levels during construction of the 2,800 sf Alternative compared to existing conditions. However, noise dissipates with distance and the noise levels at these locations would be less than 78 dBA L_{eq} . Further, the duration of construction and the amount of construction equipment used would be less than the peak construction noise generated by the

project. Thus, construction noise would be less under the 2,800 sf Alternative than the project. As under existing conditions, operational noise sources on-site would include vehicles entering and leaving, voices of staff and visitors to the 2,800 sf Alternative, large school groups, landscape maintenance machinery, and mechanical equipment for the interpretive center. Therefore, noise levels would be similar to existing conditions and would not exceed County or Caltrans standards. The impacts would be less than significant, and would be less than the project (Draft EIR, pp. 5-41 through 5-45).

The 2,800 sf Alternative would serve generally the same attendance levels at the WNNC. Thus, the 2,800 sf Alternative would not create significant traffic impacts at any of the study intersections (Draft EIR, pp. 5-41 through 5-45).

As with the project, the 2,800 sf Alternative would have a significant and unavoidable cumulative contribute to global climate change due to the increase in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions over existing conditions. To date there are no local, regional, state, or federal thresholds to determine the cumulative impacts of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions on global climate change. Therefore, in the absence of established thresholds, the Authority has concluded for the purposes of this project only that if the project would contribute more GHG emissions than were emitted in the baseline scenario, there would be a significant cumulative impact to global climate change. In the absence of further guidance, this determination is thought to be the most conservative, as any increase over baseline is designated as significant. As such, operational emissions of GHG would be significant and contribute to a cumulative global climate change impact. When guidance is issued by the California Air Resources Board, the GHG emission generated by a project of this size may no longer be considered to meet the threshold to contribute to a cumulatively considerable impact (Draft EIR, pp. 4-10 through 4-17).

7.2.3.2 FINDINGS

The 2,800 sf Alternative would not provide exhibit space, gathering space, and administrative offices to sufficiently meet the basic objective of the proposed project. The removal of the gift shop/sales area would make it difficult to generate operational funds to support the exhibits and programs. The topical exhibit area would be eliminated under this alternative, which would reduce the ability to the site to accommodate special exhibits on items of current interest by stakeholders. With limited space, the exhibits would be static displays and eliminate and/or reduce the size of the exhibits on most message areas. The message and continuity of the building exhibits were carefully designed to enhance visitor understanding of the topics, helping promote changes in visitor behavior as a result of this new knowledge. The scope and attractiveness of the exhibits are expected to be one of the key attractions of the project, both for the permanent exhibits and the ability to present pertinent information on watershed-related topics being covered in the news. By reducing the scope of the exhibits, most, if not all of the content associated with the primary project objective would be affected. The 2,800 sf main building would not accommodate an expanded set of indoor exhibits, and would not provide outdoor educational features such as the constructed wetland/riparian area and outdoor classrooms, as such the 2,800 sf Alternative would not provide a combination of indoor exhibits and outdoor features. The limited exhibit space would require elimination of themes and delivery modes, limiting the ability to reach diverse audiences within the service area. There would be a loss of continuity of the message and stimulation of

visitor interest by using more static displays that require less room and circulation space. This reduction would result in loss of the ability for the exhibits to reach the diverse audience of the region. Interpretive exhibits take more space in this respect, as the messages are presented in a wider variety of ways (visual, auditory, context, languages, tactile, interactive, etc.). When exhibit space is reduced to this extent, these delivery methods would be lost, severely impacting the quality of the visitor experience and the ability to reach the intended audience. The reduction in both content and meeting space is likely to reduce visitor use. Essentially, the site would function under this alternative as under existing conditions with a renovated facility. People generally would not travel to see the exhibit space, but they would come for the recreational experience of the Natural Area.

The minimal expansion of space over existing conditions under the 2,800 sf alternative would result in critical limitations to scheduling of groups and the availability of docent volunteers and staffing to support the facility and grounds, as well as availability of staffing to lead groups through indoor and outdoor activities and carry out programs as required by the project. This alternative is not adequate to meet the project objectives.

There would be a critical loss of circulation area needed to move visitors and groups through the lobby to the meeting area. The Exhibit hall space would not be able to accommodate the range of themes and messaging to meet the objectives of the proposed project (see Section 6 Interpretive Goals, Section 7 Audience, Section 8 Interpretive Approach, Section 9 Schematic Floor Plan and Sketch Elevations for Exhibit areas, Section 10 Visitor Experience, and Section 14 Visitor Experience Matrix of the Schematic Design Report).

Further, the quality of the visitor experience through the exhibits and programs intended by the project are no longer feasible. See Section 5.0 of the Schematic Design Report, "Facility Programming and Conceptual Schematic Design." This section provides a guide for how each specific space within the interpretive center is intended to be used to deliver the educational/interpretive programs, or for supporting staffing and operational/maintenance resources needed to deliver those programs, both inside the center and outside onsite in the natural setting. None of the visitor experience would be accomplished with the 2,800 sf Alternative.

Further, elimination of the classrooms would reduce the ability of the staff to work with students on watershed topics in a way that meets the California State Standards and Frameworks. The ability of guides/teachers to conduct classroom laboratory sessions in tandem with exposure to the constructed wetland and other aspects of the site is critical to meeting the state standards. The loss of the multi-purpose would result in the inability of the facility to serve the needs of the Authority members. Further, this alternative would miss the opportunity to accomplish one of the key objectives of the proposed project in delivering a comprehensive, well understood message about regional watershed issues, causing the 2,800 sf Alternative to become one-dimensional with the potential loss of one or more project partners.

In addition to providing facilities for learning about the watershed, the public meeting rooms were included in the proposed project design to expand the user base in a way that would bring the watershed

message to visitors who might otherwise have limited interest in the topics covered, but who are attracted to the exhibits out of curiosity while attending a function or event at the project site. Elimination of the public spaces would both reduce the learning potential offered by the project and significantly reduce the number of casual visitors who might never, on their own, seek information about the conservation topics presented at the facility.

Because of the space reductions, this alternative would not provide sufficient space to present the range and type of exhibits required to present a comprehensive, well understood message to both the general and school age populations about regional watershed issues. As such, the 2,800 sf Alternative would not meet the basic project objective to provide an interpretive center to educate the general and school-age population within a 25-mile radius of the project site about the San Gabriel River watershed at one accessible location that integrates indoor and outdoor exhibits and interpretive features. In reaching this conclusion, the Authority considered the following specific objectives, which the 2,800 sf Alternative would not meet, and therefore, would not achieve the basic project objective:

- Create an accessible interpretive nature center set in a unique regional setting, designed to educate the public about the San Gabriel River watershed through a combination of indoor exhibits, outdoor interpretive features, and educational programming.
- Provide an interpretive Nature Center that accommodates the K-12 school districts located within a 25-mile radius of the Discovery Center by providing standards-based grade-level appropriate educational programming through a wide range of accessible and free exhibits, classroom space, and hands-on outdoor experiences.
- Expand the public user base to the currently underserved, diverse urban population located within a 25-mile radius of the Discovery Center with economically and geographically accessible interpretive facilities that would enhance awareness and regional interest.
- Create a facility capable of meeting the outreach and educational programming needs of a diverse range of Stakeholders and Partner agencies.
- Create a unique facility for the greater Los Angeles area focusing on watershed management for habitat, flood control, conservation, and water quality.
- Create an access point and hub destination for the Emerald Necklace Park Network, as the only interpretive center in this 17-mile loop of parks, trails, and greenways.
- Provide a gateway to exploration of other natural areas and recreational opportunities in the San Gabriel River watershed.
- Provide leadership in sustainable building and landscape design and operations by integrating these features of the project into the indoor and outdoor exhibits.

Based on the rationale and substantial evidence discussed above, the Authority finds that specific economic, legal, social, technological, or other considerations make infeasible the 2,800 sf Alternative identified in the Final EIR and rejects this alternative.

Separate and apart from this finding, the Authority also finds the 2,800 sf Alternative infeasible because it is undesirable from a policy standpoint in that it would severely inhibit the Authority's interest in inspiring people to learn about the natural resources of the San Gabriel River region and how their daily actions impact the environment and engaging people in environmental learning opportunities designed to encourage enjoyment of the region's natural areas. Further, it would prohibit fulfillment of the Authority's stated purposes of: (a) increasing public knowledge of water-related environmental issues, including water conservation and natural habitat preservation and restoration; (b) increasing public awareness of the rich and vibrant history of the San Gabriel River and the important role it has played in the social and economic development of the communities along its water course; and (c) raising public awareness of the importance of conserving and protecting ground water resources in the Main San Gabriel Basin and in the Central Groundwater Basin (San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority Joint Exercise of Powers Agreement (2005)). The Authority may rely on such policy considerations in rejecting an alternative (see *California Native Plant Society v. City of Santa Cruz* (2009) 177 Cal.App.4th 957; *City of Del Mar v. City of San Diego* (1982) 133 Cal.App.3d 401).

7.3 FINDINGS REGARDING THE PROPOSED PROJECT

The Draft EIR evaluated the impacts of construction and operation of an 18,230 sf interpretive center and associated facilities (the proposed project). The Authority has examined alternatives to the 18,230 sf interpretive center, and has determined the project (14,000 sf Alternative) is feasible, meets all of the objectives of the project, and would reduce several of the significant environmental effects compared to the proposed project. Specifically, impacts to air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, noise, and traffic would be reduced compared to the proposed project because of the reduction in building size, area disturbed during construction, and number of visitors that would be expected to travel to the lease boundary (Draft EIR, pp. 5-21 through 5-27).

Construction of the project would disturb approximately 5 acres. Thus, the amount of grading and type of construction activities would be reduced compared to the 18,230 sf interpretive center. However, the same types of equipment would be used; thus, the peak emissions would be similar. Operational emissions are generated by area sources and mobile sources. The project would not accommodate as many daily and annual visitors as the 18,230 sf interpretive center. In addition, the amount of energy required to power the project would be less than the 18,230 sf interpretive center because of the smaller overall size (Draft EIR, pp. 5-21 through 5-27).

Implementation of the project would result in approximately 0.20 acres of permanent impacts to walnut trees (treated as walnut woodland and disturbed walnut woodland for purposes of analysis of this Draft EIR), which provide foraging and cover for sensitive species such as the Cooper's hawk and coastal western whiptail, as well as migratory bird species. Overall, a smaller area of walnut woodland and disturbed walnut woodland would be impacted by the project than the 18,230 sf Alternative (Draft EIR, pp. 5-21 through 5-27).

Noise sensitive receptors would experience increased noise levels during construction of the 14,000 sf Alternative compared to existing conditions. However, the same types of equipment would be used and

the durations would be similar to the proposed project. Thus, peak noise conditions during construction would be similar to the proposed project. Operational activity would be similar to the proposed project. These noises would rarely occur near the closest sensitive receptors, which are the commercial uses and residences to the west of the site. As such, the impact of visitor noise would be less than significant. Operational noise would also be generated by vehicles traveling to and from the site. Existing noise levels on-site were measured at 51 to 55 dBA L_{eq} during the mid-afternoon. With the noisiest hour of traffic, at a morning or evening peak hour, the existing loudest hour noise level would not be expected to exceed 57 dBA L_{eq} during operation of the 14,000 sf Alternative. This future noise level would be less than the 66 dBA L_{eq} standard of Caltrans for park uses. Further, mobile noise levels would be slightly less than the proposed project because the 14,000 sf Alternative would not be able to accommodate as many visitors (Draft EIR, pp. 5-21 through 5-27).

The addition of trips from the proposed project and the related projects would not create a significant cumulative traffic impact at any of the study intersections. There would be fewer vehicle trips generated by the project as compared to the 18,230 sf interpretive center. Thus, the project would not create a significant impact at any of the study intersections (Draft EIR, pp. 5-21 through 5-27).

Although the 18,230 sf interpretive center would obtain all of the project objectives, the environmental impacts would be greater. In addition, the cost to construct a larger, 18,230 sf interpretive center would be greater than constructing the project. Based on the rationale and substantial evidence discussed above, the Authority rejects the proposed 18,230 sf interpretive center in favor of the 14,000 sf alternative (the project).

CHAPTER 8

STATEMENT OF OVERRIDING CONSIDERATIONS

As discussed below, the Authority has identified a significant and unavoidable adverse impact that would result from implementation of the project that cannot be mitigated to a level of insignificance by the implementation of feasible mitigation measures or alternatives. CEQA Guidelines Section 15093(b) provides that when a public agency approves a project that will result in significant impacts that are not avoided or substantially lessened, the agency must state in writing the specific reasons to support its decision. If specific economic, legal, social, technological or other benefits of the project outweigh its unavoidable adverse environmental effects the adverse effects may be considered “acceptable.” Pursuant to CEQA Section 21081(b) and the CEQA Guidelines Section 15093, the Authority has balanced the benefits of the project against its unavoidable adverse impacts and has adopted all feasible mitigation measures. The Authority has also examined alternatives to the project, and has determined that adoption and implementation of the project is the most desirable, feasible, and appropriate action. The Authority, as the Lead Agency for the project, adopts the following Statement of Overriding Considerations.

8.1 SIGNIFICANT UNAVOIDABLE IMPACTS

Based on the information and analysis set forth in the Final EIR and the record of proceedings, the project would result in significant and unavoidable impacts related to global climate change, as discussed in Chapter 6 of the CEQA Findings of Fact. Even though the project has been designed according to LEED platinum standards to increase energy efficiency, reduce the use of building materials, and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, the project would generate more operational greenhouse gas emissions than the existing WNNC. The Authority has concluded, for the purposes of this project only, that the project would result in a significant cumulative impact to global climate change because it would contribute more GHG emissions than are emitted by the existing WNNC.

8.2 PROJECT BENEFITS

The Authority has (i) independently reviewed the information in the EIR and the record of proceedings; (ii) made a reasonable and good faith effort to eliminate or substantially lessen the impacts resulting from the project to the extent feasible by adopting the mitigation measures identified in the EIR; and (iii) balanced the project’s benefits against the project’s significant unavoidable impacts to global climate change. The Authority finds that the project’s benefits outweigh the project’s significant unavoidable impacts, and chooses to approve the project, despite its significant and unavoidable effects, because, in its view, those impacts are considered acceptable in light of the project’s benefits. The Authority finds that each of the following benefits is an overriding consideration, independent of the other benefits, which warrants approval of the project notwithstanding the project’s significant unavoidable impacts to global climate change. Substantial evidence supports the various benefits. Such evidence can be found in the

preceding findings, the Draft EIR and Final EIR, and the documents which make up the Record of Proceedings.

Construction and operation of the 14,000 sf San Gabriel River Discovery Center at Whittier Narrows (Discovery Center or the project) would provide the public benefits described below:

8.2.1 THE PROJECT WILL CREATE A UNIQUE PLATFORM FOR INTERPRETATION OF AND EDUCATION ABOUT THE WATERSHED

The interpretive center will provide more than factual learning. The project will include displays that will allow visitors to interpret the various elements of the watershed conditions and how they can be improved through in a human and interactive context. This approach engages the visitor and adds relevance to the messages, increasing the likelihood of an appreciation for the watershed as a resource, through an understanding of its history and functions. This level of engagement and understanding is aimed at garnering support for protection of the resource and demonstrating behaviors for work and home that have a positive impact on the watershed.

The interpretive goals of the Discovery Center fall into three categories – 1) affective goals which provoke an emotional reaction, 2) cognitive goals which are what the visitor will learn, and, 3) behavioral goals – the change to visitor’s behavior. By increasing public understanding of the important functions currently served by the river, as well as understanding how its environment could be enhanced, the Discovery Center will provide a catalyst for personal action in conservation, demonstrated through all facets of the sustainable building and site design, native landscaping and habitat restoration areas, exhibits and programs. This personal action translates into people who would adopt behaviors for work and home that have a positive impact on the watershed, volunteer as docents, serve to outreach, fundraise, and be motivated to pass these principles on to the next generation.

The interpretative program will cover the topics of geologic setting, natural history, water quality and water conservation, human reliance on river resources, flood management, and river restoration. The exhibit design conceived for the project will convey information about these topics via multiple learning modes designed to appeal to the diverse urban audience. The project’s location within the natural area and its proximity to the river in addition to the interaction between project components within the facility and outdoors on the site are designed to encourage visitors to experience nature outside the building on the nature center grounds, where they will experience physical examples that illustrate many of the concepts demonstrated and described in the indoor exhibits.

8.2.2 THE PROJECT WILL EXPAND THE EXISTING USER BASE

The Discovery Center will address the needs of the diverse urban population that surrounds it, by appealing to a broad audience through a range of facilities, including meeting rooms, a library, and indoor and outdoor interpretive exhibits. The exhibit design will account for the diversity of the population and

provide a variety of delivery methods to accommodate visitors with varying learning levels, language proficiency, and age groups.

The unique watershed interpretive approach of the facility, set in the natural area will provide a rare outdoor experience for visitors in this densely populated urban area. The facility will fill a service gap for the 10 million people living within the 25 mile radius. Because the facility costs will be fully supported by the Joint Powers Authority, there will not be entry or parking fees, making the Center accessible to all residents. The site selection process considered the tolerance for travel distance and travel time for visitors who use public, as well as personal transportation to access the facility.

Economic and geographic accessibility is critical, because 52 percent of the households within the 25-mile radius are disadvantaged, falling under the California Median Household Income of \$47,493 per year. Over 29 percent of these households have median incomes under \$25,000 per year. A very diverse population is located within a 25-mile radius of the Discovery Center. Over 45 percent of this population is Hispanic, 14 percent Asian Pacific Islander, and over 9 percent African American (see Table 8-1 below).

Table 8-1 Race/Ethnicity for 25-mile radius of the Discovery Center

Hispanic	4,622,405	45.08%
Population Of Only 1 Race	9,754,945	95.15%
White Alone	4,964,254	50.89%
African American Alone	905,766	9.29%
Native American Alone	84,762	0.87%
Asian Pacific Islander	1,367,329	14.02%
Other	2,432,834	24.94%

Note: Percents will not add up to 100 due to Hispanic/Latino being calculated separately from racial groupings

Source: Census 2000, American Factfinder factfinder.census.gov

8.2.3 THE PROJECT WILL BRING AWARENESS TO THE VALUE OF RETAINING OPEN SPACE AND HABITAT WITHIN THE HEAVILY URBANIZED AREA

The project seeks to change people's behaviors so that environmental stewardship is more widely embraced and practiced by providing accessible and engaging watershed and environmental education to the public. Although many residents of the San Gabriel Valley and the region are familiar with the Whittier Narrows Regional Park, the WNNC is less well known and has substantially lower visitation. The project will attract visitors and encourage them to protect and expand open space and habitat by exposing them to information focused on a wide range of interests, providing meeting rooms, providing stimulating, state-of-the-art exhibits and increasing curiosity. The project will inspire people to learn about the natural resources of the San Gabriel River region and how their daily actions impact the environment. It will also engage people in environmental learning opportunities and encourage

enjoyment of our region's natural areas. Further, it will allow people to collaborate with others to leverage collective knowledge and generate impact and action.

8.2.4 THE PROJECT WILL INCREASE THE NUMBER OF SCHOOLS USING THE FACILITY

Currently, the WNNC serves approximately 9,600 school children annually. The project would increase accessibility and appropriate programming to reach many more students, projected to be at least 14,000 to 19,500 students annually.

The interpretive center would expand the school user base to a wider region, serving over 2.8 million schoolchildren, from 1,823 schools within approximately 100 school districts in a 25-mile radius. The interpretive center would be equipped with a reference library, two educational classrooms and exhibits, tied seamlessly to the outdoor programs for schoolchildren. The docent-led programs would meet the California State Standards and Guidelines by providing teachers with grade level appropriate, hands-on lessons.

Standards-based, grade level appropriate programming would be the ultimate attraction for school administrators and teachers who are now accountable under the "No Child Left Behind Act," to show student proficiency at each grade level, in accordance with the California State Standards and Frameworks. Statewide extracurricular programs have either adapted to this new reality, or lost participation of schools as a result.

Additionally, the exhibits have been designed with consideration of varying learning levels, language proficiency and age groups, using a variety of delivery methods and learning modes. This is vital to attracting and accommodating the diverse local school population. Exhibits that provide this range of learning modalities require adequately sized facilities, which do not exist at this time.

Finally, the Discovery Center's range of facilities would be available to all schools at no charge. Schools would have free access to the indoor exhibits, classrooms, and hands-on outdoor experience, which is rare, if non-existent, in urban Los Angeles. Additionally, assistance for travel costs may be provided by the partner water agencies and other local transportation funding sources. The Discovery Center's 25-mile service radius considers the population's tolerance for travel distance and travel time for school classes and school groups.

8.2.5 THE PROJECT WILL CREATE UNIQUELY ACCESSIBLE FACILITY

By maximizing its location in the heart of the Los Angeles Basin, the Discovery Center would provide a facility that is readily accessible to millions of residents. It is also convenient to many local water agencies with the need to educate their constituents on the relationship between water, habitat, open space preservation and recreation—a key objective of the San Gabriel River Master Plan.

Comparable water education facilities are located out of the population center at great distance from the Discovery Center. Diamond Valley Lake is 65 miles, and Pyramid Lake is 80 miles from San Gabriel Valley. Although these facilities provide excellent opportunities to learn about the complex system of water facilities that supply domestic water to Southern California, their remoteness lessens their ability to disseminate this information to the urban population in the metropolitan Los Angeles region. The other museums in the vicinity, such as the Natural History Museum, do not address the issues of water and natural resources in an integrated manner. The other large interpretive facility in the area is the Aquarium of the Pacific which has a focus on marine ecology.

Further, the Discovery Center is unique in its goal to educate, interpret, and provide a gateway to visitors of other recreational opportunities within the San Gabriel River Watershed. The San Gabriel River is one of our region's greatest resources. From its origin in the Angeles National Forest, the San Gabriel River courses 72 miles to the ocean. Along this reach, numerous parks and trails provide respite, recreation and wildlife habitat. Five dams harness the river to provide flood protection. The watershed basin fed by the San Gabriel River provides up to 90 percent of the water supply for the communities in the region.

The project presents a unique opportunity to teach children and adults alike about the importance of preserving this critical natural resource. The Discovery Center programming will be dedicated to improving education, health, opportunity, stewardship, and environmental sustainability to the region it serves. It will present the entire story of the San Gabriel River watershed at a highly accessible facility and site at the existing Whittier Narrows Nature Center, one of the few locations where the natural river can be observed, unobstructed by concrete channel. This unique site is located within the Whittier Narrows Flood Control Basin and Recreation Area in Los Angeles County. The Discovery Center will stress important cultural, natural history, ecosystems and conservation messages, while incorporating the outdoor experiences currently presented by the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation at the existing Whittier Narrows Nature Center.

8.2.6 THE PROJECT WILL PROVIDE LEADERSHIP IN SUSTAINABLE BUILDING AND LANDSCAPE DESIGN AND OPERATIONS

The project's interpretive center will meet the U. S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Standards of the highest level (Platinum). The project will provide a green building example to allow visitors to see how these features function and how they could be used in homes, workplaces, and landscapes.

8.2.7 THE PROJECT WILL PROVIDE ACCESS TO THE EMERALD NECKLACE PARK NETWORK

The Emerald Necklace alliance currently includes eight cities, Los Angeles County, the RMC, and several other parties signed on as formal members of the Emerald Necklace Park Network coalition, committed to its completion and maintenance. The Emerald Necklace Park Network is proposed as a connected network of trails and parks focused on the San Gabriel River and Rio Hondo River and their tributaries.

With its proximity to the San Gabriel River and the San Gabriel River bikeway, the project site is intended to serve as a new staging area and trailhead to the Emerald Necklace Park Network via a short trail connecting the exhibit hall to the bikeway. This trailhead would also provide an opportunity for users of the San Gabriel River bikeway trail, which extends from Azusa to Seal Beach and connects through Whittier Narrows to the Los Angeles Rio Hondo (Lario) Trail along the Rio Hondo River. Trail users would be able to stop in at the Discovery Center to gain further knowledge about the rivers.

8.2.8 THE PROJECT WILL EXPOSE VISITORS TO OTHER RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN THE WATERSHED REGION

The project's location within the Whittier Narrows Recreation Area will expose other recreational opportunities in the watershed region. The natural setting of the site offers a unique opportunity to draw people to this particular setting. It will provide a gateway to the Recreation Area and the County's larger park system, as well as other open space resources in the San Gabriel Watershed, such as the Angeles National Forest. The site is strategically located near the convergence of several area freeways to serve as a gateway to exploring other areas such as local city parks, the Santa Fe Dam Recreation Area, El Dorado Regional Park, Los Cerritos Wetlands, and the Aquarium of the Pacific.

8.2.9 THE PROJECT WILL ENCOURAGE HABITAT RESTORATION/STEWARDSHIP

Much of the land around the project site has been impacted by its history of agricultural uses and landscaping with non-native vegetation. The project will improve the existing natural resource value of the site by setting aside approximately 8.3 acres for habitat preservation and restoration. All new landscaping installed on site would be native vegetation indigenous to the Whittier Narrows area (see Section 2.5.4. of the Draft EIR). The enhancement of open space preservation, habitat and recreational value along the San Gabriel River is consistent with the goals of the San Gabriel River Corridor Master Plan (SGRCMP).

CHAPTER 9

FINDINGS ON MITIGATION MONITORING AND REPORTING PROGRAM

Pursuant to Section 15091 (a) (1) of the CEQA Guidelines, the Authority finds that implementation of the mitigation measures and project design standards identified in the Final EIR would substantially lessen the significant environmental impacts resulting from the project. These mitigation measures and project design standards have been required in, or incorporated into the project. In accordance with Section 15091 (d), and Section 15097 of the CEQA Guidelines, which require a public agency to adopt a program for reporting or monitoring required changes or conditions of approval to substantially lessen significant environmental effects, the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program provided in this chapter is hereby adopted as the mitigation monitoring and reporting program for this project.

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MITIGATION MONITORING AND REPORTING PROGRAM

Mitigation Measure	Implementation Phase ¹	Monitoring Phase ¹	Enforcement Agency	Verification of Compliance		
				Initial	Date	Remarks
BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES						
BIO-A Prior to commencement of proposed project construction, a qualified restoration ecologist shall prepare a formal restoration plan to implement the replanting of walnut woodland. Impacts to walnut woodland (less than 0.01 acre of walnut woodland) shall be mitigated at a ratio of 2:1. Impacts to disturbed areas of sensitive vegetation (i.e., 0.20 acres of disturbed walnut woodland) shall be mitigated at a ratio of 1:1. Based on the ratios noted above, a total of 0.22 acres of walnut woodland shall be replanted in areas near or adjacent to the existing walnut woodland that are located outside of the construction impact area. Implementation of the restoration plan shall occur within one year of completion of proposed project construction. A 3- to 5-year maintenance and monitoring program shall be conducted to ensure that a native plant cover is achieved and aggressive nonnative species do not out-compete the native species. If the lease boundary does not contain sufficient area for proposed project mitigation, it is the responsibility of the Authority to obtain permission for replanting in an appropriate easement within the San Gabriel River floodplain. The proposed mitigation strategy is included in this report in Appendix C.	Pre-Construction	Construction and Operations	San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority			
BIO-B Of the total 27 mature native and nonnative trees ² that would be potentially impacted, 4 trees are salvageable. No more than 33 percent of the root matrix for each tree shall be removed during the transplanting process in order to assure or contribute to recovery and survival during and after the transplant process. No subsurface disturbance shall encroach the dripline extent of the tree (dripline is the furthest margin of the crown radiating out from the main stem [tree trunk]). For transplanting trees, pragmatic and practical concerns about handling ability (among other issues) become paramount in the transplant process. Therefore, for replanting relocated trees, no more than 2 to 3 feet of dripline encroachment shall occur to ensure root disturbance and impact is kept to a minimum. After replanting, the tree's root matrix shall be accessible 360 degrees and not asymmetrically obstructed (i.e., a tree abutting a wall or other structure), to prevent adequate rootball formation.	Construction	Construction	San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority			
BIO-C The native trees 8-inch inches diameter at breast height (dbh or larger) in natural areas of construction impact area lost to project-related activities shall be replaced in-kind at a ratio of 2:1. These trees shall be replaced with a minimum 15-gallon tree replanted in clusters of 3 to 4 under advisement of a qualified restoration ecologist in cooperation with the landscape architect(s) for the project. Each non-native mature tree (8-inches dbh or larger) removed from a landscaped area around the WNNC shall be replaced at a ratio of 1:1 with a 36-inch box tree of a species native and known to the floodplain of the San Gabriel River. The replacement trees shall be planted in small groupings (3 to 4 trees) within landscaped areas of the construction impact area near the proposed interpretive center. Salvaged materials shall be used or supplemental plantings of native species appropriate to the site (occurring within the San Gabriel River floodplain and of local genetic stock) shall be used if necessary. Post-construction monitoring shall be conducted by a qualified biologist to ensure 100 percent survival for the first year and 80 percent survival for the year after. Additional information for the proposed mitigation strategy is included in Appendix C of the EIR.	Construction	Construction and Operations	San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority			
BIO-D Prior to the start of construction, a qualified biologist shall conduct focused pre-construction surveys for the coastal western whiptail. If encountered, the species shall be relocated to an approved location based on consultation with the California Department of Fish and Game.	Pre-Construction	Pre-Construction	San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority and California Department of Fish and Game			

¹ The Implementation and Monitoring phases are broken down into four categories: Final Plans and Specifications, Pre-Construction, Construction, and Operation. "Final Plans and Specifications" indicates that the mitigation measure must be incorporated into the final approved design, plans, and specifications for the project. "Pre-Construction" refers to measures that are required prior to the start of construction. "Construction" refers to all aspects of project construction, including, but not limited to, site preparation, paving, material hauling, and construction of new facilities. "Operations" includes all measures that must be implemented during routine operations of the project.

² Mature trees are defined as those trees measuring 8 inches diameter at breast height or higher. Native trees are those indigenous to California.

Mitigation Measure	Implementation Phase ¹	Monitoring Phase ¹	Enforcement Agency	Verification of Compliance		
				Initial	Date	Remarks
BIO-E Should tree or other vegetation clearance and/or construction work need to occur during the breeding season for migratory non-game native bird species (generally March 1-September 1, as early as February 1 and as late as September 15 for raptors), weekly bird surveys shall be performed to detect any protected native birds in the trees to be removed and other suitable nesting habitat within 300 feet of the construction work area (500 feet for raptors). The surveys shall be conducted 30 days prior to the disturbance of suitable nesting habitat by a qualified biologist with experience in conducting nesting bird surveys. The surveys shall continue on a weekly basis with the last survey being conducted no more than 3 days prior to the initiation of clearance/construction work. If a protected native bird is found, the construction contractor shall delay all clearance/construction disturbance activities in suitable nesting habitat or within 300 feet of nesting habitat (within 500 feet for raptor nesting habitat) until August 31 or continue the surveys in order to locate any nests. If an active nest is located, clearing and construction within 300 feet of the nest (within 500 feet for raptor nests) shall be postponed until the nest is vacated, juveniles have fledged, and when there is no evidence of a second attempt at nesting. Limits of construction to avoid a nest shall be established in the field by a qualified biologist with flagging and stakes or construction fencing. Construction personnel shall be instructed on the sensitivity of the area. The results of this measure shall be recorded to document compliance with applicable state and federal laws pertaining to the protection of native birds.	Construction	Construction	San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority			
BIO-F The Authority shall inform the construction contractor(s), prior to the bidding process, about the biological constraints of the project site. The construction contractor(s) shall be responsible for impacts to sensitive biological resources beyond those identified in this report that occur as a direct result of construction activities. All sensitive habitat areas to be avoided shall be clearly marked on proposed project maps provided to the contractor by a qualified biologist. These areas shall be designated as “no construction” zones. The project biologist shall flag these areas prior to the onset of construction activities. Resources may need to be fenced or otherwise protected from direct or indirect impacts.	Pre-Construction	Pre-Construction	San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority			
BIO-G The Authority shall implement a contractor education program to ensure that contractors and all construction personnel are fully informed of the sensitive biological resources associated with this project. This program shall focus on (a) the purpose for resource protection, (b) contractor identification of sensitive resource areas in the field (e.g., areas delineated on maps and by flags or fencing), (c) sensitive construction practices, (d) protocol to resolve conflicts that may arise at any time during the construction process, and (e) ramifications of noncompliance. This program shall be conducted by a qualified biologist.	Pre-Construction	Pre-Construction	San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority			
BIO-H Construction in or adjacent to sensitive areas shall be appropriately scheduled to minimize potential impacts biological resources (i.e., outside of the nesting bird season and/or blooming periods of sensitive species with the potential to occur in the vicinity of the proposed project site).	Pre-Construction and Construction	Pre-Construction and Construction	San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority			
BIO-I Topsoil shall be stockpiled in disturbed areas presently lacking native vegetation. Stockpile areas shall be delineated on the grading plans and reviewed by a qualified biologist.	Final Plans and Specifications	Final Plans and Specifications	San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority			
BIO-J Staging areas shall be located in disturbed area (i.e., within the grading footprint). Staging areas are prohibited within sensitive habitat areas. Staging areas shall be delineated on the grading plans and reviewed by a qualified biologist.	Final Plans and Specifications	Final Plans and Specifications	San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority			
BIO-K Fueling of equipment shall take place within existing paved roads and not within or adjacent to drainages or native habitats. The construction contractor shall be responsible for inspecting construction equipment for leaks prior to operation and repaired as necessary. “No-fueling zones” shall be designated on construction maps and shall be situated a minimum distance of 50 feet from all drainages.	Construction	Construction	San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority			
BIO-L Erosion and siltation into off-site areas during construction shall be minimized. An erosion control plan and a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan shall be required of the construction contractor prior to the start of construction. The Authority shall be responsible for ensuring that the erosion control plan is developed and implemented per the requirements to the County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works. The plan shall include the use of hay bales, silt fences, siltation basins, or other devices necessary to stabilize the soil in denuded or graded areas during the construction and revegetation phases of the proposed project.	Pre-Construction	Construction	San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority			

Mitigation Measure	Implementation Phase ¹	Monitoring Phase ¹	Enforcement Agency	Verification of Compliance		
				Initial	Date	Remarks
BIO-M All nighttime lighting from the proposed project site shall be shielded. Parking lot lighting shall be located around the perimeter of the parking lot facing inward away from native vegetation located around its edges.	Construction	Construction	San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority			
BIO-N Signs shall be posted near sensitive biological resources and sensitive habitat areas to educate staff and the public to avoid disturbance to these resources. The Authority shall post educational signage, both inside the interpretive center and at trail heads emphasizing the protection of all natural features of the Natural Area.	Construction	Construction	San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority			
BIO-O In conjunction with County, the Authority shall develop and implement a Resource Management Plan to guide all phases of Natural Area management and maintenance within the lease boundary. At a minimum, the Resource Management Plan shall include methods and provisions for: maintenance of roads, walkways, trails, and landscaping; invasive weed avoidance and removal; routine patrolling of the Natural Area for litter pick up and inspection for vandalism; and regular closure rotation of natural areas.	Operations	Operations	San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority and Los Angeles County of Parks and Recreation			
BIO-P Any redundant trails within the lease boundary shall be closed and restored.	Operations	Operations	San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority			
BIO-Q If at any time disturbance to a sensitive habitat area is suspected, the interpretive center staff shall have the authority to temporarily or permanently close the area for rest or restoration.	Operations	Operations	San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority			
HYDROLOGY AND WATER QUALITY						
HYDRO-A Biological or non-chemical means of controlling exotics and pests shall be utilized over pesticides where feasible. Should chemical pesticides or herbicides be required, less-persistent compounds shall be used in accordance with manufacturers' recommendations and general standards of use. Application of chemicals shall be restricted such that they are not used immediately before and during rain storms or within the 24-hour period in which rain is forecast to occur.	Operations	Operations	San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority			

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CHAPTER 10 FINDINGS ON CHANGES TO THE DRAFT EIR AND RECIRCULATION

10.1 CHANGES TO THE DRAFT EIR

The Draft EIR was circulated for public review and comment on June 5, 2009, initiating a 60-day public review period pursuant to CEQA and its implementing guidelines. In response to comments from the public and other public agencies, minor modifications have been incorporated into the Draft EIR. All of the changes to the Draft EIR are described in Chapter 2.0 of the Final EIR.

10.2 FINDINGS REGARDING FINAL EIR

Pursuant to CEQA, on the basis of the review and consideration of the Draft EIR, all information added to the Final EIR in response to comments on the Draft EIR merely clarifies, amplifies or makes insignificant modifications to an already adequate EIR pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15088.5(b) and that no significant new information has been received that would require recirculation.

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