



November 2015

### **Caring for the San Gabriel River Watershed**

Turn on a tap--the water gushes. Push a handle and the water flushes. It's pretty easy to forget what water really means, even during a years-long drought here in Southern California (and as we anxiously anticipate El Nino rains.)

But the indigenous people who lived along the local waterways—what we now call the Los Angeles, the Santa Ana and the San Gabriel Rivers--knew the power and importance of water, were careful in its use and mindful and methodical in maintaining fragile local ecosystems.

It's hard to picture now as we race along the 605 freeway adjacent to a river contained by concrete but until the early years of the San Gabriel River was free-flowing with natural banks. .

For centuries the San Gabriel River had changed course with the rains. When it ran high, it flooded banks and shifted direction—as did the native inhabitants sustained year-round by the waters and local plants and animals in the watershed.

When the water moved, the people moved—away from the river banks and up into San Gabriel Canyon. “It would have been seasonal,” says Julia Bogany, a Gabrieleno/Tongva tribal elder and cultural affairs officer. “We wouldn't have lived there all the time.”

Today the San Gabriel River Discovery Center Project is part of a dynamic local urban river revitalization movement. The first steps of the project—set to get underway early next year--include habitat restoration and trail refurbishment at Whittier Narrows and the creation of outdoor classrooms to increase capacity to introduce more inland students to the area's ecosystems, history, local cultures and water education.

An alliance of local agencies and community partners have created the Discovery Center project (including local Native American groups) and have moved with great caution to assure the integrity of the indigenous history and presence as construction plans go forward. Native American monitors will be involved at every step to assure a respectful approach as building gets underway.

The San Gabriel River Discovery Center's well-rounded curriculum includes science, technology, engineering and math learning—and is committed to celebrating local cultures and educating

all visitors about the ongoing influence of indigenous people in our region and on the stewardship of the San Gabriel River watershed. We'll use many different interpretive tools, including ways of explaining and looking at nature based in the local indigenous cultures.

Renovations are set to begin soon to create more learning opportunities and a revitalization of a beloved habitat and urban retreat.

Happy November and Happy Thanksgiving!