

CONCEPTUAL REDESIGN

JOHNNY CARSON PARK

LD4 : ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS AND PLANNING | WINTER 2026

EMILY GABEL-LUDDY, SOO WAI KIN

LAURA WILLIAMS, MARISSA VEGA, JAMES KANG

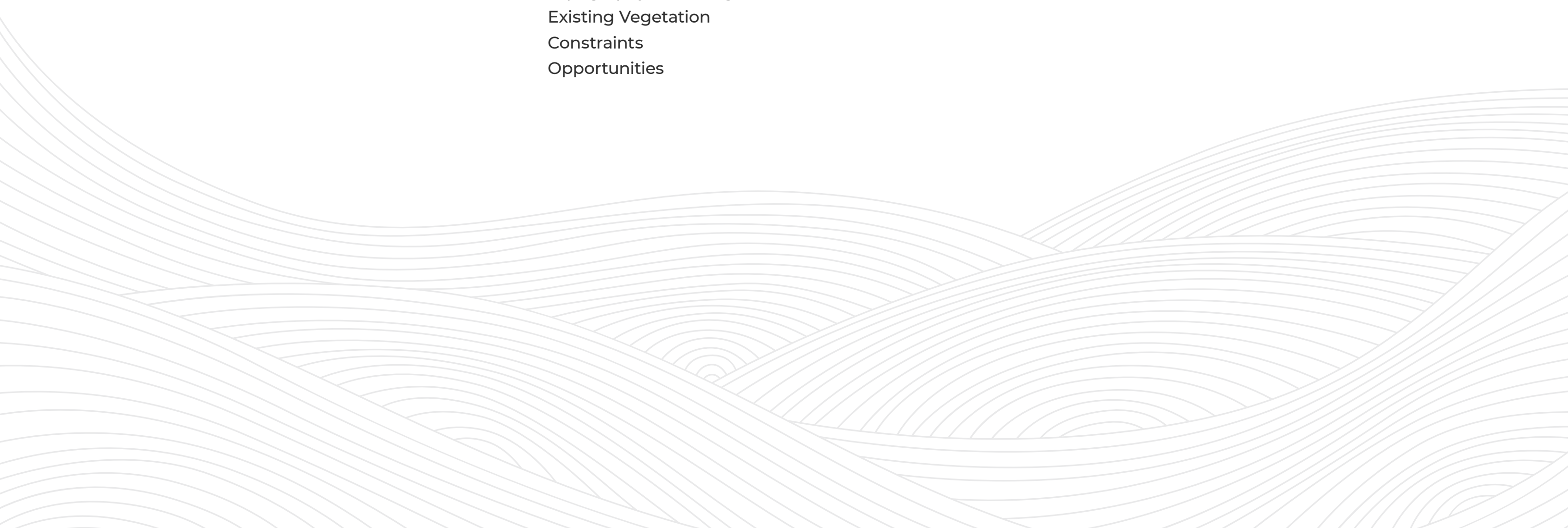


TABLE OF CONTENTS

01	Project Overview
	Location
	History
	Existing Condition
	Floodplain Reclamation
	Trout

08	Site Analysis
	Context
	Circulation
	Sun & Wind
	Noise & Views
	Topography & Drainage
	Existing Vegetation
	Constraints
	Opportunities

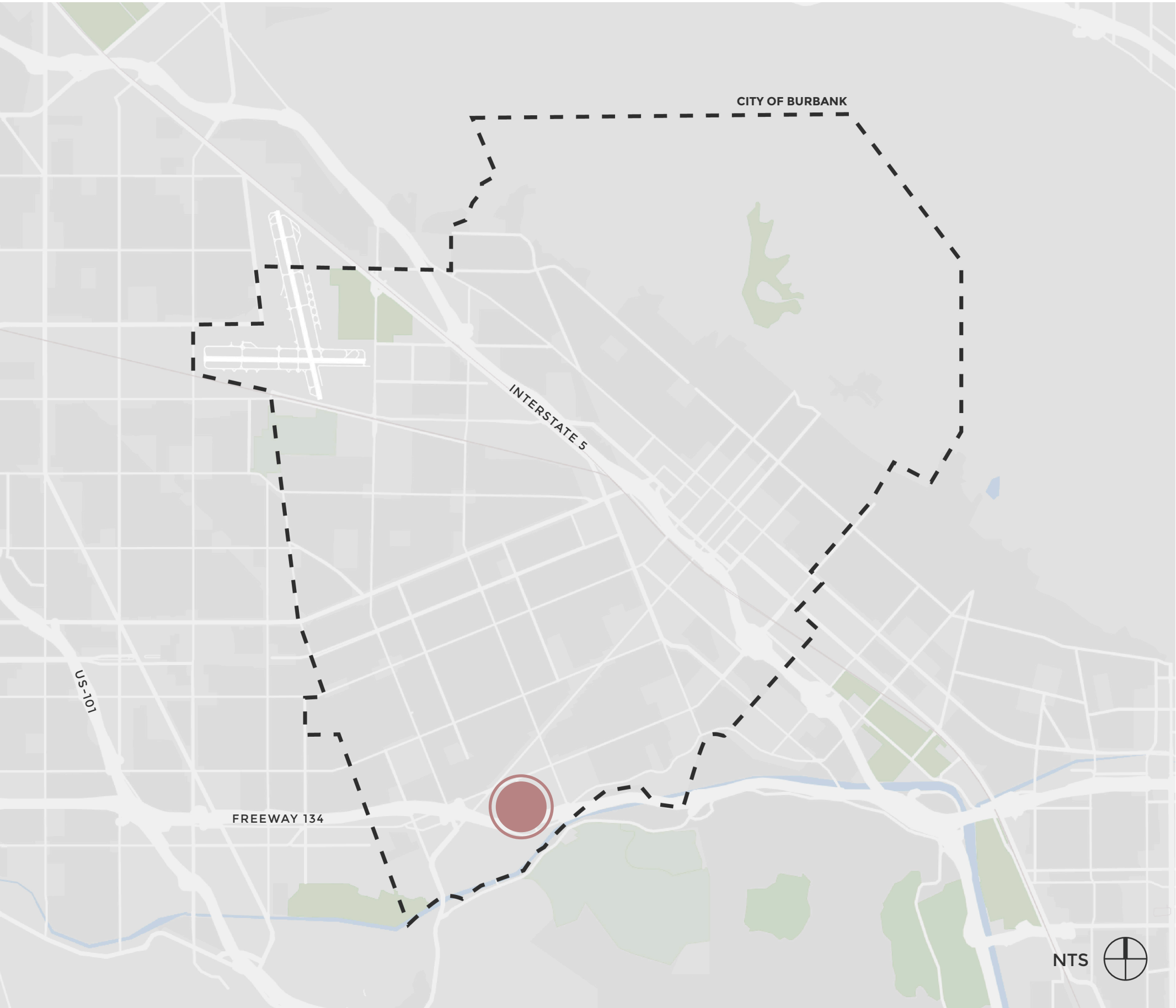
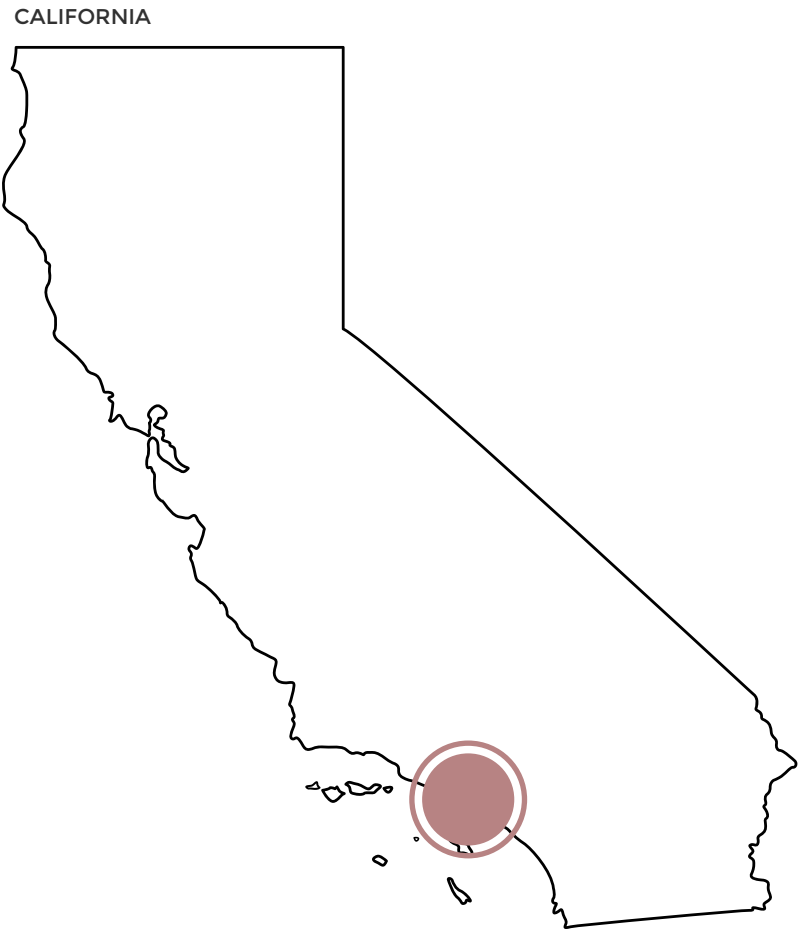
16	Concept Development
	Case Studies
	Design Concepts
	Concept Refinement

21	Site Design
	Site Plan
	Circulation
	Enlargements
	Sections/Perspectives
	Plant Palette

PROJECT OVERVIEW

LOCATION

Johnny Carson Park is located in Burbank along the edge of the Los Angeles River corridor, positioned between major infrastructure such as the Ventura Freeway (134) and the city's media district. Situated at **400 S. Bob Hope Drive**, directly across from the former NBC Studios, the park occupies a highly urbanized yet ecologically significant site.



PROJECT OVERVIEW

HISTORY

PRE-700 CE



Indigenous peoples settle throughout the Los Angeles Basin, including the ancestors of the Tongva people, Tataviam people, and Chumash people, who live in close relationship with the river's seasonal flows, wetlands, and floodplains.

1769-1850



Colonization introduces the first major human modifications to the LA River's natural systems, including the construction of a network of ditches called zanjias that channel water to the growing pueblo and nearby agricultural fields.

1850-1938



The U.S. takes control of California, and rapid urban growth spreads across the floodplain. Periodic floods reshape the river's course and damage expanding infrastructure, prompting early flood-control measures such as levees and channel straightening, and the creation of the LA County Flood Control District in 1915.

1938-1960



After the devastating Los Angeles Flood of 1938, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers channelized most of the river in concrete to control flooding and protect the rapidly urbanizing region.

1960S-PRESENT



Growing environmental awareness and community advocacy begin to reshape attitudes toward the river, leading to restoration initiatives, public access projects, and efforts to reconnect the river's ecology.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

HISTORY

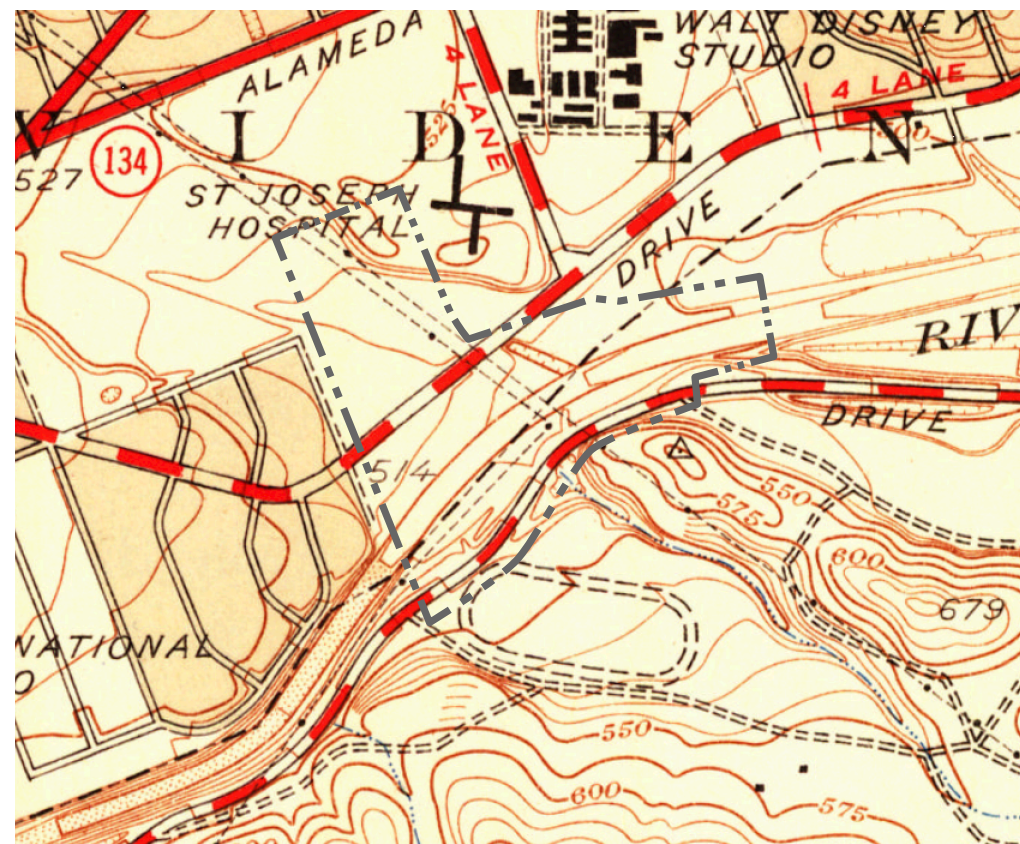
This sequence of historic maps traces the transformation of the Los Angeles River landscape at the site of present-day Johnny Carson Park from 1894 to 1966. The earliest map shows a dynamic river moving through a broad floodplain, reflecting the river's natural seasonal variability. As urbanization intensified, roads, bridges, and later freeways reshaped the corridor, while flood control infrastructure gradually confined the river's movement. By the mid-20th century, the river had transitioned from a shifting ecological system into a controlled urban infrastructure, setting the physical framework for the surrounding parks, studios, and neighborhoods that exist today.



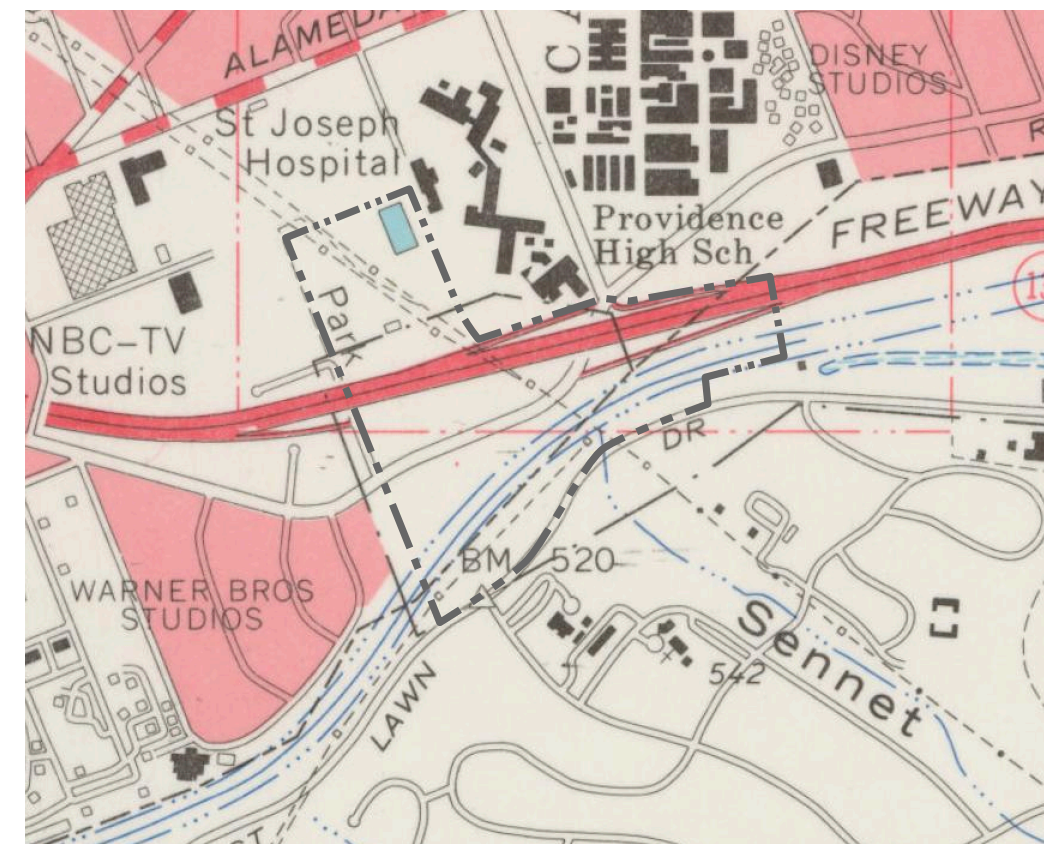
1894 - a natural river with a dynamic, meandering path



1926 - primarily agricultural adjacent to LA River



1948 - after LA River channelization



1966 - Freeway 134 constructed

PROJECT OVERVIEW

HISTORY

It moves through the urban landscape in an underdog kind of way, a concrete drainage ditch... But, like the city itself, the river is fluid, continuing to change, and so full of possibility.

Erin Payne, Zócalo Public Square

- LA River
- - - Intermittent Stream
- Canal
- Wetlands

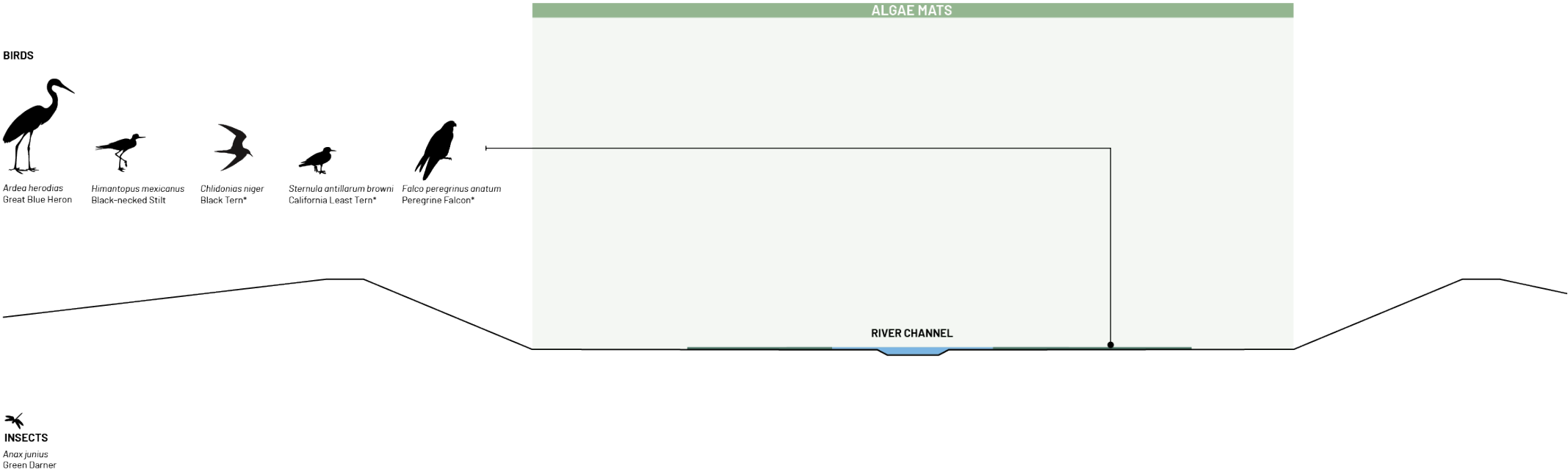


PROJECT OVERVIEW

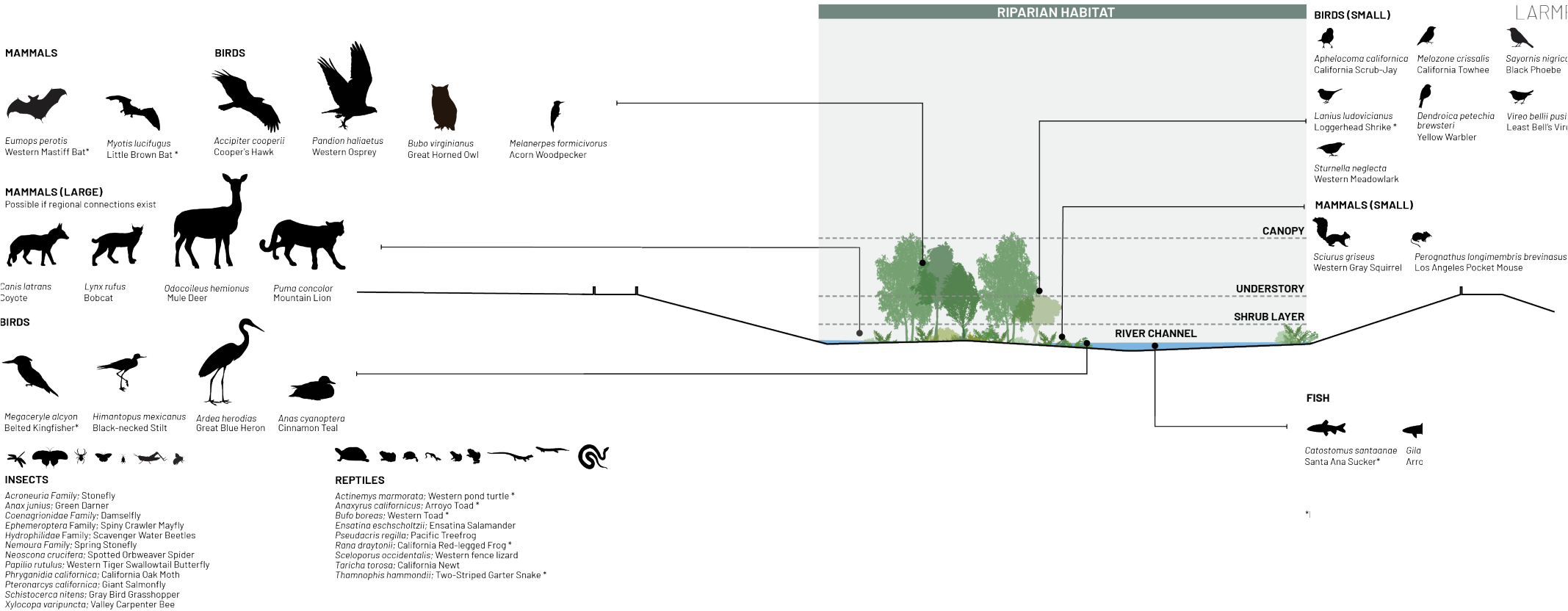
EXISTING CONDITION

The **concrete channel** is a common existing condition of the LA River and features a trapezoidal or box-shaped channel with a low-flow channel in the center. While this condition does not support native plant communities, the concrete absorbs heat from the sun, which warms the water enough to support abundant algae growth. The algae are a food source for many shoreline and other nesting birds.

The **soft-bottom channel** condition refers to segments with concrete walls and gravelly, often inundated soils at the base. This condition is found in areas such as the Glendale Narrows. The soils in this condition allow for more riparian plant communities and greater vertical structure that provides habitat for a wide variety of species.



Concrete Channel



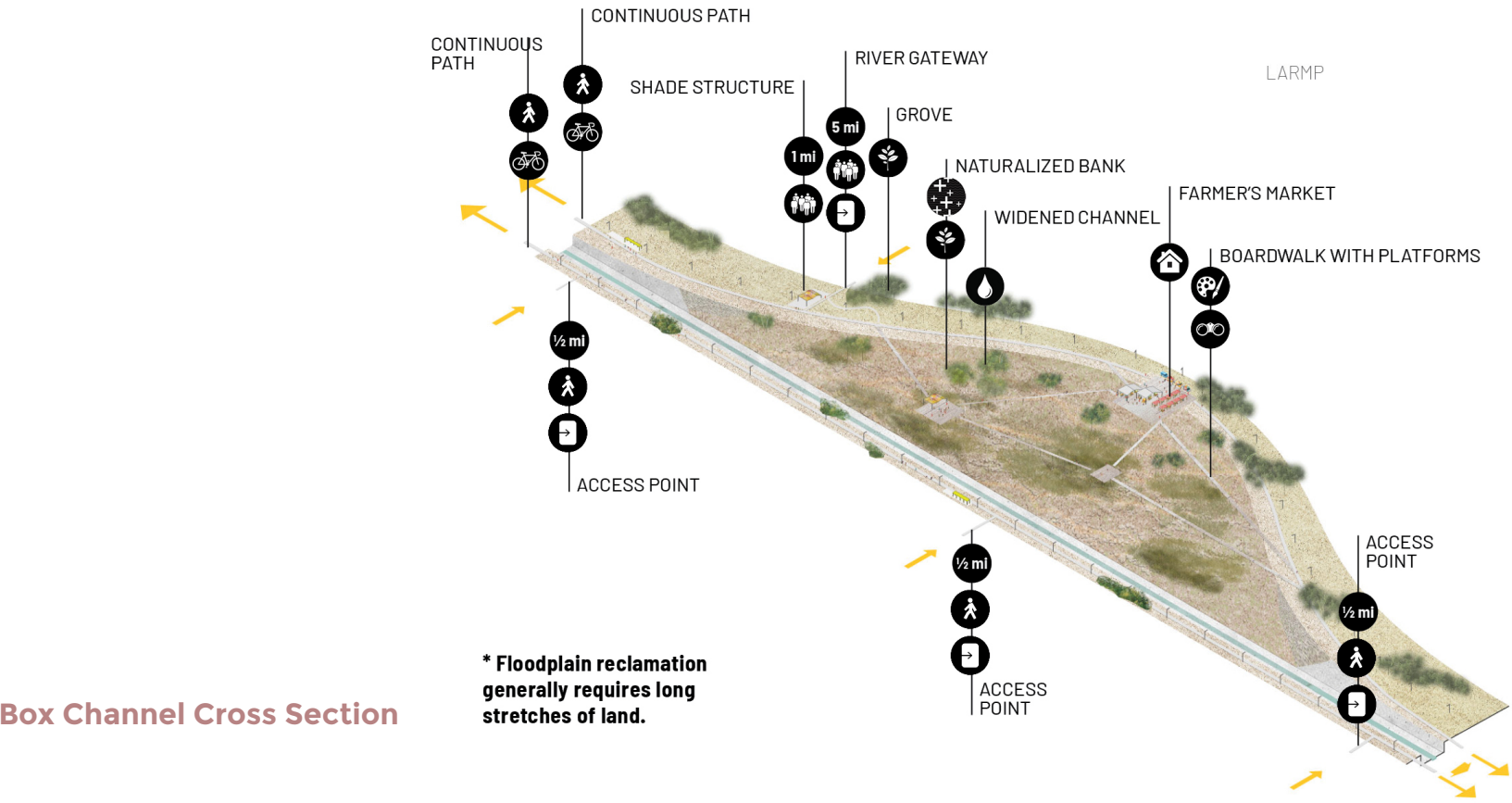
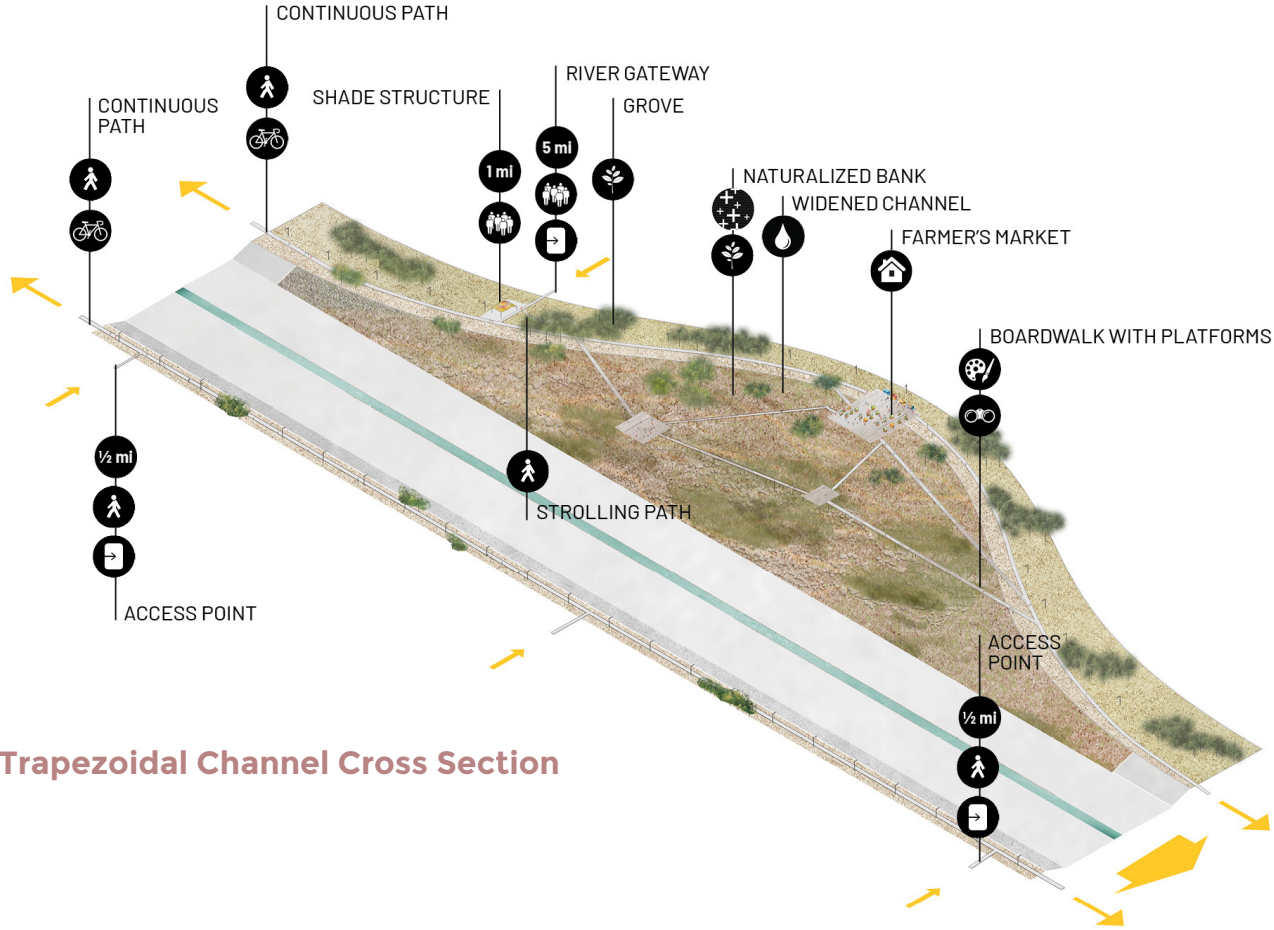
Soft Bottom Channel

Source: LA River Master Plan

PROJECT OVERVIEW

FLOODPLAIN RECLAMATION

Reclaimed floodplain areas typically incorporate a set of ecological and hydrologic design components that allow the landscape to function dynamically during both wet and dry conditions. These components may include riparian woodland plantings, seasonal wetlands, side channels or braided low-flow channels, gravel bars, and habitat islands that support biodiversity and improve river ecology. Landscape features are designed to accommodate periodic inundation while remaining usable as park space in dry periods, for example, boardwalks, seasonal trails, or elevated viewing platforms.



Source: LA River Master Plan

PROJECT OVERVIEW

TROUT

Before channelization, steelhead trout once swam up the Los Angeles River from the Pacific Ocean to spawn. The last documented steelhead in the river was recorded in 1940.

Restoration efforts are exploring ways to create conditions to allow steelhead to once again migrate through the river corridor. Designers are testing strategies such as inset naturalized channels, anchored boulders, and resting pools that slow water velocities and create places for fish to rest during migration. These habitat features, combined with improved connectivity between the ocean and the upstream tributaries, could eventually allow steelhead to move through the river system again.



Rainbow trout
Length: Up to 12 inches
Weight: Up to 8 lbs.
Habitat: Rivers



Steelhead trout
Length: Up to 45 inches
Weight: Up to 50 lbs
Habitat: Ocean and rivers



SITE ANALYSIS

CONTEXT

Johnny Carson Park is located in a dense urban context in Burbank, bordered by institutional uses, media studios, and residential neighborhoods, with the 134 Freeway defining its southern edge. Across the freeway, the Los Angeles River, adjacent parks, and new infrastructure like the Headworks Water Complex highlight the site’s position between urban development and natural systems.

- Park Projects
- Residential
- Studios
- Green Space
- Commercial
- Institutional
- 134 Freeway (Abandoned)
- LA River

LEGENDS

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| A Warner Bros Studios | G Sennett Creek Park Project |
| B Burbank Studios | H Headworks Project |
| C Future Housing Unit | I Forest Lawn Cemetery |
| D Medical Center | J Griffith Park |
| E Providence High School | K Universal City |
| F Disney Studios | L LA Equestrian Center |



SITE ANALYSIS

CIRCULATION

The site is defined by strong vehicular circulation, with the 134 Freeway and Riverside Drive acting as primary east-west corridors, and Bob Hope Drive and Buena Vista Street providing key north-south connections. Secondary streets serve surrounding neighborhoods and institutional uses.

Along the river, a continuous bike path and equestrian trail create important regional connections, though pedestrian access across the freeway remains limited, reinforcing the separation between the park and the river corridor.

- Primary Vehicular Circulation
- Secondary Vehicular Circulation
- Bike Path
- Equestrian Path

LEGENDS

- A

 Burbank Studios
- B

 Legendary Entertainment
- C

 Future Housing
- D

 Medical Center
- E

 Providence High School
- F

 Disney Studios
- G

 Sennett Creek Park Project
- H

 Headworks Project
- I

 Forest Lawn Cemetery



SITE ANALYSIS

SUN & WIND

The site sees a wide solar arc with over 14 hours of daylight in summer, though the adjacent Verdugo Mountains can create early afternoon shadows during the shorter winter days. Prevailing winds are predominantly from the west for most of the year (roughly February to November), driven by Pacific sea breezes. During the fall and winter, Burbank can be affected by strong, dry Northeast Santa Ana winds.

-  Prevailing Winds
-  Seasonal Winds
-  Sun Path

LEGENDS

- A

Burbank Studios

B

Legendary Entertainment

C

Future Housing

D

Medical Center

E

Providence High School
- F

Disney Studios

G

Sennett Creek Park Project

H

Headworks Project

I

Forest Lawn Cemetery



SITE ANALYSIS

NOISE & VIEWS

Areas north of the 134 Freeway experience significant traffic noise. South of the freeway, noise is reduced due to sound walls. Riverside Drive contributes intermittent vehicular noise, while overhead transmission lines add to the site's industrial noise character.

-  Vehicular Noise
-  Electrical Noise
- 1

 Griffith Park Mountains View
- 2

 Hollywood Hills View
- 3

 LA River View
- 4

 San Gabriel Mountains View

LEGENDS

- A

 Burbank Studios
- B

 Legendary Entertainment
- C

 Future Housing
- D

 Medical Center
- E

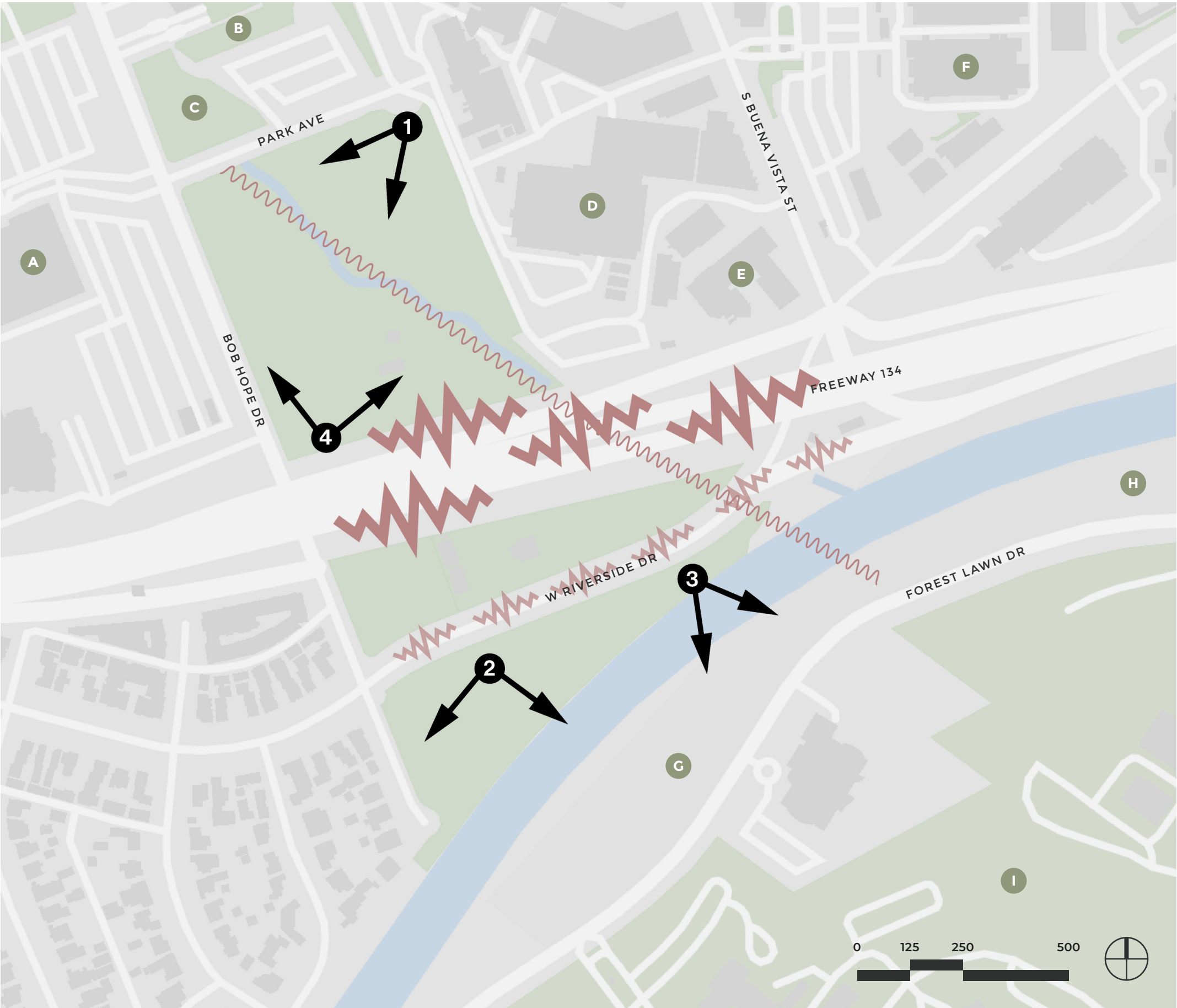
 Providence High School
- F

 Disney Studios
- G

 Sennett Creek Park Project
- H

 Headworks Project
- I

 Forest Lawn Cemetery



SITE ANALYSIS

TOPOGRAPHY & DRAINAGE

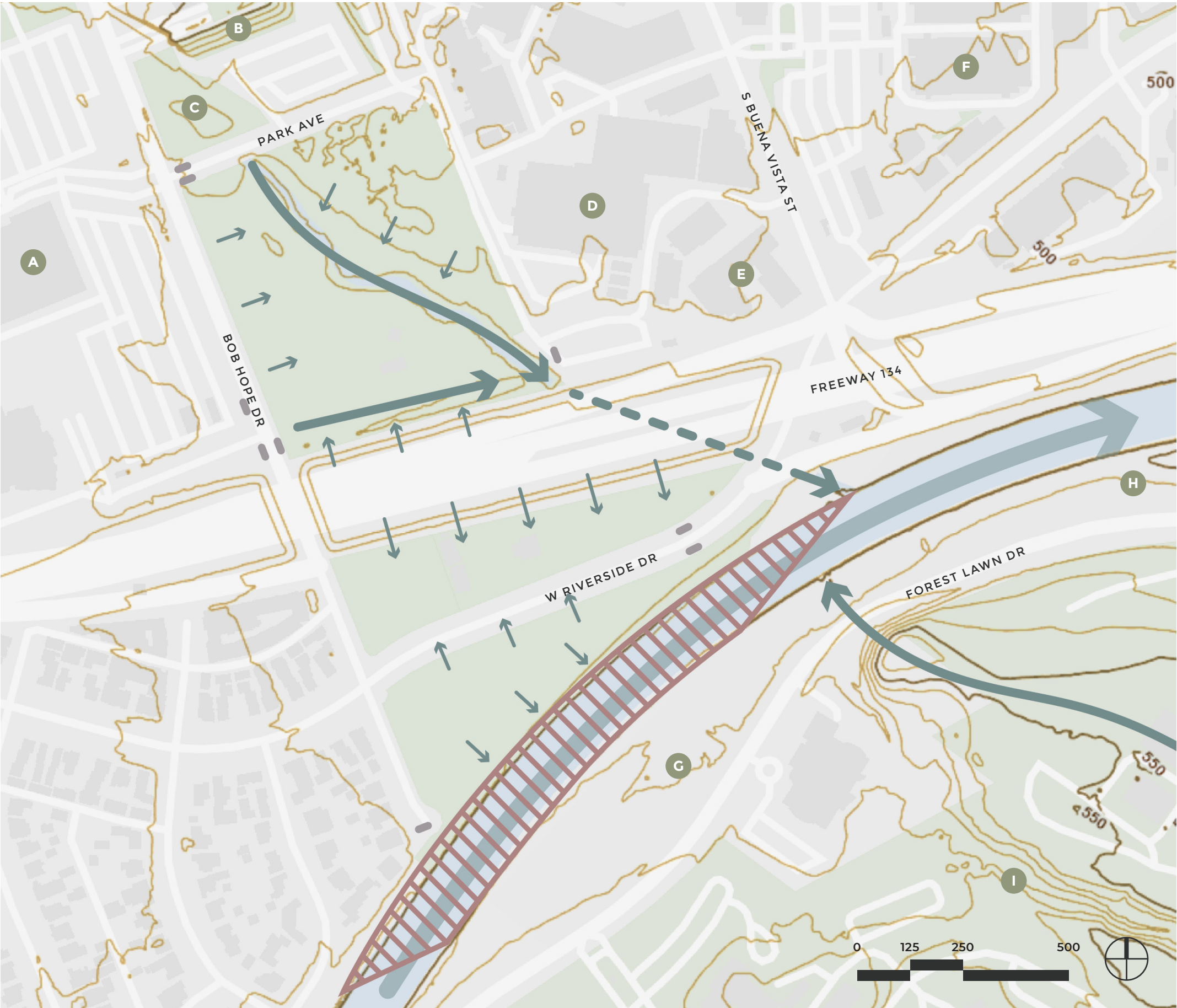
Topography across the site gradually descends toward the Los Angeles River, collecting runoff from adjacent streets, studio lots, and surrounding development. Water is quickly conveyed across impervious surfaces and funneled into the channelized river, bypassing opportunities for infiltration.

This drainage pattern highlights the disconnect between natural hydrology and urban infrastructure, revealing opportunities to slow, capture, and reintroduce water into the landscape.

- Topography
- Drainage
- Bike Path
- Flood Risk Zone

LEGENDS

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| A Burbank Studios | F Disney Studios |
| B Legendary Entertainment | G Sennett Creek Park Project |
| C Future Housing | H Headworks Project |
| D Medical Center | I Forest Lawn Cemetery |
| E Providence High School | |



SITE ANALYSIS

EXISTING
VEGETATION

The site contains a mix of mature trees concentrated within the park, with more sparse and fragmented vegetation along the river edge. Planting is largely ornamental and disconnected from the river’s ecological system.

This pattern reflects a separation between designed park spaces and the river corridor, highlighting opportunities to strengthen habitat continuity and ecological function.

-  Tree Canopy
-  Turf
-  Riparian Planting
-  Slope Planting
-  Decomposed Granite

LEGENDS

- A

 Burbank Studios
- B

 Legendary Entertainment
- C

 Future Housing
- D

 Medical Center
- E

 Providence High School
- F

 Disney Studios
- G

 Sennett Creek Park Project
- H

 Headworks Project
- I

 Forest Lawn Cemetery



SITE ANALYSIS

CONSTRAINTS

- 1 Concrete flood-control walls requiring retention and adaptation
- 2 Freeway 134 embankment obstructing visual and physical river access
- 3 Fragmented connectivity between Johnny Carson Park, Buena Vista Park, and the LA River
- 4 Mode conflict between cyclists and equestrian trail users
- 5 Tree loss risk from invasive pests (e.g., polyphagous shot hole borer) requiring resilient planting strategy
- 6 Stagnant creek conditions contributing to mosquito habitat concerns
- 7 Perceived safety issues related to urban wildlife presence (coyotes)
- 8 Overhead high-tension power lines impacting soundscape and visual quality
- 9 Insufficient wayfinding and trail hierarchy signage
- 10 Existing public sculpture requiring contextual integration within redesign

LEGENDS

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| A Burbank Studios | F Disney Studios |
| B Legendary Entertainment | G Sennett Creek Park Project |
| C Future Housing | H Headworks Project |
| D Medical Center | I Forest Lawn Cemetery |
| E Providence High School | |



SITE ANALYSIS

OPPORTUNITIES

- 1

Ecological riverbank rehabilitation to restore habitat function
- 2

Strengthened residential connections to recreational and educational river amenities
- 3

Integrated green corridor linking Johnny Carson Park, Buena Vista Park, and the LA River
- 4

Dedicated pedestrian and bicycle bridge to stitch together both riverbanks
- 5

Adaptive reuse of the abandoned freeway as an elevated linear greenway
- 6

Terraced river access designed for proximity, gathering, and seasonal change
- 7

Mixed-income housing strategy to support equity and prevent displacement
- 8

Functional public art interventions enhancing shade, identity, and usability
- 9

Community-focused dog park integrated within the larger park network
- 10

Net-zero landscape systems: solar lighting, reclaimed water irrigation, drought-resilient planting

LEGENDS

- A

Burbank Studios

F

Disney Studios
- B

Legendary Entertainment

G

Sennett Creek Park Project
- C

Future Housing

H

Headworks Project
- D

Medical Center

I

Forest Lawn Cemetery
- E

Providence High School

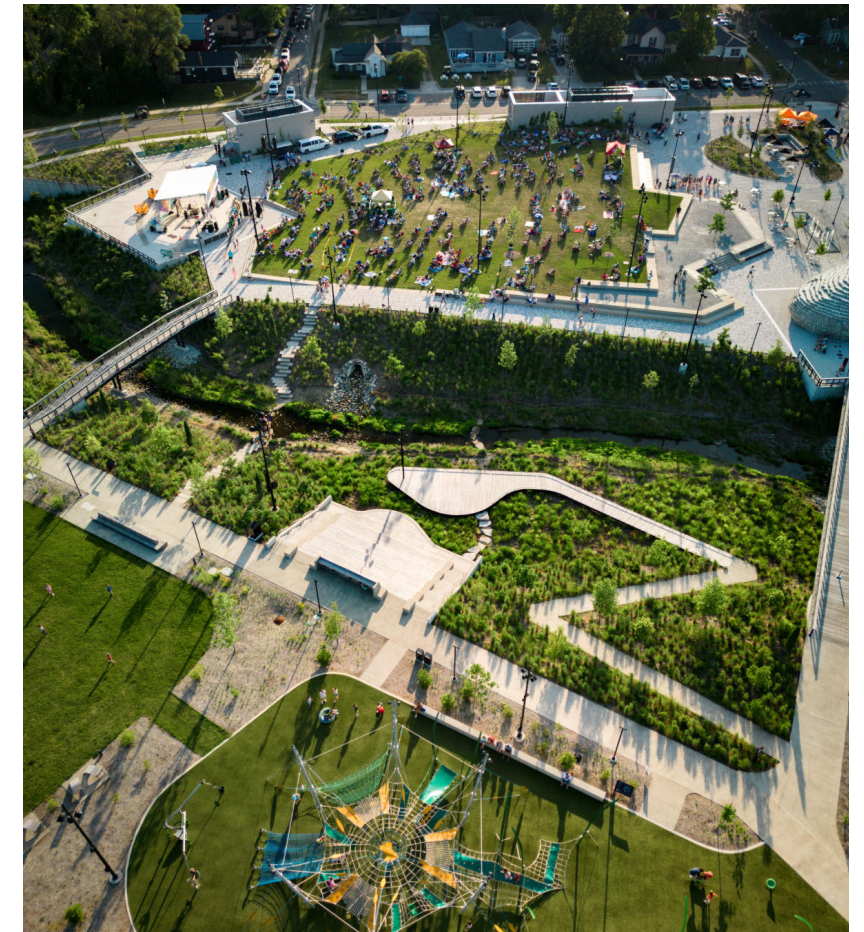


CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT CASE STUDY

01

GRAND JUNCTION PARK AND PLAZA

Grand Junction Park and Plaza in Westfield, Indiana, reimagines a flood-prone, degraded creek corridor as a resilient and engaging civic space. The design restores the Cool Creek corridor and manages stormwater, transforming essential environmental infrastructure into a visible, accessible part of the park experience. This concept addresses ecological challenges but also celebrates the creek's ecological functions, turning water management into an opportunity for public education and recreation.

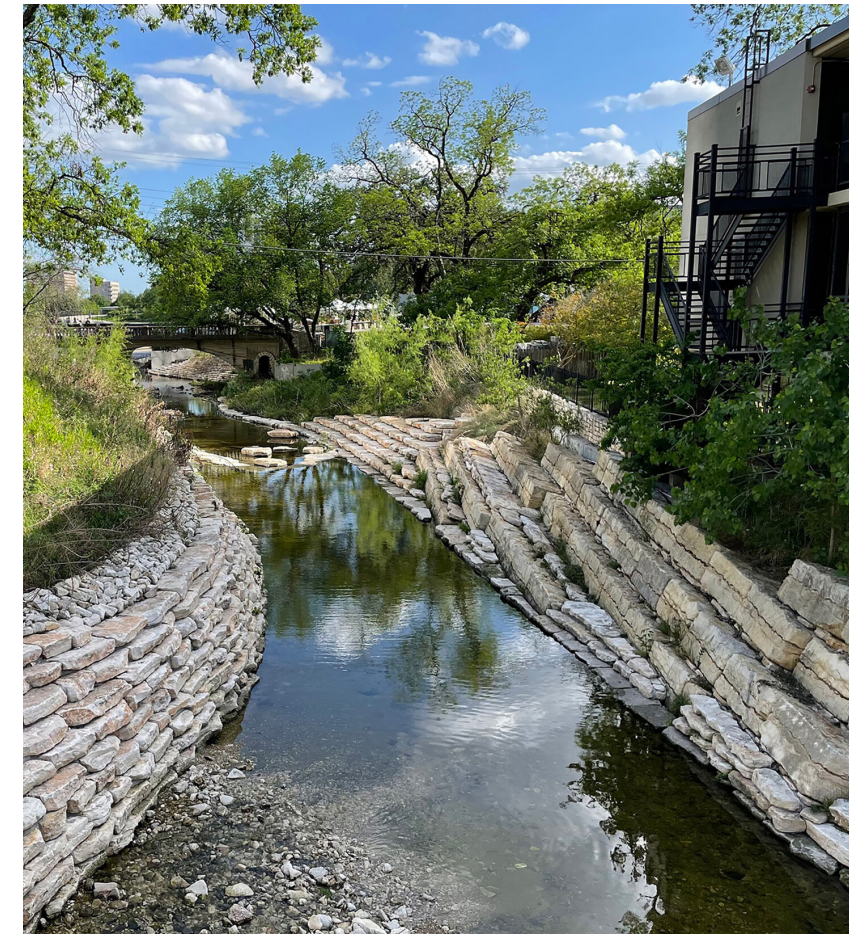


CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT CASE STUDY

02

WATERLOO PARK

Waterloo Park reclaims the Waller Creek floodplain for ecological restoration, recreation, and urban connectivity. Wetland terraces, riparian buffers, and 500+ native trees stabilize the creek corridor, while rain gardens and an 80,000-gallon cistern filter urban runoff. Trails, boardwalks, and an amphitheater integrate public space with floodplain protection and habitat restoration, connecting downtown with surrounding neighborhoods.



CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

DESIGN
CONCEPTS

01

RESTORING LA RIVER

This concept uses historical maps to restore the river's natural meandering path. It also integrates an amphitheater-style terraced river edge and reclaimed floodplain areas that support habitat, recreation, and seasonal flooding.

LEGENDS

- A

Burbank Studios
- B

Legendary Entertainment
- C

Future Housing
- D

Medical Center
- E

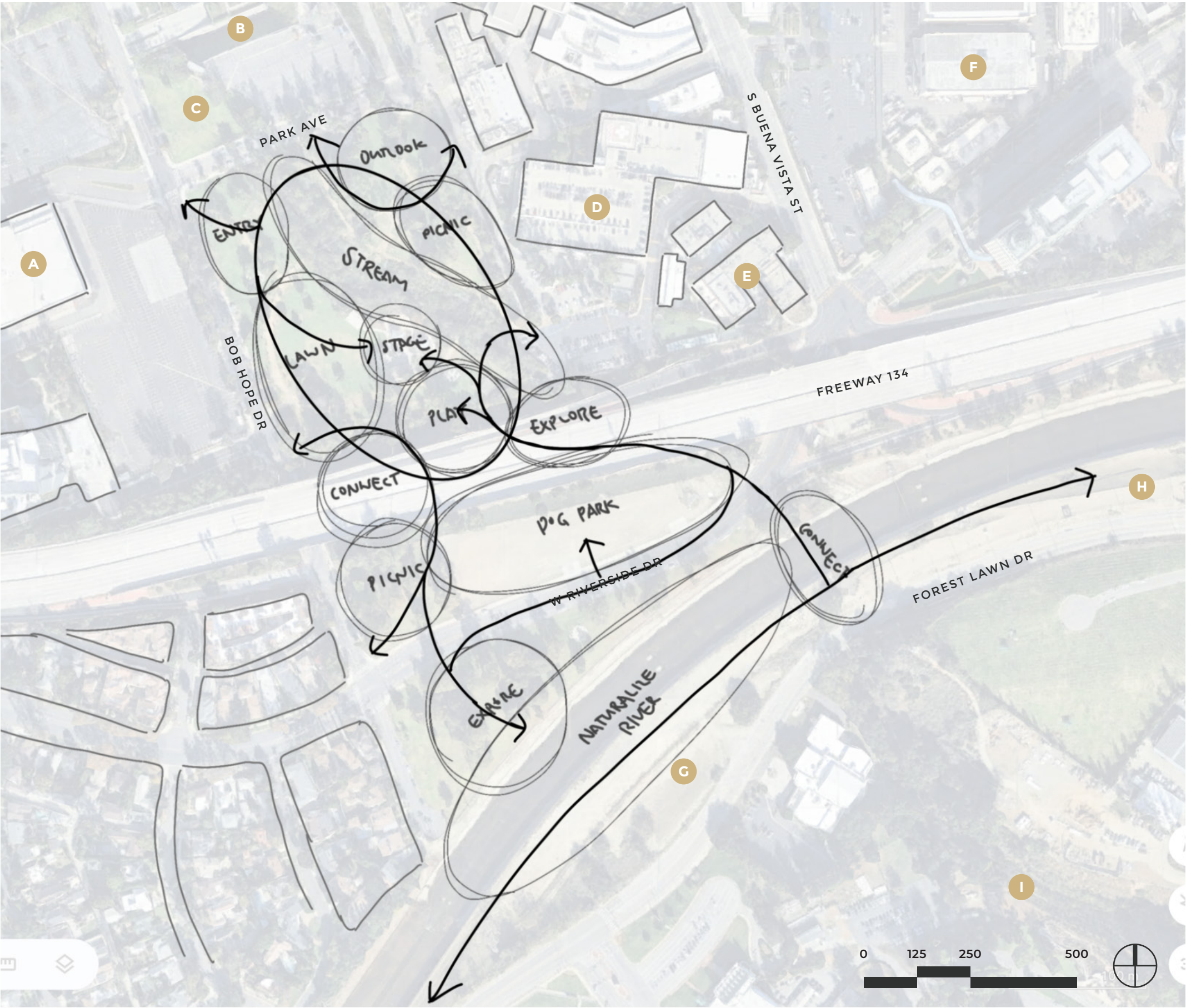
Providence High School
- F

Disney Studios
- G

Sennett Creek Park Project
- H

Headworks Project
- I

Forest Lawn Cemetery



CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

DESIGN
CONCEPTS

02

REPURPOSING
ELEVATED FREEWAY

This concept leverages the existing topography and salvaged freeway concrete to create terraced walkways and elevated seating that serve as river overlook points. A land bridge over Riverside Drive reconnects and unifies the site.

LEGENDS

- A

Burbank Studios
- B

Legendary Entertainment
- C

Future Housing
- D

Medical Center
- E

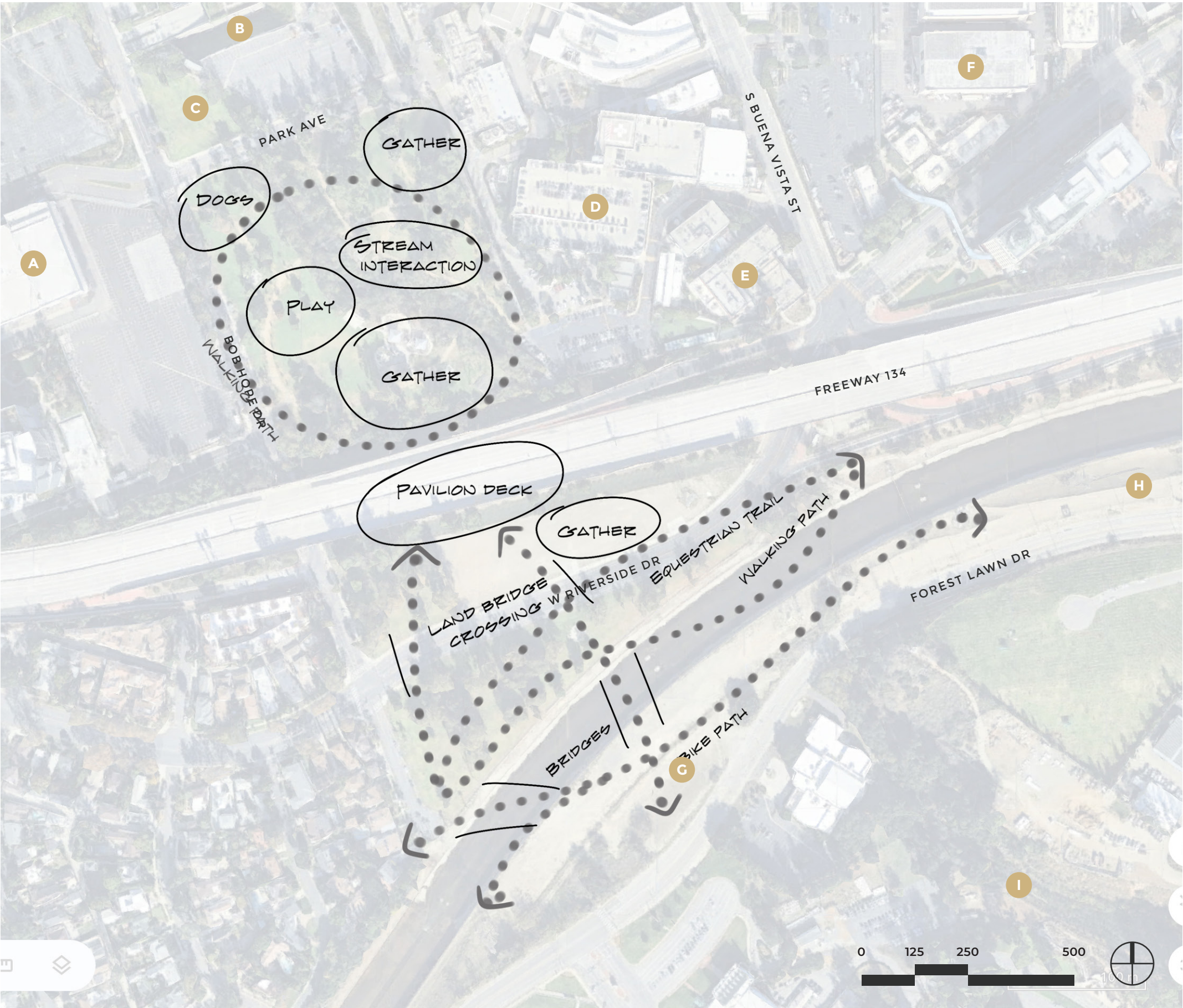
Providence High School
- F

Disney Studios
- G

Sennett Creek Park Project
- H

Headworks Project
- I

Forest Lawn Cemetery



CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

CONCEPT 01 REFINEMENT

This refined concept builds on the restoration of the river’s historic meander, using historical mapping to guide its form. An amphitheater-style terraced edge and expanded floodplain create space for habitat, recreation, and seasonal flooding.

LEGENDS

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| A Burbank Studios | F Disney Studios |
| B Legendary Entertainment | G Sennett Creek Park Project |
| C Future Housing | H Headworks Project |
| D Medical Center | I Forest Lawn Cemetery |
| E Providence High School | |



SITE DESIGN

SITE PLAN

The redesign of Johnny Carson Park reframes the Los Angeles River corridor as both ecological infrastructure and public open space. The proposal restores riparian habitat and introduces a naturalized river system that supports trout passage and improved hydrologic function. Layered circulation networks for pedestrians, cyclists, and equestrians reconnect the surrounding neighborhoods to the river while linking program elements such as a healing garden, dog park, playground, and amphitheater seating. Viewing platforms and creek crossings create moments of engagement with the water, transforming the river corridor into an accessible civic landscape.

LEGENDS

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| A Healing Garden | I Equestrian Path |
| B Creek Crossing | J Amphitheater Seating |
| C CA Native Garden | K "The Requiem" Statue |
| D Playground | L Trout Passage Channel |
| E Picnic | M Naturalized Banks |
| F Dog park | N Bike Path |
| G Pavilion | O Pedestrian/Bike Bridge |
| H Elevated Walkway | P Viewing Platform |



SITE DESIGN

CIRCULATION

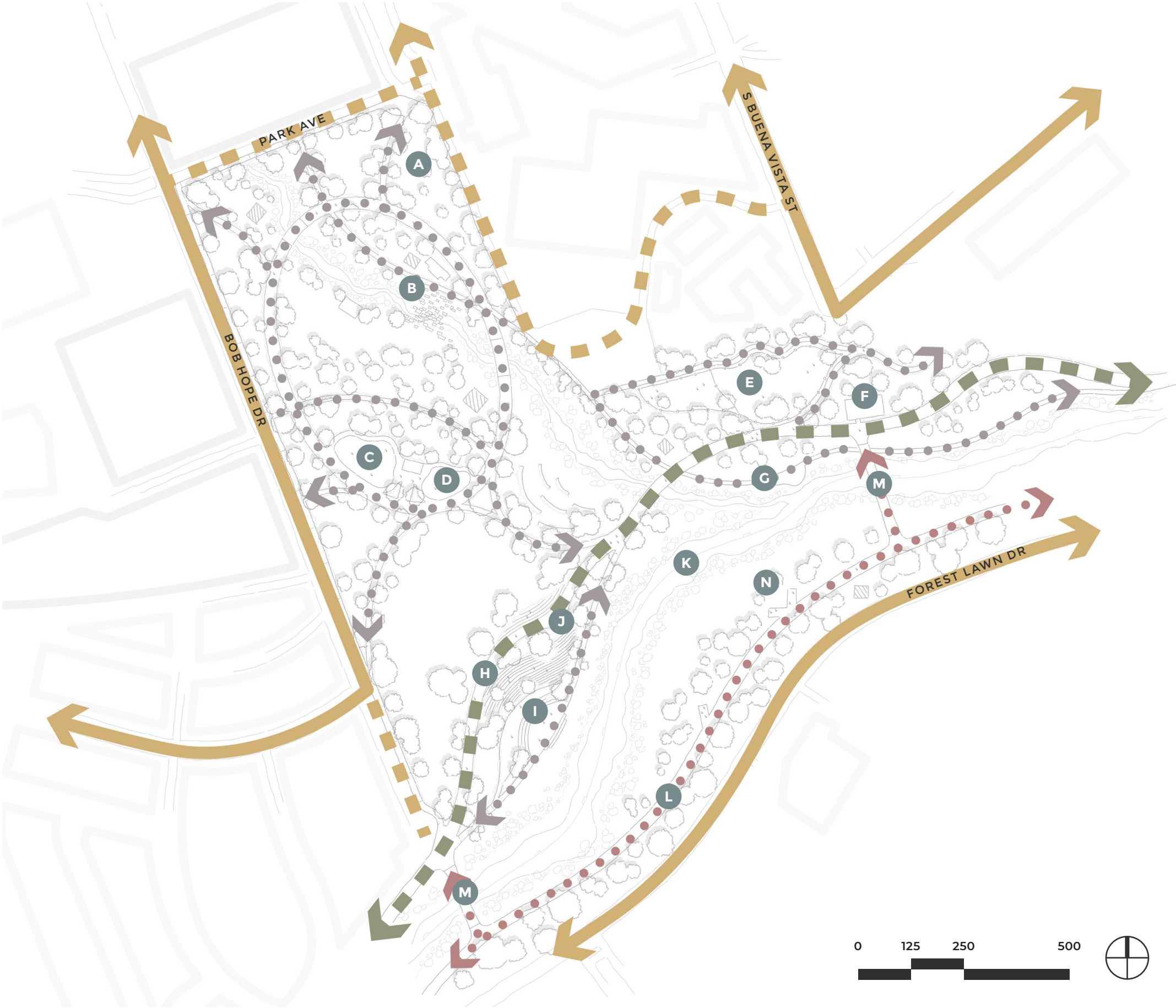
The circulation strategy creates a layered network that reconnects the park to the surrounding city and river corridor. A primary multi-use trail links regional routes, while secondary paths connect key program areas.

Equestrian trails, creek crossings, and pedestrian bridges improve access while minimizing conflicts, transforming the corridor into a continuous recreational landscape.

- Primary Vehicular Circulation
- Secondary Vehicular Circulation
- Pedestrian Path
- Bike Path
- Equestrian Path

LEGENDS

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| A Healing Garden | H Equestrian Path |
| B Creek Crossing | I Amphitheater Seating |
| C Playground | J The Requiem |
| D Picnic | K Trout Passage Channel |
| E Dog park | L Bike Path |
| F Pavilion | M Pedestrian/Bike Bridge |
| G Elevated Walkway | N Viewing Platform |



SITE DESIGN

ENLARGEMENT

This enlargement shows how topography and design shape a key gathering space. Amphitheater terraces create seating and accessible circulation, while riparian planting and a trout channel support habitat and hydrology.

LEGENDS

- A

 Amphitheater Seating
- B

 Equestrian Path
- C

 The Requiem
- D

 ADA Ramp
- E

 River Access
- F

 Trout Passage Channel

KEY MAP

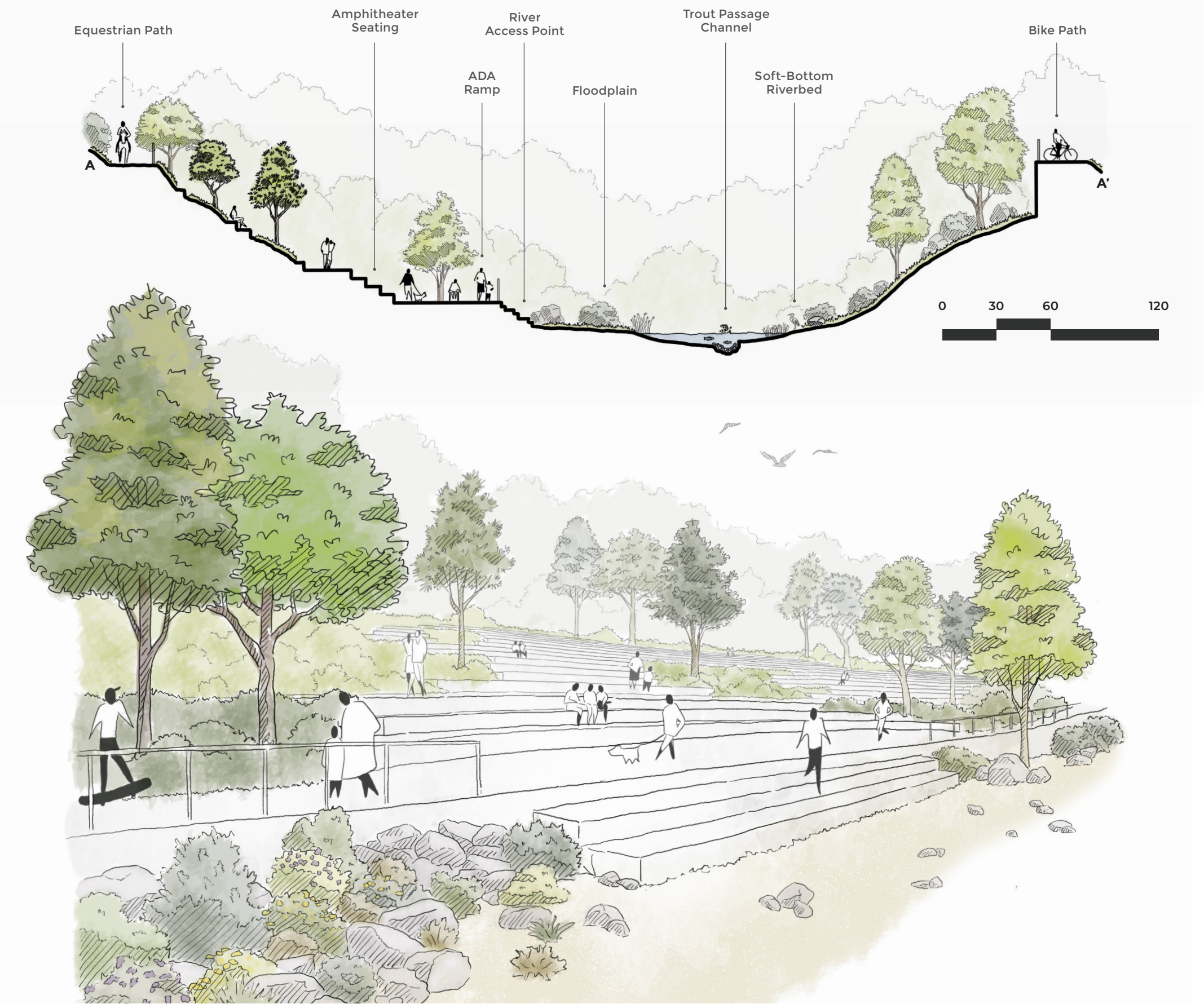
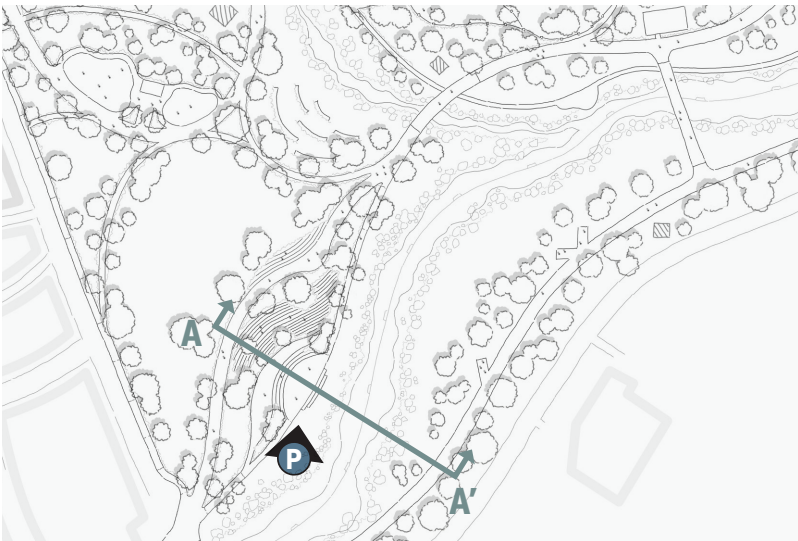


SITE DESIGN

SECTION/ PERSPECTIVE

This section and perspective reveals the layered relationship between topography, circulation, and river ecology within the redesigned park. Terraced amphitheater steps create a gradual transition from the upland park to the river edge, providing seating, viewpoints, and flood-resilient access to the water. Riparian vegetation and stabilized banks restore habitat while shaping the river corridor, and a network of multi-use paths accommodates pedestrians, cyclists, and equestrians along the landscape.

KEY MAP



SITE DESIGN

ENLARGEMENT

The LA River is widened and naturalized, replacing concrete with permeable banks that support infiltration and riparian habitat.

The park's creek flows freely into the river, where a confluence viewing platform invites visitors to experience a restored piece of the watershed.

LEGENDS

- A

 Dog Park
- B

 Equestrian Path
- C

 Native riparian habitat
- D

 Soft-bottom riverbed
- E

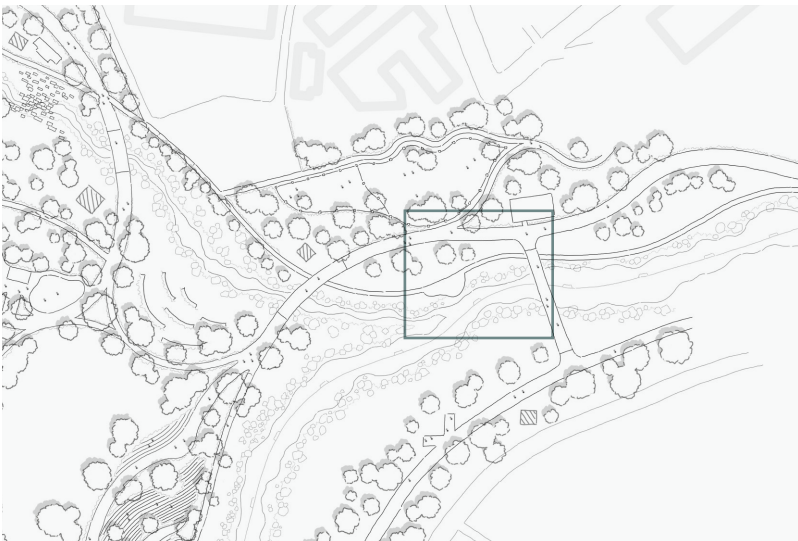
 Pedestrian bridge
- F

 Creek confluence
- G

 Confluence viewing platform
- H

 Floodplain boardwalk

KEY MAP



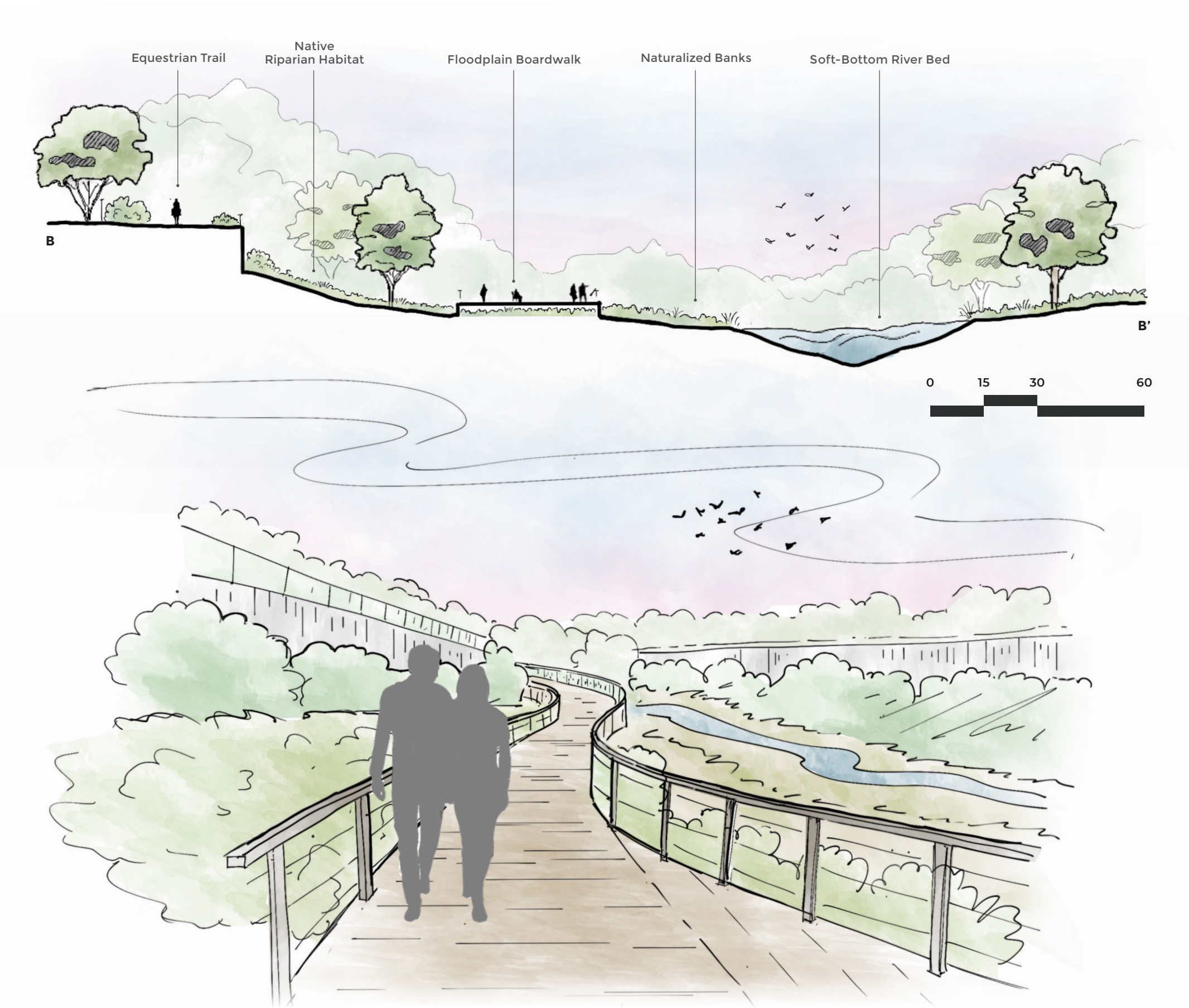
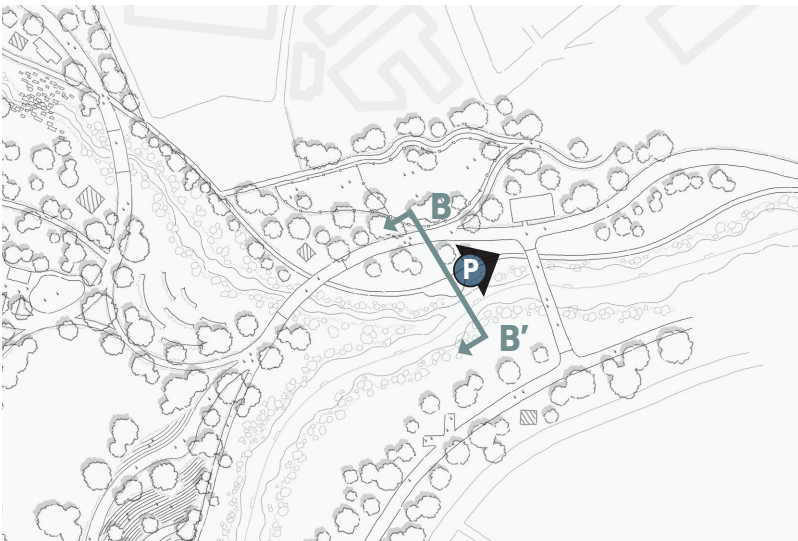
SITE DESIGN

SECTION/
PERSPECTIVE

A raised boardwalk along the river’s edge allows visitors to engage with reclaimed floodplain areas when water levels are low. Visitors can experience how it feels to meander through a restored riparian corridor – while still maintaining protections for both humans and wildlife.

While it was necessary to retain a concrete channel wall to some degree so as not to negatively impact the channel’s flood control capacity, the wall is not as tall or as prominent after restoring some of the river’s gently sloping banks and adding additional buffer plantings.

KEY MAP



SITE DESIGN

ENLARGEMENT

Reclaimed stepping boulders, repurposed from the decommissioned 134 Freeway, encourage playful engagement with Little Tujunga Wash and support material reuse.

A stage pavilion anchors the creek edge, creating a gathering space that overlooks the riparian corridor for performances, learning, and informal use.

LEGENDS

- A

Riparian Ecosystem
- B

Naturalized Creek
- C

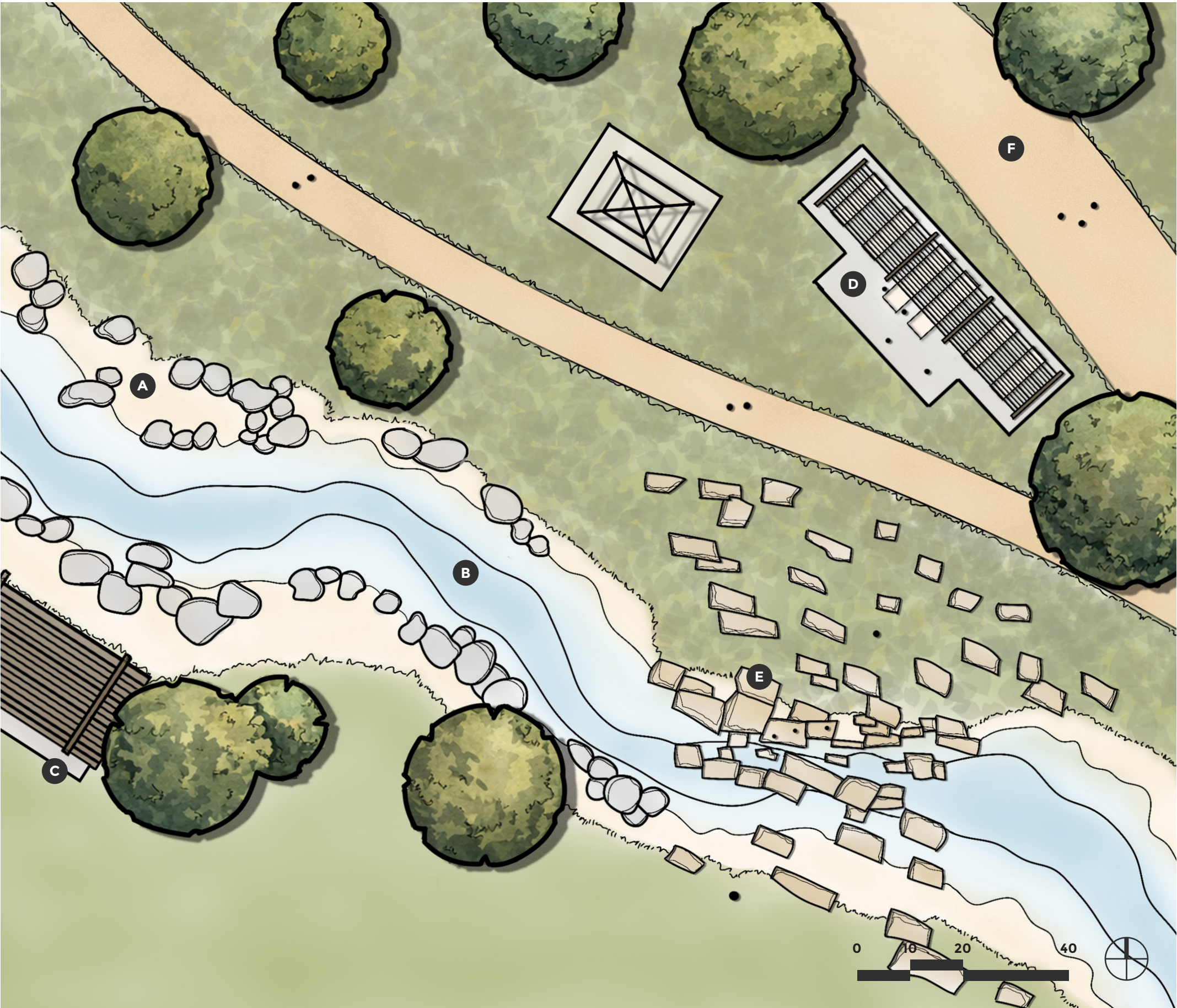
Stage Pavilion
- D

Outdoor Classroom
- E

Stepping Boulders
- F

Loop Trail

KEY MAP



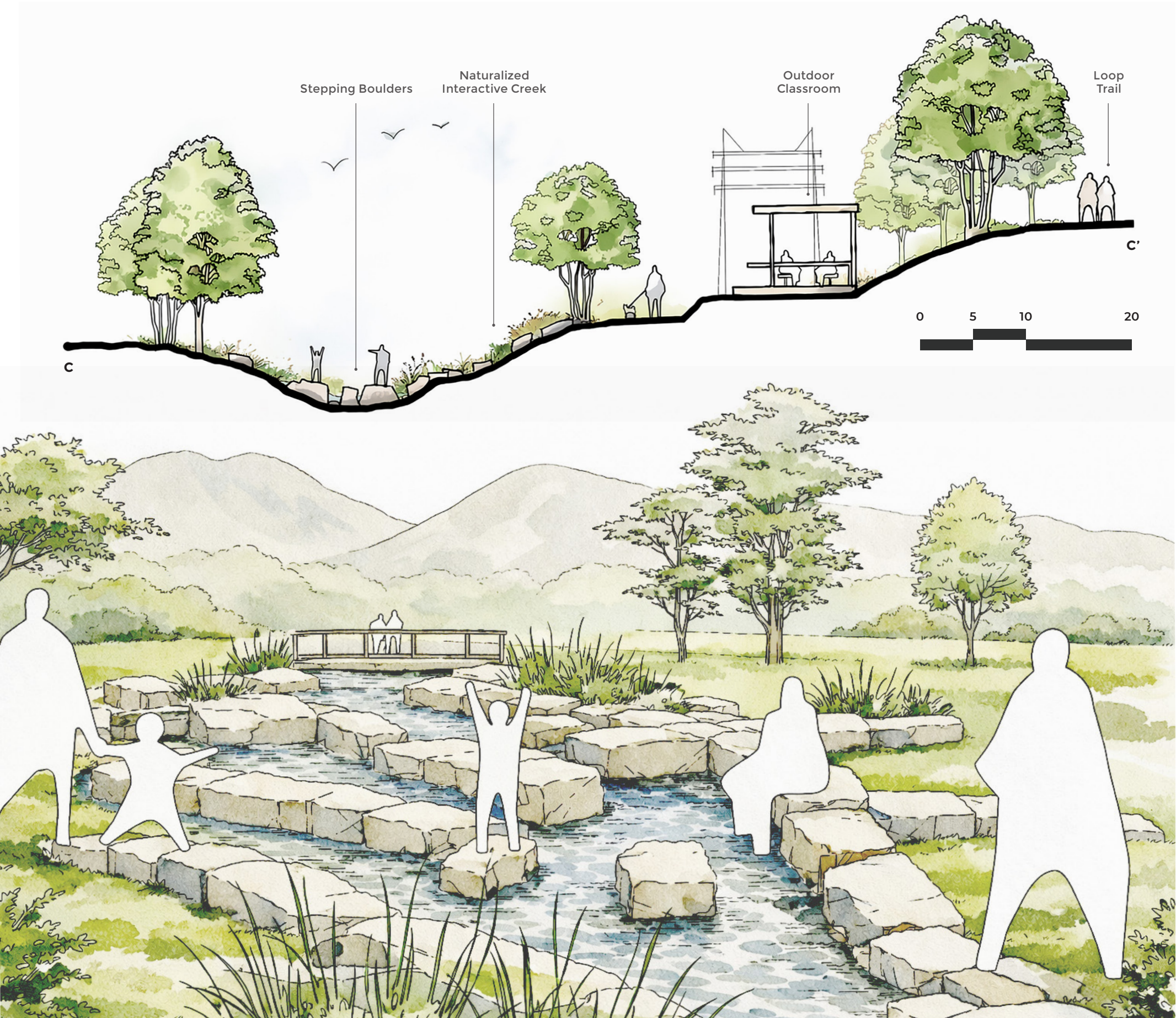
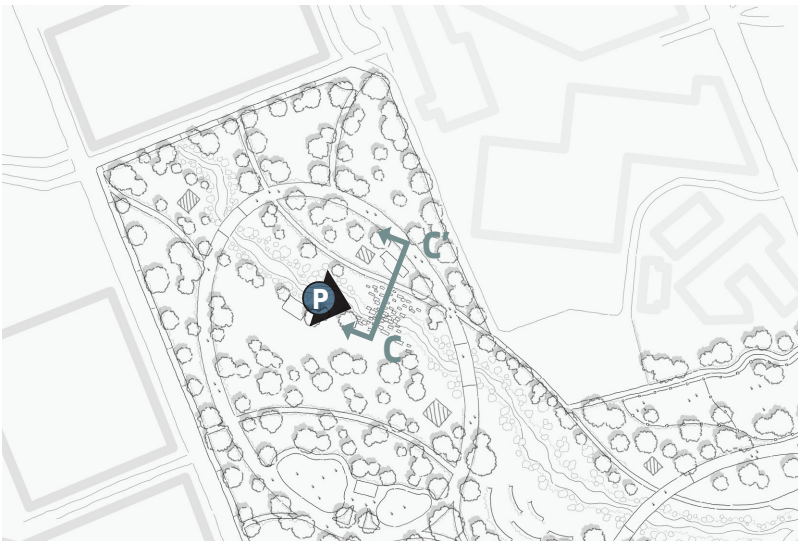
SITE DESIGN

SECTION/
PERSPECTIVE

Elevated outdoor classroom and loop trail frame the stream, supporting education, passive recreation, and a visual connection to the restored ecosystem.

Naturalized stream corridor integrates riparian planting, stepped boulder crossings, and gentle grading to create an accessible, interactive landscape.

KEY MAP



SITE DESIGN

PLANT PALETTE

The planting strategy reestablishes native plant communities that respond to the hydrologic gradients of the Los Angeles River corridor. Riparian woodland species stabilize stream edges and provide structural habitat along the waterway. Seasonal wet meadow planting occupies floodplain terraces and stormwater zones, supporting filtration and seasonal flooding. Upland native grassland communities create pollinator habitat and drought-tolerant meadow landscapes, reinforcing ecological resilience while enhancing the park's visual and seasonal character.

RIPARIAN WOODLAND (tolerant of periodic flooding & stream edges)



Salix lasiolepis
Arroyo Willow



Platanus racemosa
Western Sycamore



Alnus rhombifolia
White Alder



Rubus ursinus
California Blackberry

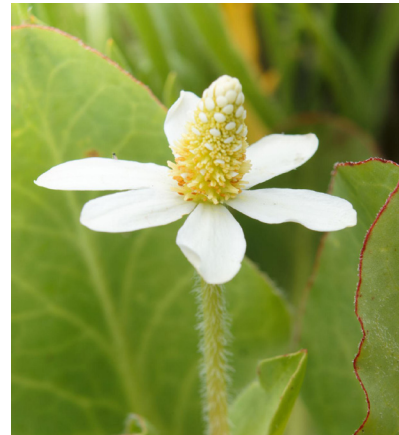


Sambucus canadensis
Black Elderberry

SEASONAL WET MEADOW (seasonally wet soils, floodplain terraces, stormwater edges)



Juncus patens
Common Rush



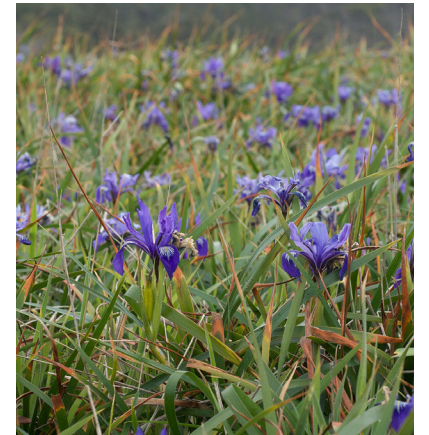
Anemopsis californica
Yerba Mansa



Muhlenbergia rigens
Deergrass



Solidago velutina
Goldenrod



Iris douglasiana
Douglas Iris

NATIVE GRASSLAND (upland pollinator & native meadow habitat)



Stipa pulchra
Purple Needlegrass



Eschscholzia californica
California Poppy



Achillea millefolium
Yarrow



Eriogonum fasciculatum
California Buckwheat



Salvia mellifera
Black Sage

