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Tuesday, DEC 18, 2007

Tidying up the creek

By GENE C. JOHNSON JR., Staff Writer 29.NOV.07

Thanks to a grant awarded this month, Compton prepares to rehabilitate a section of the “dump site” that is Compton Creek.

COMPTON — With the aid of a \$610,000 grant, city workers will soon begin rehabilitating an elementary school-adjacent plot of land along the Compton Creek.

The project is the latest in a joint effort by the Compton Unified School District and the City Council to clean up Compton Creek and the areas surrounding it. In this case, it involves about three acres near Washington Elementary School.

“We’re just waiting for the money to be placed in our hands and then we’ll get started immediately,” said Councilwoman Yvonne Arceneaux. “[The location] has become really barren. It’s a desert-like area right now. It was once used as a play area, but now it’s horrible there — but it’s going to be beautiful.”

The rehabilitation project will feature an outdoor meeting area/classroom, trail amenities, native plants and trees, interpretive signs and storm water quality improvements, said Ken Frederick, a project analyst with the Mountains Recreation Conservation Authority (MRCA), a state joint powers agency with the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.

Funding was provided through the Los Angeles Parkways Grant Program, a part of the Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000.

Construction should begin within the next four to six months. The overall projected cost for the outdoor classroom and other amenities is \$836,000.

The difference, Frederick said, will be covered through Proposition A funds that have been allocated to the MRCA to rehabilitate the Los Angeles River and its tributaries.

While the project is still in the preliminary planning stages, community meetings will soon be held to ascertain the needs of both the school community and the community at large, Frederick added.

Running diagonally through the center of the city, the 8.5 mile-long Compton Creek is a 42.1 square mile sub-watershed of the Los Angeles River, and is considered a major tributary. Washington Elementary is one of several schools located along the waterway.

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“I’ve been on the council now for more than 16 years and the first day I took office I realized [this] was a project I needed to work on. It was actually a dump site,” said Arceneaux. “My house ... is on the creek. I can almost look outside my front door at it. I knew that was something that we needed to improve in our community ... it’s a beautiful area.”

Arceneaux said city officials were surprised to receive the full amount of the grant. “It was a competitive grant — and other cities were competing for the money. When they [state officials] came out they were impressed by our master plan for the Compton Creek that we have developed for the city of Compton,” she said. “Of course we will have the opportunity to file again next year. So we’re anticipating even more money coming in for other schools.”

The Compton Creek Master Plan was completed by Mia Lehrer and Associates, an urban design firm, detailing improvements along the creek which include the planting of vegetation, bike trails, outdoor classrooms and cul-de-sac parks. The plan was completed in July 2006.

“The [improvements] are going to enhance the creek and it’s going to be a beautiful place for our students and community,” Arceneaux added. “The last step to this project is to get all of the stakeholders involved and we’re going to have some community outreach meetings — we’ll involve the community in this as well. It’s going to be a beautiful, beautiful project when it’s finished.”

- Photo by Gary McCarthy

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