EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bimini Slough Ecology Park

executive summary

Before extensive settlement and urbanization, Ballona Creek was a meandering perennial stream, lined with dense vegetation that met the Pacific Ocean in a broad expanse of tidal lagoons, salt marshes, and wetlands. Numerous tributary streams supplied the creek with stormwater runoff, with perennial springs and marshes at some locations. The Ballona Creek Watershed supported a diverse range of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems and was home to several villages of indigenous residents.

Ballona Creek

Today, Ballona Creek drains an area of approximately 130 square miles, including most of the City of Los Angeles west of downtown (and generally south of Mulholland Drive), the cities of Beverly Hills, Culver City, West Hollywood, portions of the cities of Santa Monica and Inglewood and portions of the Hollywood Hills and the Santa Monica Mountains (refer to Figure 1). With more than 1.6 million residents, the Ballona Creek Watershed is highly urbanized, with most drainage courses lined with concrete and approximately 85 percent of the land area occupied by homes, businesses, roads, and similar uses. As a result, surface and groundwater quality has been degraded, natural hydrologic functions modified, plant and wildlife diversity and movement reduced, wildlife decreased, and water quality tainted in Ballona Creek and Santa Monica Bay. While flood protection has traditionally been a high priority within the watershed, efforts to improve water quality, habitat, and open space have not been coordinated across jurisdictions and therefore have been less successful.

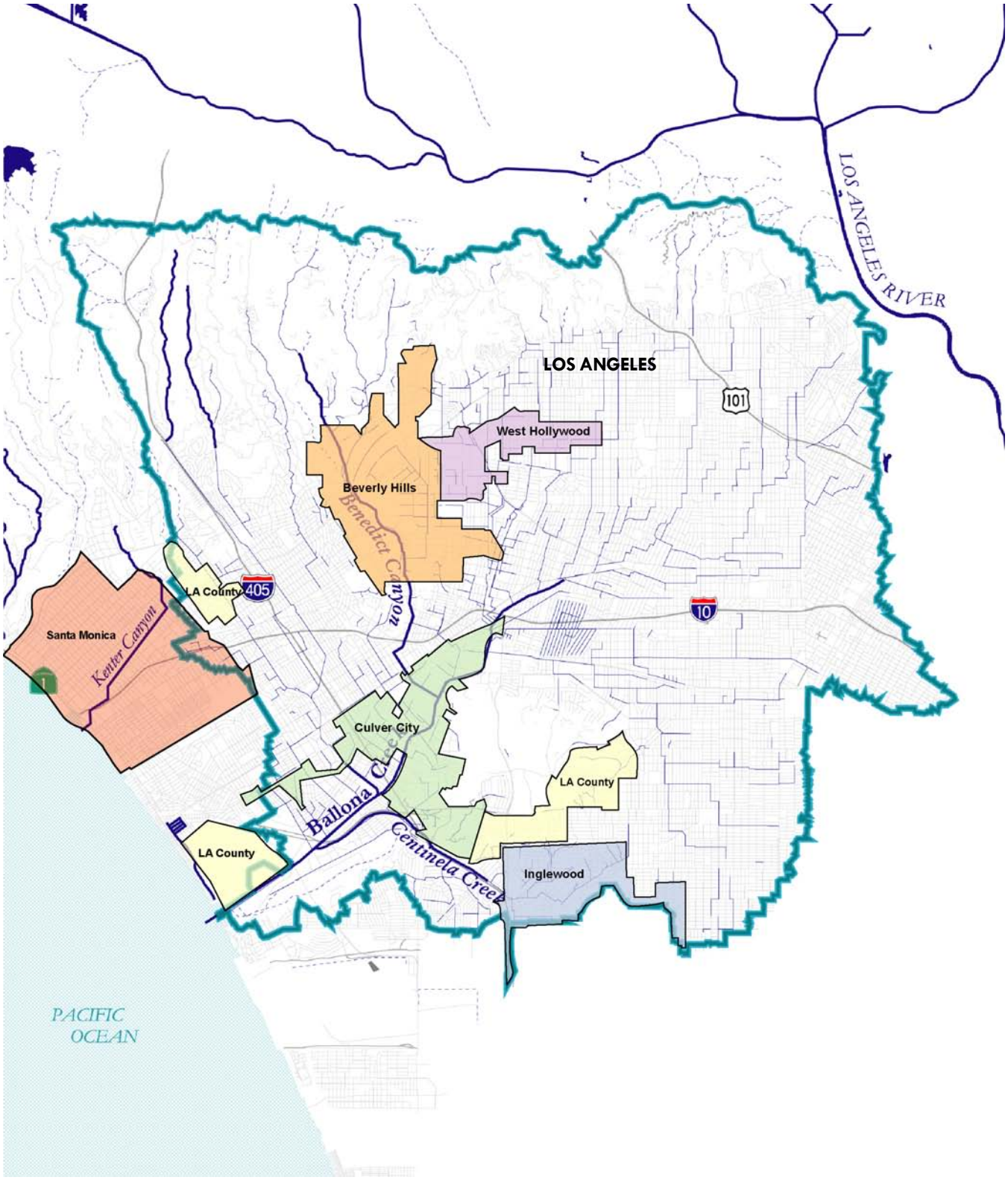


Figure 1 **Cities within the Watershed**

SOURCE: EIP Associates, 2004

Bimini Slough Ecology Park

In recent years, various community organizations, cities, and agencies have worked to transform Ballona Creek into a valued community asset, preserve and enhance open space in the Hollywood and Baldwin Hills, and to restore the Ballona Wetlands. To build upon and support these efforts and achieve more specific water quality improvements, this watershed plan has been developed to encourage broader participation in activities to improve and expand open space, optimize water resources, preserve and restore habitat, and create an integrated network of trails and bike paths throughout the watershed.

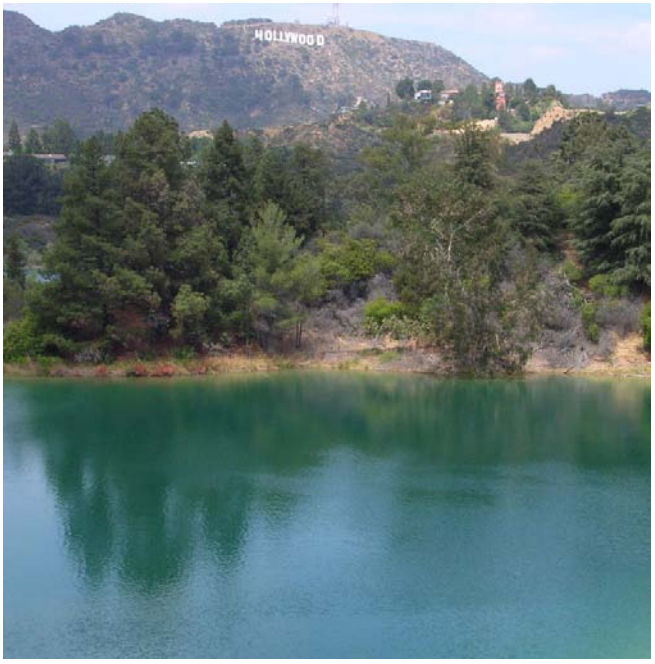
The watershed planning area includes the coastal interface zone and surface waters of Marina del Rey, the Oxford Flood Control Basin, the Venice Canals, Ballona Lagoon, and Del Rey Lagoon, as water quality in these areas are interrelated.

A. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Ballona Creek Watershed Task Force (BCWTF), a stakeholder group convened by the County of Los Angeles, the City of Los Angeles, the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission, and Ballona Creek Renaissance, articulated a broad goal for this Plan:

> [Set] forth pollution control and habitat restoration actions to achieve ecological health.

In response to perceived environmental, recreational and economic problems in the Ballona Creek Watershed, the BCWTF also adopted the following more detailed goals.



Hollywood Reservoir

WATER

- Improve Quality of Surface Water and Groundwater
- Maintain Flood Protection
- Restore Hydrologic Function to Ballona Creek and Tributaries where feasible
- Optimize Water Resources to Reduce Dependence on Imported Water
- Improve Aquatic, Estuarine and Riparian Habitat Quality and Quantity

View from Baldwin Hills

Kenneth Hahn Recreation Area

LAND

- Improve Habitat Quality, Quantity and Connectivity
- Improve Access to Open Space and Recreation for All Communities
- Improve Pedestrian and Bicycle Access and Safety
- Practice Stewardship of the Landscape

PLANNING

- Coordinate Watershed Planning Across Jurisdictions and Boundaries
- Implement Multi-Objective Planning and Projects
- Use Science as a Basis for Planning
- Involve the Public through Outreach and Education

- Utilize the Plan in an Ongoing Management Process
- Realize the Potential of Watershed Restoration for Sustainable Economic Development

For each goal, the Plan also identifies objectives that would lead to the realization of that specific goal and contribute to the overarching goal of restoring the ecological health of the Ballona Creek Watershed.

View from Baldwin Hills

B. METHODS AND MECHANISMS

To achieve the goals and objectives articulated by the BCWTF, the Plan also identifies a series of actions for each objective that, if implemented by individuals, neighborhoods, organizations, cities and local, state and federal agencies, will address the problems identified by the Task Force and improve the ecological health of the watershed. Although this Plan addresses a wide range of goals, those actions related to improving water quality and habitat are identified as priority actions because the plan was funded primarily by a Proposition 13 grant.

To improve the quality of stormwater runoff and dry-weather flows (or urban runoff), the Plan identifies a range of Best Management Practices (BMPs), which includes storage, infiltration, filtration, conveyance, practices, and outreach. Compliance with stormwater permits (under the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System [NDPES] program) will require implementation of BMPs by cities, agencies and other entities. Compliance with Total Maximum Daily Loads, pollution limits established to meet applicable water quality standards, may also involve implementation of BMPs.

Porous pavement, Plummer Park

The Plan includes an inventory of pending and proposed projects in the watershed that were identified by cities, agencies, groups and individuals, including projects in the lower Ballona Creek area, and projects that address water quality, restoration of native habitat and vegetation, transportation and trail improvements, site retrofit, and urban stream restoration. For the Plan, eight conceptual demonstration projects were developed to incorporate a range of features to improve water quality, reduce impervious areas, introduce native vegetation, including

Ballona Creek Estuary

improvement of existing parks (Mar Vista Recreation Center, Ladera County Park, and Lafayette Park), and schools (Culver City High School, Middle School, and Farragut Elementary School, and University High Retrofit/Kuruvungna Springs), development of a new trail and bike path from the Baldwin Hills to Ballona Creek Trail (along a Los Angeles Department of Water and Power easement), enhancement of the Oxford Flood Control Basin (next to Marina del Rey), and modification of a residential street to reduce paved areas and retain stormwater runoff.

C. COMMUNITY-BASED MONITORING

Several cities, agencies, and stakeholder groups currently collect data on water quality, and to a lesser extent, on habitat, in the Watershed. To consolidate and coordinate these efforts the Plan includes a Community-Based Monitoring Program that documents existing monitoring efforts, identifies data gaps or redundancies in these existing monitoring programs, and recommends a program to track progress towards the water quality and habitat goals and objectives adopted by the BCWTF.

D. OPPORTUNITIES FOR STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND FUNDING

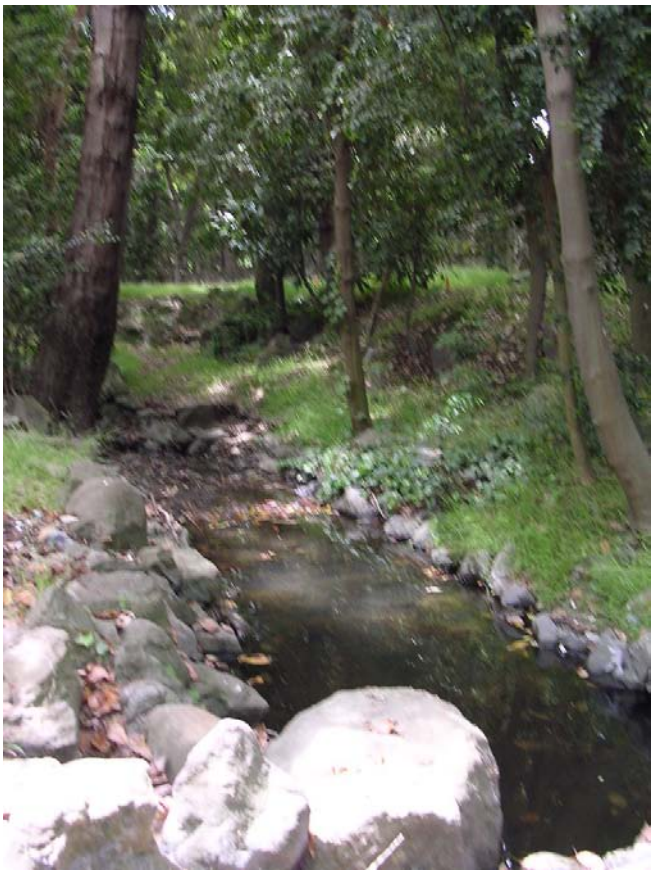
To make progress towards all of the goals identified by the BCWTF, individuals, neighborhoods, community organizations, school districts, colleges and universities, cities, and local, state and federal agencies all have roles and responsibilities that may be employed in implementation of the Plan. To foster stakeholder commitment towards watershed restoration, the Plan includes a list of potential actions for specific agencies, entities, and organizations.

University High School

To restore ecological health to the watershed, substantial financial resources will be needed. The Plan identifies various public and private funding sources and evaluates the eligibility of the demonstration projects for state funding from Propositions 40 and 50.

E. NEXT STEPS

To achieve the vision of the future for the watershed and restore its ecological health will require the combined efforts of federal, state, and regional agencies, local municipalities, nonprofit groups, community-based organizations, and individuals. Decades may pass before substantial progress is realized and appreciated, but initial key steps can be taken to demonstrate the feasibility of the actions proposed in this plan, build support for watershed restoration, and illustrate the power of coordinated stakeholder action to make positive changes. These actions include: establish, implement and monitor Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), complete a prioritization project of BMPs, reauthorize the NDPES stormwater runoff permit for Los Angeles County, complete the Lower Ballona Creek Ecological Restoration Study (by the Army Corps of Engineers), develop landscape guidelines specific to the Ballona Creek watershed, develop additional GIS based information on the watershed's characteristics, develop and implement a plan to restore the Ballona Wetlands, implement the Baldwin Hills Park Master Plan and the Santa Monica Mountains Comprehensive Plan, continue meetings of the Ballona Creek Watershed Task Force, implement recommendations of the Ballona Creek and Trail Focused Special Study, and continue meetings of the Lower Ballona Creek Interagency Task Force (to identify options for joint management of natural resources in the lower Ballona Creek area).



Stone Canyon Creek