

Land Restoration and Reclamation

Opening of Greenway Trail along LA River in Studio City celebrated



Local residents attend the opening of part of the Zev Yaroslavsky L.A. River Greenway on Saturday, a four-mile stretch through Studio City whose last half-mile has just been completed. The new greenway trail is now lined with more than 3,000 native trees and shrubs. June 3, 2017. (Gene Blevins/LA DailyNews/SCNG)

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POSTED: 06/03/17, 5:26 PM PDT |

STUDIO CITY >> Helen Giroux stopped — and stared stunned on Saturday — at a hand-crafted iron gate whose twisted forms looked like waters swirling in the nearby Los Angeles River.

Beyond it, a hillside path leading down to a new Zev Yaroslavsky L.A. River Greenway Trail was lined with yellow daisies, orange poppies and enough blooming jimsonweed to form a lavender bugle corps.

“What a beautiful gate,” exclaimed Giroux, a Studio City resident of 33 years. “The grandeur of open space is epitomized in that gate.”

The half-mile greenway was dedicated Saturday during a garden trail ceremony that drew more than 100 Los Angeles city and county officials, river advocates, Native Americans and local residents.

They hailed a Greenway Trail that provided a missing link for a 4-mile walk from Whitsett Avenue to Coldwater Canyon on the north bank of the L.A. River.

They hailed a garden paradise of more than 3,000 California sycamores, walnuts and shrubs and flowers, to become a future home to birds, butterflies and insects.

They praised a long-ago vision to boost river water quality by capturing stormwater runoff through a system of bioswales.

And they credited former county Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky for putting up the vision — and \$460,000 of its \$2.4 million tab.

“Once you have passed through the magical mountain-river gate, your world will never be the same,” said Esther Feldman, president of Community Conservation Solutions, a nonprofit advocate and developer of the garden path.

“This project is about the land and river — about bringing life and breath back from when this river was not encased in concrete.”

Funding for the greenway largely comes from mitigation money from widening the 405 Freeway, with grants from the county, Caltrans, the California Natural Resource Agency, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, and local donors.

Construction on the walking trail north of busy Ventura Boulevard and south of Weddington Golf & Tennis began in October 2015 after two official groundbreaking ceremonies. A city bike path on the south bank of the river is expected to open later this year.

The city and county, in cooperation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, has now completed hike-and-bike trails along 12 miles of the 32 miles of L.A. River through Los Angeles, city officials said. The remaining 20 miles are either under construction or on the drawing boards.

A 51-mile L.A. River greenway is planned that would better connect neighborhoods and cities from its headwaters in Canoga Park to the sea.

“This has transformed a once-barren stretch of the river into a beautiful recreation area,” said Col. Kirk Gibbs, commander of the Army Corps of Engineers’ L.A. District, which has jurisdiction over much of the L.A. River.



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“This is just spectacular,” said Rep. Brad Sherman, D-Sherman Oaks. “Those of you in good shape will be able to walk the 51 miles. Those of us who are more contemplative can read a book — or obstruction of justice statutes.”

Further up the bank from the meandering concrete box channel river was the 16-acre Weddington golf and tennis complex — the largest undeveloped and unprotected property along the L.A. River, and center of a controversial plan to build 200 apartments or condominiums. Many have long hoped to turn it into a riverside park.

Joe Edmiston, executive director of the Santa Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, took a swipe at the proposed development above the Greenway Trail.

“Think wonderful pathway for the condo development,” Edmiston said, to rousing applause from the crowd. He urged residents to notify city officials “to what devastation the condo development in this community would be.”

In the neighborhood outside the new Greenway Trail gate, yard signs said “No condos at Weddington Golf & Tennis.”

Former Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky said the L.A. River restoration and stormwater capture is being done for the next generation. For kids like his grandson Gabriel.

“It’s all about the Gabriels,” he said, looking out toward his grandson. “It’s the next generation and beyond that we’ve done all these things.

“None of this happens unless people push us ... to do good things.”