Dominguez and Compton Creek Watersheds
Nevada
California
Pacific Ocean
Area of Interest
Los Angeles
Vernon
Huntington Park
South Gate
Culver City
Ballona
Creek
Inglewood
COMPTON CREEK WATERSHED
Lynwood
Downey
El Segundo
Hawthorne
Gardena
Compton
Compton Creek
Paramount
Manhattan Beach
Dominguez
Santa Monica Bay
Channel
Los Angeles River
Redondo Beach
DOMINGUEZ WATERSHED
Torrance
Carson
Long Beach
Palos Verdes Estates
Rancho Palos Verdes
Long Beach Harbor
Los Angeles Harbor
San Pedro Bay
10
405
110
710
105
91
N
S
E
W
0
2
4
Miles

Historical Creek & Wetlands Map of the lower Los Angeles River and environs

We think of our basin as a desert, but for thousands of years, rainfall from the many mountains that surround us flowed out towards the ocean. Much of that water soaked into the earth, creating natural reservoirs, or aquifers, that fed springs, wetlands,and streams year round. Other streams and ponds only existed during the rainy season.

The streams also carried a lot of sediment and debris from the mountains. Large boulders, trees, and even wild animals would wash down into the lowlands during large storms. These streams and rivers, heavy with sediments, tended to spread and braid wildly. For the average person, these streams seemed unpredictable and frightening.

As we dried up our aquifers, we became even less aware of our waters and their behavior. Farmers tapped rivers, springs and artesian wells. As the water levels of the aquifers dropped, the roots of trees and shrubs were no longer able to remain moist. Creeks dried up, or became active only during rainstorms. The environment here very quickly became even drier than it had been before.

With urban development, we needed to pave the land, making it impossible for water to infiltrate into the aquifers. Pipes were laid in many creekbeds and buried. Larger creeks and rivers were dug out and channelized in concrete.

While these changes protected property and enabled us to develop more land, it also had many side-effects. Today flood waters rush out to the ocean at higher velocities than before. Our beaches are starved for sand, which have to be rebuilt regularly. With our creeks gone, people don't see the connection between the trash on the street and the pollution at the beach. And about 90% of our wetland and riparian habitat is lost, devastating local animal and plant populations. Today many children grow up in the Los Angeles area thinking they have no creeks to play in, no frogs to catch.

We can change this by restoring the natural processes that make creeks happen: by naturalizing concrete channels, digging up creeks buried in pipes, and by unpaving as much land as possible. Land along creeks would be needed to allow for natural flooding and groundwater infiltration. It may mean changing the way we live, but wouldn't it be worth it?

This map will help you find the wetland and riparian resources that were in the neighborhoods that you know.

Former Creek, now buried or drained

Sandy wash

Historical wetland

Pond, lagoon, or vernal pool

Existing creek

Concrete channel

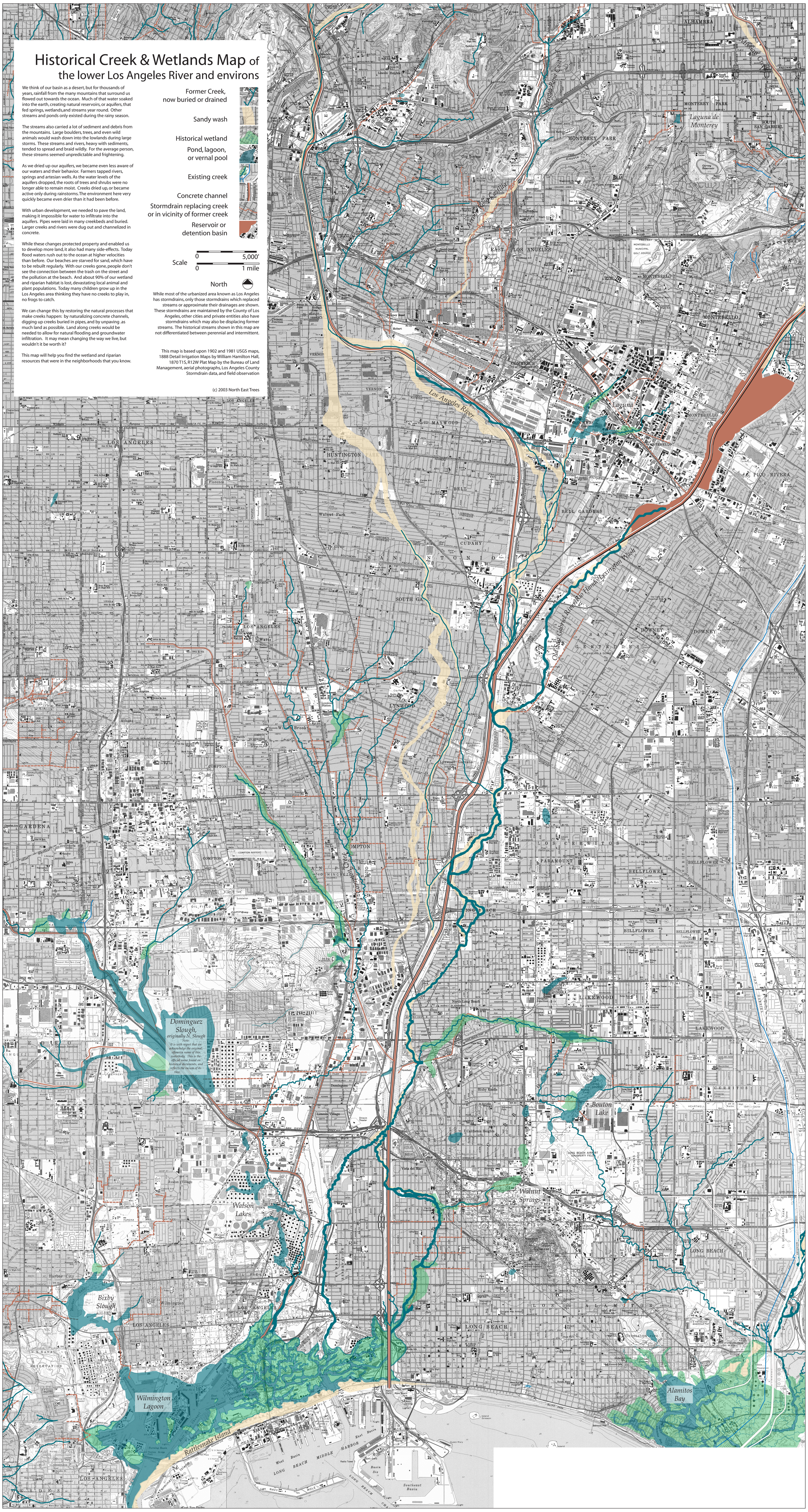
Stormdrain replacing creek or in vicinity of former creek

Reservoir or detention basin

Scale 0 5,000' / 0 1 mile

North

While most of the urbanized area known as Los Angeles has stormdrains, only those stormdrains which replaced streams or approximate their drainages are shown. These stormdrains are maintained by the County of Los Angeles, other cities and private entities also have stormdrains which may also be displacing former streams. The historical streams shown in this map are not differentiated between perennial and intermittent.

This map is based upon 1902 and 1981 USGS maps, 1888 Detail Irrigation Maps by William Hamilton Hall, 1870 T1S, R12W Plat Map by the Bureau of Land Management, aerial photographs, Los Angeles County Stormdrain data, and field observation

(c) 2003 North East Trees