

TIJUANA RIVER VALLEY ENHANCEMENT PLAN



TIJUANA RIVER VALLEY, COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

STATE OF CALIFORNIA

An enhancement plan prepared by staff of the Coastal Conservancy
April 1998

"The valley is five miles from the sea, sheltered from the rigors of fog or spray, secure from the excessive humidity at night, and open to the ocean's gentlest breeze, being neither damp nor warm, but uncommonly serene and mild in atmosphere. In fact, no better climate nor superior spot can be found on earth for invalids or persons of delicate physique..."

from "The Success of Successes - Tia Juana"
real estate advertisement, circa 1900

Cover photo: Dairy Mart Ponds in winter, Tijuana River Valley
Photo by Jim King

Tijuana River Valley Enhancement Plan

Introduction

The Tijuana River Valley lies in southernmost San Diego County, west of Interstate 5 and just north of the international border (Exhibit 1). Local interests have worked for the past twenty years to protect and preserve the rural character and open space values of the river valley. The protection of the saltmarsh and estuary at the rivermouth in the early 1980's with the dedication of a National Wildlife Refuge and a National Estuarine Sanctuary gave rise to the effort to create a regional park for the upstream areas of the valley. Nearly ten years after the initiative began to create the Tijuana River Valley Regional Park, this enhancement plan identifies key steps for advancing the conservation effort.

The enhancement plan area corresponds to the Tijuana River Valley Regional Park Focused Planning Area approved by the San Diego County Board of Supervisors for land acquisition purposes in June 1989 (Exhibit 2). Since the Focused Planning Area was established, over 884 acres of land have been brought into public ownership.

The Tijuana River enters the United States in the community of San Ysidro, approximately twelve miles south of downtown San Diego. The river valley extends in a generally westward direction from the San Ysidro border crossing to the Tijuana Estuary and the Pacific Ocean, a distance of approximately 5 miles. Newly constructed subdivisions line the north side of the valley from San Ysidro and Nestor in the east to Imperial Beach to the west. Mexican residential communities west of downtown Tijuana overlook the valley and adjacent upland areas from south of the border.

The Tijuana River Valley is primarily rural in character consisting of flood plain agricultural parcels, pasture and publicly-owned open space paralleling the river. Habitat for several listed species are found within the valley and adjacent uplands; most notable is the riparian and hillside habitat for two small birds, least Bell's vireo and California gnatcatcher. Several commercial stables board and rent horses and serve as the center of a regional equestrian community. Designated horse trails traverse the valley and extend through the National Estuarine Research Reserve to the ocean beach. An upland area known as the Border Highlands lies adjacent to the river valley to the south and within the planning area. These highlands include significant remnant areas of coastal sage scrub and coastal chaparral habitats with distinct riparian habitats found in the north-trending canyons.

Lands within the enhancement planning area have been substantially transformed primarily by agricultural and rural residential uses and by sand and gravel mining. However, significant remnant areas of natural habitats remain, both in the floodplain area of the valley and in the adjacent Border Highlands. Lands identified in the enhancement plan are needed to improve resource management by

relocating improperly located improvements and restoring contiguous areas of habitat adequate to sustain representative species. The City of San Diego Multiple Species Conservation Program identifies the Tijuana River Valley area generally as one of the Core Biological Areas for preservation and enhancement.

Property and Habitat Description

The properties identified for acquisition are privately-owned parcels containing riparian habitat, coastal sage scrub and coastal chaparral habitat or lands identified for restoration of these habitat types. The properties, their current or potential habitat value and their acreage are listed below.

The identified properties are currently either riparian habitat, upland coastal sage shrub/chaparral habitat or rural residential and agricultural lands suitable for habitat restoration. The two prominent habitat types intended for protection and restoration through this enhancement plan project are described below.

Riparian habitats:

Riparian vegetation and their associated habitats develop along the margins of freshwater streams and lakes, where soils are damp and sandy. In the Tijuana River Valley riparian habitats are dominated by willow species. Low scrubby vegetation including baccharis (*baccharis glutinosa*), mulefat and lowgrowing sandbar willow (*salix hindsiana*) are common to disturbed areas of the floodplain adjacent to the river. Vegetation grows in stature with distance from disturbance trending toward a higher, more dense and multi-layered canopy farther from the dynamic river and throughout much of its floodplain. Several willow species and cottonwoods (*Populus fremontii*) are the most common riparian species found beyond the areas of frequent disturbance. Numerous invasive exotics including Salt Cedar (*Tamarix* spp.) Coyote Tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*) and Giant Reed (*Arundo donax*) are common to Tijuana River Valley riparian areas.

The value of riparian habitat to wildlife is high. It supports more species of birds than any other habitat type in California. Birds use the valley's riparian vegetation for nesting, for food and for cover. The community is notable for a high diversity of other species as well, particularly insects. Part of the reason for the high diversity of the riparian community lies in its structural complexity wherein many species find a niche in their efforts to locate food, nest sites and cover.

Few riparian plant species are listed as rare or endangered; rather the entire riparian community is endangered as a result of human activities. The Tijuana River Valley is particularly important to a small endangered bird, least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*) a summer migrant that nests in dense stands of herbaceous and shrubby plants, typically dense willow or mulefat. The Tijuana River Valley is a very important nesting area for the vireo as their populations have declined elsewhere in California.

Coastal sage scrub:

The coastal sage scrub and coastal chaparral plant communities include such plants as California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), Lemonadeberry (*Rhus integrifolia*), Bladderpod (*Cleome isomeris*), Flattopped Buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*) and Whipple's Yucca (*Yucca whipplei*). The Border Highlands area is known to contain a number of plants at the northern limits of their range, making the area especially valuable for botanical interests. Several species found farther south in Baja California or at isolated locations either in the Channel Islands or elsewhere to the north have been found in the Border Highlands, most notably the Catalina Currant (*Ribes viburnifolium*), Shaw's Agave (*Agave shawii*), and Serpentine cactus (*Bergerocactus emoryi*). The coastal sage scrub habitat type is also home to the recently federally-listed threatened Coastal California gnatcatcher (*Poliioptila californica*).

The fragmentation and endangerment of the coastal sage scrub habitat has led to the City of San Diego's innovative Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP), one of a number of subregional plans which make up San Diego County's portion of the State of California's Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) program.

TIJUANA RIVER VALLEY REGIONAL PARK ACQUISITION LIST

PARCEL #	ACREAGE	Habitat note *
663-030-05(part)	88.00	coastal sage/chaparral
663-010-29	46.12	agricultural/riparian
663-010-30	2.00	agricultural/riparian
662-020-12	39.83	riparian
664-010-54	139.37	riparian
665-010-01	35.20	riparian
664-010-47	35.43	riparian
637-010-04	10.00	agriculture/riparian
637-010-05	10.00	agriculture/riparian
636-021-10	9.80	residential/riparian
636-021-11	9.80	agriculture/riparian
636-021-07	10.00	agriculture/riparian
636-021-06	5.00	agricultural/riparian
636-020-59	10.00	residential/riparian
636-010-10	.70	riparian

* properties denoted as agriculture/riparian or residential/riparian are parcels with a high potential for riparian restoration due to their soils, floodplain location and proximity to existing areas of high habitat value.

Enhancement Plan Goals

The goals of the Tijuana River Valley Enhancement Plan are to preserve and improve coastal resources and sensitive habitat and protected species lands and to provide, where appropriate, opportunities for public access. To accomplish these goals, the

acquisition, and where needed and feasible, the restoration and enhancement of habitat lands within the Tijuana River Valley requires the following steps:

A. Public Acquisition

The public acquisition of currently privately-owned parcels within the Tijuana River Valley is required to preserve significant coastal resources and coastal open space and to provide public access. Completion of acquisition projects will protect both plant and wildlife habitat while providing greatly needed open space and public access opportunities for residents and visitors to San Diego County.

B. Management Plan

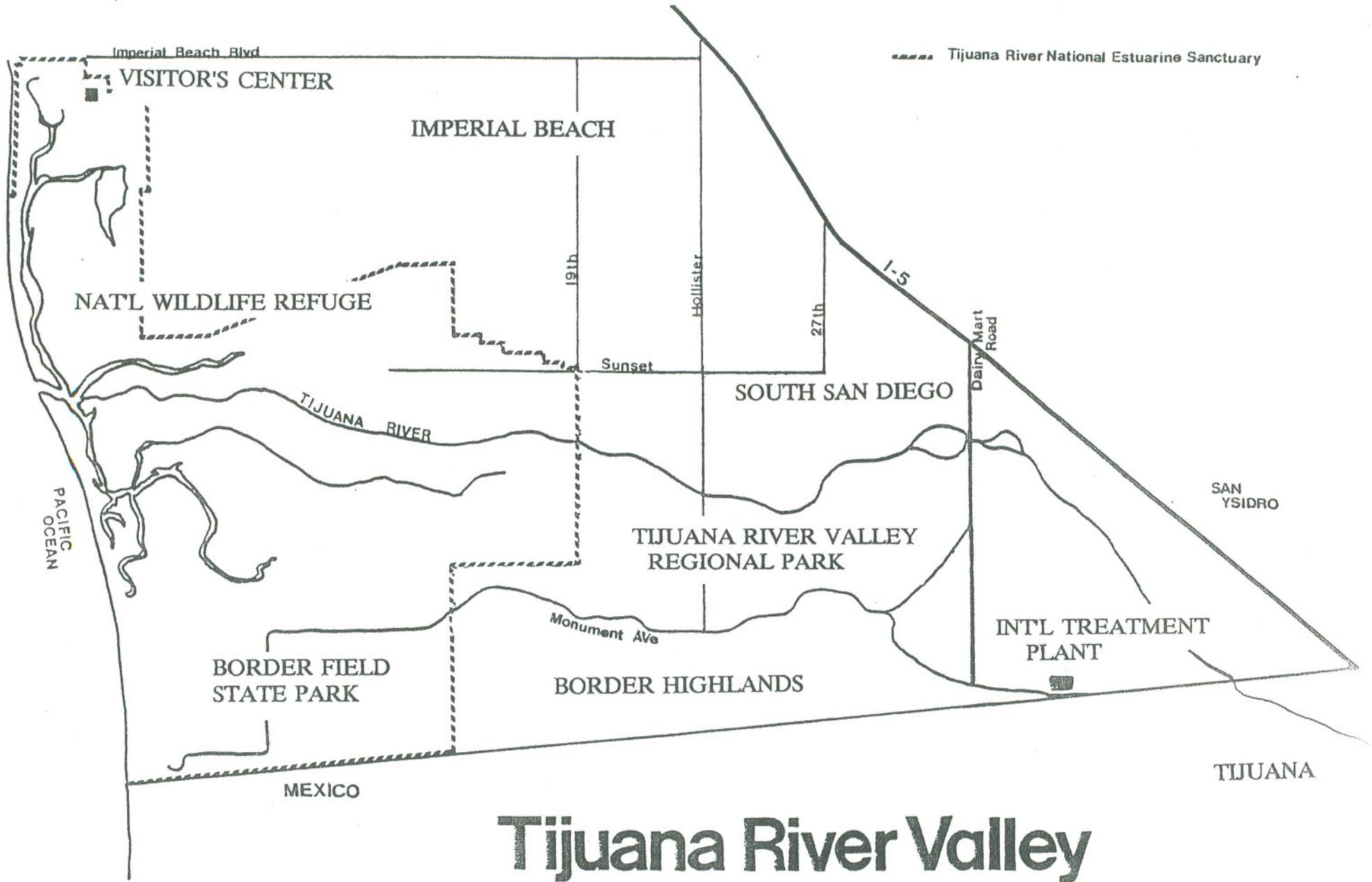
A management plan will be prepared by the County of San Diego, in consultation with local, state and federal resource agencies and interested local residents. The management plan shall be reviewed and approved by the Executive Officer of the Coastal Conservancy.

The plan shall provide specific management measures to address the various habitat and species requirements of the property acquired, including the specific habitat needs of the rare and endangered plants and animals identified in the plan.

The management plan shall address in detail public access and recreational needs and shall identify the public access improvements that can be made consistent with the protection of sensitive resources. Where necessary, public access shall be managed to protect the coastal resources in the plan area.

The management plan shall be developed within three years of the transfer of the property.

EXHIBIT 1
Exhibit 2: Tijuana River Valley Enhancement Plan



Parcels approved for acquisition – Tijuana River Valley

Approved with Enhancement Plan - April 1998:

APN# 663-030-05 (*Calmat, Phase I*)
663-010-29 (Yamamoto)
663-010-30 (Yamamoto)
663-020-12 (City of SD) (County assessor Corrected ID: 663-010-39)
664-010-54 (*Shelton Trust*)
665-010-01 (Hanson Aggregates)
664-010-47 (Hanson Aggregates)
637-010-04 (Buncom)
637-010-05 (Gonzales)
636-021-10 (Coral)
636-021-11 (Patterson)
636-021-07 (Banuelos)
636-021-06 (Banuelos)
636-020-59 (Skibbe)
636-010-10 (Skibbe)

Approved by Board action May 1999:

APN# 664-011-03 (Nelson & Sloan)
664-010-04 (Nelson & Sloan) (County assessor corrected ID: 664-011-04)
664-010-05 (Nelson & Sloan) (County assessor corrected ID: 664-011-05)
664-010-21(Calmat, Phase II)
664-010-26(Calmat)
664-010-40(Calmat)
664-010-45(Calmat)
664-010-48(Calmat)
664-010-49(Calmat)
664-010-50(Calmat)
664-010-53(Calmat)

Approved by Board action August 2002:

APN# 632-030-14 (Seacoast Dr.)
632-040-15 (Seacoast Dr.)
637-010-09 (Roberts/Scripps Group/Ferbee)
637-010-10 (Roberts/Scripps Group/Ferbee)
637-010-11 (Roberts/Scripps Group/Ferbee)
637-010-67 (Roberts/Scripps Group/Ferbee)
662-020-09 (Horwin)
663-030-04 (Nelson & Sloan)
664-011-05 (Nelson & Sloan)
664-020-02 (Nelson & Sloan)

Italics = purchased parcels