

RESTORATIVE DESIGN OF THE LOS ANGELES RIVER



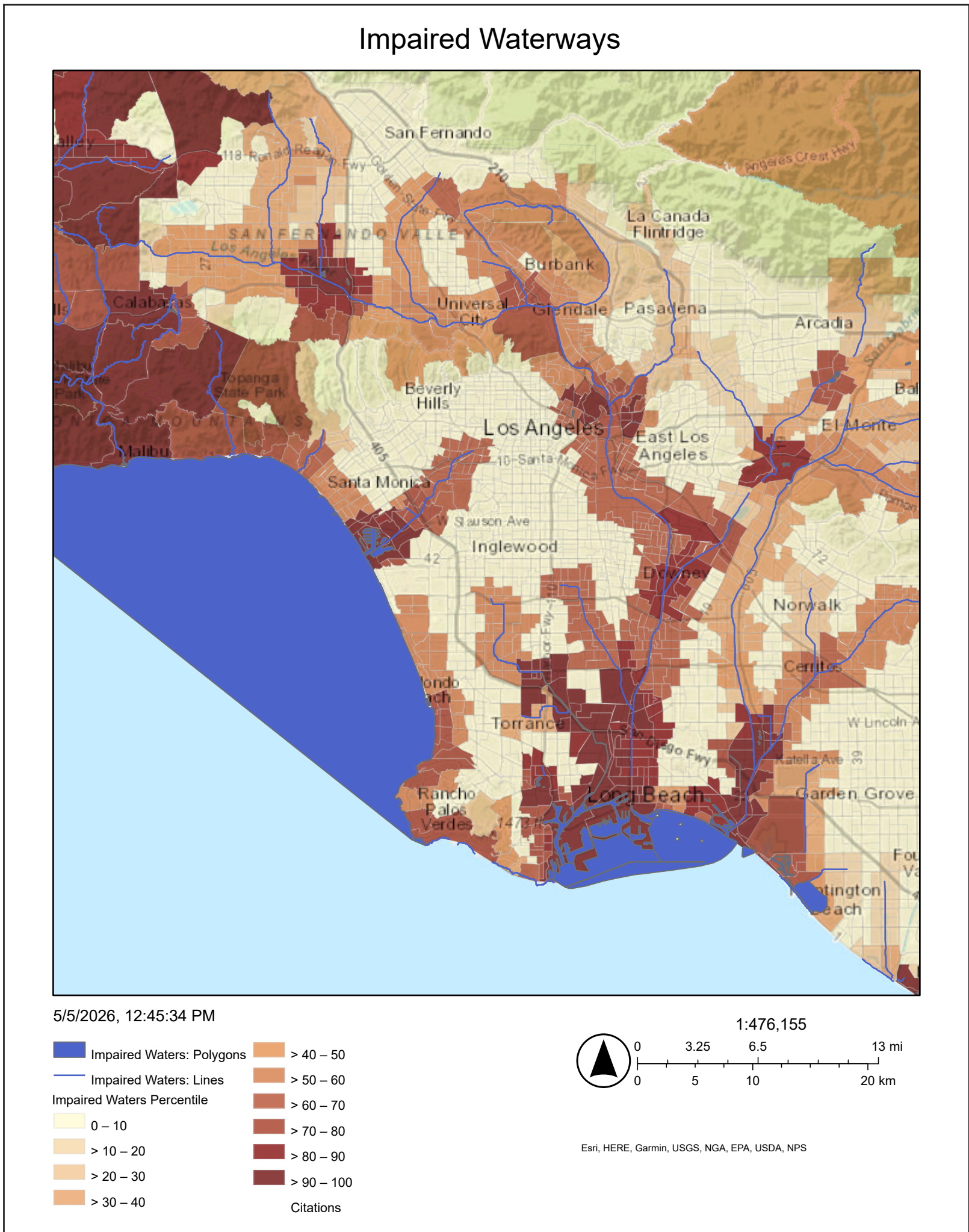
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Spring 2026

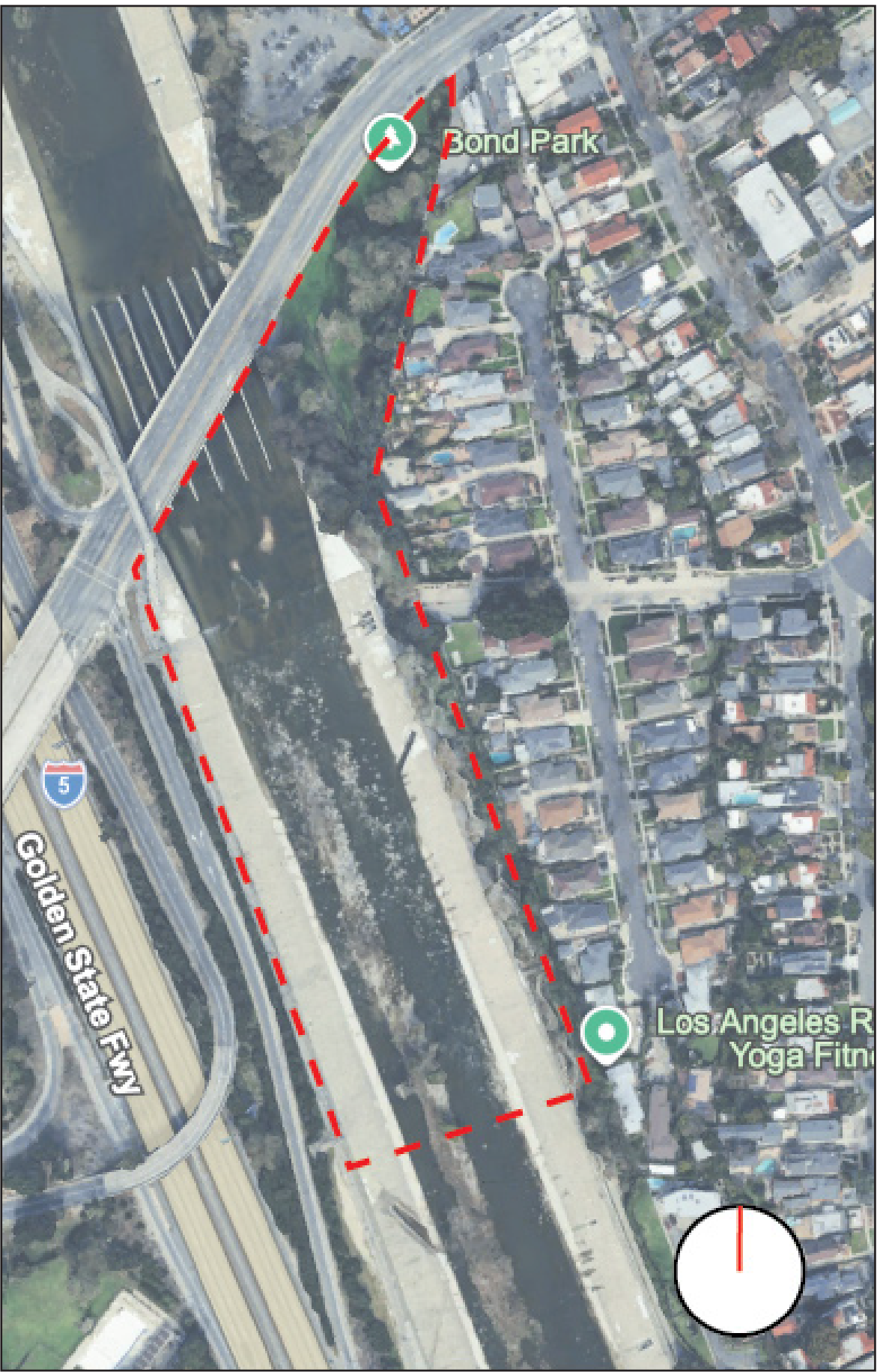
INTRODUCTION



- The Los Angeles County Flood Control District was formed in 1915 and later the large-scale channelization of the LAR in 1938 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (LA River Master Plan, 2025). Currently, 48 miles of the LAR's total 51 mile stretch run through dense heavily urbanized communities with only 11.3 miles consisting of a soft bottom near the northern most portion where vegetation and wildlife is able to grow (LA River Master Plan, 2025).
- CalEnviroScreen 4.0 categorizes the entirety of the LAR and the coastal area it lets out into as impaired waterways (State of California OEHHA, 2026).
- Current leading efforts for LAR restoration is a non-prescriptive framework created by the County of Los Angeles in 1996 and revised in 2022 which is the LA River Masterplan.
- Restoration elements like urban greening incorporate once lost vegetative elements into cities, offer greenspace, create comfortable microclimates, benefit air quality, and manage water (Barrisu & Urbano, 2020). Urban green spaces can offer far more than just environmental benefits. These spaces offer community identity, a sense of belonging, an outlet for cultural expression, and a space for community gathering with overall higher measurements of happiness and lower mental distress for people living near accessible green spaces (Jennings et al.,2016; White et al., 2013).

This study utilized Rapid Ethnographic Assesment (REA) to identify what restorative design features invite usage and assist in community building.

STUDY SITES



Bond Park : Los Angeles, CA



Urban Orchard Park : South Gate, CA



Circle Park : South Gate, CA

METHODOLOGY & KEY FINDINGS

REA approach that combined observational and participatory methods to quickly generate actionable insights into user behavior and perception. This method was utilized to replicate the urban design process which is restricted by time and funding.

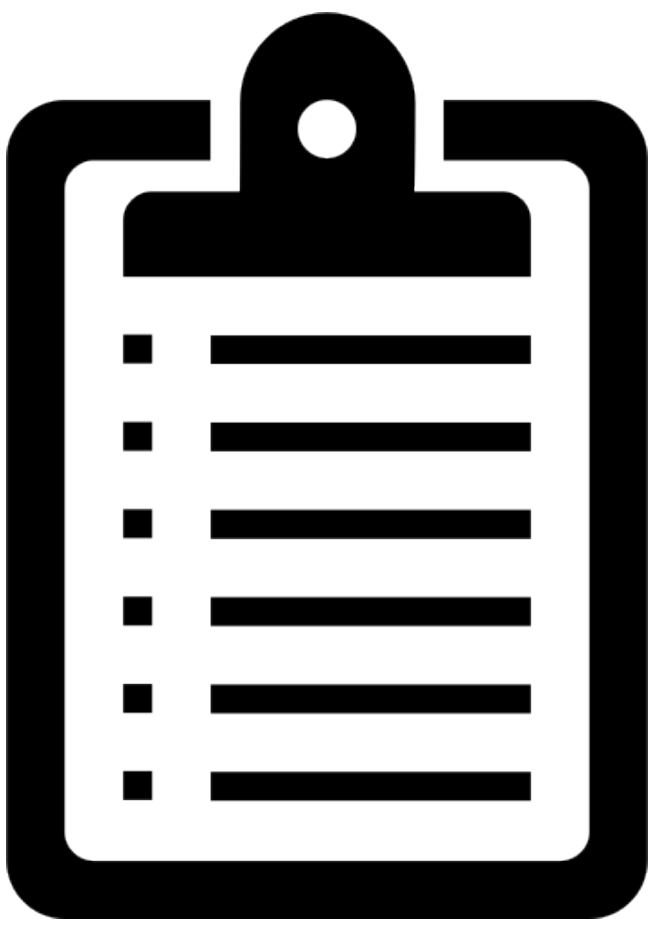
Participant Observation

- Each site was visited after regular work week hours during favorable weather and high visibility during daylight.
- Each visit consisted of full immersion with the site's features, interactions with other visitors, and an interactive walkthrough at each site area over an extended period of time.

Participant Interviews

- A total of 7 interviews were conducted.

- 1)How often do you come here and what do you like to do here?
- 2) What do you like the most about this place and what keeps you coming back?
- 3) Do you talk to or interact with others here and what do you do?
- 4) What would you like to be different here and why?



Observed User Behavior : Definitions

Passive Users	Users that are not directly engaging with the site for an extended period of time but rather in passive transit including but not limited to walking, running, jogging, and biking
Users in group activity	Users engaging in a physical group activity including but not limited to basketball, soccer, baseball, and football
Users in solo activity	Users engaging in a physical solo activity including but not limited to exercise and sports training
Users in leisure engaging	Users present at the site who are socialization while conducting activities including but not limited to sitting, eating, and sight seeing
Users in solo leasures	Users who are not socializing with others who are conducting activities including but not limited to sitting, eating, and sight seeing

Observed User Behavior

	Passive Users	Users in group activity	Users in solo activity	Users in leisure engaging	Users in solo leasure	Total Users
Bond Park	27	0	0	4	1	32
Urban Orchard Park	0	0	0	0	0	0
Circle Park	0	48	14	32	7	101

Interview Results

	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4
Bond Park	- 6-7 days a week	- Openness - Accessibility - Connection to nature	- Frequent interaction - Conversing	- Maintenance - Barbecue Pits
Urban Orchard Park	- N/A	- N/A	- N/A	- N/A
Circle Park	- 2 - 3 days a week	- Openness - Connection to nature - Accessibility - Variety of uses	- Frequent interaction - Conversing - Group sports - Group Exercise	- Dog park - Parking

N/A = Non-applicable as no individuals participated for interviews

- Openness, accessibility and connection to nature were key attributes to returned visits as well as favored features. Sites with these attributes were lively and encouraged heavy interaction amongst users.

- Urban Orchard Park interviews could not be conducted as there was not a single park user in the entire site aside from myself. Although the site contained an office space no local organizations or local government personnel were present and flyers promoting events were over a month passed.

ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Analysis

Physical Elements	Social Elements
- Visibility and accessibility were key elements in site usage and patron frequency - Restorative elements such as greening or storm water management helped the environment but ones that had interactive design features witnessed the most usage	- Consistent social activation at Circle Park specifically via local organization created long term community building through usage and engagement with the site and other visitors



View of Sports Clubs And Bioswale Walk Users At Circle Park

Recommendations

Design	Community
- Site location must be chosen with visibility and accessibility being the leading determining factors - Restorative design must highlight interactive elements such as sensory gardens, community gardens, wetlands, and bioswale pathways - In cases like Urban Orchard Park where sites are physically isolated local entities must create new connective routes and modes	- Volunteering opportunities - Local schools should utilize the interactive elements of sites as educational tools to encourage students in environmental care, make students aware of the site and its location, and nurture long term interest in restoration - Establish community organizations and consistent events for all ages and backgrounds at sites to ensure users have incentive to visit the sites as much as possible - Local governments must be given more involvement opportunities along the LAR

