



Final Report for the San Diego River Park Watch Project

(Grant Agreement #5001771)



September 20, 2013 – September 19, 2015

Report prepared for the San Diego Association of Governments
TransNet Environmental Mitigation Program

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I. Project Overview

The two-year San Diego River Park Watch project (agreement number 5001771) was given notice to proceed on September 21, 2013 and the grant project was completed on September 19, 2015. The grant scope included institutionalization of Park Watch volunteer park patrols along Santee's River Park, invasive non-native plant and trash removal as well as access control and native planting to protect and enhance Santee's River Park. Community engagement and involvement were intrinsic to the success of the project and implemented through stewardship projects such as clean-ups and invasive plant removal events as well as the Park Watch park patrol program. Maintenance and monitoring were performed through the San Diego River Park Foundation's (SDRPF) RiverBlitz surveys in April and October as well as volunteer events and site visits by project staff.

This is the final grant report for the two-year project period.

II. Project Achievements Summarized by Task

Task 1. Project Coordination

The project coordination task included regular communications and with City of Santee staff, meetings with River Park Foundation staff to ensure schedules and goals were being met and further timeline and goal refinement. This grant enabled us to strengthen the relationships between River Park Foundation staff and City Staff, and facilitated achieving the project goals through cooperation with the City in their capacity as land owner/manager, and leveraged \$20,000 in matching time provided by City staff.

Coordination also included community awareness building through coordinated outreach and communications strategy. The communications strategy included a major kick-off event, ongoing media partner relations, development of materials like brochures, mailers, website content, and other materials. Outreach was mainly coordinated as a means of volunteer recruitment through Task 2, although overall strategy was overseen in Task 1.

Planning for acquisition of materials and report preparation were also completed under the project coordination task. Reporting not only included the quarterly reports to SANDAG, but also annual reports to the San Diego River Conservancy regarding invasive removal and reporting to the City of Santee regarding project progress.

Lastly, project data aggregation and maintenance was included in this task.

All matching funds were secured and all grant funds were expended in Task 1.

Summary of Deliverables:

- Press release: releases and news stories have been included in quarterly reports
- Quarterly reports and invoices were submitted on time throughout grant period
- Data files: the final data files are included as an attachment in excel format to this report

Task 2. Volunteer Coordination

This grant allowed us to utilize a half-time Volunteer Coordinator to focus on a volunteer recruitment, training, recognition and retention strategy to support the goals of the project.

The goals for volunteer engagement were to recruit at least 500 one-time volunteers each year of the grant, ten new leaders to support our efforts in Santee and 15 new Park Watch volunteers. All three goals were successfully exceeded, leveraging in-kind match of volunteer time valued at \$94,260.09.

Volunteer Coordination Summary:

We laid the groundwork for achieving these numbers in year one by hiring new staff and creating a recruitment timeline of milestones and metrics. This strategy included making use of different online recruitment tools including: Volunteer Match, Just Serv, the City of Santee's online calendar and the San Diego River Park Foundation website. We also identified and began designing a number of outreach materials that would increase our ability to effectively recruit volunteers. Over the course of the project, we were able to produce Park Watch volunteer t-shirts, River Recue and Clean and Green leader t-shirts, a River Trail map specific to Santee, event banners and an interpretive tri-fold informational display which successfully supported our volunteer recruitment efforts at the many outreach events we attended.

Friends of Santee's River Park: We use this terminology to encompass all volunteers and supporters who engage in our efforts to protect and enhance the San Diego River Park and Trail system in Santee. Over the course of the grant, we have had a lot of success developing new relationships with both businesses and community members as means of creating new connections with the community. Through this grant project, we have surpassed our goals to engage new leaders, have strengthened relationships with a number of already existing volunteer leaders and connected with a number of community groups and organizations. We believe this contributes to the sustainability of our future efforts in Santee, because volunteers



Volunteer recruitment at outreach events in Santee.

grow our capacity to advance these projects without excessive commitment of staff time. We have built positive connections with the City of Santee, the Community Oriented Policing Committee (COMPOC), Santee Solutions Coalition, the East County Magazine, the San Diego Christian College and the Santee Chamber of Commerce.

Core Volunteers: These volunteers have received training from River Park Foundation staff and volunteer on a regular basis, some for a variety of different activities. Some also lead other volunteers at events. Because these volunteers can work independently and/or in a leadership role, they are essential for growing our capacity and sustainability in the community. We exceeded our goal of growing this core team by training 48 new Park Watch volunteers (23 of whom have stayed on long term) and 15 new leaders.

To summarize, through this project, we have recruited 38 new core volunteers through Park Watch, invasive removal and clean-up related volunteer opportunities. In addition, we have strengthened relationships with another 17 volunteers who we already had worked with, but are now playing a stronger role at events in Santee's River Park.

Volunteer Recognition: Finally, we revamped our volunteer recognition strategy. This process included the purchase of t-shirts that our volunteers earn after attending three events of the same type, as well as water bottles that are distributed to our volunteers who give 150 hours of service in one year. This grant also allowed us to leverage other funds which permitted us to purchase pins recognizing both 50 and 75 hours of service, and hats with the SDRPF logo on it for our volunteers who earn 50 hours.



Core volunteers gathered around our truck, filled with trash removed from the riverbed.

Summary of Accomplishments

- Engaged 1,298 one-time volunteers (exceeded goal of 1,000)
- Trained and engaged 23 new Park Watch volunteers (exceeded goal of 15)
- Recruited 15 new core leaders who actively volunteer to support other field events (exceeded goal of 10)
- We were able to achieve our volunteer recruitment goals through the following strategy:
 - 2 media events
 - 12 Park Watch trainings

- 9 RiverBlitz volunteer leader trainings
- 5 outreach trainings
- Many presentations to community groups including Rotary, Kiwanis, the Santee Solutions Coalition and other service groups
- Outreach presence at 49 festivals, events and/or service projects
- Development and implementation of a volunteer retention and recognition strategy
- Design, printing and distribution of new outreach materials

All grant funds were expended in Task 2.

Summary of Deliverables:

- Volunteer event logs have been submitted quarterly with invoices
- Training records have been submitted quarterly with invoices
- Park Watch volunteer sheets have been submitted quarterly with invoices

Task 3. Invasive and Debris Removal

Degradation of River habitat can take many forms, two of which were targeted for remedy in this task, invasive non-native plant and trash removal. The grant was successful in removing more invasive non-native plants than originally targeted by leveraging volunteer group resources to complete more work. While a 30-acre arson fire in April of 2013 was destructive to the project area, one benefit is that it did provide us better access to treat invasive non-native plants while the area and invasive plant biomass was reduced.

Debris Removal:

Clean-up activities during the quarter focused on targeting new trash sites identified in the April 2015 RiverBlitz. 36 trash sites were cleaned and over 4 tons of trash was removed within this three month period. Events included scouting and site visits with volunteers, one

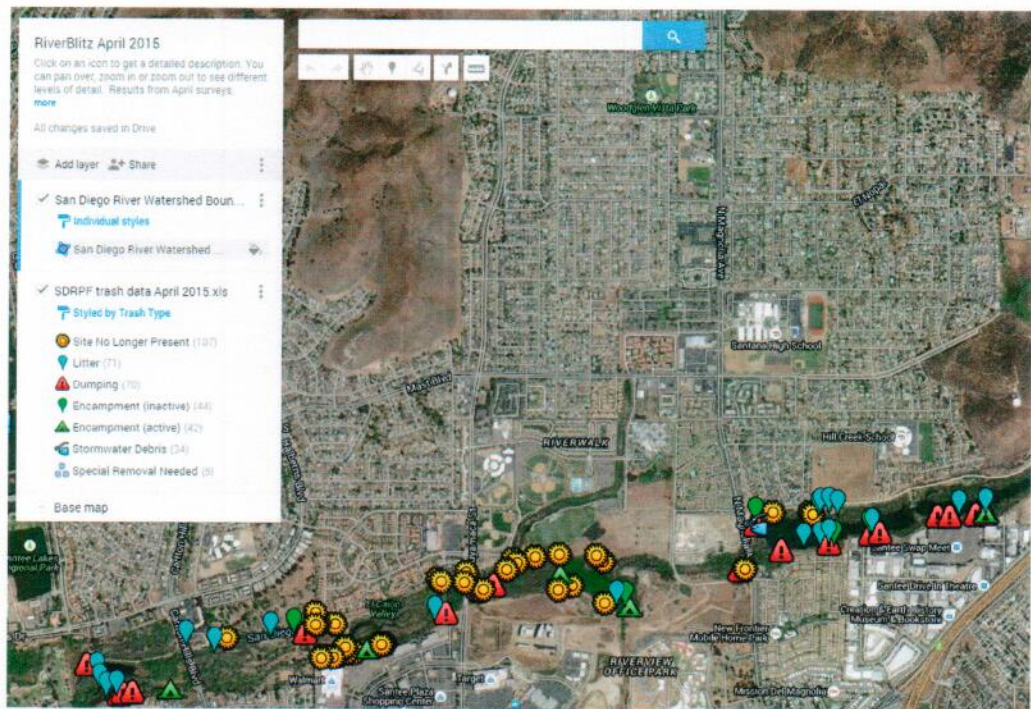


Figure 1. Trash removed during this final quarter are marked with a yellow sunshine.

large scale weekend clean-up, and five smaller weekday clean-ups or site visits. The clean-ups required partnership and coordination with the County of San Diego, the Sheriff's department, the City of Santee and local business such as Waste Management for dumpster and hauling donation. See Figure 1 for a map of sites removed this quarter.

Invasive Removal: Invasive work in the final quarter focused on retreatment and maintenance. Additional pepper trees and three Canary Island date palms were also removed. Three Mexican fan palms that were treated in year one, then burned during the fire and were particularly unsightly removed to improve the River Park and trail aesthetics.

In the final quarter, we purchased t-shirts for our clean-up regular volunteers. Our original purchase did not include enough small and medium shirts, so we needed additional in the smaller sizes. In addition, we purchased a banner to replace our clean-up banner that had been lost. We also purchased items that were needed for final retreatment and invasive maintenance events. The purpose of the smaller herbicide sprayer was to allow for easier access to small confined areas of invasive regrowth.

Summary of Accomplishments:

- Overall, $\frac{3}{4}$ acre of invasive plants removed. Please see Figure 2 below for a map of invasive plants removed. Removed plants includes:
 - 32 Pampas grass, 63 Mexican Fan Palms including seedlings, 3 eucalyptus, several areas of iceplant, 6,104 square feet of tamarisk, 4,636 square feet of arundo, 5 Canary Island Date Palms, and 10,804 square feet of castor bean
- Overall through this project, 44,775.5 pounds of trash removed (exceeded goal of removing 2 tons annually)

All grant funds were expended in Task 3.

Summary of Deliverables:

- Maps of sites removed submitted periodically with invoices, final map on previous page and links to online maps are submitted with this report
- Report of pounds of trash removed included in Summary of Accomplishments above
- Photo documentation of treated plants is included on the following page



Figure 2. Invasive Removal Photo Documentation page

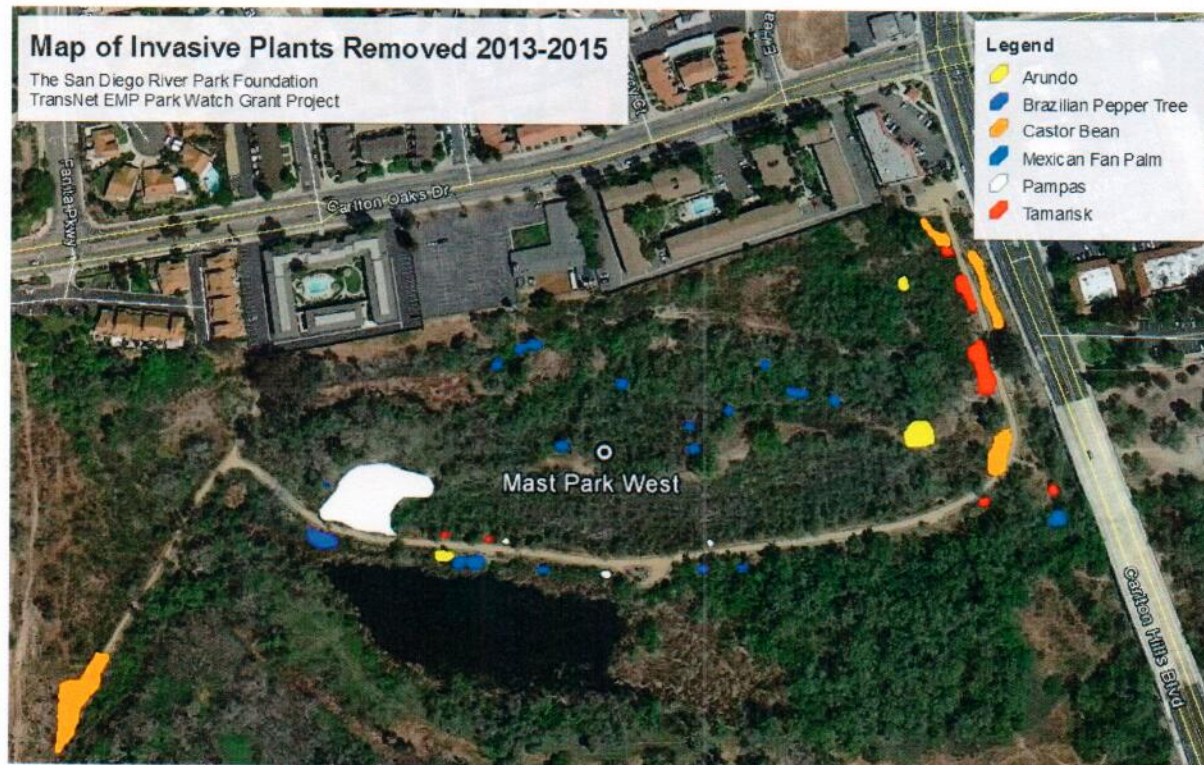
Top: Photo documentation of pre-project tamarisk, plus removal of regrowth after treatment.

Middle: Removed castor bean after volunteer work party.

Bottom: Photo documentation of Mexican fan palms pre-project, after fire, and after removal.



Figure 3. Map of Invasive Plants Removed



Task 4. Access Control, Maintenance and Monitoring

This task included Park Watch volunteer patrols, RiverBlitz surveys, access control maintenance and project monitoring.

Park Watch Monitoring: Through this grant project, we developed a program to increase regular community steward presence along the River Park and Trail in the City of Santee was critical to project success. We experienced some challenges in the number of volunteers who completed training but did not continue to regularly conduct monitoring, but we adjusted our training and orientation to include additional time spent shadowing experienced leaders and staff, and had success in increasing the number of committed volunteers. The program grew over the course of the grant to regularly cover 100% of the targeted River Park area. 23 Park Watch volunteers now walk the River Trail in their assigned sections at least weekly documenting and reporting conditions, educating the public and deterring unauthorized activities in Santee's River Park.

Additionally, The San Diego River Park Foundation has improved its partnership with the San Diego County Sheriff's Department, sharing data collected from RiverBlitz and staying in touch regarding homeless activity. The department's Homeless Outreach Team regularly conducted sweeps through both the developed and undeveloped areas of the parks, often at the request of the River Park Foundation and because of tips received by Park Watchers regarding an

increase in foot trails. The Santee Sheriff's Station homeless outreach efforts and the River Park's clean-ups, even became a model in which the Lakeside Station wished to emulate. Park Watch established an effective means of ensuring that the parks and the San Diego River trail remain welcoming, safe, and user-friendly for all patrons for now and years to come.

As mentioned above, finding and sustaining volunteers for Park Watch was challenging however, the two year grant program allowed staff the time to learn the best strategies to find and retain these volunteers. While there was great interest in the program, one of the greatest challenges was getting people started, while their interest was still heightened. One requirement to participate in Park Watch was to pass the City of Santee's background check. The background check process proved to be an obstacle to getting people out on the trail quickly. While many attended trainings and were eager, the process of having to go to a location more than 10 miles away to be finger printed and then waiting for 30-60 days for background check approval was a deterrent to people staying involved. The River Park Foundation staff worked to reduce the overall background check time through better coordination and follow-up with the City of Santee and also make the steps more clear to volunteers before they sign up for a training so they knew what to expect.

Volunteers were recruited through presentations at various meetings throughout Santee, East County newspapers, Facebook, outreach events such as the Santee Summer Concert Series, and word of mouth. Trainings were often conducted in the field, allowing volunteers to experience Park Watch duties first-hand, identify amenities and overall site condition, and ask specific questions as they arose. SDRPF staff followed up with volunteers regularly, ensuring that they felt comfortable and supported in their Park Watch role. Furthermore, the number of Park Watch volunteers increased as word of the program spread over the course of the grant period. Park Watch even inspired volunteers to become more active in other roles with The San Diego River Park, participating in our weekly River Rescue clean-ups and tree watering events in addition to their regular Park Watch duties.

While data sheets were a primary tool for reporting and documentation for volunteers, t-shirts and lanyards were also given to volunteers so that they could be identified as part of the Park Watch program and increase visibility and legitimacy of presence. Another tool used for Park Watch was the golf cart and its trailer purchased in year two. This cart is available for use throughout Santee's River Park, but it is primarily used by Park Watch volunteers with less physical ability to still cover large segment areas. Before the golf cart was put into use, training materials and regulations as well as care, access and maintenance protocols were established. Four volunteers are now trained and approved as primary users of the golf cart for Park Watch.


Park Watch volunteers have proven that they are eager and excited to give back, enjoy the river park and are willing to do more. There has recently been a request by some of our Park Watch volunteers to be provided with trash pickers so they can remove small amounts of trash and debris as they come across it during their evaluations. We were able to honor this request by purchasing trash pickers for these volunteers with the remaining funds toward the end of the grant.

Park Watch volunteers now self identify and have even met recently as a group to share resources and ideas on what they look for when out on Park Watch or new ways of reporting such as the My Santee app.

See samples of Park Watch data sheets used by volunteers to report issues on the following pages. Some volunteers also report information via email, or through the My Santee app directly to City of Santee.



Park Watch field training




PARK WATCH

Segment 1- Mast Park West


9125 Carlton Hills Blvd, Santee, CA 92071

Approx. Roundtrip Distance: 1.26 miles, Approx. Time: 30 minutes



Name _____
Date _____
Start Time _____
Finish Time _____

*Note: Parking is available in the Mast Park parking lot. Walk toward the gravel lot. Trail travels west and goes under Carlton Hills Blvd. Head north toward Carlton Oaks Dr. before doubling back and continuing west toward the golf course.



Keep a tally corresponding to what you witnessed while on the trail
(Example: People Fishing- II, Children- III, Adults- III, III)

Adults		People Camping or Sleeping	
Teenagers		Dog Park Users	
Children		Dogs Off Leash (outside of dog park)	
People Fishing		Parking Area Use	
Bike Riding		Graffiti	
Playground Use			

Amenity/Location Description	Needs Attention?		
<u>Mast Park West trail sign on bridge</u> <small>Please describe the location of the damaged amenity:</small>	Damage Type: <u>Circle One</u>	Structural	Aesthetic
<u>Mural under bridge</u> <small>Approximate Location:</small>	Damage Type:	Structural	Aesthetic
<u>River trail marker (2)</u> <small>Approximate Location:</small>	Damage Type:	Structural	Aesthetic
<u>"Sensitive habitat" signs (10)</u> <small>Approximate Location:</small>	Damage Type:	Structural	Aesthetic
<u>Kiosk, trash, benches, steeple, bike racks, pet waste bags, river trail sign</u> <small>Approximate Location:</small>	Damage Type:	Structural	Aesthetic
<u>Trash can, bench, "watershed" info board</u> <small>Approximate Location:</small>	Damage Type:	Structural	Aesthetic
<u>Native plant garden area, sign, bench, plant (10 info boards (native plants, riparian))</u> <small>Approximate Location:</small>	Damage Type:	Structural	Aesthetic
<u>Info board (ecosystem), trash, bench</u> <small>Approximate Location:</small>	Damage Type:	Structural	Aesthetic
<u>Fencing</u> <small>Approximate Location:</small>	Damage Type:	Structural	Aesthetic

General Information- Briefly describe your activities today. (Example: I walked Town Center East/ Segments 6 & 7)

Additional Comments (please be specific and include any incidents that may have occurred)

Figure 4. Final version of Park Watch data sheets. Left, front of sheet collects basic information about park users in that segment. Right, back of data sheet collects information about condition of amenities.

RiverBlitz Monitoring: RiverBlitz surveys were conducted four times throughout the grant period. The surveys provided critical data for planning and implementing clean-up activities and tracking invasive non-native plant growth. Over 159 volunteers participated and donated 581 hours walking and documenting conditions along the San Diego River in Santee.

Following the surveys, staff and volunteers compiled and reviewed data for mapping and reporting. Results were shared with local stakeholders and public agencies to improve coordination and facilitate action. RiverBlitz trash data demonstrated that the clean-up emphasis on the County-owned property in Santee resulted in a 73% reduction in trash volume over the grant period. Access to view the most recent RiverBlitz data (April 2015) are available online:

- Trash:
<https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=zGD20u5IGx5Q.ki2cM1qWUuW0>
- Invasive non-native plants:
<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=zGD20u5IGx5Q.klFWL3sSmrG4>

An additional monitoring component focused specifically on Task 3 invasive non-native treatment. Monitoring tracked treatment efficacy and regrowth. All palms treated showed signs of decline within two weeks of treatment. Full palm tree death was achieved at eight weeks after treatment. Only one tree had extensive saplings where continued monitoring allowed for increased number of treated palms and prevented significant regrowth. Arundo exhibited the highest growth rate with significant regrowth at two weeks after treatment. Arundo was followed by castor bean (four weeks), Brazilian pepper tree (eight weeks) in rate of regrowth. Tamarisk was the slowest to exhibit any regrowth (eight months) and this was minimal. Pampas grass once treated showed no signs of regrowth, indicating little need for follow-up monitoring. While regrowth on tamarisk was minimal following treatment, the length of time in which regrowth was exhibited indicates tamarisk should be monitored and if needed, retreated for at least one year after treatment to ensure a lasting effect.

Access control and maintenance: Installation of native plants, repair or replacement of damaged fencing and informational signage were techniques used to control access to reduce habitat degradation and discourage off trail use of open space areas at Mast Park West. Figure 5 below is a map displaying the locations of fencing repaired or replaced, access control signs installed and plants installed. 170 meters of fencing was replaced over the course of the grant. The fencing replacement was needed due to damage caused by the April 2014 fire at the site.

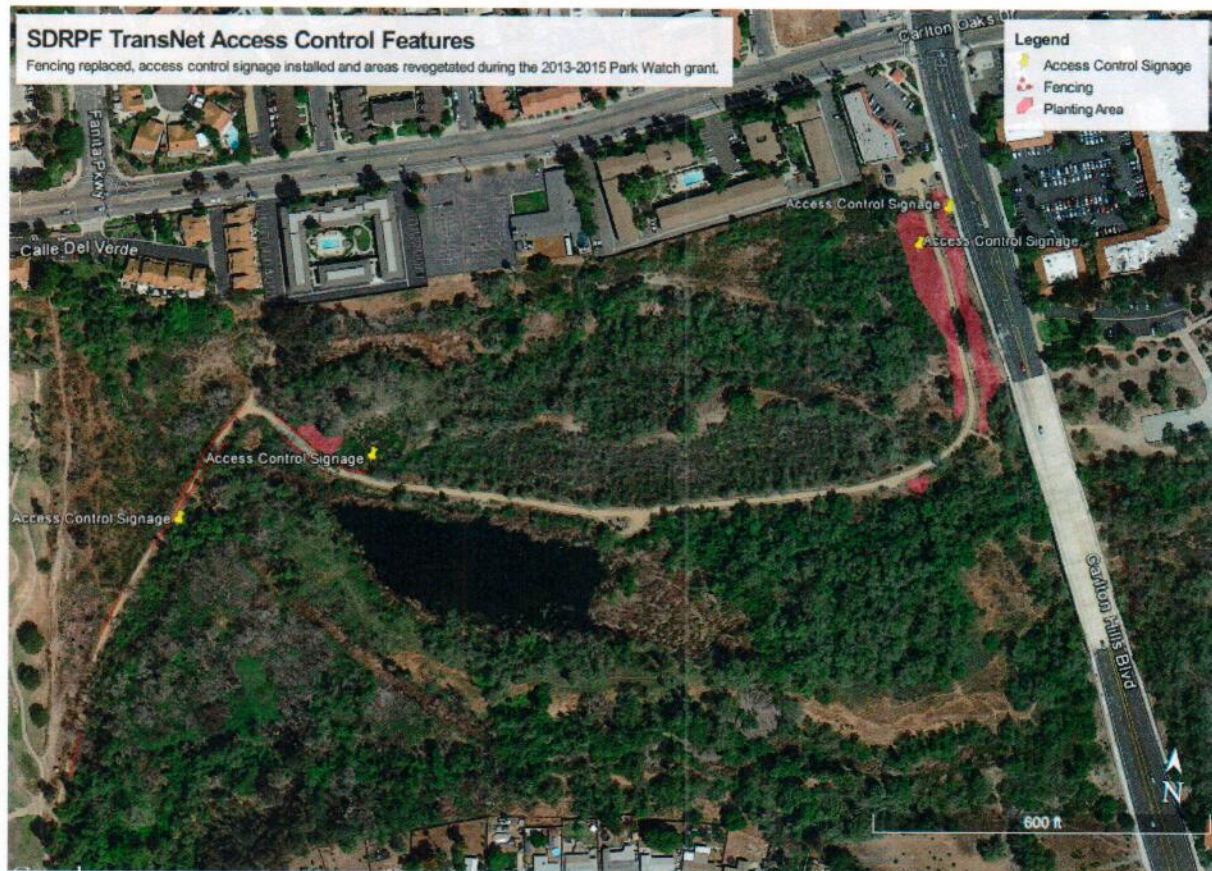


Figure 5. Map of Access Control Features Installed



Above: Veteran volunteers were recruited to help with the difficult task of removing damaged fencing and replacing with new fencing.

In addition, native plants were installed at key disturbed locations just off trail so as to promote growth and fill in patches and block off trail use. Because of drought conditions, native plants required more assistance for establishment and were given support through supplemental watering through the end of year two of the grant. Shrub species needed no support in year two but tree species including sycamore, willow and oak all required the extra water in year two. Plant survival is at over 83% because of the extra care and if wet weather conditions do occur this winter as anticipated, full establishment of tree species is expected without further support.



Volunteers assist with planting and watering of native plants.

Summary of Accomplishments

- Completed 4 RiverBlitz surveys with 159 volunteers (met goal)
- Removed access control fencing damaged in April 2014 fire and installed 562 feet of new fencing
- Planted 260 native plants to revegetate and provide additional access control
- Engaged 23 core volunteers weekly Park Watch monitoring and collected survey data for 100% of the target area

All grants funds were expended in Task 4.

Summary of Deliverables

- Park Watch summary was included in this report
- Map of fencing repaired or replaced, plants installed, and access control signage is included in this report on previous page

Task 5. Administration

Throughout the grant period, grant administration and invoice preparation proceeded on schedule with invoicing and reporting submitted completely and as requested within 21 days of the end of the quarter.

All grant funds were expended in Task 5.

Summary of Deliverables

- Quarterly invoices were submitted on time throughout the grant period

III. Next Steps

While the two-year project has now ended, the Park Watch program in Santee and Friends of Santee's River Park is well positioned to endure. The two-year grant period greatly impacted our effectiveness, allowing us to adapt as the program developed. We better understood the needs of the project and the needs of the volunteers because of the time. Because the long-term success of this project is so reliant on volunteer dedication and stewardship, we invested significant staff time in training, empowering, and recognizing volunteers, and developing volunteer leadership. These individuals are directly connected to the River and to their community, and they provide incredible capacity building for maintaining these efforts into the future with reduced staff time, and other San Diego River Park Foundation financial and technical resources.

Having Park Watch volunteers on the River Trail was excellent for early identification of issues. And importantly, the speedy response by the San Diego River Park Foundation or City Staff to issues that arise proved to be critical in volunteer retention. These volunteers need to feel that their efforts result in correction of problems in order for them to stay engaged. Into the future, we will continue to work to ensure that resources from the City of Santee or the River Park Foundation can be made available to address issues identified by Park Watch volunteers on a regular basis.

In addition, the increase in core leaders and improved relationships with the City of Santee and Waste Management (a trash hauling company) have already proved fruitful. We have already implemented smaller volunteer-led (not-staffed) clean-ups at least twice a month. These volunteers regularly remove 500-3,000 pounds of trash per event on their own with only guidance from staff on location, which enormously increases our capacity. Waste is hauled either by the City of Santee or Waste Management through donated support.

Supporting these volunteers, of course, is not free of cost, but we believe that having the funds to do the extensive work required to recruit them in the first place means that retaining these volunteers after the grant period will be a much more reasonable expense for the San Diego River Park Foundation to include in our organization budget.

This program and the lessons learned from this project is now a model which can be replicated along other locations in the watershed or the rest of the community. This partnership with SANDAG allowed us to make great advances in managing and monitoring the San Diego River and engaging the community.