

LOCAL

Meeting to focus on 'taking back' river

■ Parkway idea is taking shape for waterway

By Arlene Martinez
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Its reputation is for being a haven for the homeless, but to many people, the Ventura River is an untapped mine of environmental and recreational gems.

How to reconnect residents to the river is at

the center of the Ventura River Parkway, a plan in the works by those who want to "take back" the river from arundo's grasp and out from under people's trash.

More about the plan will be disclosed today, when Friends of the Ventura River and county Supervisor Steve Bennett will host a meeting on the creation of a parkway.

Friends of the Ventura River is a coalition of groups and individuals driving the effort.

"The Santa Clara Riv-

er Parkway has been a great success in conserving valuable river habitat, achieving soft flood protection, and working cooperatively with landowners," Bennett said in a news release announcing the meeting. "The same and more can be done for the Ventura River."

Implementation of the plan may improve tourism, reduce flood risks, improve water quality and protect wildlife, proponents say.

The California Coastal Conservancy, the Trust

“The Santa Clara River Parkway has been a great success in conserving valuable river habitat, achieving soft flood protection, and working cooperatively with landowners.”

Steve Bennett, Friends of the Ventura River and county supervisor

for Public Lands and Cal Poly Pomona Studio 606, a group of faculty members and graduate students that works on preservation and restoration of sensitive natural systems, will give presenta-

tions on the plan, as will local organizations.

The move away from the river started in the 1960s, when the four-lane Highway 33 cut off natural access to the body of water.

"Before the 33 went in,

every street ended at the river," said Lee Sherman, a spokesman for the Ventura Hillside Conservancy, which is involved in the effort and recently took over property at the south end of the river.

People fished and swam, Sherman said, and if all goes well, they will be able to do so in the future.

The meeting will be at 4 p.m. today in the Board of Supervisors meeting room in the Ventura County Government Center Hall of Administration, 800 S. Victoria Ave. in Ventura.

Ventura

Thursday, July 19, 2012

■ EMERGENCY MESSAGE

The American Red Cross of Ventura County holds a block party to drive home a message: Be prepared for natural disasters and other emergencies. **3B**

Possibilities for Ventura River envisioned

■ Achieving parkway could take a generation

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Susan Mulley, an assistant professor of landscape architecture at Cal Poly Pomona, has studied the Ventura River in depth.

The 16-mile river, with one end at the Pacific Ocean and another near Matilija Dam, "remains one of the few wild rivers mostly untouched by concrete channels," she said. "The opportunities that you have are astonishing

to make this a showpiece of Southern California."

Proponents of the Ventura River Parkway imagine the day it could be just that. They know they need strong support from residents, organizations and officials, which was the purpose of a meeting Wednesday at the Ventura County Government Center called "Reconnecting People with the River."

About 100 people at-

tended the meeting, which organizers said was a way of building support for the Ventura River Parkway, a long-term project they say could create recreational, educational and economic benefits.

The process could "take a generation," acknowledged Greg Gamble, executive director of the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy, "but with determination, I think we can get there."

Sam Jenniches, a project manager with the state Coastal Conservancy, described parkways that have been successful elsewhere in the country, including one in Ogden, Utah. When that effort began, the river at its focus was so dirty that locals said it was "too thick to drink and too thin to plow." Crews removed more than 2,000 tires, 22 tons of concrete and

15 automobiles.

Today, with the help of strong political and local will, there are fish, birds and "people tubing down this river that people wouldn't go near," Jenniches said. "It's one of the most loved places in Ogden."

Parkways in south San Diego (the Otay Valley Regional Park), San

See RIVER, 2B

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RIVER from 1B

Jose (the Guadalupe River Park) and Denver (the South Platte River Greenway) also have seen success.

All had "significant obstacles. ... For it to really thrive, the local community is really going to be driving it," Jenniches said.

It won't be easy. Of the Ventura River's 16 miles, about 10 are privately held, Gamble said. The land conservancy owns 4.5 miles, the city owns about 1 mile, and the county and the Ventura Hillside Conservancy own smaller pieces.

The groups hope to work with

private property owners, securing conservation subdivisions. But such subdivisions — a legal process that involves slicing a piece of land in cases when not an entire piece of property is being donated — can be time-consuming and costly.

"It's really a pretty daunting process," said Lynn Jensen, whose firm Jensen Design & Survey is helping the Ojai conservancy with a subdivision.

So far, it's cost \$50,000 and taken more than a year, which could be a problem in the face of all the subdivisions that will likely need to happen, Jensen said.

Throughout the presentations at Wednesday's meeting, images

flashed on a screen — of a woman and her children in a swimming hole, of young men hoisting large fish. That wasn't lost on some in attendance who use the river's water for their livelihood.

"What kind of constraints on water use will this entail?" asked Jurgen Gramckow, who grows mostly tangerines on roughly 300 acres in Ojai.

Ventura County Supervisor Steve Bennett said no one would likely have a definitive answer now but that conservation by urban dwellers likely would play a role.

"We can't disadvantage farmers," Mulley said.

Gramckow said: "I'm not op-

posed to public access and recreation, but everything has to be balanced. If we have to take land out of production to take less water, it's a big price to pay, and I couldn't support that."

Jensen, who also is executive director of the Ventura Coalition of Labor, Agriculture and Business, said, "You have to be careful of the management of the water in these watersheds if you want to continue agricultural use."

Though getting parkways complete isn't always easy or quick, supporters said they can be quite special.

Said Jenniches, "Rivers tell the stories of the people who live around them."

River project gains support

■ Corridor would include trails, parks

By Michele Willer-Allred
Special to The Star

The Ventura County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday voted 4-1 to give conceptual support to the creation of a Ventura River parkway, a project aimed at creating a continuous network of parks, trails, and natural areas along 16 miles of the river.

Supervisor Peter Foy dissented.

Governmental and nongovernmental agencies discussed the project July 18 before a full house at the Ventura Government Center, Supervisor Steve Bennett said.

"Similar to the Santa Clara River Parkway project, this is a great opportunity for conservation, for recreation, for tourism and for enhancement of the river overall," Bennett said.

"Essentially, the action today is simply to ask the (supervisors) to support in concept this parkway project, as we did with the Santa Clara River.

"It is a project that is really starting to get momentum in the Ventura River Watershed area," he said.

One facet emphasized at the July 18 meeting is that the parkway is not an eminent domain project, Bennett said.

The Ventura River parkway "is going to be a cooperative, collaborative project. Property owners are voluntarily going to participate in it.

"It's a wonderful opportunity to reconnect the city of Ventura with the river and to reconnect the beach all the way to the mountains with recreation opportunities," Bennett said.

See PARKWAY, 3B

PARKWAY from 1B

The board Tuesday also voted 4-1, with Foy dissenting, to streamline the processing of conservation easements, which allows the creation of a conservation parcel that does not meet the zoning ordinance's minimum parcel size if that lot is dedicated to riparian conservation.

While no plan has been adopted for a Ventura River parkway, conceptual planning studies have been prepared by the Cal Poly Pomona school of landscape architecture and the California Coastal Conservancy.

About 10 of the Ventura River's 16 miles are privately held.

The Ojai Valley Land Conservancy owns 4.5 miles, the city owns about 1 mile and the county and the Ventura Hillside Conservancy own smaller pieces.

Supervisor Kathy Long said the Santa Clara River project received the support of all the property owners there.

Foy said the county hasn't seen the same support from all the people who own property along the Ventura River.

"It would be nice to get them onboard in the front and not try to force this down some people," Foy said.

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