



RIVER CURRENTS

Summer 2026



CELEBRATING 25 YEARS SINCE OUR FOUNDING *A Quarter Century of People Making a Difference*

For 25 years, our organization has been guided by a simple belief: when people come together to take action, extraordinary things can happen. From a few, we have grown to a community of tens of thousands.

This anniversary is, above all, a celebration of the people who made it possible. We honor founding board members like Michael Beck and the late JoAnn Anderson, whose vision helped launch this journey. We are especially grateful for founding board members Charley Berwanger and Jim Peugh, whose unwavering leadership continues to guide our mission 25 years later, our CEO, Rob, whose dedication has been a constant since day one, and our COO, Sarah, who has been so instrumental for nearly two decades. Together, they embody the enduring spirit of our organization.

As we celebrate this milestone, we also look ahead with hope. We are still grounded in working every day to advance our mission and to create a better future for the river, its wildlife and the people of our region.



CLEAN RIVER TEAM

From the very beginning, our goal has been simple: a trash-free river.

When we started, the river in Mission Valley was largely overlooked. Public parks were limited, and years—if not decades—of accumulated trash lined the riverbed. Armed with paper maps and a dedicated group of volunteers, we focused on cleaning a handful of public spaces. Together, those early volunteers removed an astonishing amount of debris.

As our work grew, so did our understanding of what it would take to create lasting change. We expanded our volunteer program, strengthened our advocacy, and built partnerships throughout the community. Today, our efforts span nearly 20 miles of the river. Recognizing that homeless encampments had become the largest source

of trash, we also adapted our data collection program to help connect people living in the riverbed with outreach and support services.

The future is encouraging. Thanks to generous funding from the Cushman Foundation, we recently launched an exciting two-year initiative to remove buried debris, in-water trash, and other items requiring specialized equipment—more than 20% of the waste that remains in the riverbed.

Despite ongoing agency budget challenges, we remain committed to working with local agencies to reduce homelessness and restore the river. 4,276,588 lbs. have been removed to date. We will keep at it until the river is clean. Thank you to the volunteers, interns, public agencies, funders and all involved!

2010

**NATIONAL AWARD FROM
KEEP AMERICA BEAUTIFUL**

Accepted award at
White House!

2017

**RIVER RESCUE DAY DECLARED AT
SAN DIEGO CITY COUNCIL**

In honor of SDRPF's anniversary,
July 18, 2017 is declared River
Rescue Day in San Diego

2024

**FLOOD NOTIFICATION TEAM
LAUNCHED**

New team
uses data to help warn
vulnerable unhoused
populations about storms

HELP RAISE \$25,000

BIRTHDAY FUNDRAISING CHALLENGE

One of our wonderful corporate partners, Infinium Spirits, has made an incredible offer. For our birthday, they will donate \$25,000, and they have challenged us to match it!

That means if we meet the challenge, **we will have \$50,000 to support our operations.** Your donation today of \$20, \$40 or more will get us closer to making this goal.

Whether this will be the first time you have ever donated or perhaps you will be making an “additional” gift, this support will be put to work immediately to make a difference across our core programs:

- Advancing the river-long park and trail system
- Removing trash and healing the river
- Buying and managing at-risk properties critical for wildlife
- Providing underserved youth with nature learning experiences

Did you know that The San Diego River Park Foundation is a 501(c)3 public benefit charity?

Rather than a private foundation, we depend upon the generosity of people like you to work toward the vision where nature thrives and everyone can experience it.

Experiences like the beauty of being next to a 300 foot waterfall, experiencing the tranquility of a hike in nature while a golden eagle soars above, and enjoying wildlife at the river’s estuary.

We hope you will consider making a gift today.



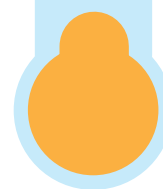
GOAL:
\$25,000!

\$20,000

\$15,000

\$10,000

\$5,000



HELP REACH THE GOAL



DONATE ONLINE:

sandiegoriver.org/donate
or scan this QR code



Other ways to donate:

- Call (619) 297-7380
- Mail a check:
San Diego River Park Foundation
4891 Pacific Highway, Suite 114
San Diego, CA 92110
(add memo: birthday gift)
- Stock
- Cryptocurrency
- IRA Qualified Charitable Distributions



Every Child Deserves a **NATURE** **CONNECTION**

Many of us feel a deep connection to nature. Whether you hike, ride, or go for a walk. Perhaps you are fortunate enough to enjoy a canyon view or frequently visit a beach.

For many kids, that's not the case.

More than half of the youth we survey tell us they don't feel connected to nature. Many say they have never experienced it at all.

Research consistently shows that spending time in nature provides lifelong benefits. It supports physical health, improves mental well-being, enhances academic performance, and fosters a lasting sense of environmental stewardship.

What many of us take for granted is something thousands of children never get to enjoy. That's

why we created the Cool River Education Program—to provide meaningful outdoor experiences that connect young people with the San Diego River and its remarkable ecosystem. Our approach is to combine science with hands-on activities, and it works!

Our program began with a simple goal: take students in grades 3–8 to available parks along the river. We hosted classes in Santee, Mission Valley, and the estuary.

As the program grew, we needed a permanent home.

Then we met the Grant family.

Together, we began imagining how their 17-acre Mission Valley property could become a place where children start their nature connection. Supported by donations and grants, Grant Park was built, and the Cool River Program now has a home, and 7000 students will receive free nature learning experiences annually!

GRANT PARK

Over the past 25 years, one of our most defining projects has been Grant Park. What began as a vision to create a place where children could connect with nature has grown into something even greater. When the City of San Diego's River Park Master Plan identified the need for a central interpretive center focused on the river, that vision expanded.

After more than a decade of fundraising, permitting, and construction, Grant Park is now hosting weekend interpretive programs and weekday youth environmental learning experiences. And we're just getting started.

The next phase includes:

- A 320+ foot elevated nature boardwalk
- A new central learning garden
- Reviewing plans for the River Center, a second building that will serve as a hub for interpretation, research, and community gatherings
- Completing construction of a plant nursery and sustainability station
- Securing grants and major funding for the building, garden and boardwalk

There is so much to look forward to, and none of it would be possible without our dedicated volunteers, and of course, everyone who has financially supported Grant Park. Thank you!

If you are interested in learning more about next phases or volunteer opportunities, we would love to hear from you.



TOP: Future home of Grant Park sign, 2014

MIDDLE: Native plant nursery build day, 2026

BELOW: Rendering of future second building



LOOKING BACK ON 25 YEARS

As I look back over the past 25 years, I am filled with gratitude and amazement at what we have accomplished together. It's incredible to think that what began as a big dream shared by a handful of passionate people has grown so much.

I remember gathering for the very first meeting of the San Diego River Coalition, when 13 organizations came together with a shared belief that we could achieve more by working together. I remember the excitement of helping author and pass State legislation that created the San Diego River Conservancy, and what we all felt when the City of San Diego approved the River Park Master Plan—a milestone that once seemed almost impossible.

I also remember the heartbreak of the Cedar Fire and the devastating impact it had on our region. I watched our organization step forward to play a major role in the recovery.

25 years hold countless memories, milestones, challenges, and triumphs. Through it all, we have grown from a small group of dreamers into a community of nearly 100,000 people.

Yet what inspires me most is that, despite how much we have grown, our purpose has never changed. We are still guided by the simple but powerful belief that when people come together, roll up their sleeves, and take action, they can create lasting change. Everything we have achieved over the past quarter century is proof of that—and it gives me tremendous hope for what the future will bring.

With gratitude,

Rob

Rob Hutsel
Co-founder and CEO

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Vice Chair

Cary Lowe
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Treasurer

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FIESTA DEL RIO!

TICKETS NOW ON SALE



SEPT. 26 from 4:30-7 PM
GRANT PARK



We invite you to join us and enjoy:

- Live music and storytelling
- Curated food stations
- Wine & beer garden
- Hands-on nature learning and art
- ... and more!

Proceeds will support education, research and other programs.

Scan here to learn more and buy tickets, or visit:
www.sandiegoriver.org/fiesta-del-rio



THANK YOU
to our early sponsors!

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SADBERRY**

MESSAGE TREE SPONSOR



NATIVE PLANT SPONSORS



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Julie and Simon Andrews
Rob Hutsel & Karen Begin
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Consider becoming a Fiesta Del Rio Sponsor!

Contact Pat Rice at patricia@sandiegoriver.org or call (619) 297-7380 for more information.

PRESERVING SPECIAL PLACES

For Wildlife and People to Thrive



FIRST ACQUISITION: BATHTUB CREEK

Our first acquisition was a 112 acre property along Eagle Peak Road.

2004

2012

FISHERMAN'S CAMP

First acquisition of the Cuyamaca Corridor Initiative in 2012.



EAGLE PEAK RANCH

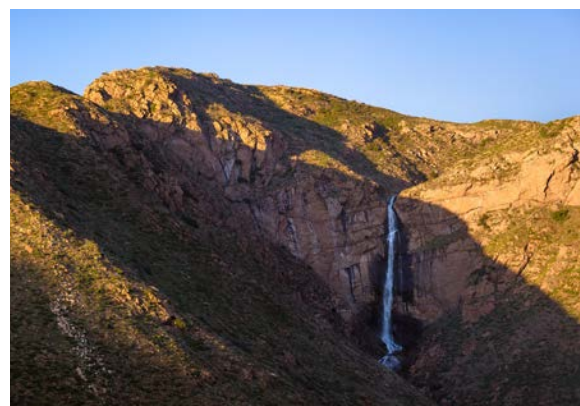
Acquisition of first parcels of this preserve at 299 acres in 2016. Our largest acquisition at that time.

2016

2025

MOST RECENT ACQUISITION: MILDRED FALLS

The property with the stunning 300-foot Mildred Falls was acquired in October 2025.



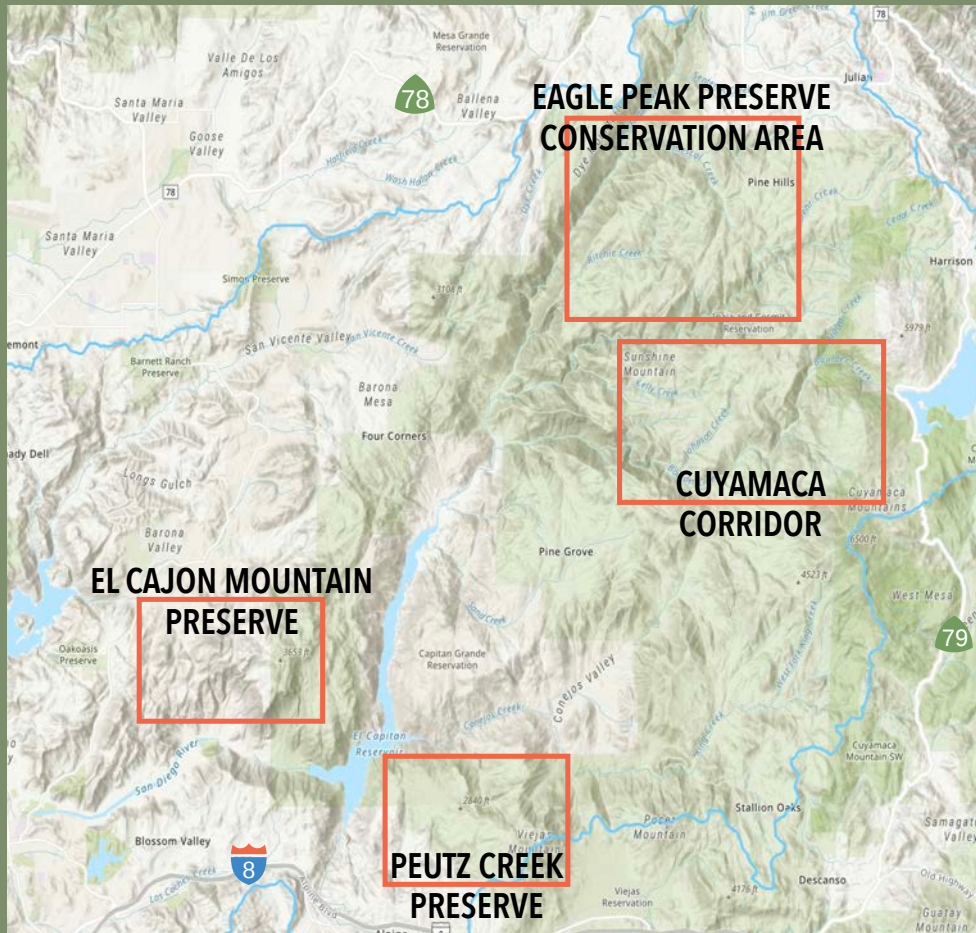
The Upper San Diego River watershed is one of Southern California's greatest natural treasures. It is home to extraordinary biodiversity—among the richest in the nation—and offers breathtaking landscapes, wild creeks, and unforgettable outdoor experiences.

When we began this work, we assumed much of this remarkable landscape was already protected. Like many people, we believed the

land within the boundaries of the Cleveland National Forest was permanently conserved. We soon discovered a different reality: hundreds of privately owned, undeveloped parcels remained vulnerable to development.

Recognizing that habitat loss is the greatest threat to wildlife, we stepped in when others weren't. Our mission became clear—to protect these critical lands before they were lost forever.

SAVE THE SOURCE: UPPER SAN DIEGO RIVER WATERSHED



Today, thanks to the generosity of our supporters and partners, more than 110 properties—nearly 3,000 acres across four priority conservation areas—have been permanently protected. Our Research Team, along with collaborating scientists, has documented the essential role these lands play in connecting wildlife habitat and allowing animals to move safely across the landscape. We've also helped conserve iconic places like Cedar Creek Falls, ensuring future generations can experience their beauty.

Our focus has increasingly turned to the tributaries of the Upper San Diego River. These wild creeks and streams are the lifeblood of the watershed, sustaining wildlife, improving water quality, and strengthening the health of the river itself. Through our Wild Creeks Initiative, we are working to acquire, protect, and restore these irreplaceable waterways before they disappear.

Most recently, we protected Mildred Falls, a spectacular undeveloped property featuring a 300-foot waterfall and vital habitat for mountain lions, peregrine falcons, amphibians, and countless other native species. It is exactly the kind of place that deserves to remain wild.

Thanks to hundreds of supporters and partners, like the County of San Diego, the San Diego River Conservancy, and the California Natural Resources Agency, together, we've raised millions of dollars to safeguard the watershed's future.

But this work is far from over. Every property that is developed is an opportunity lost forever.

The race to protect the Upper San Diego River watershed continues—and with your support, we can ensure this extraordinary landscape remains wild for generations to come.

CREATING THE SAN DIEGO RIVER PARK SYSTEM

From the beginning, we believed that inspiring people to care for the San Diego River meant creating opportunities to experience it. That vision became a river-long public park and trail system connecting communities from Santa Ysabel to Ocean Beach. After all, people are more likely to protect a place they can enjoy and explore.

In 2001, we started hosting community meetings to collect ideas of what that park and trail system could become. These ideas shaped the San Diego River Park Conceptual Plan, completed in 2002 and shared with the many public agencies whose partnership would be essential to bringing the vision to life.

With much of the river corridor in private ownership, the greatest challenge lay within the City of San Diego. We got to work, and after more than a decade of collaboration and persistence, the City adopted the San Diego River Park Master Plan in 2013.

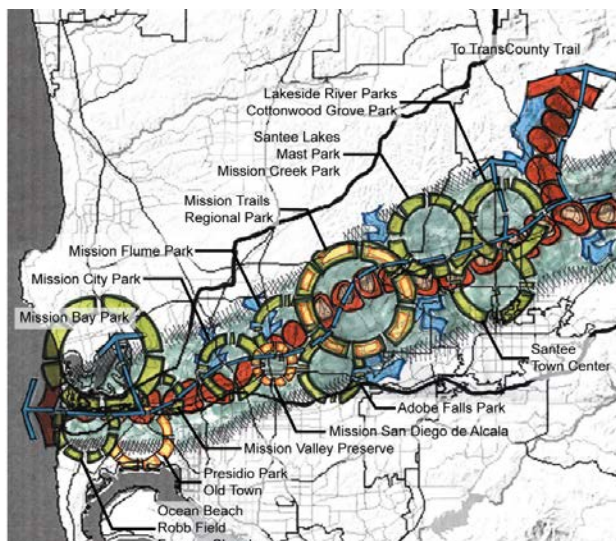
Since then, we have worked with landowners to create public parks and advance the River Trail. Riverwalk SD is a great example. That development will include nearly 90 acres of public parks and river restoration.

The next few years will be focused on advancing key sections of the River Trail to get us closer to completing the dream of a trail connecting the mountains to the ocean while we explore some new civic projects, too. We can't wait!

2002

SAN DIEGO RIVER PARK CONCEPTUAL PLAN

First comprehensive vision of a river-long park and trail system is completed.



2013

SAN DIEGO RIVER MASTER PLAN PASSES

After more than 10 years of our advocacy, the City of San Diego adopts a master plan guiding future development along 1/3 of the river.

Voting Results...	
GLORIA	✓ YES
LIGHTNER	✓ YES
FAULCONER	✓ YES
CD 4 Vacant	
KERSEY	✓ YES
ZAPF	✓ YES
SHERMAN	✓ YES
ALVAREZ	✓ YES
EMERALD	✓ YES
3:03	May 20, 2013



2020

RIVERWALK SD SPECIFIC PLAN APPROVED

The specific plan includes plans for the largest public park in Mission Valley. It was a major accomplishment in advancing the River Park vision and will serve 1000s of people while restoring the river.



GET INVOLVED

There are several ways you can be part of ongoing advocacy efforts. Here's how.

- Join the River Trail Advocacy Notification List
- Attend an October meeting regarding the Santee to Ocean trail segment
- Do you have graphic design or marketing skills? Volunteers are needed to create meaningful materials to support ongoing efforts

To learn more, contact Jillian, our River Trail Advocacy Manager, by calling (619) 297-7380 or emailing jillian@sandiegoriver.org.

CELEBRATING
25
YEARS!

San Diego River Park Foundation
PO Box 80126
San Diego, CA 92138-0126

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organization
u.s. postage

PAID

san diego, ca
permit # 957

Our mission is to take action so the 52 mile-long San Diego River becomes a natural, cultural and recreational treasure. We do this by actively engaging people through volunteerism, educational programming, advocacy and philanthropy while championing the creation of a river-long parkway from the mountains to the ocean.

25 YEARS OF IMPACT!



River Days launched to bring people together on the river.

2004



Save the Source! Since our first acquisition in 2006, almost 3,000 acres of land permanently conserved



SDRPF wins Take Pride in America Award for the clean-up programs
2011



Board of Directors on early retreat creating strategic plan to guide the organization