The Estuary Trail

A World-Class Gateway to the San Diego River



Estuary Trail Enhancement Plan

A Vision for a Safer, More Beautiful, More Connected River Trail

From Ocean Beach to Mission Valley, the San Diego River Estuary Trail offers a remarkable connection between our communities, the Pacific Ocean, and one of Southern California's most ecologically significant coastal environments.
The San Diego River Trail Enhancement Plan — Estuary Segment envisions transforming approximately 3.7 miles of the existing southern river trail into a safer, more welcoming, and engaging experience for pedestrians, cyclists, birdwatchers, families, and visitors.

Developed for The San Diego River Park Foundation in 2016, the plan builds upon the City's San Diego River Park Master Plan and its guiding vision of bringing water, wildlife, and people together.
Its recommendations include wider multi-use pathways, safer and more visible underpasses, improved trail connections and wayfinding, native landscaping, places to rest and enjoy the river, educational exhibits, and public art celebrating the estuary's natural and cultural heritage.

The vision is to create more than a transportation corridor: a river trail that connects communities, celebrates nature, and becomes a destination in its own right.

About this booklet: This is an **abbreviated summary and selected visual excerpt** of the original 51-page **San Diego River Trail Enhancement Plan — Estuary Segment** (May 6, 2016). It highlights representative concepts and proposed improvements, rather than the full technical scope, and was drafted for outreach purposes. The original plan remains the authoritative reference.

5.2 Focal Points



There a several opportunities to create unique experiences by creating new spaces adjacent to the River Trail. Three of these spacial experiences have been identified within this Enhancement Plan. They include the **AVIAN AND DUNE INTERPRETIVE GARDEN**, **FAMOSA SLOUGH OVERLOOK**, and **THE MURALS**.

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Reimagining the Estuary Trail

Three Distinct Environments. One Connected Experience.

The Enhancement Plan organizes the river trail into three distinct areas, each reflecting the character, ecology, and history of its surroundings.

Coastal Dunes
Pacific Ocean to Sunset Cliffs Boulevard
At the western gateway, the trail connects Dog Beach, Robb Memorial Field, and the river's coastal dune habitat. Proposed improvements celebrate the natural landscape through native plantings, enhanced trail access, gateway signage, and an Avian Interpretive Garden featuring educational displays, interactive art, and opportunities to observe local birdlife.

Avian Alley
Sunset Cliffs Boulevard to Interstate 5
This section follows the heart of the estuary, where tidal wetlands support an extraordinary diversity of resident and migratory birds. The plan envisions expanded viewing opportunities, interpretive displays, and a Famosa Slough Overlook, highlighting the ecological connection between the river and neighboring wetlands.

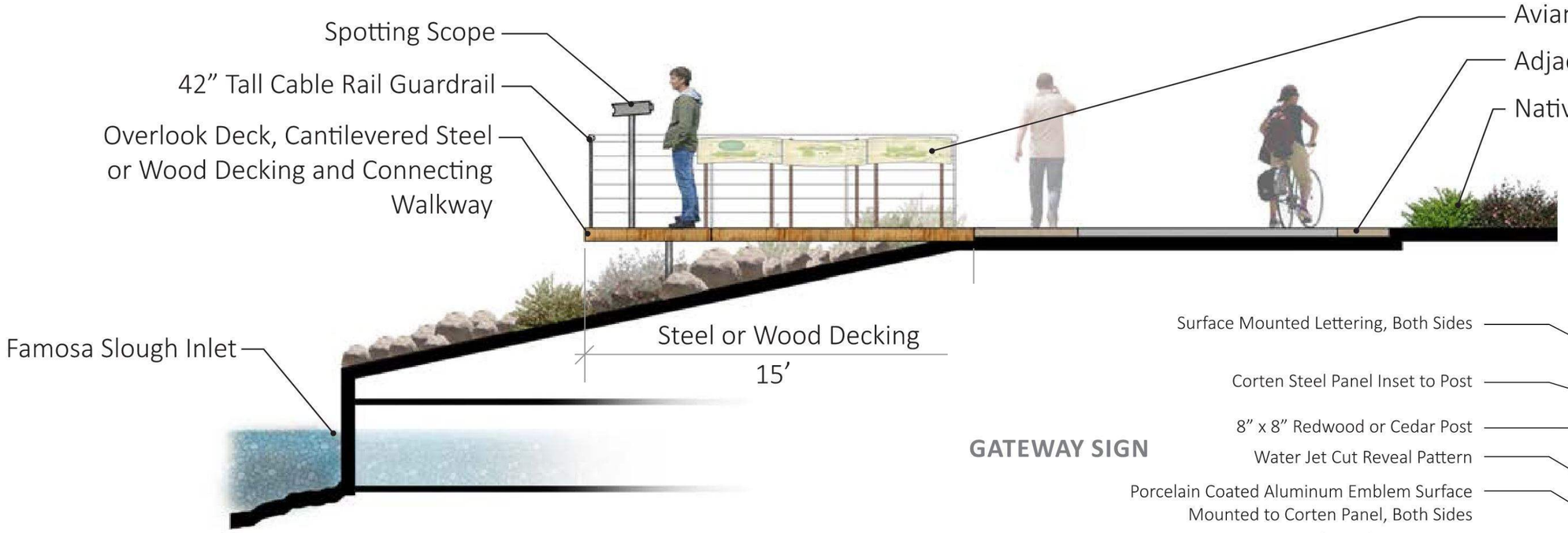
The Murals
Interstate 5 toward Sefton Field
The eastern portion passes beneath bridges and transportation infrastructure, where narrow pathways and limited visibility can diminish the trail experience. Proposed improvements include widened underpasses, carefully designed safety lighting, and expanded public murals celebrating the river's wildlife, history, and communities.

Improvements Throughout the Corridor

- Safer, more accessible pathways: Wider shared-use trails, pedestrian shoulders, and improved sightlines.
- Better navigation: Consistent gateway signs, directional markers, and distance information.
- Places to pause and explore: Benches, shaded rest areas, overlooks, and educational exhibits.
- Ecological stewardship: Removal of invasive vegetation and restoration with appropriate native plants.

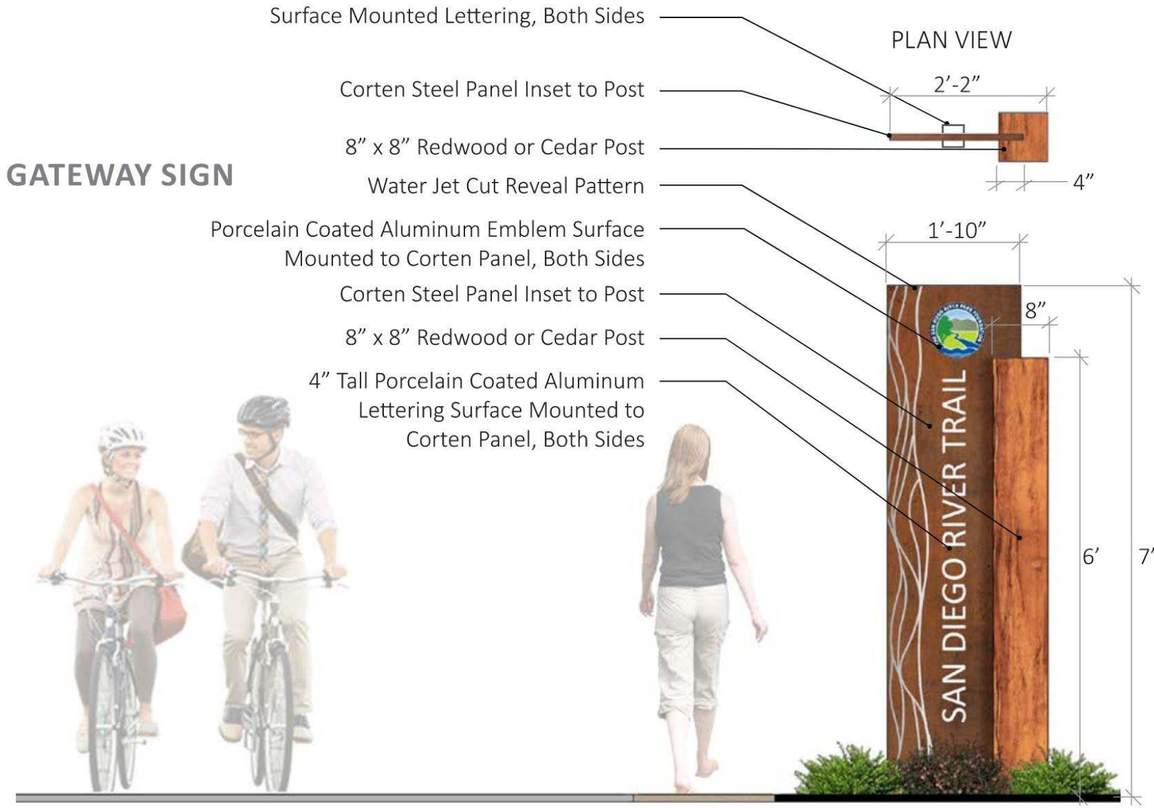
The central idea: Make the Estuary Trail a place people don't just travel through, but choose to experience.

OVERLOOK DECK, SECTION AA



Proposed overlook decks and improved directional signage will enhance wildlife viewing, help visitors navigate the trail, and create a more welcoming riverfront experience.

GATEWAY SIGN

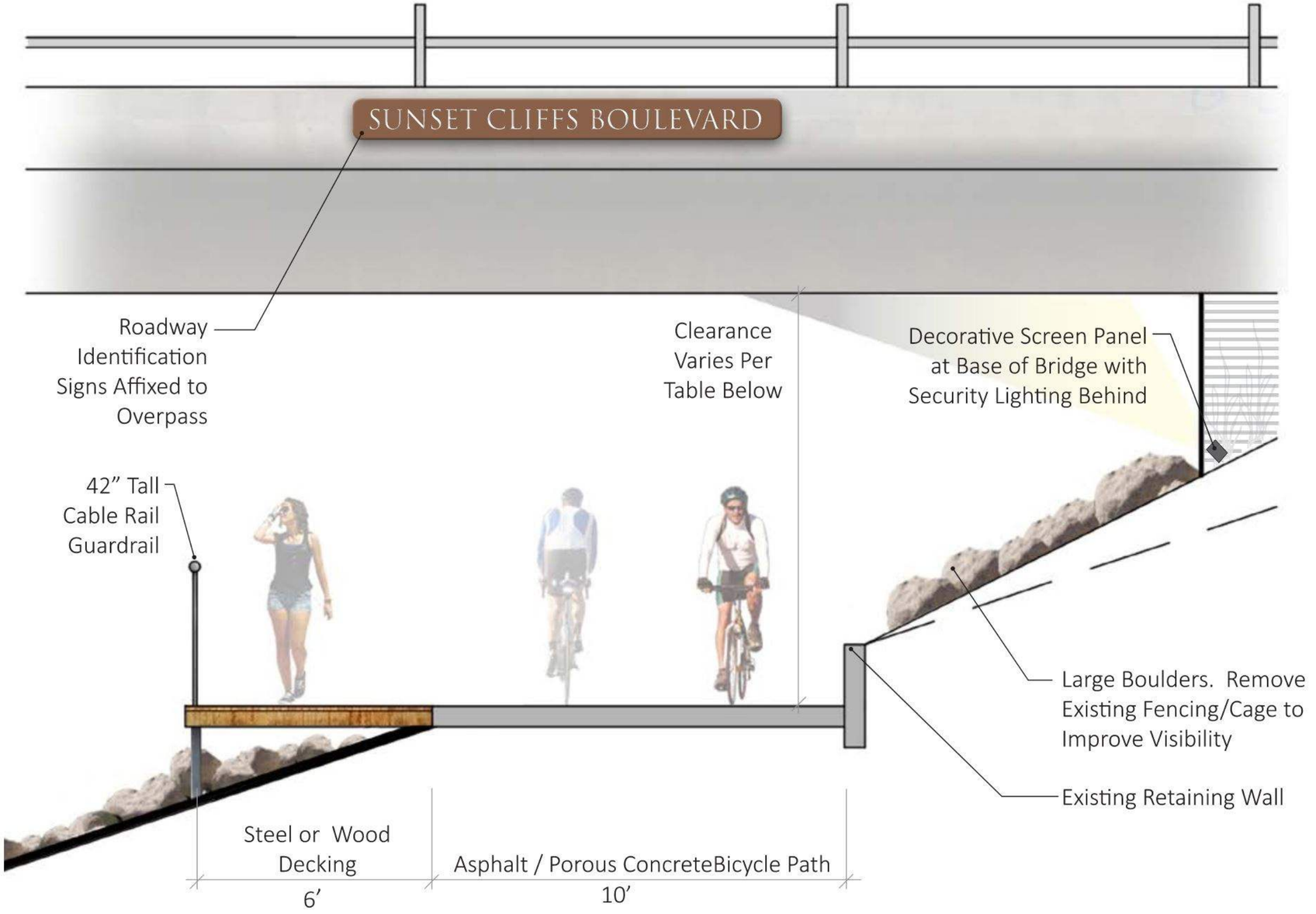


DIRECTIONAL SIGNAGE

PRIMARY MILEAGE MARKER

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Proposed underpass improvements would widen the usable trail, improve visibility, and introduce lighting designed to minimize impacts on adjacent habitat.

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From Vision to Reality

Help Shape the Future of the San Diego River Estuary Trail

The Estuary Trail Enhancement Plan represents years of planning, community input, and a shared vision for reconnecting people with the San Diego River.
Developed with input from community planning groups and more than 50 participants in walking and cycling tours, the plan offers a thoughtful framework for improving the trail while respecting the sensitive coastal environment that makes this corridor so special.

The Next Chapter: Turning Plans Into Action

The 2016 plan identifies important steps toward implementation, including City review, environmental and coastal permitting, and coordination with agencies responsible for protecting sensitive habitats and river infrastructure.Advancing these improvements will require continued community engagement, collaboration with public agencies, project development, funding, and sustained advocacy.

That's where our community comes in.

Through the San Diego River Coalition – Urban Trail Alliance, we are bringing together community members, neighborhood organizations, trail advocates, and partners to help move the vision forward. Together, we can advocate for a trail that is safer, more accessible, ecologically sensitive, and worthy of its extraordinary setting.

Explore the Full Plan - This booklet features selected illustrations and a condensed overview of the original 51-page plan. **San Diego River Trail Enhancement Plan — Estuary Segment**

Prepared by Schmidt Design Group for The San Diego River Park Foundation | May 6, 2016
Read the Complete Enhancement Plan (PDF)

The concepts presented are planning recommendations, not a representation of final approvals, construction commitments, or current project funding.

The Plans Exist. Now Let's Make Them Happen.

Get Involved

The Plans Exist. Now Let's Make Them Happen.

The vision for the San Diego River Estuary Trail is within reach, but turning plans into reality takes community involvement, partnerships, and sustained action.There are two great ways to help shape the future of the San Diego River Trail.



Join the San Diego River Coalition – Urban Trail Alliance
Help advance a connected, safe, and accessible San Diego River Trail. The Coalition brings together community members, organizations, and advocates to build the partnerships, public support, and funding needed to move planned improvements toward implementation.



Join the River Trail Action Crew
Powered by the San Diego River Park Foundation, the River Trail Action Crew is a volunteer-led stewardship team working to keep the trail clean, safe, accessible, and welcoming to everyone.

Ready to Get Involved? Whether you're an individual who would like to get more involved, or organization interested in joining the San Diego River Coalition - we'd love to hear from you!

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