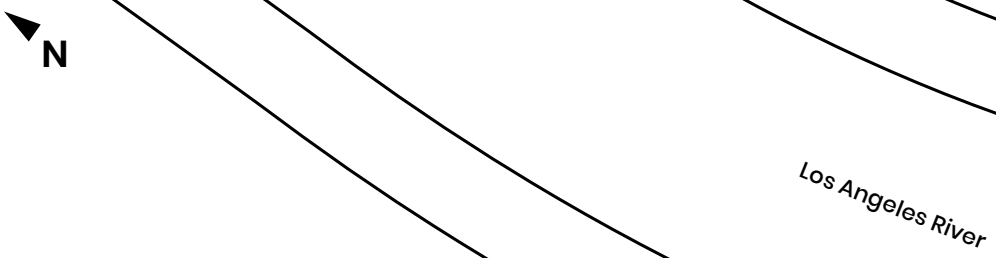
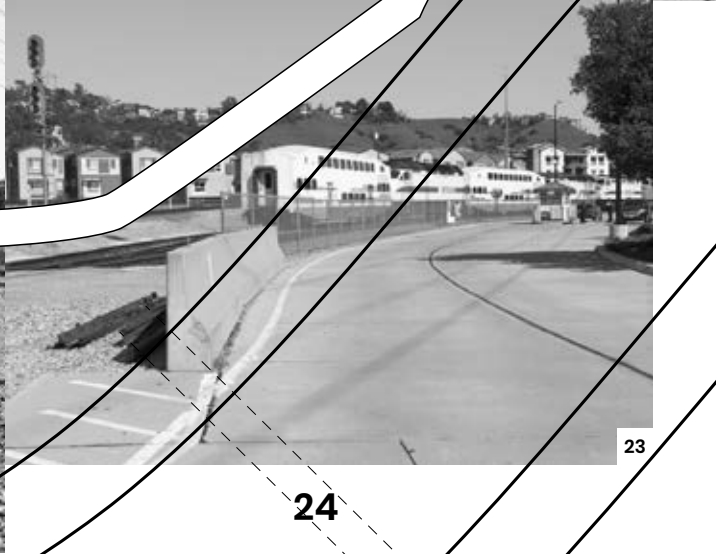
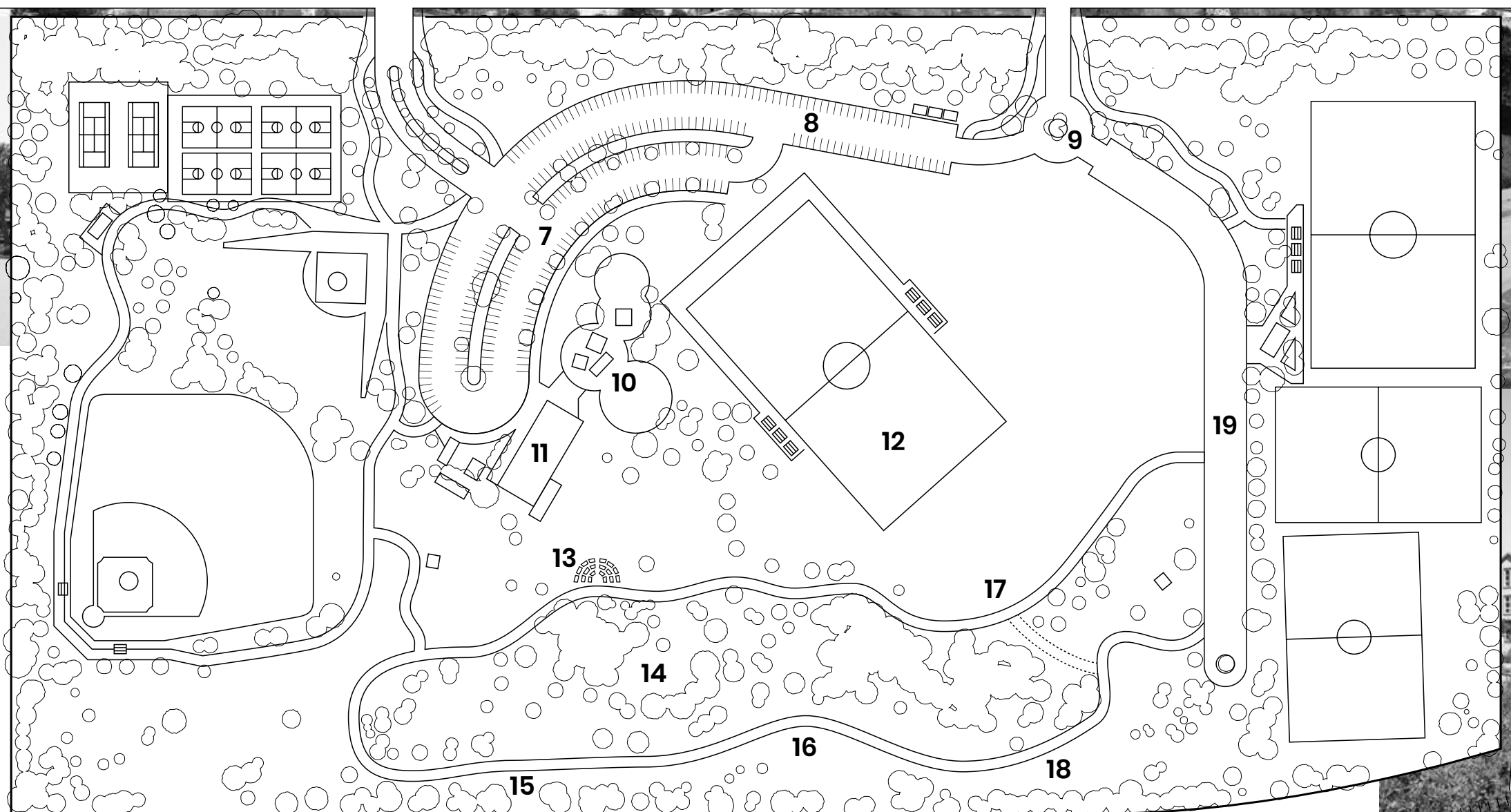
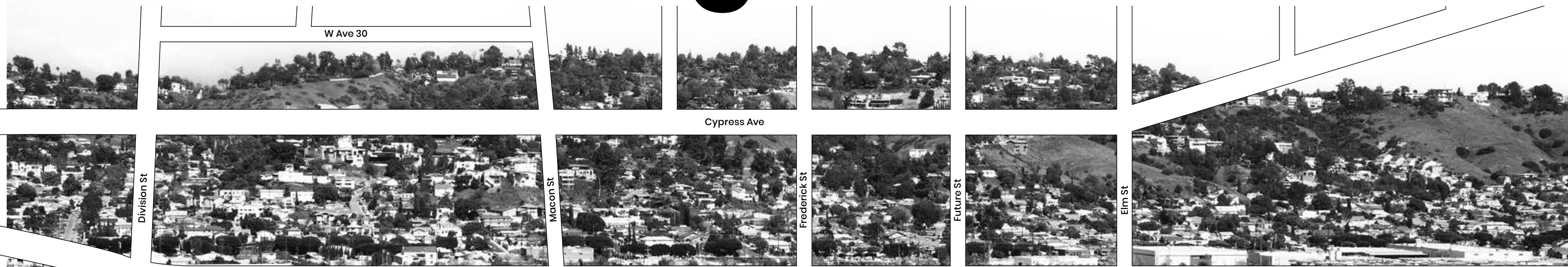


Rio de Los Angeles State Park
A Place in Between

Rio de Los Angeles State Park



- 1 Los Angeles Media Tech Center
- 2 Sotomayor Learning Academies farm
- 3 FedEx Ship Center
- 4 Con/Safos by Rafa Esparza
- 5 Interpretive signage by Rosten Woo
- 6 Concrete foundation for former railyard roundhouse
- 7 50% shaded parking
- 8 Permeable material parking stalls
- 9 Planned veterans memorial
- 10 Children's play area and splash pad
- 11 Park office and community room
- 12 Synthetic turf field
- 13 Amphitheater
- 14 Demonstration wetland/bioswale
- 15 Scent garden
- 16 Interpretive bench by Suzanne Siegel
- 17 Butterfly garden
- 18 Bird garden
- 19 Permeable gravel parking
- 20 Main route
- 21 Dayton Avenue Signal Tower
- 22 RiverPark housing development and whale skull pocket park
- 23 Entrance to Metrolink Central Maintenance Facility
- 24 Planned bridge

A Place in Between

A Place in Between Rio de Los Angeles State Park



What is a park? Is it a place to escape the surrounding city? A place to breathe and contemplate? Or is it a gathering place? A place to celebrate, laugh, play, and compete? Perhaps it is a place to learn and grow? A place where our shared cultural and natural histories are celebrated? Is it a place of beauty? A place of civic pride designed by our finest architects? Or a place apart, left alone for nature to run its course? Of course, parks can be all these things, but they can't be all these things at the same time, in the same place. The design, management, and programming of parks requires compromise between different values.

Rio de Los Angeles State Park (Rio) embodies compromise while also demonstrating how successful compromise can be. Opened on Earth Day in 2007, the 40 acres of Rio is split between “active recreation” facilities (sports fields, a playground, and a community room) and a “natural area.” The land is owned by California State Parks, but is co-managed by State Parks (who take care of the natural area) and the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks (who handle the active recreation facilities and programs). Everyday, hundreds of people come to play sports, get their children outside, attend a class in the community room, or just enjoy the open space.

Despite its success, how exactly Rio will look in the future, and whose needs it will serve, is unclear. The stretch of land which stands between the park and the Los Angeles River is the last remaining undeveloped site along the River, which puts Rio at the center of the City of Los Angeles’ grand vision to redefine the River as the City’s “front yard.” Connecting Rio to the River and potentially 59 acres of new park space presents an unparalleled opportunity, but it also increases the threat of displacement through gentrification for the surrounding communities. The future of Rio will be shaped by conversations about what a park should be.



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Un Lugar Entremedio ¿Que es un parque? ¿Es un sitio para escaparse de la ciudad alrededor? ¿Un sitio para respirar y contemplar? ¿O es una lugar de esparcimiento familiar? ¿Un sitio para celebrar, jugar, y competir en deportes? ¿Quizás es un sitio para aprender y crecer? ¿Un sitio adonde nuestras historias culturales y naturales son celebradas? ¿Es un sitio de belleza? ¿Un sitio de orgullo cívico diseñado por los mejores arquitectos? ¿O quizás es un sitio totalmente diferente, adonde la naturaleza es salvaje sin mantenimiento? Por su puesto, los parques pueden ser todas estas cosas, pero no al mismo tiempo. El diseño, administración, y programación de los parques requiere compromiso entre estos valores diferentes.

Rio de Los Ángeles State Park (Rio) es un ejemplo que demuestra un compromiso exitoso. Rio abrió en 2007 durante “Earth Day” (El Día de la Madre Tierra). Los 40 hectáreas fueron divididos en dos partes. Una parte para recreación como deportes, patio para niños, y una sala para la comunidad. La segunda parte es área natural para caminar y observar la naturaleza. Este terreno completo es propiedad de el estado de California, pero también es administrado por la ciudad de Los Ángeles. El estado se hace a cargo de la parte natural, y la ciudad cuida el resto del parque. Todos los días, cientos de personas vienen al parque para hacer deportes, para que sus hijos estén al aire libre, para atender una clase en la sala de comunidad, o simplemente para disfrutar el parque.

A pesar de que Rio es un éxito ahora, el futuro del parque es poco claro. El terreno entre el parque Rio y el Rio de Los Ángeles es el ultimo pedazo de terreno a lo largo del rio que no esta desarrollado. Esto pone el parque Rio al centro de las conversaciones para imaginar el futuro del Rio de Los Ángeles como la joya de la ciudad. Es una oportunidad para conectar el parque al Rio de Los Ángeles y posiblemente hacer 59 hectáreas de nuevo parque para poder desarrollar nuevas ideas. Al mismo tiempo esta oportunidad también trae amenaza de desplazamiento para las comunidades alrededor. El futuro del parque Rio será formado por medio de conversaciones sobre que es un parque.

25 While serving diverse functions, Rio de Los Angeles State Park does little to commemorate the history and workers of Taylor Yard. Its story occupies a small part of the interpretive bench in the park (**16**), but otherwise it is absent. Indeed few traces remain (**6, 21**) of what was once a massive industrial operation. As an important chapter in the history of the nearby neighborhoods, how will that story be present in the new parks planned for the G1 and G2 parcels?

Geological Gateway

Rio sits in the narrow valley between Mount Washington, part of the San Rafael Hills to the east, and the steep bluffs of Elysian Park, which are the terminus of the Santa Monica Mountains stretching west all the way to Malibu and beyond. This passageway is the only flat route between the San Fernando Valley and the Los Angeles Basin. All the water flowing out of the S.F. Valley is concentrated into this half-mile-wide passage, known as the Glendale Narrows. Historically, downstream the River would spread out and wind freely through the L.A. Basin to the ocean. Today, the Narrows are one of the only stretches of the channelized River without a concrete floor precisely because the high water table created by this convergence of hills defies any attempt to contain it in pavement.

The abundance of water here explains why the Tongva Indians located one of their largest villages nearby. The first Spanish expedition camped at the mouth of the Narrows and its diarist gushed about its beauty and abundance. The original Spanish pueblo relied on water that was transported from the Narrows to El Pueblo in a zanja (an aqueduct ditch). Looking into the future, the area has an important role to play in rethinking the River watershed in light of more extreme weather and flooding due to climate change.

The flow of water defines this valley, but many other things also flow through it. What is now San Fernando Road has long been a pathway for people. First, a trail blazed by Native Americans, then appropriated by the Spanish to connect the Pueblo and the San Gabriel Mission to the San Fernando Mission. Later, as Los Angeles’ connection to the First Transcontinental Railroad was extended south from Northern California, this was the natural route for the final stretch into town. Countless people first arrived in Los Angeles through this passageway. Finally, as freeways emerged as the dominant connections between regions, the California Highway Commission chose to route Interstate 5, the largest interstate highway on the West Coast, right through this geological gateway.

Puerta Geológica El parque Rio se encuentra en el valle angosto entre la montaña Mount Washington, parte de los cerros San Rafael al este, y los acantilados empinados de Elysian Park, cuales son el término de las Montañas Santa Mónica que van al oeste hasta Malibu y más allá. Esta puerta es la única ruta plana entre el Valle de San Fernando y la cuenca Los Ángeles. Toda el agua que sale del valle de San Fernando se concentra en este pasaje de media milla, llamado los “Glendale Narrows.” Históricamente, aquí el rio se regaba y torcía sobre la cuenca de Los Ángeles hasta llegar al mar. Ahora el sitio “Glendale Narrows” es el único lugar adonde el Rio de Los Ángeles no tiene cemento porque la mesa de agua esta tan alta, creada por los cerros, que el cemento no puede contenerlo.

Los Tongva, la gente indígena de esta tierra, establecieron uno de los pueblos mas grandes aquí por la abundancia de agua. Los primeros Españoles exploradores acamparon cerca de los “Glendale Narrows” y en sus cuadernos describieron una escena de belleza y abundancia. El pueblo original de los Españoles dependía del agua del Rio de Los Ángeles, que fue transportado del los “Glendale Narrows” al pueblo por medio de una zanja. Esta área, los Glendale Narrows del Rio de Los Ángeles, jugara una parte importante cuando nosotros, como una sociedad, pensamos en el futuro de nuestro medio ambiente, los ríos, las temperaturas del verano, y las inundaciones que vendrán con el cambio climático.

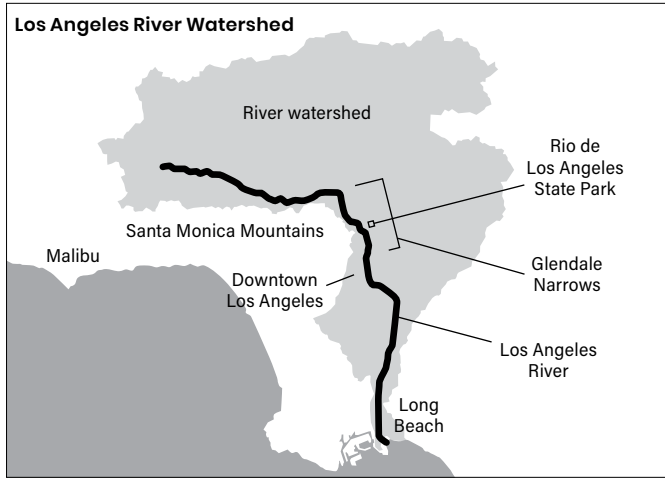
La corriente del agua formo el valle, pero otras cosas también corren por aquí. La calle que ahora se llama San Fernando Road siempre ha sido un camino para las personas. Primero, una caminata promovida por los indígenas, después un camino apropiado por los Españoles para conectar el Pueblo y la Misión de San Gabriel a la Misión de San Fernando. Después, cuando la línea de ferrocarril llamada First Transcontinental Railroad se extendió desde el Norte de California al sur, la línea paso por esta ruta para llegar al Pueblo. Muchísimas personas llegaron a este sitio via esta ruta, para visitar o empezar sus vidas en Los Ángeles. Finalmente, en la época de autopistas, cuando esta manera empezó a ser la manera primaria de cómo enlazar diferentes regiones, el gobierno California Highway Commission decidió hacer la autopista interetatal 5 por aquí, una de las autopistas mas grande del continente.

Working the Land

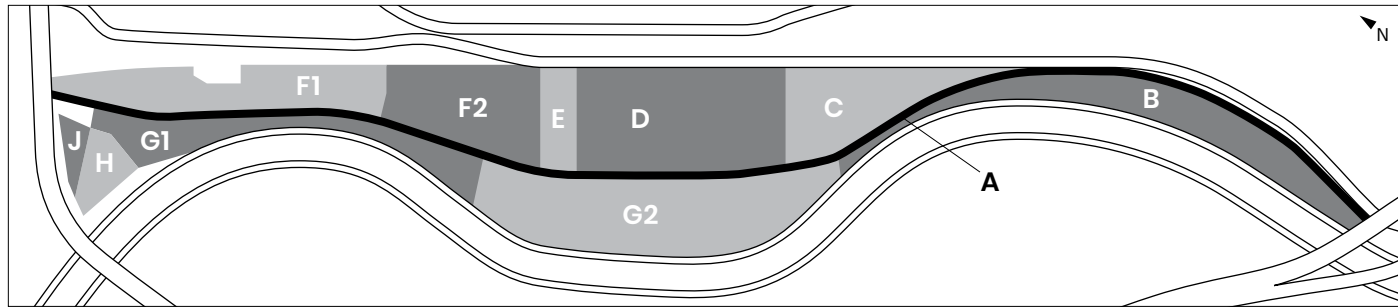
The land that is now Rio has undergone several major transformations. The first took place in the late 1700s when the Spanish Empire claimed the already-occupied land for themselves and gifted it to the Verdugo family. The Verdugo’s Rancho San Rafael stretched out over 36,000 acres from the L.A. River to the Crescenta Valley. The Rancho was home to thousands of cattle by the early 1800s which significantly altered the landscape that had sustained local Native Americans for centuries. In the 1880s, the Rancho was subdivided and this narrow valley quickly became an agricultural hotspot, taking advantage of the water supplied by the River. Near the turn of the century, the site was purchased by entrepreneur J. Hartley Taylor, who operated a grocery store and feed mill on it, as well as farming crops and raising livestock.

In the 1920s, the Southern Pacific Railroad was out-growing its facilities downstream and decided to purchase Taylor’s land to create Taylor Yard (**25**), a 244-acre railroad maintenance and operations facility. For about 40 years, it was the city’s busiest railroad hub, operating 24 hours a day. The neighborhoods of Glassell Park and Cypress Park emerged alongside the railyard and primarily housed families with ties to it. It has been estimated that at one point Southern Pacific employed 75% of the workers in the surrounding areas.

Beginning in the early 1970s, with the creation of new Southern Pacific facilities near San Bernardino, activity at Taylor Yard began to decline. By 1985, the railyard ceased operations and was divided into several parcels for sale. The first new development was an echo of the old railyard: a 29-acre Metrolink maintenance facility (**23**) at the southern end of the site. It was approved without public review, provoking a lawsuit which Metro settled in 1992 by agreeing to several mitigation measures, including funding for a new pedestrian bridge over the river (**24**). 27 years later, the bridge has yet to be built, but is set to begin construction soon. The second development was the FedEx Ship Center on the narrow Parcel E (**3**) — right in the middle of Taylor Yard, forestalling any dreams of master-planning the entire site.



26 Artist Suzanne Siegel worked with community members to create an interpretive bench at Rio (**16**) exploring the history of the Taylor Yard site and the creation of the park. This detail of the bench shows a tile featuring a poster used to promote the idea for the park as well as tiles created by local students and community members.



Taylor Yard Parcels

- A** Metrolink rail line; potential high-speed rail
- B** Metrolink maintenance facility
- C** RiverPark housing development
- D** Rio de Los Angeles State Park
- E** FedEx Ship Center
- F1** Los Angeles Media Tech Center
- F2** Sonia Sotomayor Learning Academies
- G1** Bowtie Parcel (CA State Parks)
- G2** Future Park (L.A. City)
- H** Nelson-Miller, Inc.
- J** Self-storage facility

Becoming a Park

Since the closure of Taylor Yard in the 1980s, many Angelenos have imagined what the site could become — particularly those with hopes for a revitalized L.A. River. The City of Los Angeles, however, has often looked at it as an opportunity to attract industry and jobs. Thus, when one of the nation’s largest developers proposed a split industrial/retail development on the 40-acre Parcel D in 1999, the City quickly approved the project with a \$4.37 million public subsidy and exemption from environmental review. In response, a diverse group of local residents, social justice advocates, and environmentalists united to form the Coalition for a State Park at Taylor Yard and challenge the developer’s exemption. Their victory cleared the way for California State Parks to purchase the site in 2001.

The design of Rio was developed jointly by the State and the City, and it reflects the diverse dreams of the Coalition. After a visit in 2009, river advocate Joe Linton noted that the park “is an important example of multiple uses coexisting, overlapping, and enriching each other.”

Today, two Taylor Yard parcels remain undeveloped, the riverfront pair of G1 and G2, which are both slated to become parks. The narrow 17-acre G1, known as the Bowtie, was purchased by State Parks in 2003 and, despite remaining undeveloped, has hosted a slew of programming and installations curated by the arts organization Clockshop (**4, 5**). The 42-acre G2, which sits directly between Rio and the River, was purchased by the City in 2017. The soil at both parcels remains heavily polluted from decades of industrial use, which complicates their transformation.

We value parks for a variety of reasons. A balance will once again need to be found amongst competing and complementing values in the development of G1 and G2. While the design and management of these new parks has yet to be decided, everyone seems to agree that they should be connected to the existing Rio to create almost 100 acres of continuous parkland. The decisions made in the next few years at Taylor Yard will help shape the future of Rio, the River, and the communities surrounding it for generations.

27 Parks raise questions about access. Which neighborhoods have more parks than others? Does one need a car to get to the park? Is it a place where everyone feels safe? While drawing a boundary around a parcel of land and declaring it for public use is an important statement, “vacant” spaces like the undeveloped parcels of Taylor Yard rarely go unused. Holes in fences, dutifully repaired again and again, attest to the illicit access sought by skateboarders, the homeless, and other users of the land. The development of G2, the Bowtie, and the new pedestrian bridge (**24**) will afford greater access, but we shouldn’t forget that Taylor Yard is a place that exists today. Just because it isn’t labelled as a park on the map, doesn’t mean that it hasn’t been a public space of sorts for the last three decades.