PUBLIC

NOTICE

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS
LOS ANGELES DISTRICT

SAN GABRIEL RIVER AND SAN JOSE CREEK CONFLUENCE VEGETATION AND SEDIMENT REMOVAL

LOCATION: The project area is in the cities of South El Monte and Avocado Heights, Los Angeles County, approximately 11 miles east of downtown Los Angeles, 17 miles upstream of the Pacific Ocean. The Pomona Freeway (State Route 60 [SR-60]) and the San Gabriel River Freeway (Interstate 605 [I-605]) intersect south of the project area.

PROPOSED PROJECT: To prevent further erosion of the San Gabriel River 2b (SGR2b) levee and, thus, prevent potential failure, the proposed project will consist of removing approximately 127,000 cubic yards of accumulated excess sediment and 11.2 acres of vegetation as part of the operation and maintenance of the channel. The channel in this reach is trapezoidal and comprised of concrete/grouted stone with an earthen invert. Sediment will be excavated to the design elevation of the channel invert across the entire width of the channel between the San Gabriel River/San Jose Creek confluence and the Pomona Freeway (SR60). The maintenance footprint is approximately 17.8 acres.

The depth of the sediment ranges from 3 to 10 feet. No alterations or modifications of structural elements of the engineered channel will occur.

BACKGROUND AND AUTHORITY: During a routine maintenance inspection in April 2017, significant toe erosion was discovered on the right bank of the SGR2b levee which is normally underwater. During the 2018 levee periodic inspection, the levee was further examined for deficiencies. It was determined that the entrance angle of San Jose Creek is 58 degrees, significantly higher than the 15-degree entrance angle requirement for design of a channel confluence. It was also determined that significant shoaling at the confluence of San Jose Creek and San Gabriel River have impinged and directed flows at the levee embankment. The section of levee was previously repaired and fortified with derrick stone. Despite the placed stone, the impingement persists, and the levee's embankment is actively being scoured, undermined and is at risk of failing.

The SGR2b levee is part of the larger Los Angeles County Drainage Area (LACDA). The LACDA is a comprehensive flood-risk management plan, and its purpose is to provide flood risk reduction to areas susceptible to flooding within Los Angeles County. Significant flooding between 1914 and 1934 emphasized the need for major flood risk management projects in southern California.

A failure of the levee system would increase the risk associated with flooding, as well as, the potential risk of loss of life.

The Flood Control Act of 1936 (Pub. L. No. 74-738, § 5 (1936)) authorized Federal civil works flood risk management projects for Los Angeles County, California. The Act authorized construction of flood control structures for the Los Angeles County Drainage Area (LACDA) and the improvement of the San Gabriel River for the protection of metropolitan Los Angeles County, California.

NOTICE

PUBLIC

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT COMPLIANCE:

The Environmental Assessment (EA) is necessary to document and evaluate the impacts of sediment and vegetation removal on environmental resources, and to document conditions in the project area.

Biological Resources: The Proposed Action, including future maintenance, would include design aspects and implementation of BMPs and measures that would address potential effects related to temporary habitat loss, excessive noise, increased human presence, fugitive dust emissions, and habitat movement. Permanent and temporary impacts to habitat would be offset by approximately 18 acres of vegetation management consisting of invasive/non-native species removal. The Proposed Action would not result in a substantial loss to the population of any native fish, wildlife, or vegetation, wildlife movement or in overall diversity of the ecosystem.

Least Bell's Vireo (FE, SE)
Least Bell's vireo (vireo) are known to currently maintain seven (7) territories within the project area. Of the seven (7) known territories occurring within the project area, two lie within the permanent construction footprint, five (5) lie within the Proposed Action. This would result in potential permanent displacement of two territories and temporary displacement of five (5) territories. This is assuming that vireo nesting beyond 200 feet from the project would continue successfully. To avoid potential effects to vireo, vegetation clearing would occur outside of the nesting season, and sensitive species monitoring would occur through the duration of construction activities. Additionally, considering the large width of the floodplain, movement of vireo would not be constricted within the adjacent area. Although increased competition for nest sites and other resources could occur until construction is completed.

As described earlier, nonnative species comprise a large percentage of the project area. Vegetation clearing at the beginning of construction and site enhancement after construction would create an overall improvement in riparian habitat within the project area.

Coastal California gnatcatcher (FT)
Coastal California gnatcatchers (gnatcatcher) are known to currently disperse two (2) territories within the project area. Of the two (2) known territories occurring within the project area, none are within the permanent construction footprint, one is within the Proposed Action. No potential permanent displacement of territories is expected because these were juvenile gnatcatchers dispersing through the habitat within and adjacent to the project area. This is assuming that the gnatcatcher nesting beyond 200 feet from the project would continue successfully. To avoid potential effects to gnatcatcher, vegetation clearing would occur outside of the nesting season, and sensitive species monitoring would occur through the duration of construction activities. Additionally, considering the large width of the floodplain, movement of vireo would not be constricted within the adjacent area. Although increased competition for nest sites and other resources could occur until construction is completed.

A total of approximately 95 acres of designated critical habitat fall within the project area. Approximately one-third (1/3) of designated critical habitat would be temporarily impacted during enhancement and maintenance. Of the total critical habitat within the project area, a small portion provides PBFs (i.e., breeding and foraging habitat) required for gnatcatcher occupation. Designated critical habitat outside of the permanent construction area would be enhanced after construction is completed.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Cultural Resources: Most of this area is previously disturbed, located within an active stream channel, and no archaeological resources have been recorded or are likely to occur within this area. Sediments to be removed would not extend below the original design elevation of the channel invert (the top of the toe) across the entire width of the San Gabriel River at this location in the river channel. Although the proposed undertaking is within a levee segment that may contribute to the eligibility of the San Gabriel Fiver Flood Control System (SGRFCS), the removal of accumulated sediment and vegetation would not alter in any substantive way the qualities and characteristics of a historic property, nor pose measurable visual effects to the larger resource. Coordination and consultation with the California State Historic Preservation Office and consulting parties is in progress and concurrence is expected by June 14, 2021.

Water Resources: The Proposed Action will require the removal of approximately 127,000 cy of accumulated sediment, placement of 2,000 cy of fill for access and the removal of 11.2 acres of vegetation within the San Gabriel River channel resulting the discharge of dredge or fill material within Waters of the United States (WOTUS). The temporary discharges of dredged or fill material into WOTUS associated with the access ramps, sediment removal, and stream diversion/dewatering are subject to Sections 401 and 404 of the Clean Water Act. These discharges are authorized by the Clean Water Act Section 401 Technically Conditioned Water Quality Certification (WQC) for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Los Angeles District, Operation, Maintenance, Repair, Replacement and Rehabilitation (OMRR&R) Activities Associated with the Los Angeles County Drainage Area (LACDA) Project System, Los Angeles County, a copy of which can be found in the EA. Although the Corps does not process and issue Section 404 permits for its own activities, the Corps authorizes its own discharges of dredged and fill material into WOTUS by applying all applicable substantive legal requirements, which have been considered in the 404(b)(1) evaluation also provided in this EA.

Per 33 CFR 337.1(b), any person who has an interest which may be affected by the disposal of this dredged material may request a public hearing. The request must be submitted in writing to the district engineer within the comment period of this notice and must clearly set forth the interest which may be affected and the manner in which the interest may be affected by this activity.

SUBMITTING COMMENTS: The Corps of Engineers is soliciting comments from the public; Federal, state, and local agencies and officials; and other interested parties. Comments will be accepted from June 9, 2021 to July 9, 2021.

Comments should be sent electronically to: emily.a.lester@usace.army.mil

Alternatively, comments may be mailed to:

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Los Angeles District
Planning Division
Attn: Emily Lester
915 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 930
Los Angeles, CA 90017

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS – LOS ANGELES DISTRICT