



**Office of the Mayor
City of Los Angeles**

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MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA MARKS MAJOR MILESTONE IN RESTORATION OF LOWER OWENS RIVER

Fourteen months after Mayor released river's flow, once-dry river is now flourishing with new plant and animal life for the first time in almost 100 years

LOS ANGELES – Delivering on his commitment to restore lush plant and animal life to the Lower Owen River's long-depleted banks, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa today marked a major milestone in the river's transformation, releasing its first seasonal flow and sowing the seeds for further growth along the largest river restoration project in America.

"Today, along these banks, we see the initial fruits of an historic turnaround story beyond any that Hollywood could dream up," Mayor Villaraigosa said. "Where the river channel lay cracked and dry for almost 100 years, in one year the flow of water has nurtured an entire river ecosystem back to life."

By opening the water-release gates, the Mayor began a two-week flooding of the river's banks, mimicking the snowmelt and natural seasonal flow of the river, and setting the foundation for more plant growth this year.

The increased flow – which raises the river's water level by 500 percent – will clear the river channels of silt and soak the floodplain to help the seeds of willows and cottonwoods to germinate.

Fourteen months after the Mayor released the first flow in the Lower Owens River in 95 years, the river's rebirth has exceeded biologists' expectations.

While countless reeds and shrubs have taken root along the riverbanks, the river's waters are now flowing with large-mouth and small-mouth bass, Owens

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sucker, brown trout, bluegill, mallard ducks, beavers and Great Blue Heron – already attracting kayakers, bird-watchers and hikers along its 62-mile route.

“The seasonal habitat flow is the most important management tool for development of the lower Owens into a river again,” said Mark Bagley of the Sierra Club. “Development of the river, in the once dry channel, is a process that will take some time. I’m pleased to see the progress so far, and there are many challenges ahead, but this first seasonal habitat flow is an important milestone in the process.”

Restoring the river’s flow is the cornerstone of the Lower Owens River Restoration Project (LORP), a collaboration between the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) and the County of Inyo to mitigate the environmental impact caused by 20 years of ground-water pumping in the Owens Valley by the department.

The restoration project covers a 78,000-acre area, consisting of a diverse mix of riparian (riverbank), wetlands and river vegetation, river channel and open water, seeps and springs.

Having already returned a steady, year-round flow along 62-miles of the Lower Owens River (from Big Pine to the Owens Lake Delta), the project will spread water into the Valley’s basins, creating permanent lakes, ponds and hundreds of acres of wetland habitat for waterfowl and shorebirds by the Delta.

“The success of the LORP demonstrates the commitment of the City of Los Angeles and Department of Water and Power to restoring the Owens Valley ecosystem and to good stewardship of these lands for the benefit of the environment and the people of the Owens Valley,” said David Nahai, LADWP CEO and general manager.

To track the progress of the ecosystem restoration, teams of scientists from LADWP, Inyo County Water Department and project consultant Ecosystem Sciences will launch a detailed, 15-year monitoring effort this summer.

In addition to tracking the evolution of birds, plants, animals and wetlands, the monitoring plan will include a land management program to ensure the proper management of livestock and other land uses to protect the habitat.

Along with Inyo County and public input, the department is developing a recreation plan to identify potential public facilities trails are needed. Facilities will be installed as needed to manage recreation with the goal of protecting and enhancing the river system.

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“The return of the seasonal flow of the Lower Owens River is a result of the city’s commitment to returning wildlife and vegetation to the banks of the once dry river,” said Council President Eric Garcetti. “This is an important milestone for the ecological restoration of the area.”

“Today, Eden has returned to the Lower Owens Valley,” said Councilwoman Jan Perry, who chairs the City Council’s Energy and Environment Committee.

“The revitalization of the Owens River has been an historic team effort to restore and protect our region’s environment,” said Councilwoman Wendy Greuel, a member of the Energy and Environment Committee. “In a short time, we have transformed the River from a bone-dry desert to a thriving ecological paradise for all Californians to enjoy.”

“The Owens Valley Committee is extremely pleased that the seasonal habitat flows are going to be implemented,” said Carla Scheidlinger, President of the Owens Valley Committee. “We are pleased that the City of Los Angeles is beginning to take seriously its commitment to not only provide water for the Lower Owens River, but also to responsibly manage the river system as a whole. The habitat flows are an important first step in the on-going work of this management.”

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