

Big Dreams for the Los Gatos Creek

[Extracted and adapted from the “Riparian Advocacy” presentation by L. Ames (online at www.wgbackfence.net/Coyote_Howl.pdf), presented at the “Coyote Howl” Conference at San José State University, April 17, 2015.]

The Los Gatos Creek runs from the Santa Cruz Mountains down to its confluence with the Guadalupe River near the Arena in San José. For much of its length, the creek flows thru a vibrant riparian (“streamside”) habitat and is paralleled by the popular Los Gatos Creek Trail.

However, a section of the creek was buried in a culvert some decades ago near Park Ave. at Montgomery St. in an attempt to make car traffic flow faster.

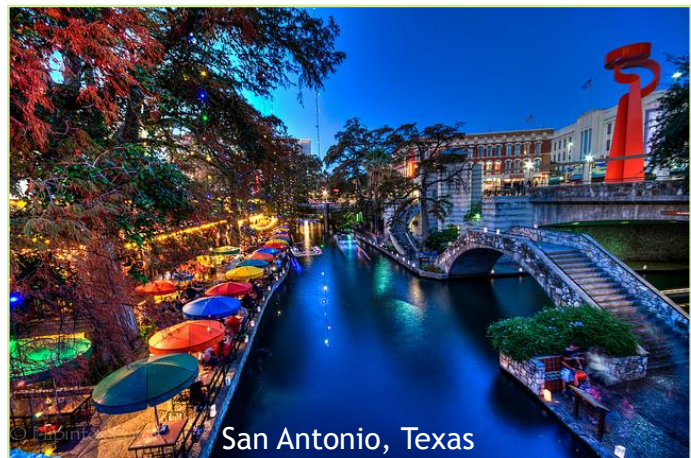


This is in the vicinity of the Diridon Station. There are likely to be significant improvements in the area soon with the introduction of High Speed Rail, BART, and either a baseball stadium or other high-intensity developments. Infrastructure will need to be modified and roadways will likely be reconfigured. The Diridon “Good Neighbors” Task force endorsed the concept of “daylighting” the creek – re-creating an open channel for the creek concurrent with the other structural improvements for the area. Besides the benefits for the environment, the freed creek would enable the continuation of the Los Gatos Creek Trail, and would also help alleviate traffic congestion by providing grade-separated crossings for the pedestrian traffic. The Diridon Station Area Plan was



brought to [City Council](#) 6/17/14 (item 4.13), and daylighting the Los Gatos was specifically singled out and confirmed. While no specific designs were adopted, the vision of freeing the Los Gatos Creek was formally recognized.

At the “Coyote Howl” Conference, I encouraged San José to “Dream Big”. I pointed out that San Antonio is justly world famous for its “River Walk”: 2.5 mile long, lined with shops and restaurants, it’s almost like a Disneyland ride.



San José also has the potential to build upon our network of creekside trails – we may have less water in the creeks, but we have more miles of trails, with several opportunities for trail-side amenities in the more urban areas. But the development should be done “San José-style”: like San Antonio, we can make the creek or stream a “destination” with shops and sidewalk cafes along the outer edges of the corridors, but we can keep the creek itself “wild and natural” at its heart.

As an example, I showed an aerial photo of the Los Gatos Creek in Campbell: there are trails on either side of the creek that are used by hundreds daily. And yet, even in such close proximity to all that public, the natural habi-



tat is thriving and even improving in between. What if, rather than being against Freeway 17, this was the section of the Los Gatos Creek between the Arena and the newly freed culvert? That section is conveniently near both downtown San José and the BART/High Speed Rail Station. Imagine, instead of the culvert and the backsides of nondescript shops, there were wide sidewalks adjacent to thru-trails, with shops, pubs, cafes, and the like lining the sidewalks, enticing visitors arriving from out-of-town or attending the Arena to stay in town longer to shop and play.

My point is that we can embrace our creeks and streams and also create lively world-class amenities: we can be inspired by the San Antonio River Walk without replicating it point-for-point. We can do things “San José-style”: we can continue to have the salmon spawning in the waters and the beaver prowling the banks while at the same time have cyclists and joggers on the thru-trails, and tourists and locals alike strolling the sidewalks enjoying the sidewalk cafes in our urban downtown environment.

“Dream Big!”

~Larry Ames, 4/21/15