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L.A.'s rivers get some respect

by *Laura Paskus*

CALIFORNIA

A new proposal could someday turn the lower Los Angeles River and the San Gabriel River - now little more than concrete-lined ditches - into one of the nation's few urban national parks.

In June, the U.S. Department of the Interior gave a tentative thumbs-up to a bill from U.S. Rep. Hilda Solis, D-Calif., to study whether the two rivers and sections of the nearby San Gabriel Mountains are eligible for inclusion in the national park system.

Solis' district in Los Angeles County, 89 percent of which is nonwhite, has 17 open-pit gravel mines and is surrounded by three Superfund sites. The lower Los Angeles and San Gabriel rivers watershed is one of the most toxic watersheds in the U.S.

"There are pockets of poverty where people don't have the luxury of traveling to go skiing or to do different recreational opportunities," says Solis. "And hopefully there can be some open space preserved for them and their families."

California's Rivers and Mountains Conservancy has earmarked more than \$60 million to restore the lower Los Angeles and San Gabriel rivers and has already begun two restoration projects in the watershed.

The bill just passed the House Resources Committee and Solis hopes it will make it to the House floor before the end of the year. But even if Congress approves the \$500,000 study, the Park Service may have to wait up to three years before receiving the funding from the federal government.

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