

Greens hope study helps revive Los Angeles River

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Environmentalists and community leaders said Thursday that they hope a \$3 million study of the Los Angeles River will find ways to create a lively residential and economic renaissance along the 30-mile span.

Funded with a Department of Water and Power economic development grant, the city plans to hire a consultant next spring to conduct an 18-month analysis of ways to improve the river's environment, along with five riverside development and park projects, including one in the San Fernando Valley.

The study's scope will consider removing concrete from the river channel to re-create the natural flowing waterway, a difficult change that would have to be approved by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which is responsible for ensuring that the river doesn't flood surrounding communities.

A more scenic, natural river could attract developers to the riverbanks -- a prospect city leaders are banking on.

"I'd like to use these economic development funds to see how we blend recreational opportunities along the river with economic development opportunities, to see housing come to the river, to see beautiful restaurants where we could have a river view while we dine," Mayor James Hahn said at a news conference to tout the plan.

Environmentalists said the river revitalization is the most exciting project in the city's future, one that has the potential to dramatically change 30 miles through the heart of the Valley, East Los Angeles and downtown.

"We need to change the blighted aspect of the river that brings the community down into something that heals the community," said Nancy Smith, spokeswoman for the Anahuak Youth Soccer Association, which has pushed for more ball fields and green space along the channel.

Joel Reynolds, an attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council, wants to see mixed-use development along the river, combining housing, jobs and shopping in a walkable neighborhood.

"Revitalizing is not just creating green space," Reynolds said. "You also need economic development for it to work."