

## Compton Creek Natural Park opens on school campus



County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas stands among members of environmental groups and students from George Washington Elementary School in Compton Nov. 13 for the opening of the three-acre Compton Creek Natural Park on the campus of George Washington Elementary School.

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**Compton Creek Natural Park opens on school campus** By Wave Staff

**COMPTON** — Ranger Collin O'Mara-Green led a group of fourth graders from George Washington Elementary School here through a winding path along the newly built Compton Creek Natural Park Nov. 13 and pointed at a dark green sage plant.

"Now I want you to touch the leaves and smell your fingers," said O'Mara-Green, a guide for the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority. The ooohs and ahhs filled the air as the students commented on the peppery, minty smell of the plant. Since their school grounds are entirely covered with asphalt, they had never seen a sage plant at close range before — never mind touch one.

But now that they have a new nature park just out the back door, the students will be able to run in the grass, smell the flowers and learn about nature as part of their daily routine and classroom instruction.

"Since we only play on the blacktop, we never had plants to smell actually," said 9-year-old Nathalie Razo. "These sage plants smell better than flowers."

It was the first time students got the chance to tour the three-acre park, which was formerly an abandoned muddy field with rolling tumbleweeds.

The restored park and habitat, which has a walking path and exercise equipment, is the first phase of a three-part master plan that eventually will include a youth center and headquarters for the Los Angeles Conservation Corps and an urban playfield with a total of four miles of space for the entire community to enjoy.

The park was completed with the support of county Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, the Natural Resources Agency, the Coastal Conservancy, the Los Angeles Conservation Corps and the Mountains Recreation Conservation Authority.

In addition, the cistern will hold 127,000 gallons of water beneath the lawn to collect rainwater that will be used to water the park.

"This park is all about implementing a dream, a vision and a master plan, for a cleaner and greener watershed," said Ridley-Thomas, who helped fund the project. "We believe that Compton Creek can and should be more than a storm drain — it should be the centerpiece of revitalization and recreation within this community."

The park is an example of how nonprofits, schools, cities, states and counties can pull together to create a new learning environment and recreation area for all people in a community to enjoy. George Washington Elementary Principal Omaira Lee said the park would be embraced as an educational resource.

“This park will bring students a safe and educational connection to their natural environment,” she said.

“It doesn’t get much better than this,” added Polly Escovedo, program manager for the California Natural Resources Agency. “We are hoping that this will be a model for other school districts.”

Two hundred years ago, Compton Creek was a lively creek bed with fish and rocks and the wildlife habitat that a river area cultivates. But due to flooding dangers, the creek was cemented and turned into a storm channel many years ago — something that devastated the wildlife and habitat.

But as the sycamores, oaks, sage grasses and wildflowers begin to take root, the butterflies, hummingbirds and lizards also will return.

Indeed as fifth grader Teo Thomas noted, “Compton Creek Natural Park is more than a park to us. For many of us it is a source of pride and joy.”