

Technical Report for Schematic Design & Air Pollution Reduction Measures Report

NATURAL PARK at Ramona Gardens Housing Development



PRESENTED TO **LEGACY LA**



Mountains Recreation & Conservation Authority



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The Natural Park at Ramona Gardens Housing Development

Combining community priorities, air pollution reduction measures, ecosystem science and engineering, the **Natural Park** will improve public health by transforming land between Ramona Gardens and the 15-lane freeway corridor into a beautiful 'Nature in the City' park. This innovative '**Big Nature/La Naturaleza en Grande**' plan features an Anti-Pollution Green Buffer with over 15,000 native trees, shrubs and plants and a pollution/sound barrier to reduce air pollutants and noise, recycle stormwater, build resiliency to climate change and provide green open space for families and children to gather, walk and play.

Legacy LA

Legacy LA is a non-profit, community-based youth development organization dedicated to long-term community change. Legacy LA positively intervenes in the lives of young people by providing tools to transform their lives and communities, including alternatives to gangs and violence. Legacy LA's flagship youth leadership program uses a social justice model to increase youths' knowledge of community issues, civics, and community organizing to build their capacity to address public health and environmental justice issues and systems that affect their lives. Legacy LA is a leader in the effort to address public health problems in Boyle Heights by improving air quality, education, and employment conditions and creating green open space.

Community Conservation Solutions (CCS)

CCS is a non-profit organization that implements innovative projects to benefit both human and natural communities. CCS develops nature-based solutions that address public health and other problems by using an ecosystem science approach to improve air quality, reduce greenhouse gases, clean and re-use stormwater, build resiliency to climate change, restore native habitat and create recreation and green open space in communities with the greatest needs.

Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA)

The MRCA is dedicated to the preservation and management of local open space and parkland, wildlife habitat, watershed lands and trails, and to ensuring public access to public parkland. The MRCA provides natural resources and scientific expertise, regional planning services, and education and leadership programs.

For more information, contact

www.conservationsolutions.org
or www.legacyla.org
or sarah.kevorkian@mrca.ca.gov

THE PROJECT TEAMS

Project Teams included Legacy LA, Community Conservation Solutions and the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority

Feldman Consulting Project Lead, Direction and Design

Feldman Consulting provides strategic and practical guidance on complex environmental, community, land use and water issues to move projects from vision to successful implementation. We specialize in innovative approaches and on integrating multiple benefits to create landmark conservation, park, community-serving and development projects.

VS2 Consulting Inc. Civil Engineering, Stormwater and Sustainability

VS2 Consulting Inc. provides planning, civil and environmental engineering, and project/program management services to institutional, public, and private clients. We leverage our expertise, local knowledge, and innovative approach to help deliver sustainably-conceived and engineered solutions to our client partners.

SWA Landscape Architecture

SWA is a landscape architecture, urban design and planning firm, with seven studios worldwide. SWA's public park portfolio focuses on improving quality of life in cities by addressing issues of density, pollution, sustainability, community programming, arts, and culture.

Land IQ Habitat Restoration and Soil Science

Land IQ specializes in providing solutions to challenging agricultural and environmental problems throughout the western United States. Native habitat restoration services include revegetating and reclaiming disturbed landscapes, and natural resources planning, analysis, and management.

WSP USA Air Quality Research and Analysis

WSP USA is the U.S. operating company of WSP, one of the world's leading engineering and professional services firms. Dedicated to serving local communities, we are engineers, planners, technical experts, strategic advisors and construction management professionals. WSP USA designs lasting solutions in the building, transportation, energy, water and environment markets.

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Public Health • Air Quality • Stormwater • Native Habitat • Green Open Space • Walking Trail • Recreation



Mountains Recreation &
Conservation Authority

PROJECT TEAM



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The Natural Park at Ramona Gardens is part of California Climate Investments, a statewide program that puts billions of Cap-and-Trade dollars to work reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening the economy, and improving public health and the environment—particularly in disadvantaged communities. For more information, visit the California Climate Investments website at www.caclimateinvestments.ca.gov.

INTRODUCTION

TECHNICAL REPORT FOR SCHEMATIC DESIGN & AIR POLLUTION REDUCTION MEASURES REPORT

We are pleased to present these two reports for the **Natural Park at the Ramona Gardens Housing Development** in Northern Boyle Heights in the City of Los Angeles.

By incorporating Air Pollution Reduction Measures specifically designed to improve air quality and public health, the Natural Park schematic design is a nature-based approach that integrates ecosystem science, engineering and community needs to help make Ramona Gardens a healthier place to live, work and play. The design concept was developed in partnership with Legacy LA and was driven by community priorities.

The 'Big Nature/La Naturaleza en Grande' design for the Natural Park features an Anti-Pollution Green Buffer with over 15,000 native trees, shrubs and plants and a pollution and sound barrier to maximize reduction of air pollutants and noise from the three freeways surrounding Ramona Gardens, and especially from the immediately adjacent 15-lane freeway and transit corridor. Ramona Gardens is in the top 1% of the most polluted communities in California and is designated as severely disadvantaged by the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA). Residents suffer disproportionately from serious health problems that air pollution makes worse, including adult and youth obesity, asthma, high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes.

The Natural Park takes advantage of the ability of native habitat – with extensive, year-round leaf canopies above ground and robust root systems and soil biosphere below ground – to absorb air pollutants and air toxins, reduce urban heat island effects and store carbon in both plants and soil to reduce greenhouse gases (GHGs). Located within the Los Angeles River watershed, the Natural Park includes cleaning and re-use of urban runoff and stormwater to help improve water quality in the L.A. River.

Other Natural Park elements include a walking trail, plaza for swap meet and community events, recreation courts, public art, seating and shade, and natural places for children and families to play.

A 'Nature in the City' Model to Reduce Air Pollution and Improve Public Health

The Natural Park at Ramona Gardens provides a model that can be replicated in disadvantaged communities impacted by air pollution throughout California. This 'Nature in the City' model featuring Air Pollution Reduction Measures demonstrates how strategically-designed native habitat combined with air pollution reduction strategies, stormwater recycling, recreation and walking trails can address serious air pollution and public health problems, while also meeting community needs for flexible open space, augmenting local water supplies and developing local resilience to climate change.

Funding was provided by the State Coastal Conservancy's Climate Ready Program and the Community Air Program through the California Air Resources Board's California Climate Investments Program, with support from the Red Blue Green Fund of the Liberty Hill Foundation, the Union Bank Foundation and the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation.

For more information, contact Legacy LA at lou@legacyla.org or the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority at sarah.kevorkian@mrca.ca.gov.

A Living Partnership:

**Native Trees, Plants and Soil Ecosystems
Reduce Air Pollutants and Store Carbon**

- Above-ground: Year-round leaf canopies in many layers
- Below-ground: Extensive root systems and soil organisms
- 250 native trees and tree-sized shrubs
- Over 15,000 understory plants, flowers and grasses

Cleaner Air and Carbon Benefits:

**Natural Park Uptakes Air Pollutants,
Reduces Greenhouse Gases and Stores Carbon**

- 280 metric tons of carbon in 20 years
- Over 2,300 metric tons of carbon in 50 years



LAND IQ



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TECHNICAL REPORT FOR SCHEMATIC DESIGN

By Esther Feldman, Feldman Consulting

We are pleased to present to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority this Technical Report for Schematic Design for the Natural Park at Ramona Gardens Housing Development in Northern Boyle Heights in the City of Los Angeles. The schematic design is based on the Concept Plan for the Natural Park at Ramona Gardens, which was developed in partnership with Legacy LA and was driven by community priorities (see Community Priorities). The schematic design for the Natural Park incorporates the recommended Air Pollution Reduction Measures to improve public health (see Air Pollution Reduction Measures Report) and presents an integrated, nature-based approach that combines air quality, ecosystem science, engineering and community needs.

The Project Team included the professions of civil, structural and hydrology engineering, habitat restoration and soil science, landscape architecture and urban planning, and reflects input from the Air Pollution Reduction Technical Team, Ramona Gardens Residents Advisory Council (RAC), Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA), swap meet vendors at Ramona

Gardens, L.A. Police Department's Community Safety Partnership at Ramona Gardens, other public agencies and Legacy LA.

Community engagement during the concept design planning was led by Legacy LA, Legacy LA Youth Leaders and the Ramona Gardens RAC, and included a door-to-door survey of the 500 residences at Ramona Gardens, meetings with stakeholder community groups and community workshops. The 'Big Nature/ La Naturaleza en Grande' Concept Plan is based on the highest community priorities, which included a "quiet place to escape the city, where people can interact with beautiful native plants, trees and wildlife;" "a natural place where children can run and play;" and "protection from the air pollution and noise from the freeway."

The Natural Park will transform four acres of underused land between the residences at Ramona Gardens and a 15-lane freeway and transit corridor—one of the busiest in the United States—into a beautiful, green 'Nature in the City' open space park that is designed as an Anti-Pollution Green Buffer to help address air and noise pollution, provide natural shade and cooling and help increase local resiliency to climate change. The ecosystem approach includes planting over 15,000 native trees, shrubs and



FIGURE 3: Artist's rendering of the Natural Park's La Plaza Verde. By SWA

plants, including nearly 200 trees and tree-sized shrubs. The Natural Park at Ramona Gardens is within the Los Angeles River watershed, so the park's capture, cleaning and re-use of urban runoff and stormwater will help improve water quality in the L.A. River.

Nature-Based Approach Integrates Ecosystem Science, Engineering and Community Needs to Reduce Air Pollution and Improve Public Health

Ramona Gardens is in the top 1% of the most polluted communities in California and is designated as severely disadvantaged by the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA). Ramona Gardens is surrounded by three freeways and industrial land uses, including two of the busiest freeways in the United States (Interstate-10 and Interstate-15).

Air quality is rated "unhealthy" during at least 40% of the year and traffic is 56% above the safe health thresholds set by the Federal Highway Administration. Breathing particulate matter from freeways is a leading cause of asthma and impaired lung development in children. The high numbers of children and seniors living at Ramona Gardens are the most sensitive to air pollution. Residents suffer disproportionately from serious health problems that air pollution makes worse, including adult and youth obesity, asthma, high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes.

By incorporating Air Pollution Reduction Measures specifically designed to improve air quality and public health, the Natural Park integrates ecosystem science, engineering and community needs to help make Ramona Gardens a healthier place to live, work and play. The Natural Park elements include:

- Over 15,000 native trees, tree-sized shrubs and plants working together as a vegetation barrier to pollution
- Earth mounds to help raise the height of trees
- Air pollution and sound barrier
- Cleaned and recycled urban runoff
- Walking fitness trail
- Plaza for weekly swap meet and community use
- Seating and shade
- Recreation courts and exercise steps
- Community-focused public art, murals and sculpture
- Natural places for children and families to play

The Natural Park maximizes the ability of native habitat—with extensive leaf canopies above ground and robust root systems and soil biosphere below ground—to absorb air pollutants, store carbon, reduce urban heat island effects and reduce greenhouse gases.

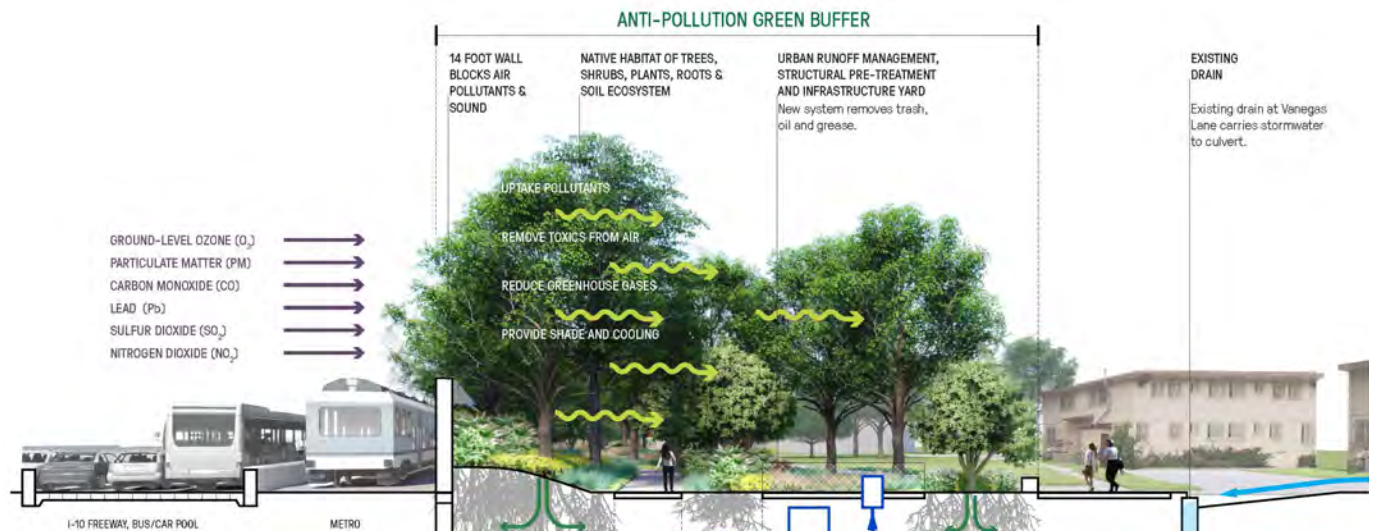


FIGURE 4: Cross-section through the Natural Park (looking west). By SWA

The ecosystem-focused design is based on native plant communities that flourished in this area over 100 years ago. The complex of native trees, tree-sized shrubs, grasses and plants are long-lived, adapted to this part of Southern California and resilient to heat and drought. In combination with the pollution barrier/sound wall and earth berms, these trees and plants provide wide, year-round leaf canopies that support birds, butterflies and other invertebrates, and root systems that contribute to a healthy soil environment rich in micro-organisms.

Job-training, workforce development, local employment and continued community engagement are integral components of the plans for the Natural Park, both during construction and for ongoing operations and maintenance. Public art that includes community design and implementation is envisioned for numerous park elements.

A 'Nature in the City' Park Model for Reducing Air Pollution and Improving Public Health

The Natural Park at Ramona Gardens provides a model that can be replicated in disadvantaged communities impacted by air pollution throughout California. This 'Nature in the City' model featuring Air Pollution Reduction Measures demonstrates how integrating strategically-designed native habitat with air pollution reduction strategies, stormwater recycling, recreation and walking trails can address serious air pollution public health problems, while also meeting community needs for flexible open space, augmenting local water supplies and developing local resilience to climate change.

Project Team, Project Funders and Next Steps

In order to advance the Natural Park at Ramona Gardens to construction, the next steps include: defining the lead agency and an entity able to perform long-term operations and maintenance; conducting Design Development and Construction Documentation; conducting a Phase I Environmental Assessment to determine the steps necessary to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); defining job-training and workforce development programs; Permits and Approvals; and Bid and Award. These steps are dependent on receiving funding from federal, state, regional and local public agencies and private sources.

All phases should include continued coordination and collaboration with the residents of Ramona Gardens Housing Development and the surrounding community, the Ramona Gardens Residents Advisory Council, and the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles.

The Technical Team is composed of Feldman Consulting, Community Conservation Solutions, VS2 Consulting Inc., SWA, Land IQ, Miyamoto International, P2S Inc., Murow Development Consultants and WSP.

The schematic design phase of the Natural Park at Ramona Gardens was directed by the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA), led by Feldman Consulting and made possible with funding from the State Coastal Conservancy's Climate Ready Program through the California Air Resources Board's California Climate Investments Program, the Union Bank Foundation and The Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AIR POLLUTION REDUCTION MEASURES REPORT

By **Esther Feldman, President**
Community Conservation Solutions

Community Conservation Solutions is pleased to present to Legacy LA this **Air Pollution Reduction Measures Report for the Natural Park at Ramona Gardens Housing Development** in Northern Boyle Heights in the City of Los Angeles. This report contributes to Legacy LA's work in Ramona Gardens, funded by the California Air Resources Board's California Climate Investments Program to help meet Assembly Bill 617 goals for reducing air pollution.

The **Air Pollution Reduction Measures** were developed based on a comprehensive review of air quality and other relevant data for the Ramona Gardens and Northern Boyle Heights communities. The results informed the design of the Natural Park to maximize reduction of air pollutants from the three freeways surrounding Ramona Gardens, and particularly from the 15-lane freeway and transit corridor immediately adjacent to the Housing Development, which includes the Interstate-10, High Occupancy Vehicle lanes, a busway and a Metrolink train line. (See *Technical Report for Schematic Design*).

The Air Pollution Reduction Measures incorporated into the Natural Park will help improve air quality and public health in Ramona Gardens and the surrounding Northern Boyle Heights community. The 'Big Nature/La Naturaleza en Grande' design for the Natural Park features an Anti-Pollution Green Buffer, and presents an integrated, nature-based approach that combines air quality, water quality, ecosystem science, engineering and community needs.

Natural Park elements that will reduce air pollutants and urban heat island effects include:

- Over 15,000 native trees, shrubs and plants that work together as a vegetation barrier to pollution
- Earth mounds to help raise the height of trees
- Structural barrier to block air pollutants and freeway noise
- Strategic locations of native habitat to help block prevailing western winds
- Year-round, extensive leaf canopies
- Robust root systems and healthy soil ecosystem

The Natural Park maximizes the ability of native habitat – with extensive, year-round leaf canopies above ground and robust root systems and soil biosphere below ground – to absorb air pollutants and air toxins, store carbon, reduce urban heat island effects and reduce greenhouse gases (GHGs). In addition to removing air pollutants from the adjacent 15-lane freeway and transit corridor, the native habitats are designed to maximize plant and soil carbon sequestration to reduce GHGs associated with climate change.

A Living Partnership:

**Native Trees, Plants and Soil Ecosystems
Reduce Air Pollutants and Store Carbon**

- Above-ground: Year-round leaf canopies in many layers
- Below-ground: Extensive root systems and soil organisms
- 250 native trees and tree-sized shrubs
- Over 15,000 understory plants, flowers and grasses

Cleaner Air and Carbon Benefits:

**Natural Park Uptakes Air Pollutants,
Reduces Greenhouse Gases and Stores Carbon**

- 280 metric tons of carbon in 20 years
- Over 2,300 metric tons of carbon in 50 years



Nature-Based Approach Integrates Air Quality Data, Ecosystem Science and Engineering to Reduce Air Pollution

The Natural Park’s long-term net carbon sequestration benefit, including GHGs that will be produced during construction, is estimated to be 280 metric tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent (tCO₂e) after twenty years, 2,360 tCO₂e after 50 years, and over 4,200 tCO₂e after 85 years. WSP used the *California Emissions Estimator Model*® (CalEEMod), a statewide land use emissions computer model, to estimate criteria pollutant and GHG emissions. This model was selected for its suitability to the emission sources around Ramona Gardens, its widespread use, and its acceptance by regulatory processes including the California Air Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Natural Park Reduces Air Pollution

The Ramona Gardens Housing Development is in the top 1% of the most polluted communities in California and is designated as severely disadvantaged by the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA). Environmental justice issues, the effects of poverty, population density and other factors exacerbate health problems caused by air pollution.

Ramona Gardens is surrounded by three freeways and industrial land uses, including two of the busiest freeways in the United States (Interstate-10 and Interstate-5). Air quality is rated “unhealthy” at least 40% of the year for children and seniors, who are most sensitive to air pollution. Traffic on the I-10 and I-5 is 56% above the safe health thresholds set by the Federal Highway Administration. Breathing particulate matter from freeways is a leading cause of asthma and impaired lung development in children. Residents suffer disproportionately from serious health problems that air pollution makes worse, including adult and youth obesity, asthma, high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes.

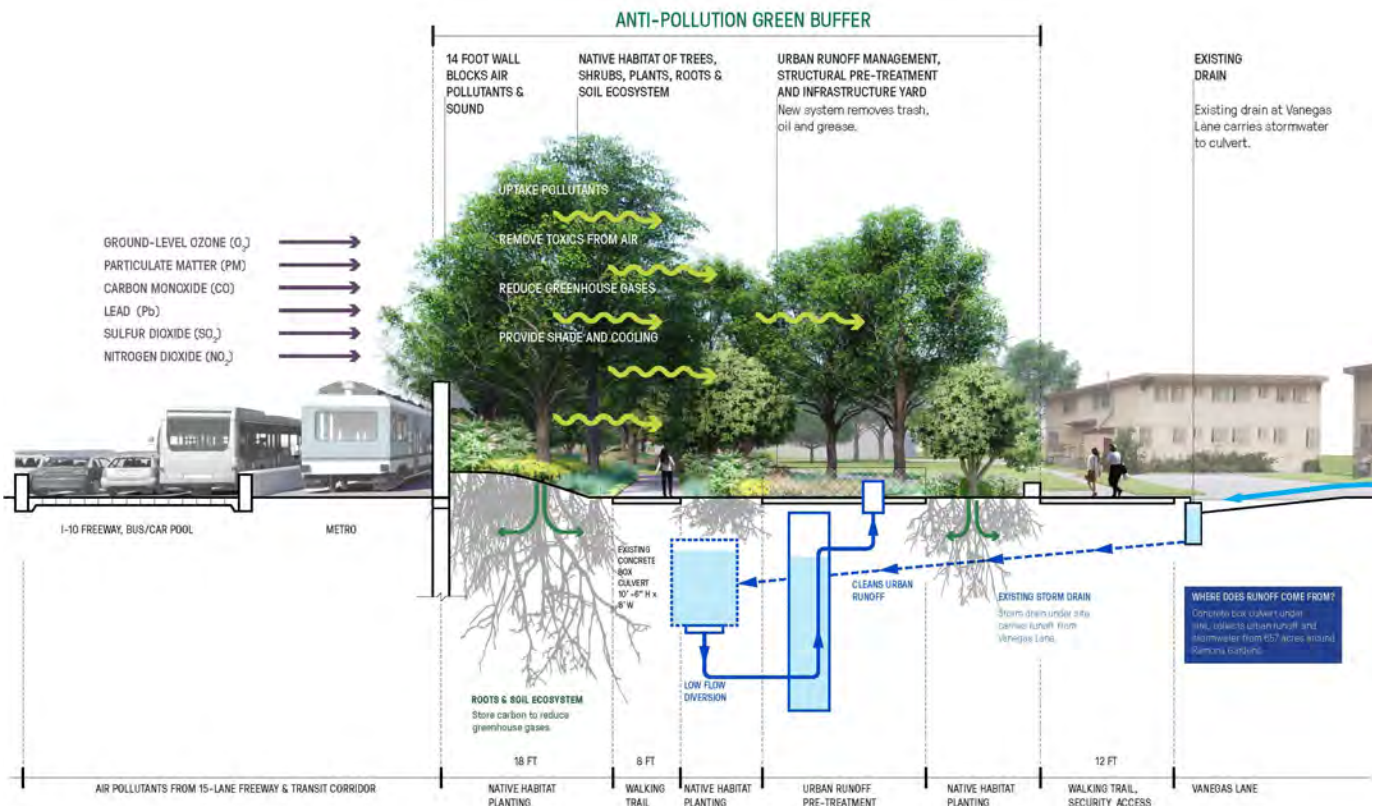


FIGURE A: Cross-section through the Natural Park (looking west). By SWA



Strategic Design Using Air Quality Data and Ecosystem Science

WSP conducted a comprehensive review of monitored air quality data for the Northern Boyle Heights area, and reviewed health thresholds, standards and information from the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD), the Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, California Environmental Protection Agency and the California Department of Transportation.

Land IQ developed a strategic design for the plantings to create an ecologically-sound, long-lived and drought-tolerant landscape, using native trees, tree-sized shrubs, grasses and plants that function together to maximize air pollutant uptake and carbon storage. This ecosystem-based model mimics plant communities of Southern California that existed in this area before it was developed.

VS2 Consulting led the integration of the Air Pollution Reduction Measures with the Natural Park schematic design.

The work conducted included:

- Research and analysis of existing air pollution conditions in Ramona Gardens Housing Development and Northern Boyle Heights
- Comparison of existing conditions with National and State Ambient Air Quality Standards
- Evaluation of the effect of prevailing winds and temperature on movement of air pollutants from nearby freeways
- Evaluation of urban heat island effects and health risks
- Summary of public health problems in Ramona Gardens related to air pollution
- Recommended changes to the Natural Park site configuration and project elements to optimize the uptake and reduction of air pollutants
- Evaluation of carbon storage and greenhouse gas reduction benefits
- Application of Air Pollution Reduction Measures to the schematic design for the Natural Park at Ramona Gardens

A 'Nature in the City' Park Model for Reducing Air Pollution and Improving Public Health

The Natural Park at Ramona Gardens provides a model that can be replicated in disadvantaged communities impacted by air pollution throughout California. This 'Nature in the City' model featuring Air Pollution Reduction Measures demonstrates how integrating strategically-designed native habitat with air pollution reduction strategies, stormwater recycling, recreation and walking trails can address serious air pollution public health problems, while also meeting community needs for flexible open space, augmenting local water supplies and developing local resilience to climate change.

Project Team and Project Funders

The project was led by Community Conservation Solutions (CCS) in collaboration with Legacy LA. The Project Team is composed of CCS, WSP, Land IQ, VS2 Consulting Inc., and Murow Development Consultants. Project funding was provided by the California Air Resources Board's California Climate Investments Program and the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation.

The Project Team included professionals with expertise in air engineering; air quality analysis; environmental planning; sustainability, energy and climate change; native habitat restoration and soil science; civil, structural and hydrology engineering; and community and urban planning.



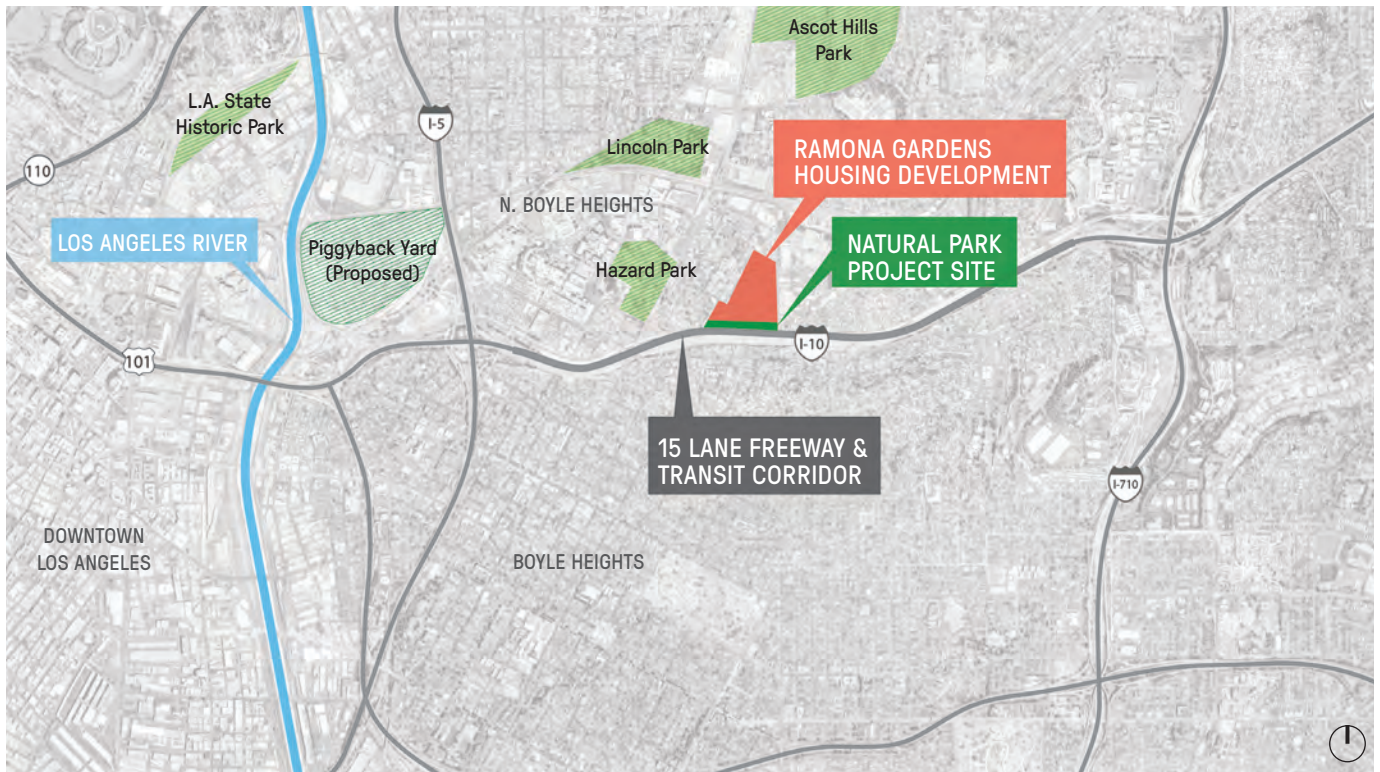
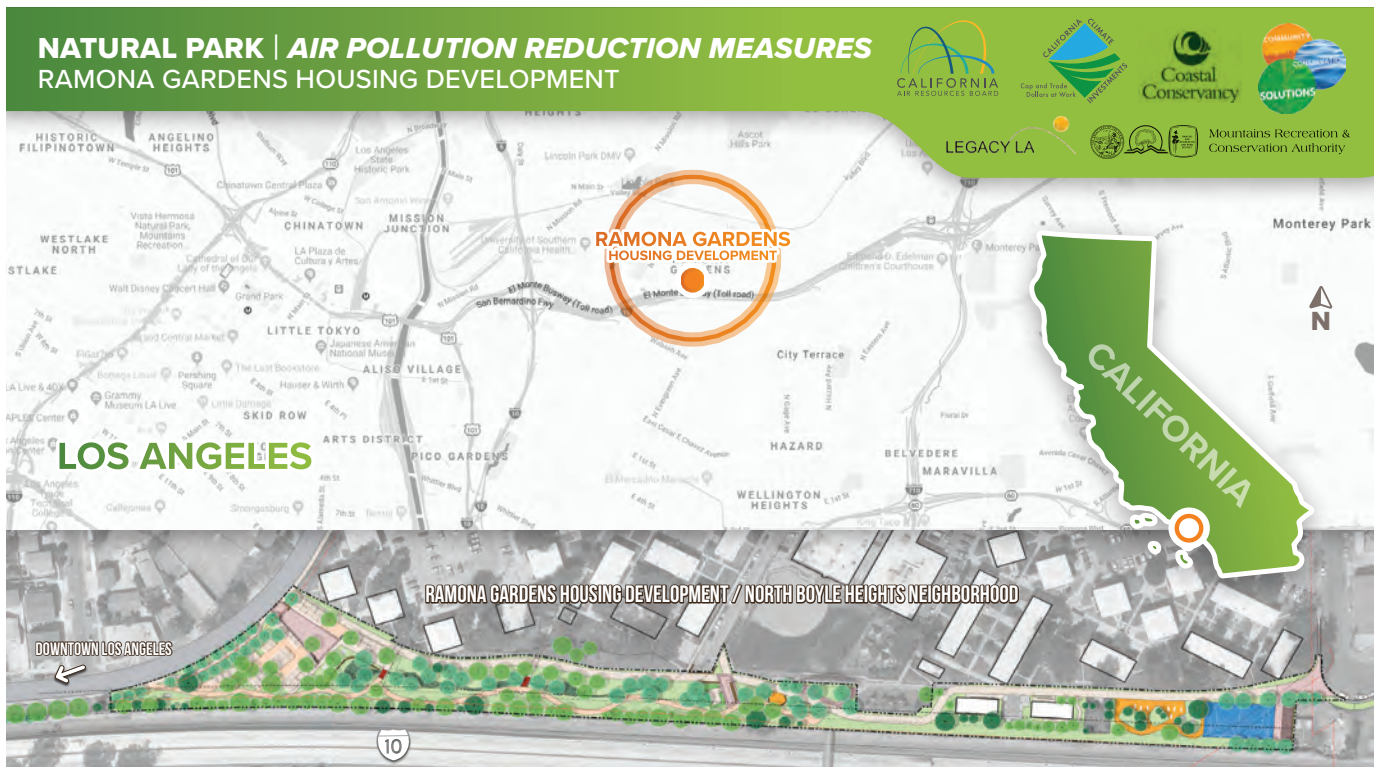


FIGURE 1: PROJECT LOCATION The Ramona Gardens Housing Development is in one of the most polluted communities in California and is next to 15 lanes of freeway and transit corridor. This includes the I-10 freeway (one of the busiest in the United States) carpool and bus lanes and a Metrolink train line. The Natural Park site is immediately adjacent to the transit corridor.



FIGURES 2–10: Graphic Booklet: Air Pollution Problems & Natural Park Solutions. Graphic design by Patrick Kresl, WSP.



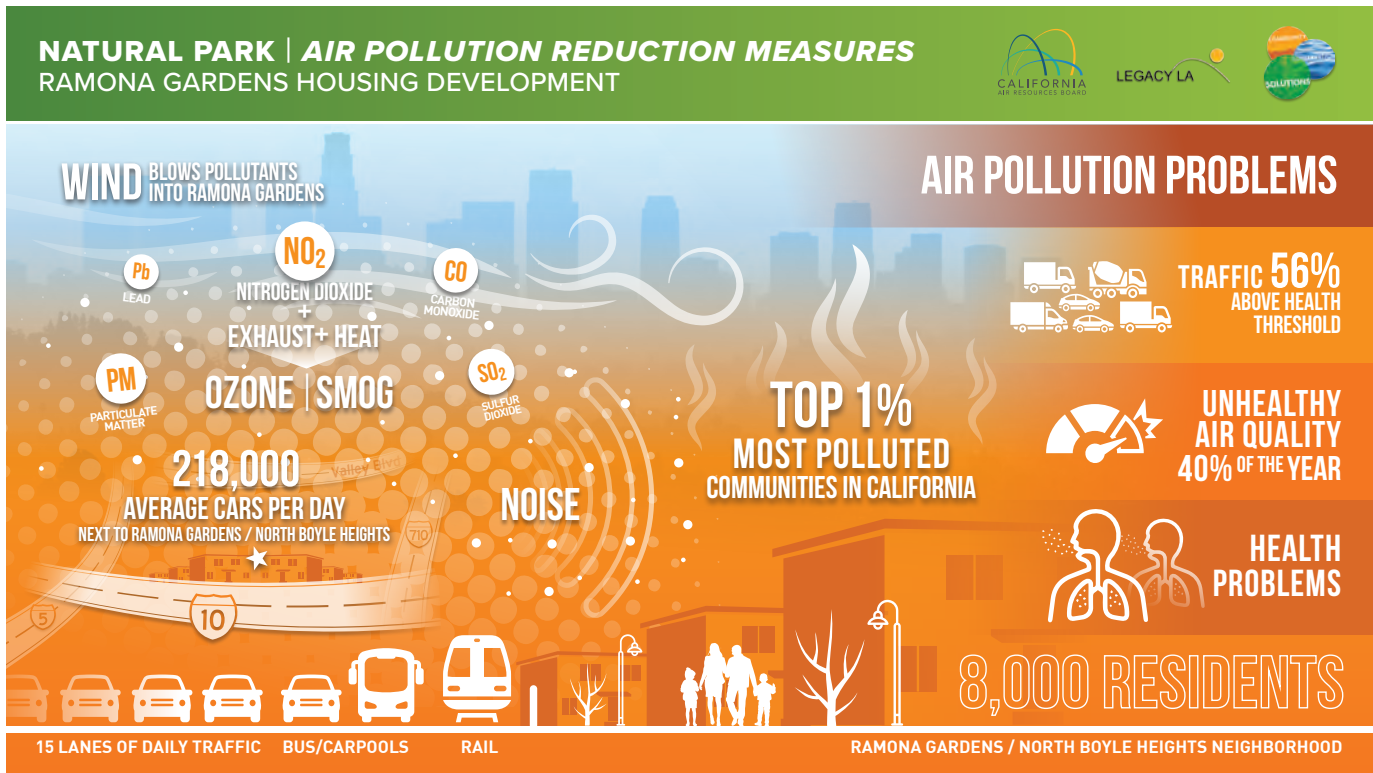


FIGURE 3: Graphic Booklet: Air Pollution Problems & Natural Park Solutions

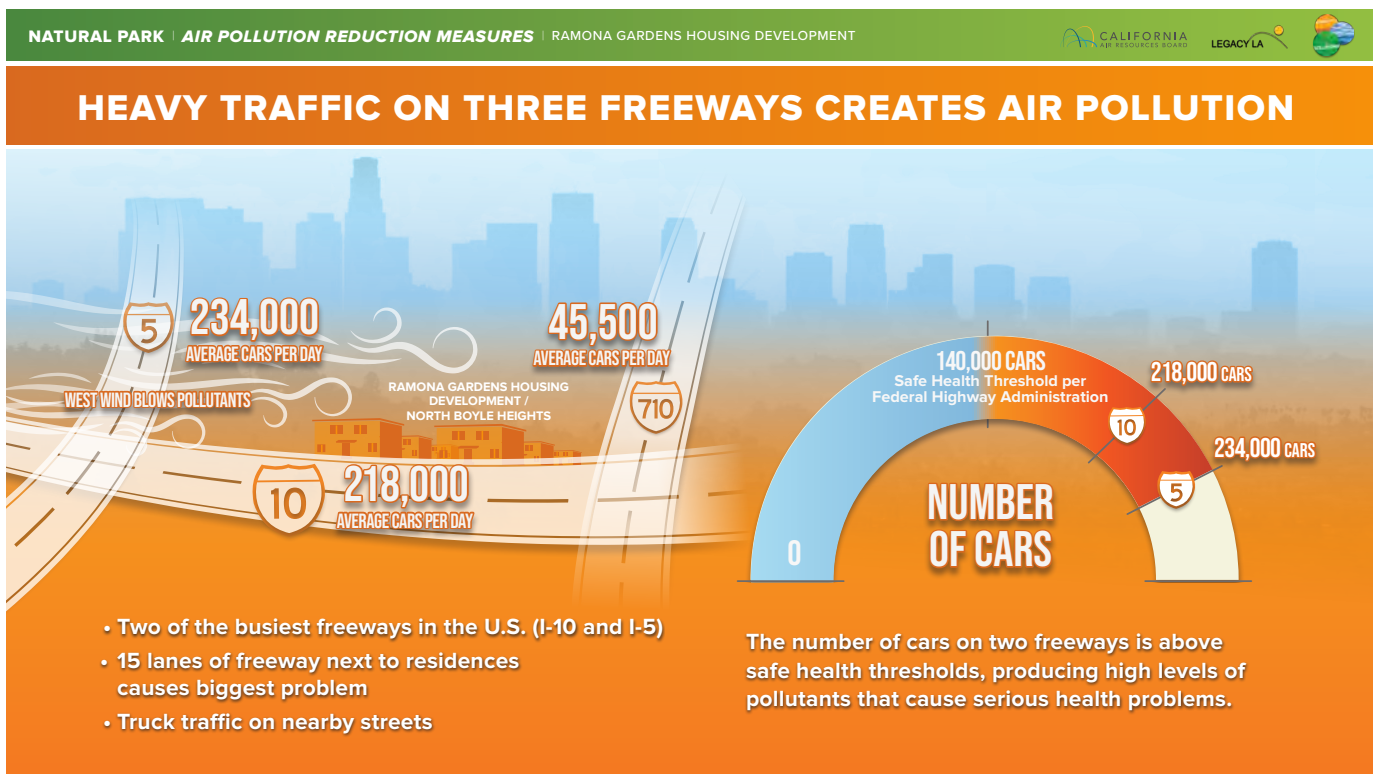


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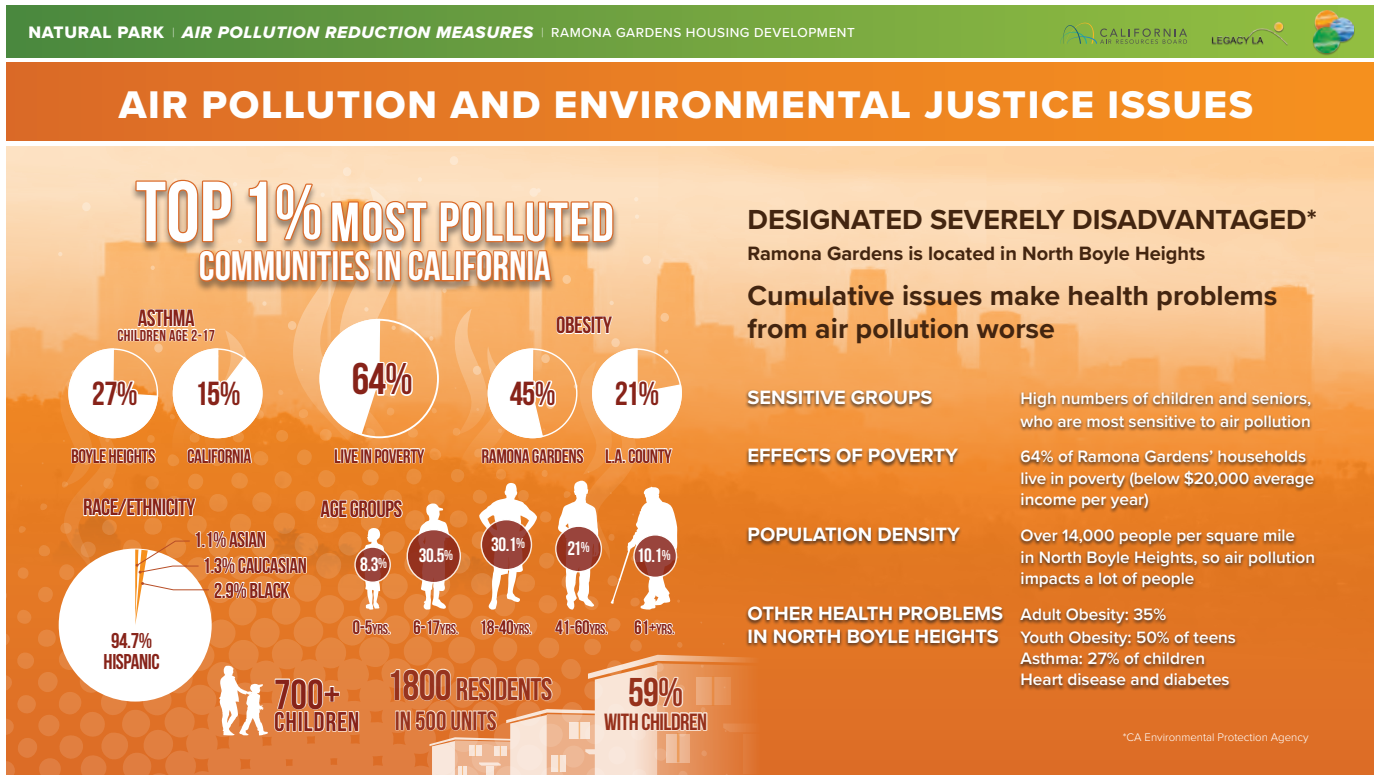


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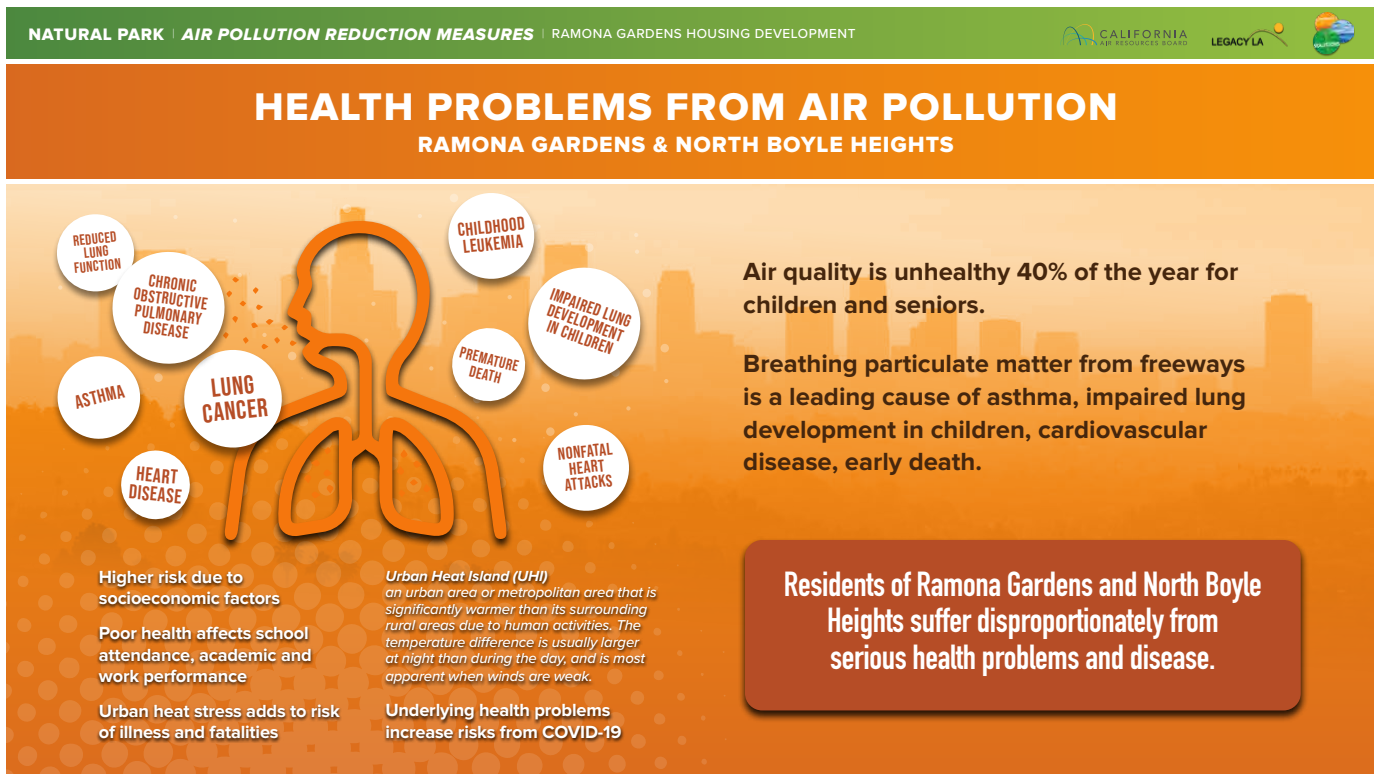


FIGURE 6: Graphic Booklet: Air Pollution Problems & Natural Park Solutions

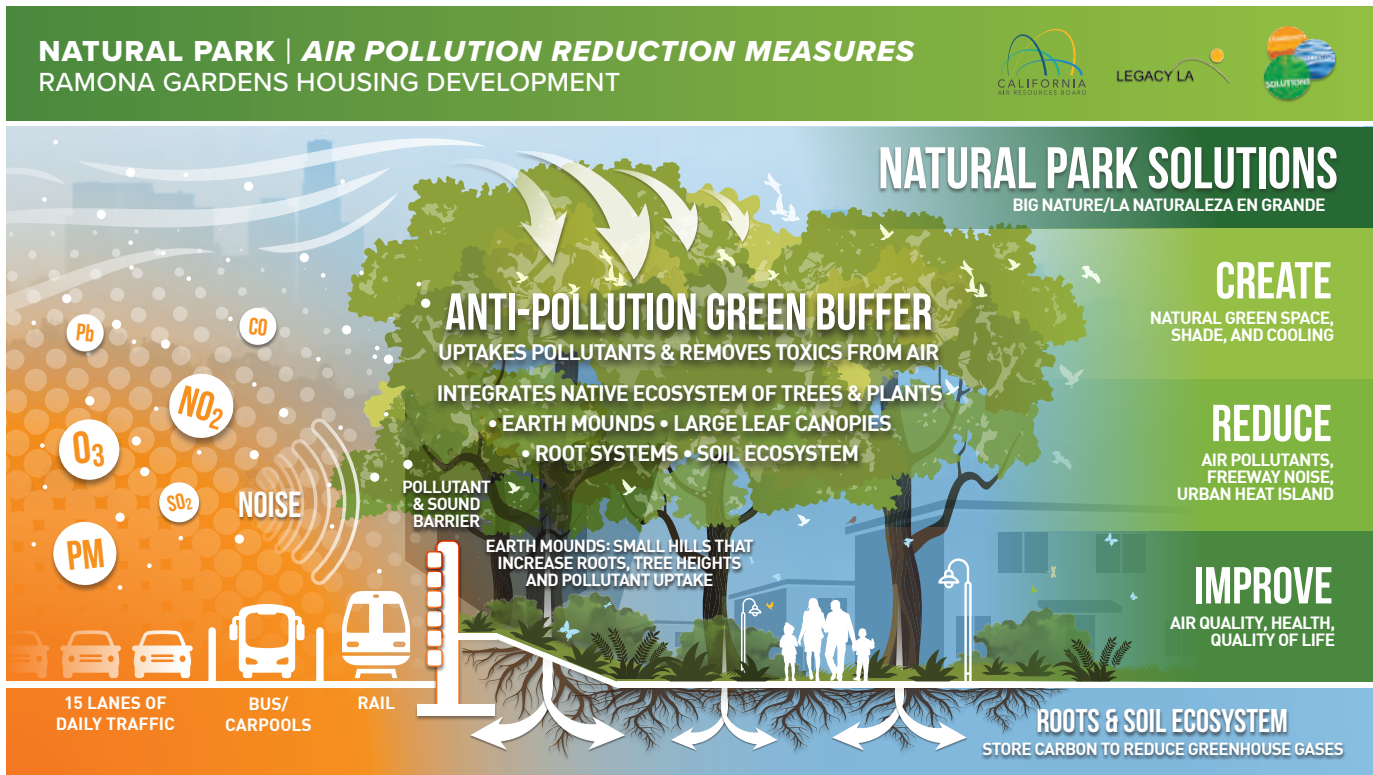


FIGURE 7: Graphic Booklet: Air Pollution Problems & Natural Park Solutions

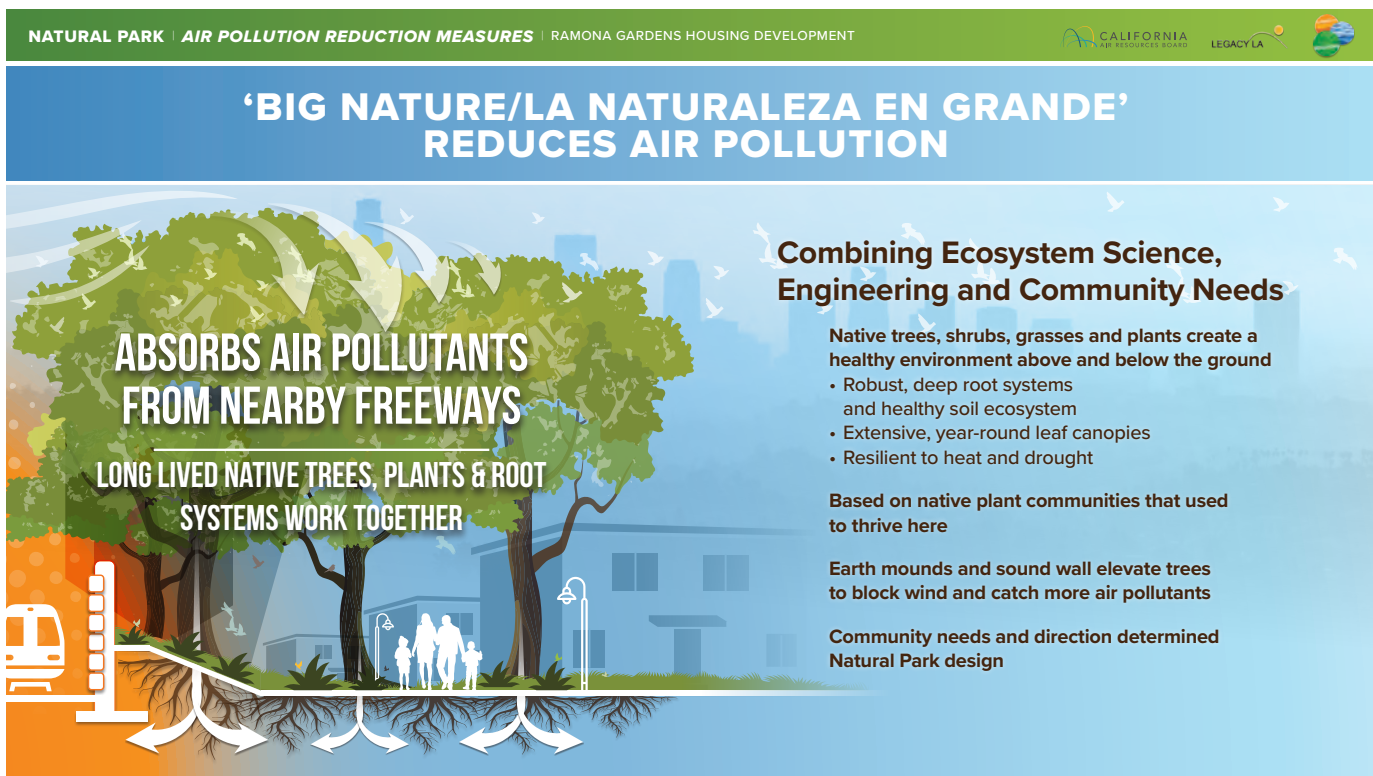


FIGURE 8: Graphic Booklet: Air Pollution Problems & Natural Park Solutions



FIGURE 9: Graphic Booklet: Air Pollution Problems & Natural Park Solutions

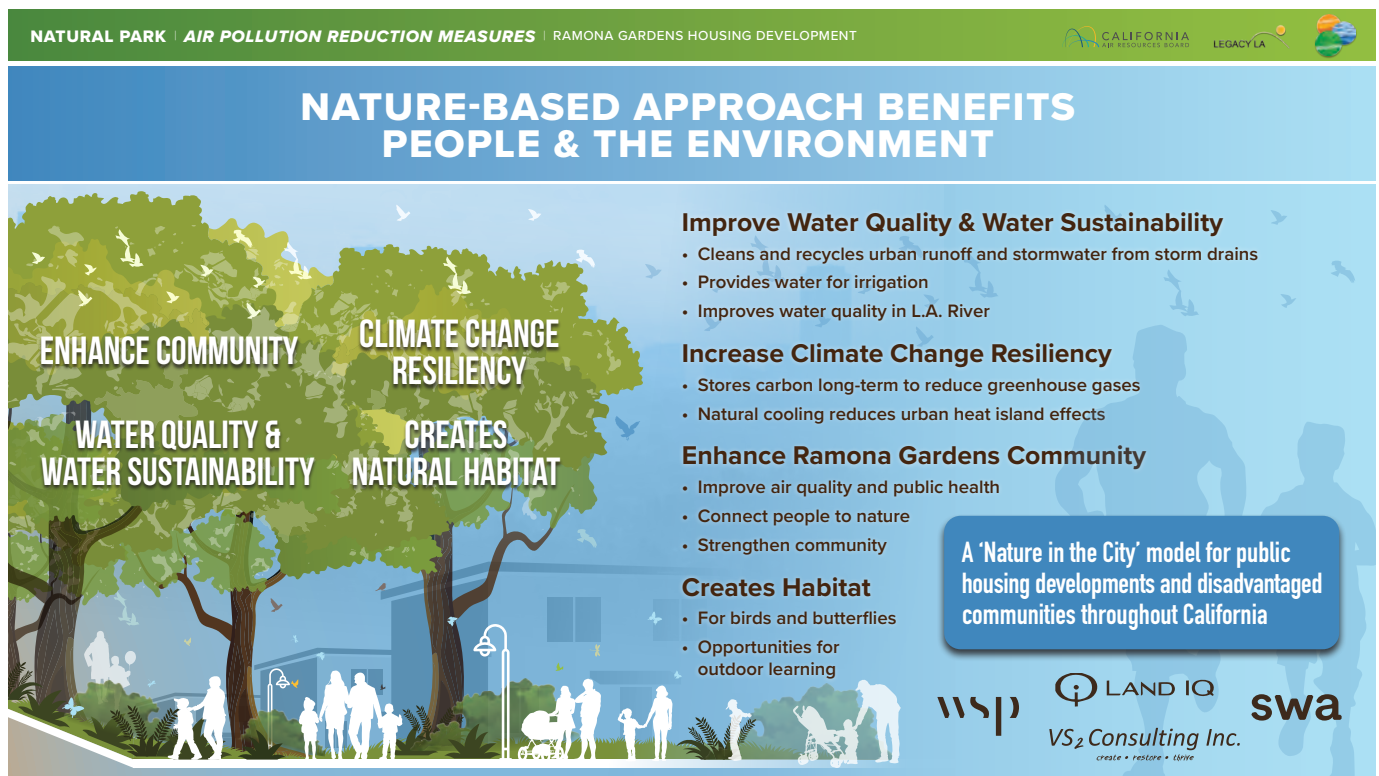


FIGURE 10: Graphic Booklet: Air Pollution Problems & Natural Park Solutions

EXHIBIT 5

ABOUT THE PROJECT TEAM

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