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River Park Foundation's 2-Year Education Effort in Mission Valley Increases Water Quality Knowledge by 25%

San Diego, CA -- In Mission Valley, modifications to the natural streambed of the San Diego River have resulted in water quality issues and foul odors for nearby residents and River Park visitors.

As a result of concerns from community members, beginning in fall 2017, The San Diego River Park Foundation's staff and volunteers deployed throughout Mission Valley to provide water quality education to people who live, work, play, and shop in Mission Valley. They specifically addressed the concern of low dissolved oxygen in the River, which is harmful to aquatic life and can lead to bad smells emanating from the River.

The San Diego River Park Foundation team endeavored to evaluate community awareness and plan education efforts by administering surveys to community members. A statistically significant number of community members were surveyed, and surveys showed that more than half of the community members surveyed had experienced bad odors, and 63% of them experienced this during the summer months. This survey served to highlight issues related to water quality during the summer months in this historically significant segment of the San Diego River.

Through presentations, tables at events, flyers, special events, social media and more, organization staff and volunteers taught about the behavioral changes which can improve dissolved oxygen levels for waterways: picking up dog poop, reducing the use of fertilizers when gardening, and ensuring that water from landscape irrigation does not runoff into storm drains. In 2019, post-project surveys were administered to measure change in awareness of water quality issues.

"From the beginning of our education effort to the end, we saw a 25% increase in people's knowledge about water quality issues," explained Ally Welborn, Community Engagement Manager. "We're so excited to see that the Mission Valley community has really taken this issue seriously and is thinking critically about what they can do to improve water quality in the San Diego River."

In addition to encouraging behavioral changes to improve water quality, San Diego River Park Foundation staff and volunteers installed solar-powered aerators directly in the River itself. The aerator devices are part of a pilot project and are designed to increase the levels of dissolved oxygen in the water, which could serve to improve water quality. Volunteers regularly test water quality at the installation site throughout the year, monitoring for dissolved oxygen and other indicators of water quality.

This activity was completed as part of a grant project funded by the San Diego River Park Foundation and the State of California Proposition 1: The Water Quality, Supply and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014. Partners on this project include the US Bureau of Reclamation, San Diego State University, and the Urban Corps of San Diego.

To learn more about water quality or volunteer on this project, visit www.sandiegoriver.org.

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About The San Diego River Park Foundation

The San Diego River Park Foundation's mission is to engage people to work toward a better future for the historic San Diego River and the creation of a 52-mile river parkway from the mountains to the ocean. The River Park Foundation is a non-profit community-based organization founded in 2001. Visit www.sandiegoriver.org for more information.