

New Grassroots Group Picks Up Trash In The Sacramento Area

In a little more than a year since it was founded, a grass-roots organization devoted to picking up trash in the Sacramento area now has more than 1,600 followers on Facebook and Instagram.

Sacramento Pick It Up! fields two or three groups of volunteers during the week and four or more groups on weekends to rid areas of trash. Most of the teams involve about 20 people and occasionally there are cleanups involving up to 50 people or just a few.

The volunteers have removed more than 150 tons of trash from the Woodlake area and cleaned up more than 100 abandoned homeless camps. Their work has been so successful the Sacramento County Regional Parks Department now provides a bobcat and trucks to haul away trash when a big cleanup project is underway.

Most of their efforts have concentrated on cleanups along streets and in Curtis Park, McKinley Park, WX freeway ramps, the Sacramento River and Tower Bridge, Steelhead Creek, Arcade Creek, the American River Parkway and more recently the vernal pools in the Mather area where Splash

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Assemblymember Ken Cooley introduced AB 2633 at a press conference in April

Homeless Camps Could be Removed From the American River Parkway

BY STEPHEN GREEN

Three Sacramento-area members of the California Assembly have introduced measures to address the “level of violence, dangerous debris and environmental destruction left by illegal campers on the American River Parkway” and other sensitive parks and nature areas around the state.

Assemblymembers Ken Cooley, D-Rancho Cordova, Kevin McCarty, D-Sacramento and Jim Cooper, D-Elk Grove, initiated the actions after the brutal slaying of 20-year-old Emma Roark on the Parkway and in response to increasing outrage by area residents who no longer find the 29-mile riparian corridor a safe place to visit.

Roark was on the Parkway taking photos in late January when she was attacked. A homeless man who had been living on the Parkway for several years has been charged with her murder.

Last year, there were more than 60 fires on the Parkway and most were started at or near homeless camps. Fires destroyed 15-to-18 percent of the Parkway according to various estimates including a large habitat restoration project at Bushy Lake managed by Sacramento State University professors and students.

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Save the American River Association has been taking weekly water samples in the lower stretches of the American River. Dangerous levels of *E.coli* bacteria are regularly found in areas where people swim and fish. A likely source of the bacteria is human waste dumped into the river by homeless campers.

“For decades, I have brought my own children and grandchildren (to the Parkway) to experience and wonder at the world around them,” Cooley said. “Public safety and environmental protection are paramount to the value of this Parkway.”

McCarty added: “Sadly, because of illegal camping, the American River Parkway isn’t safe enough – resulting in locals thinking twice about visiting our jewel of Sacramento. We can humanely and aggressively address homelessness and ensure that our Parkway remains a regional treasure.”

It is illegal to camp on the Parkway and to have fires or incendiary cooking devices (such as BBQs) outside the picnic areas. But a 2018 decision by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals legalized camping in public places. In *Martin v.*

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Mark Baker of *Sacramento Picks It Up!* removes a load of trash from the river with his dog Jax

Sacramento Picks It Up!

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conducts nature education programs for school children.

"Sacramento Picks It Up!" has been instrumental in helping the joint effort of Save the American River Association and Friends of Sutter's Landing at Sutter's Landing Park to keep this area of the river and Parkway clean and safe for the many, many people who come from all over the to spend time in the American River Parkway," said Betsy Weiland who chairs SARA's Land-use Committee. "We greatly appreciate their good work."

Sacramento Picks It Up! was founded by Allyson Seconds, a self-described "nature nerd" and co-owner of the Sacramento Fitness Collective on North D. St.

"I always wanted to be a nature person, but I was too busy," Seconds said. "Then I got my first dog, Lulu, and she changed my life."

Seconds and Lulu began taking daily walks on area riverbanks where they admired the natural areas and wildlife. But over several years, things began to change. More people were littering areas along the rivers and homeless campers were moving in and creating piles of trash and discarded needles. On backpacking trips to the coast and the Sierras, she found similar conditions.

"I started becoming quite a nut about the concept 'leave no trace.' But we're leaving our trace everywhere," she said.

So she created *Sacramento Picks It Up!* in March of last year and began organizing crews to tackle the problems in the Sacramento area.

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Camps

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City of Boise (Idaho), the court ruled that people cannot be prohibited from sleeping in public places when they have no other access to shelter.

The Assemblymembers have introduced AB 2633 in the Legislature which defines parklands with heightened risk of environmental degradation and damage due to the unique and valuable resources within it as "special parklands." The bill authorizes the removal of illegal campsites from the parks to prevent unnecessary environmental destruction and address public safety hazards.

In addition, Sen. Richard Pan, D-Sacramento, joined the Assemblymembers in proposing \$50 million in grant funding to go to counties and regional park districts to support efforts to protect the parks. Goals of the grant program include:

1. Preventing fires by reducing the incident of illegal campfires in regional parks.
2. Reducing homelessness by providing services and housing options.
3. Protecting park visitors, wildlife and natural resources.

The measures are "long overdue," said Assemblymember Cooper who is

running for Sacramento County Sheriff and has said that homelessness is the number one issue facing the region. "This bill does not criminalize homelessness. We're trying to solve a problem."

Cooley noted that the Parkway is only open from sunrise to sunset – a restriction that helps protect the natural resources and abundant wildlife in the area. But he acknowledged that there probably would be legal challenges if AB 2633 is signed into law.

"I think we just need to say we may need to get sued over this and say the Boise decision is wrong," Cooley said. "The idea that people are afraid to come to the Parkway, that is a klaxon going off that we need to do something." ■

The bill authorizes the removal of illegal campsites from the parks to prevent unnecessary environmental destruction and address public safety.

Sacramento Picks It Up!

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One of her chief pickup crew organizers is Mark Baker who had been working independently on cleanup efforts for several years.

"Walking my dog at Sutter's Landing, I always thought to myself, 'I wish someone would pick this trash up,' until I realized I could be that someone," Baker said.

Much of the trash along the riverbanks could only be accessed by water. So, along with his dog Jax, Baker began piling discarded junk and bags of trash on his kayak and raft, and hauling them to dumpsters. Soon he was recruiting more people to help him with the pickups.

"I organized my first group cleanup with 10 volunteers, then the next one we had 20, and the following one we had 30 volunteers," Baker said.

"When so many showed up, I was surprised, heartened and so uplifted."

It was during one of those cleanups that he encountered a team from *Sacramento Picks It Up!* They joined forces.

"These events are so inspirational, and the volunteers are kindred spirits," Baker said. "We have found our fellow tribe members."

Baker makes it clear that the mission is to clean up areas, mostly abandoned camps, and not to displace the homeless living there.

"We practice mutual respect," Baker said. "When any of them move out, we move in." ■

Virginia Opossums have Adapted Well in California

Some people wonder why the critter raiding the vegetable garden in their backyard is called the Virginia Opossum.

The Virginia Opossum *Didelphidae* was introduced in San Jose in 1910 and has adapted well. It is now found throughout the California coast and the Central Valley, and a few inhabit the eastern Sierra Nevada. And they also inhabit the West Coast from British Columbia, Canada, to Costa Rica.

They are commonly found in moist woodlands and brushy habitat, but urban areas also are favored. They tend to build a rough nest under a deck or squat in the nest or burrow of another critter. If food is scarce, they become nomadic and change den sites often. In times of drought, they tend to accumulate around water sources.

Opossums are nocturnal and highly opportunistic when it comes to feeding. Carrion and insects are principal foods, but fruits, berries and grains, green vegetation, earthworms and fungi also are preferred.

Female opossums have two litters a year, usually from January-March and June-July. They tend to produce a litter of about seven, but have been known to give birth to up to 25 offspring. But most don't survive long enough to attach themselves to one of their mother's 13 nipples. They remain attached to a nipple for 50-65 days and weaning occurs in 95-105 days.

The lifecycle is short. One study found they survive for one-to-three years and other studies have found opossums who made it to four years.

■



Virginia Opossum takes a break on the American River

www.sarariverwatch.org

SARA Board Has Two New Members

BY WARREN V. TRUITT

Pam Britton

Pam Britton and her husband Michael reside in the Sun River neighborhood. Their home is immediately adjacent to the American River Parkway, and a 3-minute walk out their back gate to the nearby American River. Pam loves cycling and walking within our unique Parkway.

In 1987, Pam received a degree from California State University Sacramento in Sociology and Social Sciences. Two years later, Pam earned a Specialist Instructional Credential in Special Education and began a 21-year career as a teacher in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District. Pam taught at all three tiers: as a High School Special Education teacher, a English Language Arts and History teacher at the Middle School level, and a Resource Reading Specialist at the Primary level.

Beginning in 2008, Pam became a busy volunteer, and put in many volunteer hours over the years, including for: The Sunriver Neighborhood liaison to the American River Parkway Coalition; Three additional roles on behalf of the Sunriver Neighborhood Association: Steering Committee member, Volunteer Coordinator & Events Coordinator, and; Folsom Cordova Education Association Union representative for Mills Middle School.

In addition, Pam also worked for two years with the City of Rancho Cordova, SMUD and the Sacramento Tree Foundation, to create a free tree-planting program in the Sun River neighborhood. Free trees were planted in yards of homeowners who requested one. All the planted trees are now thriving, and Pam is ready to organize yet another planting project.

Pam loves music and has been a musician most of her life. While teaching at Cordova High, Pam sang with a group called the Staff Tones. The group even auditioned for, and sang, one Christmas at the White House for dignitaries and politicians. The group also has performed the National Anthem before a King's home game. Now Pam primarily sings with her six grandsons, who range in age from three to nine.

Pam also is an avid animal lover. Over the years, all her pets have been rescued animals. Currently, there are two labs and two 15-year-old sister cats at the Britton home. Pam also participates in transporting rescued dogs to foster homes throughout Northern California. For the last six months, Pam has also volunteered at Fat Kitty City Rescue in El Dorado Hills.

Pam states, "I am so honored to be the newest member of the SARA Board of Directors and I look forward to continuing to work for the preservation and protection of the Parkway, and encouraging and teaching individuals, civic groups, non-profits, families and neighbors how to best enjoy the beautiful resources of this special place. This is where I live and is where my heart is."



Pam Britton

Joe Cadelago

Joe Cadelago joined the SARA Board of Directors earlier this year. Joe and his wife Amanda along with their two dogs, Mabel & Watson, are residents of Carmichael.

Joe was graduated from California State University, Chico, with a BS degree in Political Science. He is the Public Sector Service Manager with Waste Management, where he has been employed for the last 11 years. Joe's area of expertise with the company includes community engagement, sustainability programs, recycling, community cleanups, government affairs, and contract/regulatory compliance with multiple Sacramento County jurisdictions.

Joe came to SARA's attention when SARA board member George Nyberg proposed a joint SARA 2021 project with Waste Management to donate 100 waste containers to Sacramento County Parks for the Parkway. Parks gratefully accepted the gift and there are plans to repeat this donation in 2022.

Joe is an avid cyclist and rides his bike primarily on the American River Bike/Ped Trail between Carmichael and Beal's Point at Folsom Lake. Joe states he averages 2,500-3,000 riding miles per year. In addition, Joe and Amanda love to spend time on the river with their dogs, especially on their stand-up paddleboards.

These activities have provided Joe a deep appreciation for the American River & Parkway. Joe says, "I am thankful for each time I can have the opportunity to enjoy them. Each opportunity has been its own unique experience. Always something new to see, feel, hear, etc."

In addition, Joe advises that he enjoys taking photos of the wildlife and landscapes when out on the Parkway and river, or just sitting and enjoying the surroundings.

Other interests include reading, music, volunteering, home projects and spending time with family. ■



Joe Cadelago

Two Restoration Projects Are Being Planned

The Water Forum, which has undertaken a number of habitat restoration projects on the Lower American River, plans two more projects this year.

The first project will take place along a one-mile stretch of the river from Lower Sailor Bar to Upper Sunrise. The second one will be at Nimbus Basin between Nimbus Dam and Hazel Avenue.

“The projects will restore crucial habitat for native fall-run Chinook Salmon and Steelhead Trout by collectively laying approximately 41,000 cubic yards of clean gravel into the flowing river and

carving side channels into the existing gravel bars,” said Jessica Law, the Water Forum’s Executive Director.

“Project teams will add large woody material and plant riparian trees and bushes along the side channels,” Law added. “These elements create places for young fish to hide from predators and for insects to grow for feeding the fish and many other Parkway species.”

The Water Forum did projects in these two areas about ten years ago, but they are in need of a “tune-up.” Law explained. The Lower American is a living and dynamic river and continued gravel movement is part of a natural

process. Since dams block new gravels from coming into the lower river, and existing river gravels keep moving down stream as the river flows, it’s important to keep replenishing spawning gravels for fish and add rearing habitat elements that are supportive of fish.

The Water Forum plans to begin sorting gravel in July. Construction at Lower Sailor Bar is to begin in August and at Nimbus Basin in September. They will be holding an Open House when plans are complete and tours will be offered when construction is underway. ■

SARA Membership Donations

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SARA appreciates the support of our generous members. Without your support, SARA would not be able to continue our role as *Guardians of the American River and Parkway since 1961*. New and renewing members are listed in *RiverWatch* according to their preference (indicated on the SARA membership/renewal form).



Salmon habitat restoration

In Memoriam

Save the American River Association has received donations honoring the memory of the following friends:

DONALD CHILDS, SR

BARRY SWERDLOFF, MD

Save the American River Association frequently receives donations in memory of lost loved ones, many of whom were users and supporters of the American River Parkway. Some donors give names. Others prefer to remain anonymous. SARA notifies family members when donations are made. The money is used to further SARA’s advocacy work on behalf of the Parkway. Contributions may be made by check or online via SARA’s website. **SARA also has a Legacy program. For information on the program, please contact the SARA office.** ■

Nimbus Fish Hatchery had a Good Run of Steelhead

BY DAN BACHER

Nimbus Fish Hatchery, located on the upper section of the Lower American River, has finished spawning steelhead for the season. The run was relatively robust, although steelhead fishing has been poor for most anglers as the record drought continues in California.

“Steelhead seem to have enjoyed climbing the new ladder — we collected 2,281 fish this year — more than three times what we saw last year,” reported Gary Novak, hatchery manager, referring to the new hatchery ladder that went into operation in November 2021. “Now that spawning has finished, the fish ladder has been drained and will remain empty until the salmon return in the fall.”

During the best years the hatchery has seen since Nimbus and Folsom dams were built, steelhead counts at the facility have numbered from 3,000 to 4,000 fish. The hatchery staff this year had no problem in gathering enough eggs to reach their annual production goal of 430,000 steelhead yearlings that are released into the river in January and February every year.

Despite the comparatively high numbers of steelhead this season, fishing has been tough for most fishermen, due to clear water conditions on the river for most of the season.

Before the Gold Rush and the genocide of the Nisenan (Southern Maidu) and Miwok Tribes in the region that ensued, the steelhead and salmon runs on the American River likely numbered in the millions or hundreds of thousands. After Old Folsom Dam was built in the 1890s, much smaller numbers of native steelhead passed over the dam’s fish ladder every month except August and September, and the run peaked in May or June. The completion of Nimbus Dam in 1955 and Folsom Dam in 1956 prevented native salmon and steelhead from reaching most of their historic spawning areas in the main river and the river’s north, middle and south forks and tributaries. The Bureau of Reclamation, the agency that built the

dams, also built and funds the Nimbus Fish Hatchery to mitigate for the loss of spawning habitat.

After Nimbus Fish Hatchery went into operation in 1955, the native runs of steelhead apparently did not adapt well to new conditions found on the river. Only several hundred fish returned each year to the facility in the spring migration months of March, April, May and June.

Because of the small number of eggs collected, the CDFW introduced Eel River-strain steelhead to replace the native strain and those became the predominant strain of steelhead. “In 1958-1959, eggs from Snow Mountain Egg Collection Station on the Eel River were transferred to the hatchery,” wrote Dennis Lee, fishery scientist, in his blog. (www.dennisplee.com)

Later, the California Department of Fish and Game in their 1990 Central Valley Salmon and Steelhead Restoration and Enhancement Plan reported “American River spring-run steelhead was extirpated and the fall-run steelhead, which provided a fishery beginning in September in the American River, was severely decimated by Nimbus Dam”.

The steelhead on the American are now the largest strain of steelhead found in the Central Valley. Several Eel-strain steelhead in the 19-to- 20-pound class were caught in the 1980s and 1990s on the American, including one weighing exactly 20 pounds that was caught by a client of guide Barry Watson on January 1, 1990.

The largest-ever steelhead/rainbow trout documented on the American was a 25.02-pound wild fish (weighed on a digital scale) caught below Nimbus Hatchery in February of 2002. The fish may have been a wild rainbow that washed over from Lake Natoma or a steelhead living on the abundant forage below the dam, but since it was considered a wild steelhead under CDFW regulations, the angler had to release it.

“Nimbus seeks to perpetuate the Eel River

strain of steelhead by only spawning returning, hatchery-origin fish,” according to the CDFW. “Unlike salmon whose life cycle ends at spawning, steelhead potentially can spawn over multiple years and are returned to the American River almost immediately after spawning at Nimbus.”

Scientific data are collected before the fish are set free — measurements, scales and tissue samples — “to better understand and inform the management of the American River’s steelhead,” the CDFW noted.

The average size of steelhead on the American River before Folsom Dam was built was apparently larger in size than other Central Valley stocks, according to my interviews with one of the few anglers who fished the river below the Nimbus Dam.

The less abundant winter steelhead would average around 7 pounds, while the more abundant spring-run fish that ascended the river and its tributaries from March through June averaged 3-to-6 pounds before the construction of Folsom Dam.

Those of us who fish the river in the spring from April to June have caught and released wild steelhead that could be the original strain of spring-run steelhead, but no genetic analysis of these particular fish has been ever done.

Cliff Clifton, who owned Hilltop Grocery in Half Moon Bay before he passed away in the early 1990s, used to regularly fish in the forks of the American River above what is now Folsom Lake in the spring and summer. He reported catching and releasing lots of steelhead smolts, along with resident river rainbows and browns, during the 1940s before Folsom Dam was built.

“I have fished the American for over 40 years,” said Thomas Cannon, California Sportfishing Protection Alliance (CSPA) fishery biologist. “Spring run steelhead

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The steelhead in the American are among the fastest growing trout found in any watershed — but also suffer significant mortality during the summer from disease spurred by warm water conditions.

Steelhead

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were my main target. I have caught hundreds of wild 2-6 pounders into June, including many on dry flies.”

The steelhead in the American are among the fastest growing trout found in any watershed – but also suffer significant mortality during the summer from disease spurred by warm water conditions.

Juvenile steelhead, while living in the river over the summer, need a daily mean water temperature of 65 degrees F or lower, according to Rob Titus, CDFW Biologist, during a presentation that he gave at a Save the American River Association meeting back in December 2013. Titus emphasized that 65 degrees is the limit, not a preferred temperature, with 76 degrees being the lethal temperature for steelhead.

Chinook salmon spawning in the fall need water temperatures below 60 degrees for spawning and 58 degrees for egg incubation.

He also documented how steelhead in the lower American River, the ones that anglers like myself love to catch, may be the “fastest growing trout” in the world.

“There is a lot of food in the American – the fish average a growth rate of .82 mm per day. They grow really well,” he said.

He contrasted a slide of steelhead from the American River with one from Secret Ravine Creek, a tributary of Dry Creek. Whereas the American River fish is plump and healthy looking, the fish from Secret Ravine looks skinny and undernourished.

However, the same relatively warm conditions American River steelies encounter every summer have spurred the outbreak, first documented in 2004, of an anal vent disease called “rosy anus” associated with water temperatures of 65 degrees and above.

The bottom line? “We need temperatures of 65 degrees or less at Watt Avenue to protect steelhead,” said Titus. “We also need to enhance the coldwater pool in Folsom Lake to maintain biodiversity of Chinook salmon on the American River. Finally, we need to balance temperature needs of Chinooks and steelhead.”

The next anadromous run of fish to arrive in the American this year after the steelhead will be the American shad, a member of the herring family introduced from the Eastern Seaboard in the late Nineteenth Century. Shad usually started moving into the American in mid-April and should show in large numbers by Cinco de Mayo. That run will be followed by the fall run of Chinook salmon from September through December.

In 2021, a total of 15,115 adult fall Chinook salmon and 7,188 two-year-old “jacks” returned to spawn at the hatchery or naturally on the river. Fifty percent of the total fish were natural spawners. However, that is just a fraction of the number of fish that returned to the American in the fall of 2002, when a total of 150,000 Chinooks returned to the system.

Between 2002 and 2021, the American River provided an average of 18 percent of total Sacramento River fall-run Chinook salmon spawning escapement.

A major problem with the management of the American River for fish at this time is that Folsom Dam is the closest major reservoir to the Delta. Folsom and Nimbus Dam releases are frequently used by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to maintain salinity standards on the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta as agribusiness interests, such as the Westlands Water District and Stewart and Lynda Resnick, the biggest orchard fruit growers in the world, export water to grow almonds, pistachios and other crops in the San Joaquin Valley. In addition, the American River serves many water users in a metropolitan area of over 1-1/2 million people.

There are too many demands on the American River – and not enough water because of the overallocation of limited water resources – and the steelhead, salmon and other fish end up suffering. The continuing drought in the West, the worst in 1200 years, according to climate scientists, only adds to the dilemma we currently face. ■

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Where to Purchase Your Parks Pass

- Online through the American River Parkway Foundation Web site arpf.org/visit
- At REI stores in Sacramento, Roseville and Folsom
- Patriot Cycles in Fair Oaks
- Effie Yeaw Nature Center at Ancil Hoffman Park
- Regional Park offices and park kiosks
- American River Parkway Foundation office at the William B. Pond Recreation Area ■



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