

RIVERWATCH

VOLUME 49, ISSUE 1

SPRING 2010

American River Parkway Plan Adopted...Finally!

By Betsy Weiland



With no fanfare and very quietly last October, Governor Schwarzenegger signed into state law AB 889, the updated Urban American River Parkway Preservation Act.

Well, there may have been no fireworks and balloons at the Capitol, but I can tell you right now that Save the American River Association and all of our Parkway partners were launching those

fireworks and balloons if only in our minds. Some of us were soon popping champagne corks.

The Parkway Plan was last updated in 1985 and the current plan is a seven-year and more than 1 million dollar effort that involved thousands of volunteer hours.

The process started in 2002 and the Update Citizens Advisory Committee (UCAC) met at least once a month from January 2004 until June 2006. Although SARA was limited to one representative on the Advisory Committee, several of our Board members and Advisory Council members committed to attending each meeting, special public workshops and tours, as well as following the

adoption process all the way through to the end.

The adoption process included many hearings before the Sacramento City Planning Commission and the Council, the Planning Commission and Council of Rancho Cordova as well as the County Parks Commission, Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors, plus various state legislative committees and others. It meant making sure that the recommendations made by the UCAC were not altered in the political process. This Parkway Plan truly represents a community consensus-built effort and deserved to be adopted as recommended.

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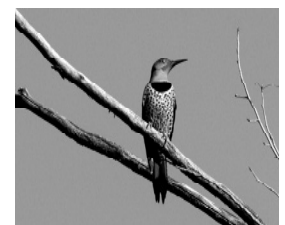
Budget Cuts Hurl a Critical Blow to the Future of Parks

By Bill Davis and Betsy Weiland

Recently there have been numerous articles in the newspaper alerting us to the fact that Sacramento County is in a budget crisis, and will require all of us to make tough choices. We will have to choose from among equally important and competing priorities; parks,

health and human services, and sheriff deputies for example. Regrettably, significant reductions will be proposed that may affect our quality of life, but will likely be needed to achieve a balanced budget for the next fiscal year beginning July 1, 2010.

Long-term stakeholders will remember the beginning of the parks funding shortfall in 2004. After several years of parks funding cut backs, we have reached a critical point that can not tolerate any more cuts if we are to maintain the American River Parkway.



Red Shafted Flicker

Photo by Warren Truitt

This Fiscal Year, the Regional Parks budget is a dismal 0.36% of the County's annual discretionary budget, down from a sustainable 1.73%, as was the case in 2001.

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Eastern Fox Squirrels are Expanding their Range

By Stephen Green

A toothy intruder is expanding its range on the American River Parkway.

For decades, Eastern Fox Squirrels (*Sciurus niger*) have been raiding gardens and bird feeders near the Lower American River. But in the past year, they've been moving into the Lake Natoma area.

The first known record of the introduction of Eastern Fox Squirrels from our opposite coast was at a Los Angeles veterans' home in 1904. They colonized the Stanford University campus

in 1930 and now are found in many parts of California despite a 1935 state law banning the import of any tree squirrel.

The Eastern Foxes are brownish gray with rusty-brown faces and bellies. But like all squirrels, there can be color variations in different locales. In the wild, they typically live 4-7 years and have been known to live 18 years in captivity. They tend to weigh up to three pounds, typically measure about 10 inches from nose to tail, and the tail is about the same length.

That makes them a little smaller than the native Western Gray Squirrels (*Sciurus griseus*) which have little tolerance for the Eastern Foxes. But that doesn't seem to bother the latter. Any time they are menaced by a Western Gray, they deftly race away.



Parkway Intruder

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Cuts to Parks Budget not Sustainable

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While other Departments have been allowed to increase their percentage of the county's discretionary spending, funding for Regional Parks has decreased. Clearly, the county cannot provide adequate, long-term, stable funding for County Regional Parks.

No doubt you have already read of closures and cutbacks implemented due to cuts in the County Regional Parks Budget.

Overflowing garbage cans in the Parkway, partial closure of Effie Yeaw Nature Center, closure of Gibson Ranch Regional Park, and use of Habitat Restoration Program funds to avoid further reduction in the number of Park Rangers are existing examples of the consequences of these decisions. All indications are that an already bad situation, not only for the American River Park-

way but for all County Regional Parks, will only continue to get worse.

You may be wondering why SARA

is concerned with survival of County Regional Parks. First, the American River Parkway is just one of the County's Regional Parks that will suffer as a result of the County

The Effie Yeaw Nature Center has been forced to lay off staff and reduce educational programs for children and adults. The Center needs your help!

Please consider a tax deductible donation "In support of EYNC" and send to:

C/o ARNHA
P.O. Box 579
Carmichael, CA 95609

budget crisis. Second, other Regional Parks will provide viable alternatives to the Parkway, thereby preventing overuse and further damage. A diverse regional parks system is needed to best serve the needs of all user groups.

It's up to all of us to stay informed and act throughout the county budget process. Please let your County Supervisor know:

- (1) County Regional Parks are important to your quality of life and the economic future of the region.
- (2) At a minimum, the county has the duty to provide sufficient funding to preserve the assets that already have been paid for with taxpayer funds and donations until an adequate, long-term stable funding source is established.
- (3) Sale of Regional Parks assets to balance the budget are not acceptable.
- (4) The Board of Supervisors must endorse, support, and facilitate grass-roots efforts to develop long-term, stable funding options. These need to be presented to the public for review and discussion prior to decisions being made regarding the future of Sacramento County Regional Parks, including the American River Parkway.

SARA Joins Delta Water Contracts Law Suit

By Stephen Green



Save the American River Association has joined three other organizations in a lawsuit demanding full disclosure of the environmental impacts caused by the renewal of contracts to export water from the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta.

The suit, filed in Fresno County Superior Court, targets six contracts up for renewal with the Westlands Water District in the San Joaquin Valley, which currently receives about one-fifth of the Delta's water.

It demands full compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act so that environmental impacts of the continued water diversions will be examined and disclosed. Westlands officials contend there would be no impacts.

Joining SARA in bringing the suit were the North Coast Rivers Alliance, Friends of the River and the Winnemem Wintu Tribe.

The suit was filed Feb. 8, the same week that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported that the Chinook Salmon run through the Delta last fall numbered only 39,530 fish – the lowest number ever recorded. That compares with 64,456 Chinook in 2008 and 87,940 the previous year.

The Pacific Fishery Management Council has banned salmon fishing off the California and Oregon coasts, and part of the Washington coast, for the past two years. As of this writing, the council is considering limited recreational and commercial salmon seasons this year based on federal projections

that as many as 245,000 fall-run Chinook will swim up the Sacramento and San Joaquin River systems this year.

Opponents argue that a run of 245,000 -- if it materializes -- is far below the level of historic runs. Letting those fish spawn would ensure larger runs in the future, they contend. The council is to make a recommendation on April 14 and the National Marine Fisheries Service will have final say on the matter.

For 15 years, SARA has worked with the Sacramento Water Forum to develop a new flow standard for the American River. The Westside contracts have been a major barrier to achieving that goal. Water releases from Folsom Dam and Shasta Dam often are timed to export water to growers on the San Joaquin Valley's West Side. SARA's position is that water releases should be timed to benefit the fishery resources.

"All scientists agree that the Delta is now on the brink of ecologic collapse," said Stephan Volker, attorney for the plaintiffs. "Renewing these contracts for one-fifth of the Delta's exports without required environmental re-

view is like nailing your gas pedal to the floor as you approach a hairpin turn. This suit asks the court to slam on the brakes before Westlands drives the Delta over the cliff."

Felix Smith, a member of the SARA board of directors, noted that runoff from lands irrigated by Westlands is heavy in selenium. That has caused massive deaths and deformations of birds and fish at the Kesterson National Wildlife Refuge.

"That pollution moves down slope to the San Joaquin River and the Delta," Smith said. "Water supplies from the American and Sacramento Rivers are going to be left on the hook to dilute the pollution. It won't work. It could kill migratory birds and fish in the Delta just as they were killed at Kesterson."

If the plaintiffs succeed in forcing compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act, independent scientists will do an environmental analysis that leads to full public disclosure of adverse impacts on the ecosystems.

Eastern Fox Squirrels

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Squirrel nests are called "dreys." In warm weather, they may consist of just a few twigs and leaves on a tree branch for a place to loaf. For rearing young, they make a complex assemblage of tightly woven twigs, leaves, fronds and perhaps something from a clothes line. They also den in tree hollows.

Eastern Foxes love to dig up bulbs and are particularly fond of oranges and persimmons. They'll spend hours scavenging acorns, almonds and walnuts, which they cache in small holes dug in the ground. Since they never find all the

caches, the hidden larder can produce tree growth.

Many ideas have been advanced for keeping Eastern Foxes off your property: two-foot-wide metal bands around tree trunks, ammonia-soaked rags in trees, hot ground pepper sprinkled around plantings, and etc. These tree rats, however, are fun to watch as they show their ability to outwit just about any obstruction placed between them and food.

But here's an idea you can chew on: Brunswick Stew.

Coming Soon!

Advertise in the *Riverwatch* and support SARA!

- A stylized drawing of the Parkway will be included in each *Riverwatch*. To advertise, submit a request with a check and a short message or name which will be inserted into a small banner in the drawing.
- Get creative! Some ideas may include birthday or anniversary wishes, memorials, special event notices and even marriage proposals!
- Clubs, businesses, individuals and organizations encouraged to participate!
- Price structure per *Riverwatch* issue:
 \$250 1 issue
 \$500 2 issues
 \$750 3 issues
 \$1000 4 issues

Purchase an Annual Parks Pass Today!

The Pass pays for itself in 10 visits and all funds go directly toward maintaining and operating the 15,000 acre system. For as little as \$50 per year, you can have unlimited access and parking privileges to all county regional parks. Passes are valid for one year from month of purchase.

City of Folsom Lake Natoma Project Opposed by SARA

By Warren V. Truitt, SARA President



The Winter 2009 issue of *Riverwatch* included an article by retired California State Parks ranger Dan Winkelman bringing attention to a project proposed by the City of Folsom, on land managed by State Parks and owned by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

SARA is opposed to this project for two primary reasons:

One, the project officially known as *Lake Natoma Waterfront and Trail Enhancement Project*, is not an appropriate use for the area designated. While good intentioned on the part of the City of Folsom -- including access for the disabled --

due to the sheer mass of the concrete footprint and related devastation of existing habitat, the trail will actually destroy beautiful natural terrain and access currently enjoyed by pedestrian and off-pavement cycling users.

In addition, because of the need to provide an ADA compliant path -- the length of the zig-zagged access is not likely to even be used by disabled people -- since the river would be 400 yards from the nearest public parking facility. To access the river, disabled people would have to navigate an elevation drop of 70 feet, and then make the challenging climb back up the hill. Meanwhile, current users will have lost the natural setting that attracted them in the first place. This is an issue that SARA experiences all too often -- attempting to apply community park values and uses to parklands established, protected and maintained for natural values.

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Where to Purchase your Parks Pass

Purchase on-line at www.co.sacramento.ca.us
 REI stores in Sacramento, Roseville & Folsom
 Patriot Cycles in Fair Oaks
 Effie Yeaw nature Center in Ancil Hoffman Park
 Regional Park office and staffed Co. Regional Park kiosks

Parks Pass Fees

Vehicle: \$50
 Vehicle + Trailer or oversized (+22 ft) vehicle
 \$100 Vehicle + Horse Trailer: \$75
 Vehicle + small watercraft: \$75



Folsom Lake Natoma Project

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Two, the application for the grant to construct this project included endorsements of the project by non-profit organizations that actually did not endorse the project, but nevertheless were listed as endorsers. SARA is in possession of letters from: Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates (SABA); California Native Plant Society (CPNS), and; Friends of the Folsom Powerhouse Association – all clearly clarifying they did not endorse the project nor, in some cases, even knew about it. In addition, Folsom Area Bicycle Advocates (FABA) was listed as endorsers but officially is neutral on the project. At the time the related grant application was filed, neither the State of California nor the Bureau of Reclamation had endorsed the project as well.

On January 25th, several SARA members attended a presentation of the project at a meeting of The Heritage Preservation League of Folsom. Robert Goss, director of Folsom Parks & Recreation, reviewed the project before a full house, and indicated it was still in a “very conceptual form” and in need of several upgrades – which is a concern since the grant was issued based on the drawings included in the application. Some good questions were asked by the audience, including: “Why do you need to light the trail when the parkway is closed at night?,” and “What affect will this have on current users?”

The *Folsom Telegraph* recently printed two successive articles about the proposed project, and

included SARA’s concerns. SARA did contact the *Telegraph* to clarify two points in the second article: (1) SARA was not listed as an endorser as one article implied and does not endorse the project, and; (2) SARA is supportive of the completion of the existing paved bike trail around Lake Natoma – a separate project. Next up for the project are CEQA hearings, at which SARA and other stakeholder organizations intend to appear and present our concerns. If you would like to be kept informed on this project, please let SARA know at (916 482-2551 or e-mail us at: info@sarariverwatch.org).

New Attacks on Parkway Vegetation

By Stephen Green

Destruction of vegetation along the American River Parkway is a chronic problem. People tend to cut trees and bushes to improve their views or access, or for firewood.

This winter, there were two egregious cases in the River Bend Park area. Willow trees were hacked down in front of a palatial home in an area where cutting has occurred over a number of years. On a nearby island, more than a dozen alder trees were cut with a chain saw.

County park rangers investigated, but were unable to find any witnesses to the vandalism. Even when there are known suspects, Sacramento County District Attorney Jan Scully refuses to prosecute anyone unless there are witnesses.

When there are witnesses, the fines are minor because the crime is considered a misdemeanor. There was the celebrated case in 2002 when Sacramento County Superior Court Judge Peter J. McBrien was caught cutting down 80-year-old oak trees in front of his home. He got off by paying a \$500 fine and \$20,000 in restitution. Some people who own multi-million-dollar homes on the Parkway don’t mind paying fines and restitution if they can enhance their views and property values.

SARA was successful at getting media coverage of the River Bend-area cuttings. Calling attention to the problem may prevent

some vandalism in the short term. But we can expect more illegal cutting over the long haul. That’s a good argument for making such vandalism a felony.

Parkway users who observe vandalism of any kind should phone in a report to county rangers by calling 875-PARK.



American River Parkway Plan Adopted

Continued from page 1

It is significant to note that the UCAC decided from the outset that the goals and principles of the 1985 Plan were still relevant and should remain unchanged. The overarching goal was to ensure preservation of the natural environment while providing limited developments to facilitate human enjoyment of the Parkway. That guided the committee through some very tough and often contentious discussions regarding new uses and competing interests. Also of note is the fact that the American River Parkway Plan is not only the management plan for the County of Sacramento, but it also acts as the management plan for the federal and state Wild and Scenic Rivers Acts.

The Lower American River from Hazel Avenue to the confluence of the American and Sacramento Rivers is classified as a "Recreation" river within the State and Federal Wild and Scenic River Systems.

The plan also -- for the first time -- includes that portion of the Parkway from Hazel Avenue upstream to the Folsom Dam, and includes Lake Natoma.

This updated plan is a living document that will guide the future of the Lower American River and Parkway for the next 25 years or so. It will be SARA's job in the coming years to make sure that this plan is followed in letter and spirit.



It cannot go without saying that the plan would not be what it is today without the leadership and guidance of Assembly Member Dave Jones and his excellent staff in the person of David Gonsalves. All of us who worked so hard on the plan, as well as every resident in the region, owe them a debt of gratitude.

A Delta Conversation with Steve Evans from *Friends of the River*, and Leo Winternitz from *The Nature Conservancy*

By Annemarie Vincent

In March, the SARA board invited Leo Winternitz from the Nature Conservancy and Steve Evans from Friends of the River to discuss their professional views on the Water Bond issue which was approved by the Legislature in November 2009. Both presenters believe that the Delta is in a state of crisis, but they differ in their views toward the Water Bond, and whether or not it is a good step toward fixing the problem.

Both Leo and Steve do agree about the causes that have brought the Delta to a state of steep decline. They also agree that to do nothing as the Delta continues to decline is not an option. If nothing is done, the consequences would be profound and devastating, and will have severe economic impacts to the state. An ecosystem decline will lead to extinction of species such as Salmon

and Steelhead, less reliable supplies of water, health and safety issues, and the relaxation of environmental laws such as the Endangered Species Act.

Why the Delta is in Severe Decline

1. Modification to the Delta has resulted in critical loss of habitat. Sixteen hundred miles of levees have been constructed for water conveyance to move water from north to south. 60,000 – 80,000 acres of the Riparian Corridor, Flood Plains, and tidal marshes need to be restored in order to create a sustainable food source systems.

2. Diversion and exports of water have created less outflow. Outflow is an indicator of fresh water for fish. Because of these diversions and exports, there is 1/3 less Delta outflow. The problem is made worse during

drought conditions. Diversions and exports capture about 45% of the fresh water. Upstream diversions capture nine million acre feet and another six million acre feet are exported to urban areas. The State Water Resources Control Board needs to establish instream flow standards on rivers and tributaries to the Delta that will sufficiently protect Public Trust resources as part of their trustee responsibilities to the citizens of the state. Non-Government Organizations need to be proactive and engage the state board to press for inflow standards in the Lower American River.

3. The current system of water transfer in the Delta is known as *Reverse Flows*. This means that the Sacramento River, San Joaquin River and the Old and Middle Rivers in the Delta flow backwards.

A Delta Conversation

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Reverse flows are detrimental to fish and the production of aquatic food in the Delta. New Systems that isolate water so that the San Joaquin and Sacramento Rivers can flow naturally need to replace a reverse flow system.

4. There is little transparency or accountability in the governance structure. More than 200 federal, state and local agencies have some kind of authority and responsibility in the Delta, but no one agency is in charge, and the State Water Resources Control Board, which has sufficient authority and responsibility, has not acted over the last 20 years. A Delta Council with authority needs to be established.

Neither *The Nature Conservancy* nor *Friends of the River* disagree that monies are needed to restore the Delta. Money is needed to:

- Provide for increased storage (particularly in light of climate change).
- Provide for increased water use efficiency.
- Provide for conjunctive use programs (coordinated use of surface and groundwater).
- Provide for clean up of groundwater contamination.
- Provide for watershed protection.

However, The Nature Conservancy (*Leo*) and Friends of the River, (*Steve*) disagree that the Water Bond will help solve the problem.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Supports the \$11.4 billion Water Bond because they believe it addresses all the concerns listed above. If the bond is not passed, and absent any additional funding source, the Delta's ecosystem will continue to

deteriorate. Water supply reliability from the Delta will also continue to deteriorate. This decline will eventually result in economic costs to the state well over \$11 billion. Water flowing through the Delta is used in Silicon Valley, the counties of Santa Clara, Alameda and Contra Costa. It also provides southern California cities with 1/3 of their water needs. And it provides up to 70% (depending on water year type) of the water needed for agriculture south of the Delta.

With the deterioration of California's economy and the onset of health and safety issues resulting from unreliable water supplies, TNC expects that politicians will try to relax endangered species laws. Last month, Senator Dianne Feinstein was unsuccessful in her attempt to do just that. In the future, this type of political wrangling may become a regular occurrence, and chances are they will be successful, resulting in further deterioration of the Delta's environmental resources. TNC believes that if the Water Bond does not pass, we will have to move quickly to secure another funding source to provide for delta restoration and water supply reliability.

Friends of the River (FOR) Opposes the \$11.4 billion Water Bond approved by the Legislature in November 2009. *The Bond still needs voter approval.* FOR opposes primarily because they believe that passage of this bill will encourage a new wave of dam building and river destruction. They also assert that this bond will have devastating effects on the state budget that will negatively impact all other state social, safety, education, health and environmental services and programs that receive general funds.

Other reasons FOR opposes the Water Bond include;

- The bond provides 1.5 billion for restoration tied to a peripheral canal. Water importers, not the public, should be responsible for the cost of restoring the Delta ecosystem.
- Local rate payers should pay for local water projects and not be subsidized by this bond. The bond is not sustainable.
- Private entities can benefit from the bond and may operate and own new dams, and then turn around and sell water for a profit.
- This bill provides no drought relief. Most money will go toward dams and will not solve the problem because hydrology science does not support the viability of dams.

FOR offers other options to the Water Bond.

- Implement robust Urban Conservation practices.
- Implement recycling water strategies to clean up the water.
- Implement farm control and efficiency measures.
- Implement state regulation to monitor and regulate ground and surface water storage.
- The state exercises no regulation over ground water and over appropriates more water than is available.
- The state water board is not enabled to act and can only recommend. They need to have the authority to implement recommendations.
- Department of Water Resources only has the authority to monitor but not to regulate. They need to have the authority to regulate.



Save the
American River
Association

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since 1961.

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