

More Dams Won't Solve Our Water Problems

BY STEPHEN GREEN

California's population soared from 23.6 million in 1980 to an estimated 38.8 million in 2014. But thanks to California's toilet efficiency standards, today we are flushing an estimated 640,000 fewer acre-feet of water annually compared to the 1980s.

Modern toilets use about 1.28 gallons per flush compared to 4-to-5 gallons per flush for toilets in older homes. If we could replace all the old toilets, another 290,000 acre-feet of water could be saved yearly.

California always has been an innovator when it comes to increasing efficiency and conservation. That has never been more obvious than this summer when drought-stricken jurisdictions statewide have been reducing water consumption to meet state-ordered cutbacks.

Utilities are expanding investments in water recycling and reuse. Leaky water systems are being upgraded. Drought-tolerant plantings are replacing grassy landscapes. Cities such as Sacramento

Continued on Page 4

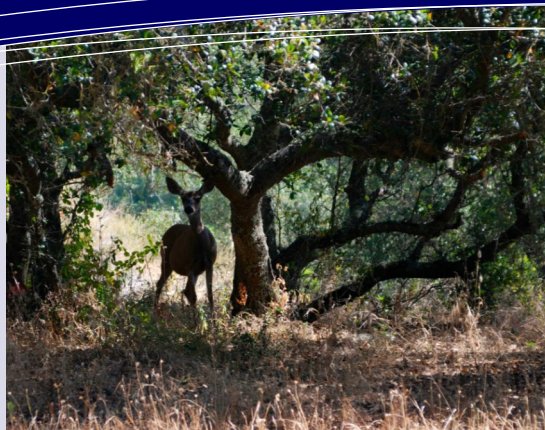


Photo by Pam Lapinski

this issue

The Future of the American River Parkway	P.1
More Dams Won't Solve Our Water Problems	P.1
In Memoriam	P.5
Historic Site is Threatened	P.6
Read Your <i>RiverWatch</i> Online	P.6
Global Warming Made Our Drought More Intense	P.7
SARA's New Board Member	P.7

The Future of the American River Parkway?

BY DALE T. STEELE

I marvel at the work it took to preserve the American River Parkway from development. Some 5,000 acres exist for the public to enjoy along the winding reaches of the lower American River because of the vision of people more than 60 years ago. For many of us, hardly a day goes by when we don't enjoy the outdoors thanks to that effort. Other times, we get through the day in part because we can relax later with nature in our backyard. Exploring the Parkway was high on my list for years before I moved here.

When we relocated to Sacramento, I headed off on a bike trail just blocks away and returned a few hours later babbling about the wildlife I had seen and habitats I encountered, including a majestic cottonwood forest that served as natural air conditioning on that warm day. Ten years later, I haven't lost the sense of wonder and excitement as I explore trails nearly daily.

But all is not well on the Parkway. That grove of cottonwoods has mostly burned up into a ghostly reminder of

what has been lost along the Parkway. There is much concern about the loss of habitat from fires and the lack of an overall effective fire management and habitat restoration strategy. Another 60-plus acres burned in the lower reaches of the Parkway this summer and the frequency is increasing. Arson fires threatened homes in Carmichael and on The Bluffs in Fair Oaks.

The Woodlake and Cal Expo fires burned acres of grassland providing important raptor foraging during nesting. Those areas have burned frequently including during fire department training in June. Two pairs of Swainson's Hawks and a White-tailed Kite monitored the site during the latest Woodlake fire mop up.

The Parkway is used by so many people that they must value it as a jewel of the region, right? The answer is yes, but it's complicated. Cutbacks in rangers and regional park programs have made it impossible to keep up with the pressures of the growing population and the legal and illegal activities occurring there. Recent

Continued on Page 2

Future

Continued from Page 1

county funding and staffing increases are positive, but haven't reached levels needed to manage the Parkway or address increasing problems. Homeless campers occupy many areas of the lower Parkway and are spreading into other sections including sites around Lake Natoma. Neither the City of Sacramento nor the county have been able to solve this problem. The Parkway, its wildlife and habitats suffer.

In addition, the spread of invasive species and the lack of a clear plan to restore habitat (some damaged as far back as hydraulic mining for gold) contributes to more habitat loss yearly. Flood control and competing local interests for golf courses and active recreation facilities and events also cut into the health and quantity of native habitat

that provides food and shelter for wildlife and the outdoor experiences we need now more than ever. More frequent large urban events are now held in the Parkway and human recreation also has increased. Those combined pressures have reduced the ability of nature and natural processes within the Parkway to provide clean air and water, and to sustain other natural resources necessary for our health and well-being.

Those pressures aren't unique to the Parkway, as the entire state and west in general is in the midst of a severe drought and suffers from population growth and development impacts. That fact adds to the importance and value of places like the Parkway. As climate change brings new threats, we find the Parkway ill prepared to cope.

I sense that expectations for the Parkway may be changing too. There are more large events designed to bring funds into local organizations involved in Parkway management and geared more at entertainment than nature. Popular areas along the Parkway gather large crowds coming to soak up sun or find a cool spot along the river. Despite regulations in place, off-leash dogs, off-trail bike riders, rowdy rafters, large volumes of trash, dog and human waste, feral cats, and empty containers are increasingly common along the Parkway.

The Parkway is appreciated, maybe even loved to death, and certainly taken for granted. That's a trend that can be changed with much outreach, education, and leadership. But those are in short supply for the Parkway. There are concerned citizens and local organizations doing great things to help the Parkway, but they are overwhelmed by the extent of the problems.

What will it take to improve this situation? We need a fully funded and staffed regional parks department with the vision, direction and tools to protect sensitive resources, to heal and restore areas now impacted, and to implement a balanced recreation program that avoids further impacts and results in sustainable wildlife habitats and adequate passive recreation. Recent discussions about turning Parkway management over to a third party don't address the difficulty of providing adequate long



Photo by Warren Truitt

Continued on Page 3

Future

Continued from Page 2

-term funding or how such an effort would provide for the challenging enforcement issues within the Parkway. There is a need to expand existing nonprofit efforts in the Parkway and improve

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their coordination and compliance with the Parkway Plan. The City of Sacramento needs to work more closely with the county to address issues impacting the lower Parkway as many of those are within city limits and have a direct connection to activities and lands like Sutter's Landing Park.

How do we get there? Discussions with the county Board of Supervisors to restore funding cuts to regional parks positions and programs are a critical first step. Efforts to create a Natural Resource Management Plan and accompanying Resource Impact Monitoring Program for the entire Parkway are equally important and must be adequately funded. When

implemented, the plans must result in the conservation and management of natural resources throughout the Parkway and regulate all activities so that habitat restoration is successful. The American River Parkway Plan was last updated in 2008 and addresses these issues and must be followed more effectively by the many jurisdictions and overlapping functions.

The county has lead responsibility for management of the entire Parkway, which includes areas under other ownership and oversight. The county must take this stewardship responsibility more seriously than in the past. That seems to be happening now but needs to speed up. Based on observations and trends described by those who know it best, the Parkway is critically ill but can recover to be as great as it has been before. That must happen so that future generations can marvel at the amazing resource we all have in our backyard. ■



Swainson's Hawk

PARKWAY WILDLIFE

The American River Parkway hosts more than 220 bird species, including 45 nesting species. There are 30 mammal species and 43 river species.

Species defined by law as endangered, threatened or of concern include:

Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle (Threatened)

Swainson's Hawk (Threatened)

Bank Swallow (Threatened)

White Tailed Kite (Threatened)

Great Horned Owl (Threatened)

American Kestrel (Endangered)

Red-Shouldered Hawk (Threatened)

Cooper's Hawk (Of Concern)

Burrowing Owl (Of Concern)

Great Blue Heron (Endangered)

Great Egret (Endangered)

Bald Eagle (Endangered)

Western Pond Turtle (Threatened)

Fall-run Chinook Salmon (Threatened)

Central Valley Steelhead (Threatened)



Water Problems

Continued from Page 1

which have been slow to install residential water meters are speeding up installations. Farmers are growing food with less water. And many of us are stepping up to do things differently.

On Aug. 12, the state Dept. of Water Resources launched two new programs offering rebates for turf removal and toilet replacements. If you rip out turf and replace it with water-wise landscaping, you can qualify for up to \$2 per square foot of turf removal up to \$2,000. If you

replace that old toilet, you can earn a \$100 rebate. Applications for both programs can be made online at SaveOurWaterRebates.com.

But despite our progress, there is still much work to be done. State government has been very slow to implement the law to stop the over drafting of our aquifers. Farmers have been forced to idle a half million acres, yet water still is being shipped to some growers who have planted unsustainable crops on arid land. State regulators have made feeble

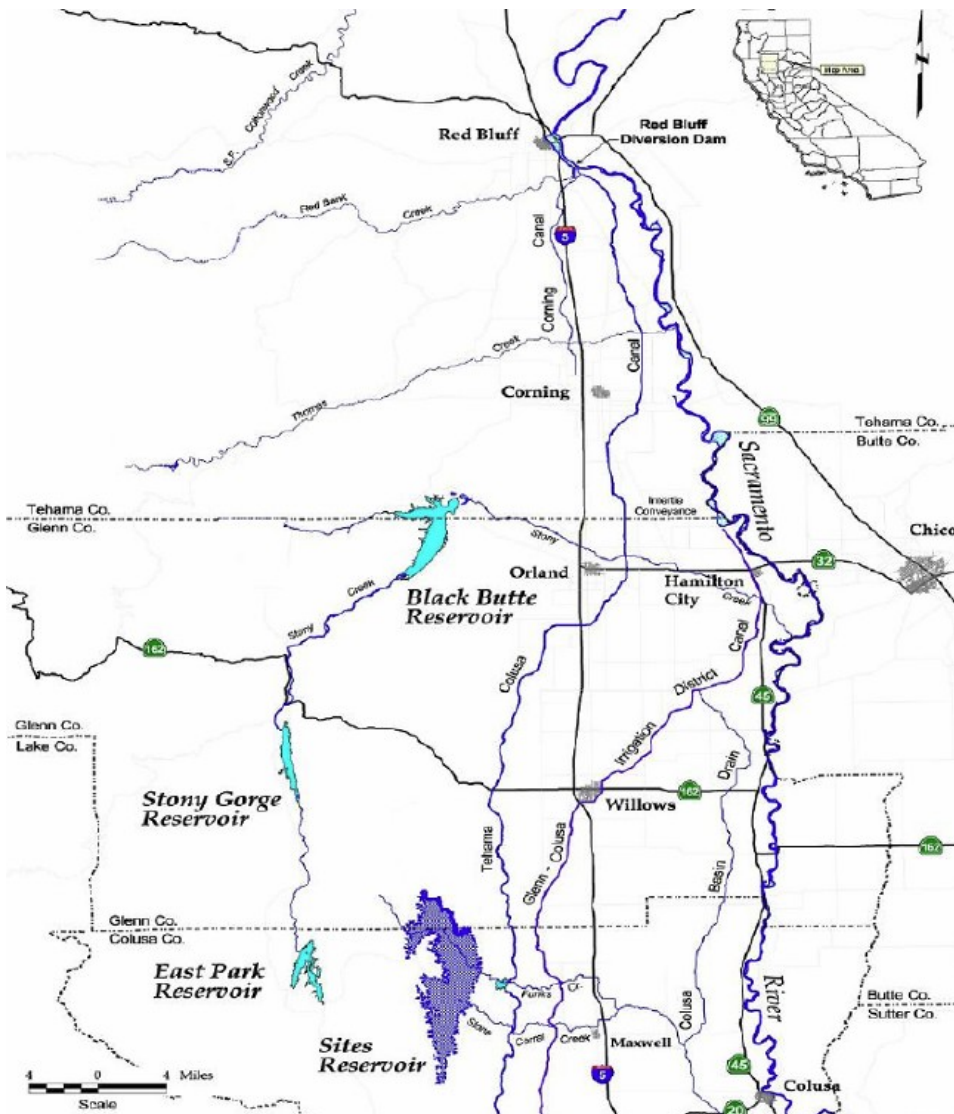
efforts to stop pot farmers from diverting water from streams and rivers. Urban sprawl continues unchecked in Folsom and many other areas. And water abusers aren't being dealt with as harshly as they should be.

Statewide, there are minimal efforts by home and business owners to capture and use rainwater. In many parts of the world, there's a cistern at every home.

Many of our elected leaders are still carping about a need to build more reservoirs. Two projects getting the most attention are Sites on the west side of the Sacramento Valley and Temperance Flat on the upper San Joaquin River. If those reservoirs had been in place during the current drought, they would have increased California water storage by about two percent — a drop in the bucket.

Cost of the two projects is roughly estimated at \$6.5 billion. The Sites Reservoir would be filled by water pumped from the Sacramento River. During a prolonged drought like the one we're in, water wouldn't be available to pump to the reservoir. No one has been able to show that the cost of building Sites makes economic sense. It's a project that has been proposed off and on since 1943 but has never been built. If it were economically feasible, it would have been in place long ago.

Far more water can be gained more cheaply by investing in better water management, recycling, conservation, upgrading infrastructure and reallocation of water deliveries currently made to impaired agricultural lands. ■



The costs of building the Sites Reservoir would never be recovered.

SARA Membership Donations *April—June 2015*

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Gary Keill	SARA appreciates the support of our generous members. Without your support, SARA would not be able to continue our role as <i>Guardians of the American River and Parkway since 1961</i> . New and renewing members are listed in <i>Riverwatch</i> according to their preference (indicated on the SARA membership/renewal form).
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AmazonSmile is a simple and automatic way for you to support SARA when you shop online. You'll find the exact same low prices, selection and convenient shopping experience as Amazon.com, with the added bonus that Amazon will donate 0.5% of the price of your eligible purchases.



To get started, go to smile.amazon.com. On your first visit, select Save the American River Association as your charitable organization before you begin shopping. AmazonSmile will remember your selection, and then every eligible purchase you make will result in a donation to SARA. ■

In Memoriam

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

David W. Mitchell

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 and those people are always very appreciative. The money is used to further SARA's advocacy work on behalf of the Parkway. Contributions may be made by check, Visa or MasterCard. A form for contributions appears on the last page of this newsletter.

SARA also has a Legacy program. For information on the program, please call the SARA office (916) 482-2551. ■

www.sarariverwatch.org

Historic Site is Threatened

A wooded slope above Lake Natoma was site of a vibrant Chinese community of 2,500-3,000 people in the 19th Century. Artifacts from that time are still being recovered in the area and there are remnants of a hand-laid brick road that led to a Benevolence Hall and Shrine owned by the Young Wo Benevolence Association.

Members of History Matters call the site the last historic remnant of Folsom's Chinatown. The Young Wo were Chinese sojourners who came from Canton, China, during the 1800s to work in the gold fields. They purchased the beautiful property in 1881 as their meeting place. The Young Wo, along with many other Chinese, stayed and participated the building of the new State of California. They were the primary laborers for construction of the Transcontinental Railway and The Delta's system of levees, and were service workers and merchants throughout the small Northern California towns.

History Matters, a grassroots environmental organization in Folsom, is leading the fight to save the wooded slope that was once the site of the Young Wo Benevolence Hall, Shrine and caretaker's cottage. Just a few feet away, the Young Wo Cemetery, purchased in 1883, has been saved and is registered as a California State Point

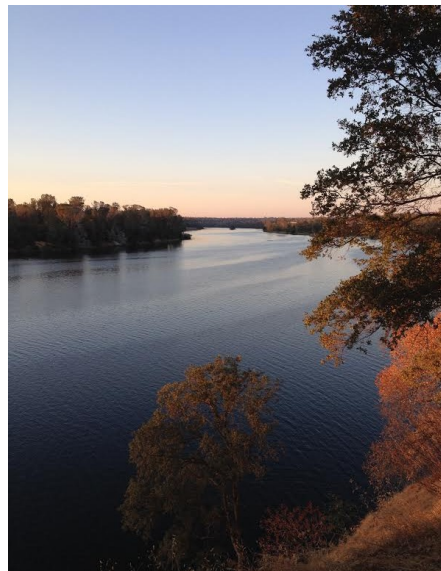
of Interest. The Cemetery represents one half of the holdings of the Young Wo Benevolence Association in Folsom.

These two properties are monuments to Chinese historical heritage in California.

Last December, the Folsom City Council gave approval to a Sacramento developer to disregard the obligation to save the Young Wo heritage and build Leidesdorff Village Residential Project: 36 condominium units, 18 for-sale residential flats and two single-family houses. In doing so, the council ignored petitions, testimony and letters from Folsom residents who want the site preserved.

The council approval was based on a Mitigated Negative Declaration. An Environmental Impact Report, which would have saved the Chinese cultural resources, was not completed.

In response, Folsom resident Deborah Grassl filed a lawsuit against the city and its council citing several violations of California State environmental law. Although the lawsuit concentrates on the failure to preserve significant Chinese cultural resources, many other California Environmental Quality Act concerns are being taken into consideration: lack of neighborhood sustainability, increased residential traffic, inadequate sewer capacity, lack of recreational amenities, and rezoning without respect to the Historic District underlay zoning law.



Lake Natoma photo by David Thesell

The main issue being brought by Grassl's lawsuit is: can Folsom citizens rely on current laws governing the preservation of the Historic District's environmental integrity, or is the City Council legally able to circumvent laws without prejudice?

History Matters is a grassroots organization made up of concerned residents in the Historic District who educate the public on historic and environmental matters. They are fundraising for Grassl's legal and court costs. If you would like to know more about History Matters, read the lawsuit against the City of Folsom, or would like to contribute to History Matters, please call: (916) 985-7796 or e-mail at historymatters2015@gmail.com. ■

Read Your *RiverWatch* Online

In an effort to reduce the amount of paper we use and to reduce our costs, SARA is now offering our members the option to read *RiverWatch* online.

RiverWatch is available in an electronic PDF format on our website, sarariverwatch.org. If you elect to receive your copy electronically, we

will send you an e-mail each quarter with a link to the same articles on issues affecting our River and Parkway, so you'll never miss an issue.

Please take a moment to let us know if you'd like to read *RiverWatch* online. Visit the SARA Web site, sarariverwatch.org, and choose "Newsletter" and then "Delivery

Preference" from the top menu. Complete the short form and, beginning with our next issue, we will e-mail you a link to *RiverWatch* and you will no longer receive a paper copy in the mail.

Thank you for your valued membership and for helping us become a greener organization! ■

Global Warming Made our Drought More Intense

Global warming has worsened California's drought by a factor of 15-to-20 percent according to a study published in the journal *Geophysical Research Letters*.

The current drought would still be occurring based on natural climate variability, according to the lead author, Columbia University climate scientist A. Park Williams.

The warming atmosphere robs moisture from plants and soil on the surface, he explained. As the warming continues, future droughts will increase in severity, he added.

Droughts occur when a ridge of high pressure builds up in the western Pacific Ocean and blocks storms from reaching California during the winter. The current drought resembles the pattern of past droughts.

Since 1895, California has warmed by more than two degrees Fahrenheit. That's a large number, Williams said. Warmer air draws water out of plants and soil more aggressively.

The study is entitled: "Contribution of Anthropogenic Warming to California Drought During 2012-2014." It can read on the Columbia University website. ■

SARA's New Board Member

Science Writer John D. Cox has joined Save the American River Association's Board of Directors.

A journalist and author, Cox specializes in weather and climate science and has long experience covering water issues in the West.

He's had positions as a reporter for United Press International in four bureaus in the West, as an editor for Reuters Ltd. in London, and as a senior writer for The Sacramento Bee, where he first began covering science in the early 1990s.

In 1995, Cox was awarded a Knight Science Journalism Fellowship at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he spent the 1995-96 academic year. He is a former science consultant to the California State Senate.

Cox is the author of three books about meteorology. Most recently, *Climate Crash: Abrupt Climate Change and what it Means for Our Future*, was published by Joseph Henry Press, an imprint of the

National Academy of Sciences. His first book, *Weather for Dummies*, was described in the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society as "an extraordinary book about weather" and "unquestionably the best book for the nonprofessional." His second book, *Storm Watchers: The Turbulent History of Weather Prediction from Franklin's Kite to El Niño*, was published by John Wiley & Sons.

He lives in east Sacramento. ■



New SARA Board Member John Cox

Support County Parks — Buy An Annual Pass

The Pass pays for itself in 10 visits and all funds go directly towards maintaining and operating the 15,000-acre system. For as little as \$50 per year, you can have unlimited access and parking in the parks.

Pass holders receive free daily entry into Regional Parks and annual passes are valid for one year from date of purchase.

Pass Fees Are Based On Use:

Vehicle	\$50
Vehicle + Trailer or over-sized vehicle (over 22 feet):	\$100
Vehicle + Horse trailer	\$75
Vehicle and small watercraft:	\$80
Parks supporter pass*	\$50

** This pass is for those who want to support Parks but do not drive to Parks facilities*

Where to Purchase Your Parks Pass

- Online through the Sacramento County Web site www.regionalparks.saccounty.net
- 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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