

# RIVERWATCH

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## Delta Water Exports Should Be Cut 50%

*By Stephen Green*

Water pumped out of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta should be reduced by 50 percent if the threatened ecosystem and fish populations are to be preserved for future generations.

That is the key finding of a 190-page State Water Resources Control Board staff report released Aug. 3.

The board's scientists concluded that a minimum of 75 percent of the water flowing to The Delta is needed to sustain the estuary and its wildlife. Currently, about 50 percent of that runoff goes to farms and urban areas.

"The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta (Delta) is a critically important natural resource for California and the nation," the report noted. "It is both



The Delta has been called the hub of California's water system. Photo Courtesy: Adrian Mendoza

the hub of California's water supply system and the most valuable estuary and wetlands on the western coast of the Americas.

"The Delta is in ecological crisis," the report continued, "resulting in high levels of conflict that affect the sustainability of existing

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## SARA and the Grass Roots Working Group

*for Adequate, Stable, Long-Term Funding for Our Regional Parks and Open Space System*

*By Warren Truitt*

### Why was the Working Group Formed?

Sacramento County's budget crisis is threatening our Parkways, Regional Parks, and Open Spaces. Without adequate, stable, long term funding for our Regional Parks and Open Space

System, our Parkways will suffer from overuse, the budget crisis will increase pressure to split up our Regional Parks and Parkways among nonprofits, cities, and local park districts and to further reduce County funding.

SARA has recognized this crisis and is leading a grass roots

effort to provide recommendations for securing adequate, stable funding for our Regional Parks and Open Space System. Simply put, our Parkways will not thrive unless the Regional Parks and Open Space System thrives.

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### For More Information About the Grass Roots Working Group

Updates and additional information can be found at [www.sarariverwatch.org/grassroots.html](http://www.sarariverwatch.org/grassroots.html).

Either we rise to the challenge of funding our Regional Parks and Open Space System or bear witness to the loss of our magnificent public Parkways and Open Space throughout the Sacramento region.

## Proposed New American River Bridge

*By Betsy Weiland*

Since the early 1990s, Save the American River Association has been closely involved with planning for a new transit/bicycle/pedestrian bridge over the American River as part of Sacramento Regional Transit's Green Line, also called the Downtown-Natomas-Airport or DNA.

The bridge will cross the river at Richards Boulevard in the downtown River District and finish at Truxel Road, where light rail will continue, one day, all the way to the Sacramento International Airport. The first phase of the 12.8-mile downtown-to-airport route is a 1.1 mile segment set to open in January/February 2011. It extends light rail to Richards Boulevard and 7<sup>th</sup> Street at the Township 9 development.

With SARA's support, the updated American River Parkway plan, adopted in 2010, acknowledges the new transit/bicycle/pedestrian bridge in Chapter 2, Page 34, Policy 8.18.1: "The Downtown-Natomas-Airport (DNA-TF) light rail project alignment, as approved by the Regional Transit Board of Directors in December 2003, is recognized by this plan."

One change that SARA will watch closely is a request by the City of Sacramento to change part of the alignment to Sequoia Pacific Boulevard. According to Joanne Koegel of Koegel Associates, at this point the change is recommended by the consultant only. The Regional Transit staff will recommend and the Regional Transit Board hopefully will approve the request when the Transitional Analysis is approved, hopefully on November 8.

The changed alignment has not been subjected to an environmental review. That could happen early next year. It appears that the proposed new alignment through the Parkway and over the river is shorter. As I said, SARA will pay careful attention to this new development.

Our SARA Board faced, and still faces, many tough decisions regarding this proposed new river crossing. The bridge



Swainson's Hawk  
Photo Courtesy Chris Conard  
Sacramento Audubon Society  
<http://sacramentoaudubon.org/>

footprint will:

- Impact nearly five acres of scarce riparian/scrub habitat.
- Impact state-listed species: Swainson's Hawk and Burrowing Owl.
- Impact federal-listed species: Giant Garter Snake, Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle, Chinook Salmon and Steelhead Trout.
- Cause impacts to the American River and the Parkway ranging from biological to visual to noise pollution.

But what is the alternative? If we oppose a new transit/bicycle/pedestrian bridge and continue to trap people in their cars, we are perpetuating our dependence on oil, and insuring continued and worsening health effects from dirty air and lack of exercise.

SARA ultimately decided to work closely with Regional Transit, despite the short-and-long-term impacts on the American River and Parkway, in favor of the larger goal of building a sustainable community and regional transportation system. Hopefully, the gains will outweigh the negatives.

We will continue to work collaboratively with Regional Transit on the bridge design, the mitigation measure and other issues, to insure a win for the local and regional communities, the river and the Parkway. None of us should take the

Green Line project lightly, especially since light rail today costs as much as \$65 million per mile to construct.

And finally, SARA, in all probability, faces a critical challenge as planning for the new bridge moves forward.

After many years of cooperation with Regional Transit and an extensive public process, the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG), and potentially now the City of Sacramento, at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour have proposed adding as many as four lanes of car-truck traffic to the transit/bicycle/pedestrian river crossing. They did so with no consideration or thought for the years of time, money and effort invested by Regional Transit and the public in existing planning.

SACOG and the city have had every opportunity over the decades-long planning effort and the six-year process to update the American River Parkway Plan, to reach out, collaborate, and bring forward their request and proposals for designing a bridge that included car/truck traffic. Instead, they wait until the public process, the environmental review, and other major planning investments and outreach have been done to propose "tacking on" car/truck traffic to a carefully planned and vetted transit/bicycle/pedestrian bridge.

Not only is SARA alarmed by this "shadow" proposal, but Regional Transit is concerned that his push to re-invent the bridge will delay their goals of increasing the people's ability to access transit to the airport and points between, and to obtain local and federal funding.

I encourage everyone to stay involved with not only the river crossing issue, but the entire Green Line project. You can contact Regional Transit's Traci Canfield at [tcnfield@sacrt.com](mailto:tcnfield@sacrt.com) and ask her to add your name to RT's outreach list. As always, SARA appreciates and encourages your questions and comments also. Please feel free to contact me at [flweiland@yahoo.com](mailto:flweiland@yahoo.com).

## 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 oversized vehicle (over 22 feet):	\$100
Vehicle + Horse trailer	\$75
Vehicle and small watercraft:	\$75
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 website [www.co.sacramento.ca.us](http://www.co.sacramento.ca.us)
- At REI stores in Sacramento, Roseville and Folsom
- Patriot Cycles in Fair Oaks
- Effie Yaw Nature Center at Ancil Hoffman Park
- Regional Park offices and park kiosks
- American River Parkway Foundation Office at the William B. Pond Recreation Area

## State Parks Initiative on Nov. Ballot

By Stephen Green

It's been said that two of the most vile words in the English Language are "deferred maintenance."

California's 278 state parks have a backlog of more than \$1 billion in deferred maintenance projects.

For every dollar saved by deferrals now, California taxpayers will eventually spend \$5-to-\$10 to correct the problems. In the meantime, many of the threatened sites will have irreversible damage.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's budget cuts have shut down nearly 150 parks part-time and most of the parks have had service cuts.

Last year, 62,575 crimes were reported in state parks or about 171 per day. That compares with 65 crimes per day in 1999. Yet there are only some 300 park ranger positions (the same number we had in the early 1980s) and many of the existing positions are vacant.

**"Our parks are in peril  
because of chronic  
underfunding"**

Elizabeth Goldstein,  
president of the California State Park  
Foundation

Schwarzenegger is the same governor who floated the idea of selling sponsorships for state parks so that a commercial name could be applied to them. Had he succeeded, Santa Monica State Beach could have become "BP State Beach."

The Folsom Lake State Recreation Area could be the "Tidy Bowl State Recreation Area."

"Our parks are in peril because of chronic underfunding," said Elizabeth Goldstein, president of the California State Park Foundation. "They have no reliable source of funding."

That's why the foundation has spear-headed the placement of Proposition 21 on the November ballot.

The official title is the State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund Act of 2010. It would provide a stable, reliable and adequate source of funding for the state parks, for wildlife conservation, and for increased access for all Californians.

The trust fund would be financed by an \$18 annual fee on all California cars, motorcycles and recreational vehicles. Motorists would pay the fee when they renew their registrations.

In return, each of those vehicles would have free day-use access to the state park system all year. They currently pay for access.

The fee would raise approximately \$500 million yearly (based on 28 million registered vehicles). Eighty-five percent of the funds would be allocated to state parks and 15 percent would go to state wildlife and ocean protection agencies. At the same time, the fee would free up some \$130 million in state General Fund dollars that could be used for other purposes such as schools or public safety.

The trust fund would be audited annually by the State Auditor and a Citizens' Oversight Committee would be created

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State Park Visitor Centers, like this one at Brannon Island State Recreation Area, are seldom open.

Photo Courtesy: California State Parks Web site [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)

## California's Water Bureaucracy has been Beached

*By Stephen Green*

Who would have thought that California's water bureaucracy is a hodge-podge of conflicting, fragmented and only partially accountable entities that are incapable of managing the state's water now and in the future?

That was the conclusion of a report issued in August by the Milton Marks Commission on California State Government Organization and Economy, better known as the Little Hoover Commission.

The report, based on 18 months of hearings and investigations, concluded that California needs a new structure for water governance "that has planning and management of the state's valuable water resources as its core mission."

Specifically, the report called for the creation of a new Department of Water Management within the Natural Resources Agency. The new department could consolidate management and

planning functions of the existing Department of Water Resources with the Rights Division of the State Water Resources Control Board. It also would take in the instream flow group of the Water Branch of the Department of Fish and Game.

Among the new department's chief responsibilities would be collecting and monitoring data on water use and establishing water availability for environmental, agricultural and urban needs.

To accomplish that, the responsibility for the State Water Project would be transferred from the Department of Water Resources to the new department.

The State Water Project would become part of a sub-group of the new department called the State Water Authority. The authority would not only run the State Water Project, but have jurisdiction over water rights, and own the state's

dams, canals, pumps and other hydroelectric assets. It would be governed by a board appointed by the governor and approved by the State Senate.

The commission's report had been out for less than a day before the screaming started over removing the State Water Project from the Department of Water Resources. The State Water Project delivers water to 25 million people and 750,000 acres of farmland. The report argues, however, that the new State Water Authority would "improve transparency, efficiency and accountability."

The State Water Authority also would be charged with further integrating operations of the State Water Project with the federal Central Valley Project "with the ultimate goal of merging the two systems under state ownership."

The commission has no authority to implement the report's recommendations. Action by the state legislature and governor would be required to carry them out.

Nothing is expected to happen until a new administration and legislature are in place next year. Time will tell whether the report will be taken up then or left, like so many others, to gather dust on state shelves.

The complete report, titled "Managing for Change: Modernizing California's Water Governance," is online at [www.lhc.ca.gov](http://www.lhc.ca.gov).

## In Memoriam

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

**Donald W. Alden**  
**Elmer C. Aldrich**  
**William Bickford**  
**Bob Claremon**  
**James A. Cramer**  
**Alyce Mae Fielder**

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 Master Card. 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.**

## In Recognition

SARA received a donation last quarter in honor of **Frank and Doris Cirill's 50th wedding anniversary.** Congratulations!



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## Delta Water Exports Should be Cut 50%

water policy in California. Several species of fish have been listed as protected species under the California Endangered Species Act and under the federal Endangered Species Act."

The study was mandated by the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Reform Act of 2009. And like most water board reports, its findings are non-binding. But it is an important resource for Save the American River Association and allied organizations that have been seeking reduced water exports.

We have been arguing for decades that more water must flush through The Delta. Higher flows mean cooler, deeper, less salty and less polluted water for fish spawning and migration. More water also would help steer fish away from the giant pumps that entrap and kill vulnerable species. Most Delta farmers also support that view.

The study was immediately denounced by corporate farmers in the San Joaquin Valley who continue to claim that water exports are not the cause of ecological collapse in The Delta.

Fish don't need more water, they say.

The Delta's problems are the fault of invasive species, urban runoff, agricultural chemicals and inadequate sewage treatment.

And while those factors are definitely contributing to The Delta's crisis, the basic problem and the action exacerbating all other negatives is the excessive export of water – a fact substantiated by the water board's report.

The corporate farmers obtain taxpayer-subsidized water at extremely low rates and many turn around and sell much of it to cities and water districts in Southern California. Many growers clearly are more interested in marketing water than growing crops.

We can expect the rhetoric over water exports to be ratcheted up in the coming months. But given the political climate on water issues, it is unlikely that rhetoric will produce the needed results. If past experience is any guide, we'll have to depend on court action to reduce Delta water exports.

Just one week after the report's release, the legislature passed a measure to delay their \$11.1 billion water bond measure

until 2012. When it was negotiated behind closed doors last November, the measure was to have been placed on this November's ballot.

Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, argued that the delay would provide an opportunity "to improve" the measure. But others such as Assembly members Lois Wolk, D-Davis, and Alyson Huber, D-El Dorado Hills, claimed Steinberg and the other backers knew the measure was dead-on-arrival at the polls.

The measure didn't address some of the fundamental water problems. It would have allowed private operators to assume control of some water conveyances built at taxpayer expense. It was developed at a time when California has more than \$3 billion in unspent water bond money. And, worst of all, it contained some \$3 billion in pork – everything from museums, trails and a water taxi for Lake Tahoe to an "economic stimulus" package for Siskiyou County.

Los Angeles Times columnist George Skelton watched the legislators debate whether to delay the measure.

"... amazing – even amusing in a sick way – was watching the hypocrisy of so-called fiscal conservatives arguing to preserve a bond laden with such superfluous spending," Skelton wrote. "They were pleading for the taxpayers' purchase of nonessential toys.... These are Republicans willing to join Gov. Schwarzenegger in killing California's main welfare program and shuttering classrooms, while borrowing to build bike trails and watershed education centers."

Assemblyman Jared Huffman, D-San Rafael, who once supported the measure, said there's no reason to think it will pass in 2012. "It's a wounded measure," Huffman declared.

The state report is titled: "Development of Flow Criteria for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Ecosystem." It is available at [www.waterboards.ca.gov](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov).

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## State Parks Initiative on Nov. Ballot

to provide oversight of spending. Audit, oversight and administrative costs for the fund would be limited to one percent of annual revenues.

The mission of the state park system is to preserve the state's biological diversity, protect valued natural and cultural resources, and create opportunities for outdoor recreation.

Yet, as the Sacramento Bee editorialized recently: "The unfortunate reality is that the state does not have a consistent process for protecting state parks from proposed land uses that may be inconsistent with these park purposes."

It has taken citizen groups to stop construction a private toll road through San

Onofre State Beach, and a high-voltage power line through Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.

A major problem at the Folsom Lake State Recreation Area is backyard encroachment – people who extend their yards and fences into the park, dump trash and cuttings, or cut trees to improve their views.

"There are so many of these, we don't have the staff time or money to deal with them all," said senior Parks and Recreation Specialist Jim Michaels.

Passage of Proposition 21 would finally give the state parks staff those resources.

*Continued from page 1*

## SARA and the Grass Roots Working Group

This is a time of both crises and opportunity. Either we rise to the challenge of funding our Regional Parks and Open Space System or bear witness to the loss of our magnificent public Parkways and Open Space throughout the Sacramento region.

### Vision

The guiding vision of the Grass Roots Working Group is an integrated system of regional parks and open space linked by a bicycle transportation network. A system that is safe, accessible, well-maintained, and provides recreational and educational opportunities to Sacramento County's diverse communities.

This system will incorporate farmlands and wild lands thereby allowing the people of Sacramento to enjoy the health and welfare benefits of clean air and water, locally grown food, and abundant opportunities to walk, hike, bike and recreate.

### Mission

The Mission of the Grass Roots Working Group is to identify an appropriate structure to manage our regional parks and open space system linked by a non-motorized transportation network, coupled with a reliable funding stream that adequately provides for the operations, maintenance, and expansion of the system.

Please note that SARA is a 501(c)3 organization. Tax ID: 94-2987563.

More information about SARA can be found on their Web site [www.sarariverwatch.org](http://www.sarariverwatch.org) and additional information about the Grass Roots Working Group can be found at [www.sarariverwatch.org/grassroots.html](http://www.sarariverwatch.org/grassroots.html). SARA's phone is (916) 482-2551 or you can e-mail: [info@sarariverwatch.org](mailto:info@sarariverwatch.org).

### How Do I Donate?

Make your check payable to "Save the American River Association,"

Write "Grass Roots Effort" on the memo line on the face of the check (This will ensure that the contribution will be directed to a restricted account limited to paying the costs of the Grass Roots Effort). Please go to:

[www.sarariverwatch.org/grassroots.html](http://www.sarariverwatch.org/grassroots.html) for the most current status,

Please write "ok" near the memo line on the face of the check if you are agreeable to being listed publicly as a supporter of the Grass Roots Effort, and

Mail your check to:

**Save the American River Association**  
4441 Auburn Blvd. Suite H  
Sacramento, CA 95841-4139



Fair Oaks Bluffs  
Photo Courtesy Warren Truit

# Sewage Plant Upgrade is Long Overdue

*By Stephen Green*

We've known for years that about 90 percent of the ammonia in waters of The Delta is introduced by the Sacramento Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant.

There it can harm aquatic life – especially fish – if they encounter sufficient quantities.

Waste water discharged into the bottom of the Sacramento River from the Elk Grove plant reaches the surface of the river after traveling only a few hundred feet – posing a risk of exposure to pollution by swimmers and boaters.

Yet officials of the Sacramento Regional County Sanitation District have fought all efforts to force upgrading the plant to expand treatment of sewage.

They contend it would be too costly and routinely trot out inflated figures on the cost of upgrading treatment.

Former legislator and Sacramento Mayor Phil Isenberg noted that ten other sanitation plants in the region already have upgraded their operations to clean up ammonia and other pollutants. He contends the Sacramento regional plant should have done the same long ago when it would have been cheaper.

"Most people think that polluters have a duty to cleanup up the problems they create," Isenberg said.

That could change, however, now that the regional plant's discharge permit is up for renewal. The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board renews the permit every five years and recently issued a draft discharge permit requiring significant upgrades. A comment period on the draft ends Oct. 8. The sanitation district can then appeal permit conditions to the State Water Resources Control Board. And if that doesn't go well, they can go to court.

Of great significance is the fact that the



Blue Heron  
Photo Courtesy: Warren Truitt

draft permit gives the sanitation district 10 years to bring the plant into compliance.

The sanitation district's immediate response was a claim that the upgrades would cost \$2 billion and monthly sewer rates for each household on the system would jump from \$20 to about \$62. There also would be higher fees for government and commercial facilities, and for new hookups.

**"Most people think that polluters have a duty to cleanup up the problems they create"**

Phil Isenberg

The regional plant serves some 1.3 million people in unincorporated areas of Sacramento County and the cities of Sacramento, West Sacramento, Citrus Heights, Folsom, Elk Grove and Rancho Cordova.

The effluent currently being discharged contains live pathogens including giardia and cryptosporidium that can sicken river users.

The ammonia is a byproduct of urine and feces. It can disrupt The Delta's food chain by preventing blooms of zooplankton that fish eat. In backwater areas where extreme concentrations can develop, ammonia can attack the nervous systems of fish, causing lethargy, loss of appetite and, in rare cases, coma.

There is no question that the regional plant is contributing to the collapse of The Delta ecosystem. We shouldn't have to wait ten years for a fix.

"The Sacramento River is a major migratory bottleneck for numerous endangered species, including salmon," said Bill Jennings, executive director of the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance. "So the permit is going to have to be rigorously protective of water quality."



Save the  
American River  
Association

Guardians of the American  
River and Parkway  
since 1961.

We're on the Web!  
[www.SARAriverwatch.org](http://www.SARAriverwatch.org)

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**The following membership categories are suggested:** (Please circle your choice)

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