

DATE: May 24, 2024

TO: Sacramento County Supervisor Rich Desmond, District 3
Sacramento County Parks and Recreation Director, Liz Bellas

FROM: Bruce Forman, Retired Fish & Wildlife Interpretive Supervisor/Program Manager

SUBJECT: **SAILOR BAR ACCESSIBIITY CONCERNS AND PROPOSED SOLUTIONS**

BACKGROUND

I am a retired California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife interpretive supervisor/ wildlife program manager. My position with the DFW was to develop and promote public recreation use to benefit visitors while safeguarding the lands. In retirement, owing to my professional experience and my frequent personal use of the American River Parkway, I still have deep concerns about the need to safeguard naturalistic wildlife habitats. The County's dedication to the adherence and implementation of the American River Parkway Plan works to achieve this balance.

CONCERNS

The County's plan to reopen the now closed maintenance roads into the interior of the Sailor Bar unit of the Parkway for public motor vehicle traffic appears inconsistent with it's the goals to provide quality recreational activities, support migratory and resident wildlife, and ensure public safety for the reasons described below:

Wildfires: The recent American River Parkway Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) (April 29, 2024) cites that areas Sailor Bar, Upper Sunrise and Sunrise Bluffs are especially vulnerable to wildfires. And that "A ravine and steep sections of grassland surround the homes located on Bluff Lane, which is Metro Fire's highest fire hazard concern in the parkway."

Furthermore, the CWPP indicates that most of the fires started within the parkway are primarily from escaped cooking and warming fires, accidental ignitions, and arson. Opening up the maintenance /emergency vehicle gravel roads to public motor vehicles is a conduit for wildfires and is counter to the intent of both the CWPP and the American River Parkway Plan (2008).

Sensory Experience: Motor vehicle traffic significantly reduces the quality of a walking/hiking experience in an area designated for nature recreation. People visit the Sailor Bar to find a peaceful, safe, and clean place to enjoy nature without the sights, sounds, and toxic fumes of motor vehicles. Furthermore, pedestrians who have do not feel secure using the trails/paths due to limited mobility rely on using these same roads.

Debris: As experienced when these roads were opened, people will bring in a great deal of gear and supplies, which will result in discarded garbage, glass, BBQ's, batteries, textiles, and many

other debris. I see this scattered in Sacramento Bar, Nimbus Hatchery bluffs along Parkway and Lower and Upper Sunrise areas of the Parkway.

Erosion: Vehicle access greatly concentrates use by the river and hasten moderate and severe erosion on already established social paths. These carved out paths to the water's edge drain directly into primary salmon/steelhead spawning beds, which have been restored in recent years. The sedimentation of cobble is known to suffocate salmonid eggs. This important issue prompted the development of large, outdoor, high-profile exhibits at Nimbus Fish Hatchery, which I spearheaded. The mock spawning beds (healthy and lethal) exhibits were vetted in their planning and development through DFW fisheries biologists.

Accessibility: On the issue of accessibility for everyone, I share your concern for opening the roads parallel to the river is to accommodate persons with disabilities. Currently, there is no designated accessible trail for those with limited mobility. People with hearing and visual impairment disabilities should be able to enjoy walking along a river path to experience the serenity of Sailor Bar and the delightful sights or sounds of the birds, and the flowing river, the sounds and sensation of a breeze in the woods and meadows without the intrusiveness of car sounds and gas fumes, and dust flying in their face.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

County Parks would serve the community and environments well by keeping the maintenance/emergency vehicle roads closed to public motor vehicle traffic, while implementing accessible trails designed for people with limited mobility to use as an alternate path to enjoy the sensory experiences of taking stroll along river. The possible solutions below are consistent with the Parkway Plan.

Develop an accessible trail and shaded resting area from Illinois Avenue parking lot

- Develop an accessible trail from Illinois Ave. parking lot (west side) out through gently sloped woods 0.15 mile to a very scenic, wide river vista overlooking prime salmon areas (at a forked ripple, quite an auditory location). Such a trail would provide for quality birdwatching. Interpretive signs could highlight salmon ecology, birds, and conservation and reduce the development of trenched/crumbling social paths.
- A canopy for shade would encourage *spring*/summer use along with a bench.
- Two parking stalls and signage could be installed along with a trailhead sign. Such a trail with high-level interpretive signs would be a shining star among various new visitor service improvements of the entire Parkway. (I managed the development of interpretive signs at Nimbus Hatchery and at other locations during my career with DFW and am happy to volunteer to assist in the planning and support of this project).

Reclaim nature on social paths by native revegetation and gravel, and install interpretive signs

- Reclaim nature on social paths by native revegetation and gravel. This could involve help from community volunteers. Use barriers as needed, especially where steep or where use should be prohibited due to the degree of vulnerability and sensitivity. This would be needed in the vicinity of the above proposed trail (vista terminus) since a few steep social paths have been initiated.

- Develop interpretive signs on topics such as birds (eagle, heron, cormorant, waterfowl, etc.) and their ecology on historical use by various indigenous peoples, gold miners, and others, and select native plant and habitats such as blue oaks, willows, elderberry, and flowering plants.
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Create an accessible trail and resting areas at Turtle Pond

- Create resting and picnic opportunities at the Turtle Pond areas). These wonderful areas are underutilized, desirable, and unique. A trailhead sign and interpretive panel on pond ecology and conservation would be a welcome, beneficial addition.
- Develop an accessible trail (0.1 mile) from the large parking lot on upper Illinois Ave. to the southern end of the pond. It is a gentle slope that is scenic and under-utilized. Asphalt with chronic holes and uplift safety hazards needs to be removed. Water outtake from the pond has long been terribly obstructed by mud and branch debris. It is not draining as it should into a creek. This blockage could have consequences because it drains to creek-side plants.
- This trail affords a panoramic view. The sounds of pond draining, and creek will aid visually impaired visitors. The pond seems heavy with algae, which can lead to an aeration problem (eutrophication). Drainage flow would reduce the algae. The pond's out-take structure also seems long neglected.

The lower American River, a federally designated Wild and Scenic River with an important run of salmon and steelhead, needs to be protected and managed for its ecological values. Simply expanding public use of motor vehicles does not provide for a safe and pleasant experience to enjoy nature for people with limited mobility. Motor vehicles in sensitive areas will perpetuate the negative consequences already facing the river elsewhere. We need to be proactive and be stewards to leave the parkway and river in healthy condition for future generations.

Sincerely,

Bruce Forman

Retired CA Fish and Wildlife Interpretive Supervisor/Program Manager

Cc: Sacramento County Board of Supervisors
Sacramento County Disability Advisory Compliance Staff
Sacramento County Disability Advisory Commission
Save American River Association
Friends of Sailor Bar