

Species on the American River Parkway

Habitat along the American River Parkway represents both natural and altered landscape. After the discovery of gold, portions of the river were dredged by the large gold mining companies, leaving behind large piles of cobbles and excavated areas. The slow process of natural reclamation has returned some areas to a semi-natural state while the most severely altered areas can still be seen today.

River

The American River is a large riverine system which carries water from the Sierra Nevada and eventually flows into the Sacramento River and ultimately San Francisco Bay. Most of the riverine habitat is fast moving, open water without any vegetation. A variety of fish including several native species (salmon, steelhead, Sacramento pikeminnows, Sacramento sucker) and several introduced species (American shad, striped bass) can be found within the American River. Predators, such as great blue heron and river otter, are sometimes seen on the river. Other common species seen on the river are beaver, muskrat and western pond turtle.

Open Water

In addition to the river itself, there are pockets of water where old channels of the river have been cut off or dredger mining activities have left deep depressions. These backwater areas typically contain large open water areas with a fringe of emergent marsh plants such as cattails and rushes. The calm waters provide excellent habitat for ducks such as cinnamon teal, American wigeon and mallard.

Island

Several islands occur within the active channel of the river. These islands generally support riparian scrub and riparian forest habitats. They are unique in that they provide isolated habitat with less potential for attack from ground-based predators (like feral cats) or from human disturbance. These wooded islands serve as nesting habitat for a variety of birds.

Marsh

Emergent marsh habitat is found in still or slow-moving, shallow water located along the edges of the river and on the banks of open water areas. These marshes are dominated by aquatic vegetation such as cattail, tule, soft rush and blue vervain. Birds such as green heron and great egret feed on western toad, pacific chorus frog, bullfrog and other inhabitants of this densely vegetated, shallow-water habitat.

Riparian Scrub

Riparian scrub habitat is typically dominated by thick clumps of willow and blackberry. Unlike mature riparian forest, riparian scrub lacks an overstory of taller trees. Riparian scrub forms along the edges of the river, along the edges of emergent marsh habitat, and other areas subject to frequent flooding or high ground

water. As such, riparian scrub represents a transitional phase between gravel bars and mature riparian forest. Along the Parkway, riparian scrub habitat is inhabited by songbirds such as Bewick's wren, yellow-rumped warbler and white-crowned sparrow.

Riparian Forest

A common habitat type located along the American River Parkway is riparian forest. Riparian habitat consists of a complex, multi-layered canopy of tall and medium sized trees. Occasional shrubs are found beneath the tree canopy and annual grasses and forbs form the lowermost vegetation layer. The tree canopy is usually dominated by cottonwood, valley oak and willow, with occasional white alder, box elder and Oregon ash. Understory species include wild grape, wild rose, blackberry and elderberry.

Riparian forest is some of the most species-rich habitat along the Parkway. The various layers may be winter or summer home to birds such as northern flicker, white-breasted nuthatch, scrub jay, American robin, northern oriole, wood duck and a variety of warbler species. On the forest floor dusky-footed woodrat, raccoon and skunk make their homes. Riparian habitat along streams and rivers provide essential wildlife corridors throughout California. Larger mammals such as mule deer use riparian habitats such as those in the Parkway to move between the Central Valley and the adjacent Sierra Nevada mountains.

Dredger Tailing Vegetation

Gold mining activities in the early part of the 20th century left behind large piles of cobbles, some of which remain visible today. These tailings are sparsely vegetated with patches of riparian vegetation found in "dredger hollows," the depressions between mounds of cobble. Within the hollows, species such as cottonwood and willow are able to tap groundwater and prosper. Shrubs such as coyote bush, coffeeberry and elderberry are scattered, with sparse annual grasses, over the old dredge piles. Animal species found within the more densely vegetated dredger tailing habitat are similar to those found in the riparian forest. The sparser areas are home to western fence lizard, alligator lizard, and western rattlesnake.

Oak Woodland and Oak Savanna

Oak woodland habitat consists of stands of valley and interior live oak. Oak woodlands along the American River can have a dense, interlocking canopy with only sparse understory vegetation. Where canopies are less dense, a ground cover of grasses such as wild oat, brome, barley, and ryegrass are able to grow.

Oak woodland and oak savanna are home to a variety of bird species such as California quail, plain titmouse, scrub jay, rufous-sided towhee, acorn woodpecker, as well as larger predators like the great horned owl. Oaks within the woodland and savanna provide excellent nesting and roosting sites for large birds of prey such as red-tailed hawk which forage on small mammals. Mammals such as western gray squirrel, striped skunk and mule deer can also be found within these habitats along the American River Parkway.

Grassland

Most open areas within the Parkway support a variety of non-native grasses such as wild oats, brome, barley, and ryegrass. Other non-native weedy species include filaree, wild geranium, mustard, and wild radish. A variety of native plants also occur in open areas including California poppy, vetch, tidy tips, larkspur and yarrow.

The grasses usually stand 6-36 inches tall, providing food and protection for small mammals such as deer mice, California vole, broad-footed mole and black-tailed jackrabbit. Grassland predators include gopher snake, red-tailed hawk, white-tailed kite and coyote.

Chinook Salmon

Chinook salmon are hatched here on the American River but only spend a portion of their life in the river. As they mature they travel out the ocean where they feed and live, returning only to spawn. The largest of the salmon species, Chinook salmon average about 30 pounds but can get to over 100 pounds. Keep an eye out in fall when the bulk of Chinook return to the river to spawn.

Great Blue Heron

The Great blue heron lives on the American River Parkway year-round. The birds hunt fish during the day in the marsh areas and along the shores of the river. Great blue herons build their nests high in the trees in groups called a heronry (similar to a rookery). They stand approximately four feet tall with a wingspan of six feet and are quite impressive when seen taking flight.

River Otter

The American River is one of the few places that host a sizable population of River otters. Much of the otter population disappeared because of hunting in the 18th and 19th century. They still face challenges today because of loss of habitat and sensitivity to pollution. While most people see otters swimming around on the river they are quite adept at moving on land as well. An otter can run up to 15 mph on land.

Rattlesnake

Rattlesnakes are the only dangerous reptile on the parkway. A few differences between a rattlesnake and other harmless species are the triangle shaped head and the rattle attached to the tail. Most rattlesnakes will try and avoid humans and are not confrontational. If you come across one leave it alone. Most bites happen because people try to handle the snake or don't give it room to retreat.

Poison Oak

Poison oak will give most people a rash if they touch it. Many people are taught to recognize poison oak by its bright red leaves of three but these leaves are only red for part of the year. They can be a glossy bright green in spring. oak provides a nutritious snack for wildlife and nesting habitat for birds.

Valley Oak

Valley oaks are one of the iconic features of the Sacramento area. They can reach 100 feet high and have huge spreading limbs. The complex structure is one reason Valley Oaks support a wide diversity of wildlife from raptors and songbirds to small mammals. The round brown "apples" seen on Valley oaks are actually wasp galls.

Print & Mail
Fulfillment

5700 Arden Way
Carmichael, CA 95608
(916) 486-2773

AMERICAN RIVER PARKWAY FOUNDATION

The American River Parkway is a 4,800-acre ecosystem, rich in wildlife and natural beauty. The Parkway stretches 23 miles from Discovery Park at the confluence of the Sacramento and American Rivers to the Nimbus Fish Hatchery. This land is a natural and recreational asset to its surrounding urban and suburban communities. The American River Parkway Foundation promotes the conservation and recreational use of this incredible civic amenity, as well as supports environmental education and year-round volunteer opportunities.

Parkway History

The Nisenan people inhabited the Sacramento Valley and foothills for thousands of years. The land provided food and material to sustain them and build their round houses. Nisenan villages dotted the fertile floodplain, part of which is now the Parkway, where they fished, hunted, and gathered food. This richness was impressive to Jedediah Smith when he first camped along the Lower American River in 1827.

In 1839, John Sutter arrived in Alta California, Mexico to establish a colony he called New Helvetia. Sutter contracted with James Marshall to obtain lumber from Marshall's sawmill in Coloma in order to develop the area in his vision. While Sutter's Fort was built near what is now 16th Street, Sacramento, his plan to build housing and a wharf was thwarted by the Gold Rush and the influx of large populations coming to the West.

As the population of Sacramento grew and experienced the river's periodic flooding, levees were built which began to narrow the floodplain.

With the completion of the Folsom Dam in 1955, land on both the north and south sides of the river was developed for residential and commercial use.

Fortunately for the Sacramento area, and because of people like William Pond, once director of the County Department of Parks, the American River Parkway Plan was incorporated in the County's 1962 General Plan and land acquisition began for the Parkway. Now urbanized along its entire length through Sacramento County the American River Parkway is 4,800 acres of natural environment that inhabits wildlife and provides outdoor experiences for millions of residents and visitors. Sacramento County Regional Parks owns the land that makes up the Parkway from Discovery Park to Nimbus Dam.

The American River is recognized for its unique qualities by designation as a California Wild and Scenic River (1972) and a National Wild and Scenic River (1980). The Lower American River features migration and spawning of Chinook salmon, steelhead trout, and other fish species. The river is also home to a wide-range of bird species that include double-crested cormorants, red-shouldered hawks, and acorn woodpeckers.

The American River Parkway is designed to provide natural open space and recreational opportunities for an urban population, as well as habitat for the flora and fauna native to the region. It provides critical habitat to several endangered species and is the longest linear, uninterrupted park in the country. The Parkway is considered a recreational civic amenity and public health asset, always rich with its unique land, wildlife, and endless outdoor opportunities.

American River Parkway Foundation

The mission of the American River Parkway Foundation is to support the preservation and enjoyment of the American River Parkway by fostering environmental education, stewardship and volunteer opportunities. For more information or to volunteer please contact the American River Parkway Foundation.

5700 Arden Way
Carmichael, CA 95608
(916) 486-2773
www.arpf.org



VOLUNTEER CENTER

Parkway Foundation Programs:

• Campfire Outdoor Educational Site: Located in River Bend Park this site is an amazing resource for youth and adults to experience outdoor education.

• Invasive Plant Management: Each year the Parkway Foundation staff and volunteers remove tens of thousands of invasive plants from the Parkway, which can inhibit wildlife habitat, crowd out native plant species, and/or deplete soil moisture.

• Clean-ups: The Parkway Foundation removes tens of thousands of pounds of trash and debris from the Parkway every year. Clean-ups are organized throughout the year with two large, multi-site clean-ups occurring in April and September.

• Pups in the Park: The Parkway Foundation raises funds to purchase "mutt mitts" for the dispensers located throughout the Parkway.

• Trail Maintenance: The Parkway Foundation helps maintain the equestrian/hiking trail that runs the length of the 23 mile Parkway.

• Financial and Mile Stewards: A wide range of businesses and organizations adopt a mile of the Parkway and provide financial or volunteer support to remove trash and debris from the area.

Developed Recreational Areas

These areas feature a range of amenities for users to enjoy. The recreational areas below are listed on the map.

Discovery Park

- Archery
- Boat ramp
- Equestrian staging area
- Horseshoe pits
- Picnic areas
- Picnic areas for reservations or w/ BBQs & hot coal pits
- Restrooms

Paradise Beach

- Picnic areas
- Sandy beach
- Walk-in access, no parking fees

Howe Ave. River Access (off La Riviera Dr.)

- Boat ramp (small watercraft)
- Picnic areas
- Restrooms

Watt Ave. River Access (off La Riviera Dr.)

- Boat ramp (small watercraft)
- Picnic areas
- Restrooms

William B. Pond Recreation Area

- ARPF Office
- Equestrian staging area
- Fishing Pond
- Picnic areas
- Picnic areas for reservations w/ BBQs
- Restrooms

River Bend Park

- Campfire Outdoor Educational Site
- Equestrian staging area
- Horseshoe pit
- Picnic areas
- Restrooms

Ancil Hoffman Park

- Effie Yeaw Nature Center
- Equestrian staging area
- Golf course
- Picnic areas
- Restrooms

Rossmoor Bar

- Picnic areas
- Restrooms
- San Juan Rapids

Sacramento Bar

- Hiking trails
- Picnic areas
- Restrooms

Sunrise Blvd. River Access

- Lower Sunrise (west side area)
- Equestrian staging area
- Horseshoe pit
- Picnic areas
- Restrooms

Upper Sunrise (east side area)

- Boat ramp (small watercraft)
- Picnic areas
- Restrooms

Sailor Bar (off Illinois Ave.)

- Boat ramp (small watercraft)
- Equestrian staging area
- Hiking trails
- Picnic areas
- Restrooms

American River Parkway

Jedediah Smith Memorial Trail

Trail System

The Jedediah Smith Bicycle Trail extends nearly 32 miles from Old Sacramento to Beal's Point. Bicycles share the trail with pedestrians, who walk and jog on the left shoulder, facing traffic. An unpaved equestrian/hiking trail roughly parallels the bicycle trail through the Parkway.



Legend

- Jedediah Smith Trail
- (---) Equestrian/Hiking Trail
- (P) vehicle access with parking
- (U) equestrian trail staging
- (H) restroom
- (Picnic Area Icon) picnic area
- (Boat Ramp Icon) boatramp
- (30) mile marker
- (Bike Route Icon) county bike route
- (Fountain Icon) drinking fountain
- (Light Rail Icon) light rail stops

Nimbus Fish Hatchery
Made necessary by Folsom and Nimbus Dams blocking access to historic spawning gravels, the hatchery artificially spawns chinook salmon and steelhead, raises the young and releases them back to the river as well as into the Delta. The best time to take advantage of the self-guided tour of the hatchery's educational displays and visitor center is during the peak migration time for salmon, October through December.



Nimbus Dam
Nimbus Dam forms a reservoir called Lake Natoma that serves as the regulator of flows from Folsom Dam. CSUS operates its Aquatic Center here and provides opportunities for flatwater recreation including rowing, wind-surfing and canoeing.