



Environmental Council of Sacramento P.O. Box 1526, Sacramento, California 95812 office@ecosacramento.net

May 2, 2024

Ms. Dana Repan
Senior Planner and Sutter's Landing Park Master Plan Update Manager
City of Sacramento Department of Youth, Parks, & Community Enrichment
Parks Planning and Development Services
915 I Street, 3rd Floor, Sacramento, CA 95814
drepan@cityofsacramento.org Sent via Email

Subject: Comments on the City's Update to Sutter's Landing Park Master Plan

Dear Ms. Repan,

Habitat 2020, the Conservation Committee of the Environmental Council of Sacramento (ECOS), and ECOS would like to request that you adopt a **nature-centric planning approach** as you prepare the update for Sutter's Landing Park Master Plan.

On September 7, 2023, we presented to the Youth, Parks, and Community Enrichment Commission the findings and recommendations from our *Campaign for Protecting Natural Areas in the City of Sacramento* report which is attached and incorporated by reference into these comments. Pages 14 and 15 of the report specifically identify Sutter's Landing Park as one of the nine critical natural areas in the City that merits strong protections because of its strong habitat values:

"Native vegetation growing in the Park includes box elder, black walnut, cottonwood, Oregon ash, valley oak, willows, blackberry, California rose, coyote brush, elderberry, sedges, mushrooms, cucumber and grape vines, mugwort, and sacred datura.

"Notable birds include the Swainson's hawk (State-listed as Threatened, federally-listed as a Species of Concern). The Parkway provides an eastern extension of habitat and a vital ecological buffer for, white-tailed kites (State-listed as Fully Protected), and northern harriers (State-listed as a Species of Special Concern), bald eagles, hummingbirds, migratory songbirds, owls, waterfowl, woodpeckers, and many others. Park visitors can encounter butterflies, such as the western swallowtail and the pipevine swallowtail, and dragonflies that are so crucial to the reproduction and survival of birds and other wildlife. Other notable fishes, mammals, and reptiles include salmon, steelhead, catfish, clams, crawdads, beavers, river otters, jackrabbits, cottontails, coyotes, gopher snakes, rattlesnakes, western fence lizards, and western pond turtles (State-listed as a Species of Special Concern)."

The report also highlights the park's important cultural history of the Nisenan (Southern Maidu) Native Americans who lived and hunted on the property.

Sutter's Landing Park's "Mound" provides the most important section of upland river habitat along the southern portion of the Lower American River within the City. The Mound supports the sensitive wildlife species listed above and other animals. Protected large sections of upland habitat like the "Mound" are critical to maintaining the rich array of wildlife the public enjoys along the Lower American River.

While the existing Master Plan designates the Mound as a "Future Natural Area," it does not preclude uses such as disc golf and mountain biking that would damage the habitat. The Mound should instead be designated as a "Natural Area" allowing for docent-led hikes and environmental interpretation, but free of more intensive uses that would degrade its habitat values.

The City should be commended for its recent acquisition of the Blue Diamond property and its acceptance of the land donation from SMUD that extend the park's boundaries westward. These properties already provide habitat for some wildlife and extraordinary opportunities to restore habitat for additional species through the planting of native species. These properties can also support sensitively extending the Two Rivers Bike Trail westward to the Northern Sacramento Bikeway bridge to provide the public with greater opportunities to connect with nature and a GHG free pathway for recreation and commuting. The City should also designate these properties as protected "Natural Areas" and work to acquire and restore the adjacent Dellar Trust and Bell Marine properties as future park extensions.

Sutter's Landing Park is inherently connected to the American River Parkway by its physical location, cultural history, wildlife uses, and public uses. The Master Plan should call for greater coordination of management between the City and the County of Sacramento's Regional Parks system to ensure that these precious resources are fully protected. Better coordination should include joint efforts to protect and restore the natural resources within both the Parkway and Sutter's Landing Park and increased law enforcement to prevent unauthorized damage to these fragile natural resources.

The City's draft Parks 2040 plan recognizes that Sacramento residents prioritize having connections to nature and places to hike:

"What kind of park areas do you value most?" Participants indicated that places to walk, bike, picnic, socialize, play, and spend time in nature were most valued. Research shows that each of these contributes to our health." (Draft Parks 2040 Plan at page 92)

"In conversations with youth groups, as well as in findings from the Youth Art Expo & Contest, the mental and physical health benefits of parks were both implicitly and explicitly described. Youth described how parks benefited their mental health by providing fresh air, providing places (including Camp Sacramento and local parks) to experience nature and wildlife, and giving them alternatives to "screentime" (computer and phone use.) They associated parks, trails, the riverfront, and even duck ponds with "de-stressing," peace, relaxation, and fun. Trees were mentioned as particularly important, for shade, cooling, and visual respite in highly built-out neighborhoods; several participants described Sacramento as the 'City of Trees.'" (Draft Parks 2040 Plan at page 93)

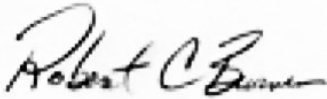
Accordingly, the draft Parks 2040 Plan identifies “Nature and Trail Connections” as one of the City’s nine “Key Directions” for parks and open space. By taking the actions outlined above, the City can significantly advance both the “Nature and Trail Connections” key direction and the public’s priority on having places to hike and connect with nature while enhancing, rather than degrading, the natural value of these resources.

The American and Sacramento Rivers were fundamental to the establishment of the City of Sacramento. The Lower American River is the premier natural and recreational resource in the region drawing more than eight million visitor days each year. The river’s natural beauty and rich wildlife and cultural history are to be celebrated. Unfortunately, these resources continue to be degraded by various infrastructure projects and unauthorized uses, and only a small fraction of the original natural areas remain within City boundaries.

Designating these portions of Sutter’s Landing Park as “Natural Areas”, expanding and restoring the park’s lands, and improving joint management with the American River Parkway are vital positive steps the City can take to preserve these precious resources for the enjoyment of current and future Sacramento residents.

For all of these reasons, Habitat 2020 and ECOS urge the City to adopt a nature-centric planning approach to the update of the Master Plan and to implement the recommendations in this letter and in our *Campaign for Protecting Natural Areas in the City of Sacramento* report.

Sincerely,



Rob Burness
Co-Chair, Habitat 2020, ECOS



Susan Herre AIA AICP
President of the ECOS Board of Directors

- cc. The Honorable Katie Valenzuela, Member, Sacramento City Council
Ms. Victoria Vasquez, Chairperson, Youth, Parks, and Community Enrichment Commission
Ms. Jackie Beecham, Director, Youth, Parks, and Community Enrichment Department