

Discovery Park Picnic Shelters and Interpretation

City of Sacramento

\$942,000.00

This proposal is to consider the allocation for a grant to Sacramento County Regional Parks (Regional Parks) for the reconstruction of picnic shelters and installation of new interpretive signage at Discovery Park (Park) in Sacramento County (Project).

LOCATION

Discovery Park spans both sides of the American River just before it converges with the Sacramento River, north of downtown Sacramento. It is bordered on the west by the Sacramento River, on the east by Northgate Boulevard, on the south by Richards Boulevard, and on the north by Garden Highway.

The Park is substantially developed and is one of the most intensively used areas of the American River Parkway. According to the 2008 American River Parkway Plan, of the total 559 acres, 130 are designated for Developed Recreation, and 53 for Limited Recreation. The remaining acres are identified as Protected Area and Nature Study Area and should be used in a manner that conserves and restores natural resources. Additionally, several archaeological sites are within the Park.

Bannon Island, a natural wildlife area and a designated Nature Study Area, is located at the northwest corner of the Park and is separated from the main body of the Park by Bannon Slough. A second natural area is located along the American River, east of the I-5 freeway bridge. In addition, Bannon Slough and areas along the American River within the Park provide habitat for the valley elderberry longhorn beetle (VELB), a federally listed threatened species.

A six-lane boat access ramp and parking area, information kiosk, restrooms, and fish cleaning facility occupy the western end of the Park. Picnic shelters are located in a large turfed family and group picnic area centrally located in the Park, along with restrooms and parking areas. A field archery range and target archery range are situated towards the easterly end of the Park along with an equestrian staging area. The Jedediah Smith Memorial Bicycle Trail and adjacent pedestrian trail, which begins at the Park and continues to Folsom Lake, meanders through the area. A separate equestrian/hiking trail follows Bannon Slough and continues to Folsom Lake.

The Park's proximity to downtown Sacramento and the Sacramento River make it a popular spot for boating, fishing, picnicking, and other water-based recreational activities. The boat ramp is the only off-channel launch facility in the area and is by far the most popular. The archery target range and the archery field range are also unique facilities contained at the Park.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Park offers four high-occupancy picnic shelters that can be reserved by the public for events and gatherings. Two of these shelters, the Redbud and Sycamore sites, are over 33 years old and suffer from water damage and severe splitting, due to annual flood inundation, making them structurally unsound. These two picnic shelters experience high demand, serving between 15,000 and 20,000 people per year. The picnic shelters also provide a unique location to connect with a wide range of visitors,

including visitors from disadvantaged communities.

Of the two other picnic shelters from the same era at the Park, the Oak site has been replaced with a concrete and steel structure, and the Alder site has had one supporting column rot almost entirely through and is fenced off-limits. Reconstruction of the Alder picnic shelter is planned with funds awarded separately from the California State Parks Proposition 68 Per Capita Program.

The Project proposes demolition of the Redbud and Sycamore wooden picnic shelters and construction of two new concrete shelters on the same site as the wooden shelters. The new shelters will use the same design that was used for the Oak site, modified as necessary for differing size and pad layout, with concrete columns supporting a steel canopy. This new shelter design will be able to withstand annual inundation for weeks at a time and has a life expectancy of 25 years. Repairs are expected to be minimal. The Project will retain pre-existing visitor capacity at each site without enlarging the picnic area's footprint.

An additional Project component includes installation of five new interpretive panels, one each at the Redbud and Sycamore picnic shelters and three others distributed nearby. The goal of the interpretive panels will be to convey compelling stories about the natural environment of the American River Parkway and inspire a desire to explore further while protecting the resources. Interpretive themes may include:

- *Are Rivers Obstacles or Resources?*
This panel would describe Native American significance of the site, perhaps in the context of native use of the rivers for transportation and use of the natural resources found here. Consistent with Implementation Policy 11.11 of the Parkway Plan, no specific locational data for sensitive cultural resources would be disclosed.
- *Why is the River Here?*
This panel would describe how the current channel of the American River in the site vicinity was carved here to protect the young city of Sacramento from flooding. It could discuss the effects of flood control changes on riparian growth and habitat for fish and avian species and describe how restoration efforts are rebuilding that habitat nearby.
- *Are You Standing in Fish Habitat?*
This panel would explore the importance of shallow floodplains in providing abundant food for young salmon and escape from large predators. It could describe the Project and how it is built to withstand flooding, perhaps providing fish habitat itself during floods.
- *Keeping Some Places Wild Gives Nature a Home*
This panel would describe how the American River Parkway Plan designates areas with special characteristics of flora, fauna, topography, available surface water, or other characteristics that make them worthy of study and protection.
- *What Does a Parking Lot Have to do With Nature?*
This panel would describe how efficient land use can save space for nature and reduce climate change while still encouraging use by visitors from a distance. It could compare how nature often provides multiple layers of habitat, with reference to the mature riparian vegetation just south of the

Redbud site.

PROJECT FUNDING

Project Tasks	WCB	Non-WCB Funds*	Total Cost
Designs, Engineering, Permitting, & Outreach	\$75,000	\$5,500	\$80,500
Construction	\$859,000	\$35,000	\$894,000
County Inspections and Closeout	\$8,000	\$0	\$8,000
Totals	\$942,000	\$40,500	\$982,500

Project costs will be for 90% and 100% designs, engineering, interpretive sign design, permitting, community outreach, construction and inspections, fabrication and installation of six signs, and Sacramento Regional Conservation Corps work.

*Non-WCB funds include in-kind contribution from Regional Parks.

CONSISTENCY WITH THE AMERICAN RIVER PARKWAY PLAN

In accordance with Public Resources Code Section 5845.5, the American River Parkway Compliance Analysis will be completed for the project at the November 2019 Recreation and Parks Commission meeting.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Advisory Committee of the Lower American River Conservancy Program recommend one of two Project Alternatives:

1. Funding approval will specify that the interpretive panels will exclude Native American interpretation, and will specify that panels must be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), or
2. Fund with augmentation: Augment requested funding amount up to \$10,000. Funding approval will specify that Regional Parks consult with culturally affiliated tribes for appropriate content to be added to interpretive panels and that panels must be compliant with the ADA.

Following the choice of Alternative 1 or Alternative 2, additionally recommend that WCB staff present this project to the Wildlife Conservation Board for approval at a 2020 Board meeting.