

Effie Yeaw Nature Center Facilities Improvement Planning

Sacramento County

\$112,000.00

This proposal is to consider the allocation for a grant to the American River Natural History Association for an educational and interpretive facility planning project (Project) in Sacramento County.

LOCATION

The Effie Yeaw Nature Center (Nature Center) is 96 acres and designated as a Nature Study Area in the 2008 American River Parkway Plan (Parkway Plan). Located within Ancil Hoffman Park and the Ancil Hoffman Plan Area of the Parkway Plan, the Nature Center has a rich and engaging history dating back to the 1950s. In 1955, Effie Yeaw, a teacher, conservationist, and environmental educator began leading natural and cultural history walks along the American River in an area once known as the Deterding Ranch in the town of Carmichael. Ms. Yeaw and other local citizens recognized the value of the natural and cultural resources along the American River and began working with citizen groups to raise interest in preserving the lands along the river. She worked with William B. Pond, then Director of the Sacramento County Parks Department, to develop the concept of a “parkway” along the river that included the preservation of the Deterding Ranch, now known as the Effie Yeaw Nature Center and Nature Study Area.

In 1976, the Sacramento County Recreation and Parks Commission developed an interpretive nature center which was staffed by an occasional part-time ranger and was only open on the weekends. Over the next 30 years as part of the Sacramento County Department of Regional Parks (Regional Parks), the interpretive nature center grew to include programs, including the construction of six rotating displays, becoming the natural history and interpretive center for the American River Parkway (Parkway).

In 2010, the interpretive center transitioned from being publicly funded to being operated by the American River Natural History Association (Association), a nonprofit organization. Today, the Nature Center is managed and operated by the Association pursuant to a lease agreement with the County of Sacramento, and is open to the public six days a week, with 100,000 visitors annually, hosting hundreds of programs for both children and adults. The Nature Center’s professional staff includes administration, environmental interpreters, animal caretakers, and over 250 active volunteers.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Nature Center is unique to Sacramento County and the Parkway because it provides a variety of educational opportunities to visitors, schools, and the community through programs both onsite and offsite. Each weekend the Nature Center offers low cost programs that are open to the public, rain or shine, reaching more than 100,000 people. Specialized programs offered to schools and home school groups are very popular and increasing in demand annually. Seasonal Nature Camps are a key component at the Nature Center, and adult programs include The Nature of Things speaker series, the University of California Naturalist Certification program, and Young at Heart tours and presentations for seniors.

The Nature Center takes care of nearly 30 non-releasable animals native to the American River. These animals serve as ambassadors for the Nature Center and are used in outreach programs with the goal of engaging visitors and teaching them about

the local fauna. These animals cannot be returned to the wild due to injury and/or habituation to people. The existing aviary is substandard, consisting of only four sections (known as mews). The Nature Center is therefore limited to four raptors, of which two must be classified as “limited flight capabilities” because only one mew meets state and federal standards for a flighted raptor. Being limited to four raptors also constrains the Nature Center’s programming, since the raptors are in high demand for public outreach.

In 2017 the *Effie Yeaw Nature Center Master Plan for Facilities Improvement* (Master Plan) was prepared in order to plan for improvements to the visitor experience and to enhance educational and interpretive programs and exhibits. Planned improvements would create a natural interpretive environment which provides museum exhibits that truly represent the natural environment of the American River, and provide higher-quality living quarters for the site’s animal ambassadors.

The goal of this project is to complete planning, designs, environmental review, and permitting for proposed Phase I construction of the Master Plan. Phase I would include construction of a separate aviary adjacent to the Museum in the current amphitheater location. This new aviary would replace outdated and inadequate facilities currently used to house live animal ambassadors for the Nature Center. The new aviary will provide a secure location for live animals and an improved work area for staff assigned to their care. Phase 1 would also include the replacement of the existing amphitheater with an improved outdoor education classroom, adjacent to the proposed new aviary.

Based on program needs, including use within the Nature Center’s interior live bird exhibits, it is optimal to increase the number of raptors at the Nature Center. The birds at the Nature Center are currently housed in an enclosed mew, providing limited access to sunlight and fresh air. The Association’s veterinarian, state and federal regulators, and animal care staff have recommended that the birds’ quality of life would be improved by providing both an indoor and outdoor space. These improvements will also provide more enhanced environmental educational opportunities by providing an upgraded site to observe the birds in a more natural and beneficial environment.

The plans propose for the existing amphitheater to be relocated to the adjacent hillside and converted into an outside classroom with new Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant seating. A shade screen would also be installed to protect the area and make it more usable year-round for both visitors and the live animals.

The scope of work for this planning and design Project includes:

- Public outreach
- Approval of 2017 Master Plan by Sacramento County Board of Supervisors
- Environmental review for the 2017 Master Plan, pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)
- Geotechnical engineering study and soils report
- Architectural and landscape designs
- Civil engineering

PROJECT FUNDING

Project Task	WCB	Non-WCB Funds*	Total Cost
Master Plan Public Outreach, County Approval, and CEQA	\$0	\$22,500	\$22,500
Engineering and Designs	\$112,000	\$0	\$112,000
Total	\$112,000	\$22,500	\$134,500

Project costs will be for architectural and landscape designs and geotechnical, structural, mechanical, plumbing, and civil engineering.

*Non-WCB funds include cash contributions from a private donor.

CONSISTENCY WITH 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 not recommend this project for funding under the current Proposal Solicitation (PSN). Additionally, recommend that WCB staff provide technical assistance to applicant in order to resubmit a revised proposal under a future Program grant solicitation.