

Regional Parks
Liz Bellas, Director

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County of Sacramento

County Executive
Navdeep S. Gill

Draft NRMP and ARCF Integration White Paper

To fulfill requirements in the American River Parkway Plan, address the interests of the newly created Lower American River Conservancy Program (LARCP), and accommodate continuing demands for access to Parkway lands for habitat mitigation and restoration, Sacramento County Regional Parks (Regional Parks), with funding from the Wildlife Conservation Board, is preparing a Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP) for the American River Parkway (Parkway). Simultaneously, in order to ensure that the flood control improvements authorized pursuant to the American River Common Features 2016 General Re-Evaluation Report include appropriate mitigation for unavoidable impacts to Parkway vegetation and wildlife habitat, the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is negotiating with the responsible federal wildlife agencies a comprehensive plan for vegetation and wildlife habitat enhancement in the Parkway. The parties recognize that it is imperative to align these two planning efforts so as to ensure that the USACE mitigation plan advances the goals and objectives of the NRMP and the NRMP provides the landowner protections necessary to support the mitigation plan. Toward that end, the parties are working toward an agreement to coordinate their respective planning efforts through the Resource Advisory Committee that has been established in connection with the USACE flood control project and the NRMP Task Force which is being created by County Parks to facilitate completion of the NRMP.

It is anticipated that this coordinated planning process will produce a shared vision for the enhancement and conservation of vegetation and wildlife in the Parkway building on the accomplishments of the Vegetation and Wildlife Element of the 2002 Lower American River Corridor Management Plan (RCMP). In pursuit of this vision, it is recognized that the process through which Parkway lands have historically been made available for habitat enhancement in the Parkway, either as mitigation for flood control or other infrastructure improvement projects or as restoration, needs to be modified in order to provide greater institutional, legal, and physical protections for the improved habitat. Through the coordinated planning process the parties will develop the necessary modifications including an appropriate land conservation instrument, which (1) identifies the specific areas of the Parkway that could be modified; (2) describes proposed habitat modifications and affirms their consistency with the desired conditions

described in the NRMP; and (3) specifies the responsibilities of the parties with respect to implementing, funding, operating, maintaining, and monitoring the permitted modifications over time.

A new study (post adoption of the NRMP) will be required to create the cost structure matching the above modifications. This study will identify the scope of planned habitat improvements to the Parkway over the next 10 years (off-site mitigation for the USACE erosion control program, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and Water Forum's gravel augmentation and rearing habitat improvement program, the federally authorized ecosystem restoration program at Woodlake and Bushy Lake, expected LARCP grant funded habitat enhancements, etc.); characterize the scope (and cost) of Regional Parks site security, monitoring, administration and operation and maintenance responsibilities in connection with these specific improvements; and develop a fee structure that incorporates whatever balance remains in the existing Habitat Restoration Program Fee account and projects a revenue stream adequate to build an interest bearing endowment capable of funding Regional Parks annual habitat conservation costs.

The coordinated planning process would be supported by the attached work plan which has been presented to County Parks. In order to avoid delays in implementing the USACE flood control project, the final design, environmental review and permitting of the work planned for Site 2-1 and its associated mitigation sites would proceed in parallel with the coordinated planning process. Regional Parks would provide the traditional rights to enter and encroachment permits for the mitigation sites associated with this work with the understanding that once the conservation instrument described above has been developed through the coordinated planning process, this instrument and fee structure would be applied to the Site 2-1 mitigation sites and all future mitigation sites associated with the USACE project.

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Natural Resources Management Plan and American River Common Features Integration

Draft Work Plan

Overview

In order to orchestrate the coordinated plan development process, a NRMP Task Force (similar to the Bank Protection Working Group's Resource Advisory Committee (RAC)) would be created which will function separately but in parallel to the RAC with overlapping personnel and where possible, joint meetings. The RAC would focus on development of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Conservation Strategy and mitigation plan for the erosion program; and the NRMP Task Force would focus on completing the NRMP. It is anticipated that this work will need to be done by the end of the year in order to meet the goals for the NRMP and to align with what is understood to be USACE's timeline for developing the Conservation Strategy and the plan for off-site mitigation for the erosion program.

RCMP Strategy

The Lower American River Corridor Management Plan (RCMP) – the Vegetation and Wildlife Management Element (VWME) in particular – is an existing document that will serve as a good basis for the vegetation and wildlife components of the NRMP and USACE's Conservation Strategy. The proposed strategy is to rely on the RCMP/VWME to the extent appropriate, and update with new information as needed.

NRMP Task Force

The NRMP Task Force would be facilitated by MIG with assistance from ICF and would be comprised of representatives from each of the following: Sacramento County Regional Parks (Regional Parks), Wildlife Conservation Board, Parkway Stakeholders, SAFCA, Water Forum, and USACE, with Chuck Watson (WRC Environmental) and Chris Elliott (ICF) serving as technical advisors. As in the case of the RAC, which reports out periodically to the Bank Protection Working Group and the Lower American River Task Force, the NRMP Task Force would report out to the American River Parkway Advisory Committee, the Sacramento County Regional Parks Recreation and

Parks Commission and as requested, the Lower American River Conservancy Advisory Committee.

Tasks

Stemming from the previously described rationale for this proposal, there are specific tasks being proposed as a part of this joint effort. While there are undoubtedly tasks that are very specific to the NRMP that don't require substantial coordination, and will therefore remain intact without change, the following tasks are being proposed in order to fulfill needs that are shared between the NRMP and the ARCF project. ICF and MIG labels after each Task # simply note which firm and/or contracting mechanism are recommended for leading that specific task.

Task 1. (ICF) Chuck Watson and Chris Elliott work together to review the RCMP/VWME and provide recommendations to the NRMP Task Force and RAC as to how it could/should be updated to reflect current thinking and changed conditions since 2002 and serve the purposes of the Conservation Strategy and NRMP. This would be an early deliverable followed by a joint RAC/NRMP Task Force meeting, utilizing a presentation led by Chuck and Chris, to get these groups comfortable with using the VWME as the jumping off point for their respective planning efforts.

Task 2. (MIG) Bring together and facilitate the NRMP Task Force, hosting up to 6 meetings with the intent of the Task Force to coordinate and work collaboratively in a manner that contributes to a fully informed and implementable NRMP. The purpose of the NRMP Task Force is to provide input and direction to the development and implementation of the NRMP, while utilizing the existing structure of the NRMP administrative draft, particularly Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 which address existing conditions (allowing for such revisions as the NRMP Task Force may think are appropriate), but update as appropriate in accordance with the results of Task 1.

Task 3. (MIG) Add a Vegetation and Wildlife Management Element (Chapter 7) drawn directly from the Vegetation and Wildlife Management element of the RCMP (minus the Introduction and Existing Conditions to the extent already addressed) with such revisions as may be appropriate. Revisions process will utilize technical advisors (Chuck/Chris), USACE and the RAC, the Water Forum (so as to ensure that the landscape elements of the FISH Plan are reflected), and the NRMP Task Force (to ensure that the expectations of the WCB and Parkway stakeholders are reflected). Develop the supporting GIS mapping system necessary to support this task. MIG will lead the effort of merging applicable VWME information into the NRMP but rely on work to be carried out by ICF to update the VWME in close coordination with MIG.

Task 4. (ICF) MIG is preparing an NRMP Implementation chapter, including maps. ICF will supplement that effort, to the extent needed to serve the cumulative hydraulic analysis and the long-term development of a land conservation instrument. The product would be an updated 10-year Implementation Plan reflecting the anticipated landscape demands of the USACE erosion program, the federally authorized ecosystem projects at Bushy Lake and Woodlake, the landscape element of the updated FISH Plan, the

priorities of Regional Parks, and the mitigation needs of anticipated infrastructure/utility improvement projects affecting the Parkway. This effort would include recommendations on the terms and conditions under which Regional Parks would make lands in the Parkway available for these changes (site specific land conservation instrument terms and long-term management plans covering operation and maintenance, potential for site disturbance, and a fee structure that updates the existing Habitat Restoration Program fee structure to cover the costs of such long-term management).

Task 5. (MIG) Add a Resource Impact Monitoring Plan (Chapter 8) that would be based on the concepts outlined by MIG in the current Chapter 7 of the admin draft. The Parkway Plan calls for such a plan and MIG's existing admin draft (Chapter 7) lays the groundwork for it. This monitoring plan would need to be closely coordinated with NRMP Implementation chapter and the VWM 10-year implementation plan discussed above (Task 4) as there would be substantial overlap between the monitoring plan for the Parkway as a whole and the site specific monitoring required under the agreements governing VWM mitigation/restoration sites. This plan should specifically address VELB issues associated with maintenance of non-flood facilities based on existing guidelines.

Task 6. (ICF) Federal Ecosystem Restoration Plans. The federally authorized ecosystem restoration projects in the Bushy Lake and Woodlake Plan Areas could be key elements of the USACE Conservation Strategy and the NRMP Vegetation and Wildlife Management Plan. The projects as currently designed would occupy slightly more than 200 acres of Parkway land. Additional work is needed to confirm the ecological value and refine the cost of the federal "best buy" plans. The additional work will inform their suitability for the NRMP.

Task 7. (ICF) Hydraulics. Building on the accomplishments of the 2009 Floodway Vegetation Management Plan (FVMP) and recent hydraulic modeling of the Parkway by CBEC and others, SAFCA, USACE and the State through the RAC would develop appropriate mapping (e.g., from Task 4), modeling and monitoring protocols for maintaining the conveyance capacity of the flood system in the Parkway. This goal of this task is to generate the information that Regional Parks could utilize in pursuit of regulatory approval (e.g., Section 408 Permission) for NRMP-related restoration in the Parkway.

Task 8. (ICF) Land Conservation Instrument. This task would upgrade the legal framework within which Parkway lands are made available for mitigation/restoration. The task would develop an appropriate land conservation instrument which (1) identifies the specific areas of the Parkway that could be modified; (2) describes the proposed habitat modifications and affirms their consistency with the desired conditions described in the NRMP; and (3) specifies the responsibilities of the parties with respect to implementing, operating, maintaining and monitoring the permitted modifications over time, and will include an appropriate cost structure. This Land Conservation Instrument would require approval of the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors.

The outcomes/products of these tasks would inform and be incorporated into, as appropriate, County Parks' NRMP and USACE's Conservation Strategy.

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