

1. American River Ranch Animal Barn Construction

WCB Grant: \$2,012,000

Fund Source(s): California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68), Public Resources Code Section 80100(a)(3)

Grantee: Soil Born Farm Urban Agriculture and Education Project

Landowner: County of Sacramento Department of Regional Parks

Location: City of Rancho Cordova, River Bend Area

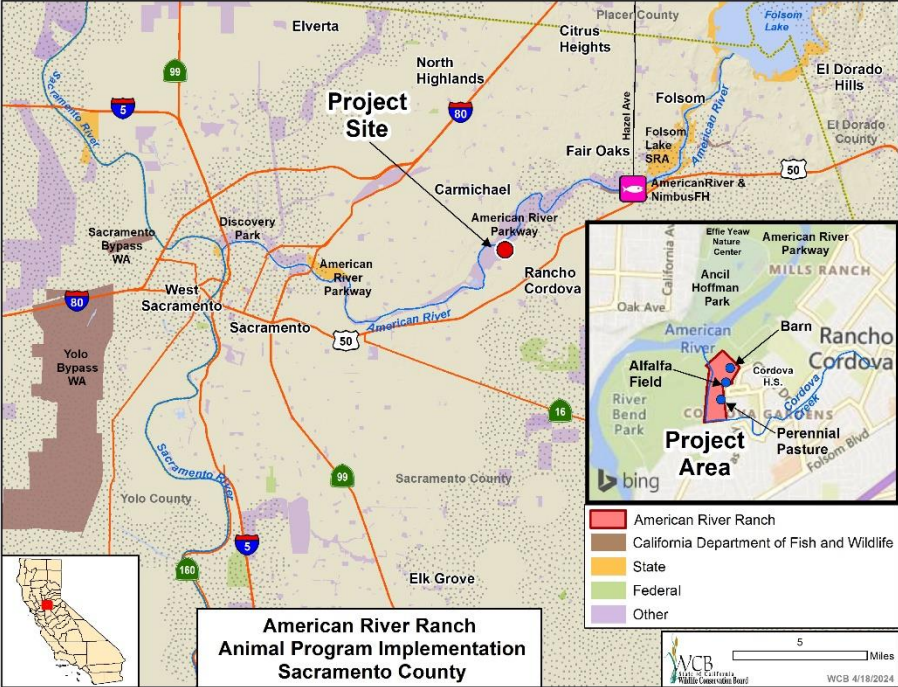
Located within a DAC and adjacent to an SDAC.

Project Highlights

- A new 3,000 square foot ADA-compliant interpretive animal barn.
- First flagship interpretive facility on the historical American River Ranch.
- Expanded educational partnership with Cordova High School.
- Holistic land stewardship of 150 acres of Parkway land.

Priority Metrics

- Advances LARCP Goals:
 - Education
 - Public Access
 - Wildlife Habitat
- Advances goals and objectives identified in the American River Parkway Natural Resources Management Plan including interpret historical resources, control invasive plants, reduce fuel loads, protect cultural resources, build partnerships, support scientific research, and develop curriculum for teaching environmental stewardship.
- Benefits a DAC/SDAC: Project is within a DAC according to DWR and within 1 mile of a justice community in the top 25th percentile according to CalEnviroScreen. The partnership developed with Cordova High School (a Title 1 school) will provide students from the surrounding disadvantaged communities with farm field trips, hands-on learning, teen internships, and job training opportunities.
- Pathways to 30x30: Pathway 6, Expand and Accelerate Environmental Restoration and Stewardship; and, Pathway 8, Align Investments to Maximize Conservation Benefits.
- WCB Strategic Plan Goals B and C and Objectives 1.4 and 3.1



Project Description

The Project will replace outdated and unsafe animal pens with an ADA-compliant animal barn that will support new educational programming and a grazing program for managing Parkway lands. The animal barn is designed to:

- Shelter up to 60 sheep, 20 rabbits, and 200 chickens year-round.
- Serve 60 people at a time for classes and the visiting public.
- Provide intensive hands-on practice and demonstration for Future Farmers of America students.
- Provide space for chick incubation and veterinarian care for all farm animals.
- Demonstrate a living roof featuring drought-tolerant native grasses, forbs, and succulents.
- Demonstrate raised garden bed management with urban farm animals.
- Interpret organic farming, habitat plantings, oak and elderberry forest, Cordova Creek, and American River watershed through multi-lingual signage.
- Secure feed, tools, and instructional supplies.

The Project will complete land improvements for rotational grazing by:

- Establishing 6 acres of perennial pasture and 2.5 acres of alfalfa plantings for hay.
- Installing 6 raptor perches and 20 bluebird boxes.
- Installing solar panels and wildlife-friendly mobile electric fencing for rotational grazing.
- Installing mobile watering system and livestock shade structures.
- Modifying irrigation system to support hay and pasture blocks.

The Project will set the stage for implementing Phase 2 of Soil Born Farm's Animal Program which will:

- Reintroduce livestock to the American River Ranch.
- Launch targeted grazing for improving soil health, controlling invasive plants, reducing fuel loads, managing habitat, and preparing sites for habitat restoration on over 150 acres in the Parkway.
- Serve 300+ underserved urban teens per year in partnership with Cordova High School's Agriculture Academy.
- Provide internships and paid job training for up to 15 teens per year.
- Provide up to 10 new adult classes specific to urban livestock and land stewardship.

Key Management Responsibilities

Soil Born Farm has adopted a Management Plan that guides management actions for the Project, including management of the American River Ranch. If at any time during the 25-year life of the Project, Grantee does not manage and maintain the project improvements, the Grant Agreement requires that it refund to the state of California an amortized amount of funds based on the number of years left on the Project life.

Project Funding

The proposed funding breakdown for the Project is as follows:

Project Task	WCB	Non-WCB Funds	Totals
Project Management	---	\$172,181	\$172,181
Site Preparation	---	\$18,750	\$18,750
Barn Construction	\$2,012,000	\$294,890	\$2,306,890
Indirect	---	\$28,640	\$28,640
Total	\$2,012,000	\$514,461	\$2,526,461

Non-WCB funders include:

- Grantee - \$18,750
- City of Rancho Cordova - \$495,711

Letters of Support or Opposition

Support:

- Liz Bellas, Director, Sacramento County Department of Regional Parks
- Micah Runner, City Manager, City of Ranch Cordova
- Jim Huber, Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent Educational Services, Folsom Cordova Unified School District
- Evan Schmidt, Chief Executive Officer, Valley Vision

Opposition:

- None received.

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 April 2024 Recreation and Parks Commission meeting.

CEQA

The project is proposed as exempt from the CEQA pursuant to the State CEQA Guidelines, Section 15303, Class 3, New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures, consisting of the construction and location of limited numbers of new, small facilities or structures and the installation of small new equipment and facilities and Section 15304, Class 4, Minor Alterations to Land, consisting of minor private alterations in the conditions of land, water, and/or vegetation. Subject to approval of this proposal by the WCB, the appropriate Notice of Exemption will be filed with the State Clearinghouse.

State and Local Government

- Senate: Senator Roger W. Niello, District 6
- Assembly: Assemblymember Josh Hoover, District 7
- Sacramento County Board of Supervisors: Pat Hume, District 5

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Advisory Committee of the Lower American River Conservancy Program recommend this project for full funding as proposed.

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Proposal #: 2024002	Provide Benefits to Severely DAC: Yes
Applicant: Soil Born Farm Urban Agriculture and Education Project	Proposal Title: Animal Barn Construction
Project Location: River Bend, County Land	Funds Requested: \$2,012,000
Project Type: Implementation	Match Funds: \$514,461
	Total Project Cost: \$2,526,461
	Consulted with CCC/CALCC: No

CEQA Status: NOE to be filed by City of Rancho Cordova prior to WCB board meeting. WCB will complete its own CEQA compliance at the time of project approval.

Average Score: 84.4 (of five reviewers)

Project Summary

This project will bring the American River Ranch Animal Program to fruition, for the dual purposes of providing holistic ecosystem management and land stewardship education. Construction of a shared-use animal barn will be completed under this proposal, marking the first flagship interpretive facility built on the American River Ranch. Upon completion, the animal barn will allow Soil Born Farms to reintroduce livestock as a management tool for Parkway lands, while providing education about land stewardship and agroecology for local urban youth and the visiting public. A partnership with neighboring Cordova High School will support the school system’s unique career pathway in food, health, and the environment, providing students with hands-on experience managing livestock for ecological outcomes, including controlling invasive weeds, building soil health, reducing wildfire fuels, sequestering carbon, and stewarding wildlife habitat.

Magnitude of Benefit

LARCP GOAL	SIGNIFICANCE RATINGS
Habitat	<i>Modest to Significant</i>
Public Access	<i>Small to Very Significant</i>
Education	<i>Significant to Very Significant</i>
Water Quality	<i>NA to Meaningful</i>

Alignment with American River Parkway Natural Resources Management Plan

- Educational programming supports Goals: 4.6: Interpret environmental, archaeological, and historical resources; and Goal 5.5: Encourage public outreach and educational activities to increase the public’s understanding and appreciation of Parkway resources.
- Educational programming supports Objective 5.5a by establishing a new educational partnership with Cordova High School’s Agriculture Academy to

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develop curriculum for teaching environmental stewardship and proper use of Parkway resources.

- Grazing program supports Goals: 1.2: Conserve high-quality native habitat; Goal 1.7: Reduce the prevalence of invasive non-native species; and Goal 3.1: Protect archaeological and historical resources.
- Grazing program supports management actions for the River Bend Area Plan including managing 100 acres of high priority invasive plants such as yellow starthistle; enhancing/protecting “Conservation” areas by reducing flashy fuels and competition with invasive plants; and supporting “Naturalization” areas with holistic site preparation that will improve soil health and remove invasive plants while protecting sensitive cultural sites.


Highlights and Issues

Highlights (from multiple reviewers)

- Multi-benefit project that will deliver enduring benefits for interpreting the history and resources of the Parkway, educating, and inspiring the next generation of environmental stewards, and improving the Parkway’s natural environment.
- Animal barn will be a new learning laboratory that provides Cordova High School students with experiential education.
- The barn will serve as a new interpretive center in the Parkway representing the synergistic intersection of human health and environmental stewardship.
- Community education will be expanded through new educational themes about using animals for land stewardship and how it improves carbon capture, water capture, and nutrient cycling.
- Livestock will be used for holistic land management of the ranch and adjacent Parkway lands through targeted, rotational grazing.
- Project expands efforts to restore and enhance a historic farming culture near the river.
- LARCP funded the planning and design of the animal barn.

Issues (from one reviewer)

- Proposal is not clear why each of the elements are needed to advance the project goals.
- Expensive project with limited habitat and public access benefits and only a portion of the educational value is wildlife or habitat related.
- Wildlife/habitat benefits could be achieved with a significantly less expensive project.

An aerial photograph of a rural farmstead. In the foreground, there is a paved parking lot with several spaces. To the left, a small building is partially visible. The middle ground is dominated by lush green trees and a large, open field. In the background, there are more fields, some with rows of crops, and a large white structure that appears to be a covered walkway or a large shed. The horizon shows a dense line of trees under a clear blue sky.

American River Ranch Animal Barn Construction

Applicant: Soil Born Farms

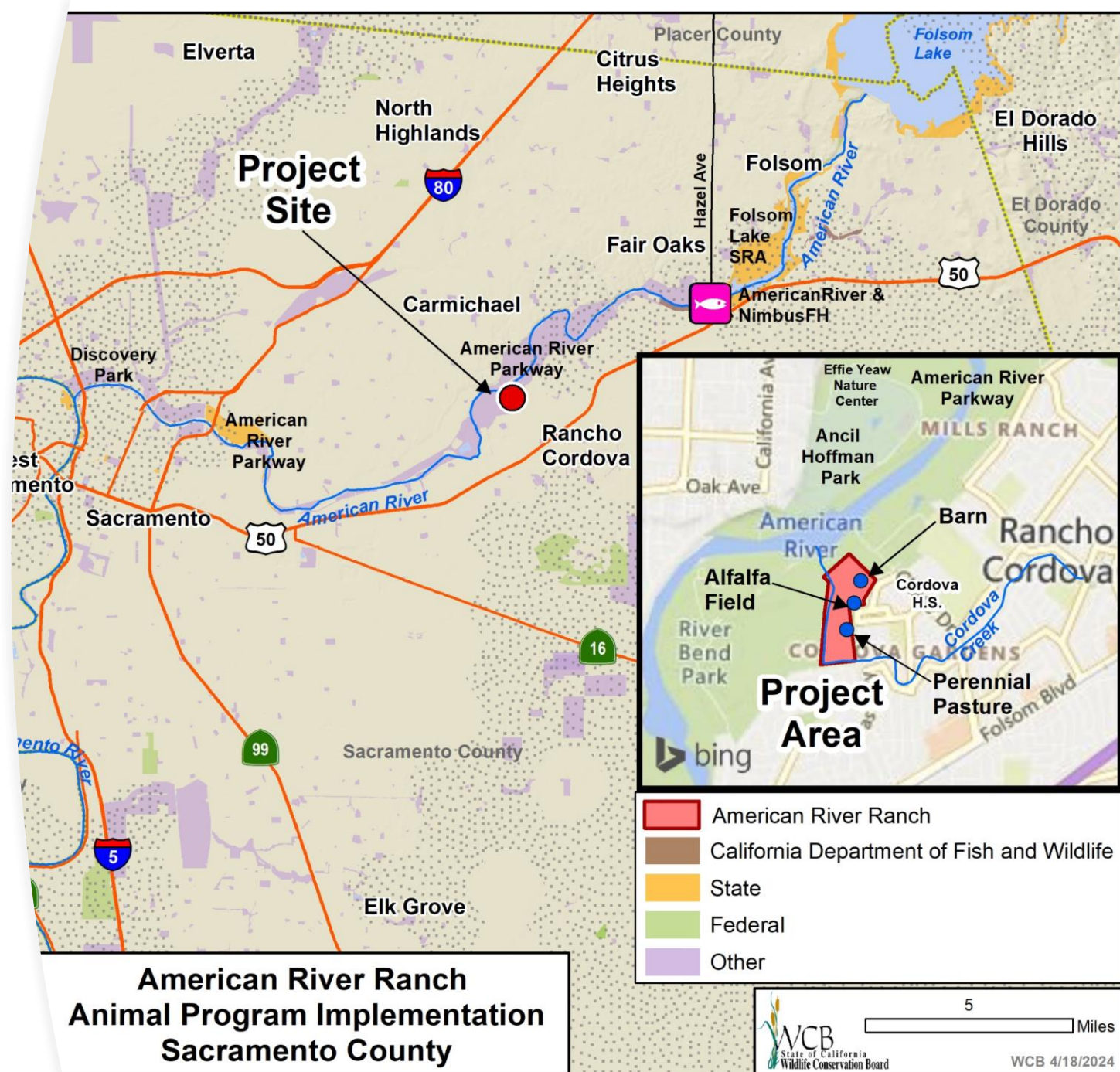
Project Type: Implementation

WCB Request: \$2,012,000

Cost Share: \$514,461 (20%)

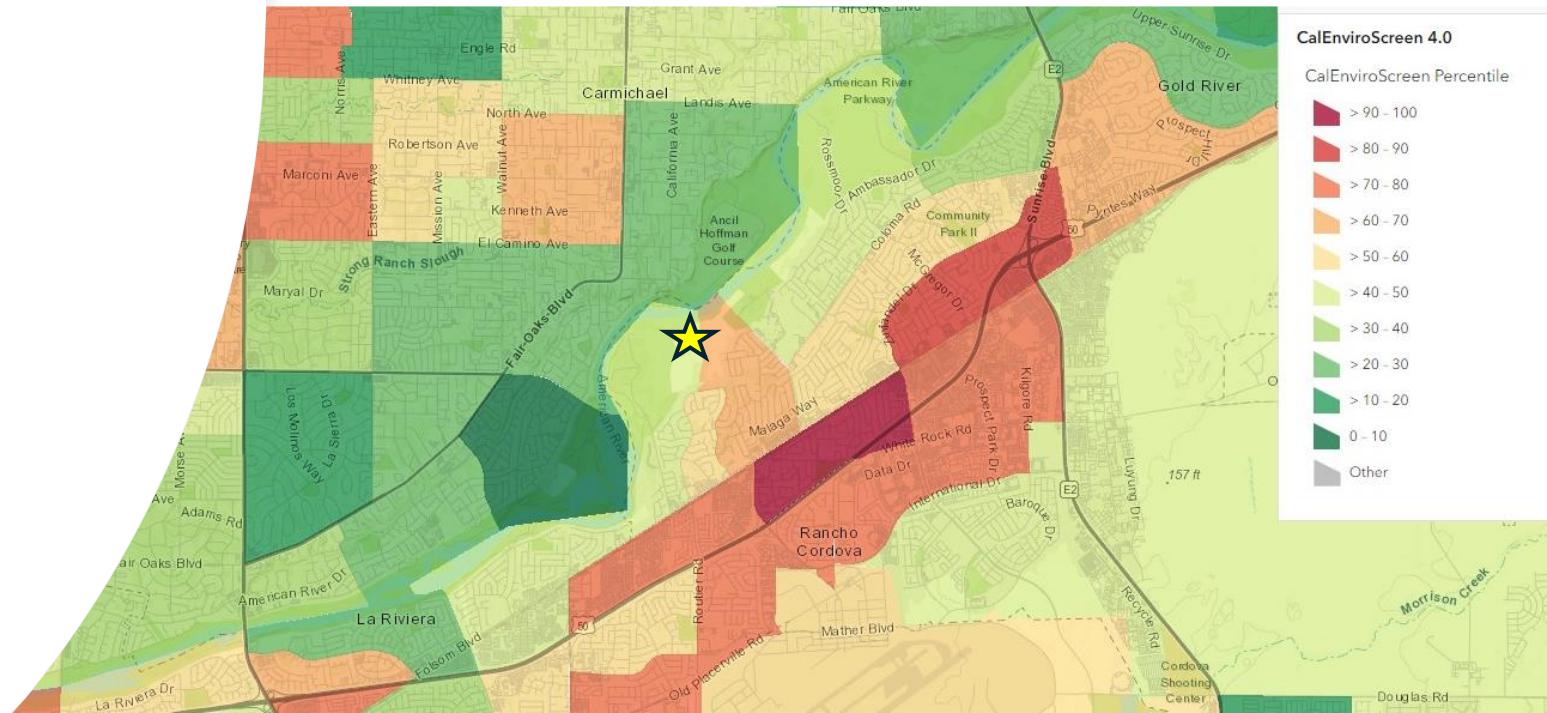
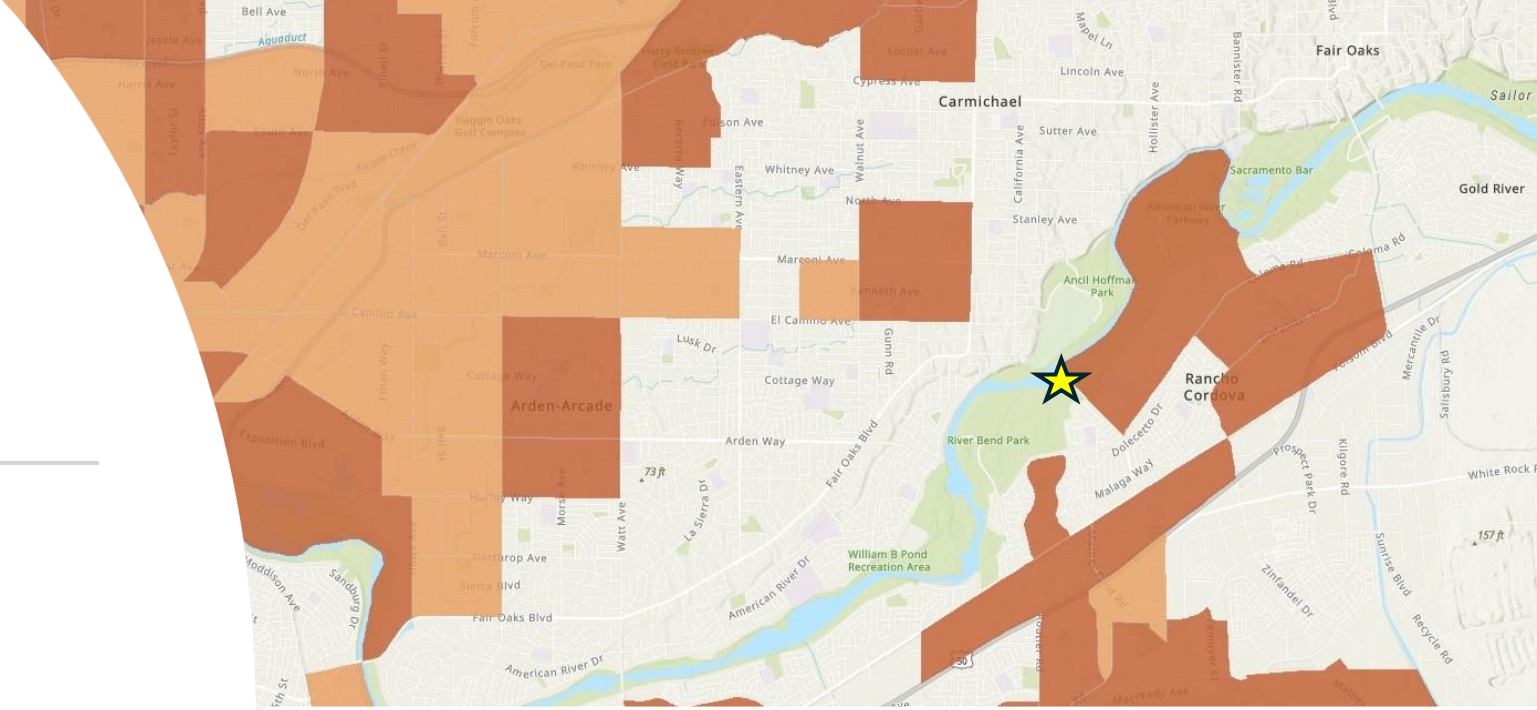
LOCATION

- City of Rancho Cordova
- River Bend Area of Parkway
- South side of American River
- Adjacent to Cordova High School

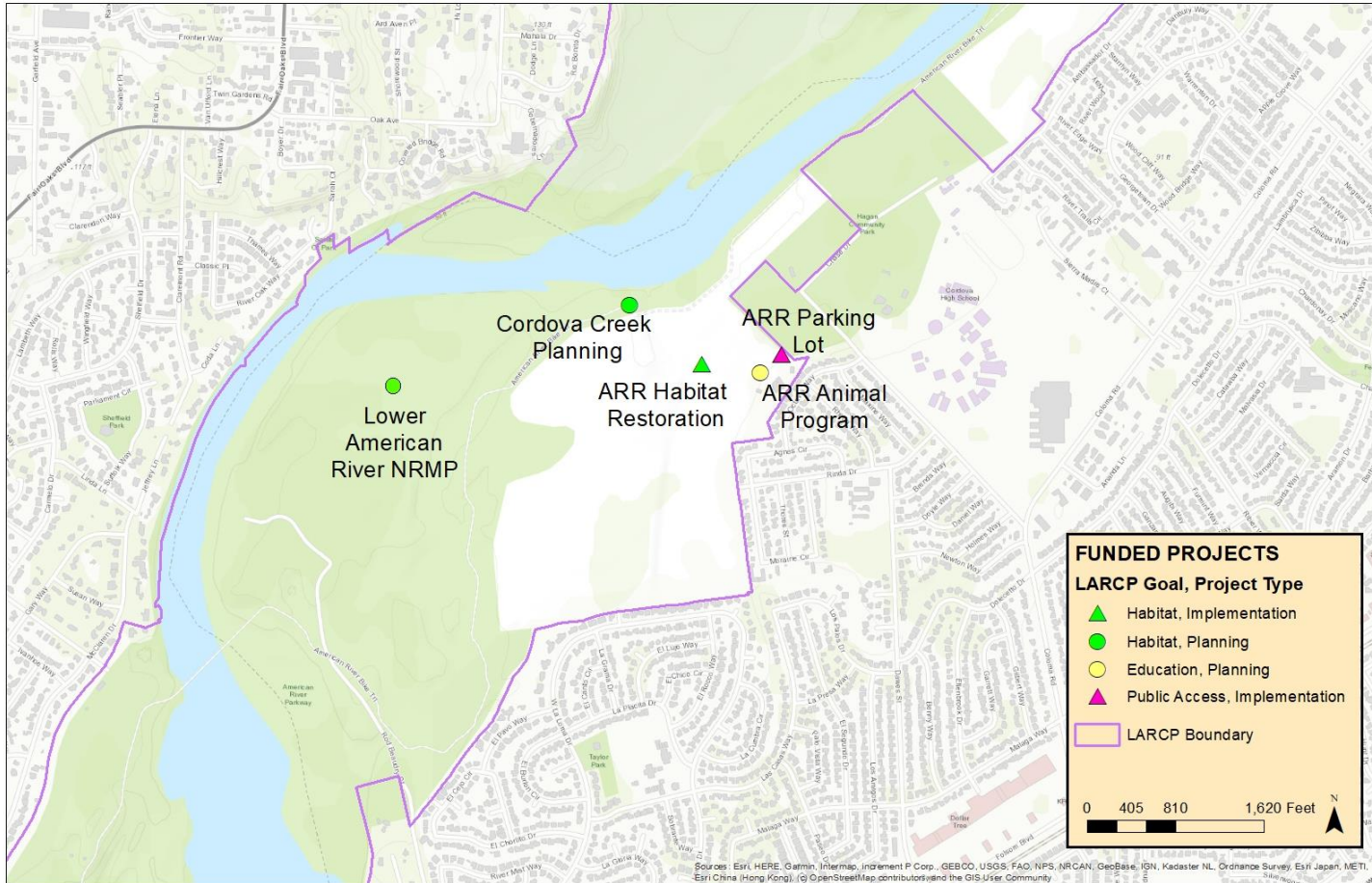


JUSTICE COMMUNITIES

- In a disadvantaged community (DWR)
- Within 1 mile of justice community (CalEPA)



PREVIOUS INVESTMENTS



- Parking lot construction
- Animal Program planning
- Habitat restoration
- Lower Cordova Creek restoration planning
- Parkway's Natural Resources Management Plan

NEED

- Fulfill SBF's mission and commitment to Regional Parks
- Interpret site's history as last working ranch on the American River
- Manage Parkway lands holistically
- Support educational partnerships





GOALS

- Set the stage for Phase 2 of the Animal Program
- Advance American River Ranch Master Plan
- Foster experiential education for ecology and land stewardship
- Support the Parkway's NRMP goals

OBJECTIVES

- Complete final designs
- Construct 3,000 square foot barn
- Improve over 8 acres of land to support a grazing program



OUTCOMES

- Multi-benefit interpretive center for the Parkway and community
 - Dynamic interpretation of the Parkway's farming culture
 - Year-round living laboratory for 300 urban teens/year
 - Internships and paid job training for 15 teens/year
 - New community education about ecology and building climate resilience
- "Grazing the way" to achieving NRMP goals





TECHNICAL REVIEW

WCB Scores: 94, 95

LARCP AC Scores: 58, 82, 93

CDFW Review: Strongly supports

Magnitude of Benefit (high to low):
education, habitat/public access, water
quality

Unresolved concerns:

- Does not align with intent of LARCP
- Agriculture focus
- Expensive
- Will exhaust remaining LARCP funds when there are higher priority projects nearing readiness.

