



**2015 Winner**

## **American River Parkway**

Submitted by: County of Sacramento

The American River Parkway is the “Crown Jewel of Sacramento”. The Parkway is a blueprint for preservation of a naturalized environment while providing recreational activities for more than 5 million visitors each year. The 23-mile, 4900 acre Parkway extends from Folsom Dam at the northeast to the American River’s confluence with the Sacramento River at the southwest with easy access to recreational opportunities for over a million Sacramento residents. The Lower American River is the central focus of the American River Parkway and is classified as a “Recreation” river within the State and Federal Wild and Scenic River System. This unique wildlife and recreation area lures joggers, cyclists, strollers, naturalists, horseback riders, birdwatchers, picnickers, and fishermen.

It is the place to be in the Sacramento area for a serene getaway in the middle of urbanization and for healthy active recreation.



The Bike Trail, aka the Jedediah Smith Memorial Trail, is the focus for recreation activities. The Trail offers a rich experience for all those recreating by foot, bicycle or rollerblade. This experience can be an all-day cycling excursion for the full length of the Parkway and back or catching the trail at many access points for a morning walk to hear birds sing and savor the beauty of the river. The Trail also hosts an equestrian trail separate from the Bike Trail. The trail has frequent location maps and call boxes so users feel safe, as well as many interpretive displays to highlight natural features. The Bike Trail is a key commuter route for cyclists traveling from Sacramento's suburbs to the downtown, adding to transportation choices.



The American River Parkway is home to Eppie's Great Race, known as the "The World's Oldest Triathlon", founded in 1974. This signature event has been held every year since and is a Sacramento-area summertime tradition for elite athletes, fitness enthusiasts, friends and families. The race features a 5.82-mile run, a 12.5-mile bike and a 6.35-mile paddle held along the scenic Parkway.

The Parkway is also home to the Effie Yeaw Nature Center, an award-winning environmental and cultural education center, with a 100-acre nature preserve featuring interpretive trails that meander through the riparian woodlands along the American River. Deer, coyotes, migratory songbirds, raptors and wild turkeys can be seen while exploring the preserve's lush oak woodlands. The Center offers a variety of fun activities for children and adults including popular educational programs and tours for schools and other groups.



A strong preservation and restoration effort insures that the natural habitats are preserved for generations to come. The Parkway contains several distinct terrestrial habitat types that support wildlife including special status species. The river itself is an essential corridor for aquatic species and vegetation. The Parkway provides essential shaded riverine aquatic habitat. Many efforts have been expended to enhance and restore vegetation such as blue elderberry which supports the Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle, oak trees and other riparian vegetation. The Parkway has provided opportunities for environmental mitigation associated with related levee and dam improvements.

The Cordova Creek Restoration project is an example where a former graffiti-ridden drainage channel running through the parkway is poised for a major makeover that will transform concrete walls into a riparian creek corridor with native vegetation and walking trails. Immediately adjacent to Cordova Creek is the 55 acre American River Ranch where the non-profit Soil Born Farms leases a site that provides education about the production of vegetables and fruits to Sacramento residents, particularly those in underserved neighborhoods with little to no access to fresh, nutritious food.

The American River Parkway is managed under the guidance of the award-winning American River Parkway Plan, adopted in 2008. The Plan is a superb example of true collaboration between diverse interests and multiple public entities. The Public entities involved in the preparation of the Plan includes: Sacramento County, the City of Sacramento, the City of Rancho Cordova, the Cordova Recreation and Park District, the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency, the Water Forum, and the California Exposition and State Fair. Finally, the Parkway Plan is unique in that it is adopted by the California State Legislature.



Distinct areas of the Parkway each have individual features which contribute to their separate identities. Area Plans insure that Nature Study and Protected Areas provide strong preservation of the natural environment with minimal human intrusion, and designated Recreation areas focus on human activity areas. Many regional and community parks line the Parkway.

The County of Sacramento Department of Regional Parks manages the Parkway, providing habitat preservation, maintenance and ranger services. Many State and Federal agencies contribute to the success of the Parkway. In addition, many local non-profit organizations contribute significant volunteer hours to support the Parkway and to maintain the fine balance between preservation and recreation, including:

- Save the American River Association
- American River Natural History Association
- American River Parkway Foundation
- American River Parkway Volunteer Equestrian Trail Patrol
- National Audubon Society

The American River Parkway truly exemplifies a Great Place in California by preserving a significant open space asset and providing a healthy place for communities to gather and recreate.