

The American River Confluence Parkway

Building Community Conservation and Stewardship



Panoramic vista of the graceful arches of the historic Mountain Quarries Railroad Bridge from the popular Stagecoach Trail. Photo by: Eric Peach.

A community-based action plan for enhanced river canyon
conservation, stewardship, and close-to-home outdoor recreation.



April 2004

The American River Confluence Parkway project is a Protect American River Canyons initiative that involves engaging and building community and agency support for a new general plan for the Auburn State Recreation Area(ASRA) that will emphasize resource protection and restoration, enhanced recreational opportunities, increased public safety, and diverse community benefits.

Credits and Acknowledgements

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I. Introduction

The Motivation for Community Action

The idea of creating an American River Confluence Parkway originated from discussions beginning in 1996. At that time the Parkway was envisioned as a canyon-based park that would be readily identified with the community of Auburn.

The portion of the American River canyon lying directly below the City of Auburn is part of the much-larger Auburn State Recreation Area (ASRA). The canyon's steep wooded walls and sweeping ridgelines offer a beautiful backdrop to many Auburn neighborhoods. Trails leading into the canyon provide residents with convenient access to what is truly a remarkable open space resource.

The early Confluence Parkway discussions were motivated in part by a belief that the canyon's recreational potential was not being fully realized. This was due to legal limitations on public use associated with the abandoned Auburn dam construction project, along with an ASRA management philosophy that at the time discouraged additional public use and recreational facility development. In addition, there was a perception that greater emphasis should be placed on protection and restoration of the canyon's natural resources.

Despite the barriers to public use, recreational activity in the canyon below Auburn has climbed steadily since the establishment of ASRA in 1976 and adoption of its first general plan in 1978. Overall visitation and the diversity of recreational activities enjoyed by park visitors has continued to grow rapidly since adoption of ASRA's 1992 interim resource management plan.

Burgeoning population growth in the greater Sacramento region has brought many more people within an easy drive of this beautiful foothill river canyon. The rising popularity of outdoor

recreational activities such as trail running, mountain biking and whitewater boating has made the area a magnet for those seeking a quality close-to-home recreational experience. The popularity of the canyon among recreational users is certain to continue growing, with no end in sight to the region's population boom.

The increasing popularity of the American River canyon has, not surprisingly, also given rise to a host of community concerns. Land and resource managers are challenged by the growing pressures and impacts on the fragile natural and cultural resources of the canyons, and are hampered by a general scarcity of agency and community resources to address the most critical resource management issues. Impacts on the canyon environment are also exacerbated by a relative lack of visitor services and facilities. Canyon rim residents are concerned about impacts to their neighborhoods from increased recreational use, and many who value the tranquility and beauty of the canyon fear its increasing popularity will cause it to lose these special qualities.

At the same time, many community members welcome the economic opportunities made possible by regional population growth and increased recreational use of Auburn's American River canyon. These recreation proponents believe that with appropriate resource protection safeguards in place, the canyon can accommodate additional recreational use without compromising natural resource values or causing negative impacts to canyon rim neighborhoods.

It was with these interests and needs in mind that planning for the parkway was launched in earnest. Early in 2001 PARC initiated a strategic planning effort to assess how best to balance increased interest in enhanced recreation with a need to protect and restore the canyon's natural resources and address community concerns. The planning

process was designed to reach out and expand community and partner involvement in articulating a vision and in shaping future action. As a first step, a group of 20 PARC Board members, agency, and community partners and individuals convened to brainstorm and clarify major issues, challenges, and needs. The intent was to develop a framework for building community awareness and involvement, and to work toward creating a collaborative approach to accomplishing a vision for the American River Confluence Parkway.



Gentle rapids and river washed gravel bars along the American River Confluence Parkway. Photo by Mark Leder-Adams.

II. The American River Confluence Parkway

Project Summary

So what is the American River Confluence Parkway? The American River Confluence Parkway is a proposed open space and recreation area along the North and Middle Forks of the American River within the Auburn State Recreation Area (ASRA). Near the City of Auburn, the parkway stretches from just below both Lake Clementine on the North Fork and Mammoth Bar on the Middle Fork, through the confluence of the two forks, past Mountain Quarries "No Hands" Bridge, and downstream through the former Auburn dam construction site to Oregon Bar.

The planning, designation and development of the parkway is seen as an integral element of a new general plan for ASRA. Essential to this project is the active engagement of community and agency interests in the development of a parkway vision and a general plan committed to resource protection and restoration, enhanced recreational opportunities, increased public safety and diverse community benefits. While the project will consider the entire Auburn State Recreation Area, it will emphasize the parkway - the westernmost portion of ASRA comprising the North and Middle Fork canyons below Lake Clementine and Mammoth Bar, through the Confluence area, and down to Oregon Bar.

The **project planning area** includes the entire Auburn State Recreation Area, with special emphasis on the parkway. It also includes connections to recreational amenities and access points both within ASRA and in nearby communities.

This latter geographic area, proposed to be designated the "American River Confluence Parkway" is essentially envisioned as a park within a park. When completed, the parkway will feature river access points connected by a system of trails that link the riverfront to recreational and interpretive sites within ASRA and to major community access points, trailheads, and visitor services.

Given its easy access and proximity to the communities of Auburn and Cool, the proposed Confluence Parkway is already the most heavily used part of ASRA. With the impending closure of the Auburn dam diversion tunnel and restoration of the river to its natural channel in the canyon below Auburn, there is great potential for enhanced recreational use of this part of ASRA and a corresponding need to wisely plan future recreational improvements and facilities in a way that will meet recreational needs without compromising resource protection or public safety.

The Confluence Parkway proposal will be further developed through dialogue with interested stakeholders and by soliciting community input at public meetings. A central goal will be to continue to work closely with the California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks), which manages ASRA, and the United States Bureau of Reclamation, which owns most of the public lands within ASRA's boundaries, to address agency concerns and to ensure that all key planning issues are identified.

The ultimate goal of the Confluence Parkway project is to assist State Parks in developing and implementing ASRA's new general plan. It is hoped that when enacted, this new general plan will reflect a management philosophy that: 1) recognizes the river's importance to the community and 2) is committed to the protection and enhancement of the natural, recreational, historical, and cultural resources of the canyons of the North and Middle Forks of the American River.

III. Protect American River Canyons

Organization Overview

Protect American River Canyons (PARC) is a community based non-profit organization based in Auburn, California. The group's roots date back to 1973 when its primary mission focused on encouraging community participation in opposing construction of the Auburn dam and helping to ensure the long term protection of the North and Middle Forks of the American River and its canyons. PARC has grown to a membership and volunteer base of over 500 people and has remained effective in promoting recreational use and conservation of the American River and its canyons. PARC has also been a leader in sponsoring community education programs and events, including the annual American River Confluence Festival, river trips, docent led hikes and bicycling tours, and activities for school children. PARC conducts annual river clean-ups, and also publishes a quarterly newsletter as well as an American River guidebook.

In 2001 the group refined its mission and developed organizational goals to chart its future.

Mission Statement

Protect American River Canyons is dedicated to the protection and conservation of the natural, recreational, cultural, and historical resources of the North and Middle Forks of the American River and its canyons for all to care for and enjoy.

Long Term Organizational Goals

- ✓ Promote the protection and restoration of the North and Middle Forks of the American River.
- ✓ Ensure protection of the watershed's natural, cultural, and historic resources.
- ✓ Increase public awareness of the resources of the river and its canyons and their community benefits.
- ✓ Enhance recreational opportunities and public access compatible with resource conservation.
- ✓ Promote diverse community involvement in the work of Protect American River Canyons.
- ✓ Promote the long term sustainability of Protect American River Canyons as a visible, active, and effective river education and conservation organization.



Hiking on the popular Western States Trail below Auburn offers many scenic views of the river and canyons. Photo by Eric Peach.

IV. Auburn State Recreation Area

Planning Context

The Auburn State Recreation Area is located approximately 35 miles east of Sacramento near the City of Auburn. Auburn State Recreation Area (ASRA) is comprised of 41,000 acres lying within the watershed of the North and Middle Forks of the American River in the Sierra Nevada foothills. Since 1976 the lands comprising ASRA have been managed by the California Department of Parks and Recreation under an agreement with the United States Bureau of Reclamation, which has jurisdiction over approximately 25,000 acres within the SRA. (The remaining 16,000 acres are under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, and private land owners.)

The boundaries of ASRA coincide with the take line of the proposed Auburn dam and reservoir, which was authorized by Congress in 1965. Dam-related construction began in 1967 but was halted because of seismic concerns following an earthquake at Oroville in 1975. Repeated efforts over the years to revive Auburn dam have been unsuccessful, and it now appears doubtful that the dam will ever be built.

State Parks developed a general plan for the Auburn dam and reservoir project lands in 1978 designed to manage the area as a reservoir-based recreation area once the proposed dam was completed. In 1992 State Parks developed an interim resource management plan (IRMP). The purpose of the IRMP was to guide the management and administration of ASRA as a river-based recreation area on an interim basis until Congress decided whether or not to pursue the dam project.

The IRMP recognized that ASRA would continue to experience rapid growth in popularity among recreational users and that strong resource protection measures were needed to preserve the canyon's natural values, as well as to ensure public safety. At the same time, the IRMP was premised on an assumption that Auburn dam would eventually be built and therefore was designed so as not to encourage additional public use or recreational facility development.

In 2001 the California Department of Parks and Recreation committed to the development of a new general plan for ASRA and convened a task force comprised of a diverse group of stakeholders to help shape the planning process. The formal general plan development process will commence early in 2004 and will take approximately two years to complete.



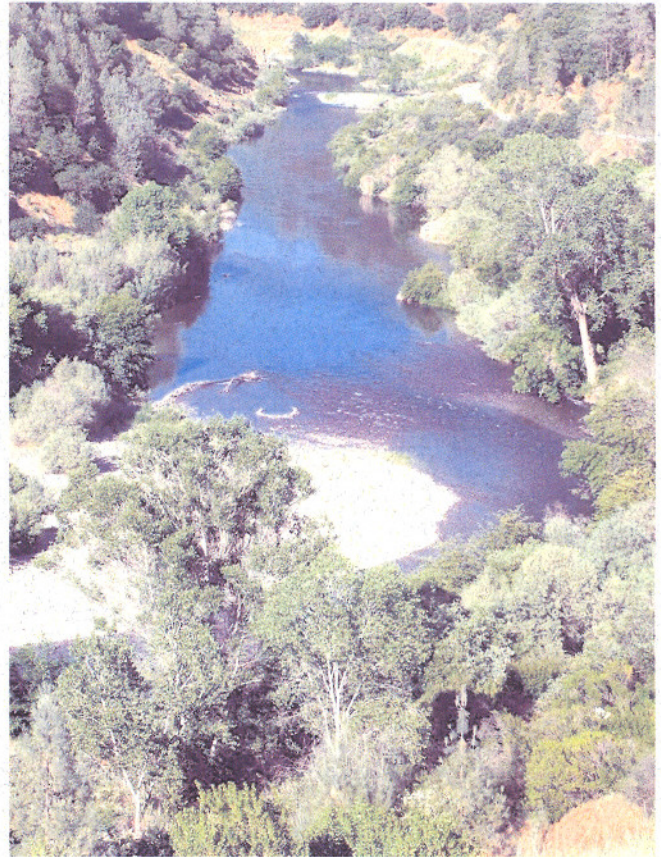
Hot summer days and very slow river flows present this young river guide an opportunity to try out his rowing skills on the North Fork. Note: PARC recommends life jackets for all young river enthusiasts. Photo by Eric Peach.

V. American River Confluence Parkway

Introduction to the Planning Effort

The anticipated development of a new general plan for ASRA spurred action by PARC to launch an in depth project planning effort building on work begun in 1996. In January of 2001 PARC board members and a number of agency and community partners came together in an all day workshop to begin a more focused Confluence Parkway planning process. This initial group of 20 participants began its work by outlining and discussing major issues, challenges, and needs that would affect completion of the proposed Confluence Parkway. This in depth discussion was needed to clarify and build agreement about the most pressing challenges and opportunities that could shape the future of a Parkway. This was followed by a discussion of community involvement and identification of the major elements of a public outreach effort with a goal of building and sustaining the participation of individual agencies and organizations in ongoing planning and project completion.

As a result of this in depth discussion, five major themes emerged from the workshop. They include: 1.) resource protection; 2.) conservation and environmental education; 3.) recreation planning and management; 4.) community benefits and impacts; and 5.) park administration, facilities, and management. A second workshop held one year later brought together many of the same individuals and partners to more deeply and thoroughly consider the major issues. This was followed by a substantial investment of time and energy in developing a plan with detailed goals and objectives that would guide community involvement and action. The following action plan outlines a framework for ongoing and strengthened collaboration between agencies, community groups, local businesses and individuals, each committed to the vision of an American River Confluence Parkway.



Woodlands provide key habitat for birds that live and hunt along the riparian corridor. Photo by Kurt Bertilson — SierraDigitalServices.com

A Community-Based Action Plan

RESOURCE PROTECTION, CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Natural Resources & Environmental Education

The American River and its canyons within ASRA's boundaries comprise a diverse ecological community consisting of foothill woodlands, valley grasslands, chaparral, pine forest and streamside woodlands. Woodlands, grasslands, and chaparral cover the upper canyon walls of the south facing slopes, while the north facing slopes provide prime habitat for pine, fir, cedar and oaks. Broad leaved trees dominate the riparian zone, interspersed with ferns, wildflowers, blackberries and wild grape. Prevalent tree species include foothill pine, ponderosa pine, incense cedar, white fir, douglas fir, black oak, sugar pine, and California bay laurel.

Wildlife is abundant in the canyons, and species naturally overlap a variety of vegetation zones. Historical records of fish resources are limited. However, it is known that Native Americans subsisted on salmon and cutthroat trout from the North and Middle Forks of the American River and that the river once contained an abundant population of rainbow and brown trout.

Water from the North and Middle Forks of the American River is of outstanding quality, due in part to the relatively undeveloped nature of its watershed, which covers a 960 square mile area. This watershed encompasses portions of the Tahoe National Forest, as well as lands under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management, and includes 35,520 acres of proposed wilderness area.

The North and Middle Forks merge in the canyon below Auburn to become the North Fork American River, which continues to flow an additional five miles or so until it reaches the high water mark of Folsom Lake, which is operated by the Bureau of Reclamation as part of its Central Valley Project.

Common mammals found within ASRA include the mule deer, raccoon, opossum, California mole, California ground squirrel, deer mouse, pocket gopher, ornate shrew, and several species of hare and bats. Predatory mammals in these areas include the gray fox, bobcat, bear, coyote and mountain lion. Area birds include turkey vulture, white-tailed kite, red-tailed hawk, sparrow hawk, California quail, mourning dove, water ouzel, horned lark, red-winged and Brewer's blackbirds, towhee, sparrow, scrub jay, California thrasher, and numerous waterfowl. Amphibians and reptiles include the tiger salamander, California newt, western spade foot toad, California toad, California alligator lizard, Pacific gopher snake, king snake, rattlesnake, California striped racer and a variety of lizard species.

The American River continues as the Lower American below Folsom Dam, feeding Lake Natomas and joining the Sacramento River approximately 30 miles downstream of Auburn in Sacramento.

The Placer County Water Agency's Middle Fork Project, developed in the 1960s, includes French Meadows and Hell Hole Reservoirs in the Middle Fork watershed upstream of ASRA's boundaries. These reservoirs and associated infrastructure capture and deliver PCWA's Middle Fork water entitlement to PCWA customers as well as to other water agencies and municipalities that purchase water from PCWA. The Middle Fork Project also includes a number of hydroelectric facilities which are operated by Pacific Gas and Electric.

PCWA additionally has a permit to draw a portion of its Middle Fork entitlement from the river below Auburn, near the former Auburn dam construction site. PCWA's temporary pumps at this location are being replaced by a permanent pump station that will have its intake in the currently dry but soon to be restored river channel. This project is scheduled for completion in 2005.

Environmental education programs inform visitors and local residents about the importance of the American River and surrounding canyon lands. ASRA hosts a variety of programs - from science programs for teachers to junior ranger programs for children. Protect American River Canyons assists with program coordination and recruitment focusing on river clean ups and education programs.

Cultural Heritage and Historical Resources

Humans lived in these lush riverine canyons as far back as 6,000 years ago. A partial survey of ASRA identified more than 1,000 prehistoric and historic archaeological sites. The indigenous people were Nisenan - hunter-gatherers and members of the Penutian-speaking southern Maidu tribe. The remains of Native American culture include villages, seasonal gathering camps, quarrying stations, tools, and workshops. The oldest remains were found in a limestone cave on the south bank of the Middle Fork, but the cave no longer exists due to a rock quarry which is still in operation.

California's Gold Rush brought thousands of European-Americans to this area, and both the

North and Middle Forks were intensively mined. Sizeable towns and camps grew up within the canyons and along the rivers to support the mining operations. The river and canyon environment suffered greatly from the miners' efforts, but time has now healed most of the wounds.

The river canyons have also been home to a myriad of transportation byways. The Old Stage Coach Trail was once a wagon route into and out of the river canyon to Auburn. The Mountain Quarries Railroad once ran from Auburn to Folsom. Highway 49 now connects Placer and El Dorado Counties by a highway bridge that was originally built as a suspension toll bridge in 1860.

The canyons are dotted with more than 1,500 gold rush era historic and Native American cultural sites, many of which are eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. One historic site is the Mountain Quarries Railroad Bridge (also called No Hands Bridge), which was built to accommodate trains servicing an upstream rock quarry and was the first concrete bridge of its kind built in North America.



A gold rush miner uses a "long tom" sluice box to separate placer gold from river gravel on the American River. Photo credit: Placer County Museums

Key Issues

Maintaining the integrity of the canyons' ecological communities, as well as its historical and cultural resources must be a central objective of any future ASRA management plan. Long term historical use of the area and more recent recreational and urban land uses have caused habitat degradation and threats to cultural and historical resources. What is needed now is a comprehensive approach to resource conservation, protection, and restoration.

Species-specific and habitat-wide impacts are prevalent. The American River canyons' ecological communities contain a number of species on the federal and state rare, endangered, or threatened species lists. Nisenan manzanita, Pine Hill ceanothus and Pine Hill flannel bush are all high on the federally endangered plant species list. The area also features other special status species, including bald eagles, golden eagles, black-shouldered kites, ospreys, northern goshawks, American peregrine falcons, spotted owls, blue grouses, ring-tailed cats, badgers, horned lizards, Yates snails, California red legged frogs, and pale big-eared bats. Introduction of non-native species threatens the health of these ecological communities. Common non-native plants include vinca, bearded iris, tree of heaven, Scotch broom, and star thistle.

More recent impacts include the Auburn dam project, which was halted in 1975 before completion. This project has left a significant stretch of the river canyon denuded of trees. Dirt roads crisscross the hillsides, and gaping scars (originally intended for dam footings) run from the bedrock to the top of the hillsides. The river has been diverted through a half-mile long tunnel that was blasted through the lower canyon wall. The river no longer flows in its historic channel, which is now dry and devoid of riparian habitat. The impending construction of PCWA's permanent pump station and restoration of the river to its historic channel provide a great impetus for restoring this highly disturbed portion of the

canyon. An important part of the restoration effort should involve replanting native tree and plant species, including native riparian plant systems that will help reduce channel erosion and sedimentation, as well as provide habitat for native animal species.

As mining towns developed during the Gold Rush era, hillsides were stripped of timber. Now, many years later, the forest cover has rebounded to the point that one must look carefully for the remains of historic bridge abutments, building foundations, tailings, and mineshafts. Many of these historic sites, as well as all cultural sites, are protected under the Archeological Resource Protection Act. The Auburn State Recreation Area Interim Resource Management Plan (1992) requires the recording of historic sites so they can be assessed for significance and protection plans developed.

With the increase in visitor use of this area, it is critical to take steps to ensure protection and conservation of the canyons' ecological, historical, and cultural values. This can best be accomplished by engaging in comprehensive assessment, planning, and management complemented by the development of education and stewardship programs that engage the community.



Auburn dam site 25 years after construction came to a halt due to seismic concerns. Photo by Mark Leder-Adams

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Resource Protection and Conservation

Increase the protection and restoration of natural, cultural, and historical resources.

- ❖ Complete an updated resource inventory of native and non-native plants and animals.
- ❖ Complete survey of historically and culturally significant areas.
- ❖ Clearly define pressing water quality issues and integrate key strategies into a comprehensive community based watershed management plan.
- ❖ Develop and implement a habitat restoration plan for both upland and aquatic native species.
- ❖ Monitor and assess the health of the canyon ecosystem on an on-going basis.
- ❖ Develop and implement a natural, cultural and historical resources management plan.
- ❖ Protect sensitive resources from visitor impacts through improved informational and educational signage and strategic management of sensitive natural, cultural, and historical sites.



Barbi Kerschner of "Wild Things," specializing in interpretive wild animal programs, introduces Shasta, a male Golden Eagle, at PARC's annual American River Confluence Festival. Photo by Tracy Smith-Conners

Environmental Education

Increase awareness of the uniqueness of the American River and its canyons and commitment to resource stewardship.

- ❖ Develop a comprehensive education and interpretive program.
- ❖ Develop self-guided interpretive trails and provide docent led hikes and rides.
- ❖ Expand educational programs and create guidelines for river access and usage.
- ❖ Develop an interpretive visitor's center.
- ❖ Continue and expand existing clean-up and garbage removal efforts.

RECREATION PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Recreation Resources

The Auburn State Recreation Area includes a full spectrum of nature-based recreational amenities, including free flowing rivers and rapids, deep canyons with diverse plant and animal life, and miles of trails and river access points. Visitor use has steadily climbed over the last ten years. Nearly one million people now visit ASRA annually to experience the wild and beautiful canyons of the North and Middle Forks of the American River. Visitors to the area participate in a wide variety of outdoor activities, including whitewater rafting, kayaking, canoeing, swimming, fishing, bird watching, hiking, trail running, mountain biking, and horseback riding. Opportunities exist to visit Native American cultural sites, picnic, or pan for gold on numerous riverside beaches. The Confluence area draws the greatest use, given its numerous trailheads, swimming holes, and easy access.

The waters of the North Fork are a source of relief for visitors on hot days. The Confluence beaches are particularly popular. Clark's Hole, an easy half-mile hike upstream from the Confluence, is also a favorite due to its beautiful rock formations and deep pools. Numerous other riverside beaches are accessible by trail and by boat.

Rafting and kayaking continue to grow in popularity. Commercial boating is permitted on the North Fork from Iowa Hill Bridge to Ponderosa Bridge and on the Middle Fork from Oxbow Reservoir to Ruck-A-Chucky. Private boaters utilize these stretches as well as the less technically challenging section of the Middle Fork from Ruck-A-Chucky to Mammoth Bar, and on the North Fork from Yankee Jim's Bridge to Upper Lake Clementine. Private boaters also seasonally float the North Fork from below Clementine Dam to the Confluence, but activity on this stretch is limited somewhat by the difficulty of access to the put-in site. The section downstream of the Confluence to Oregon Bar has been closed to boating since

Auburn dam construction began over 30 years ago. This boating run will become available to public use upon completion of the Placer County Water Agency pump station project, which will include restoration of the river to its natural channel, closure of the Auburn dam diversion tunnel, and related recreational improvements to facilitate public access to this stretch of river. Given its easy access and gentle rapids, the Confluence to Oregon Bar run should prove to be quite popular with private boaters.

More than a hundred miles of trails provide access to a number of natural gems, including waterfalls, pools, canyons, and tree covered riverbanks. Approximately 30 miles of the popular Western States Trail traverse the Recreation Area. This trail hosts two world-renowned 100 mile endurance events: the Tevis Cup equestrian competition and the Western States Endurance Run. Canyon trails have become increasingly popular among hikers, runners, equestrians, and mountain bikers, leading to some trail conflicts and overuse impacts. In addition some illegal trails have been cut, causing erosion problems. Development of a few additional strategically located trails may well be appropriate to alleviate use demands on existing trails and to provide new and enhanced trail experiences for recreational users. The North Fork Trail, a proposed multiple purpose trail in the North Fork Canyon from the Confluence to Ponderosa Bridge, is one example. Another logical location for a new multiple purpose trail is from the Confluence downstream to the American River Overlook staging area on the canyon's edge in Auburn, and continuing downstream to connect to trails in Folsom Lake State Recreation Area.

The Mammoth Bar Off Highway Vehicle(OHV) area is located in the Middle Fork canyon and is accessed via Old Foresthill Road. This area includes 1200 acres of terrain that ranges from flat gravel bars to valleys and steep canyon sides. It includes a riverside track and numerous trails. These are the only trails open to motorized recreation within ASRA's boundaries.

Visitor Facilities and Access

Visitor facilities are limited in the Recreation Area. Primitive restrooms exist at the Confluence, Clementine Dam, Mammoth Bar OHV Area, along the Mountain Quarries Trail, and at the overlook staging area. Potable water is only available at the equestrian staging area at the overlook. There are two small campgrounds, one at Mineral Bar on the North Fork and the other at Ruck-A-Chucky on the Middle Fork.

Past and present transportation routes have become key access points for today's recreational enthusiasts. Old Stage Coach Road is now a major trailhead for hikers and mountain bikers. Highway 49 and Old Foresthill Road allow visitors to park their cars along roadsides or in dirt parking areas within a short walking distance of the Confluence. There is existing non-vehicular access leading into the canyon from Pleasant Avenue and Maidu Drive. Mammoth Bar and Clementine Dam provide vehicular access to the canyons and resources upstream. Only foot, horse, and bike access are currently available downstream of the confluence, with connections to Cool and the American River Overlook and Oregon Bar.

Key Issues

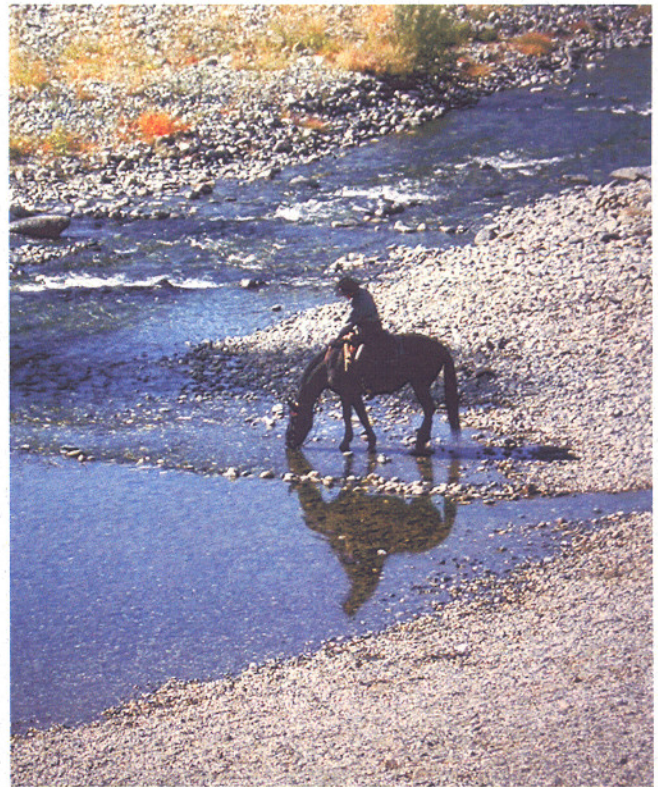
As use of the Auburn State Recreation Area increases and the surrounding communities continue to grow, recreational use of ASRA will increase. Expectations about the nature and quality of recreational experience, access, and facilities may change. Expansion of commercial use is possible.

Recreational development planning will need to ensure that the natural character of the canyon is maintained and that resources are protected. New trails, interpretive facilities, and other visitor services will need to be developed in a manner consistent with protection of the canyons' valuable natural resources. Resource impacts at the dam site, in the river channel, and within the more intensely

used river canyon areas must also be addressed to plan for the restoration of affected sites, prevention of further deterioration, and to ensure protection of natural resources. In addition, cultural and historic resources along trails and within designated recreational areas must be considered as part of an overall resource protection plan.

Given the likelihood of increased trail use, existing and potential trail conflicts should be evaluated and addressed upfront in the planning stage. Trail restoration and maintenance and new trail development must also be addressed to provide connections to the most popular areas.

Access to and availability of visitor facilities, which are currently limited, will need to be addressed, considering both recreational needs and resource sensitivities. Planners must develop ongoing access and facilities maintenance plans to guard against resource impacts.



The river offers a welcome opportunity for horse and rider to cool off after a vigorous canyon trail ride. Photo by Eric Peach.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Recreation Resources

Enhance recreational opportunities within the Auburn State Recreation Area consistent with resource conservation and restoration goals.

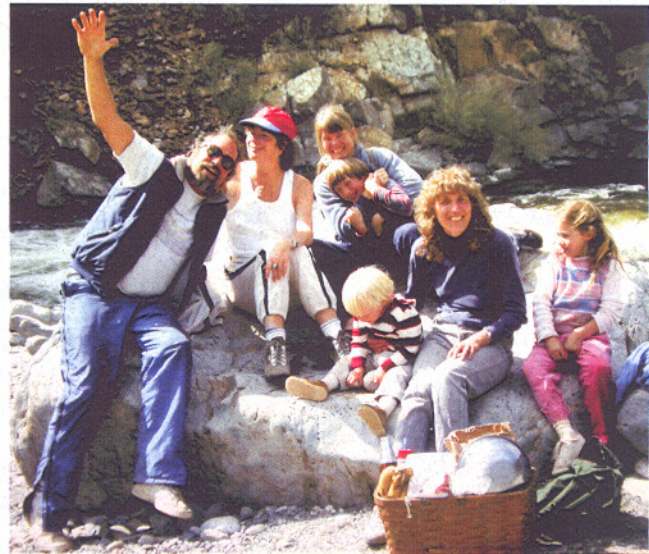
Maintain the natural character of the Auburn State Recreation Area, its canyons and the Confluence Parkway.

- ❖ Develop new low impact backcountry trails where needed, to provide connectivity to key recreational sites, adjacent resources, and communities, and to expand opportunities for non-motorized recreational use.
- ❖ Promote recreational user awareness of potential impacts and what they can do to minimize or prevent impacts.
- ❖ Coordinate future recreation planning with planning efforts in contiguous jurisdictions, including Folsom Lake State Recreation Area and Tahoe National Forest.
- ❖ Maintain existing commercial use of the river on North and Middle Forks above the confluence.
- ❖ Develop and implement a trail maintenance and resource stewardship program, considering resource restoration needs.
- ❖ Monitor local recreational activities and their impact on natural, cultural, and historic resources.
- ❖ Promote safe public recreational use through the elimination of hazards on land and in the river and through appropriate informational and regulatory signage.

Visitor Facilities and Access

Provide and maintain visitor facilities and access appropriate for low impact use.

- ❖ Evaluate existing trail and river access and promote development of new and improved trailheads, put-ins and take-outs and other access points considering recreational demands, resource needs, community impacts, connectivity, and a need to maintain the canyons' natural character.
- ❖ Develop new low impact visitor facilities where needed to promote resource conservation, incorporating environmentally sensitive designs and installations.



There is no better way to spend a spring day with family and friends than enjoying a picnic at the American River. Photo by Eric Peach.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS AND IMPACTS

The canyon lands adjacent to the City of Auburn are a valuable community asset. Their natural beauty and scenic appeal augment the attractiveness of the Auburn community, and the diverse recreational opportunities constitute a great amenity for both residents and visitors alike.

The North and Middle Fork canyons also contribute significantly to the local economy. Local land use planning policies have allowed for extensive residential development within, and adjacent to, the river canyons. Home and property values are enhanced by the proximity to the canyons and the dramatic views that many of these homes offer.

The importance of recreation to the local economy cannot be overstated. Recreational enthusiasts from greater Sacramento, the Bay Area, and beyond are attracted to the unique recreational opportunities and easy access afforded by these beautiful, largely pristine foothill river canyons. Local businesses benefit from the area's popularity, since many visitors shop, eat, and sleep in Auburn during their stay.

A recent study conducted by the California Department of Parks and Recreation indicates that visitors to California's state parks spend nearly \$3 billion a year in the local communities serving those parks, and that the "ripple effect" of that spending results in over \$7 billion in local economic benefits. Visitation to the Auburn State Recreation Area produces millions of dollars in local revenue on an annual basis.

Key Issues

The proposed American River Confluence Parkway will lead to even greater recreational use. The benefits to the Auburn community are obvious - more recreational opportunities for residents and additional revenue for local businesses.

There are potential negative impacts as well, however, and there is a real need to plan wisely for

the future management of the canyons. Increased recreational access must be designed and regulated to protect the health of the canyon ecosystem and to minimize public safety risks, including the risk of wildfires. An appropriate fire management plan would reduce the risk of fire damage to the canyon lands and reduce the danger to the surrounding neighborhoods that lie on this urban wild land interface area.

California State Parks is in the process of developing a comprehensive fire management plan for the entire Auburn State Recreation Area. This plan is being developed through the cooperation of the City of Auburn, American River Watershed group, California Department of Forestry, the Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of Reclamation, fire safe councils (e.g. the Auburn Fire Safe Council), and private landowners.

Future planning must also be sensitive to legitimate neighborhood concerns regarding potential traffic, parking, noise, crime, and litter.

The staff at the Auburn State Recreation Area has done a commendable job managing the canyon lands on its existing budget, but increased use will require further evaluation of park management needs.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Community Benefits

Increase community awareness of the recreational and economic benefits of the natural, cultural, historic, scenic, and recreational resources of the Auburn State Recreation Area.

- ❖ Promote community involvement in interpretation, resource stewardship, and park management.
- ❖ Work with the Auburn Chamber of Commerce to promote the Auburn State Recreation Area and the American River Confluence Parkway as a destination.

Promote comprehensive ongoing management and stewardship of the Auburn State Recreation Area and its natural, cultural, historic, scenic, and recreational resources.

(See page 15 for a comprehensive list of goals and objectives that apply to resource conservation and stewardship.)

Minimize potential impacts to neighborhoods through collaborative planning and management and strategic investment of park staff and financial resources.

- ❖ Build cooperative partnerships between key stakeholders including public agencies, community organizations, and individuals in recreation and resource planning.
- ❖ Actively implement good neighbor plans and guidelines including fire management, emergency response, and controlled access.
- ❖ Support increased funding and staff resources at the Auburn State Recreation area.



Flakes of gold turn up in the gold pan of a hopeful young gold panner over 150 years after the first gold fever wave passed through the American River canyons. Photo by PARC.

PARK ADMINISTRATION, FACILITIES, AND MANAGEMENT

Since the Interim Resource Management Plan was implemented in 1991 ASRA has, as predicted, experienced a significant increase in popularity. State Parks estimates that annual recreational visitor days have more than tripled in the last decade, jumping from fewer than 300,000 in 1994-95 to approximately one million in 2000-01. Canyon trails are increasingly popular among mountain bikers and trail runners, and have continued to see heavy use from equestrians and hikers. Recreational boating on the Middle and North Forks has also experienced steady growth, and the impending restoration of the North Fork below the city of Auburn will open a new and accessible stretch of river to public use.

Part of the Goldfields District of the California Department of Parks and Recreation, ASRA is currently administered by a park superintendent who oversees a staff of three park rangers, several maintenance workers, and numerous park aids. ASRA operates on an annual budget of \$850,000 (2001-02). In keeping with the philosophy of the 1991 IRMP, very little facility development has occurred over the last decade (except at Mammoth Bar, which has a separate budget funded entirely by the state's Off Highway Vehicle grant program).

Key Issues

Given the dramatic growth in recreational use of ASRA (a trend that is likely to continue as the Sacramento region continues to grow), the time is ripe for a change in the management philosophy for ASRA. These lands have become a river and canyon-based recreational paradise, offering an outdoor experience not easily found elsewhere. At the same time Congress has made clear it has no interest in reviving the Auburn dam project, soundly rejecting two dam proposals during the 1990s. The estimated cost of the project has escalated dramatically, no local cost-sharing partner

has been identified, and Sacramento is moving ahead with flood control measures that will allow it to achieve all the flood protection it needs without building a dam in Auburn.

Under these present-day circumstances, continued adherence to a management philosophy that assumes an Auburn dam will be built is questionable at best. Instead it is time to adopt a new approach that recognizes present and future recreational demand, and that strives to accommodate that demand in a manner consistent with protection of ASRA's natural, cultural, and scenic resources.

Successful implementation of the new management philosophy will require that ASRA be funded and staffed at a level reflecting current and projected recreational demand and that recognizes the challenge of managing these sprawling and rugged canyon lands. While ASRA is presently well-managed, it is under-funded and under-staffed given the current level of recreational use occurring in the park. There appears to be a clear need for more rangers, as well as for a resource ecologist and interpretive specialist. Adequate staffing is essential to enable State Parks to meet its public safety and law enforcement obligations, as well as to protect natural resources and effectively manage recreational use. It will also be important to plan and budget for future facility improvements that will enhance the outstanding recreational and educational potential of this unique state recreation area.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Promote and support a community supported Auburn State Recreation Area management philosophy that recognizes current and future recreational demands, and that strives to accommodate that demand consistent with protection of natural, cultural, scenic and community resources.

- ❖ Involve stakeholders and encourage community input in management planning.
- ❖ Promote coordination and collaboration between ASRA staff and other government entities in areas of common concern, including public safety, law enforcement, and fire protection.
- ❖ Develop and implement river management plan for Confluence Parkway, including on-river patrols.
- ❖ Develop private sector sponsorship of ASRA programs.
- ❖ Fund and staff ASRA at a level reflecting current and projected recreational and conservation demands including new staff positions for a resource ecologist and an interpretive specialist. (see also community benefits)



Mountain biking along the Middle Fork of the American River on the Clementine Loop Trail is a popular year round ride. Photo by Alice Tenscher Dunbar.



Photo by PARC.

VI. Reflecting on the Future

The vision of an American River Confluence Parkway is an ambitious one, calling for recreational improvements, as well as a heightened commitment to the protection of the American River canyons' natural, cultural, and historical resources. ASRA's relatively easy access (particularly in the area of the proposed Confluence Parkway), together with the outstanding recreational opportunities it offers, make it easy to understand why it has become one of the most popular outdoor recreation destinations in the Sacramento metropolitan region.

The challenge for the future is to manage ASRA's magnificent canyonlands in a way that accommodates increased recreational demand without compromising the canyons' rich natural resources, wilderness qualities, and community benefits. The task is not an easy one and will require the dedicated involvement of all those who consider

themselves stewards of the American River and the lands comprising Auburn State Recreation Area.

PARC commits itself to the process of working with State Parks, the Bureau of Reclamation, and all other stakeholders to create the best general plan possible for ASRA. We stand ready and willing to offer our leadership, ideas, time, and effort to this worthy cause and to the creation of an American River Confluence Parkway.

The American River and its canyons form a priceless local treasure, a place of great inspiration, beauty, and community pride. By working together we can ensure that these extraordinary canyons and the rivers that flow through them are maintained in a healthy natural condition, and at the same time enhance the public's ability to enjoy the canyons' outstanding recreational features. Our community and the canyons themselves deserve no less.



The American River Confluence Parkway is dedicated to the memory of PARC leader Frank Olrich, who died in a cross country skiing accident in February 1999. Frank loved the river, and he had a special fondness for the stretch of river below the City of Auburn having grown up in Robie Point area of Auburn. Frank felt this beautiful wilderness canyon, lying literally at Auburn's doorstep, was a unique community asset deserving greater recognition and access by residents and visitors alike. At the time he died Frank was leading the effort to create the Confluence Parkway. Protect American River Canyons is committed to help make the Confluence Parkway dream a reality.

