

3 THE EXISTING PARKWAY



3. THE EXISTING PARKWAY

3.1 EXISTING PARKWAY LANDS

The Conservancy, in conjunction with its member agencies and nonprofit partners, has successfully secured for future generations two-thirds of the nearly 5,900 acres targeted in the San Joaquin River Conservancy Enabling Act for the Parkway, without the use of eminent domain. The San Joaquin River Conservancy has acquired 2,595 acres on the San Joaquin River for conservation and public access purposes. Over 1,000 acres of Conservancy lands are open for public use at least seasonally; the remaining Conservancy lands are used by supervised stewardship and education groups through license agreements.

Other public lands serving Parkway purposes include the County of Fresno's Lost Lake Park, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's (CDFW) San Joaquin Fish Hatchery and San Joaquin River Ecological Reserve (SJR ER), among others. The State of California retains sovereign fee-title ownership of the San Joaquin River between the ordinary low water marks, under the management jurisdiction of the State Lands Commission.

Within the Parkway Plan Area, approximately 520 acres are owned and managed by local government agencies—principally the future Riverbottom Park (City of Fresno), Lost Lake Park and the Eaton Trail corridor (County of Fresno), and Scout Island and the future Diamond R Ranch (Fresno County Office of Education). Some of these acquisitions and parks were established more than 40 years ago. More than seven miles of the primary Parkway multi-use trail, designated the Lewis S. Eaton Trail in and near Fresno, have been completed.

The nonprofit San Joaquin River Parkway & Conservation Trust (River Parkway Trust) provides public recreation and conservation education at its Coke Hallowell River Center. The River Parkway Trust currently owns 59 acres in the Parkway Plan Area. The American Farmlands Trust holds a conservation easement on 95 acres in the Parkway Plan Area.

To date, the Conservancy has invested approximately \$33.4 million in State bond funds for land acquisitions. Grants and partnerships have resulted in an additional \$10.7 million in federal funds, \$13.1 million in other State funds, and \$2.4 million in private donations and nonprofit organization funds. These investments do not include public lands existing prior to the San Joaquin River Conservancy Act.

Public lands within the Parkway are listed in Table 3-1.

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TABLE 3-1 EXISTING PARKWAY AND PUBLIC LANDS				
Land Acquisitions	Year	Fresno (Acres)	Madera (Acres)	Conservation Easements (Acres)
San Joaquin River Conservancy				
Wildwood Native Park	1996	0.00	22.00	0.00
Jensen River Ranch	1997	156.10	0.00	0.00
Beck	1998	105.92	0.00	0.00
Friant Cove	1998	2.64	0.00	0.00
Ball Ranch	2000	358.40	0.00	0.00
Schneider	2000	0.00	47.10	0.00
Wagner (aka Cottonwood Creek)	2001	0.00	64.32	0.00
Ledger Island	2001	0.00	161.17	0.00
River Vista	2001	0.00	176.66	0.00
Van Buren (aka Proctor, Broadwell, Cobb, part of River West Madera)	2001	0.00	261.54	0.00
Willow Lodge (Finch, Glaspey)*	2002	40.00	0.00	0.00
River West Fresno (Spano)	2003	290.84	50.00	0.00
Sycamore Island	2005	0.00	347.00	0.00
Liddell/Bluff Pointe Golfing Center	2005	134.00	0.00	0.00
Gibson	2008	320.96	0.00	0.00
SJ Fish Hatchery (Friant Station)*	2008	2.00	0.00	0.00
SJ Fish Hatchery (Hovannisian)*	2011	0.17	0.00	0.00
Camp Pashayan	**2012	11.43	0.00	0.00
Jenco Farms	2015	23.16	0.00	0.00
Circle V Ranch	2016	0.00	20.82	0.00
<i>Subtotal</i>		<i>1,445.62</i>	<i>1,150.61</i>	<i>0.00</i>
California Department Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)				
Hansen Unit San Joaquin River Ecological Reserve (ER)		34.00	0.00	0.00
Lost Lake Park (see also County of Fresno)		76.00	0.00	0.00
Rank Island Unit SJR ER		270.00	0.00	0.00

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Land Acquisitions	Year	Fresno (Acres)	Madera (Acres)	Conservation Easements (Acres)
SJ Fish Hatchery		35.35	0.00	0.00
Milburn Unit SJR ER	1989	286.00	0.00	0.00
Willow Unit SJR ER (1)	1990	149.67	0.00	0.00
Willow Unit SJR ER (2)	1992	88.23	0.00	0.00
Camp Pashayan Unit SJR ER	1995/ 2012	20.00	0.00	0.00
San Joaquin River Parkway & Conservation Trust				
Coke Hallowell River Center		20.00	0.00	0.00
Owl Hollow	2005	5.00	0.00	0.00
Caglia Farms	2006	28.20	0.00	0.00
Spano Remnants	2003	6.00	0.00	0.00
American Farmland Trust				
Hansen Conservation Easements		0.00	0.00	95.00
County of Fresno				
Lost Lake Park (see also CDFW)		191.66	0.00	0.00
Friant Road Scenic Lands (Eaton Trail)		141.00	0.00	0.00
Fresno County Office of Education				
Scout Island	2000	84.66	0.00	0.00
Diamond R Ranch	2000	0.00	68.00	0.00
City of Fresno				
Riverbottom Park	1999	35.00	0.00	0.00
Bureau of Reclamation				
Millerton Below Friant Dam		137.50	137.50	0.00

*These lands were acquired by the Conservancy to be managed under the jurisdiction of CDFW.

**Camp Pashayan was originally acquired by the River Parkway Trust in 1995 and later sold to the Conservancy.

The Conservancy’s statutory goal is to develop a Parkway encompassing 5,900 acres to provide a “harmonious combination of low-impact recreational and educational uses and wildlife protection” (PRC §32510). Approximately 1,900 acres were anticipated to be in Madera County and approximately 4,000

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acres were expected to be in Fresno County of which 1,250 acres were already in public ownership before the Conservancy was formed according to the Conservancy Act. As of 2017, the Conservancy owns approximately 1,150 acres in Madera County and approximately 1,445 acres in Fresno County; a roughly equal total amount of land has been protected for a variety of public purposes by other agencies and interests related to the Parkway. In addition, the California State Lands Commission has jurisdiction over State sovereign lands of the San Joaquin River between the ordinary low water marks.

There are a number of public access and/or conservation easements that directly relate to the overall Parkway goals including one agricultural easement on productive farmlands held by the American Farmlands Trust.

It is anticipated that opportunities for Parkway expansion through land dedication, mitigation lands, land bequeathed, or land offered for purchase would occur throughout the life of the Parkway.

3.2 EXISTING PUBLIC ACCESS AND RECREATION CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

The original Parkway Master Plan was developed, and the Conservancy was created, in response to public demand for the preservation of riverbottom open space and habitat, and access to the river for boating, fishing, picnicking, environmental education, and other activities that can only be provided to the area through a river parkway. The acquisition of Parkway lands has reinforced the demand to open them for public use.

Parkway improvements have occurred on public lands within the Parkway that are owned by the Conservancy and by other entities. Several grants and bond funding have been made available for project-specific planning and implementing public access and recreation projects. The most significant investments include the Jensen River Ranch Habitat Enhancement and Public Access Project, including the Tom MacMichael Sr. Trail; the Lewis S. Eaton Trail, including the Riverside Trail segment; Friant Cove; Wildwood Native Park; San Joaquin Fish Hatchery visitor improvements; Sycamore Island/River West Madera; improvements at Lost Lake Park; and the Coke Hallowell River Center. Overlooks, vistas, and trailheads have been developed at Woodward Park, Copper River Drive, Copper Avenue, Milburn Avenue, Polk Avenue, and Riverside Drive. Local agencies are assisting with long-term operation and maintenance of trails and parks.

As the entities take advantage of improvement opportunities, needs are also met through funding sources other than the bond funds allocated to the Conservancy. For example:

- The Fresno County Office of Education has secured land within the Parkway at Scout Island and across the river from the Scout Island facility. It has developed educational facilities with its own funding sources.

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- The Parkway Trust has completed and operates the Coke Hallowell River Center, a major visitor center, and has improved Owl Hollow and the Hidden Homes Trail, using donor contributions, other grants, and a relatively small Conservancy grant toward improvement of the historic home.
- A local developer fully designed, funded, and constructed a ¼-mile Parkway trail extension and vista feature, and established assessments and fees within the neighboring development that support the operation and maintenance costs.

3.3 EXISTING HABITAT CONSERVATION, ENHANCEMENT, AND RESTORATION

Habitat restoration is a mission mandated by the Conservancy's enabling legislation. The habitat values of much of the land within the Parkway Plan Area have been significantly degraded. Habitat restoration is integral to the Parkway capital improvements program, and projects most often include both habitat enhancements and public access and recreation components.

The Conservancy is working with the River Parkway Trust, WCB, CDFW, DWR, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and others to identify restoration needs within the Parkway. The Conservancy has sponsored projects to restore over 300 acres of riparian, floodplain, and channel habitat in the Parkway at Jensen River Ranch, Wildwood Native Park, River West Fresno, the Riverbottom Park site and the Schneider property. The Conservancy and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation are cooperatively sponsoring a gravel pit isolation, floodplain restoration, and public access improvement project, which serves Parkway and SJR Restoration Program objectives. The Conservancy has received small restoration grants from the North American Wetland Conservation Act program. The Conservancy has developed cooperative projects with the County of Fresno and Caltrans to implement mitigation enhancements on Conservancy lands.

In 2015, the Conservancy initiated a multi-benefit ecosystem and watershed protection grant program made possible by funding from the Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014 (Proposition 1).

The Conservancy has awarded local assistance grants to improve Conservancy properties through removal of invasive plants. The Fresno County Economic Opportunities Commission, Local Conservation Corps is a recipient of a three year Conservancy grant to remove invasive species, while also providing job and learning opportunities for local disadvantaged youths. Other sources of funding, including the CDFW and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation are actively addressing eradication of invasive species in the Parkway Plan Area.

The Jensen River Ranch Habitat Enhancement and Public Access Project is among the most significant restoration projects implemented within the Parkway to date, and was funded by many sources, including the Central Valley Project Improvement Act, Conservancy funding from Proposition 12 (Parks Bond of 2000) and Proposition 40 (Resources Bond of 2002), a Resources Agency River Parkways Grant, along with

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funding from Caltrans. The River Parkway Trust and City of Fresno are major collaborators in implementing this project.

To date, the Conservancy has invested \$29.1 million of State bond funds allocated to the Parkway in planning, design, and construction of habitat restoration, public access, recreation, and outdoor education projects. Through partnerships, the Conservancy's bond funds have leveraged an additional \$4.2 million in federal funds, \$3.3 million in other State program funds, and \$10.3 million in non-governmental funding to develop the Parkway.