SAN JOAQUIN RIVER CONSERVANCY

Agenda Item

Item: G-3

December 15, 2021

TO: San Joaquin River Conservancy Governing Board

FROM: John M. Shelton, Executive Officer

SUBJECT: INFORMATION ITEM: Executive Officer's Report

RECOMMENDATION:
This report is provided for informational purposes. No Board action is recommended.

SUMMARY:
This Executive Office Report is a review of the work the San Joaquin River Conservancy has accomplished over the last few years. Most of this work entailed much effort by our team, which includes many partnerships. These partners range from agencies to non-profit and commercial organizations all the way to individuals that have stepped forward to ask how they can help. There has been a lot of effort by Board members, local elected officials and their staff, our parent organization, the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA), and our sister Conservancies. I include in our team or staff help from the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB), our Deputy Attorney General for the Department of Justice (DOJ), and the Department of Parks (Parks).

These last two years have been anything but business as usual. We have been dealing with COVID 19, which not only required us to mostly give up our office use, it has entailed learning how to host our Board meetings (and many other meetings) through virtual means. COVID also lead to some major budgeting issues for last fiscal year, where we worked with CNRA to make sure we covered what was needed so that all of our staff can now comfortably work from home (new laptops, printers, chairs, etc.). CNRA helped us move our web hosting platform to the Department of Water Resources (DWR), both for security purposes and to be able to rely on a strong information technology team. In the last few months, CNRA offered to help us transition into a new software for integrated communications solution (GovDelivery) that should greatly enhance our ability to communicate with our Board members, partners, stakeholders, and the general public. As part of this, DWR has given us staff time to facilitate our transition (more on GovDelivery below). One COVID related issue that may have gone unnoticed, effective July 1, 2020, in response to the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the state instituted the Furlough 2020 Program. All of our state team had a pay reduction and give two furlough days per month. This lasted until June 30, 2021. For the Conservancy staff, our standard work environment has always been to be careful of expenditures due to our limited base funding, but with reduced hours and working remotely, making progress relied on hard work and creative thinking. As the Executive Officer, I put in lots of effort to develop new partnerships to help us be effective, which many times required working evenings and weekends. I am very proud of our team, with team meaning not only our core team but all the organizations and individuals that have put in a tremendous amount of work and thought so that we can make progress. For an

idea of how many groups are part of our overall network, as we have compiled lists of organizations that we are currently working with or coordinating with, the preliminary number is over 60. It should grow as we continue to check our files and past communications. Below, I will cover some important categories of the progress we have made, though to list everything would be too much.

Approved/On-Going Projects (Table 1): Several projects were started before I started as the Executive Officer. For example, the Jensen River Ranch, Jenco Farms Property Habitat Enhancement Project was started and has entered its close-out phase. The grantee for this project, the San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust (Parkway Trust), has completed all the restoration plantings and has been maintaining the area while the plantings become established. This is one of the most visible restoration projects that the Conservancy has funded and has greatly enhanced the area for a scenic view, especially in spring and early summer. As the trees and shrubs grow, the viewshed will even be better, plus the ecological values will be realized. My tenure as the Executive Officer has also seen an increase in or active partnerships. The Parkway Trust has been a major partner since our inception, and the Department of Water Resources has been funded for multiple projects, several that have gone from initial alternative analysis to completed. They have just recently finished the Sycamore Island Fishing Pond Enhancement Project with includes the American with Disabilities Act compliant fishing dock and access. We are currently closing this project out, but the facilities were available all summer and have received very good reviews for those that I have talked to while out visiting on several occasions. DWR is now involved in the Millburn Pond Isolation project, as is efficiently moving through the phases for this. The Milburn Pond project has been made possible with the Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014 (Proposition 1). This grant source has a limited amount of planning funding, which we have not expended. The Conservancy still has over $5,000,000 left to expend, but this will all be for implementation phases. Proposition 1 funds are also our only funding source for which we are required to implement a competitive Request for Proposals. Our intent is to wait until the projects that used Proposition 1 funds are ready for the final phase to re-open the competitive process.

Over the last two years, the Conservancy has reached out to several organizations to bring in a more diverse network of partners. In listening to advocates and leaders, I have been consistently reminded that the best way to get input into decisions is to not only “have a seat at the table”, but to actually supply jobs that allow for that “seat” to be filled with someone who is there as part of their job. As such, we now have a couple of projects, one with Fresno Building Healthy Communities (FBHC) and another with the US Green Building Council (USGBC), that has expanded our diversity of stakeholders. These two grantees are just in the beginning stages of their planning and outreach projects but have already greatly expanded the communities that are aware of the San Joaquin River Parkway and are actively engaged. USGBC partnered with Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival (AICLS) for their project, Circle V Public Access Plan, which is exploring potential uses of the Circle V property as Indigenous and Environmental Resource Center. So not only does this project engage those stakeholders that champion building and design concepts that are energy efficient, we also have an impactful outreach to our Native American organizations and Tribes. In addition, with their other partner being Fresno State’s Lyles College of Engineering, we are working with students. FBHC’s projects is also focused on stakeholder input, with a focus on reaching those communities in our region that have not been engaged in the past. FBHC has a terrific network that they have developed in providing improvements to green space and parks through other grant processes in our region. The combination of these two projects mean the Conservancy will be busy over the next two years with stakeholder processes.

Another project, although awarded to a familiar partner, the Ball Ranch Managed Aquifer Recharge Planning and Analysis Project (Ball Ranch Flood MAR) that River Partners is leading, seeks to work with our regional water management agencies and stakeholders. River Partners has a history of working with the DWR's Division of Statewide Integrated Water Management to bring together coalitions to study multiuse projects that focus on water supply, flood management, and ecosystem restoration. Recently, they have also taken leadership roles in exploring multi-benefit projects that include groundwater recharge. Our project with them, will bring a focus on doing this sort of project in our region as the effort continues to solve these issues.

Of course, the Conservancy still has several projects that focus on restoration. River Partners and the Parkway Trust both have ongoing projects, the Parkway Trust's Pond E project should be able to plant next year, and River Partner's Ball Ranch Planning study can lead to implementation in a few years. River Partner's work is also looking at the potential to capture the needs of the San Joaquin River Restoration Program to increase juvenile rearing habitat by looking into re-establishing a high-flow channel.

Approved Acquisitions: The Conservancy's mission is:

> "The San Joaquin River Conservancy is a regionally governed agency created to develop and manage the San Joaquin River Parkway, a planned 22-mile natural and recreational area in the floodplain extending from Friant Dam to Highway 99. The Conservancy's mission includes acquiring approximately 5,900 acres from willing sellers; developing, operating, and managing those lands for public access and recreation; and protecting, enhancing, and restoring riparian and floodplain habitat."

We have continued to acquire property or provided grants to our partners to acquire property since the Conservancy was established. Table 3 is a list of all the properties we have acquired under our management, while Table 4 lists properties that other organizations manage. For our recent acquisitions and the dates they were brought to the Board (and to the Wildlife Conservation Board), see Table 5.

Project Development: An important part of staff's work is to continually work with our existing and potential partners to put together projects to fulfill the San Joaquin River Parkway Master Plan Update of 2018. As described above, we have some important new partners, but we continue to work with others behind the scenes, with the hopes of developing projects that can either come to the Board for their approval, or potentially receive funding from other sources. An important group of projects that are included in our Master Plan, but not detailed, are dedicated river crossings for pedestrians and bicycles. We have been working with the State Lands Commission and the Tesoro Viejo Conservancy (TVC) for the last couple of years to further the process to replace the bridge between Ball Ranch and Ledger Island. With grant funding from the Conservancy, DWR assessed this bridge and determined that there were multiple deficiencies. Since that time, we have been working on concepts to replace this bridge so that we can allow easy access between Ball Rand and Ledger Island. Although the bridge should be safe for pedestrian and bicycle use, maintenance vehicle access to Ledger Island is important to fully open this area for public use. The TVC is interested in allowing users of their trail system to access both Ledger Island and Ball Ranch. We currently have an agreement with TVC for them to conduct member access and group activities, but the general public does not have formal access yet. (We have let the public know that we are not enforcing trespass for hiking, biking and fishing, especially since we do not have park rangers and our local law enforcement agencies have other priorities.) TVC offered to include a design and to work with the State Land

Commission to cover the replacement of this bridge in their application process. We believe that the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process will be finalized over the next year and that we can then look for funding for the final permitting and bid package development. We have not identified a funding source, or partner(s) for this but expect to work with the San Joaquin River Restoration Program. The existing bridge, besides being structurally deficient, interferes with the functioning of the River and is likely contributing to the downstream erosion that is collapsing the Ledger Island Bank.

Another important and potentially very positive effort for bridge construction is working with CalTrans, the City of Fresno, and our two Counties to address "Active Transportation Projects" and "Vehicle Miles Traveled". These two areas of potential development and funding maybe very useful in getting bridges or dedicated and protected paths on existing bridges. Both Highway 99 and Highway 41 bridges have the potential for a dedicated path since they have existing space that is not being used by motor vehicles. The planned replacement of the Friant Bridge is being led by Fresno County in partnership with Madera County. We have worked with them to have a protected bikeway included and at this point in the planning process we believe it is included. I am also working with various planning efforts to include bridges and other connections to the Easton Trail and believe that as the City of Fresno and our two counties move forward with the Vehicle Miles Traveled evaluations, that projects tying the Parkway to major bikeways will take place, including the potential for dedicated bridges.

Staff has also been in discussion with both Madera and Fresno Counties on projects that they have identified and worked with us in the past. Although these projects are mostly well received by county policymakers, staffing issues have led to a delay in progress. We have and will continue to work with them, though the Conservancy is now at the point where much of our current Bond funds are either committed or likely needed for the ongoing projects. We do believe that if we can get these projects ready to be formally proposed, they can be funded with future funding.

Other Stakeholder Outreach: The Conservancy, as part of the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA), has been actively involved in processes and programs to work across organizational programs. CNRA has successfully brought together its departments, commissions, and conservancies to more efficiently carry out all of our missions. Central to this has been information sharing between the conservancies. As an example, many of the Executive Officers of the other Conservancies have generously given their time to talk about how they manage and operate their lands and facilities. They have shared with me what they believe are the most efficient pathways to ensure that we have the resources available for operations and maintenance. In addition, I have had discussions with the leadership of some of the larger Departments, such as State Parks and the Department of Water Resources. Midsize Departments such as the Department of Conservation has also discussed potential partnerships with the Conservancy. This current fiscal year, CNRA and its departments and offices, received very large additional funding that we all realize needs to be efficiently expended in grants and programs. My staff and I will continue to work with CNRA to further both the Conservancy's mission, but also the mission of the State of California.

Legislation

I'm not sure how much I need to remind the Board of the busy year we had with legislation. Of course, AB 559 required a lot of attention and information sharing. We coordinated both with CNRA and with the Governor's office on how this bill was being amended as it worked its way through the system. I had many calls from you the Board, but also from other stakeholders. As a state employee, I could not advocate outside of my work with CNRA, but I was able to provide

information that likely helped shape the bill. While this was going on, we also had the state budget process going. This year was different than many in the past, in that our work through CNRA and the Governor's budget process to both propose the Governor's Budget last January, and then update in his May Revise, was not nearly the final work. We worked with the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) to increase our Bond Authority so that we now have all of Proposition 84 bond funds available and to cover administrative costs such as an increase in funding to cover the assistance WCB does for managing our funding. We worked with Assemblymember Arambula's office to estimate what our operations needs are, and finally, with CNRA to discuss the additional funding ($1.3 Million) the Conservancy received as part of the Climate Resiliency Package.

In Summary: We have accomplished a lot over the last few years. This has been possible by the hard work of the staff under the trying circumstances of dealing with remote work and lack of in-person meetings. We adapted and held meetings virtually or in the field with small groups and lots of space to walk and talk. I believe as the Executive Officer that I could have done more, but I believe for the most part that as part of a very good team, that includes not only my direct staff, but those we rely on from the WCB, State Parks, and Department of Justice. The help and guidance from CNRA and our sister organizations have been instrumental in project and program development. And finally, our partners that range from local governments and large non-profits to small non-profits and individuals are responsible for much of our progress. Our grantees have worked hard, under the same stressful conditions of COVID restricts, and have mostly succeeded or figured out ways to make it work. We have Scouts involved, local Facebook groups, chapters of national organizations, and many individuals that now know the Parkway is theirs and they have taken responsibility to help us make it better.

DocuSigned by:

John M. Shelton

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John M. Shelton
Executive Officer

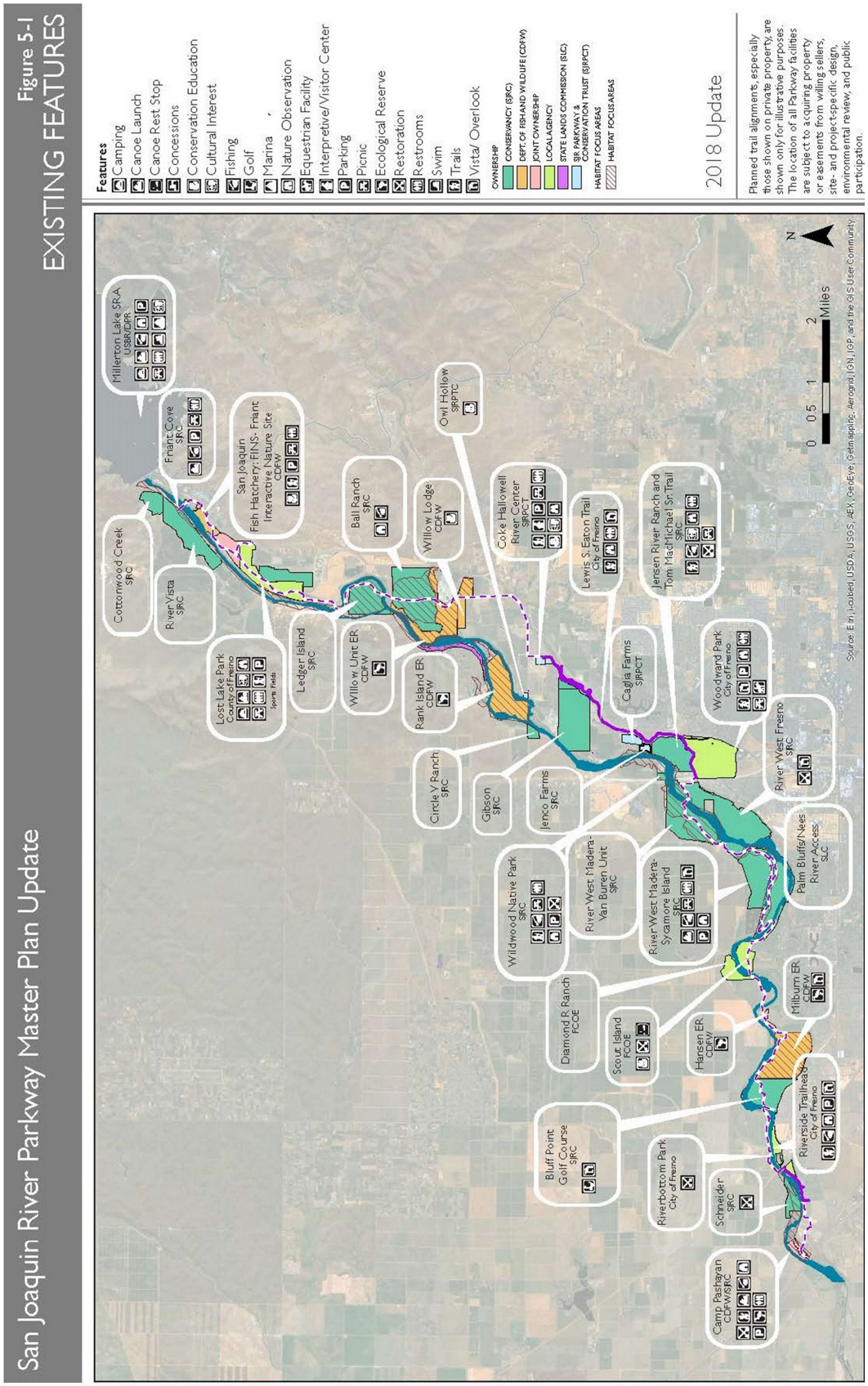

Figure 1: SJR Parkway Existing features, from the SJRC Master Plan Update 2018

Grants In Progress

Title	Grantee	SJRC Board	WCB Board	Start	End	Grant Amount	Other Funding	Project Status	Funding Sources
Jensen River Ranch, Jenco Farms Property Habitat Enhancement Project	Parkway Trust	Mar 2017	May 2017	Jun 2017	Jun 2021	$271,800	$6,000	Close out near	Prop 1
Sycamore Island Habitat Enhancement Project	Parkway Trust	May 2017	Aug 2017	Sep 2017	Mar 2023	$218,660	$0	Complete	Prop 84
Sycamore Island Fishing Pond Enhancement Project	DWR	Jul 2017	Aug 2017	Jun 2017	Jun 2020	$1,606,627	$187,000	Close out near: In use	Prop 1
Restoration Planning and Permitting at Ball Ranch and Willow Unit Project	River Partners	Sep 2019	Nov 2019	Apr 2020	Mar 2022	$375,690	$0	In Progress	Prop 1
Milburn Pond Isolation	DWR	Sep 2019	Nov 2019	Dec 2019	Sep 2022	$622,512	$773,642	In Progress	Prop 40
River West Fresno E-Pond Habitat Enhancement Project	Parkway Trust	Dec 2019	Feb 2020	Jun 2020	Jan 2024	$588,000	$8,000	In Progress	Prop 40
Augmentation: Sycamore Island Fishing Pond Enhancement Project	DWR	May 2020	May 2020	Jun 2017	Mar 2022	$200,000	$223,432	Close out near: In use	Prop 12 and Prop 40
Circle V Public Access Plan (Circle V)	USGBC-CV	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Apr 2021	Jun 2024	$1,050,000	$47,959	In Progress	Prop 84 ($874,659) Prop 40 ($175,341)
Western Reaches Access Activation Plan: Camp Pashayan to Millburn Overlook (WRAP)	FBHC	Mar 2021	May 2021	Aug 2021	Jul 2023	$1,519,000	$0	In Progress	Prop 84
Ball Ranch Managed Aquifer Recharge Planning and Analysis Project (Ball Ranch Flood MAR)	River Partners	Apr 2021	Aug 2021	Jul 2021	Jun 2023	$324,317	$304,933	Started	Prop 84
River West Eaton Trail Extension Project (River West)	City of Fresno	Sep 2021	Nov 2021	Dec 2021	Dec 2023	$3,104,831	$58,869	Approved by WCB	Prop 84
						Total	Total		
						$9,881,437	**$1,609,835**		

Prop 40: California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002	subtotal	$1,585,853
Prop 84: Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006	subtotal	$6,041,467
Prop1: Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014	subtotal	$2,254,117

Table 1. In Progress Grants (some are in close out)

Table 2. Bond Funding for the San Joaquin River Conservancy

San Joaquin River Conservancy Bond Funding					
Prop #	**Title**	**Year Passed**	**SJRC Funding**	**Active Appropriation Balance**	**Available for Appropriation**
12	**Prop 12**: Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000	March 2000	$15,000,000	$157,133	$0
40	**Prop 40:** California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002	March 2002	$25,000,000	$34,028	$0
84	**Prop 84**: Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006	November 2006	$36,000,000	$500,159	$0
1	**Prop 1:** Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014	November 2014	$10,000,000	$5,663,531	$0
68	**Prop 68**: California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access For All Act of 2018.	June 2018	$6,000,000	$0	$5,550,000
			Total	**Total**	**Total**
			$92,000,000	**$6,354,852**	**$5,550,000**

Table 3: San Joaquin River Parkway - San Joaquin River Conservancy's properties.

San Joaquin River Conservancy Properties

Land Acquisitions	Year	Fresno (Acres)	Madera (Acres)
Wildwood Native Park	1996	0.00	22.00
Jensen River Ranch	1997	156.10	0.00
Beck	1998	105.92	0.00
Friant Cove	1998	2.64	0.00
Ball Ranch	2000	358.40	0.00
Schneider	2000	0.00	47.10
Wagner (aka Cottonwood Creek)	2001	0.00	64.32
Ledger Island	2001	0.00	161.17
River Vista	2001	0.00	176.66
Van Buren (aka Proctor, Broadwell, Cobb, part of River West Madera)	2001	0.00	261.54
Willow Lodge (Finch, Glaspey)*	2002	40.00	0.00
River West Fresno (Spano)	2003	290.84	50.00
Sycamore Island	2005	0.00	347.00
Transfer of lands between DFG and SJRC including River Vista, Van Buren, Ledger Is, and Moen	2006-08		974.54
Liddell/Bluff Pointe Golfing Center	2005	134.00	0.00
Gibson	2008	320.96	0.00
SJ Fish Hatchery (Friant Station)*	2008	2.00	0.00
SJ Fish Hatchery (Hovannisian)*	2011	0.17	0.00
Camp Pashayan**	2012	11.43	0.00
Jenco Farms	2015	23.16	0.00
Circle V Ranch (Vinnard)	2016	0.00	20.82
Cobb/Madera Co	2020	0.00	11.52
Slenders (in process)	2021	0.00	35.45
Lanes Road - Gagnebin (on WCB's agenda for Feb. 2021)	2021	22.87	0
Total 2,666.07		**1468.49**	**1197.58**

*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.

Table 4: San Joaquin River Parkway – Public Lands other than SJRC Properties

OTHER PARKWAY PUBLIC LANDS

California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)	Year	Fee		Cons. Easement
		Fresno (Acres)	Madera (Acres)	
Hansen Unit San Joaquin River Ecological Reserve (ER)		34.00	0.00	
Lost Lake Park (see also County of Fresno)		76.00	0.00	
Rank Island Unit SJR ER		270.00	0.00	
SJ Fish Hatchery		35.35		
Milburn Unit SJR ER	1989	286.00	0.00	
Willow Unit SJR ER (1)	1990	149.67	0.00	
Willow Unit SJR ER (2)	1992	88.23	0.00	
Camp Pashayan Unit SJR ER**	1995/ 2012	20.00		
Total 959.25		**959.25**	**0.00**	**0.00**

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

San Joaquin River Parkway & Conservation Trust	Year	Fee		Cons. Easement
		Fresno (Acres)	Madera (Acres)	
Coke Hallowell River Center		20.00	0.00	
Spano Remnants	2003	6.00	0.00	
Owl Hollow	2005	5.00	0.00	
Caglia Farms	2006	28.20	0.00	
Sumner Peck Ranch Winery (in progress)	2021	76.20	0.00	
Total 59.2		**135.40**	**0.00**	**0.00**

American Farmland Trust	Year	Fee		Cons. Easement
		Fresno (Acres)	Madera (Acres)	
Hansen Conservation Easements		0.00	0.00	95
Total 95		**0.00**	**0.00**	**95.00**

Fresno County	Year	Fee		Cons. Easement
		Fresno (Acres)	Madera (Acres)	

Lost Lake Park (see also CDFW)		191.66	0.00	
Friant Road Scenic Lands (Eaton Trail)		141.00	0.00	
Total 332.66		**332.66**	**0.00**	**0.00**

Fresno County Office of Education	**Year**	**Fee**		**Cons. Easement**
		Fresno (Acres)	**Madera (Acres)**	
Scout Island	2000	84.66	0.00	
Diamond R Ranch	2000	0.00	68.00	
Total 152.66		**84.66**	**68.00**	**0.00**

City of Fresno	**Year**	**Fee**		**Cons. Easement**
		Fresno (Acres)	**Madera (Acres)**	
Riverbottom Park	1999	35.00	0.00	
Total 35.		**35.00**	**0.00**	**0.00**

US Bureau of Reclamation	**Year**	**Fee**		**Cons. Easement**
		Fresno (Acres)	**Madera (Acres)**	
Friant Dam Access Areas		137.50	137.50	
Total 275.		**137.50**	**137.50**	**0.00**

Partners Total		**Fee**		**Cons. Easement (Acres)**
		Fresno (Acres)	**Madera (Acres)**	
Total 1,889.97		**1684.47**	**205.50**	**95.00**

	Fee			**Cons. Easement (Acres)**
	Subtot	**Fresno (Acres)**	**Madera (Acres)**	
San Joaquin River Conservancy Properties	**2666.07**	**1468.49**	**1197.58**	**0.00**
Other Public Lands	**1813.77**	**649.02**	**205.50**	**95.00**
Total Public Lands in SJR Parkway	**4479.84**	**3076.76**	**1403.08**	**95.00**

Table 5: San Joaquin River Conservancy's Recent Acquisitions with Grant Funding.

Recent Aquisistions					
SJRC Board Date	**Property**	**Status**	**Grant Amount**	**Total Cost**	**Funding Sources**
Sep 2010	San Joaquin Fish Hatchery (Hovannisian Property). Grantee: CDFW	Escrow Closed	$28,500	$28,500	Prop 40
Jun 2016	Acquire the Circle V Property from the Vinnards - Madera County. Grantee: SJRC	Escrow Closed	$1,090,000	$1,090,000	Prop 84
Aug 2017	Acquire the Cobb Property from County of Madera - Madera County. Grantee: SJRC	Escrow Closed	$332,433	$332,433	Prop 84
Aug 2020	Acquire the Sumner Peck Ranch Property. Grantee: San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust (Parkway Trust)	Winery Concession open; open to other public use	$3,602,945	$3,698,945	Prop 84 ($202,945.) Prop 40 ($3,400,000)
Oct 2020	Lanes Road Fresno County Acquisition. Grantee: SJRC	Escrow Closed	$2,200,000	$2,200,000	Prop 84
Oct 2020	Slenders' Madera County Land Acquisition. Grantee: SJRC	General Service Review	$1,035,000	$1,035,000	Prop 84
Prop 40: California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002				subtotal	**$3,428,500**
Prop 84: Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006				subtotal	**$4,860,378**