

Sycamore Island

ANNUAL OPERATIONS REPORT: JULY 2023 - JUNE 2024

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SAN JOAQUIN RIVER PARKWAY AND CONSERVATION TRUST

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Basic Operations

Under agreement C22100002 The San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust operated Sycamore Island, including the attached Van Buren Unit for public daytime use, seven days per week. The park was open in 2023 through Veterans Day in November and then reopened after a brief winter break on January 12, 2024. Hours of operation changed seasonally depending on the length of daylight but generally allowed for public use from early morning to sunset. Hours of operation were as follows:

- January, February, March, October, November – 6:00am to 5:30pm
- April, September – 6:00am to 7:00pm
- May, June, July, August – 6:00am to 8:30pm

From the park's main entrance, visitors were able to drive into Sycamore Island and on all existing roads. The Van Buren unit was limited to pedestrians, cycling and horse riding. Small, trailered boats could be launched in the trout pond. Only electric trolling motors were allowed to be used in the ponds. Primitive put-ins for hand-launched boats were available at all other ponds and two were present on the river. Park rules included:

- No weapons
- No alcohol
- No off-roading
- No camping
- No fires, grills, or fireworks
- No hunting
- No loud music or noise

The smaller building onsite was used as a bait shop and center for park information. It was staffed and open to the public during all operating hours. Visitors paid day use fees on weekends at the bait shop. The Trust charged \$9 per vehicle and \$5 per trailer on Saturday and Sunday. Monday through Friday was free to enter. 12-month annual passes were available for \$85. Discounted day and annual passes were available to disabled individuals and veterans for \$6 and \$60 respectively. Vehicles that entered the park during the last 1.5 hours of operation on weekends were also eligible for a discounted \$6 vehicle fee.

Snacks, beverages, bait, lures, and tackle were sold on-site for profit. Bottled drinking water was sold at cost. A cash register and square card reader were used to process and track sales. Concessions sold for profit included:

- Soda, energy drinks, and sports drinks
- Pre-packaged chips, seeds, nuts, granola bars, and candy
- Live worms
- Hard and soft plastic lures
- Hooks, floats, sinkers, and fishing rods.

In addition to concessions, 1-person kayaks and 2-person canoes were available for rent during park hours for \$10 per hour or \$50 for all day. Boat rentals were limited to enclosed ponds and included paddles, lifejackets, and delivery or pickup to or from the water. Visitors had to be 18 years or older to rent a boat. Kids 12-years or older could ride in canoes if accompanied by an adult. Park Hosts helped with fitting life jackets and provided brief instructions on boat use upon delivery. Picnic Shelters were also able to be reserved for \$50 per day.

The larger building onsite was used as equipment and materials storage for park operations and on-site programs or events.

The bait shop also served as the base of operations for Park Hosts where they had access to a first aid kit, fire extinguisher, chairs, fans, drinking water dispenser, and a cell phone.

Two Park Hosts were always on duty and were responsible for opening and closing the property each day, tracking visitation, performing light grounds and facility maintenance, providing visitor information, and informing visitors of park rules. One host was always present at the bait shop, while the second host traversed the property for monitoring, maintenance, and to interact with visitors. Park Hosts provided a 45-minute courtesy reminder of the park's closing time and ensured all visitors had exited the property before locking up. Hosts had access to a golf cart, two-way radios, hand tools, supplies and personal protective equipment to complete tasks.

Most Park had worked at Sycamore Island the previous year, but all hosts received an orientation and training at the beginning of the year or at the start of their employment. New hosts were scheduled with the Park Manager or an experienced Park Host during the first two weeks for additional on-the-job training and supervision.

Daily monitoring and maintenance completed by Park Hosts included:

- Maintaining a consistent presence throughout the entire park as feasible.
- Monitoring the property for hazards, maintenance needs and ensuring visitors followed park rules.
- Picking up litter around the property.
- All trash cans were checked at least twice daily. Trash cans were emptied as needed and at least at the end of each day. Trash bags were placed in a dumpster on site that was emptied weekly.
- In addition to the two pairs of vault restrooms, five portable toilets and hand wash stations were rented and placed around the property. Portable toilets were serviced weekly. Additional hand wash stations were rented and placed at the vault restrooms. Park hosts provided light housekeeping and stocked all toilets as needed.
- The River Parkway Trust paid for the vault restrooms to be pumped shortly before the beginning of this agreement and monitors their levels.

Other monitoring and maintenance completed by park hosts:

- Mowing around the bait shop, picnic areas, bathrooms and other facilities.
- Cleaning picnic tables.
- Sweeping picnic shelters, paved walkways, and all other concrete surfaces.
- Graffiti removal and coverup.

Special Events, Interpretive Programs, & Recreational Activities

The San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust hosted and facilitated a wide array of public and private events, interpretive programs, and recreational activities at Sycamore Island during the upcoming year. Below is a list of those that took place between July 2023 and June 2024.

Color Coded Key: **Special Events** – **Interpretive Programs** – **Recreational Activities**

- **(Always available by request) Calm Water Adventures** – A guided paddling trip around the ponds that was suitable for all skill levels. Participants learned the basics of paddling, played

games, and learned about the natural world of the San Joaquin River Parkway. Public bookings were available through <https://riverparkway.org/activities/river-tours/>.

- **(Available October through April) Madera and Fresno Unified School District Field Trips** – 6th through 8th grade classrooms joined the San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust for special field trips that included canoeing, teambuilding, and educational activities that are NGSS and Common Core aligned for each grade level.
- **(July 2023) River Camp Academy for Sherman Thomas Charter School** – A private summer day camp for students of the Sherman Thomas Charter School Led by the Trust. Each day campers practiced paddle sports, swam, hiked, enjoyed interpretive activities, and did team building.
- **(July 2023) River Camp Academy for Madera Unified School District** – A private summer day camp for students of MUSD led by the Trust. Each day campers practiced paddle sports, swam, hiked, enjoyed interpretive activities, and did team building.
- **(July 2023) River Camp Voyagers** – A public summer day camp for entering 9th through 12th grade students. Each day campers practiced paddle sports, swam, hiked, learned basic naturalist skills, and did team building activities. Registration was available through <https://riverparkway.org/river-camp/river-camp-voyagers/>.
- **(July 2023) River Camp Voyagers VISTAS** – VISTAS was developed as an expansion of the Youth Parkway Ambassador program described below. It provides program graduates a comprehensive view of the San Joaquin River Watershed through overnight camping trips to the Sierra Nevada Mountains and the San Francisco Bay, as well as a 3-day program consisting of field trips and special presentations from organizations, individuals, and sites involved with the restoration of the San Joaquin River. A field trip for this program was held at Sycamore Island. More information can be found on the Trust's website: <https://riverparkway.org/education-programs/vistas/>.
- **(August 2023) River Stewards Volunteer Workday** – A public volunteer event through the Trust's monthly River Stewards volunteer programs. Volunteers removed the invasive plant, *Sesbania punicea*, as part of the Trust's Invasive Plant Removal and Jobs Creation Project for the San Joaquin River Restoration Program. Registration was available through the Trust's website: <https://riverparkway.org/ways-to-give/volunteer/>.
- **(August 2023) Family Fishing Clinic** – The San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust piloted a beginner level fishing clinic open to the public. Participants learned the basics of fishing using fishing rods, tackle, and lures provided by the Trust.

- **(September 2023) Run 4 The Miracle** – The Kiwanis Clubs of Fresno and Madera County held an annual 10k trail run, 5k run/walk, 2-mile fun run, and a kid's ¼ mile fun run to benefit Valley Children's Hospital Pediatric Trauma and Injury Prevention Program. The races began at the historic Cobb Ranch and went through the Van Buren Unit into Sycamore Island. Registration was available through runsignup.com.
- **(January 2024) Sycamore Island 5k and 10K Run** – An annual race through Sycamore Island and the Van Buren Unit hosted by the San Joaquin River Running. Registration was available through sanjoaquinrunning.com.
- **(February 2024) R I D E Foundation Group Ride** – The San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust coordinated with the R I D E Foundation for a group horse ride at Sycamore Island. This foundation is a nonprofit organization that helps people heal from emotional trauma using unadoptable mustangs.
- **(February and March 2024) Bald Eagle Tours** – Similar to Calm Water adventures, this was a guided paddling trip at the trout pond that was suitable for all skill levels. Participants observed and learned about bald eagles and other birds that called Sycamore Island home. Public bookings were available through <https://riverparkway.org/activities/river-tours/>.
- **(March 2024) San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust Members Walk** – A guided nature walk that included discussion of current Parkway projects and issues facing the river.
- **(March 2024) Youth Parkway Ambassadors Training** – Youth Parkway Ambassadors (YPA) is a 3-month program completed in partnership with Madera Unified School District. High school students learned about the San Joaquin River and its role in our community, shared memorable outdoor experiences with new friends, accessed and explored multiple parkway properties, and learned naturalist skills, while gaining experience planning events, creating outreach materials, and leading outdoor activities. Visit <https://riverparkway.org/activities/youth-parkway-ambassadors/> for more information.
- **(April 2024) Youth Parkway Ambassadors Open House** – The Youth Parkway Ambassadors taught the skills and activities they practiced to the community with the support of the Trust's resources and staff. The students held an open house event at Sycamore Island that was free to the public. They taught canoeing, lead hikes, taught fishing, and organized games. Visit <https://riverparkway.org/activities/youth-parkway-ambassadors/> for more information.
- **(April 2024) Justice Outside Calm Water Adventure** – The San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust partnered with Justice Outside to provide an outdoor training experience with young adults. Trust staff led team building activities, taught canoeing, and activities.

- **(May 2024) Latino Outdoors Family Canoeing** – The San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust partnered with Latino Outdoors to provide a family event featuring canoeing, a nature walk, and art activities.

Repairs and Maintenance Projects

The following repairs and maintenance work, as proposed by the San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust and as approved by the San Joaquin River Conservancy within agreement C22100002, occurred between July 2023 and June 2024. Many of the deferred maintenance projects planned for this operating year were postponed until a permanent Executive Office was in place at the San Joaquin River Conservancy. This list does not take into account the unexpected repairs and maintenance that arose from public access operations at the park.

All work was completed in accordance with the rules, regulations, and guidance outlined in agreement C22100002 with the San Joaquin River Conservancy. Any necessary permitting was completed by the Trust in coordination with the San Joaquin River Conservancy. The Trust followed its internal procurement policy to gather estimates and sought further approval from the San Joaquin River Conservancy where required.

Fall 2023

- The San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust work with the California Conservation Corps for vegetation management to reduce fuel loads and remove hazardous tree limbs.

Winter 2023/2024

- Began initial assessment of the Property's power connection and equipment.
- Began initial assessment of the repairs needed for the bait shop's roof, ceiling, and HVAC unit.
- Created a protective barrier and installed signage along an eroded bank and road.

Spring 2024

- Worked with SJRC staff to contract Madera County to produce and install new roads signs to direct visitors to Sycamore Island.

- Met with PG&E to discuss potential courses of action to repair the property's power connection and equipment, or to transition the system from its current 3-phase connection to a single-phase system. This communication is ongoing. We are working with PG&E to receive a written recommendation including what equipment would be provided by them.
- Performed additional vegetation management to reduce fuel loads and remove hazardous tree limbs.
- Worked with SJRC staff and CDFW to coordinate pond surveys and receive a fish stocking strategy.

Summer 2024

- The San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust met with the San Joaquin River Conservancy to discuss the budget and direction for deferred maintenance items.
- Performed additional vegetation management to reduce fuel loads and remove hazardous tree limbs.