

# A Vision for Sutter's Landing Park Sacramento's Gateway to the American River Parkway



Created by Friends of Sutter's Landing Park  
<http://www.sutterslandingpark.org>

## *A Vision for Sutter's Landing Park*

*Create a welcoming and safe place  
along the American River Parkway  
at historic Sutter's Landing Park  
in Midtown Sacramento  
where families and individuals  
can relax, recreate, and enjoy the beauty  
and wonders of nature,  
both now and for generations to come.*



# The Opportunity

Nestled along the banks of the American River about a mile northeast of downtown Sacramento and less than three miles from California's State Capitol, Sutter's Landing Park is a natural treasure in the heart of Sacramento. It serves as a historic gateway to the 31.5-mile American River Parkway, which enjoys more than 8 million visitor days per year—more than Yosemite National Park! With high population densities in the nearby adjacent neighborhoods of Midtown, Downtown, and East Sacramento, one of Sutter's Landing's best aspects is its accessibility to city residents.



Sutter's Landing presents the opportunity of a nature park in the middle of the Central City, providing habitat for wildlife, as well as great access to trails along the American River for people. This 163-acre park currently offers a wide variety of other recreational opportunities, such as a covered skateboard park, a dog park, and the more recently added basketball and bocce ball courts.

Sutter's Landing offers a unique opportunity to enhance the quality of life of residents today and for future generations. The park could become a legacy project for the City of Sacramento, enriching the livability of our city and making it a destination

for families, nature-lovers, and outdoor recreation enthusiasts.

There exists an opportunity to add to the current park by widening the corridor along the river that supports wildlife, by expanding access for people to enjoy this resource through additional nature trails, and by helping inspire children and their families through increasing opportunities to learn about science, nature, and the history of this important site.



# Location



*Sutter's Landing Park is a riparian and upland corridor of the American River that serves as a buffer to the urban environment while providing vital habitat and recreation for wildlife and people.*



# History

The Nisenan, or Southern Maidu, were the original inhabitants of this area. Traditionally, the Valley Nisenan lived along running water and traveled from place to place in boats made of tule reeds. They thrived by hunting, fishing, and gathering food from the area.

In 1839, John Sutter and his men, after coming up the Sacramento River, landed at the northwest corner of what would eventually become Sutter's Landing Park. Shortly thereafter, Sutter established a permanent camp, and later built his fort at the current site of Sutter's Fort, the first settlement within the present city limits of Sacramento.

Soil was taken from the Sutter's Landing area to build levees and elevate the city to prevent flooding. By the mid-1800's, these

excavations resulted in the formation of large pits. Over time, the pits were filled in with garbage generated by the expanding city. The site became known as the 28th Street Landfill. It became the city's primary landfill, growing to become the highest point in the City of Sacramento.

After decades of use, the city first identified the landfill as the site of a future regional park in 1984. It was named Sutter's Landing Park by the City Council in 1989 and a Preliminary Master Plan for Sutter's Landing Park was adopted in 1995. The City of Sacramento's current approved Sutter's Landing Park Master Plan was adopted in October 2003. Since then, a number of substantial improvements have been made to the park.



# American River Parkway Plan

The first inklings of a parkway along the American River date back almost a hundred years. As far back as 1915, the first possibility of a protected parkway along the American River was outlined by the eminent urban planner John Nolen.

In the late 1940s, efforts for a parkway were again brought forward by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., the renowned planner and landscape architect and son of Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., the designer of New York's Central Park. Olmsted emphasized the importance of some kind of protection for the river, including a parkway for the "Sacramento River and its Tributaries."

Naturalist Elmer Aldrich, of Sacramento's River Park neighborhood, renewed efforts to create a parkway in the early 1950s. He envisioned a protected recreation area through the creation of the American River Parkway. He called for the public purchase of private land to form "an integrated park system for public enjoyment."

In 1962, the first American River Parkway Plan was adopted in concept by Sacramento County, declaring

the county's intent to preserve an open space greenbelt along the length of the American River in Sacramento County. The plan has been revised

a number of times since its adoption, including most recently in 2008. The primary goal of the plan is, "To provide, protect and enhance for public use a continuous open space greenbelt along the American River extending from the Sacramento River to Folsom Dam."



Map of the 1915 American River Parkway Plan by John Nolen.

The riverfront area of Sutter's Landing Park is included in the Woodlake Area Plan. Woodlake Area Plan Policy 10.16 of the 2008 American River Parkway Plan aims to:

"Protect, enhance, and expand native habitats that benefit fish and wildlife species including creation of seasonal wetland habitat, grassland restoration for raptor foraging habitat, and restoration of riparian and woodland habitat."

It's time to further implement the vision of the American River Parkway Plan in and around Sutter's Landing Park.

*"The Parkway also provides a naturalistic riparian corridor and open space greenbelt teeming with terrestrial and aquatic vegetation and wildlife. Beginning at the confluence with the Sacramento River at the northern edge of the City of Sacramento's downtown core, the Parkway provides a refreshing respite from the pressures of urban living....the American River Parkway truly is the Sacramento regional jewel."*

# Friends of Sutter's Landing Park Objectives

- Keep it Wild! Restore and enhance wildlife values at Sutter's Landing Park for the benefit of the wildlife and the enjoyment, education and well-being of all who visit.
- Restore and enhance wildlife values on the land surrounding Sutter's Landing Park by extending the boundaries of the American River Parkway to include additional land between the Capital City Freeway overpass and the 17th Street Bridge (on the southern side of the American River), including willing seller acquisition projects.
- Create a safe and direct connection between Sutter's Landing Park and the larger American River Parkway via a new pedestrian and bike trail connector.
- Enhance recreational opportunities that are compatible with wildlife values.
- Incorporate environmental, historical and cultural educational features and activities within the park.
- Evaluate strategic locations within Sutter's Landing Park which may be appropriate for green energy generation, as long as:
  1. The construction and operation are non-disruptive to wildlife and habitat and are aesthetically appropriate for the American River Parkway, AND
  2. A significant portion of the revenues generated through the lease of the park's land is directed toward wildlife habitat restoration within the park.
- Endeavor to make Sacramento's Sutter's Landing Park a model for connecting urban families and individuals with nature.



# The Ecosystem

Diverse communities of plants and animals coexist within the natural areas at Sutter's Landing. The river attracts a wide variety of terrestrial and aquatic birds, mammals and other wildlife species. Riparian wetlands habitat provides food, water and shelter for a wide variety of birds, mammals, insects, fish and plants that make their home here.

The American River is the dominant element of this ecosystem and, along with shoreline and upland habitats, form a connected and interdependent system. Submerged plants provide food and shelter for many creatures. River otters den and forage near the river's edge. Plant foods sustain turtles, crayfish and aquatic insect larvae. A cottonwood forest offers ideal nesting habitat for the threatened Swainson's Hawk, as well as many other birds, mammals, butterflies and other insects. Nearby upland areas provide foraging for many species as well as cover and nesting for other wildlife.

Seasonal patterns in river level and flow fluctuations create changes throughout the year, presenting different habitat conditions for the plants and wildlife that rely on the area for sustenance and providing visitors with the ability to view an array of wildlife.



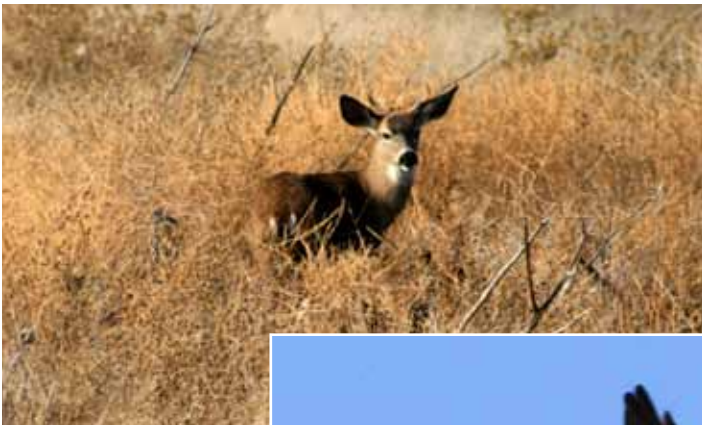


# Wildlife

The diversity of wildlife making a home at Sutter's Landing Park and nearby areas is surprising and impressive, especially considering how close it is to Downtown Sacramento. The area provides a home for wildlife that are at-risk, including Swainson's hawks (California Threatened species), white-tailed kites (California Fully Protected Animal), and northern harriers (California Species of Special Concern).

Visitors can also see river otters, beavers, jackrabbits, cottontails, coyotes, raccoons, gopher

snakes, fence lizards, skunks, ground squirrels, voles, and an occasional sea lion. Aquatic life includes clams, crawdads, catfish, salmon, steelhead trout, and other fish. Western pond turtles, the only native fresh-water turtle on the Pacific Coast, can be found here along with the introduced red-eared slider.



*Clockwise from top left: Black-tailed deer, birdwatchers, northern harrier, river otter, raccoon tracks; (center) red-tailed hawk with prey*



# Birds

Ranging from shorebirds and waterfowl to raptors, a wide range of birds can be spotted at Sutter's Landing, making it an excellent location for birding. Wood ducks, mallards, mergansers, cormorants, geese, pied-billed grebes, Swainson's hawks (California Threatened species), northern harriers (California Species of Special Concern), white-tailed kites (California Fully Protected Animal), red-tailed and red-shouldered hawks, barn and great horned owls, great blue heron, lesser and greater egrets, killdeer, western sandpipers, western meadowlarks, black phoebes, red-winged blackbirds, kestrels, ash-throated flycatchers, northern mockingbirds, belted

kingfishers, northern flickers, cedar waxwings, warblers, woodpeckers, Anna's hummingbirds, yellow-billed magpies, sparrows, swallows, wrens, American goldfinches, mourning doves, robins, as well as Lazuli buntings can all be seen at various times of the year, depending on migration patterns.



*Clockwise from top left: Common egret, Swainson's hawks, birdwatchers, great blue heron; (center) spotted towhee*



# Plants

A variety of plants make their home along the river at Sutter's Landing, including cottonwood trees, elderberry bushes, non-native fig trees, box elders, at least three species of willows, sedges, mushrooms, and many more. Previous disturbances have allowed the establishment of common non-native plants in

areas. Some restoration work has been done through Friends of the River Banks, with more planned to bring back a number of the native plant species.



*Clockwise from top left: Wild grapes, honeybee pollinating native blackberry flowers, cattails, oak woodland*



# Butterflies, Dragonflies, and More

Numerous insects can be found at Sutter's Landing Park, including at least 35 species of butterflies, dragonflies, ladybugs, bees and beetles. The valley elderberry longhorn beetle, a federally threatened species, can be found at Sutter's Landing. Both the western tiger swallowtail and pipevine swallowtail butterflies can be seen at Sutter's Landing. The pipevine swallowtail caterpillars feed only on Dutchman's pipe, a vine found along the American River.

Other types of invertebrates, not as showy as the butterflies and dragonflies, are found in the water and on land. These species play a critical role in the food chain. Without them, the birds and mammals would not exist here.



*Clockwise from top left: Merganser family with crayfish for dinner; damselfly, clam, looking at critters, exploring the river*



# Recreational Opportunities

Sutter's Landing offers myriad opportunities for a variety of recreational activities for families and a place for children to experience nature. Some of the recreational opportunities include:

- Interpretive/hiking trails that provide opportunities to view wildlife in their natural habitats
- Boat launch for kayaks, canoes, and other non-motorized boats
- Dog park
- Photography
- Bird-watching
- Cycling
- Walking and jogging
- Spiritual practices such as meditation and tai chi
- Yoga
- Bocce ball
- Basketball
- Skateboard park
- Outdoor stage
- Restoration work
- Nature walks
- Picnicking



*Four photos above: Existing recreational facilities at Sutter's Landing Park include a large dog park, bocce ball court, basketball court, and a skateboard park.*

# Educational Opportunities

With its proximity to a large population base, Sutter's Landing presents a wonderful opportunity for a range of educational programs, on topics such as Native-American history, science, natural history, and living history, including programs for children that focus on the natural and cultural history of the American River Parkway. Sutter's Landing offers the space for educational programs that focus on the environment and on the importance of restoration, preservation, and conservation.



# Restoration Opportunities

Opportunities exist at Sutter's Landing for improving wildlife habitat through plantings of native species, thereby bringing back the area to a more natural state. Especially if additional land can be brought into the park, the wildlife corridor

could be widened and restored and the riverside habitat could be increased, providing a wider and significantly more productive wildlife corridor for visitors to enjoy.



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# Friends and Supporters

The following organizations, businesses, and individuals support the Friends of Sutter's Landing mission:

- B Street Theatre
- Boulevard Park Neighborhood Association
- Courtyard School
- East Sacramento Preservation
- Friends of the River Banks
- Friends of Grant Park
- Garcia Realty
- Joseph Cornell, author, *Sharing Nature with Children*
- Marshall School New Era Neighborhood Association
- McKinley East Sacramento Neighborhood Association
- Midtown Neighborhood Association
- Mindset Software
- New Era Community Garden
- Thai Basil
- Habitat 2020
  - Sacramento Audubon Society
  - Save The American River Association (SARA)
  - Sacramento Area Creeks Council
  - California Native Plant Society - Sacramento Valley Chapter
  - Friends of Swainson's Hawk (FOSH)
  - Save Our Sandhill Cranes (SOS Cranes)
  - Environmental Council of Sacramento (ECOS)

One of our partner organizations, Friends of the River Banks (FORB), offers free nature walks and activities on the second Saturday morning of most months. Recent walks include an expert-guided talk about subjects such as geology, mushrooms, birds, native plants, and dragonflies. For more information, visit <http://www.friendsoftheriverbanks.com>.



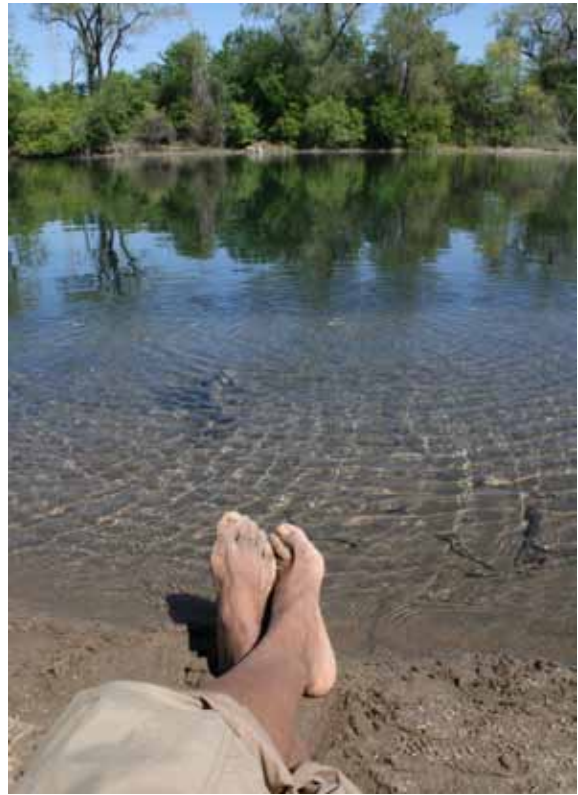


# Conclusion

Sutter's Landing Park is a place where people can bask in the natural world within the hustle and bustle of our urban core. It is a place where children can play and absorb themselves in nature. It offers wildlife a home within our urban midst and a chance for urban residents to connect with nature. The opportunity is there to expand upon.



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## *Keep It Wild!*

*There's a stretch along the American River  
Where nature's beauty will set you free,  
There's an oasis in the heart of Sacramento,  
A place our children love to be.  
Let's keep it wild!*

*We invite our community leaders to join us  
In restoring wildlife values as we strive  
To enhance Sacramento's urban oasis  
So that all life at Sutter's Landing Park can thrive.  
Let's keep it wild!*

*It is time to connect with the river,  
As the honorable Nisenan people of the Maidu tribe would do,  
It is a constant source of wisdom,  
And of lessons, old and new.  
Let's keep it wild!*

*Now imagine our great grandchildren  
Playing along these historical shores,  
Laughing with the river otters,  
Watching the spectacular Swainson's hawks soar.  
Let's keep it wild!*



**Contact Friends of Sutter's Landing Park**  
**<http://www.sutterslandingpark.org>**

Laurie Litman  
916-444-5118; [llitman@pacbell.net](mailto:llitman@pacbell.net)

Lori Ward  
916-448-3465; [grisward@sbcglobal.net](mailto:grisward@sbcglobal.net)

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