



San Joaquin River
Parkway and
Conservation Trust, Inc.

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*Can you remember the last time you stepped outside with no agenda
and truly embraced the unhurried pace of nature?*

You may have paused to discover which flowers captivated the buzzing bees, noticed the variations among the rocks beneath your feet, or found solace on a bench while observing the intricate movements of birds, insects, and the ever-changing canvas of the sky.

In our fast-paced world, it can be challenging to find the time and mindset necessary to slow down, disconnect, and genuinely appreciate the beauty and serenity of nature. But I recently have been inspired to prioritize slowing down when heading outside.

And that inspiration came from Xander, a four-year-old preschooler who joined the Trust's Young Explorers Enrichment Outdoor Preschool Program this year.

It was incredible to watch Xander and his peers fully connect with the natural landscapes of the River Center and Sumner Peck Ranch. Throughout the program, Xander developed a sense of belonging and confidence outside. His journey was transformational.

And YOU made his journey possible!

That's why I'm writing to you today – to share how your generous support has impacted young children like Xander and to inspire you to follow in his footsteps by slowing down and embracing your next adventure outside.



CREATING AND PROTECTING THE SAN JOAQUIN RIVER PARKWAY
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I first met Xander during a special tree planting at the River Center. It had been raining steadily the previous few days, and a light drizzle continued that morning. Xander and his classmates gathered near the new picnic shelter, preparing to plant Valley oak seedlings. After an introduction about oak trees, we directed the children to find the planting hole they liked best. I watched Xander and his group as they dug their hands into the soil and delicately placed the seedling. I could hear small voices wishing the tree a wonderful life as they covered the acorn.

Then the real fun began.

The rain had formed giant mud puddles in the area. And few things are more enticing to a young child than a mud puddle. One by one, Xander and his peers began to explore what limits would be placed on their muddy fun. The preschool program focuses on giving kids a chance to connect deeply to the land, and that includes playing in the mud. Splashing, laughing, and expressions of joy ensued. "I need more mud," Xander exclaimed, throwing his mud-caked hands in the air.

Reflecting on that day makes my heart glad. Thanks to you and others like you, the River Center will be a place where Xander can return to sit beneath the oak tree he planted, fondly remembering what it was like to play in the mud without a care in the world.

Will you make a special donation of \$100, \$250, or more to support opportunities for young children to explore and connect with the outdoors?

Because outdoor nature play and education in early childhood support sustainability outcomes later in life. Providing repeated and enjoyable opportunities for young children to engage with green space means preparing future generations to steward protected lands.

The Trust's outdoor preschool program focuses on learning through play, exploration, and hands-on experiences using nature as the classroom. Each day builds on the last, with adaptable program activities that engage each child's interests. It's been remarkable to witness how quickly the children adjusted to the natural space, becoming more confident every day. An example of this confidence is the behavioral change around bees from the beginning to the end of the session.

Like many young children, Xander demonstrated a fear of bees. At first sight of a bee, he and his group would scream and attempt to escape. The Trust's Preschool Program Director, Lauren, saw this as an opportunity. *"If I can help these children understand the benefits of bees, we can overcome this fear,"* she thought.

Lauren focused on sharing why bees are essential to life on Earth and talked about what might cause a bee to sting. While on a scavenger hunt, Lauren paused and asked Xander to stop and watch the bees. She asked him questions to focus on the action of the bees instead of his fear. *"What are they doing? Which do you think is their favorite type of flower? Where are they going most often?"*

As he watched, Xander became more curious, pointing out how the bees seemed to really like the blossoms in the citrus orchard. Other children in the group also joined in to make observations about what the bees were doing. There was no more screaming or running away after that day. By the end of the program, Lauren helped Xander and his peers build enough confidence to sit calmly and listen to a story about pollinators near the bee boxes at Sumner Peck Ranch.

Because of his experience, Xander learned that he could exist in the same space as the bees and the other wild creatures that make the San Joaquin River home. Building this confidence at such a young age will provide a foundation for a lifetime of enriching experiences in the outdoors.

Your generosity makes this work possible. When you donate to the River Parkway Trust, you support the stewardship of open space that bees and other pollinators rely on to survive. And you help provide programming that gives children like Xander the space and time to see, name, and develop a sense of caring for the plants and animals found along the Parkway.

Will you help continue this work by making a donation of \$100, \$250, or more today?

During one of the final program dates this spring, I encountered Xander's group on an exploratory nature walk. Xander and a few other children huddled together, investigating something on the ground. As I approached, I could see they were working to identify animal scat they had found near the edge of a squirrel hole. Before I reached the group, I heard a familiar voice. *"There was a bobcat here,"* Xander announced.

Lauren encouraged the children in her group to slow down, stop, ask questions, and investigate their surroundings during the nature walk. Xander was among the first to spot the squirrel hole and scat. Together they described what they were seeing and, with Lauren's help, identified wildlife that had visited the space based on the clues left behind.

In our world, filled with constant busyness, the Trust's outdoor preschool program provides children a space to exist without an adult's agenda. The open-ended nature of the program allows participants to explore, experiment, and learn to overcome challenges independently. Xander became a problem solver, and his peers became educators to one another, fostering a strong sense of self-reliance and cooperation.

Xander became an independent explorer through repeated experiences in the natural settings on the San Joaquin River Parkway. Programs like the outdoor preschool provide meaningful connections to the San Joaquin River that instill a lifelong love for the outdoors and concern for the natural environment.

The River Parkway Trust's work begins with land conservation, recognizing our shared responsibility for future generations. Will they be ready to care for the San Joaquin River Parkway when their time comes?

As I've witnessed Xander's transformation this year, I can tell you the answer is an emphatic YES!

Especially with your support! Will you make a special donation of \$100, \$250, or an amount that reflects the value you see in the Parkway? Your support today will help protect and steward the places where young children can learn about bees, rocks, flowers, and themselves.

I opened this letter with a question for you. *Can you remember the last time you stepped outside with no agenda and truly embraced the unhurried pace of nature?*

Today, there are more places along the Parkway to get outside with no agenda. I encourage you to visit Sycamore Island, now open seven days a week. Or, enjoy a picnic near the oak trees planted by our preschoolers at the River Center. Don't be afraid to splash in a puddle. Head outside with the mindset of a preschooler, pause, look around, and enjoy exploring the amazing wonders of nature.

Thank you for supporting the River Parkway Trust's land conservation work and outdoor programs. I am incredibly grateful for your partnership in creating and protecting the San Joaquin River Parkway.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sharon J. Weaver", with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Sharon J. Weaver
Executive Director

P.S. Your special donation will support the places and programs that provide all of us a chance to develop a deep connection to the San Joaquin River.