



San Joaquin River  
Parkway and  
Conservation Trust, Inc.

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Greetings,

*“This is so great for the children – teaching them about where they live.”*

Those are the words of a bus driver that brought students out for our first school field trip at Owl Hollow, a recently improved site on the river. I caught up with them on the road into the site to see how the buses navigated the dirt road into the property. Some school districts won’t allow buses to drive on dirt roads, and I felt some trepidation as I joined the line of buses entering the first entry gate.

The first bus driver had trouble navigating the turn. She stopped her bus in the middle of the gate, worried that she wouldn’t make it. The second bus driver was a veteran, and he parked his vehicle and walked over to help. I parked behind his bus and walked up to see how it all worked out. As I passed the bus full of six graders, I heard them chattering with excitement in a way that was contagious. Their enthusiasm and energy swept me up, and I realized,

**This is a great day to visit the San Joaquin River!**

If you’re anything like me, you often settle into a day-to-day routine and take the natural world and wonders that surround us for granted. As I walked by the bus that Monday morning, I was reminded of how even short trips can be an **ADVENTURE**. The students weren’t quite sure what to expect. Some of them were nervous, some of them were excited, and all of them were pleased to be out of the classroom for a few hours.

*When did you last feel that kind of nervous excitement about a new experience? Were you traveling? Were you learning something new?*



**CREATING AND PROTECTING THE SAN JOAQUIN RIVER PARKWAY**  
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The school buses were both able to navigate the first turn through the gate and made their way down the road toward the Owl Hollow. The first rainstorm of the season created large mud puddles in a few areas, and as I followed the buses, I confess that I was quite worried about how the drivers would characterize the experience.

Would they deem the road unsafe for buses? Would they suggest that no future trips should use this site?

I stopped just outside of the property to survey the students as they disembarked. The excitement was permeable. They were laughing, talking, thrilled to be outdoors in a new place. Even from a distance, I could feel their energy.

Ninety students gathered in the picnic shelter, and our program team began an orientation to the site. “*Good morning, my friends,*” Program Assistant Katie said as she welcomed the students to Owl Hollow. Katie covered the obligatory masking requirements and provided an overview of the activities that would take place during the visit.

As I walked up to the bus drivers, I asked them how they felt about the drive in. I worried that they might be angry about the muddy road and concerned about their ability to navigate the drive on the way out. Instead, the male driver responded:

*“It’s so beautiful out here! I was a little worried about the road when I first looked at it, but it’s no problem. This is so great for the children, teaching them about where they live—showing them what they have right in their own backyard. It’s so important for them to see these things. **I love what you’re doing.**”*

Whew! Relief washed over me. I had been worried that this person would be more concerned about the mechanics of his job and unable to see the purpose of driving down a muddy road to a new site on the San Joaquin River. Instead, he reminded me of the value of our work.

And that’s why I’m writing to you today. You see, our work doesn’t take place without private support. Unlike a school district or other agency, the Trust doesn’t receive government funding in the traditional sense. Grants and fees pay for certain projects and programs, but we couldn’t make it all happen without you.

**Will you make a year-end donation of \$50, \$100, or more to support education programs and the creation of outdoor spaces like Owl Hollow?**

While exploring Owl Hollow, the students found animal tracks and talked about the birds, fish, coyotes, bobcats, and other wildlife that rely on the San Joaquin River. Several hawks flew overhead and created teachable moments. They participated in stream science activities and returned to school with a new appreciation for the world we inhabit.

As a River Parkway Trust supporter, you contribute to one of the most important parts of the Parkway effort. Your generosity helps provide education opportunities and protect and steward the land our local wildlife depends on to survive.

**Your year-end donation of \$50, \$100, or more will support land conservation and stewardship projects to benefit the fish, birds, and animals found at Owl Hollow and other Parkway lands in the year ahead. Will you make a special donation right away?**

The students on this field trip were from Madera Unified School District. Every sixth-grader in the district participates in three program days with the Trust. Before the field trip, the program team completed the first in the series of program days, an in-class presentation focused on the San Joaquin River watershed and lifecycles of trout and salmon. The in-class presentation gives the students a baseline of knowledge to prepare them for their time in the field.

We've added a new element to the sixth-grade program this year. Each elementary school will participate in the Trout in the Classroom program with students raising trout at their school. In the spring, the students will participate in a field trip to Sycamore Island in Madera County. There they will release the fish they've raised in the classroom, learning about the next phase of the fish life cycle and enjoying another joyful learning experience on the river.

The River Parkway Trust's work begins with land conservation, recognizing our shared responsibility for future generations like the Madera Unified sixth-graders we will serve this year.

Will those young people be ready to take over the stewardship of the San Joaquin River Parkway when their time comes?

**If they have the chance for a few more adventures on the San Joaquin River, I think the answer is a resounding YES!**

You make outdoor education programs for young people possible as a River Parkway Trust donor. Your generosity supports places and programs for children to learn about the importance of the San Joaquin River and the wildlife it supports.


Will you help the River Parkway Trust continue expanding programs to connect children and youth to the San Joaquin River? Please make a year-end donation of \$50, \$100, or more right away!

As I returned to the office after observing the field trip, I felt a renewed responsibility to expand access so that more students can experience the beauty, mental renewal, and excitement of a trip to the river. And I was overwhelmed with gratitude for you who make these opportunities possible.

**Will you consider a year-end gift of \$50, \$100, or more? Your generosity today will contribute to a new year of conservation projects and outdoor programs. Please write a check or donate online before December 31, 2021.**

Thank you for considering the River Parkway Trust in your year-end giving plans. In this season of gratitude, I am incredibly thankful for your support of the San Joaquin River Parkway.

Sincerely,



Sharon Weaver  
Executive Director

***P.S. Your year-end donation translates to more joyful river experiences for children in our community. Please write a check or donate online by December 31st!***