



San Joaquin River
Parkway and
Conservation Trust, Inc.

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Dear Friend,

“I’ve never seen a live fish before,” Mariana shared with the group as she peered over the edge of the holding tank.

Noticing the look of surprise on some of the faces of her fellow high school students and the Trust’s program staff, Mariana continued. *“I mean, I’ve seen a fish being caught, and I’ve eaten fish.”*

But I’ve never watched a fish like swimming around in the wild.”

The first live fish Mariana saw was an adult Chinook salmon emerging from the water as she and the other VISTAS Voyagers tossed krill into the tank for feeding. They were taking part in a tour of the interim Salmon Conservation and Research Facility at the San Joaquin Fish Hatchery. Throughout the morning, Mariana learned about the lifecycle of salmon and had the opportunity to see the fish at different stages, from egg to spawning adult.

Things got even more exciting from there. As the tour continued, hatchery staff engaged Mariana and her peers in research activities, including counting fish, identifying viable eggs, and catching fish to weigh and measure. Mariana was fascinated as she realized that some of the fish she held would eventually journey to the sea. Mariana was becoming a fish biologist right before our eyes.

YOU made her experience possible!

That’s why I’m writing to you today – to share how your generosity has impacted local youth as they’ve had new experiences in and developed a connection to natural spaces.



Mariana's first encounter with the San Joaquin River came during her sixth-grade year. She was part of the River Parkway Trust's Madera Unified field trip program, in which students are engaged in an in-class presentation and two field trips on the Parkway. Mariana had the chance to paddle a canoe on the Old Muddy Pond at Sycamore Island during her time with the program.

Years later, as a high school senior at Madera High South, Mariana joined an orientation about a new program in which she could learn more about the river and outdoor recreation activities. As the orientation went on, she knew she wanted to become a Youth Parkway Ambassador.

As Mariana and her peers spent more time outside on the Parkway and learned more about the San Joaquin River watershed, an eagerness to experience the outdoors at night and in new places emerged. Trust staff witnessed a budding confidence growing within Mariana as she deepened her connection to the San Joaquin River's ecosystems – it was confidence that she would rely on more and more as her time with the Trust continued.

Taking into account feedback from Mariana's cohort of the Ambassadors program, the Trust developed a new program opportunity to give high school students more opportunities to explore the San Joaquin River watershed. When Mariana first heard about the VISTAS program, she couldn't wait to sign up.

Thinking about Mariana's journey with the Trust gives me so much hope for the future of the Parkway. And I feel gratitude for friends like YOU who make it possible for teens like Mariana to enjoy many enriching experiences outside throughout their childhoods. Your support translates into future stewards of the San Joaquin River Parkway.

Will you make a year-end donation of \$25, \$50, or more to sustain experiences like Mariana's in the year ahead?

There are many young people like Mariana growing up in our region who haven't yet had the chance to paddle a canoe or see a fish swimming in the wild, who will graduate from high school and embark on a pathway to their future in the years ahead. With your support, they can have multiple meaningful outdoor experiences that provide exposure to conservation, science, education, and recreation career paths.

Mariana joined the VISTAS program with peers from the first two groups of Youth Parkway Ambassadors (YPA). VISTAS is an extension of YPA and allows teens to experience overnight campouts in the Sierra Nevada Mountains and on the Pacific Coast, along with a week of river exploration at River Camp Voyagers.

During the program, VISTAS participants also host a public volunteer day to remove invasive plant species from the Parkway. The program culminates with participants creating a capstone project documenting their experiences in the outdoors. The projects will be featured in a special exhibit at the Riverview Ranch House through December.

A Madera Unified school bus pulled into Sumner Peck Ranch on a warm morning in late spring. Mariana felt excited about the day ahead, during which she would practice setting up a tent. Working in teams and with support from the Trust's program staff, slowly but surely, the tents were successfully erected. The group felt a sense of accomplishment and looked forward to the upcoming campout at Redinger Lake and Horseshoe Bend Hike.

The day finally came in mid-June. Though she felt a bit nervous since it would be the longest hike she'd completed, Mariana was ready for the trek to Horseshoe Bend.

When they returned to the trailhead after hiking 7+ miles, each participant shared how good they felt about completing something difficult. "I wasn't sure I could make it the whole way, but I'm so glad I gave it my all," Mariana expressed. The group shared stories of the day's adventures that night as they gazed at the stars.

New bonds were forming – friendships that may last a lifetime.

Later in the summer, the students enjoyed a week at River Camp Voyagers, a camp developed specifically for high school students. Camp days were spent exploring the river at Sycamore Island, with plenty of time for canoeing, kayaking, and swimming, including a sunset paddle on the Old Muddy Pond.

Finally, it was time for the overnight campout on the coast at the Point Pinole Regional Shoreline Park. After setting up camp, Mariana and the other VISTAS walked out to the pier to watch the sunset. They watched people fishing from the pier and cheered when someone made a catch. "I wonder if the salmon we saw at the hatchery will make it here someday," Mariana thought.

The wind began to pick up. After working together to cook dinner, the group gathered around the campfire – an experience they had been looking forward to for months. Participants roasted marshmallows and shared stories. The group huddled closer to the fire as the wind continued to howl.

You make programs like VISTAS possible as a River Parkway Trust supporter. You give young people like Mariana the chance to challenge themselves and enjoy new experiences in the outdoors!

Your year-end donation of \$25, \$50, or more will create more opportunities for youth to paddle, hike, star gaze, and build bonds with the natural world and one another. Will you make a special donation today?

I'm pleased to share that Mariana's journey with the River Parkway Trust continues to this day. The YPA and VISTAS programs have provided local youth experience and training in outdoor, leadership, and teambuilding skills. As their connection to the San Joaquin River watershed deepened, youth expressed their desire to remain involved and share their stories with other teens and children from their communities.

Mariana is now part of the River Parkway Trust's staff, facilitating the Fall 2023 cohort of Youth Parkway Ambassadors. Just a few weeks ago, she led the program orientation, enthusiastically sharing her experience and how the program impacted her. Soon, the current YPA cohort will have their first camping trip at Millerton Lake. Mariana is ready to lead them through their first camping experience.

Each story of a young person participating in a River Parkway Trust program deepens my resolve and commitment to land conservation and expanding access to the Parkway. I feel responsible for providing more students with multiple opportunities to have new experiences in natural spaces. Because the chance to paddle, stargaze, sit by a campfire, and see a fish swimming in the wild for the first time contribute to a lifetime of love and concern for protected land and the natural world.

Will you join us in reaching more young people next year by making a year-end donation today? Your generous gift of \$25, \$50, or more will contribute to a new year of conservation projects and outdoor programs. Please write a check or donate online before December 31st!

Thank you for considering the River Parkway Trust in your year-end giving plans. In this season of giving, I am grateful for friends like you who remain committed to realizing the 22-mile San Joaquin River Parkway vision.

Warm regards,



Sharon J. Weaver
Executive Director

P.S. Your year-end donation translates to more experiences for youth like Mariana on the San Joaquin River. Please write a check or donate online by December 31st!