

Letter from the Board President

I'm thrilled to share the River Parkway Trust's annual report for 2023 with you. As you read through each section, I hope you feel great about the impact your support had last year. I'm incredibly inspired by the number of people who could explore and enjoy the San Joaquin River through the Trust's programs and park operations.

People love the river when it is open to them.

The River Parkway Trust expanded operations of Sycamore Island to 7 days per week beginning in May. More than 19,000 people visited the property to enjoy time fishing, hiking, biking, and wildlife watching. Running River Ranch has also become a cherished place to enjoy a walk by the river and pick fresh citrus and blueberries, with more than 8,000 visitors last year.

Young people are flocking to the river.

Thanks to the support of generous friends like you, thousands of elementary school students participated in River Field Trips at Sycamore Island, Lost Lake Park, Owl Hollow, and the River Center. More children and youth enjoyed the River Camp experience at seven camp program locations in the summer, the first-ever Fall Foragers mini-camp, and Winter Break camps in Fresno, Madera, and Firebaugh. In 2023, the Trust served more children than ever in the organization's history. Celebrating these future generations of river stewards brings me so much joy.



People love the river so much; they volunteer in all kinds of ways. Last year, dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers contributed 10,987 hours of service. Volunteers were key to the success of the Trust's Fresno River West E-Pond wildlife habitat enhancement project – 121 people invested 76 hours to help plant 3,314 native trees and shrubs on the project site. In the years to come, these plants will mature and provide habitat for wildlife.

I feel encouraged by what's to come in the year ahead. The River Parkway Trust will continue to seek ways for more people to fall in love with the river as we provide more public access and opportunities for the community to come and enjoy a day on the banks of the San Joaquin River.

Thank you for your support and involvement with the River Parkway Trust.

Julia O'Kane
Board President

Your feedback matters! If you have any comments or questions about the information contained in this annual report, please give us a call at 559-248-8480 or email sparkes@riverparkway.org.



San Joaquin River
Parkway and
Conservation Trust, Inc.

11605 Old Friant Road
Fresno, CA 93730-9701
www.riverparkway.org



2023
Annual Report
RIVER PARKWAY TRUST



Message from the Executive Director

As we report on the Trust’s work in 2023, I find myself reflecting on my 25 years with the organization. It’s been a journey of growing the Parkway through land acquisition, public access improvements, and restored habitat.

When I started with the Trust in 1999, the future Coke Hollowell Center for River Studies (River Center) was a wreck of an old house. The Trust was raising funds to restore the Ranch House and build the Welcome Center that exists today, and many board members, community volunteers, and members of East Fresno Rotary were putting physical labor into the project.

Sycamore Island and Ball Ranch were still in private ownership, and the Thomas MacMichael Sr Loop Trail hadn’t yet been constructed at Jensen River Ranch. The acquisition of Spano River Ranch – now known as Fresno River West – was underway, but it would take four more years to complete.

Today, Sycamore Island is protected forever and is open for public recreation seven days a week. Thanks to you, 19,158 people visited Sycamore Island last year. The restored River Center is a hub of activity with various education and community programs that connect people to the rich history of the San Joaquin River. With your support, almost 35,000 people enjoyed the River Center last year.

When I feel like we’re not making progress fast enough on the Parkway, it’s great to look back and see how far we’ve come.

But here’s something interesting. Throughout my 25 years with the Trust, what I understood as the big challenge to public access was a lack of operations and maintenance funding for Parkway land. In 2021, Assemblymember Joaquin Arambula helped overcome that obstacle by garnering \$15 million in the state budget specifically for operations. And what I’ve learned since then is this:

Money doesn’t make the Parkway. People do.

People like YOU and early pioneers like Coke Hollowell, our founding mothers, first Executive Directors, supportive elected leaders, community leaders, and many

other ranchers, farmers, attorneys, doctors, real estate professionals, university professors, teachers, and bankers – the list can go on-and-on.

We’ve advocated for our shared vision of a completed Parkway with places for people to gather with friends and enjoy time in nature. River Parkway Trust supporters have generously given of their time, money, and political capital because they believe the Parkway is an important quality-of-life amenity for the San Joaquin Valley. Throughout my time with the Trust, many people have been willing to fight for the Parkway’s future.

Back to the wonderful windfall of \$15 million. **It turns out that money isn’t enough.** You also need the **will** to make it happen.

The past 3 years have included more operations and maintenance funding for the Parkway than our founders and early supporters ever imagined. And yet, over the past 12 months, we’ve had less access to Parkway lands than at any other time in my career.



Something is wrong with this picture.

The Trust has a unique and important relationship with the State Conservancy created to build the Parkway. We work closely with Conservancy staff and provide verbal reports on Parkway issues at every Conservancy Board meeting. But the change in the Conservancy’s leadership in April 2023 created significant management challenges that shut the doors on public access – even for licensed partner organizations like the Trust.

This experience has cemented my understanding of the importance of having a mix of both public and publicly accessible private land on the Parkway. The land owned by the Trust is private, but sites such as the River Center and Running River Ranch are open seven days a week for access. While we temporarily lost access to many Conservancy properties, we continued to provide access on our own land. Your support makes it possible for the Trust to steward and provide access to our properties.

The good news is that the Conservancy’s new Executive Officer Kari Daniska is on the job and able to move access forward.

Sycamore Island operations are running strong, and Ball Ranch will open for daily public access very soon. But more is still needed. The Parkway isn’t finished yet, and we must still advocate for its full completion—that vision of safe, clean public parks, a 22-mile trail system, and a healthy river supporting local wildlife.

I want to thank you for your support and advocacy for the Parkway. I hope you enjoy reading about the great work and accomplishments you helped make possible last year. And as we look forward, I’m asking you to remain steadfast in your support and advocacy to fulfill the Parkway vision.

Sincerely,

Sharon Weaver
Executive Director

Creating and Protecting the San Joaquin River Parkway for Everyone



The River Parkway Trust’s mission is to preserve and restore San Joaquin River lands having ecological, scenic, or historic significance; to educate the public on the need for stewardship; to research issues affecting the river; and to promote educational, recreational, and agricultural uses consistent with the protection of the river’s resources.

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The River Parkway Trust relies on the generosity of people like you to help create the Parkway and provide outdoor programs for all. You can donate today by returning the enclosed envelope, calling 559-248-8480, or by visiting www.riverparkway.org.



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Conservation

Last year marked significant progress in increasing biodiversity and improving flood resilience along the Parkway. Thanks to the generosity of people like you, thousands of native species were planted at Fresno River West to improve habitat for wildlife. The restored floodplains at Fresno River West and Sycamore Island were put to the test during the high river flows in the spring and early summer. It was exciting to witness the ecosystem benefits of floodplain restoration. Your support also contributed to improving the Lewis S. Eaton Trail.

4,190

Native Trees and Shrubs planted at Fresno River West E Pond Habitat Enhancement Project



68.24

Acres of Invasive Species *Sesbania punicea*, *Arundo donax*, *Centaurea solstitialis*, and *Eucalyptus globulus* were treated and removed

46

Individual plant species were seeded or planted on the San Joaquin River Parkway, increasing the biodiversity and resilience of our region.

47

Acres of pollinator habitat improved to provide year-round nectar sources for bees and other pollinator species.

28

Lewis S. Eaton Trail bollards were removed, refinished, and reinstalled to support public recreation and trail access

4.5

Acres of the Floodplain Revegetation Project at Fresno River West and Sycamore Island were monitored and maintained

Education

In 2023, a diverse array of educational programs along the San Joaquin River Parkway engaged and enriched the lives of thousands of local children. From experiential River Field trips to lively in-class presentations, students learned about the natural wonders of the river ecosystem. Your support also helped increase the capacity of River Camp programs, which expanded to the fall and winter seasons in Fresno, Madera, and Firebaugh. Local children with intellectual or developmental disabilities had the opportunity to participate in River Camp and others fully alongside their peers in the Inclusion Program. And, more high school students had the chance to develop their outdoor and leadership skills while exploring the San Joaquin River watershed from the Sierras to the Sea in the Youth Parkway Ambassadors and Voyagers VISTAS programs.

9,777

Students

Participated in River Field Trips at the River Center, Owl Hollow, Running River Ranch, Lost Lake Park, and Sycamore Island

2,467

River Campers

River Camp in Fresno, Owl Hollow, Scout Island, Sycamore Island, and Running River Ranch through the spring, summer, AND winter, and River Camp in Firebaugh

1,571

Students

learned about the San Joaquin River Watershed through in-class presentations

349

Public Youth Program Participants

Children and youth in pre-school through high school enjoyed outings to explore the San Joaquin River through outdoor weekend programs

701

Participants

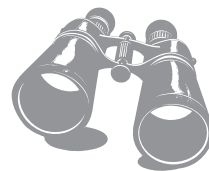
in the Youth Parkway Ambassadors, VISTAS, and Family Adventures at Millerton programs



44% Increase

in the number of children reached through outdoor education programs over 2022

Recreation



Your support in 2023 helped provide access to the Parkway at Sycamore Island, Running River Ranch, and the River Center.

These beloved Parkway properties are under the stewardship of the River Parkway Trust and are open 7 days per week for your enjoyment. You also helped provide guided walks on the Parkway and bald eagle-focused paddling adventures at Sycamore Island.

Sycamore Island Visitors 19,158

Anglers, wildlife watchers, hikers, runners, cyclists, equestrians, and paddlers in 2023

8,280 Running River Ranch Visitors

Community members picked citrus and blueberries, and enjoyed spending time along the river

308 Nature Walks

People explored new places with experienced nature walk guides.

50 Bald Eagle River Tours

People enjoyed paddling to spot bald eagles at Sycamore Island.

Volunteers

From helping plant trees to leading nature hikes on the Parkway, volunteers play a critical role in the River Parkway Trust's core mission areas of conservation, education, and recreation.

10,987 Hours of volunteer service contributed by individuals like you

Thank you to every volunteer for the gifts of your time and talent.

Social Media

20,517 followers



@SJRPCT
@SycamoreIslandPark



@riverparkwaytrust



10,900 email subscribers

River Center

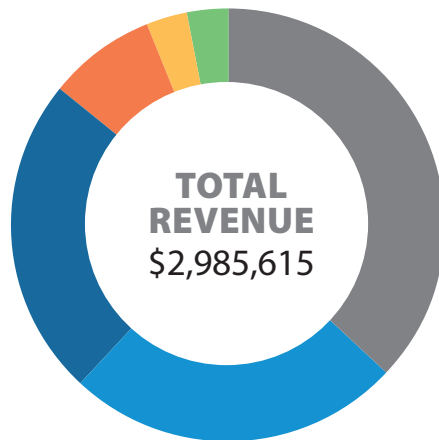
Your generosity in 2023 contributed to caring for and providing public access to the Coke Hallowell Center for River Studies. Many people enjoyed the River Center's gardens, Hidden Homes Trail, and wildlife-watching opportunities throughout the year. The new picnic shelter has become a hub of activity for River Field Trips, community group visits, and families seeking to enjoy time together in the outdoors. You help the Trust keep this community resource open to the public 7 days per week.



34,799 Visitors

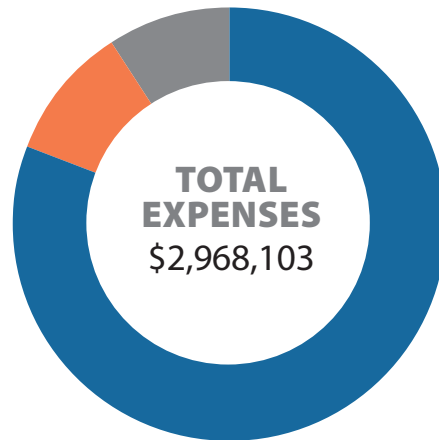
enjoyed the River Center in 2023

2023 Financials



REVENUE

■ Program Services	37%	\$1,095,115
■ Grants	25%	\$726,949
■ Donations	24%	\$717,857
■ Other	8%	\$245,064
■ Investment Income	3%	\$100,851
■ Farm	3%	\$99,779



EXPENSES

■ Program Services	81%	\$2,395,749
■ General Administrative	10%	\$296,864
■ Fundraising	9%	\$275,490

The financial information included in this report is from the Audited Financial Consolidated Statement of Activities for the year ended December 31, 2023.

Scan QR code to view the River Parkway Trust's Audited Financials and Form 990 or visit our website: <https://riverparkway.org/what-we-do/irs-form-990>



\$150,000+ LIFETIME DONORS

We'd like to thank these individual donors who have generously supported the River Parkway Trust through the years.

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We're proud to recognize these individual donors who gave generously to the River Parkway Trust between January and December 2023.

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\$10,000+
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We're grateful to these agencies, businesses, foundations, and organizations that supported the River Parkway Trust between January and December 2023.

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US Bureau of Reclamation

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Parks California
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Kathleen Wilburn
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