



Impact Report

RIVER PARKWAY TRUST

San Joaquin River
Parkway and
Conservation Trust, Inc.
11605 Old Friant Road
Fresno, CA 93730-9701
www.riverparkway.org

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Letter from the Board President

Each time I reflect on the Trust's Annual Impact Report, I find myself wondering how we can stretch even further to serve the community. Looking back on 2024, I am amazed by the number of people we reached, the growth of the Trust's programs, and the incredible support we received from generous people like you.

As a former educator, I notice first the number of young people connecting with the river. I am especially proud of the Youth Parkway Ambassadors Program, where high school students gain outdoor experience and leadership skills that inspire them to pursue jobs on the Parkway or even college majors connected to conservation and education. I am also encouraged by the expansion of the Inclusion Program, which makes it possible for children with intellectual, developmental, and physical disabilities to thrive at River Camp alongside their peers.

Open Parkway properties continue to draw record numbers of visitors. In 2024, over 20,000 people visited Sycamore Island, a San Joaquin River Conservancy property that the Trust operates under contract. That same role enabled the Trust to open Ball

Ranch and Ledger Island, offering new opportunities for families, hikers, and explorers to experience the river.

None of this would be possible without the generosity of the Trust's volunteers. In 2024, they contributed more than 13,000 hours to the Trust by removing invasive plants, planting native species, guiding outdoor experiences, opening the River Store, tending the River Center gardens, and assisting with events, among other activities. Their dedication inspires me and shows how much our community values the San Joaquin River.

Of course, all work and no play isn't the goal, so grab your hat and get out to the river!

Julia O'Kane
Board President



Letter from the Executive Director

Have you ever watched a salmon swim upstream?

These incredible fish journey hundreds of miles from the ocean, navigating shallow waters, leaping over obstacles, and pushing through strong currents, all to return to the place where their life began. Sometimes their determination is so intense, they wear themselves raw against the rocks, leaving traces behind on the journey. It's remarkable, and a little heartbreaking, to witness.

I've been thinking a lot about salmon recently, especially as we've seen a historic return of 448 adults to the San Joaquin River through the San Joaquin River Restoration Program. This year's return is just 52 short of the 500 adults estimated as a minimum population of returning spawners to reach sustainability. People often ask me, "Is anything even happening with that program anymore?" The answer is a resounding **YES!** While most of the progress isn't visible to the public, scientists are out on the river studying fish at every life stage, monitoring flows, and helping adults reach upstream spawning grounds. Their persistence is paying off.

Like the salmon making their way home, and the quiet, determined work behind their return, the Trust's work isn't always easy to see. Sometimes working on the Parkway feels like swimming against the current. There always seem to be hurdles to overcome and challenges to face. But like the salmon, we stay



the course because the future we're working toward is worth every effort.

As I look back on 2024, I can see that we've accomplished a great deal. We celebrated the opening of Ball Ranch and Ledger Island for daily access, facilitated outdoor education and recreation programs along the Parkway, and watched thousands of people explore, volunteer, and connect with the river. We expanded programming for children of all abilities in 2024, ensuring that more kids could experience the natural world up close. At River Camp, I've



PHOTO: US BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

heard campers explain erosion and sediment deposition better than most adults, because they didn't just learn it from a book, they saw it happening in the river channel.



Hands-on learning is what makes these experiences so lasting and meaningful.

We also saw new opportunities on the horizon, including a historic \$11 million in funding for the Parkway through Proposition 4. These accomplishments reflect what's possible when long-term planning, persistence, and community support come together.

Much of that work isn't flashy. It looks like reviewing complex environmental reports, navigating state contracting requirements, working alongside agency partners to keep projects moving, and showing up – again and again – to ensure that public access and community input remain central to the Parkway's future.

That effort is paying off. The Ledger Island bridge is one example. While the bridge remains closed for safety

reasons, we're actively working with engineers and partners to explore creative, cost-effective solutions to restore access. Thanks to your support, we're able to lead these efforts with care and urgency.

From educating the next generation to advocating in decision-making spaces, your support ensures the Parkway reflects both the needs and the hopes of this community.

Throughout it all, I'm reminded that the true strength of the River Parkway Trust lies in the people behind it: our staff, board, partners, and supporters like YOU. Your commitment makes it possible to keep pushing forward, even when it means swimming against the current.

With gratitude,

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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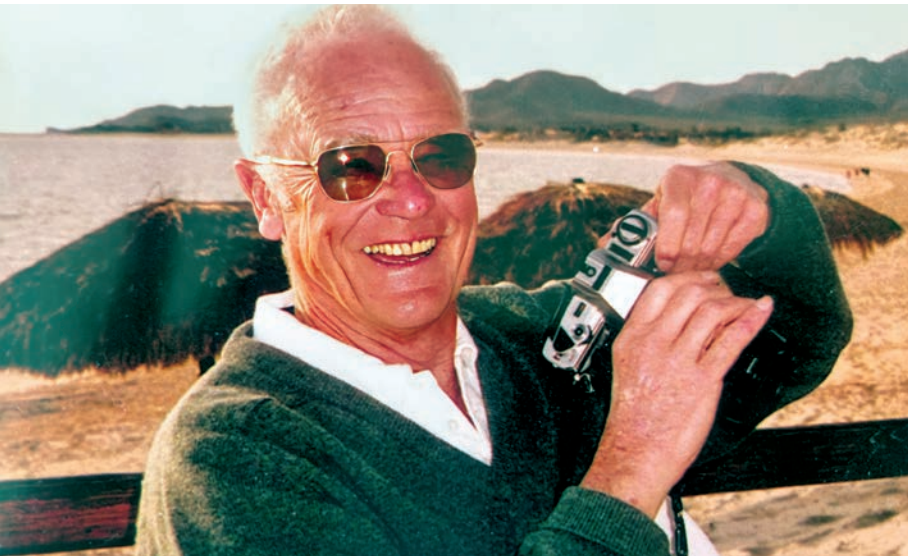
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Rental Events Manager

Running River Ranch

Marcelino Cervantes
Ranch Foreman

People on the Parkway



John Wissler:
Visionary Leader,
Devoted Advocate

When the San Joaquin River Parkway was still a bold and uncertain dream, John Wissler brought clarity, confidence, and a deep sense of purpose. As one of the Trust’s original board members and a tireless advocate for conservation, John played a foundational role in setting the organization up for success.

A retired Rear Admiral in the U.S. Navy, John and his wife, Brooke, moved to the family ranch in Madera County after decades of military service. What might have been a quiet retirement instead became an active and impactful chapter of public service. John’s commitment to the Parkway sprang from a lifelong love of the outdoors, rooted in his childhood

in Minnesota, where Boy Scouts and canoe trips shaped his early understanding of the importance of open space. That passion never wavered.

“He saw every place as Camelot,” his daughter Cecelia recalled. “He looked at the San Joaquin River and saw possibility.” That unwavering optimism translated into meaningful action. Whether serving on the Trust’s executive committee, representing the Trust at land use hearings, or recruiting allies one dinner party conversation at a time, John made the Parkway a priority in every corner of his life.

His leadership was especially critical during the Parkway’s early years, when the concept of a 22-mile greenway through urban and agricultural lands was still controversial. John chaired the Madera County Citizens Committee for a general plan update, working

John Wissler *continued*

tirelessly to ensure the full Parkway Plan was included. “That was entirely John’s effort,” said Dave Koehler. “And it stuck.” His skill in navigating politics and winning hearts and minds came not just from his credentials, but from his character. “He was authentic,” Dave noted. “When he spoke, people listened—not because of his title, but because of his conviction.”

John’s legacy also lives in the example he set for collaboration. He believed deeply in partnerships and encouraged nonprofits to work together to achieve shared goals. And in quieter moments, he mentored emerging leaders with

warmth and wisdom. For Dave, one of his first and most formative experiences as Executive Director was sitting at John and Brooke’s table while John shared his love for the Parkway.

Today, more than 25 years later, the Parkway continues to reflect his vision. John believed it was our generation’s turn to do something good for the river—and he lived that belief fully. His advice still resonates: “Stay the course. Look at the long-term goals. And never forget to look back and see how far you’ve come.”

Parkway Update

Ledger Island Bridge: Why It’s Closed and What the River Parkway Trust Is Doing About It

In November 2024, the River Parkway Trust proudly opened Ball Ranch and Ledger Island for public recreation—an exciting milestone in expanding access to the San Joaquin River Parkway. However, visitors quickly discovered that the Ledger Island Bridge, the only non-vehicle connection between Fresno and Madera, was closed and fenced off.

The closure is based on safety concerns following a 2014 bridge assessment conducted by the California Department of Water

Resources (DWR), at the request of the San Joaquin River Conservancy. The study revealed that years of high river flows caused significant scouring and erosion, which washed away sediment around the bridge’s foundation. The bridge’s support piles, originally designed to be embedded at least 15 feet into the riverbed, now have as little as 2 feet of support. While the bridge’s upper structure appears intact, the weakened foundation could lead to sudden and catastrophic failure without warning.

Ledger Island Bridge Closure *continued*



In response, the Conservancy determined that the bridge should be closed to the public. As part of our operations agreement to open Ball Ranch and Ledger Island, the River Parkway Trust was required to install fencing and signage to restrict access across the bridge and safeguard visitors.



Preliminary estimates from DWR placed the cost of a full structural evaluation at around \$900,000, with full bridge replacement estimated at \$17 million.

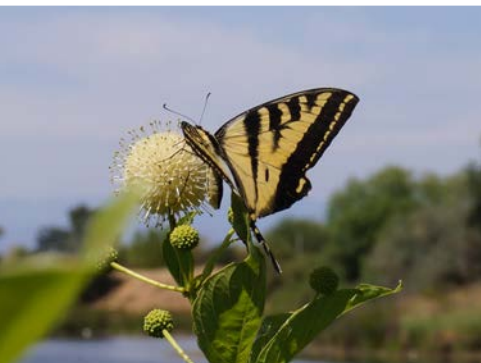
The River Parkway Trust is actively working with the Conservancy and other partners to find a safe and more cost-effective path forward. In early 2025, we contracted with local engineering firm Blair, Church, and Flynn to explore the possibility of repairing rather than replacing the bridge. They have proposed three options that would address safety

issues, require minimal permitting, and keep costs in the \$1 million range.

Ledger Island remains open to the public through the Tesoro Viejo Trail System in Madera County or by personal watercraft on the river.

The River Parkway Trust is committed to reopening this important river crossing and will continue working with public and private partners to move the project forward.

Scenes From the Parkway



River Parkway Trust 2024 by the Numbers



Conservation

2024 marked a year of progress in the Trust's commitment to improving wildlife habitat, increasing biodiversity, and building climate resilience along the Parkway. The Fresno River West E Pond and Sycamore Island Trout Pond Habitat Improvement Projects were among the Trust's conservation priorities, with work to support plant establishment resulting in positive survival rates. Pollinator species benefited from special projects that included planting narrowleaf milkweed (Asclepias fascicularis) and wildflower seedling at Running River Ranch, the River Center, and Fresno River West.



1,500 Narrowleaf Milkweed (Asclepias fascicularis) plugs were planted on Parkway properties

56.94 Acres of Invasive Species were treated and removed

4,380 Native Trees and Shrubs were monitored and maintained



Education

Your generosity supported educational field trips, in-class learning experiences, and weeklong exploration at River Camp across all seasons. You helped ensure that children of all ages, including preschoolers taking their first steps in nature and teens developing outdoor leadership skills, could connect with the river in ways that inspire wonder, curiosity, and environmental stewardship. Families also found opportunities to explore and learn together, strengthening their connection to nature and one another through shared experiences along the river.



9,837 Students Participated in School field trips

258 Pre-schoolers learned about the plants and animals found along the river

1,670 Students engaged in classroom-based lessons

695 Participants in Youth Parkway Ambassadors, VISTAS, and weekend outings

2,066 River Campers across 6 locations in Fresno, Madera, and Firebaugh

River Center

In 2024, your support helped the River Parkway Trust care for and maintain the Coke Hallowell Center for River Studies as a welcoming Parkway destination for the community. Visitors of all ages explored the Hidden Homes Trail, wandered native plant gardens, and paused to enjoy spotting birds and other wildlife through the seasons. The River Center picnic shelter remains a special gathering space for school field trips, family outings, and community organizations. Thanks to you, the River Center was open 7 days a week, offering a place for learning, connection, and outdoor enjoyment all year long.



35,660 Visitors enjoyed the River Center in 2024

Social Media Engagement

20,517 Social Media Followers

@SJRPCT @SycamoreIslandPark

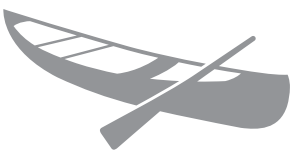
10,900 email subscribers

@riverparkwaytrust



Recreation

The Trust celebrated the grand opening of Ball Ranch and Ledger Island, welcoming the public to enjoy hiking, biking, fishing, wildlife watching, and exploration. The golf course and residential subdivision proposed for Ball Ranch was the catalyst for the concept of the San Joaquin River Parkway, and daily public access to the site is a reminder of how far we've come.



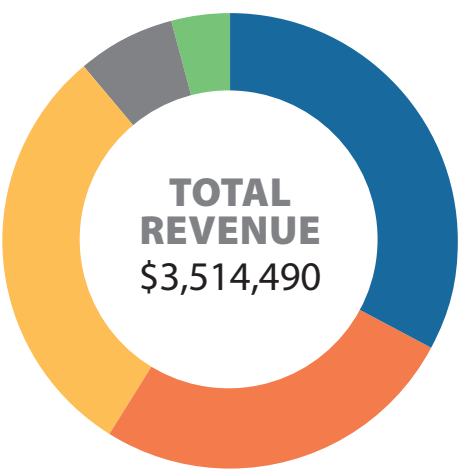
22,712 Sycamore Island Visitors

8,760 Running River Ranch Visitors

1,779 Ball Ranch & Ledger Island Visitors

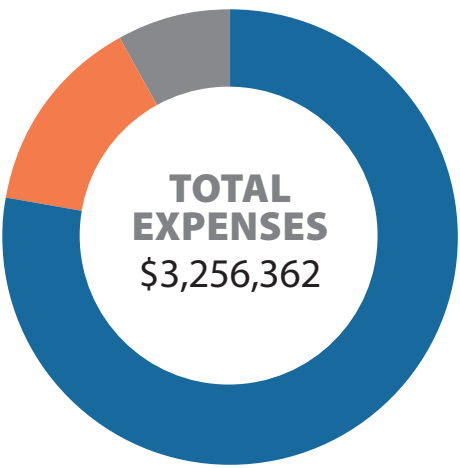
304 Public Recreation Program Participants

2024 Financials



REVENUE

Program Services	33%	\$1,159,912
Donations	30%	\$1,071,637
Grants	26%	\$905,552
Other	7%	\$243,079
Interest and Dividends	4%	\$134,310



EXPENSES

Program Services	78%	\$2,541,226
General and Administrative	14%	\$464,753
Fundraising	8%	\$250,383

The financial information included in this report is from the Audited Financial Consolidated Statement of Activities for the year ended December 31, 2024.

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



Stories That Take Root

Where Stories and Stewardship Meet

When Lindsay joined the River Parkway Trust as an AmeriCorps Climate Action Corps (CCAC) Fellow, she brought a mix of energy, curiosity, and passion for storytelling. With degrees in English and Geography, she came to the fellowship with a deep interest in the stories we tell about the land and nature, especially how those stories shape our sense of place and responsibility.

Over the past year, Lindsay became a key part of the Trust's climate resilience work, coordinating hundreds of volunteers supporting habitat restoration, invasive species removal, food waste recovery, and pollinator species planting along the Parkway. Thanks to her efforts, there is now a volunteer opportunity nearly every weekend. Lindsay's passion for community building shines brightest when she's out on the land talking with volunteers. She says that hearing why people come out to give



their time has been one of the most rewarding parts of the role. "Everyone has a different story about why this work matters to them," she shared. "I love that I get to be part of those moments."

This is Lindsay's second year as a Climate Action Fellow, but her first with the River Parkway Trust. She remembers pulling into the River Center for her interview and thinking, "Oh, I definitely want to work here." After totaling up the impact of her work, we discovered that Lindsay doubled the number of volunteers involved with River Parkway Trust projects during her year of service.

As Lindsay's fellowship came to a close at the end of August, we're incredibly grateful for the care, curiosity, and creativity she's brought in support of the Parkway. Her passion has helped shape not only our volunteer program but the community that surrounds it.



Thank You to Our 2024 Parkway Sponsors



Thank You to Our Donors

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 our website www.riverparkway.org.



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.

\$150,000+ LIFETIME DONORS

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

Frank and Florence Caglia Family
Dr. Virginia S. Eaton
Mary and Gerald Finch
George and Jackie Folsom
Paul Gibson and Joan Eaton
Roger and Terry Gaspey
Coke and James Hallowell
Sharon Hanley
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2024 INDIVIDUAL DONORS

We're proud to recognize these individual donors who gave generously to the River Parkway Trust between January and December 2024.

\$100,000+
Coke Hallowell
Dr. and Mrs. Arthur Jing
\$25,000+
Pat Furman
Jean and William Thompson

\$1,000+

Dave and Sharon Koehler
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\$50,000+

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North Fresno Lions Club
Peri & Sons Farms

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We're grateful to these agencies, businesses, foundations, and organizations that supported the River Parkway Trust between January and December 2024.

\$100,000+
Fidelity Charitable
State of California, San Joaquin River Conservancy
State Of California, Wildlife Conservation Board

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Elizabeth and Brent Demonte
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