

RiverWatch

Climate Change is Reducing the Sierra Nevada Snowpack

If the pace of global warming remains unchanged, there will be 64 percent less snow in the Sierra Nevada by the end of this century, according to a study by the Center for Climate Science at the University of California, Los Angeles.

"Temperatures across the Sierra Nevada are warming," said Dr. Alex Hall, professor of Atmospheric & Oceanic Sciences, who heads the Center.

"The snowpack is melting earlier, and increasingly winter precipitation doesn't arrive as snow in the first place," he added. "That trend is likely to accelerate in the coming decades so that by the end of the century, if we don't do anything to reduce carbon emissions globally, we really will see a pretty dramatic loss of snowpack by the end of snow season."

Currently, about 23 million Californians get their water from the Sierra Nevada.

The UCLA study projected, however, that if the global community takes measures to

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Illegal campsite by the American River. Photo by George Nyberg

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Weekly Tests are Finding Unsafe Levels of *E.coli* Bacteria in the Lower American River

BY STEPHEN GREEN

In late June, two signs went up in Discovery Park with warnings that unsafe levels of *Escherichia (E.coli)* bacteria may be lurking in the waters in the Lower American River. In the 56 years since the American River Parkway Plan was adopted, it's the first time that Sacramento County has posted signs warning of potentially dangerous pollution in the river.

The signs went up after weekly tests found significant amounts of bacteria in water near Tiscornia Beach, Discovery Park, Sutter's Landing and Steelhead Creek.

Among other warnings, the signs tell people don't drink the water or wash dishes in it, wash hands and shower after swimming, and don't enter the water if they have cuts or open sores.

For the last 12 years, the state Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board has been sporadically taking water samples from Folsom Lake, Lake Natoma and the Lower American River. At times, they have found unsafe levels of *E.coli* bacteria in those areas — including near the Sacramento State University Aquatic Center where national and international rowing events are held, students train and children attend summer aquatic classes.

But the Board has never attempted to identify the sources of the bacteria. Nor did they share their findings with county health

officials and other government agencies despite the fact the American is designated as a "Recreation" river within the state and federal Wild & Scenic River Systems. The Lower American gets eight million visits annually — twice as many as Yosemite National Park.

Visitors first learned of the *E.coli* pollution in an August 2017 Sacramento Bee article. But despite public outcry and complaints filed with area legislators, the Board showed little interest in resuming testing.

Last spring, the Board began testing again — but only in the Lower American River below Howe Avenue. Board officials say they hope to expand their testing and conduct source identification studies this fall. But no date to begin the work has been set.

Save the American River Association (SARA) representatives began taking water samples in Lake Natoma last spring. They have found evidence of the bacteria in half of the samples. On June 12, a sample taken near Willow Creek contained unsafe levels of *E.coli*. Another sample with unsafe levels was taken on July 10 near the beach at Nimbus Flat where people swim. The site is directly across from the Sacramento State University Aquatic Center. SARA is continuing to take samples in the lake.

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E.Coli

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Likely sources are wildlife, dogs and homeless campers on the American River Parkway. Every time there is a heavy rain, sewers overflow in Folsom and the Sacramento Area Sewer Agency system. For years, SARA has been attempting to get the Board to adequately police the Folsom and Sacramento Area Sewer Agency systems – with limited success.

In 2017, the Sacramento Area Sewer Agency had an overflow in excess of 400,000 gallons. The Board issued a Notice of Violation and took no other actions. No fine or orders to fix decaying sewer infrastructure.

The Board's mission statement couldn't be more explicit: "To preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California's water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health, and all beneficial uses, and to

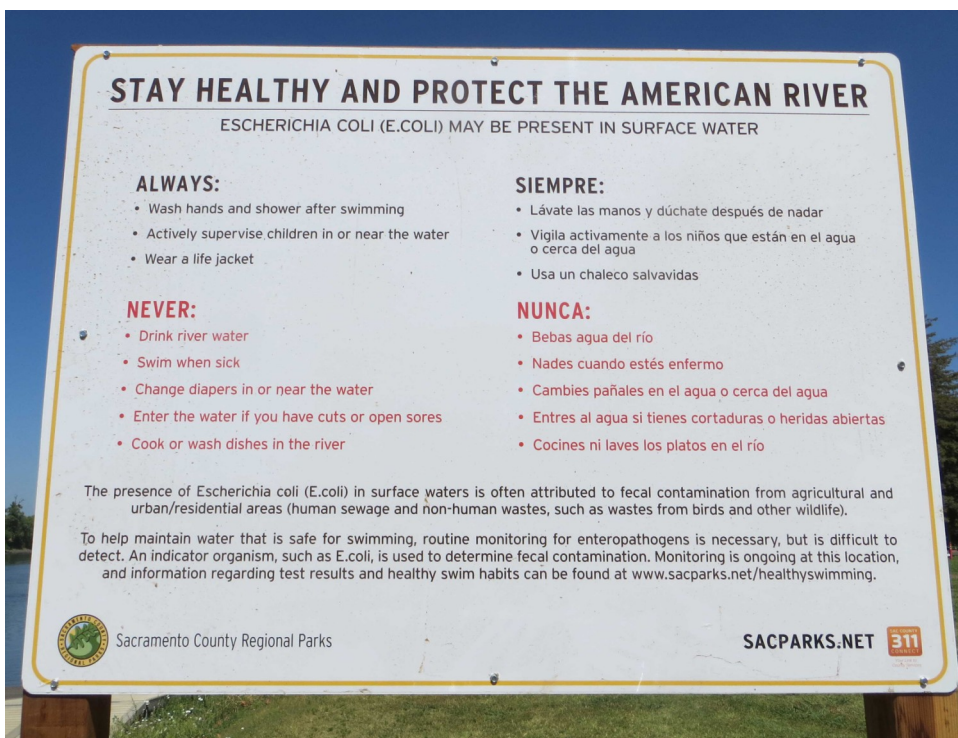
ensure proper water resource allocations and efficient use, for the benefit of present and future generations."

Jared Blumenfeld, former regional administrator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in the western states, has repeatedly expressed frustration with the failure of all nine regional state boards to take action against polluters.

"If the individual regional water boards aren't willing or able to enforce pollution laws, then the state should take back the program and run the water enforcement work from Sacramento," he said.

SARA has been urging legislators to conduct oversight hearings on the Central Valley Board's operations and policies.

In 2017, the Sacramento Area Sewer Agency had an overflow in excess of 400,000 gallons.



Support County Parks — Buy An Annual Pass

The Pass pays for itself in 10 visits and all funds go directly towards maintaining and operating the 15,000-acre system. For as little as \$50 per year, you can have unlimited access and parking in the parks.

Pass holders receive free daily entry into Regional Parks and annual passes are valid for one year from date of purchase.

Pass Fees Are Based On Use:

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Vehicle + Horse trailer:	\$75
Vehicle and small watercraft:	\$80
Parks supporter pass*	\$50

* This pass is for those who want to support Parks but do not drive to Parks facilities

Where to Purchase Your Parks Pass

- Online through the American River Parkway Foundation Web site <http://arpf.org/visit/>
- At REI stores in Sacramento, Roseville and Folsom
- Patriot Cycles in Fair Oaks
- Effie Yeaw Nature Center at Ancil Hoffman Park
- Regional Park offices and park kiosks
- American River Parkway Foundation office at the William B. Pond Recreation Area ■

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Snowpack

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curb climate change in line with the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, the loss of average springtime snowpack volume would be about 30 percent.

President Donald Trump has frequently called the Paris Agreement “a hoax” and has said he wants the United States to withdraw from it. His administration, however, has yet to start that process but has been relaxing pollution standards.

The researchers found that about half of the water in the Sierra Nevada runs off by early May. If greenhouse gases are not reduced, they projected that half the water reserve would be running off up to 50 days earlier. That would pose significant problems for managing water in the reservoir system.

Record snowfall and early runoff during the winter of 2017 caused a spillway to fail on the Oroville Dam. Nearly 190,000 people were forced to evacuate.

The researchers projected that extremely wet winters and extended periods of drought will be more common in the coming decades.

The study is titled “Climate Change in the Sierra Nevada: California’s Water Future.” It can be found on UCLA’s Center for Climate Science website.

■

Proposition 3 Must be Voted Down

In the November election, voters will be asked to approve Proposition 3, an \$8.877 Billion – yes Billion – water bond act to fund projects and programs around the state.

The Sierra Club has called it “A fiscally irresponsible approach to California’s water problems (that) flies in the face of good governance by being written behind the scenes by those who would gain funds from it, rather than through a legislative process.”

If approved, money would be spent without a legislative appropriation, removing the public from overseeing how funds are spent on programs and projects or whether they would be effective. The projects and programs also would be exempt from the Administrative Procedure Act, providing no avenue for public input into the allocation of the funds, and no review by the Office of Administrative Law as to whether the spending complies with the bond’s stated priorities.

The measure would fund water projects that benefit agriculture. It would require the state to pay for repairs and upgrades of water supply projects financed by local water agencies, which is contrary to the long-held practice that beneficiaries pay for the new work.

One of the most controversial allocations would be \$750 million for the Friant Water Authority to repair the Friant-Kern canal. The 152-mile canal was built along the east side of the San Joaquin Valley in the 1940s from near Chowchilla to the Kern River in Bakersfield. It supplies water to 30 cities and irrigation districts. But the canal has lost 60 percent of its carrying

capacity because of ground subsidence caused by over-pumping of water from the aquifers. Critics contend that those who pumped the groundwater and caused the damage should pay for the repairs to the canal.

Drafters of Proposition 3 understood that they couldn’t win passage if they only have support from agribiz and big water districts. So they added millions for conservancies and programs to help communities with unreliable water supplies in an at-

tempt to gain backing from environmental and stakeholder groups. The Lower American River Conservancy would get \$30 million.

In the June 5 primary election, voters approved a \$4.1 billion bond to fund water infrastructure improvements and improvements to parks. The Lower American River Conservancy will receive \$10 million from that meas-

ure. The state also hasn’t spent all the money it borrowed in 2014 when Proposition 1 was approved to fund infrastructure projects.

When bonds are sold to fund Proposition 3, the state General Fund would be required to pay \$400 million year for debt service. Since much of the General Fund is dedicated to K-12 education, that could mean other social and environmental programs that get their money from the General Fund could be cut to pay for the bond service debt. An economic downturn would worsen those impacts. ■

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New SARA Board Members

Kathy Kayner

Kathy is a lifelong resident of Sacramento. She was born at Sutter Memorial Hospital and, interestingly enough, so were her three children.



She was employed from 1987-2012 with USAA Insurance primarily handling Homeowner/Rental/Boat claims. She was sent to different locations in the U.S. to handle hurricane and earthquake damages for members. She ended her career as a Litigation Manager handling Homeowner litigation claims and worked closely with the defense attorneys.

Since retiring, Kathy developed a keen interest and connection with our local wildlife and birds — specifically Raptors. She followed a pair of Great Horned Owls for two years in the American River Parkway by visiting their nesting site 3-4 days a week, taking photos and being still in their presence.

After the storms of 2016/2017, she could no longer find them in the Parkway as all available nests that they could take over (they never build their own nests) were destroyed. In April of 2017, she received an email from the president of the Sacramento Audubon advising of a volunteer opportunity available at a wild Bald Eagle nest in Orangevale. She contacted California State Parks and was accepted as a docent. Her volunteer duties involved greeting guests and answering questions about the Eagles, and leading them to a designated area to view them during the nesting season. She also kept an eye on the Eagles to make sure they were not disturbed or stressed in anyway. In January 2018, she became a docent for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation at the Bald Eagle nest site and plans to continue her volunteer duties at the site in 2019.

Joseph (Joe) Klun

Joe Klun comes to the SARA Board with several decades of varied experience in a number of California state government agencies. His areas of focus have included: Public safety, health programs, research and statistics, fiscal management and budgeting, and program administration. In these assignments, he frequently worked closely with legislative staff and committees on program oversight and improvement.



Prior to relocating to Sacramento from the Bay Area in 1974, Joe often heard about the beauty of the American River and recreation opportunities on the American River Parkway. The River and the Parkway did not disappoint and Joe has enjoyed bicycle commuting, recreational bicycling, and walking/running along the Parkway for many years.

Joe connected with SARA in 2011 when a large government “Joint Operations Center” was proposed to be built along the Parkway near the Nimbus Fish Hatchery. Joe found working with several SARA Board members in successfully fighting this encroachment to be a very instructive and rewarding experience. ■

Nutria are Destroying Levees and Waterways

A husky invader is ravaging crops, levees and wetlands in six San Joaquin Valley counties and could soon be expanding its range into Sacramento Valley waterways.

The Nutria (*Myocaster coypus*) is a swamp rodent from South America that burrows into levees, water projects and riverbanks. It chews its way through sloughs and ravages adjacent croplands.

Nutria get to be the size of a beaver and can weigh up to 25 pounds. They have strong webbed hind feet and yellow buck teeth. But most notable is their reproductive capability. Females become sexually mature in four months, have litters of up to a dozen, and can become pregnant with 48 hours after giving birth. The youngsters leave their burrows after a few weeks and have been known to travel up to 50 miles in search of new habitat.

The rodents were imported to North America in the 19th Century. Their lush fur was used widely for hats and hood liners. But before long they were disrupting waterways and aqueducts.

California wildlife officials thought they had killed them off by the 1960s. But in March 2017, a Nutria was discovered in a beaver trap at a duck-hunting club in Merced County. Since then, more been found in San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Tuolumne, Mariposa and Fresno Counties.

It's not known how they got here, but most officials think someone imported them in defiance of state law.

State and federal officials have an eradication effort underway. But as is the case with most wildlife programs in California, there's a lack of funding.

Wildlife officials spent \$21 million on an eradication program in the Chesapeake Bay Region of Maryland and Virginia which ran from 2002 to 2015. There have been no new sightings in the last three years.

Louisiana pays bounty hunters to trap Nutria. But the rodents are still thriving in the area. ■



SARA Membership Donations *April — June 2018*

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Community Association

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SARA appreciates the support of our generous members. Without your support, SARA would not be able to continue our role as *Guardians of the American River and Parkway since 1961*. New and renewing members are listed in *RiverWatch* according to their preference (indicated on the SARA membership/renewal form).

Make Every Day Earth Day at the Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op

You can contribute financially to SARA and it's mission every time you shop at the Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op!

SARA is honored to be one of five organizations, selected by vote of Co-op shoppers in April, to be a beneficiary of the Co-op's Bag Token Program for the next year. For every reusable bag you bring in to bag your purchase, the Co-op issues a token. Deposit your tokens in the collection box (es) for your favorite organization(s) near the store's exit, and the Co-op donates five cents to each organization for every token it receives—and that adds up.

So, visit the Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op at their new location at 2820 R Street, Sacramento, and continue your support by "voting" for SARA. ■

In Memoriam

Save the American River Association has received donations honoring the memory of the following friends:

Howard Leach

Jeffrey Arthur

Save the American River Association frequently receives donations in memory of lost loved ones, many of whom were users and supporters of the American River Parkway. Some donors give names. Others prefer to remain anonymous. SARA notifies family members when donations are made.

The money is used to further SARA's advocacy work on behalf of the Parkway. Contributions may be made by check or online via SARA's website.

SARA also has a Legacy program. For information on the program, please call the SARA office (916) 936-4555. ■

Homes and Businesses Could Go Up Near a Severely Polluted Site

Some of the most severely polluted groundwater in the nation is found in Sacramento County.

During the mid-20th Century, Aerojet General Corp. and McDonald Douglas Corp. dumped rocket fuel and chemical waste in and around their Rancho Cordova plants. Aerojet dumped the largest portion at some 300 sites. During the 1960s and 70s, Aerojet leased the Gladys Gray Cattle Ranch east of Prairie City Road in what is now Folsom and both dumped and burned chemicals there.

The plume of groundwater contamination spread to the northwest, west and south of the dump sites. The area was declared a federal Superfund Cleanup Site in 1982. Although the spread has been largely contained today, it covers some 125 square miles beneath Rancho Cordova, Folsom, Fair Oaks and Carmichael.

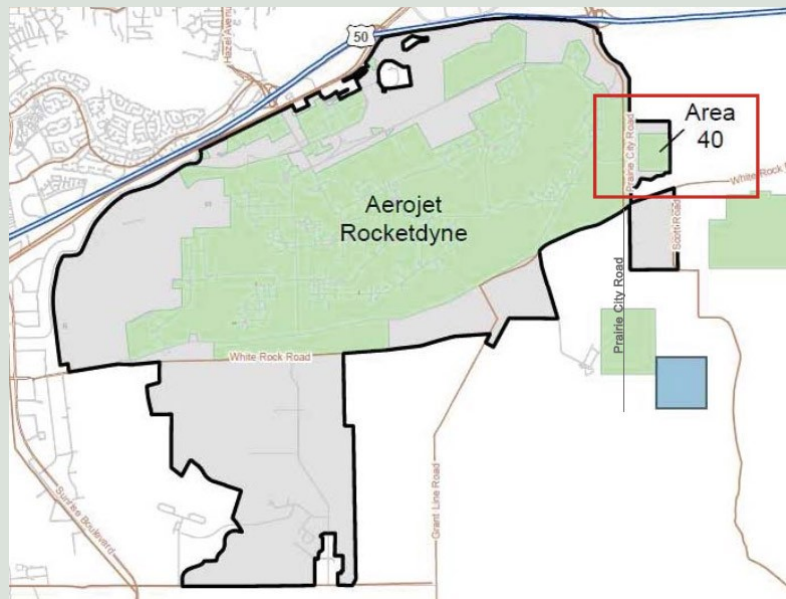
Pumps extract contaminated groundwater 24-hours per day and send it to treatment facilities. Most of the treated water ends up in the Lower American River and some is used to irrigate the Ancil Hoffman Golf Course.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency hopes to expand the Superfund cleanup to some 75 severely contaminated acres called Area 40 which is on the old ranch property east of Prairie City Road, south of Highway 50 and north of White Rock Road. The EPA recently reached an agreement with the state Dept. of Toxic Substance Control to take the lead on the cleanup.

Chemicals with the potential to cause cancer are found in groundwater, soil and vapors that escape into the atmosphere from the site. Those of greatest concern are trichloroethylene, perchlorate and dioxins/furans. Trichloroethylene exists at a rate 24,000 times higher than the allowable contamination level in the soil and groundwater.

The Dept. of Toxic Substance Control has

developed a Remedial Action Plan for the cleanup. They would excavate some 13,000 tons of contaminated soil and remove it from the site. A 600-foot wall would be placed in the ground at the west end of the property that would trap and neutralize contaminants in the groundwater. For many years in the future, the area would be monitored to detect releases of contaminants.



Some 20 or more acres with the most serious contamination would be fenced off to keep people and wildlife away from the dangerous toxins that escape into the atmosphere. A park would be established in an area where there is less contamination. And Folsom would eventually allow up to 11,000 homes and apartments to be built in the area along with commercial development. Some homes would be within 300 feet of the fenced-off area. Structures built in the area would have deed restrictions that prohibit soil excavation and require piping systems where some vapors are escaping.

The Superfund has a Community Advisory Group which monitors the cleanup and consults on operations. It is made of area residents and members of organizations. Save the American River Association has two representatives on the Group.

At a community meeting on the Remedial Action Plan held in Folsom June 20, the Community Advisory Group presented a detailed statement to state officials that was highly critical of the cleanup plan. Among

other findings where that the state had not established goals for the safe level of toxic chemicals that would remain in the area.

The plan also did not consider how outdoor areas would be impacted by escaping vapors, and the Community Advisory Group concluded that "fencing is not an effective deterrent in reducing contaminant exposures." They urged state officials to

develop a more aggressive and multifaceted cleanup plan since the existing landscape poses "a very high cancer risk and non-cancer hazard to human health and to ecological health..." The need for such a plan is "urgent," they said.

As of this writing, state officials are reviewing input from the Community Advisory Group and other organizations and individuals.

Generating the most controversy is the plan to fence off the most severely contaminated area with the potential to expose people, wildlife and the downwind ecosystem to contaminated

vapors.

In addition to idle grazing land, Area 40 has an oak woodland and a seasonal wetland and creeks that support wildlife, including species that are classified as endangered, threatened and of special concern.

Among those species observed there at various time are the Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle, Western Spadefoot Toad, White-tailed Kite, Northern Harrier, Swainson's Hawk, Ferruginous Hawk, Golden Eagle, Merlin, Burrowing Owl, Loggerhead Shrike, Tricolored Blackbird, Bank Swallow, Great Horned Owl, American Kestrel, Red-shouldered Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Bald Eagle, Pallid Bat and American Badger.

At the Herlong Federal Correctional Institution in Lassen County, the exercise yard has a high fence topped by razor wire. Two bobcats recently got over the fence. A fenced-off zone in Area 40 would not deter birds, rodents, some mammals and people with wire cutters. ■



Pictured above: Dan Winkelman & Stephen Green

Exotic Tales

BY DAN WINKELMAN

Back in late April, I had become a little stressed while looking for a crew to help cut milk thistle at Lake Natoma. The thistle heads would soon be open making removal of the whole plant more difficult. One critical area is between the city corporation yard and the multi-use paved trail.

For the past 16 years I've been removing thistle there with the hope that one day it would be gone for good. Many professionals who work to remove exotic plants had told me that total eradication was beyond reach. The best possible outcome of my work was to minimize the thistle population.

In State Parks, exotic plants are prioritized for removal in three categories. One: exotics, two: invasive, and three: fire hazard. Mainly four exotic thistles are found near the lake: star, Italian, bull, and milk. I chose milk thistle for removal as it met all three criteria making it a top priority.

When I started the cuttings, milk thistle grew in large patches that shaded and

took water from native plants. At the end of summer, the thistle would be dry and upwards of 5 feet tall. A fire in the area would send flames from the thistle into the tree canopy magnifying the destruction of climax vegetation.

A recent addition to the park is an interpretive sign placed by the City of Folsom in the area of their Lake Natoma Enhancement project. The sign explains that the park is a mix of native plants and "naturalized" exotics. Where did they find this distortion of ecology to be displayed in our park? It certainly violates the mission of our State Parks: "To provide for the health, inspiration, and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation."

SARA President Stephen and Judi Green volunteered to help me cut thistle. This was their third year of giving assistance to the task. We assembled at

my house with our tools, bags, and proper clothing. Remember that rattlesnakes and ticks inhabit the area. After a walk through the milk thistle zone, it became clear that our effort this year would be to no avail. We checked all over, but could not find one milk thistle. I felt that I had let my friends down, but we still rejoiced at finding a milk thistle free area with only golden poppies and mixed grasses along the trail.

I still can't believe that milk thistle is gone and I will check back for several years to confirm complete eradication. I bet there are some seeds lying dormant waiting for better conditions to facilitate growth. Until then, might I rejoice at my victory?

When I started my volunteer work around Lake Natoma in 2002, I was alone in my effort to pick up litter, cut vegetation on trails, repair picnic tables, and cut milk thistle. A few years ago, Friends of Lake Folsom and Natoma (FOLFAN) established the Adopt-the-Parkway program and assigned one mile segments of the lake to volunteers. FOLFAN has done a great job of litter control around Lake Natoma.

This year I have decided to relinquish my mile to another volunteer, Maryellen Blackburn. Age is catching up with me and the younger folks can handle the work with far better results. This ol' retired Park Ranger has done his best to provide for and protect our parks. Enjoy your day at Lake Natoma. ■

"All defeats are permanent, and all victories are temporary."

DAVID BROWER



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River and Parkway Since 1961*

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