

# RIVERWATCH

SAVE THE AMERICAN RIVER ASSOCIATION, INC.

VOLUME 44, ISSUE 1

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SPRING - 2006

## ***Why is Folsom Reservoir Storage so Low?***

*by Felix Smith*



The Bureau of Reclamation (Bureau) operates Folsom Reservoir for several purposes including flood control, water conservation, river regulation and fish management.

During a majority of the Chinook salmon holding and spawning period flows released to the Lower American River were about 2,200 to 2,300 cfs. However since the last week in December, the operation of Folsom Reservoir has been for flood control purposes. Starting on December 22, 2006 releases from Folsom Reservoir were increased reaching about 33,000 to 35,000 cfs on December 27, 2005. Such flows lasted for about 10 days. Over the next 18 days releases were gradually decreased to about 4,000 cfs for 8 days then increased to 15,000 cfs and then down to about 5,000 cfs on February 19, 2006. From December 23, 2005 to February 19, 2006 storage in Folsom Reservoir decreased from 642,000 to about 387,000 acre-feet. This storage is about 210,000 acre-feet less than same time last year's storage of 598,000 acre-feet.

In the Upper American River Basin, French Meadows and Hell Hole Reservoirs are operated by Placer County Water Agency while Union Valley Reservoir is operated by Sacramento Municipal Utility District. These reservoirs collectively have creditable space for flood control purposes totaling about 200,000 acre-feet. However these reservoirs captured (short stopped) the early runoff and are now at or near capacity according to Bureau representatives.

When this Upper Basin space is lost (water is stored), Folsom Reservoir must be operated so as to have an additional 200,000 acre-feet of capacity available for flood control purposes. This was accomplished by drawing down Folsom Reservoir. In March the Bureau will start cutting back the releases from Folsom

Reservoir, diverting that water to conservation storage. Depending on the runoff, diversion to conservation storage could continue into June. As a result of the Bureau's releases, there could be instream impacts (reduced coldwater pool in Folsom Res.) to meet the temperature needs of summering over steelhead and for returning adult Chinook salmon this fall. This in turn could delay Chinook salmon spawning thereby increasing pre-spawning mortality.

Presently there is little coordination between the operators of Upper Basin reservoirs and the Bureau's operation of Folsom Reservoir for meeting the needs of fish and other aquatic resources, associated uses and values in the downstream reaches of the Basin including the Lower American River. Sufficient instream flow and the timing of that flow is necessary throughout the year in each stream in order to maintain the aquatic ecosystem and associated resources. This also includes meeting good conditions for Chinook salmon and steelhead resources in the Lower American River.

SARA believes that a level of historical natural flow should be released from Upper Basin reservoirs throughout the year, and be considered a non-consumptive use to help assure the viability and renewability of riparian and instream resources downstream to the Delta.

SARA believes that American River Basin interests, under the direction of the State Water Resources Control Board, should undertake the development of an American River Basin or sub-basin reservoir / lake minimum pool, instream flow regimen and corridor management plan. A reservoir minimum pool along with adequate instream flows and riparian corridor protection plan would help restore or protect many reaches of the North, Middle and South Forks and their respective tributaries and would help support the ecological conditions of Lower American River to meet the "good condition" criteria contained in Fish and Game Code Section 5637.

**EDITOR'S CORNER**

by Elke Guenter

Volumes and volumes have been written about the incredible restorative powers of the natural world. I have always considered myself one of the fortunate ones who find in Mother Nature a source of solace, tranquility and joy.

So when I learned of the recent, sudden and untimely death of a very dear friend, I instinctively turned to look out one of my windows overlooking the American River. It was around 7 o'clock in the morning when I received the devastating phone call. As is so typical at this time of year, the meadow between my backyard and the river was covered with a thick blanket of fog.

Suddenly everything changed as the first ray of the morning sun sped across the fog bank, creating a shimmering path of gold. And then another ray shot across, and another and another, transforming an ordinary blanket of white into a multi-hued mystical fairyland. Here and there a few bushes and several small trees began to emerge, bathed in a golden glow.

As the fog further dissipated, patches of intensely brilliant green appeared at ground level, as if placed by the deft strokes of an artist's brush. Vestiges of last season's browns were still interspersed among the promise of a new spring.

By now, the dark, brooding river in the background of this painting had slowly evolved into a deep, rich blue—touched by ripples of gold. Just then, several gulls gracefully wove their way across the water, white bodies glistening in the early morning sun. My painting complete, I now faced the day with some sense of comfort, strength and peace.



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SAVE THE AMERICAN RIVER ASSN., INC.  
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**SARA ANNUAL MEETING**

by Elke Guenter

At least 70 people attended the 44<sup>th</sup> SARA Annual Meeting, held this past December at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center. All current directors of the SARA Board had agreed to continue for 2006 and the SARA members in attendance voted to accept the slate of directors.

The SARA Board presented two awards this year for persistent and outstanding efforts on behalf of the American River and Parkway—one to Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates (SABA) and the other to Ron Stork, Senior Policy Advocate of Friends of the River (FOR), a national organization with headquarters here in Sacramento. Walt Seifert accepted the award on behalf of SABA. Ron Stork also delivered the major policy address, concerning both the upper and Lower American River.

Among the guests were Supervisors Ila Collin and Roger Dickinson, as well as Ted Wolter, Chief of Staff for Supervisor Roberta MacGlashan. William Pond, the first director of Sacramento County Parks and known as the "father of the Parkway" was also present as well as Howard Leach, a member of the original group who created SARA back in 1961.

Also in attendance were Dick and Dodie Backus, Lou Heinrich, Sr. and Joanne Lindsay, all long-term members of SARA; in fact, Mr. and Mrs. Lindsay have been members since the early 1960's.

After the meeting, guests were invited to a light lunch and conversation with new and long time friends and associates. The next SARA Annual Meeting will be held in the same location on December 2, 2006. Hold the date!

**NOTICE TO MEMBERS**

E-mail addresses are **very specific**, and accuracy is a must. Please send an email to us so your address can be "**saved**" to eliminate any errors. Just type **SAVE THIS ADDRESS** in the subject line and send it to: **riverwatch@comcast.net** - Let us know if you need to change your e-address, or mailing address. We will include your e-address on our Parkway Safety Alert listing **unless** you tell us otherwise.

**Thanks!**

**FAIR OAKS BLUFF LOAN PAID IN FULL**

by Frank F. Cirill, SARA President Emeritus

A ten year effort by the community to purchase the Fair Oaks Bluff overlooking the American River as parklands for public use has come to a successful conclusion.

After a long period of previous fund raising by Citizens to Save the Bluff, along with the assistance of many Parkway supporters and the Save the American River Association - there still remained a balance of \$51,000.00 from a \$326,000.00 bank loan. At the request of Supervisor Roberta MacGlashan, the County of Sacramento provided \$35,000.00 and Gerry and Karen Kamilos of Fair Oaks made a generous personal donation of \$16,000.00. These two donations resulted in the payment of the loan balance.

The bluff property will become part of the 23-mile American River Parkway, an integral part of the Sacramento County Department of Regional Parks, Recreation and Open Space.

**PROPOSED NEW RESIDENCES ON THE RIVER BLUFF IN CARMICHAEL**

by Frank F. Cirill, SARA President Emeritus

Last fall Judge Judy Hersher of the Sacramento County Superior Court adjudicated that the County Board of Supervisors committed a prejudicial abuse of discretion when it approved a building permit for a river bluff property in the Riverwood Community in Carmichael. the permit would have allowed the Markis-Lien property owners to demolish an existing residence and build three new residences on the bluff property.

The Sacramento County Department of Review and Assessment (DERA) is now required to review the proposed project which involves a request by the project proponent for a Use Permit to reduce the 70-foot setback from the river bluff to approximately 35 feet for the construction of two new single-family residences.

A "Notice of Preparation" for the proposed project has been issued by DERA on January 17, 2006. SARA will respond to the "Notice" and continue to be involved in the review and public hearing process. We will keep SARA members informed of future developments.

**PROGRESS REPORT: UPDATING THE 1985 AMERICAN RIVER PARKWAY PLAN**

In May of 2004 the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors and the Sacramento City Council initiated the update of the current 1985 American River Parkway Plan. A Charter was formed at that time which established the Update Citizen's Advisory Committee. This Charter describes the tasks, roles, responsibilities, timeline and work of the Update Committee members, project staff and facilitators.

Members of the Update Committee were appointed jointly by the County Board of Supervisors and the City Council. The Committee consisting of a total of twenty five members has five County representatives, four city representatives with the balance of the members being representatives of recreational groups or environmental associations.

The Update Committee has been meeting once a month, but because of the increased work load started to meet twice a month in February 2006. Completion of work by the Update Committee is scheduled for May 2006.

The next steps are summarized as follows:

- \* Preparation of the Environmental Report by the Dept. of Environmental Review and Assessment.
- \* Review and Approval by: Sacramento County Board of Supervisors and Sacramento City Council.
- \* Review and Input by: Rancho Cordova City Council
- \* Approval by the State Legislature.

The process is to be completed by the summer of 2007.

**By Frank F. Cirill, SARA President Emeritus.**

"What a nation chooses to save, is what a nation chooses to say about itself."

Mollie Beattie,  
Director US Fish and Wildlife Service, 1994-1997



## ***Mayhew Levee Project Threatens Loss of Parkway Land and Trees***

*by Jim Morgan*

The south bank American River levee upstream of the Mayhew Drain (the "Mayhew Levee") is about three feet lower than the levee on the north bank. It is also the lowest, in relationship to flood height, of any levee on the American River.

The local community and flood control agencies have been working towards increasing the height of the levee for some time. However, besides adding to the height of the levee, a "standard" levee would also result in conversion of a substantial amount of Parkway land to levee or "vegetation free space." Alternatives have been proposed that would reduce the loss of Parkway land compared to a "standard" levee. These alternatives need your support.

The Mayhew Levee is located next to a little-known part of the Parkway called the Gristmill area. It is near Bradshaw Road, west of Rancho Cordova. It is used mainly by local residents, plus occasional fishers and boaters. In part because of its isolation, it has retained or regained a mostly natural character since the levee was built in the 1970s.

It has several habitat types, including areas with dense tree canopies, areas with scattered trees, and grassland areas with numerous flowering plants. It supports abundant wildlife, including coyotes, deer, rabbits, squirrels, hawks, pheasants, and other mammals, birds reptiles, and insects. One admirer recently described it as a "secret garden."

The heart of the problem is that if the existing levee were to be replaced by a "standard" levee, it would not only be three feet higher, but would be about 40 feet wider, including "vegetation free

space" on both sides for inspection and maintenance. This would result in loss of about 20% of the Parkway in this area. This would have a significant negative impact on the Parkway.

There are several alternatives that would give equivalent flood protection, but reduce loss of the Parkway. These alternatives include a partially screened floodwall that would save three large heritage oak trees. Also under consideration for most of remainder of the project is a more highly engineered levee that would have a somewhat steeper riverside slope and be reinforced with "Geogrid." This would reduce the amount of Parkway land converted to levee.

A draft Environmental Impact Statement/Report on the project was released in November, 2005. This document is grossly inadequate. It failed to identify or study feasible alternatives that would be environmentally preferable, and had numerous false or misleading statements or analyses. Extensive comments pointing out the problems with the draft environmental document were submitted by the adjacent Butterfield-Riviera East Community Association (BRECA) and a letter was submitted by SARA.

A final environmental document is expected to be released in the near future. After that, the various flood protection agencies will make decisions on which alternative to implement.

### ***We need your help!***

If you are interested in helping or learning more about the area, please contact Jim Morgan at 361-7236 or [\*\*\*jmorgan1@ix.netcom.com\*\*\*](mailto:jmorgan1@ix.netcom.com).



## ***Pelagic Organism Decline***

*by Felix Smith*

We are going to hear a lot about Pelagic Organism Decline (POD) in the Delta. However, this decline is not new. It has been going on for years. The continued health and viability of the Delta and its public trust resources, uses and values are at stake.

Last year a special team of inter-agency scientists announced a dramatic downturn of 4 species of fish in the Delta. The Delta smelt, Longfin smelt, threadfin shad and juvenile striped bass. The team also reported severe declines in plankton that these fish depend upon for food.

The Delta smelt's decline is significant because it lives entirely in the confines of the Delta estuary. Therefore the Delta smelt is to the Delta what the canary was to the miners. The index is a scientific measure of relative abundance. Data since 1995 indicates the lowest index on record at only 26. A few years ago the index was 899.

The striped bass (an introduced species) index was 121 in 2005 and 53 in 2004. In 1967 before massive water exports the index was 20,038. The Longfin smelt index was 129 in 2005 and in 1967 was 81,790. For threadfin shad the index was 2,866 in 2005 and 14,402 in 2001.

The three main culprits of POD appear to be; water diversion (timing and amount of diversion); contaminants (various types of herbicides, pesticides and trace elements such as Selenium); and invasive species (competing native and exotic species. This POD follows 3 to 4 years of record and near record water exports from the Delta.

The USGS (USGS Cir 1159, 1998) found 49 pesticides in the San Joaquin River and tributaries. Seven pesticides exceeded the criteria for the protection of aquatic life. The most common diazinon frequently exceeded toxic levels to aquatic life.

In addition, long-banned organochlorine insecticides continue to be transported to the Delta by soil erosion and sediment movement. These include DDT toxaphene, and chlordane with concentrations frequently exceeding chronic criteria for the protection of freshwater aquatic life.

Concentration of DDT and organochlorine insecticides in aquatic organisms and sediment still exceed guidelines for the protection of fish eating animals. Nitrates and ammonia have also increased over the years.

Selenium carried in the agricultural drainage and wastewater can be found in food chain organisms throughout the lower San Joaquin River and in the Delta.

The Bay-Delta has been the depository of exotic organisms from around the world with animals from the east coast of the United States to the waters of the Orient. Each species is competing for food and living space with native species.

The cause of POD cannot be simply explained. There are too many variables. Research will be conducted to determine the cause or causes. But that may take years.

“A river is more than an amenity...it is a treasure. It offers a necessity of life that must be rationed among those who have power over it.”

Oliver Wendell Holmes

“Only within the moment of time represented by the present century has one species—man—acquired significant power to alter the nature of his world.”

Rachel Carson

## **FOLSOM DAM FLOOD CONTROL OPTIONS UPDATE**

by Jack Sohl

Feasibility studies and engineering tasks are being conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Reclamation, California Water Resources Control Board, SAFCA, and others, to define options and make decisions leading to a system or modifications to Folsom Dam which would significantly increase the level of protection from potential flooding of the American River. An increase from one chance in a 100 year period of flooding to 1 chance in a 200 year period is the target goal. Included in the decision-making processes are cost and complete date considerations.

The American River flood-control issue has been a highly political and contentious arena for over twenty years. It is very rewarding to finally see the various federal, state and local government agencies, politicians and environmental organizations working together.

The most reasonable solution, based on completion time, cost, and technical concerns appears to be a new spillway which would pass around the southern end of the dam (not under it), a modest rise in the height of the dam, and enlargement of some existing flood gates. Funding for spillway preliminary design studies and cost estimating has been appropriated, as well as funds for the existing dam modifications. There are still obstacles to overcome, such as getting full funding for whichever solution is finally selected, and keeping the Auburn Dam advocates from short-stopping the proposed project. Stay tuned for further developments.

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### **NOTICE TO SARA MEMBERS!**

Please check the renewal date above your name on the address page. If the last two numbers are **05**, it means that your renewal is past due. Any date ending with **05** means that your last renewal was received over a year ago.

**PLEASE HELP US BY RENEWING NOW!**



## **AMERICAN RIVER PARKWAY SAFETY COALITION**

by Bob Hanna, Coordinator

Emergency telephone number cards provided by SARA and the American River Parkway Safety Coalition are available for free at the Sacramento County Parks Rangers' Office, 4040 Bradshaw Road, during normal week-day working hours. Parkway users are encouraged to enter the emergency telephone numbers into their cell phones.

Emergencies occurring on the Parkway upstream from Hazel Ave. are within the park jurisdiction of State Parks and downstream from there, County Parks. As a practical matter, in the event of an emergency a person should first call 911. Immediately thereafter consider calling either State Parks (916) 358-1300, or County Parks (916) 875-6672, depending on which side of Hazel Ave. you are on.

Park Rangers may have greater familiarity with locations and routes which could result in speedier assistance. Callers can help by being conscious of approximate distance from mileage markers. In the event of problems connecting to 911, consider calling the Sheriff's Department (916) 874-5111 if upstream from Howe Ave. and then follow up with a call to the appropriate Park Ranger's office.

During the five years existence of the American River Parkway Safety Coalition, all adverse incidents have involved people who were alone on the Parkway. Using the Parkway in the company of a friend should minimize risk of unlawful confrontation. With common sense and reasonable awareness of the surroundings nearly all of us can enjoy the bounties available in the Parkway, considered by many to be the Jewel in Sacramento.

Bob Hanna is Coordinator of the American River Parkway Safety Coalition.



**TO HELP THE PARKWAY, JOIN SARA TODAY!**

**THANKS TO ALL OUR SUPPORTERS!**

SARA will soon be the beneficiary of a donation from the Sacramento Wheelmen, the proceeds from their recent silent auction! Many thanks from all of us to the Wheelmen. Sacramento Bike Hikers also made a generous donation, and Grant Werschull, Executive Director of the Smith River Alliance, has personally donated funds. The cover letter with his check states, in part ---"it has been my privilege to see the dedication of your Board members ---Felix, Frank, Jack and Jim through many years of Water Forum meetings."

These regular, generous donors are in many ways the bread and butter of SARA. Individual memberships are, of course, extremely important as well. We have been fortunate to receive continued support from Print Tech, Jet Express Mail, CFFU, Granite Bay Flycasters, American Fly Fishing Co., Central California Canoe Club, River City Paddlers, Fly Fishers of Davis, American River Raft Rentals and several long time SARA members who prefer to remain anonymous, but are very committed to helping protect and preserve the Parkway.

**SARA OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS**

- Alan Wade.....President
- Warren Truitt.....Vice President
- Elke Guenter.....Secretary
- Jack Sohl..... Treasurer
- Frank Cirill.....President Emeritus
- Jim Jones.....Past President
  
- Wayne Chubb.....Bill Griffith
- Burt Hodges.....Gary Keill
- Harold Kerster.....Mary Beth Metcalf
- Jim Morgan.....Kevin Regan
- Felix Smith.....
- Betsy Weiland.....Volunteer & ARNHA Liaison
- Dan Kopp.....CGNA Liaison
- Bob Burrows.....Advisor
- Howard Ross.....Advisor
- Elmer Aldrich.....Advisor
- Bud Getty..... ARNHA Liaison

**LOCATION FOR SARA BOARD MEETINGS**

SARA's Board meetings are held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. Meetings are currently being held in the Conference Room in the County Parks and Recreation Dept., located at 3711 Branch Center Road. From Bradshaw Road turn right onto Ecology Lane - Turn right again into the first parking lot. Call ahead of time for possible changes to date or location.

**(Best number to call for information: 383-1298 - Wanda)**

SARA phone and fax line: (916) 387-1763  
SARA E-mail: riverwatch@comcast.net  
SARA Website: [www.sarariverwatch.org](http://www.sarariverwatch.org)

Word Processing and Layout by Wanda Denson

NOTE: BECAUSE SARA IS THE PRIMARY ADVOCATE APPEARING BEFORE GOVERNMENT & COMMUNITY AGENCIES ON BEHALF OF THE AMERICAN RIVER PARKWAY, YOUR MEMBERSHIP DUES AND/OR SPECIAL DONATIONS, ARE NOT TAX DEDUCTIBLE.

**PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO: SAVE THE AMERICAN RIVER ASSOCIATION, INC. (OR SARA)  
MAIL TO: SARA - P.O. BOX 277638 - SACRAMENTO, CA 95827-7638**

**SAVE THE AMERICAN RIVER ASSOCIATION, INC.  
MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL AND APPLICATION FORM**

**SPRING - 2006 ISSUE**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ NEW MEMBER? [] RENEWAL? []

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_ HOME PHONE: (    ) \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_ WORK PHONE: (    ) \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY -

**ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES**

**WANT TO VOLUNTEER? \_\_\_\_\_**

- \$10.00 FULL TIME STUDENT     \$25.00 REGULAR     \$50.00 SUPPORTING     \$100.00 FAMILY
- \$100.00+ SUSTAINING     \$250.00 CORPORATE/BUSINESS     \$1,000.00+ LIFETIME/PATRON
- \$ \_\_\_\_\_ LEGAL FUNDS     \$ \_\_\_\_\_ PARKWAY     \$ \_\_\_\_\_ GIFT     \$ \_\_\_\_\_ OTHER

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SACRAMENTO, CA 95827-7638**

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**MARCH 13 -“Discovering Rancho Cordova’s Natural Treasures” sponsored by Habitat 2020**

Cordova Recreation and Park District Headquarters at 2197 Chase Drive - Bldg. #2  
7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. - Refreshments will be served

**APRIL 8 & 9 - Wildflower Weekend at Crawford’s Barn**

2715 Tiber Dr. Rancho Cordova - 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.  
[www.sacvalleynps.org](http://www.sacvalleynps.org) or call 737-wild

**APRIL 15 (Saturday) - American River Clean Up - 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon**

To volunteer please call (916) 456-7423 or sign up online at [www.arpf.org](http://www.arpf.org)

**APRIL 22 - Earth Day Celebration at CSUS Campus 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.**

[www.earthdaysac.org](http://www.earthdaysac.org)

**APRIL 21-28 - Creek Week - Many activities scheduled**

[www.sacto-ucc.org](http://www.sacto-ucc.org) or call 482-8377

**APRIL 29 - Creek Clean-up Day - Celebration at Discovery Museum 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.**

**MAY 20 - Folsom Dam 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary - 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at Beals Point**

[www.usbr.gov/mp/arwec](http://www.usbr.gov/mp/arwec)

**JUNE 4 - River City Run - [www.earthdaysac.org](http://www.earthdaysac.org)**