

**REVIEW OF SPECIAL EVENT PERMIT FOR
GOLD COUNTRY ORIENTEERING EVENT
September 22, 2013**

The Event

On September 15, 2013 an orienteering meet, a “Special Event” as permitted by County Regional Parks, was held in the Sacramento Bar and Lower Sunrise Areas of the American River Parkway. Attachment A is the Application and Attachment B is the Special Event Permit. The Overall Event Description in the Application is as follows:

“This orienteering meet will have participants use a detailed map to find specific markers in order. Participants will walk or run around the park, crossing the river on the Jim Jones Bridge. Meet headquarters will be either at the Lower Sunrise parking lot or the Sacramento Bar parking lot.”

Information on the Gold Country Orienteers website on September 16, 2013 included a description of the terrain and identified cobble, poison oak, black berry and star thistle as being present and suggested that participants in the event wear cleats and gaiters to deal with the conditions.¹

The following is the definition of orienteering taken from the Applicant’s website, www.goldcountryorienteers.org:

What is Orienteering? Orienteering is a competitive international sport that combines racing with navigation. It is a timed race in which individual participants use a specially created, highly detailed map to select routes and navigate through diverse and often unfamiliar terrain and visit control points in sequence. Courses can also be enjoyed as a walk in the woods, with difficulty levels from beginner to expert offered at most events.

By posting times for each entrant, the results of the September 15, 2013 event that have been posted on the Gold Country Orienteering website clearly show the event to be a competitive event.

County Regional Parks staff report that the Gold Country Orienteering group has been holding events in the Parkway for more than ten years.²

Findings

1. Land Use Designations: A large portion of Lower Sunrise is designated in the Parkway Plan as Protected Area, and most of the equestrian/hiking trail through Lower Sunrise is in Protected Area. All of Sacramento Bar, except for the area surrounding parking, is comprised of Protected, Nature Study, and Open Space Preserve Areas.

¹ Email from K. Baygell to B. Davis, SARA, September 20, 2013 6:05 p.m., Subject: “orienteering results ’08 thru sept ’13”

² Email from A. Veselka, Recreation Supervisor, to K. Baygell, September 17, 2013 9:01 a.m., Subject: “lower sunrise orienteering”

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2. Parkway Plan Requirements: The Parkway Plan specifically does not allow activities associated with a large group orienteering race to occur in Protected, Nature Study, and Open Space Preserve Areas, nor does it allow a competitive event to occur on the equestrian/hiking trail.³

The Parkway Plan and County Park's Special Event Application Form also require that group activities and special events approved by permit shall occur in a manner that minimizes impacts on other Parkway users, natural resources and aesthetics in the Parkway.⁴

3. Event is a Competitive Event: Race participants were observed running both upstream and downstream on the equestrian/hiking trail and through the vegetation adjacent to the trail in a designated Protected Area in Lower Sunrise. In addition to the Applicant's website, some participants also confirmed the event was a timed, competitive, orienteering race.⁵ Also, results posted on the Gold Country Orienteering website demonstrate the competitive nature of the event.

4. No Layout Map showing Course: The County Application form states that event organizers must submit a special event layout map sixty days prior to the event. The layout map is to detail: emergency response routes, the special event course, parking, camping, fencing, food service, concessions, portable restrooms, dumpsters, and any other equipment or structures used during the event. Except for the identification as an "orienteering meet", the application and permit for the event make no mention of a race, equestrian/hiking trail use, or of specific areas to be used in the two parks. No layout map was submitted, and Parks has no documentation on file for the event other than the application and permit.

5. Apparent Permit Violations: Some Terms and Conditions of the permit were not met:

- a. The application specifies that there will be 90 participants. There were 125 participants.
- b. The application states that special events will not negatively impact the park's cultural or natural resources, yet race participants were observed running through vegetation in a Protected Area of Lower Sunrise and presumably through vegetation in the Protected, Nature Study, and Open Space Areas of Sacramento Bar since no course map was provided. Information on the Gold Country Orienteering website clearly describes the intent to run thorough these areas.

³ American River Parkway Plan 2008, Chapter 7, "Land Use", pages 116-117

⁴ American River Parkway Plan 2008, Chapter 5, "Recreation Use of the Parkway", page 101, "Group Activities"

⁵ Email from K. Baygell to B. Davis, SARA, September 16, 2013 8:45 a.m., Subject: "lower sunrise orienteering"

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6. Natural Resource Impacts Not Identified: The extent of impacts to the natural resources has not been identified and cannot be adequately measured as Parks has not prepared the Resource Impact Monitoring Plan called for in policy 3.4 of the Parkway Plan.
7. Approval Not to be Based upon Prior Approvals: Since 2008 the Gold Country Orienteers have held 19 orienteering meets in the Sacramento Bar, River Bend, Rossmoor Bar, Lower Sunrise, and Sailor Bar areas of the Parkway. There have been anywhere between 78 and 224 participants at each meet. Note that the County Application form states that “Event organizers should not assume special events are approved based on the previous year’s event approval.”

Conclusion

Sacramento County Regional Parks has violated state law by issuing a permit that is NOT consistent with the American River Parkway Plan 2008.

Attachments

1. Unsigned and Undated Special Event Application by Gold Country Orienteers
2. Special Event Permit for Gold County Orienteering Event at Sac Bar /Lower Sunrise on September 15, 2013, dated March 7, 2013 and signed March 7, 2013