

Colusa-Sacramento River State Recreation Area

Preliminary General Plan and Draft Program Environmental Impact Report



February 5, 2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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**Preliminary General Plan and
Draft Program Environmental Impact Report**

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A. PARK DESCRIPTION

Colusa-Sacramento River State Recreation Area (the Park) is located immediately north of the City of Colusa, California on the west bank of the Sacramento River. It occupies about 359 acres in the Sacramento Valley, an important agricultural region of northern California. The river is the main reason for the Park's existence. Much of the Park lies within the designated floodway of the Sacramento River. Regular floods from the north nourish the Park's riparian forest, create (and re-create) beaches and move woody debris into the river.

The Park is within the Colusa Subreach of the Natural Resources Agency's Sacramento River Conservation Area (SRCA), which encompasses about 222 river miles between Redding and Verona (Figure ES.1). Currently, river access is limited along the Colusa Subreach between Princeton and Colusa. Few public roads provide access to the river corridor through the productive orchards of fruit and nut trees. Of thirteen sites now owned by public agencies, the only developed recreational facilities are in Colusa-Sacramento River SRA and the adjacent Colusa Levee Scenic Park. Most other public lands are currently accessible only by boat. The [Colusa Subreach Recreation Access Plan](#), prepared for The Nature Conservancy in 2007, recommends that *"no new land access points are recommended at this time."* Instead, it recommended expansion of, and increased facilities development, in the SRA. In particular, improving boating and camping facilities here will improve access to the river's abundant natural and recreational resources, as well as a wide variety of public lands.

B. PURPOSE OF THE GENERAL PLAN/ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

General plans are broad-based policy documents that provide management guidelines for a park unit. These guidelines define a unique framework, focused on this particular unit, for implementing State Parks' diverse mission of resource stewardship, visitor use, interpretation, and visitor services. The general plan defines the purpose, vision, and long-term goals and guidelines for park management for the next 20 years or more. Typically, a general plan is not a project-specific document; therefore, it typically does not define specific objectives, methodologies, and designs on how to accomplish these goals. Instead, it provides guidelines for future land management and for the facilities required to accommodate expected visitation. Because a General Plan is likely to be in effect for so long, it must be flexible enough to accommodate expected environmental change while clearly guiding decision-making consistent with the adopted Park vision.

The California Environmental Quality Act of 1970 (CEQA) requires state agencies to analyze and disclose the potential environmental effects, both direct and indirect, of a proposed discretionary action. The Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is an integral component of this General Plan.

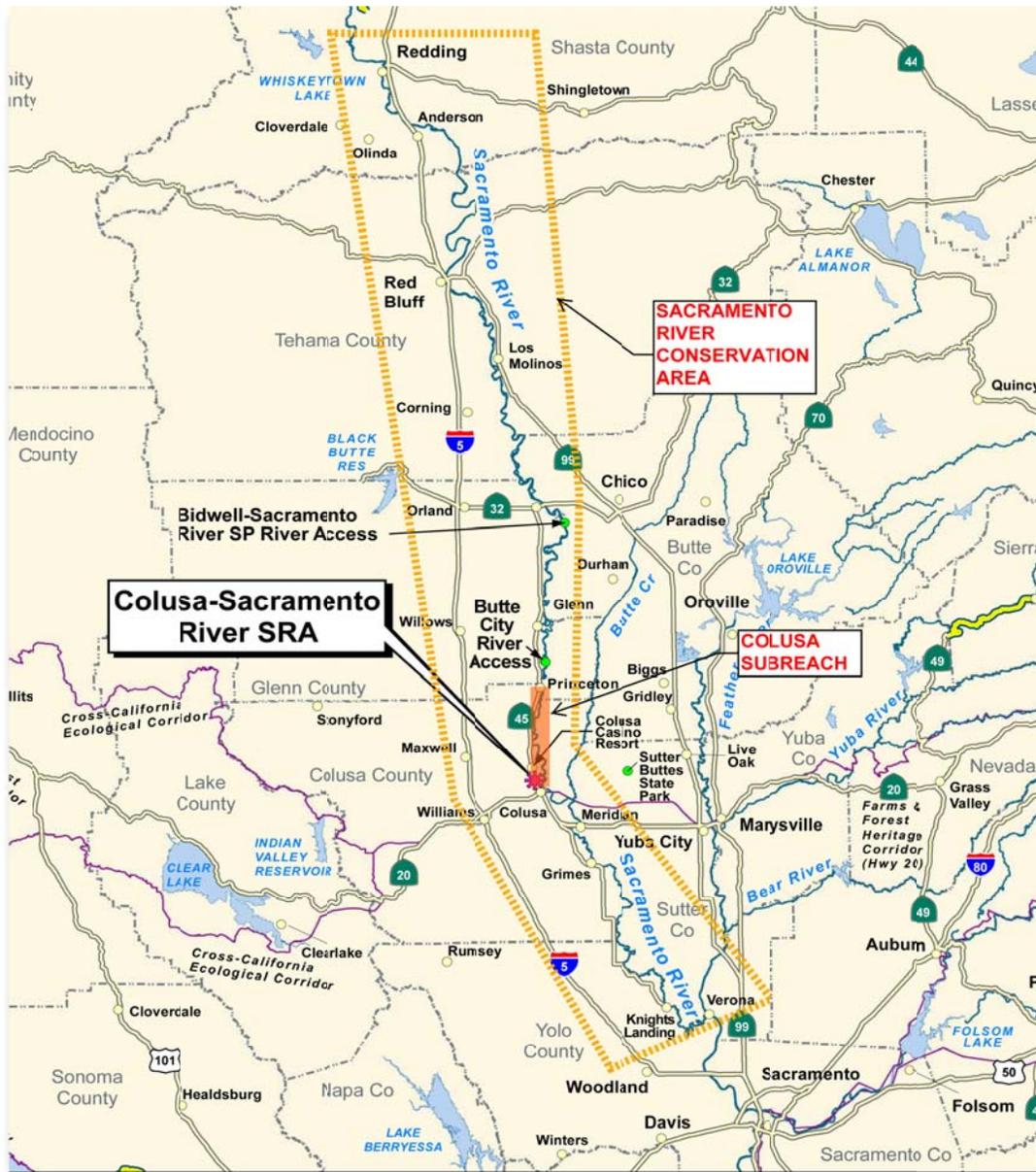


Figure ES.1. Sacramento River Conservation Area and Colusa Subreach

C. RELATED PLANNING EFFORTS AND PUBLIC OUTREACH

Stakeholder involvement is an important component of the general plan process. The people of California have entrusted California State Parks to manage the park system's natural and cultural resources while providing recreational opportunities on these public lands. It is important for planners to obtain input from diverse sources so the park's vision reflects the needs of a wide cross-section of Californians. The following groups and individuals provided written input or were consulted during the planning process begun in 2006:

Agencies. City of Colusa, Colusa County Resource Conservation District, Colusa Unified School District, Colusa County Local Agency Formation Commission, Colusa County, Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, California Department of Water Resources, California Department of Fish & Wildlife, California Department of Transportation, Central Valley Flood Protection Board, California State Lands Commission, US Army Corps of Engineers, US Fish & Wildlife Service

Stakeholder Groups. Colusa Chamber of Commerce, Colusa County Garden Club, Colusa County Farm Bureau, Family Water Alliance, Sacramento River Trust, Sacramento River Conservation Area Forum, The Nature Conservancy, California Native Plant Society, Mt Lassen Chapter

Native American consultation. Ten tribal individuals/organizations on the Native American Heritage Commission consultation list were mailed letters requesting input.

Adjacent Property Owners and the Public. All City utility ratepayers, including adjacent property owners, were notified. Two public workshops were held in the City of Colusa. The California Parks and Recreation Commission conducted a public hearing on the Preliminary General Plan/Draft EIR.

D. DECLARATION OF PURPOSE.

The purpose statement describes the unique role that the Park will play in meeting the California State Parks mission. The proposed Declaration of Purpose for the Park is as follows:

The purpose of the Colusa-Sacramento River State Recreation Area is to make the passive and active recreational opportunities which are offered by the Sacramento River and its river bank available to all people; and to protect and enhance the riparian and riverine environment while accommodating changing hydrologic conditions and the successional processes which occur in the Colusa Subreach.

E. PARK VISION

The proposed Vision Statement is as follows:

The Park provides high quality recreational experiences consistent with the dynamic riverine environment of the Colusa Subreach of the Sacramento River. River access is provided to all visitors who enjoy activities such as boating, floating, fishing and beach activities. The Park and its recreational facilities encourage active, healthy lifestyles by offering walking, biking and paddling opportunities and other outdoor activities. The Park also offers passive recreational opportunities such as picnicking, camping and wildlife viewing.

The Park holds precious remnants of the historically-extensive Great Valley Riparian Forest and wetlands which are ecologically important to the watershed, the state, and the international Pacific Flyway. The Park's floodway resources are protected and its biodiversity is enhanced over time. The river channel, riparian forest and grasslands are managed as a dynamic interconnected system driven by natural successional forces to the extent compatible with surrounding land uses and river flow management objectives. Park facilities accommodate flooding where prudent and minimize disturbance to habitat values.

Partnerships engage Californians in experiencing and learning about the dynamic nature of the Sacramento River watershed and the Great Valley landscape it nourishes, and the State's role in managing its abundant biodiversity, its water supply and its flooding potential. The Park's facilities and programs enhance regional recreational activities by offering year-round overnight accommodations, boat launching and landing facilities, event space, regional recreation information and long-distance bicycling infrastructure. The history and pre-history of the region are illustrated through living history programs, personal interpretation and various media, both on- and off-site.

F. ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

As a result of the outreach to agencies, stakeholder groups, tribes, and the public, a number of issues and opportunities emerged that are addressed in this General Plan. These include:

Unit Classification. The existing unit classification as a State Recreation Area was found to be appropriate. According to extensive studies cited in Chapter 2, the Park is the best place in the Subreach to increase recreational use, and more recreational facilities are needed. Recreation will remain a primary use of this Park with natural and cultural resources values preserved through management goals and guidelines.

Purpose and Vision. The Purpose and Vision highlight these priorities: 1) the significant recreational experiences that will be accommodated, 2) the primary ecosystem values to be supported and, 3) how the Park's facilities, land base, management and programs could enhance

regional recreation, preserve biological diversity and protect natural and cultural resources through partnership efforts.

Recreation Opportunities. There is an unmet and increasing need for outdoor recreation opportunities, facilities and services in the region. The Park is an appropriate location to increase motorized and human-powered boating access, wildlife watching and nature observation, health and fitness activities, river access, overnight accommodations, and social and cultural activities.

Interpretation and Education. Primary audiences that would benefit from increased interpretive programming include local and regional school children engaged in standards-based learning, local and Central Valley families and adults learning about their cultural and natural resources heritage, Northern California visitors engaging in wildlife observation and adult boaters exploring the Sacramento River.

Natural Resources Management. The Park sustains significant physical and biotic natural resources, including special status plant and wildlife species, within the Sacramento River Conservation Area designated by the Natural Resources Agency. Special management goals and guidelines focused on the existing habitat restoration projects, the Sacramento River floodway, the former river channel (commonly called Roberts Ditch), and climate change will help preserve natural resource values as recreational activities increase.

Facilities and Infrastructure Development. Expanding boating, park entrance and circulation, overnight accommodations, picnicking, and river access facilities in the Park require careful consideration, including collaboration with the Park partners listed at the end of Chapter 2. The construction of a boat launch ramp in the adjacent city park will require changes to both facilities and park management. Providing vehicle access to the RESTORATION PROJECT, RIPARIAN AREA and SOUTHWEST PARCEL will require modifying vehicle circulation facilities.

Park Revenues, Operations and Maintenance. Park management is currently shared with the City of Colusa. Management goals and guidelines for continuation of this partnership are incorporated into the Plan, such as completing a cost/benefit analysis to establish appropriate cost-sharing with the City of Colusa, pursuing mission-compatible concession opportunities, and exploring more collaborative management structures.

Community Concerns and Input. The most significant community desire is for increased recreational facilities and opportunities in the Park that benefit the City of Colusa residents and businesses. Partnering with the City of Colusa to complete the proposed Boat Launching Facility is particularly important to community members. Some community members are concerned that relocating the park entrance will create significant localized traffic impacts. Phasing improvements, such as a new campground and entrance station, over time may resolve these concerns.

G. GENERAL PLAN PROPOSAL

The General Plan recommends that, in order to meet the Park Vision stated earlier, opportunities for the following recreation & interpretive activities be expanded:

- Motorized and human-powered boating
- Wildlife watching and nature observation
- Trail activities such as bicycling, hiking, running, and orienteering
- Safe public access to the river, including for persons with mobility challenges
- RV and tent camping for groups and individuals, as well as overnight lodging
- Large and small outdoor social, interpretive and cultural events for groups and families
- Information and facilities serving regional recreation opportunities

The following facilities are allowable under this plan:

- Paved and unpaved roads, bicycle paths and trails
- Two primitive group campgrounds (up to 50 tents each)
- Unpaved day use parking (up to 35 spaces)
- Paved day use, boat trailer, and en-route parking (up to 110 spaces)
- Two boat launches
- Boat-in primitive campground (up to 8 tents)
- Maintenance yard and staff residence
- Individual and small group developed campground with RV hookups and/or cabins (up to 42 sites)
- Individual and large group developed campground (up to 20 sites)
- Picnic sites (up to 44 sites)
- Restrooms
- Outdoor event center
- Vehicle entrance improvements and entrance station (potentially off-site)
- Boat launching facility (off-site)

Increasing recreational opportunities, activities and associated facilities may impact natural and cultural resources in the Park. In order to reduce, eliminate or mitigate negative impacts, goals and guidelines have been developed for Park management in the following categories:

- Natural Resources Management (NRM)
- Cultural Resources Management (CRM)
- Recreational and Community Activities (RCA)
- Visitor Facility Planning (VF)
- Infrastructure (INF)
- Visitor Management (VM)
- Park Operations and Maintenance (O&M)
- Interpretation and Education (I&E)

In addition to this, management zones for appropriate recreation activities and facilities have been proposed, with zone-specific goals and guidelines. Analysis of the site opportunities and constraints considered the Park’s physical, biotic, aesthetic, recreational and cultural resources; as well as existing circulation patterns, surrounding land uses, regional planning influences, and operational factors. This analysis led to designation of six management zones and consideration of off-site facilities to meet needs that are not able to be accommodated in the Park:

MANAGEMENT ZONE	MANAGEMENT INTENT
Restoration/Recreation Management Zone (RESMZ)	Improve habitat for regionally-native plants and animals, improve biological integrity and function, and provide floodway-compatible recreational and educational activities.
Riparian Recreation Management Zone (RIPMZ)	Perpetuate habitat for regionally-native plants and animals, allow ecological processes to nourish and sculpt the landscape, and provide floodway-compatible recreational activities.
Levee Overlay Management Zone (LOMZ)	Provide for flood control, as well as vehicle, pedestrian and bicycle circulation.
Southwest Management Zone (SWMZ)	Continue administrative and maintenance functions. Provide for camping and overnight lodging.
Channel Management Zone (CHMZ)	Protect ecological processes that nourish and sculpt the landscape while recognizing that historic human uses may take precedence.
Southeast Management Zone (SEMZ)	Provide diverse, concentrated recreational activities in a flexibly managed urban park setting.
Off-site Facilities (OFF)	Collaborate with partners to provide desirable off-site facilities and services. Consider land acquisition.

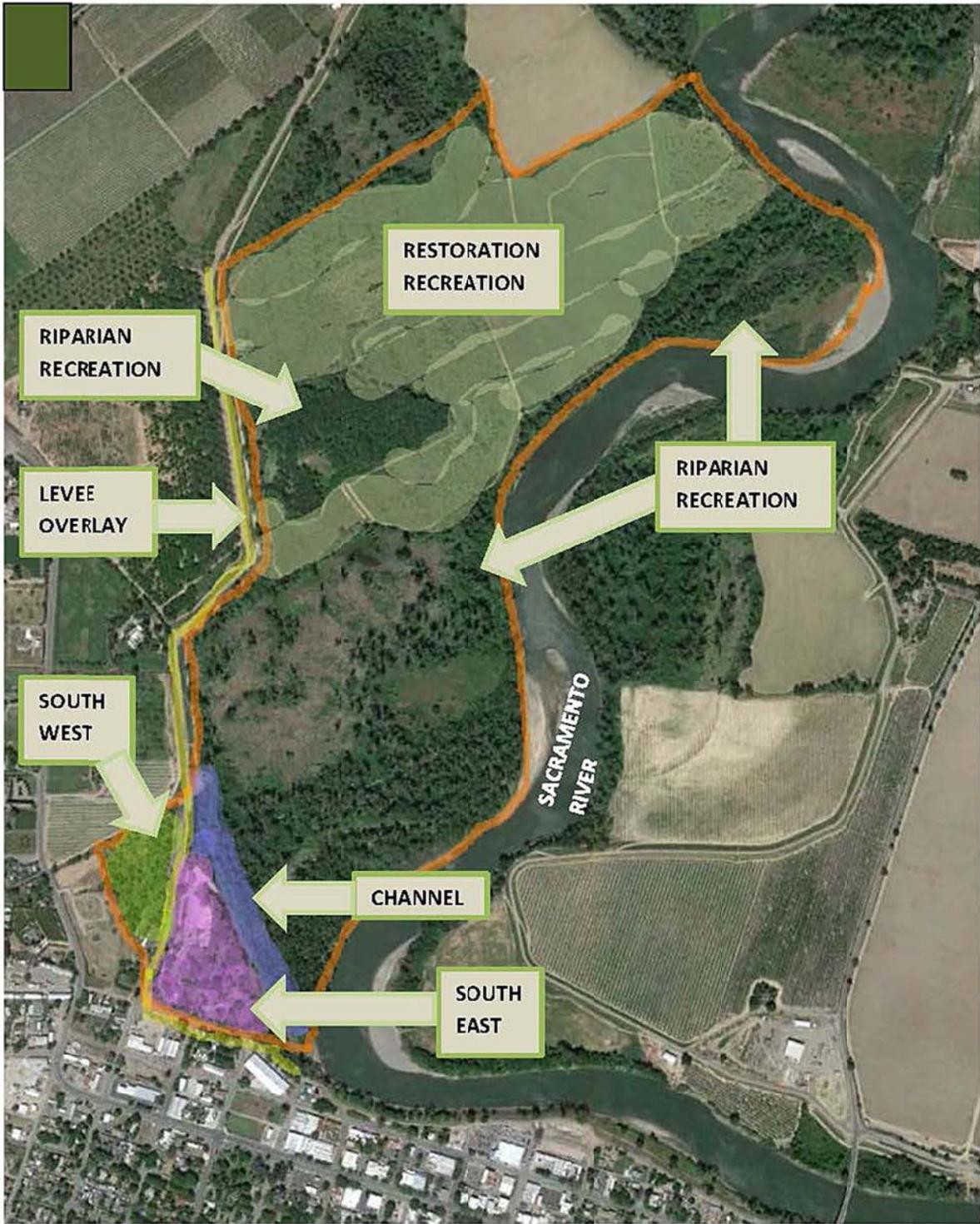


Figure ES.2. Management Zones

H. IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING EFFORTS

Because the General Plan is a general long-range document, implementing it will require more detailed planning. Implementation planning efforts may include feasibility reports, and site-specific development plans. At a minimum, the following issues will require additional planning before they can be implemented:

1. Overnight accommodations
2. Vehicle circulation and Park entrance
3. Park operation, including the boat launching facility

Overnight accommodations. Providing an expanded range of camping and overnight lodging opportunities in, or near the Park, is recommended. More primitive camping is suitable in the floodway and more developed accommodations should be outside the floodway. A feasibility study will assist the department with identifying opportunities such as joint management, concession operation, and off-site partnerships, as well as an analysis of facility size and amenities which influence the operational cost-effectiveness.

Vehicle circulation and Park entrance. Reconfiguring vehicle circulation, including the entrance station, is recommended to implement many of the facilities allowed in the plan while protecting natural resources, Park facilities and public safety. The General Plan includes design guidelines to resolve this, and other, circulation issues.

Park Operation. Park facilities are currently operated by the City of Colusa. Future operation of the Park must be negotiated upon expiration of the current Operating Agreement in October 2016 and after completion of the City of Colusa's proposed boat launching facility. The General Plan includes several recommendations that should be considered during these negotiations.

I. ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

This General Plan/EIR provides a program-level evaluation of the potential for significant adverse environmental impacts on aesthetics, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, agricultural resources, greenhouse gas emissions, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, land use and planning, mineral resources, noise, population and housing, public services, recreation, transportation and traffic, and utilities and service systems. The criteria used to determine the significance of impacts in the resource discussions were derived from State CEQA guidelines.

Implementation of the General Plan is not expected to result in significant impacts on the environment, because the goals and guidelines contained in Chapter 4 The Plan, the Department Operations Manual policies, the Department's Standard Project Requirements, the Department's Trails Manual, and Departmental Notices in conjunction with federal, state, and local laws and regulations, would avoid potentially significant effects or maintain them at less-than-significant levels.

Colusa-Sacramento River State Recreation Area



Sacramento River looking south toward Sutter Buttes. SOURCE: Courtesy of Dennis Dahlin

