

**NORTH SACRAMENTO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE &  
AMERICAN RIVER PARKWAY PRESERVATION SOCIETY**

February 20, 2006

**Open Letter to Sacramento County Board of Supervisors and Sacramento City Council**

Our two organizations, the North Sacramento Chamber of Commerce and the American River Parkway Preservation Society (ARPPS) have been working together for some years to improve public safety in the Lower Reach of the Parkway, to ensure the safe and enjoyable use of that area by the adjacent community.

Adjacent community complaints over the years to the Parks Department and the rangers staffing the Parkway about the unsafe conditions were largely ignored or deemed unjustified, raising, among other issues, an environmental justice concern.

This was in direct contradiction of Sacramento County reports notifying of the danger, including the *American River Parkway: Financial Needs Study* report of 2000 which said under the heading of New Threats to the Parkway: "...the invasion of areas of the parkway by homeless persons which has created a sense of lack of safety." (p. 2); and the *Lower American River: River Corridor Management Plan* of (2002) which stated as a recommended action, "Increase the number of County Ranger Patrols and City "Problem Oriented Police" efforts to achieve a "best practice" operational standard and to target illegal camping in the Parkway." (p. 59).

There have also been many articles about public safety in the Lower Reach in the local print media, (list enclosed), yet with all of this attention, there still appears to be an on the ground dismissing of the problem and the latest rendition of this is as a result of the efforts of Mary Tappel.

Mary is an environmentally-knowledgeable Parkway user who lives close to the Parkway. She has been very active in Creek Week, works for the State as an Environmental Scientist and has done work for SAFCA. She has led and organized creek clean ups throughout North Sacramento for the past 15 years and has a strong environmental justice perspective.

Mary was involved in a serious incident last year as a volunteer on the American River Parkway Foundation's Great American River Clean-Up in the Lower Reach area of the Parkway. We had advised against allowing volunteers to go into that area, (the Chamber deciding against being a sponsor, as we had in the past, because of our safety concerns) because of the fears we had of the illegal camper vs clean-up volunteer conflict Mary Tappel became the victim of.

Mary has continued her dedicated advocacy for safety in the Parkway, and from our perspective, she is doing the absolutely vital work of trying to protect the public against Parkway crime in the area having the dubious distinction of being the most dangerous in the Parkway.

We would hope that you will continue to respond to the important message that Mary and other advocates carry to the community, which is, that the entire Parkway needs to be a safe and enjoyable place for the public to recreate.

Sincerely,

Franklin Burris, President  
North Sacramento Chamber of Commerce

Michael Rushford, President  
American River Parkway Preservation Society

Cc: Chamber Board & Parkway Task Force, Parkway Society Board  
Enclosure: Print Media on Illegal Camping: October 2003 to February 2006

## **Print Media on Illegal Camping: October 2003 to February 2006**

- 1) Sacramento Bee, October 3, 2003: Parkway camping slackens with pressure on homeless** **By Walt Wiley -- Bee Staff Writer - (*Published October 3, 2003*)** “The huge campsites with dozens of occupants and accompanying filth by the ton are on the wane, even if there are people still camping on the parkway and even if homelessness is as much a problem as ever.”
- 2) Sacramento News & Review: November 14, 2004: Can't see the river for the trash, By Marie Wilson** “**My companion opened the door of the car to let his dog out.** Immediately, someone began shouting expletives at us, and two dogs began snarling and growling in our direction. Several homeless people appeared to be permanently camped in the shade of the trees with nearby trash strewn everywhere.”
- 3) Sacramento News & Review: December 2, 2004: Trail of fears** *The American River Bike Trail is idyllic, as long as you don't get maced, mugged or beaten with a rock ;* **By Jason Probst** “**Encompassing 32 miles from downtown** Sacramento snaking east into Folsom, the American River Bike Trail is a regional jewel of recreation and outdoor splendor. But some enthusiasts point to a discomfiting trend of incidents--including muggings, vehicle burglaries and assaults--that suggest public safety on the trail is sorely lacking.”
- 4) Sacramento Bee, December 22, 2004: R.E. Graswich: Waters irked at judge's refusal to cite homeless man for camping in park; By R.E. Graswich** “**Camped in:** The city of Sacramento has suffered a big defeat in its battle to stop homeless people from camping in parks. Sacramento Superior Court Judge D. Robert Shuman threw out a ranger's misdemeanor citation to Ronald Earl Stevens for camping on the American River Parkway. “
- 5) Sacramento Bee, March 31, 2005: City, county look for ways to stop trashing of parkway; Attempts to stop camping by the homeless haven't worked; By Cameron Jahn:** “Patrols and cleanups to battle illegal dumping by homeless campers in the American River Parkway have cost Sacramento County taxpayers at least \$630,000 since 2001 - with little success to show for it.”
- 6) Sacramento Bee, May 15, 2005: Anita Creamer: The struggle to change; A homeless woman searches for hope - helped by a mentor who won't give up** **By Anita Creamer -- Bee Columnist:** “Some nights, Allen sleeps on the couch of a longtime friend who lives in West Sacramento. Other nights, she stays on the river. Camping, she calls it. Unlike a lot of homeless women, she feels safe there: She's gathered an intricate network of friends - her street family - and they watch out for one another.”
- 7) Sacramento Bee, June 24, 2005: Challenge planned on camping ban; Often arrested, homeless man wants a jury to rule on his right to sleep anywhere.; By Christina Jewett;** “Gremlin is a homeless loner with a shock of gray

in his flaming red hair and a rap sheet nearly as long as he is tall. He is seldom seen, except by police, park rangers, prosecutors and public defenders. To them, he represents the point where homelessness is equal parts criminal justice dilemma and social problem.”

**8) Sacramento Bee, June 30, 2005: A day in the life of the parkway; The urban oasis along the American River is the region's jewel: By Blair**

**Anthony Robertson;** “The lower part of the trail is at times controversial, as many people say it is too frightening for them to use, what with the population of homeless campers and transients and the infrequent patrols by county park rangers.”

**9) Sacramento Bee, July 21, 2005: Chief ranger says the job is a balancing act; Between protecting nature and enforcing the law, resources are stretched thin. By Bill Lindelof:**

**Q:** Are there unsafe areas on the parkway west of the Capital City Freeway? **A:** I would not say they are unsafe. Some of the homeless with shopping carts out on the trail are intimidating. But crime associated with the homeless is almost completely restricted to what they are doing to each other. **Q:** Would you caution travel there alone? **A:** Anywhere on the parkway, we encourage people to buddy up. You never know who is going to be out there. In pairs, you have a better chance to avoid becoming a victim. **Q:** Is illegal camping still a big problem? **A:** Yes. Two rangers are assigned entirely to that problem on the lower river. We issue citations and make the homeless aware of services. We pick up camp debris on a daily basis: 30 tons in the last fiscal year. **Q:** What is the effect of illegal camping on plant life? **A:** They chop down plant material for campfires, for cooking sticks and tent stakes. They are indiscriminate. It does not matter if it is a nonnative plant or a protected species such as a valley elderberry (bush). Elderberry grow long, straight stems that make good cooking sticks and tent poles. **Q:** Should we have Dumpsters on the parkway for the homeless to use? **A:** We find that they go through the Dumpster and pull things out of it. That is one of the problems with having a Dumpster too close by to the parkway. **Q:** Ever afraid for your safety when trying to evict squatters from the parkway? **A:** No. We try to do that in pairs. A ranger on his or her own, if there are pit bulls or there is drinking, that ranger will radio for help.”

**10) Sacramento Bee, September 8, 2005: Who uses the parkway, and how do they use it?; To explore funding needs, a telephone survey attempts to answer those queries. By Bill Lindelof:**

“The bicycle trail, [Alan]Wade said, is maintained fairly well. It's off the trail, mostly, where trash is strewn. He also noted in his e-mail that some public restrooms are not in good shape, dogs run loose, there is unlawful camping, and rangers are in short supply.”

**11) Sacramento Magazine January 2006: Into the Wild; by Andrea Todd:**

“The 32-mile American River Parkway is arguably the greatest natural recreational resource in our state—if not our nation. More people use the parkway’s Jedediah Smith Memorial Bicycle Trail (which runs from Discovery park to Folsom Dam), a county park, on a given day than any other national or state park. Secluded, the parkway is idyllic. BUT IT IS SAFE? From poison oak to perverts, here’s what every trailblazer needs to know before venturing out.”