



January 22, 2004

Open Letter on American River Parkway:

According to Ron Suter, Director of County Parks, American River Parkway services might have to be shut down soon due to lack of funding. There is one area of the Parkway where this causes little concern, as services seem to have been shut down for many years. In the North Sacramento area of the Parkway, unsanctioned illegal camping has destroyed access to the Parkway by the community and has been ignored by County Parks for years.

Finally, after endless complaints of huge illegal campgrounds with rampant drug use, burning of parkway trees for fuel, pollution from human waste running into the river, and attacks on joggers and bicyclists, County Parks initiated a ranger presence. They quickly wound up hauling away 60 tons of refuse the first year they were there.

According to Ranger Dave Lydick. "That first year, 2001, our rangers -- just our rangers, not counting all the other people doing it -- our rangers picked up 60 tons of trash from those campsites," Lydick said, "It was amazing how fast those campers would drag in stuff: sofas, beds, batteries to run TVs. And there was no sanitation, so the places pretty soon would get so filthy they couldn't stand it anymore, and they'd move on, just leave the mess for us to clean up while they started a new huge camp nearby," he said. Supervisor Roger Dickinson reported recently at our Chamber luncheon that for 2003, in our part of the parkway - they gave 154 citations, made 14 arrests, and hauled away 40 tons of garbage.

While the problem has been reduced, it is still prevalent. Recent reports indicate the camps, though smaller, are still there. Directly contrary to established criminal justice crime reduction procedures, there has never been a consistent enforcement focus on the area of highest Parkway crime, which is in North Sacramento.

The threat of shutting down the Parkway and Ron Suter's thoughts as expressed in the Bee article of December 29, 2003, that vandalism, theft and violence likely would increase, and the battle to stem the spate of illegal homeless campers and the tons of trash they leave behind soon would suffer a major setback, rings hollow. Many think it is a threat directed more to the well patrolled areas of Carmichael, Gold River, Sierra Oaks, and Fair Oaks, that they could become like North Sacramento if they don't find more money for the Parks department. In fact, in recent meetings County Parks Commission leadership has said this. However, the idea of giving more money to County Parks to continue their failed policies, doesn't seem to be stimulating much excitement.

The business community has a vital stake in the outcome. In addition to being one of the most beautiful natural environments in the nation, the Parkway is an economic engine that "generates an estimated \$259,034,030 in annual economic activity in the local economy." (*American River Parkway: Financial Needs Study*. Dangermond Group, July 2000)

We call for short-term strategies that stave off the damage done from ongoing ineffective management, and agree with the Bee's position that, "The most easily achievable short-term solution is a joint powers authority that is funded by the communities along its path -- Folsom, Rancho Cordova and the city of Sacramento (a full third of the parkway goes through the city), with the county providing funds as well. A similar authority is in the works for redevelopment along the Sacramento River. The idea could work for reviving the American River Parkway as well. A regional amenity is appropriate for more regional governance and financial support. The supervisors must protect the parkway, even it means giving it up." (*Parkway in Peril*, Sacramento Bee Editorial, January 2, 2004)

On a long-term basis we call for strategies that learn from history, are built on sound organizational principles, and look at all available options, particularly those that do not increase taxes.

Sincerely,

Franklin Burris
President