

M95-038/P95-127      **AMERICAN RIVER RESTORATION PROJECT:  
INFORMATIONAL WORKSHOP**

LOCATION:                      South Natomas & North Sacramento  
   Council Districts 1 & 2

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**SUMMARY:**

This is an informational report on the American River Restoration Project. Planning staff has been working with various local and state agencies and EIP Associates to process the entitlements discussed below.

The purpose of this Workshop is to provide background information to the City Planning Commission, in preparation of requesting action on the project at the March 14, 1996 Commission meeting. The Workshop should have as its primary focus:

- A.    1985 American River Parkway Plan -Proposed Discovery Park East & Woodlake Area Plan (**ATTACHMENT A**);
- B.    The Proposed project Reclamation Plan for Borrow/Restoration (Surface Mining) Activities in Compliance w/SMARA OF 1975;
- C.    The Proposed Zoning Ordinance Amendment for Section 24 - American River.

It is recommended that immediately following the informational Workshop, a public hearing be opened to accept comments on:

- D.    Summary - Discovery Park East and Woodlake DEIR (SCH# 95112045).

All comments received will be addressed in the Response to Comments document developed following the close of the comment period. Technical support staff will not be available to address comments at this public hearing.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

No Commission action is requested at this time.



**OVERALL BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

The Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency (SAFCA) and the Sacramento County Department of Regional Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (County Parks) have reviewed their shared interests in the management and improvement of the American River Parkway (Parkway) and identified opportunities to accomplish both environmental restoration and flood protection goals. Discussions have focused on development of a sustainable program to:

- ✓ excavate accumulated soil terraces;
  - ✓ use the excavated material for local levee reconstruction and bank stabilization projects;
- and
- ✓ re-contour the disturbed areas to a condition suitable for establishing riparian and wetland habitat.

Based on such discussions, the SAFCA Board of Directors, as part of its approval of the capital assessment district for the North Area Local Project (Local Project), authorized its staff to cooperate with County Parks in preparing an updated area plan for Discovery Park East and Woodlake of the American River Parkway, and to apply to the City Planning Commission for approval of a Special Permit.

Additionally, the City Zoning Ordinance, Section 24 - American River is required to be amended to permit this type of activity, subject to Commission approval of a Special Permit w/Reclamation Plan, consistent with the California Surface Mining and Reclamation Act of 1975 (SMARA).

Existing land use in the project area consists essentially of cropland which is regularly diced and tilled and typically produces an annual hay crop. Riparian trees, shrubs, and thickets ring the perimeter of the Parkway Plan designated "Protected Areas" of the Discovery Park East and Woodlake Area Plans. On-site development consists of a system of bicycle/pedestrian and equestrian trails, including a portion of the Jedediah Smith National Recreation Trail. SMUD, WAPA, and PG&E transmission facilities and related access roads traverse the area. The Natomas East Main Drain Canal (NEMDC), and an adjoining overflow channel created by a previous borrow operation run along the northern and eastern boundaries respectively of the Discovery Park portion of the project area. A drainage canal runs along the northern and eastern boundaries of the Woodlake portion of the project area.

**A. American River Parkway Plan - Proposed Discovery Park East and Woodlake Area Plan****Background**

The American River Parkway is an open space greenbelt which extends 29 ± miles from Folsom Dam at the northeast, to the American River's confluence with the Sacramento River at the southwest. The Parkway is a regional park which crosses the jurisdictional boundaries of the City, the County, and a portion of the Folsom State Recreation Area. The purpose of the Parkway Plan is to provide a guide to land use decisions affecting the Parkway; specifically



addressing its preservation, use, development, and administration. It also provides basic policy guidance for the future of the Parkway.

There are several distinct areas of the Parkway, each having individual features which contribute their separate identities to the Plan, and are subject to "Area Plans". An Area Plan shall be reviewed by the County Recreation and Parks Commission when a physical change is proposed in the Parkway, in order to determine the appropriateness of the change. The Parks Commission will review the Proposed Discovery Park East and Woodlake Area Plan on February 22, 1996. On February 29, staff will provide the Planning Commission a verbal report on the action of the Parks Commission.

### Summary

The Discovery Park East and Woodlake Area Plan has three principal objectives:

- restore riparian and seasonal wetland habitats in the American River Parkway by excavating, grading, and irrigating portions of Discovery Park East and Woodlake;
- remove the excavated soil from the Parkway for use in constructing SAFCA's Local Project and other public works improvements near the project area;

and

- explore opportunities for using the resulting habitat to create a mitigation bank for projects approved by the City and County of Sacramento.

The Discovery Park East and Woodlake Area Plan is organized around four elements: phasing, restoration/borrow, mitigation banking, and land management.

### Phasing Element

The project area has been divided into seven "modules" to permit the Area Plan to be implemented in phases as borrow needs materialize. The seven modules represent minimum construction units which are designed to be completed intermittently over time without compromising the functionality of the project.

The Area Plan assumes that Module 1 (Discovery Park East) would be restored by SAFCA in conjunction with the agency's North Area Local Project. The site-specific reclamation plan developed and implemented at this site would serve as a prototype for Modules 2 through 7, which are located in the Woodlake area.

### Restoration/Borrow Element

The Restoration/Borrow element constitutes the core of the Area Plan. This element encompasses the key issues to be addressed in the site specific reclamation plans approved for each of the modules in the project area: excavation of the restoration site and removal of the excavated material from the Parkway, fine grading of the site, erosion control, construction of

a channel/water delivery system to provide irrigation and drainage, habitat restoration, and operation and maintenance.

#### Mitigation Banking Element

The habitat created under the Area Plan could be used to establish a mitigation bank for impacts on riparian, wetland, and rare, threatened and endangered species habitat caused by projects approved by the City and County. Toward this end, the planning process for the Area Plan could include consultation with federal and state resource agencies to identify the terms and conditions under which the bank would operate.

#### Land Management Element

Borrow/restoration plan participants could be required to improve land management in limited recreation areas by providing new recreational facilities, including improved equestrian, pedestrian, and bicycle trails, wildlife observation points, and picnic tables, an interpretive program and improved public access. Other land management measures could include: improving the local stormwater drainage that currently flows directly into the American River by using the wetlands and riparian habitat created under the Area Plan as a biological filtration system; addressing the recurrent problem of wildfires in the Parkway by incorporating moist areas of biological habitat into a system of fire access routes with trails and fire breaks; clean up activities associated with the former "City of North Sacramento Dump"; and improving the protection provided to identified Native American burial sites by leaving these sites at grade, treating them with light surface planting, and shielding them from disturbance.

#### **B. Proposed Discovery Park East - Module 1 Reclamation Plan Summary**

The Proposed Discovery Park East - Module 1 Reclamation Plan has been prepared pursuant to SMARA as amended and the City of Sacramento Zoning Ordinance, as amended. The express purpose of the Reclamation Plan is to describe a process that will minimize environmental impacts during and resulting from surface mining, to achieve the earliest possible reclamation following surface mining, and to leave the Discovery Park East site in a condition compatible with the City of Sacramento's General Plan and the American River Parkway Plan land uses and zoning designations.

The site will be reclaimed as riparian and seasonal wetland channel habitats after the surface mining operation is completed. Approximately 4.9 acres of channel habitat, 10.5 acres of riparian habitat, and 1.6 acres of riparian scrub habitat area proposed to be created.

The Discovery Park East - Module 1 Reclamation Plan's goals are:

- to ensure the site is left in a condition that does not present a threat to public safety and health;
- that air and water quality and wildlife habitat are protected;



- that erosion and flooding are avoided; and
- that reasonable measures are taken to promote revegetation and a productive use of the site.

The Reclamation Plan consists of the following components:

#### Mining Plan

The material to be mined from the Discovery Park East site is soil. The amount of soil to be excavated from the site is estimated to be 230,000 cubic yards (cy) at an average depth of 10 feet, with the depth of excavation ranging from a minimum of 8 feet to a maximum of 12 feet. Excavation will begin at the northerly end of the site and proceed southward. The excavation process will be phased limiting active excavation to approximately three to four cells of approximately five acres in size.

#### Haul Routes

The material will be removed from the Module 1 site and used to raise the levees along each side of the NEMDC between Northgate Boulevard and El Camino Avenue and Arcade Creek between the bike trail and Marysville Boulevard and Hagginwood Park as part of SAFCA's North Area Local Project. Haul routes for trucks to follow between Module 1 site and the levee improvements would travel along Northgate Boulevard, East Levee Road, Railroad Drive, Del Paso Boulevard and Rio Linda Boulevard. Offroad haul routes for trucks to follow would travel within the NEMDC along perimeter benches.

#### Grading Plan

All fill required to complete the reclamation plan will be obtained from the project site and will consist of overburden material. There will be no need for imported fill. Key elements of the grading plan are:

- Varied topography within the site including three intermounds to allow for planting and volunteer recruitment opportunities for species with different water requirements and flood tolerances.
- The perimeter slope of the Module 1 site will be graded at a 4:1 to 10:1 slope to maximize the opportunity for volunteer establishment of riparian vegetation following inundation episodes.
- In order to ensure that suitable soils are left in place, the perimeter slopes will be constructed in place using in situ material and dressed with one foot of surface material.



- The intermounds will be created by excavation of the low-water channel and any unsuitable soil material. The mounds will be dressed with one foot of surface material.
- A low-water channel and culvert system will be created to drain the site when the levels in the NEMDC recede. The channel system will reduce the amount of prolonged ponding on the site to minimize the creation of mosquito breeding habitat. The channel and culvert system will also allow for the free passage of fish and other aquatic life between the NEMDC and the Module 1 site (both ingress and egress).
- The ground surface in the area of temporary construction easements and off-road haul routes will be restored to the existing lines and grades. All disturbed areas will be scarified and applied with erosion control hydroseeding.

#### Erosion Control Plan

Erosion and sedimentation will be controlled during all phases of excavation and reclamation to ensure land and water resources are protected from erosion, gulling, sedimentation and contamination. The slopes around the perimeter and the intermounds within the Module 1 site will be hydroseeded to establish a ground cover to minimize erosion from the slopes and potential siltation of the NEMDC.

#### Planting Plan

The Module 1 site will be reclaimed as riparian and seasonal wetland channel habitats after the surface mining operation is completed.

#### Channel Habitats

Approximately 4.9 acres of channel habitat are proposed. The channel will provide open water aquatic and seasonal wetland habitats. As designed, the constructed channels will have approximately 25-foot bottom widths and have 2:1 immediate side slopes. These side slopes would lessen late season moist soil conditions that could encourage mosquito problems.

#### Riparian Habitats

The principal habitat to be created at the Module 1 site is riparian habitat. Approximately 10.5 acres of riparian habitat is proposed. This habitat will be created on the sideslopes, intermounds and bottom of the site excavated to the 10 to 13 foot elevation. A full range of typical riparian species will be planted and/or encouraged to grow in these areas including, for dominant overstory trees: fremont cottonwood, valley oak, Oregon ash, boxelder, and willows; for understory shrubs: wild rose and elderberry; for understory herbs and grasses: barbara sedge and creeping wildrye.



### Riparian Scrub Habitat

To maintain low clearance conditions underneath utility lines, the Planting Plan proposes planting of small to medium height shrubs, such as sandbar willow, arroyo willow, boxelder, buttonwillow, and California Rose. Approximately 1.6 acres of riparian scrub habitat is also proposed.

### Operations and Maintenance

Initial management of the site will exclude water (to the extent feasible) from the Module 1 site during the plant establishment period (approximately five years). Depending on the degree of flooding and the needs of the plants, supplemental irrigation will be used during the dry season for plant establishment purposes. In order to wean plants from watering, supplemental irrigation will be scaled back during year three and applied to only those plants showing signs of stress during the dry season. Following the five-year establishment period, the culvert to the NEMDC will be permanently opened to allow for the development of a self sustaining habitat based on the regional hydrology from the NEMDC and Sacramento and American Rivers.

Following plant installation during years one and two, weeding and plant maintenance will occur at three times during the growing season (beginning, middle, and end). During years three through five plant maintenance will occur twice during the growing season. At a minimum, maintenance will include checking and adjusting screens, collars, and weed mats to accommodate plant growth and weeding to reduce competition in and directly around the plantings.

### Monitoring Program

The monitoring program will document the degree of success or failure in achieving the Reclamation Plan goals. The program can also be used to assess maintenance methods or restoration techniques that may need to be changed or modified during the five-year establishment period. Monitoring reports will be prepared comparing data results with performance standards. Monitoring reports will be submitted to the appropriate agencies annually for years one to five beginning with completion of the planting.

Since uncertainties may affect any reclamation effort, the monitoring program will allow for revisions and minor conversion from one proposed habitat type to another. It is proposed that no more than a 25 percent conversion will be allowed. The plantings will be deemed successful if 70 percent of the target number of plantings survive after three years and 50 percent after five years.

### Schedule

Excavation of the Module 1 site would begin in June 1996. Completion of site clearing and grubbing would occur as excavation cells are opened. All work on the water side of the levees, removal of all temporary low-flow channel crossings of the NEMDC and removal of haul roads would occur by October 15, 1996. Completion of all finish grading of the project site and



erosion control seeding will be completed by November 1, 1996. All work on the landside of the levee and clean-up of the project site would occur by November 1, 1996. Complete reclamation of the project site would begin in October 1996, and be completed by June 1997.

**C. The Proposed Zoning Ordinance Amendment for Section 24 - American River**

The City Zoning Ordinance, Section 24 currently explicitly prohibits surface mining activities in the American River Parkway - Flood Plain (ARP-F) and/or the American River Parkway Corridor (PC). Staff is working with the City Attorney's office, the applicant, affected agencies and the public in drafting the appropriate language for the Zoning Code Amendment.

As currently proposed Section 24 would be amended as follows (changes in *italics*):

Paragraph 24.04

In addition to the uses permitted within the ARP-F zone pursuant to paragraph 24.02 (Permitted Uses), ....

*Subject to a Planning Commission approved Special Permit, a surface mining operation is permitted, provided that it shall not...[be a commercial aggregate/gravel pit, or..?]; and shall have as a primary component the restoration of the natural features of the floodplain or the expansion and/or enhancement of open space for the use and enjoyment of the public. The requirements of Section 2-E-46 (Planning Commission Special Permit for a Surface Mining Operation) shall be satisfied for any application for a special permit for a surface mining operation pursuant to this provision.*

It is the intent of this language revision to very narrowly tailor the area of specially permitted surface mining activity in the ARP-F and PC zones. It is explicitly not the intent of this Zoning Ordinance revision to provide for land uses which are inconsistent with the American River Parkway Plan.

**D. Summary - Discovery Park East and Woodlake DEIR**

The City's Planning Services Division has completed and circulated the Discovery Park East and Woodlake Area Plan and the Discovery Park East-Module 1 Site Specific Reclamation Plan DEIR on January 19, 1996. The DEIR is initially published as a Draft EIR (DEIR) and will be subject to review and comment by the public and all responsible and other interested jurisdictions, agencies and organizations during a 45-day review and comment period. The 45-day public review and comment period began on January 19th and will close on March 4, 1996.

The purpose of this hearing is to accept public testimony on the adequacy and completeness of the DEIR in identifying and analyzing the possible impacts of the project on the environment and how significant impacts of the project might be avoided or mitigated. Technical support staff will not be available to address comments at this public hearing. Following close of the comment period, the City will prepare the responses to comments document which will respond

to all comments submitted in writing or given orally at this hearing. The responses to comments and any changes to the DEIR will become the Final EIR (FEIR), to be presented to the Sacramento City Council for certification as to its adequacy under CEQA.

#### Contents of the DEIR

The EIR has a dual purpose: 1) to specifically evaluate the effects in Discovery Park East associated with implementing the Module 1 Reclamation Plan and provide mitigation designed to reduce or eliminate impacts of the Discovery Park East project (Module 1); and 2) to evaluate at a conceptual or "program" level the potential effects of the proposed project as a whole (including the Woodlake Area (Modules 2-7)), and provide mitigation designed to reduce or eliminate impacts.

The Woodlake area analyses in the DEIR are considered "program-level" because these phases of the plan are at a conceptual level only and will be implemented over a long time span. It is expected that further CEQA evaluation would be performed when applications for Woodlake area phases (referred to as Modules 2-7) are made. At such time, those projects would be viewed together with this EIR and applicable mitigation measures from this EIR would be incorporated into the "project-level" environmental document for a specific Woodlake area phase project.

#### Avoidable Significant Impacts of the Proposed Project

Significant adverse project specific impacts that would result from development and *can* be mitigated below a level of significance occur in the following environmental categories: short-term roadway and bicycle path impacts from construction, short-term noise impacts from construction, temporary loss of habitat for plant and animal species, possible exposure to hazardous materials during construction, possible impacts to water quality during construction and after project completion, inadequate amounts of soil to complete the project, possible discovery of surface and subsurface cultural resources, the possible need for expanded security requirements, a potential increase in mosquitos, potential conflicts with overhead electrical lines and other utilities, and a modification of the visual quality in the project area.

#### Unavoidable Significant Impacts of the Proposed Project

Significant adverse project specific impacts that would result from development and can be mitigated below a level of significance occur in the following environmental categories: short-term air quality impacts during construction, short-term noise impacts during construction, and the loss of foraging habitat for the Swainson's Hawk.

#### Avoidable Cumulative Significant Impacts of the Proposed Project

Significant adverse project specific impacts that would result from development and can be mitigated below a level of significance occur in the following environmental categories: None.

### Unavoidable Cumulative Significant Impacts of the Proposed Project

Significant adverse project specific impacts that would result from development and can be mitigated below a level of significance occur in the following environmental categories: a contribution to the region's cumulative air quality problem, and a contribution to the cumulative loss of plant and animal life habitat.

### Alternative Analysis

As required by CEQA, this DEIR evaluates the comparative impacts of a "range of reasonable alternatives to the project." This DEIR considers three alternatives for the proposed project:

1. **Alternative A: No Project (AA)**

The No Project alternative would allow for limited project objectives to be met because habitat restoration is an approved land use of the site, according to the American River Parkway Plan. Some upland plantings could occur under No Project, although no earthmoving would be conducted to attain the restoration and mitigation banking objectives of the proposed plan. Without excavating the high terrace areas to allow for seasonal flooding, the plantings would change from a riparian and seasonal wetland target habitats to upland habitats, such as oak woodland and oak/elderberry savannah.

No borrow would be removed from the Discovery Park East or Woodlake area sites. The 230,000 cy needed for SAFCA's Local Project would be provided by alternative borrow locations. Alternative borrow sites would be the currently permitted sites specified in SAFCA's Project Plans for Construction of Natomas Area Flood Control Improvements Project, Units 1A, 2A, 3A, and 3C.

2. **Alternative B: Recontour/No Export Restoration (AB)**

The Recontour/No Export Restoration alternative would allow earthmoving to occur on-site and restoration of limited riparian habitat and increased uplands habitat to occur with no exporting of earth off-site. Excavation of the high terraces for riparian and seasonal wetland restoration would occur with the excavated material left on-site to create high mounded areas. This alternative would require that no spoils from excavation and grading operations be exported and would reduce the amount of riparian and seasonal wetland restoration in exchange for upland oak woodland or oak/elderberry savannah habitat. Complete restoration of the site to these habitat types would be possible under this alternative. For purposes of analysis, up to five-foot depths would be excavated in this alternative, or half of the proposed project.

No borrow would be removed from the Discovery Park East or Woodlake area sites. The 230,000 cy needed for SAFCA's Local Project would be provided by alternative borrow locations, discussed above in the No Project alternative.

3. **Alternative C: Recontour/Modified Export Restoration (AC)**

Excavation would be modified to achieve the riparian and seasonal wetland habitat objectives. The depth of excavation would be up to five feet deep or approximately one-half the proposed project excavation depth. All or a portion of the site could then be restored under this alternative. Material to be removed to meet the habitat objectives would be available for use by SAFCA or other public work project needs.

The 230,000 cy needed for SAFCA's Local Project would be provided, half from the Discovery Park East site and half from the alternative borrow locations.

Please refer to the Discovery Park East and Woodlake Area Plan and the Discovery Park East-Module 1 Site Specific Reclamation Plan DEIR for a more complete overview of the proposed project, alternatives, impacts and mitigation measures.

**RECOMMENDATION:** No action is requested of the Planning Commission during this Informational Workshop. All comments received will be addressed in the staff report for the meeting of March 14, 1996.

Also, no action is requested of the Planning Commission during the DEIR public hearing. All comments received will be addressed in Response to Comments document developed following the close of the comment period. Technical support staff will not be available to address comments at this public hearing.

The project will be presented for action at the Commission meeting of March 14, 1996.

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Attachment(s):

Attachment A      1985 American River Parkway Plan -Proposed Discovery Park East & Woodlake Area Plan