

American River Parkway

The American River Parkway preserves approximately 5,000 acres of open space and wildlife habitat in the middle of a highly urbanized area—the parkway is five times the size of New York’s Central Park. It stretches for 23 miles along both sides of the American River from the confluence with the Sacramento River to Lake Natoma. It is managed by the Sacramento County Department of Parks and Recreation with assistance from a coalition of citizens’ groups. The parkway is a model of civic planning and community action, though, like open land everywhere that is adjacent to urbanization, it faces threats of encroachment from numerous proposals, as well as financial shortfalls (sarariverwatch.org).

Most access points currently require a \$5 entrance fee per vehicle, but there are many sites accessible by foot, bicycle, or public transportation (sacrt.com). A \$50 annual vehicle pass can be purchased from the Sacramento County Department of Parks and Recreation (www.sacparks.net). A pocket-sized map of the parkway can be purchased at monthly general meetings of the Sacramento Audubon Society, at the Effie Yeaw Nature Center (916-489-4918), or on the Web site of the American River Parkway Foundation (arpf.org). Another valuable resource is *Biking and Hiking the American River Parkway*, published by the American River Natural History Association (arnha.org).

Birders should be mindful of bikes speeding along the trail, homeless camps, especially on the lower third of the parkway, and lush stands of poison oak throughout. Rattlesnakes are fairly common, especially on the upper half of the parkway, and mountain lions have been spotted on a few occasions. If leaving a vehicle unattended, it is wise to park in areas that get regular traffic from other park visitors; break-ins are more likely to occur in isolated lots where there are no witnesses.

Opening and closing hours change seasonally and are posted at each access. Generally, the sites are open from sunrise to sunset. The Jedediah Smith Memorial Trail (also known as the American River Bike Trail) is a paved bike route that runs the length of the parkway and continues past Lake Natoma to Beal’s Point at Folsom Lake. There are additional paved bike routes, a hiking and horse path that parallels the bike trail, and countless informal trails and park service roads to explore. Despite its proximity to over one million people, the parkway is surprisingly under-birded. There are many access points to the parkway in addition to those listed below. We hope that the following pages will encourage you to explore this wonderful area in Sacramento’s backyard.

