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FRESNO COUNTY
PUBLIC WORKS & DEVELOPMENT
SERVICES DEPARTMENT



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Ms. Gina Francis County of Fresno Public Works and Development Services Department 2220 Tulare Street, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor

Re: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report: Fresno County General Plan Update

Dear Ms. Francis:

Fresno, CA 93721

June 4, 1999

The San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust (River Parkway Trust) appreciates the opportunity to provide written comments on the County's Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Fresno County General Plan Update.

On September 6,1997 David Koehler, submitted comments on the General Plan Background Report. On May 12, 1999 I presented some remarks on behalf of the River Parkway Trust at the public scoping meeting. This letter reiterates and clarifies those comments, particularly our request that the General Plan Update should incorporate the San Joaquin River Parkway Plan (Parkway Plan) as county policy.

The San Joaquin River Parkway extends for 22 miles along the northern edge of Fresno County between Millerton State Park and Highway 99. The San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust is a not-for-profit public benefit corporation established in 1988 for purposes of planning the Parkway and, in plain language, making it happen. The planning efforts of our organization and the citizens of Fresno and Madera Counties included the following:

- 1989 San Joaquin River Parkway and Environs Conceptual Plan
- 1992 San Joaquin River Parkway Plan by Dangermond and Associates et al.;

San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust, Inc. 1550 East Shaw Ave. • Suite 114 • Fresno, CA 93710 • (209)248-8480 • FAX 248-8474 http://www.riverparkway.org

- 1995 establishment of the San Joaquin River Conservancy, a state agency created to acquire and manage the Parkway, as well as bring together the three local jurisdictions within the Parkway boundaries;
- 1997 San Joaquin River Parkway Interim Master Plan, which was adopted by the San Joaquin River Conservancy in December 1997.

Fresno County has long-standing policies in support of the San Joaquin River Parkway and has formally directed consideration of the San Joaquin River Parkway in General Plan updates. Please see the attached Fresno County Resolutions #87-389 and #92-418. We believe these policies and the importance of the San Joaquin River to the County combine to form a compelling reason to include the Parkway in the General Plan by incorporating its guiding goals, policies and objectives as defined in the *Parkway Plan*.

The Fresno County General plan is essentially the County's constitution that governs the pattern of all future development. The General Plan was last comprehensively updated twenty-three years ago, in 1976, and currently incorporates 42 assorted regional plans, community plans, and specific plans. The San Joaquin River Parkway Plan (Parkway Plan) is not among those plans, yet should be included as a regional plan. A review of the fundamental goals of the Parkway Plan and the General Plan requirements indicates clearly why this is so.

The Parkway Plan's fundamental goals are as follows:

Preserve and restore a riparian corridor of regional significance along the San Joaquin River

Protect wildlife species that depend on or prefer the river environment for at least part of their existence

Provide for conservation, education, and recreation, particularly a continuous trail, in a cooperative manner with affected landowners

Protect irreplaceable natural and cultural resources in a way that will also meet people's recreational and educational needs

Protect existing undeveloped areas of the riverbottom, which should remain non-urbanized and be retained in open space or agriculture if feasible

Provide land use and management policies for the San Joaquin River and areas of the riverbottom included in the parkway that will enhance the attractiveness of the Fresno-Madera metropolitan area and enhance the quality of life of its residents

California requires local governments to adopt general plans that have seven mandatory elements: land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open-space, noise and safety. Local governments may also adopt optional elements, such as Fresno County is proposing for economic development, parks and recreation and public facilities.

The *Parkway Plan* is relevant to many of the General Plan elements embodies the principle objectives that are enumerated in the Notice of Preparation (NOP).

- Diversify the Fresno County economy to provide a broad range of employment opportunities
- Reduce unemployment and promote the creation of higher wage jobs
- Minimize conversion of agriculture land
- Promote compact urban development
- Minimize destruction and disturbance of natural habitat
- Enhance quality of life for residents of Fresno County

#### Relevant Mandatory Elements and Relation to Principle Objectives

#### 1. Land Use

The land use element establishes a framework for the General Plan by establishing policies that relate to all other elements. In addition to identifying areas subject to flooding or rich in mineral resources, this element addresses the distribution of open space, natural resources and public facilities.

The *Parkway Plan* developed its goals, objectives and policies around land use designations defining areas of natural reserve, wildlife corridor and recreation areas.

The Parkway Plan takes a comprehensive look at a stretch of river impacted by decisions and actions of three local jurisdictions. While the Parkway is not entirely within Fresno County, Government Code section 65300 allows "inclusion of any land outside its boundaries in which the planning agency's judgment bears relation to its planning".

Madera County has already incorporated the *Parkway Plan* into its General Plan. The City of Fresno will be asked to follow suit. It is critical to the success of the Parkway, and the sustainability of the Parkway's conservation, education and recreation programs, that all three jurisdictions incorporate the goals, objective and policies for the Parkway and surrounding riverbottom areas.

#### 2. Circulation

The River Parkway Trust is currently in partnership with Fresno County on a TEA-21 grant to extend the Lewis S. Eaton Trail 2.5 miles along Old Friant Road from the Riverview Ranch house to the Willow Unit of the San Joaquin Ecological Reserve. The funding is eligible through the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality program as it creates a Class One bike lane that can be used as an alternate transportation route for cummuters.

There will certainly be other opportunities to pursue similar partnerships in developing Parkway facilities. Although Fresno County has been supportive of these types of projects, which benefit both the County and the Parkway, the process for implementing projects through our partnerships would be much clearer were the *Parkway Plan* included as County policy, thereby formalizing the strong partnership that has been developing.

#### 3. Conservation

The Parkway Plan provides the necessary policies for preservation of a diminishing riparian resource in the County. While the plan is directly about the San Joaquin River, its principles may also be applied to other significant riparian areas, including the Kings River, thereby creating consistent countywide policy for all riparian areas within the county.

The conservation element must include a mineral resource component And establish policies that are consistent with the Surface Mining and Reclamation Act (SMARA). The *Parkway Plan* provides concise reclamation guidelines that address wildlife habitat, backfilling, regrading, slope stability, recontouring, vegetation restoration, surface water impacts and ground water impacts.

General plans must be consistent with state legislation. The State of California declared in adopting the San Joaquin River Conservancy Act:

"The San Joaquin River, its broad corridors, and its prominent bluffs constitute a unique and important environmental, cultural, scientific, agricultural, educational, recreational, scenic, flood water conveyance and wildlife resource that should be preserved for the enjoyment of, and appreciation by, present and future generations."

## 4. Open Space

Government Code section 65563 requires the County to develop an action item in its general plan that defines the specific programs the

County intends to pursue in order to achieve long-range, comprehensive preservation and conservation of open-space lands.

### Relevant Optional Elements

1. Economic Development

Economic development and quality of life are two key issues for Fresno County. The Parkway, which has developed according to the San Joaquin River Parkway Plan, has already made a significant economic contribution to Fresno County. The River Parkway Trust collaborated with California State University, Fresno to research and publish a report titled Economic Benefits of the San Joaquin River Parkway to the Fresno-Madera Region (in press).

2. Parks and Recreation

Please clarify if the Parks and Recreation element is intended to serve the same function as the mandatory Open Space element. If not, the distinction is not evident.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at (559) 248-8480 with any questions about this letter. The River Parkway Trust will appreciate receiving all future notices and documents from Fresno County regarding the General Plan update.

Sincerely,

Deborah North

Land Stewardship Director

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File #7287 September 15, 1987 Resolution #87-389

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# EEFCRE THE ECARD OF SUPERVISORS COUNTY OF FRESHO STATE OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE MATTER OF )
SAN CHACUIN RIVER FARKWAY)

RESCLUTION

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COUNTY OF FREDRO FREDRO, CALFORNA FC-14 MASS MEREAS, the San Coacuin riverbottom and bluffs are one of the most unique physical and environmental settings in the Cantral Valley, making it a valuable scenic resource for the one-half million residents of Fresno County; and

MEREAS, the San Joaquin River's riparian habitat represents a highly diverse vegetative community supporting a wide range of migrating and resident wildlife and is presently a habitat of special concern for California; and

METERS, the San Josquin riverbottom would yield recreational opportunities for hiking, bicycling, casping, picnicking, fishing, caracing, swimming, and observing nature for Fresno County residents, as well as providing valuable educational opportunities for the area's schoolchildren; and

WETERS, the San Josephin River Parkary project will be a major asset to Frence County and Callifornia by maiding the river accessible to the public and securing the valuable resources of the San Josephin for use by future generations; and

WERENS, the San Josquin River Parkery project will improve the quality ("life for Freezo County residents and provide recreational and educational opportunities, open space; and wildlife preserves; and

Tective maximum comperation between citizen groups, local entities, and the State and federal governments;

NCM, THEREFORE, BELIT RESCLVED, that the County of Fresho has supported and continues to support multiple use open space uses of the San Idaquin Riverbottom, including wildlife habitat areas, natural or unique vegetation, scenic land, unique natural resource areas, mineral extraction, public and private parks, other recreation activities, and agriculture; and

EE IT FURTHER RESCLVED, that the County of Fresno will join with the public, the County of Marcera, the City of Fresno, other affected local agencies, and acomposite State and federal agencies to establish a single ajency such as a State park, a park district or a recreation and park district generally encompassing the Fresno Clovis Metropolitan Area and portions of Madera County. The purpose of the agency shall be to plan, develop, and operate a San Joaquin River Parkway, and obtain all funds necessary to carry out these activities.

THE FORESCING was passed and adopted by the following vote of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Fresno this 15th day of September, 1987, to-wit:

AYES: Supervisors Andreen, Koligian, Conrad, Lavy, Ramacher

NCES: None

ABSENT: None

ATTEST

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Board of Supervisors

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RESCLUTION #87-389

TY OF FRESHO C. SUPSHA -2-

# BEFORE THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE CCUNTY OF FRESNO STATE OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE MATTER OF THE SAN JOACUIN RIVER PARKHAY)

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RESOLUTION ACCEPTING THE FINAL SAN JCAQUIN RIVER PARKHAY PLAN AS PREPARED BY DANGERMOND AND ASSOCIATES AND SUPPORTING ASSEMBLY BILL 2452, AS AMENDED, TO CREATE THE SAN JOAQUIN RIVER CONSERVANCY

by introduced ZEW 3121 Assembly Eill Nc. WHEREAS. Assemblyman Jim Costa in the 1990 session of the State Legislature setting forth general goals for a Plan for the river corridor; and

WHEREAS Assembly Bill No. 3121 appropriated \$200,000 in State funds for the plan and provided for a San Joaquin River Parkway Task force to take the lead in the planning process; and

WHEREAS, in May, 1991, the State Department of Parks and Recreation awarded a contract for preparation of the San Joaquin River Parkway Plan to Dangermond and Associates; and

WHEREAS, Dangermond and Associates held several meetings and workshops with the full Task force and interested members of community; and

WHEREAS, a draft San Joaquin River Parkway Plan was prepared by Dangermond and Associates for Task force review and public comment; and WHEREAS, on March 10, 1992, the Board of Supervisors

considered the draft Plan and directed their Task force representative present the Board's concerns to the Task force and report back on the action taken at the March 30, Task force meeting; and

WHEREAS, the Board's concerns included, but were not limited to, the need for the Plan to clearly indicate that there shall be voter approval of any taxes, surcharges, assessments, or fees (except user fees) required for, or resulting from, implementation of the Parkway Plan and that there will be no net cost or added liability to the County as a result of the Plan; and

WHEREAS, on March 17, the final San Joaquin River Farkway
Plan was received by Fresno County; and

WHEREAS, on March 25, Assemblyman Costa responded in writing to the Boards concerns; and

WHEREAS, at the March 30, Task force meeting the final Plan was approved by a vote of 16 to 4, with 2 abstentions and 3 absent; and

WHEREAS, on April 2, Assemblymen Costa and Bronzan introduced to the Legislature an amendment to Assembly Bill 2452, proposing to create the San Joaquin River Conservancy; and

WHEREAS, the final San Joaquin River Parkway Plan, together with Assemblyman Costa's commitments and Assembly Bill 2452, as amended, effectively address the Board's concerns.

NCW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESCLVED that the Fresho County Board of Supervisors hereby accepts the final San Joaquin River Parkway Plan as prepared by Dangermond and Associates and support \$2,452, as amended; and

preparation of the environmental work and any newsery General Plan amendments the Board will further consider an amendment to the County General Plan relating to the Parkway.

THE FOREGOING was passed and adopted by the following vote of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Fresno this 19th day of May, 1992, to-wit:

AYES: Supervisors Koligian, Levy, Conrad, Oken, Vagim

NOES: None

ABSENT: None

SHARI GREENWCCD, Clerk Board of Supervisors

File #10881

Item #8

Resolution #92-418