

Rescue Our Regional Parks - A Status Report October 6, 2011

The Sales Tax Proposal: The Grassroots Working Group (GWG) recommended on May 24, 2011, legislation that would give only Sacramento County permission to put a one tenth of one percent (a penny per \$10) sales tax (with no provision for “multiples”) before the voters. Funds from this sales tax would be dedicated to parks.

The County Board of Supervisors, on August 9, 2011, decided to move ahead with legislation recommended by County staff that would authorize any city or county in California to place before the voters, a one tenth of one percent sales tax, or multiples thereof, that would be dedicated to parks. Despite the best efforts of the County’s legislative advocate, the sales tax legislation proposed by the County was not approved. Reasons given include (1) being too late in the legislative process, (2) lack of support since the Governor had just signed a bill enacted earlier in the year that authorizes every city and county to levy sales taxes in multiples of one-eighth of one cent, and (3) unwillingness of author(s) of related subject bills to accept amendments.

The Rest of the GWG Recommendations: The Board of Supervisors did not ask the Legislature for changes recommended by the GWG as being needed to allow the Board to initiate creation of a regional park district at some future date. The Board was informed that the County Executive would appoint an advisory committee on parks. The Advisory Committee would report to the County Executive with recommendations regarding (1) long term funding, (2) arrangements for operation and maintenance of regional parks, and (3) governance of the regional parks system. The stated goal is for the Advisory Committee to report its recommendations in December 2011.

The GWG Recommendations will be one option to be studied by the County Advisory Committee. A GWG representative will participate in the Advisory Committee as will a representative of Save the American River Association (SARA). A work plan for the Advisory Committee has been developed by County staff and a time schedule is being prepared.

GWG has spent more than a year and more than \$50,000 in donations to develop the GWG Recommendations. While the GWG believes that the Recommendations offer the best chance to rescue our regional parks, GWG would be supportive of an alternative that accomplishes the same results as the GWG Recommendations with as good a chance for success. The goal, after all, is to rescue our regional parks and open space system.

The Sacramento Metro Chamber of Commerce (Metro Chamber): The Metro Chamber has established a Civic Amenities Committee that is exploring the development of a comprehensive and collaborative plan for development of civic amenities (e.g. entertainment, the arts, sports, science, recreation, sustainable agri-tourism and cultural attractions) in the Sacramento region. GWG has been contacted and will be sending a representative(s) to brief the Metro Chamber Civic Amenities Committee on the regional parks situation and the results of the GWG efforts. This activity is a logical extension of the GWG work and provides opportunity for the business community to participate in efforts to rescue our regional parks and open space system. Further participation by the GWG has yet to be defined.

Successor Entity: A successor entity to address the entire regional parks and open space system was contemplated when the GWG effort was initiated in June 2010. Work to date has focused on the establishment of a countywide nongovernmental organization to work in support of the entire regional parks system (Existing organizations are focused on particular units of the regional parks system.). The successor entity could be modeled on the East Bay Regional Parks Foundation. If formed in time, the successor entity could replace the GWG in responding to outputs of the County Advisory Committee; continue to develop support for the GWG recommendations or a satisfactory alternative. In the longer term, the successor entity could also raise funds to support our parks, conduct education and outreach, and generally support either the County or a regional parks district whichever is the final outcome.

The Crisis Continues: The crisis facing our parks continues. The County Regional Parks Department has effectively been dismantled and the County is unable, because of budget problems, to provide sufficient funds for a regional park system that is clean, well maintained, and safe to use. Additionally, the need to prevent further deterioration of the Regional Parks and Open Space System while the long term solution is developed also requires an answer. The GWG believes that means must be found to ensure that the work by the GWG is not wasted and to keep focus on the crisis facing our regional parks and local parks until an effective course of action to rescue our regional parks is identified and implemented.

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What Can You Do?

Write or email the GWG and tell them what you believe. The GWG can be contacted by writing to Grassroots Working Group, % Save the American River Association, 4441 Auburn Boulevard, Suite H, Sacramento CA, 95841 or by telephoning SARA at 916-482-2551 or by emailing SARA at info@riverwatch.org.

Contribute to the GWG effort to continue to rescue our regional parks and establish a successor entity by sending a check to SARA and writing "Grassroots" in the memo line of the check.

Visit the GWG web page to keep informed of the situation as it develops. The GWG page is hosted on the SARA website and can be accessed by going to <http://www.sarariverwatch.org/grassroots.php>.