

Celebrity Chef G. Garvin brings exclusive snack recipes to your Family Night. [VIEW ALL RECIPES NOW!](#)

Opinion - Viewpoints  
24 Comments | Print

## Viewpoints: Voters should get say on county parks system

By Janet R. Baker  
Special to The Bee  
Published: Friday, Sep. 2, 2011 - 12:00 am | Page 17A

Sacramento County's Board of Supervisors and county executive dealt another crushing blow to the operating budget of their Regional Parks system in June. What is the future of parks, trails and open space in this region? Is there a path to stable, secure funding and governance of Regional Parks?

While city and county park agencies have faced extreme challenges during the four-plus years of the economic downturn, the only governance structure faring well is the special district. Because they receive a set percentage of property taxes, their operating budget fluctuates very little compared with the more than 50 percent cuts facing city and county park agencies. Could special district governance with a secure and stable funding source rescue Sacramento County Regional Parks?

The groundwork for this shift has already been accomplished. For more than a year, the Grassroots Working Group, an organization of community leaders and park advocates have worked tirelessly and raised private funds to have the Trust for Public Land study options for funding and governance for Sacramento County's regional park system. Polling was also done as a companion to their study. All of this clearly pointed to the recommendation for a ballot measure to create a regional special district for parks and fund the district with a 0.1 of 1 percent sales tax increase.

Regional Parks has a 52-year legacy of environmental stewardship in this community. It is a delicate balance to protect nature, while providing active recreation areas for a growing county. The Regional Parks system in Sacramento County draws over 8 million visits annually. Our park treasure is the [American River Parkway](#).

Sacramento County Regional Parks operates and manages those 4,600 acres that were hard fought to acquire, taking nearly 30 years to accomplish. The continuing fiscal crisis puts not only the American River Parkway and its signature parks – Discovery, River Bend, Ancil Hoffman, William Pond – at risk, but also 10,000 additional acres of natural beauty, wildlife and recreation abundance including the Cosumnes River Preserve, Deer Creek Hills, Mather Regional Park, Effie Yeav Nature Center, Sacramento River Delta parks, Gibson Ranch and the Dry Creek Parkway.

The mission of Regional Parks is unique: to manage, protect and connect open space, trails and large scenic parks to all parts of the region and beyond. The American River Parkway winds its way from Folsom Lake through the cities of [Rancho Cordova](#) and Sacramento. The Dry Creek Parkway in the northern county could eventually provide a multi-use trail system from the city of Sacramento through Rio Linda, Placer County, across Folsom and then connect back with the American River Parkway, creating a 72-mile loop trail. The newly developing eastern county provides great opportunities for new trails and connections west to the Cosumnes River Preserve. Without a strong Regional Parks agency, these opportunities will be lost forever.

Regional Parks, under the umbrella of Sacramento County government, must compete with priorities such as [law enforcement](#) and social services. In addition, the county "overhead" system severely straps Regional Parks' budget. This year parks owes nearly as much to the county government system in overhead – \$2 million – as it receives in general fund support – \$2.5 million. Simply put, Regional Parks cannot afford to be a part of big county government.

Without secure and stable funding, Regional Parks cannot sustain the existing park system or grow with the region. Many of the state's special park districts are continuing to prosper and grow. For example, check out East Bay Regional Park District's website and see the diverse facilities and programs they offer in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. They stand in testament to what a stable funding source and a proven track record can deliver. People trust their actions and leaders, and have voted repeatedly to pass bond measures and assessments to sustain and grow that agency. This type of thriving park system could exist in Sacramento County if a special district and stable funding were approved by voters.

Unfortunately, the Board of Supervisors and the county executive want to spend another six months studying various options with community stakeholders, most of whom have been involved in the Grassroots Working Group effort over the past year. New options or "business models" do not exist if this community wants free, accessible, safe, protected, well-managed and commercial-free parks, trails and open space.

The Regional Park system does not belong to Sacramento County government or the Board of Supervisors, but rather it is owned by every member of this community. And this community should expect that the Board of Supervisors will do everything in its power to provide the best future for their park system. Without immediate action by the Board of Supervisors, Sacramento's Regional Parks will continue to be dismantled, outsourced, privatized and reduced into oblivion.

The voters in Sacramento County deserve the chance to decide what type of regional parks, trails and open space system they want. The Board of Supervisors needs to get this issue on the ballot without further bureaucratic delays.

[Recommend](#) Be the first of your friends to recommend this.

© Copyright The Sacramento Bee. All rights reserved.

[Share](#)

Janet R. Baker is the former director of Sacramento County Regional Parks.

• Read more articles by Janet R. Baker

More on sacbee.com powered by Lingospot

 **Chevron legal settlement helps save Sacramento County DA jobs**  
Kim Minugh, 2 days, 20 hours ago

 **Alcohol ban on American River Parkway, river in effect...**  
1 week ago

 **Once an NFL player, Keith Jerome Wright now a suspect in Sacramento County jail**  
Kim Minugh, 5 days, 7 hours ago

**Life insurance at \$12/Mo?**  
Get \$250,000 in Life Coverage for as little as \$12/Mo. Free Quotes!


**Sacramento: Work At Home Jobs (EXPOSED)**  
We investigated work at home jobs and what we found may shock you...

**Sacramento: Dermatologists Hate Her**  
Local Mom Exposes an Anti-Aging Miracle. Her \$5 Tric EXAGERS Wrinkles!

**Kate's BEAT IT SAFEWAY**  
Enter online at [beebuzzpoints.com/grocerygiveaway](#)


**THE NEWS DELIVERED YOUR WAY**  
INTRODUCING THE SACRAMENTO BEE iPad APP  
Download today!

**sacramento connect** powered by Lingospot

 **County Animal Shelter Second Annual Whiskers & wine Fundraiser September 17...**  
Sacramento Scoop: sacramento connect, 3 days, 18 hours ago

 **Sheriff launches manhunt for suspect in councilman's murder**  
YubaNet.com: sacramento connect, 4 days, 5 hours ago

 **Elk Grove Police Make Unusual Discovery During Arrest**  
Elk Grove News: sacramento connect, 1 week, 3 days ago

 **Fifth Suspect Arrested in Homicide**  
From the Capitol: sacramento connect, 1 week, 1 day ago

- MOST VIEWED** | **BLOG POSTS**
- Thunderstorms possible in Sacramento region today, Saturday
  - Cleveland condemns house where 11 bodies found
  - Assembly passes Jerry Brown's business tax changes
  - Authorities first investigated molestation claims of two Creative Frontiers students in 2000
  - No practice? It's not perfect, but 49ers' Crabtree has track record
  - Flights to San Diego on schedule after blackout

**careerbuilder**

QUICK JOB SEARCH

Enter Keyword(s):  Enter a City:

Select a State:  Select a Category:

Advanced Job Search | Search by Category

- SACRAMENTO BEE JOBS**
- CHILD CARE WORKERS
  - US-CA-Fair Oaks
  - DRIVER Class A
  - CARDINAL GLASS
  - US-CA-Galt
  - IT ANALYST I/II
  - YUBA CO PERSONNEL
  - US-CA-Marysville
  - CARE PROVIDERS
  - CALIFORNIA MENTOR
  - US-CA-Sacramento
  - Government
  - County of Yolo
  - US-CA-Sacramento
  - OUTSIDE SALES PROFESSIONAL DELUXE PACKAGES
  - US-CA-Sacramento
- [SEE MORE TOP JOBS](#)

**Buy** 

About Comments

Reader comments on Sacbee.com are the opinions of the writer, not The Sacramento Bee. If you see an objectionable comment, click the flag icon below it. We will delete comments containing inappropriate links, obscenities, hate speech, and personal attacks. Flagrant or repeat violators will be banned. See more about comments here.

Hide comments on sacbee.com

Like

Like

Showing 1-10 of 24 comments

Sort by newest first



navygirl1234

Why is Janet Baker and her next in command, Jill Ritzman, not with the County Parks Department any longer? Anyone who believes that they resigned or retired because they were in opposition to the direction the parks has taken are living on Fantasy Island. These people were resounding failures. They helped waste millions of dollars and were ultimately responsible for the decaying park system. All they cared about was supporting the unions and maintaining their salaries. Now Janet Baker wants to spend more of our tax dollars in support of the Grassroots working group, a group who wants to take control of the parks system, without over site, buy more land and connect it all at the cost of millions more of our tax dollars. Money doesn't grow on park trees Janet! Don't be fooled by comments by the likes of LillithMC, who is a member of the Grassroots group!!

09/04/2011 07:50 AM Report Abuse

Like Reply



JDWilliams

Baker says: "Without immediate action by the Board of Supervisors, Sacramento's Regional Parks will continue to be dismantled, outsourced, privatized and reduced into oblivion."

Actually, Gibson Ranch, whose management was outsourced recently, is coming back from "oblivion" like a phoenix rising from the ashes of Baker's Parks Department. Perhaps the management of other run-down county parks should be outsourced as well.

09/04/2011 12:26 AM 1 Like Report Abuse

Like Reply



cdmason

Janet, your "grassroots working group" was an exclusionary group that did not allow participation by anyone with an alternative idea of how to save our county parks. Your support of this group is blatantly self-serving, as you were intimately involved in its development and direction.

09/04/2011 12:15 AM 3 Likes Report Abuse

Like Reply



PatriotUSMC

Janet Baker's only claim to fame is her incompetence in running the county parks department. Frankly, I don't think that Janet could find her way out of the corner of a room. Janet spent countless hours of county time helping the grassroots group come up with their new plan to "save" the county parks for one reason, to try to were intimately involved in its development and direction.

09/04/2011 12:15 AM 3 Likes Report Abuse

Like Reply



PatriotUSMC

Janet Baker's only claim to fame is her incompetence in running the county parks department. Frankly, I don't think that Janet could find her way out of the corner of a room. Janet spent countless hours of county time helping the grassroots group come up with their new plan to "save" the county parks for one reason, to try to salvage her job. The plan was for the parks dept employees to move from the parks office into a new independent district, one that would not be accountable to the BOS. I would like the BOS to explain how much taxpayer funded county staff time went into supporting, working with, and assisting the grassroots working group. Perhaps if Janet's department had worked even half as hard on maintaining our parks, the parks wouldn't be in their present deplorable condition.

If anyone wants to see how the proposed sales tax increase will be wasted, at an estimate of over \$17 million think that Janet could find her way out of the corner of a room. Janet spent countless hours of county time helping the grassroots group come up with their new plan to "save" the county parks for one reason, to try to salvage her job. The plan was for the parks dept employees to move from the parks office into a new independent district, one that would not be accountable to the BOS. I would like the BOS to explain how much taxpayer funded county staff time went into supporting, working with, and assisting the grassroots working group. Perhaps if Janet's department had worked even half as hard on maintaining our parks, the parks wouldn't be in their present deplorable condition.

If anyone wants to see how the proposed sales tax increase will be wasted, at an estimate of over \$17 million per year, one only has to look at how Janet's department has wasted grant money. Janet spent over \$400,000 on an entry gate project at Gibson Ranch, a project that the Three Stooges could have finished for less than \$50,000. She recently spearheaded the \$650,000 renovation of the Gibson Ranch Park Ranch House, a dilapidated structure that still looks dilapidated, except with new roofing, lights, and air conditioners. Although for the amount of money spent the building could have been torn down and replaced with a larger state of the art beautiful facility, it appears that Janet ran out of money after spending all the grant money on supporting her office and employee salaries. You know, all those months and years of "planning" to actually accomplish something. So now the taxpayer is left holding the bag to pay off those grants on into perpetuity, with essentially nothing to show for it.

Anyone supporting the sales tax increase for county parks will simply be voting to throw their tax money away by giving it to unaccountable and incompetent managers like Baker. Why would anyone want to hand over even more tax money to the same people that got us here in the first place, a group that if it gets its way as an independent park district, would no longer be beholden to anyone.

09/03/2011 11:55 PM 4 Likes Report Abuse

Like Reply



djack80

Funding the parks is always one of the first thing to go...the reason, everyone Taxpayers and taxconsumers alike use the parks. There is no way to single out the taxpayers, so the government puts a blanket over more tax money to the same people that got us here in the first place, a group that if it gets its way as an independent park district, would no longer be beholden to anyone.

09/03/2011 11:55 PM 4 Likes Report Abuse

Like Reply



djack80

Funding the parks is always one of the first thing to go...the reason, everyone Taxpayers and taxconsumers alike use the parks. There is no way to single out the taxpayers, so the government puts a blanket over everyone. With enough pressure, they may be able to win a bigger tax increase.

09/02/2011 05:28 PM Report Abuse

Like Reply



ccampbell1946

Well according to the News today they report that we will have high unemployment through 2017. Funding the parks is always one of the first thing to go...the reason, everyone Taxpayers and taxconsumers alike use the parks. There is no way to single out the taxpayers, so the government puts a blanket over everyone. With enough pressure, they may be able to win a bigger tax increase.

09/02/2011 05:28 PM Report Abuse

Like Reply



ccampbell1946

Well according to the News today they report that we will have high unemployment through 2017.

Maybe it is time to turn our parks into Little Hoovervilles

If it will take until 2017, then we are in a Second Full Blown Great Depression.

09/02/2011 01:54 PM Report Abuse

Like Reply



usadownthedrain

There's hope and change if we elect a new president in 2012. My bet is that if we elected a pro-business president, the high unemployment levels would come down much sooner than 2017. The class-warfare and socialist policies of our current president clearly are not working to reduce unemployment, even though the uber-liberals just love all the hate directed at hard working, successful

Used Cars

Dealer and private-party ads

Make:

Acura

Model:

Select a Model

Price Range:

\$0

to No Max

Search within:

30

miles of ZIP 95814

Search used

Advanced Search | 1982 & Older



**usadownthedrain**

There's hope and change if we elect a new president in 2012. My bet is that if we elected a pro-business president, the high unemployment levels would come down much sooner than 2017. The class-warfare and socialist policies of our current president clearly are not working to reduce unemployment, even though the uber-liberals just love all the hate directed at hard working, successful folks.

09/02/2011 06:12 PM in reply to ccampbell1946 2 Likes Report Abuse



**LillithMc**

Couldn't have anyone more pro-business than GW Bush. No regulations. Government set up to pay his friends with no-bid contracts. \$800 Billion in tax breaks for the wealthy. Tax breaks to send jobs overseas. If you are talking about "real" business, don't see anyone representing the GOP who does more than represent fundamentalist religions. Our "pro-business" Board of Supervisors just gave Gibson Ranch for free to Doug Ose as a "business plan" for his personal profit. More crony "Capitalism". Just want to give you some of your partisan spin. usadownthedrain is a good name for you.

09/03/2011 12:38 AM in reply to usadownthedrain Report Abuse

Couldn't have anyone more pro-business than GW Bush. No regulations. Government set up to pay his friends with no-bid contracts. \$800 Billion in tax breaks for the wealthy. Tax breaks to send jobs overseas. If you are talking about "real" business, don't see anyone representing the GOP who does more than represent fundamentalist religions. Our "pro-business" Board of Supervisors just gave Gibson Ranch for free to Doug Ose as a "business plan" for his personal profit. More crony "Capitalism". Just want to give you some of your partisan spin. usadownthedrain is a good name for you.

09/03/2011 12:38 AM in reply to usadownthedrain Report Abuse



**dougose**

Lillith, welcome home again from your recent vacation. My offer to give you a personal guided tour of Gibson Ranch still stands from four months ago. I regret that you continue to insist on opining without seeing or understanding what is transpiring at Gibson Ranch. In July, over 33,000 people visited the park and had the opportunity to enjoy a day of sunshine and relaxation. Why that is a disappointment to you eludes me.

Lets play a little game. This game is called "Lillith's World".

In June 2010, the Board of Supervisors issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to take over the operation and management of Gibson Ranch. The County very clearly said they lacked the funds to keep the park open. Lillith provided no input to the structure of the RFP nor did she submit a proposal.

In March 2011, the Board of Supervisors awarded a ten year lease to a private operator to run the park. Lillith did not appear at the hearing and offered no written testimony in favor or against the proposal.

Between April 1 and today, Lillith regularly and with enthusiasm blogged about what a bad idea it is to privatize the operation of Gibson Ranch, apparently preferring to keep it closed until some fairy godmother appeared to make all things better. In this case, the fairy godmother is the so-called Grass Roots Working Group that is advocating for an increase in sales tax rates to as to turn vast new sums of money over to a new governmental entity led and managed by the people who failed so miserably in protecting these park assets in the first place.

It is now early September 2011. Gibson Ranch has been open and privately operated since April 1. It is clearly being utilized by the public. The deferred maintenance that had accumulated under the auspices of the County Parks Department is being systemically repaired. The grounds are clean. The grass is being out. The bathrooms are clean. The garbage is being removed. The rental cabins are being refurbished. The equestrian operation is prospering. Groups of walkers welcome each day at sunrise with a three or five mile walk. The lake is stocked with fish and kids of all ages are trying their luck every day. Families are picnicing, riding bikes, flying kites, playing volleyball, camping every day.

Lillith's World would have none of this ever occur. It is a dreary place occupied by people of limited vision who insist on telling everyone what should be done but have never done anything themselves. They hide their inadequacies behind a web pseudonym so no one can ever know who they are. They root for the failure of those who risk and do, so that one day they can say "See....We told you so."

To those who don't live in Lillith's World, I say thank you for the opportunity to open this park and provide a place where the residents of this County can safely gather for active and passive recreation. My team and I are working every day to restore and improve Gibson Ranch. In the event we fail, then at least the park will have been open in the interim, and I will humbly accept the ridicule that the Lilliths of the world will be quick to pin on me. In the meantime, we will continue to do the best we can. Come see what we have to offer. We appreciate your support.

Gibson Ranch: a little bit of country and a whole lot of fun!

09/03/2011 10:41 PM in reply to LillithMc 6 Likes Report Abuse



**usadownthedrain**

Lillith, the point is that a typical recession lasts 1-2 years and then the economy rebounds when our government makes the right moves to restart the economy. However, in this case, the recession is prolonging much longer because our country made the mistake of electing a socialist/class-warfare/business-hating government who doesn't know/understand what it takes to fix things. Creating a bunch of make-work short-term jobs in liberally-dominated industries like global warming research, and temporarily extending jobs in state/local government that were targeted for elimination with unsustainable federal grants is clearly not the answer to restoring a healthy economy. So, instead of things getting better, they're getting worse. And they will continue to do so until we make a change and get a new presidential administration that understands how to fix things right. And this isn't "spin", it's reality, whether you accept it or not. Fortunately, millions of Americans are realizing this, ergo Obama's poll ratings which are dropping like a rock with every passing month.

09/03/2011 10:55 AM in reply to LillithMc 4 Likes Report Abuse

M [Subscribe by email](#) [RSS](#)

1 2 3 Next →

Real-time updating is enabled. (Pause)