

# **Chapter 1. Introduction**

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## **PURPOSE AND DOCUMENT CONTENTS**

This document includes project background information, project goals, a site assessment, and potential project elements and scenarios for the Jensen River Ranch restoration site. The document also includes a conceptual restoration plan, monitoring and maintenance recommendations, project phasing, and potential funding sources. It is intended to assist the San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust (Parkway Trust) and the Jensen River Ranch Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee) in making an informed decision regarding habitat and public use enhancement of the Jensen River Ranch.

Chapter 1 provides background information and goals for the restoration project. Chapter 2 includes an analysis of the site's existing conditions, opportunities, and constraints. Chapter 3 contains a description of potential project elements that will aid in achieving the project goals, four potential project scenarios, and a discussion of the next steps in the project's execution. Chapter 4 describes the benefits analysis that can be used to select a Project Alternative. Chapter 5 describes the implementation strategies and presents results of the benefits analysis for the restoration element options. Chapter 6 outlines project phasing strategies and identifies potential funding sources. Five appendices are also included with this document. Appendix A contains photographs of the site; the public access plan is presented in Appendix B. Detailed cost estimates are found in Appendix C, and assumptions used to conduct the benefits analyses of alternatives and restoration element options are presented in appendices D and E, respectively.

## **PROJECT BACKGROUND**

The rapid development of the Fresno-Madera metropolitan area as the regional headquarters and economic center of the San Joaquin Valley has focused local community attention on the San Joaquin River and the adjacent river bottom as a natural resource to be celebrated, enhanced, and protected. The community has expressed concern that this vital economic, recreation, and wildlife resource may be lost or compromised as development spreads toward the river in both Fresno and Madera Counties. Recognizing the value and significance of this remaining riparian corridor, local community and state agencies identified the need to develop a comprehensive San Joaquin River Parkway Plan (Parkway Plan) with the goal of directing natural resource preservation, public access, and recreation along the river.

Acquisition of the Jensen River Ranch by the San Joaquin River Conservancy (Conservancy) and grant funding provided by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) to the Parkway Trust for restoration of the site are two actions ensuring that the vision of a parkway

corridor becomes a reality. Parkway Trust is managing and restoring the property for the Conservancy.

## LOCATION OF PROJECT SITE

The Jensen River Ranch project site is a 167-acre parcel owned by the Conservancy and located in the Woodward Park area of the City of Fresno, directly adjacent to the northside of Woodward Regional Park (Figure 1-1). The site is bordered on the west by State Route 41 and Woodward Bluffs Mobile Home Estates. The San Joaquin River borders the property on the north. Access to the site is provided through Woodward Park from the east via a 60-foot-wide easement from Rice Road and through a private access road from State Route 41 via Perrin Road. Appendix A contains photographs of numerous features within the project site.

## PROJECT GOALS

Project goals for Jensen River Ranch are based on the Parkway Plan goals and recommendations from the Advisory Committee. The goals have been separated into broad subject areas to ensure that all issues be addressed. The following goals reflect revisions made during the September 1, 1999, Advisory Committee meeting.

### *Wildlife*

- Amount of riparian woodland, riparian scrub, upland, and wetland habitat should be increased for native wildlife.
- Property should function as wildlife corridor with adjacent lands.
- Protected areas (with minimal disturbance) should be provided within the site.
- Wildlife and vegetation should be inventoried to appropriately direct restoration.

### *Vegetation*

- Project should contribute to the habitat diversity and quality within this reach of the river and the site.
- Plant species should be planted where existing soils and hydrology will support natural regeneration and minimize long-term maintenance.
- Native trees and shrub species should be planted from seeds or cuttings taken from the San Joaquin River between Friant Dam and the Mendota Pool.

- Wildland and agricultural weeds should be controlled on the project site to reduce competition with native species.
- Non-native species may be utilized for specific land management issues.

### *Hydraulics/Flooding*

- Floodplain should be expanded to the extent feasible to enhance the site's hydrology without jeopardizing the integrity of adjacent land uses.
- Sum total of all actions resulting from this project will not increase flood damage or flooding potential.
- Current settling capability (75% rate) of the DK area channel drainage will be maintained.

### *Recreation*

- Project should accommodate multi-use trails through the site but should locate the trails to provide the least disturbance to adjacent land uses and sensitive wildlife habitat.

### *Sustainability and Maintenance*

- Planted and constructed restoration features should require only minimal maintenance three years after construction is complete.

### *Use of Natural Processes/Innovative Techniques*

- Where possible, the design should allow for natural processes to establish and maintain desired vegetation.
- Cost saving and innovative techniques should be considered in the restoration program to the extent feasible, including the use of pilot projects.

### *Education*

- Educational features should be incorporated into the overall plan, explaining the restoration project to increase public awareness.

### *Access Control*

- Access and public use should be focused in key areas of site.
- Shade should be provided for visitors.
- Trails should be designed so that they are visible from the bluff and other access points for “drive-by” safety and security patrol.

### *Adjacent Land Use*

- Visual screening should be provided for adjacent land uses.
- Visual connections from Woodward Park (viewing overlooks) should be incorporated into the plan.

## **RELATED STUDIES AND PROJECTS**

### **San Joaquin River Parkway Plan**

The Parkway Plan (Dangermond and Associates 1992) articulates the vision of the Parkway Trust for the San Joaquin River. It describes the existing conditions, goals and policies, acquisition priorities, and ecological restoration needs along the river. A programmatic environmental impact report for the San Joaquin River Parkway Interim Master Plan was adopted by the Conservancy in December 1997 (EIP Associates 1997). The Jensen River Ranch habitat enhancement and public access project has been developed in keeping with the goals and policies of the Parkway Plan.

### **San Joaquin River Riparian Habitat Restoration Program**

The San Joaquin River Riparian Habitat Restoration Program recently completed two studies of the San Joaquin River from Friant Dam to the Merced River. One is a historical riparian habitat conditions study (Jones & Stokes Associates 1998a); the other is an analysis of the physical processes and riparian habitat potential (Jones & Stokes Associates 1998b). The first study provides an assessment of historical changes in the spatial distribution of riparian habitat types and adjacent land uses along the river and the factors that may have caused these changes. The report presents a quantitative analysis of historical changes in areal extent and spatial distribution of riparian habitat and adjacent land uses at five points in time: prehistoric, 1937, 1957, 1978, and 1993. The second study addresses how physical processes affecting the San Joaquin River affect the distribution of riparian vegetation and sediment in the river, and how riparian vegetation is constrained by physical conditions and current river management.

This study also recommends feasible approaches to the future expansion or enhancement of riparian habitat and management of sediment.

### **Fresno-Clovis Storm Water Quality Monitoring Program 1997-1998 Annual Report**

This report describes the water quality monitoring efforts of the Fresno Metropolitan Flood Control District (FMFCD). In the section regarding the DK area outfall structure that releases flow into the Jensen River Ranch, it describes the nature and type of material within the DK area channel. Although the sediment trap at the base of the outfall structure must be cleaned out every 3 to 5 years, the sediment is fairly clean and can be disposed under the district's normal operations. (Fresno Metropolitan Flood Control District 1998.)

### **Phase I Environmental Site Assessment**

This study was prepared for the Jensen River Ranch Property, by Krazen and Associates, to determine previous uses of the property, including possible hazardous materials storage or disposal, that may degrade soils or groundwater. (Krazen and Associates 1996.)

### **Tom MacMichael Sr. Loop Trail Environmental Assessment**

An environmental assessment (No. EA-98-039) was prepared for the Tom MacMichael Sr. Loop Trail proposed for the project site. The loop trail will be a short trail segment from the Lewis S. Eaton Trail through the project site. A Notice of Determination was filed with the Fresno County Clerk, and a Notice of Completion and an Environmental Document Transmittal Form were sent to the State Clearinghouse. (City of Fresno 1998.)