The year is 2050. The 22-mile San Joaquin River Parkway has reached full buildout, and looks like...what?

We posed this question at the River Parkway Trust’s annual strategic planning session. Each fall, our board and staff gather to plan for the future, and this year we took a long-range approach.

Our organization is focused on implementing projects to protect open space and enhance wildlife habitat throughout the Parkway. Last winter, hundreds of volunteers joined our restoration staff to plant more than 10,000 native plants at Spano River Ranch. These growing plants are already providing habitat for nesting riparian song birds and raptors.

Providing public access to the San Joaquin River Parkway is also a priority. In the last few years, support from individuals just like you has created opportunities for tens of thousands of children, families, anglers, birders, and recreation enthusiasts to get out on the Parkway through our array of education and community programs.

Our goal for this year’s planning session was to build on our recent successes and develop a vision for what we hope to accomplish during the next thirty years.
But before we began, I wanted to make sure we were thinking about what benefits the completed San Joaquin River Parkway would bring to the community. And so I asked several of my fellow board members for help by talking about the ecological, economic, educational, health, and recreational benefits the Parkway will provide.

He stood up in front of the group.

“You all should know that I am a trust-fund kid.”

The comment caught us somewhat off guard.

“I grew up in the Bay Area as the beneficiary of a trust-fund. I inherited some of the most beautiful land any child could ever hope for. From the first day I could walk, the Marin Headlands, every old-growth forest in California, and the entire John Muir Trail were all mine to explore. My inheritance was secured by people that wanted to protect public land for the next generation. I hope to give the next generation more than was given to me.”

This from Ryan Commons, a Trust board member, husband, and father of two young sons. Ryan represents the future of the San Joaquin River Parkway, and he inspired my thinking about what the River Parkway Trust is working to accomplish.

And for that reason, I am writing to share his words with you. I hope that you’ll be inspired to join us in fulfilling the 2050 vision of a completed Parkway by making a generous year-end contribution today.

When I am an old man, and my sons are grown, I want to take a long walk from Highway 99 to Friant Dam with my grandchildren. I want to see a mother pushing her baby under the shade of riparian trees on a hot summer day. I want to see a bobcat scurrying off the trail as an equestrian slowly approaches. I want to see families picnicking, fishermen fishing, scouts scouting, birders birding, kayakers kayaking, golfers golfing, painters painting, and the occasional visitor remarking on what a beautiful river Fresno and Madera Counties enjoy.

Are you imagining these scenes now?

It might be your family members kayaking downstream from Lost Lake to Owl Hollow or River West Fresno. Maybe it’s your grandchildren or great-grandchildren in their scout uniforms learning about birds or geology on the banks of the river. Or perhaps you are imagining tourists enjoying a relaxed picnic, beneath an old oak tree at Ball Ranch, on their way to the mountains.

My hope for the San Joaquin River Parkway is hardly a new idea. Around the world, wherever civilization and rivers meet, there is a story about the people and their river.

I am fascinated by stories about the confluence of people and rivers. They describe the creation of gardens and parks, and people coming together in a shared backyard that offers far more than anyone seeks. As the gardens and parks grow, the true value of the river is recognized and what was once “the river” becomes “our river.”
I joined the River Parkway Trust’s board because I want to see the San Joaquin River become “our river.”

You can make this vision a reality. You can help create the Parkway and make the San Joaquin River shared backyard. Your special donation of $100 or $250 - sent by December 31 - will support the long-term Parkway effort.

Because the San Joaquin River Parkway is our shared backyard and the place where open space and people come together in our region.

Every day thousands of your neighbors come together to enjoy open space and the river along the Parkway. Cyclists, equestrians, hikers, and runners use the existing miles of trail stemming from Woodward Park and down at Jensen River Ranch.

At Sycamore Island anglers enjoy fishing for bass and trout, and birders come together to look for birds nesting in the rookery on site.

Every week, River Center visitors delight in spotting a bald eagle perched high in a sycamore tree, or a bobcat hiding in the golden grass along the Hidden Homes Trail.

The San Joaquin River Parkway with its trails, open space, education facilities, wildlife habitat, and access to the river is our shared backyard. And it’s up to you and me to make sure we continue advancing the effort for completing the Parkway vision.

This is where you come in. This is where your gift of $100, $250 or more can make a real difference for creating the Parkway.

Your commitment to the Parkway vision matters. Your generosity will support the steps necessary to open more Parkway lands, build new trails, and enable more people to come together in our shared backyard. Please make a special year-end donation right now.

Today, we are in a magnificent position to see the greater vision for the 22-mile Parkway come to be. This is thanks to the generosity of people like you, devoted volunteers, and the hard work and dedication of every person involved with the effort.

The San Joaquin River Parkway is not only within grasp, it is happening every day. Right now, thousands of new native plants are growing along the Parkway. Nearly 10 miles of trails and 1338 acres of open space are available to the public throughout the Parkway.

Even more exciting, 3369 of acres of natural beauty sit in trust today, just waiting for the necessary support to make the land a publicly available resource. I want to do everything I can possibly do to accelerate the opening of that land to the public.

As an heir to California’s public land, as a runner, a hiker, a fisherman, a hunter, a backpacker, a mountaineer, and a person that loves to look upon nature’s wonderlands, I want to leave more accessible public land for the next generation than I received as my Californian birthright.
My wife and I are committed to supporting the River Parkway Trust to make sure future generations can take a long walk along the banks of the San Joaquin River. For all that YOU, and people just like you have given to Fresno, Madera, my family, my children, and me - please accept my “thank you” and know that the River Parkway Trust is hard at work to see the mission through. - Ryan Commons

Ryan and his wife, and their two young sons represent the future of the San Joaquin River Parkway. And so do you, and me, and every generous friend of the River Parkway Trust.

Please join Ryan and me today. Please make a special year-end donation before December 31. You are part of our vision for the future, and your gift today will make a lasting impact.

In 2018, the River Parkway Trust will celebrate 30 years of work towards creating and protecting the San Joaquin River Parkway. Every acre of open space protected, tree planted, and mile of trail built has become part of the trust for the future.

Creating the 22-mile San Joaquin River Parkway is a long-term effort. We are committed to fulfilling the vision, but we can only do it with your committed support. No gift is too small, and every gift will help us take steps forward.

The year is 2050. Thanks to you, the San Joaquin River Parkway has become our shared backyard and “the” river has become “our river.”

Thank you for being part of the future of the San Joaquin River Parkway.

Sincerely,

Bart Bohn

President, Board of Directors

P.S. Don’t forget to make your donation before December 31! And remember, your support today is what will make the future of the Parkway possible.