

Least Bell's Vireo Returns to the Central Valley

Endangered Songbird Not Seen in Valley for 60 Years Reappears at River Partners' Restoration Site at National Wildlife Refuge



Least Bell's vireo at the San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by Po-Hon Liu.

One of the greatest affirmations that the restoration work done at River Partners is having an impact came in the form of a distinctive "cheetle, jeew" call, heard at the San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge, a call that hasn't been heard anywhere in the Central Valley for more than 60 years. The call came from a pair of nesting least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*), who are raising their young in a three-year-old restoration site at the Refuge, designed and implemented by River Partners. The birds were first discovered by Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO) bird monitor Lynette Lina in the Refuge in early June.

The least Bell's vireo is a state and federally-listed endangered species that was once common throughout California's Central Valley. They had disappeared from

the area due to a 90% decline in the riparian habitat used by the birds. The restoration site is in a former, non-productive farm field that was planted by River Partners to match the original valley riparian habitat of willows, blackberry, wild rose thickets and mugwort. After three years, the plantings have grown together to form these thick brambles, which is where the vireo nest was found.

"Hearing the least Bell's vireo again demonstrates that a good recovery plan, committed partners and resources to carry it out, can bring many species back to life in areas where they seemed lost forever," said Steve Thompson, manager of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's California-Nevada Operations Office.

Geoffrey Geupel, Terrestrial Ecology Division Director of PRBO Conservation Science, which conducts bird monitoring throughout California, called it a "superb success story" and an example of how the restoration project, which included patch work design and planting herbaceous under story, supports native bird species.

Says River Partners Senior Restoration Ecologist, Tom Griggs, "The recent news of the least Bell's vireo nesting and successfully fledging two young in our restoration project at the San Joaquin River NWR is a very significant milestone in the evolution of riparian restoration planting."

The project has been funded by CALFED, which provided key funds to

River Partners Receives Governor's Award



The 2004 Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Award was presented to River Partners at a ceremony December 1, 2004. State officials honored River Partners for our innovative and effective strategies to restore, enhance, and improve California's watersheds, while promoting sustainable economic progress.

"Recipients of this award have shown a deep commitment to balancing environmental preservation and protection with the need to keep California's economy growing. I commend them for their efforts," Governor Schwarzenegger said to the press.

"This award symbolizes our organization's commitment to serve our communities, protect the environment and economic viability. River Partners success is only possible because of the dedication of our team and that of our valued partners. Those efforts and results are the true measure of our success; the award is just a thoughtful reflection," adds River Partners President, John Carlon.

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The Journal is published quarterly by River Partners, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit public benefit corporation. Our mission is to create wildlife habitat for the benefit of people and the environment.

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Message from the Board Chair

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the first edition of the River Partners Journal, a quarterly publication designed to keep you informed of the activities of River Partners.

River Partners is a relatively new and growing organization that in seven years has managed to establish itself as one of the leading scientific-based non-profits engaged in riparian restoration along California waterways.

River Partners got started in 1998 as Sacramento River Partners, working with such agencies as the California Department of Fish and Game, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, and the state Wildlife Conservation Board to restore wildlife habitat along various stretches of the Sacramento River. Our success in those endeavors led to invitations to participate in projects on additional rivers as well and, subsequently, we changed our name to simply River Partners.

Right now we are engaged in restoration activities on six California rivers and additional creeks. For the most part, our work involves converting flood-prone farmland into riparian vegetation that attracts wildlife and at the same time serves as a "filter strip" buffer that protects water quality. Additional physical benefits include improvements in air quality through carbon sequestration, erosion reduction, and enhanced flood protection for neighboring agriculture. Economic, recreation and educational benefits ensue from restoration activities as well. In the future we expect to increase the number of local schools that use River Partners restoration sites as outdoor laboratories for their students.

So far we have restored over 3,900 acres of riparian habitat and planted more than 510,000 native trees and shrubs. We are extremely proud of the recognition given to our accomplishments by our receipt of the 2004 Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Award, an honor that recognized River Partners as the "leading experts in riparian habitat in the state of California."

I hope you enjoy this first issue of the River Partners Journal and that future issues will serve to further your understanding and appreciation of the importance of riparian restoration to the quality of life of all Californians and, specifically, the contribution that River Partners makes to that effort.



Irving Schiffman
 Irving Schiffman
 Chairman of the Board

Where Is River Partners?

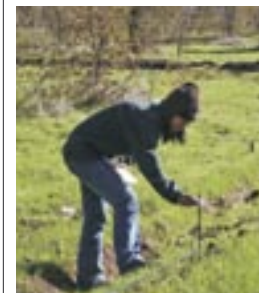
River Partners has 19 current restoration projects throughout California's Central Valley, including these highlights.

Turtle Bay Arboretum

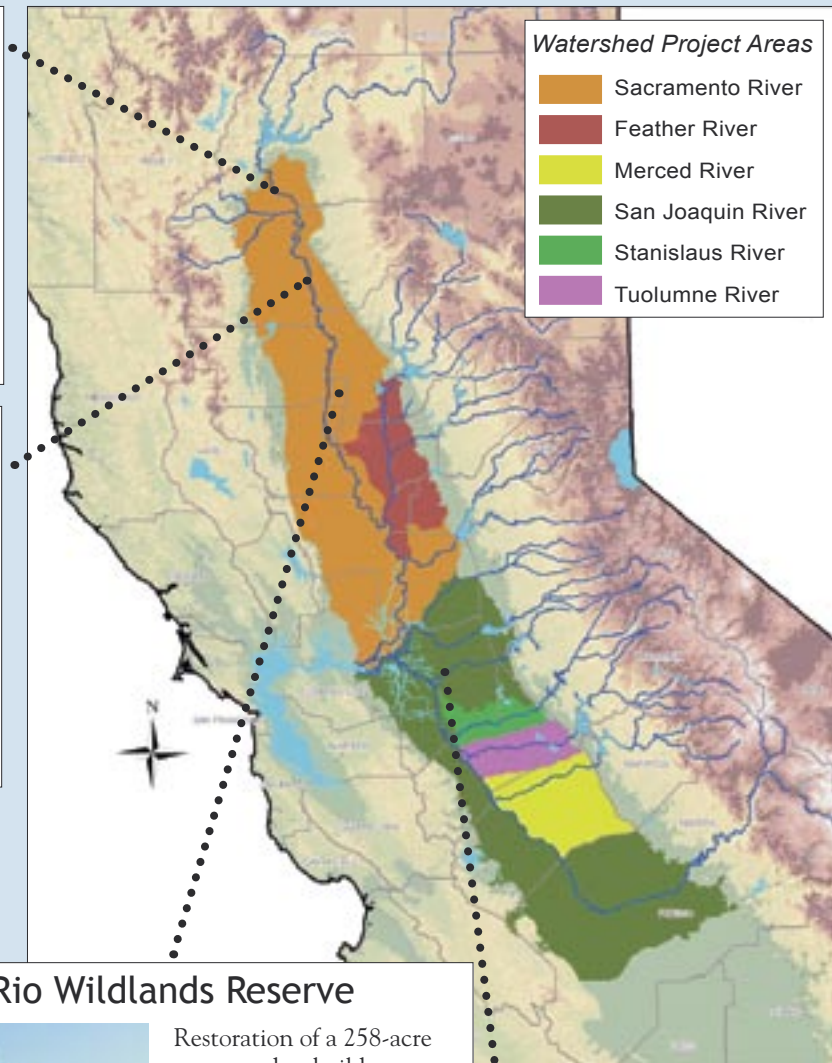


Restoration of 215 acres of the McConnell Arboretum at Turtle Bay Exploration Park, along the north bank of the Sacramento River in Redding. Our goal is to provide native trees, shrubs, and grasses supportive of wildlife.

Butler Slough



Restoration of 54 acres of riparian habitat on the Butler Slough Ecological Reserve (BSER), south east of Red Bluff. Our goal is to restore native riparian trees, shrubs, and grasses that once existed on the site to extend critical habitat for wildlife species in the Central Valley.



Restoration Brings Back the Bell's Vireo

Continued from Page 1

purchase an 800-acre farm on flood-prone land, which was transferred the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Other agencies also contributed, including the Natural Resources Conservation Service, USFWS, the California Resources Agency, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Audubon Society. The restoration was conducted by River Partners, with input, consultation and monitoring by PRBO conservation Science, the USFWS and the Endangered Species Restoration Program at CSU-Stanislaus.

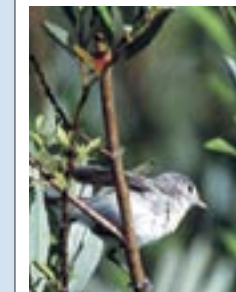
Although the area immediately around the vireo nest has been temporarily closed to the public, check the River Partners and Refuge websites for updates on the status of the birds and additional sightings, at www.riverpartners.org and www.fws.gov/pacific/sanluis.

Del Rio Wildlands Reserve



Restoration of a 258-acre preserve that builds on the largest contiguous block of conservation ownership and easements on the Sacramento River. Our plantings of native grasses, trees and shrubs are providing habitat for a host of birds and other wildlife.

San Joaquin River National Wildlife Refuge



The US Fish & Wildlife Service has contracted with River Partners to restore 1,361 acres of the Refuge to provide habitat for native birds and the riparian brush rabbit, an endangered species being reintroduced to the area.

Project Location



Beyond the Classroom Walls

By Alexa Leigh Valavanis & Paul Kirk

For the past six years, Mark Rodriguez and his third-grade class from Marigold Elementary School have participated in River Partners' youth environmental education activities. Our "get your hands dirty" educational approach facilitates environmental education, while providing students an opportunity to experience a variety of restoration activities – from planting native plant species to monitoring their growth.

Since 1999, River Partners has been providing K-12 educational activities to a number of Chico schools. Teachers eager to provide outdoor environmental education have taken the initiative to contact River Partners and inquire about field trip opportunities to habitat restoration sites. To date, River Partners biologists and staff have provided over 30 restoration field trips, and numerous school-wide presentations to public schools



Elementary school children learn how to plant trees with River Partners and the US Fish & Wildlife Service

in Chico, including five elementary schools, Chico Junior High and Pleasant Valley High.

Additionally, River Partners has provided daylong presentations, in conjunction with the comprehensive Wetlands curriculum at Chico Junior High - highlighting restoration as an environmental science career.

River Partners has worked with local

college students as well, providing fieldtrips for Butte College and numerous other junior colleges. These activities not only provide exciting learning opportunities for local students, but also create another avenue for River Partners to reach out to local communities.

Two years ago, River Partners formed a partnership with the Student and Landowner Education and Watershed Stewardship Program (SLEWS) in order to provide long-term environmental education activities for high school students in Chico as well as the San Joaquin Valley. The SLEWS program provides funding to facilitate a year-long partnership between a high school class and a landowner or organization that is in the process of implementing

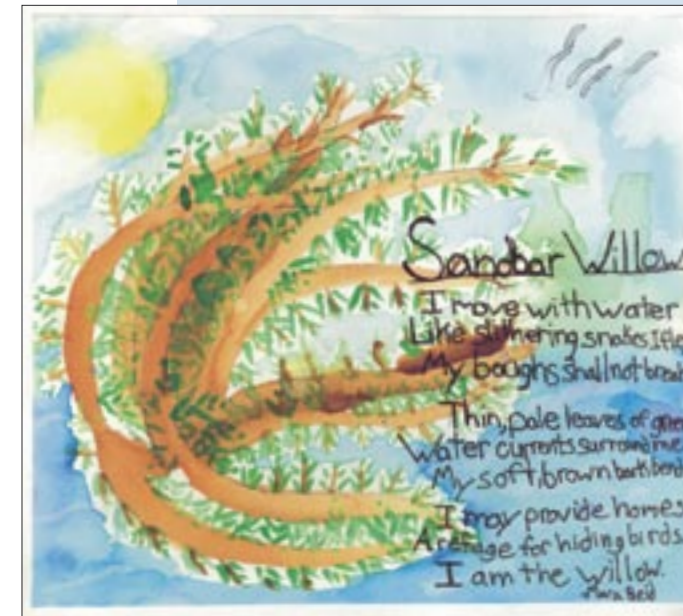
habitat restoration. River Partners staff, including board members, have organized restoration activities, provided plants and participated in SLEWS field trips for the past two years.

Last fall, River Partners and Chico Country Day School (CCDS) created a

partnership to develop a hands-on learning opportunity for elementary students to study ecology and earth science principles, while participating in restoration activities and conducting field studies. The joint venture between CCDS and River Partners was selected to receive a \$26,000 grant through the Nature Restoration Trust, a partnership jointly created by the Pacific Gas & Electric Corporation and the National Fish and Wildlife Refuge.

Our "get your hands dirty" approach facilitates environmental education, while providing students an opportunity to experience restoration activities.

Although words can be used in a classroom to describe sights, sounds and smells found in a riparian forest, there are no words to describe the look on a child's face that has witnessed a seed they planted, months prior, as it breaks through the earth. This experience is learning within nature, fostering a connection with the earth - beyond the classroom walls.



Dear Paul,

I enjoyed the trip to the riparian habitat and would like to thank you. I particularly enjoyed the Steal the Plant game. That was fun! I learned a lot about which plants were native and which weren't. I also learned a lot about the plants themselves.

Mara Reid (6th grade)



Olivia Lawler, 6th Grade (Mary Schoenthaler's Class)

Community Visits Del Rio Wildlands Preserve

On June 5, more than 20 people joined River Partners on our Birds of the Riparian Habitat Tour of the Del Rio Wildland Preserve in Glenn County. Led by Tom Griggs, Senior Restoration Ecologist, and Dan Eiseff, Restoration Ecologist, we toured a portion of the 258-acre preserve, viewing newly planted restoration areas. After only two seasons, riparian shrubs and grasses such as willow, rose, Blue rye and needle grass were thriving. We also visited established riparian areas to gain a sense of how the area will look in several years. Dan and Tom explained the restoration process, how soils impact the types of plants we see, and how birds use the riparian areas.

This project builds on the largest contiguous block of conservation ownership and easements on the Sacramento River. The 19,000-acre Llano Seco Ranch borders the property on the north and a seasonal wetland protected by a Wildlife Conservation Board easement lies to the east. Among the bird sightings were nesting and feeding Western king birds, Ash-throated flycatchers, Spotted towhees, orioles, Swainson's hawks, red-winged blackbirds, and many others.



A family of bird-watchers at River Partners' Del Rio Wildlands Preserve in Glenn County. Photo by Tempra Board.



Dear Paul,

Thank you for explaining to us about plants. What I liked best was when we planted and played steal the bacon! I learned that poison oak can make you really itchy and fox tails don't really look like fox tails. Thanks again for teaching us about plants. That was a fun field trip. But the fun part was the planting.

Kelsey (3rd grade)

Disappearing Cottonwoods

By Michelle Cederborg

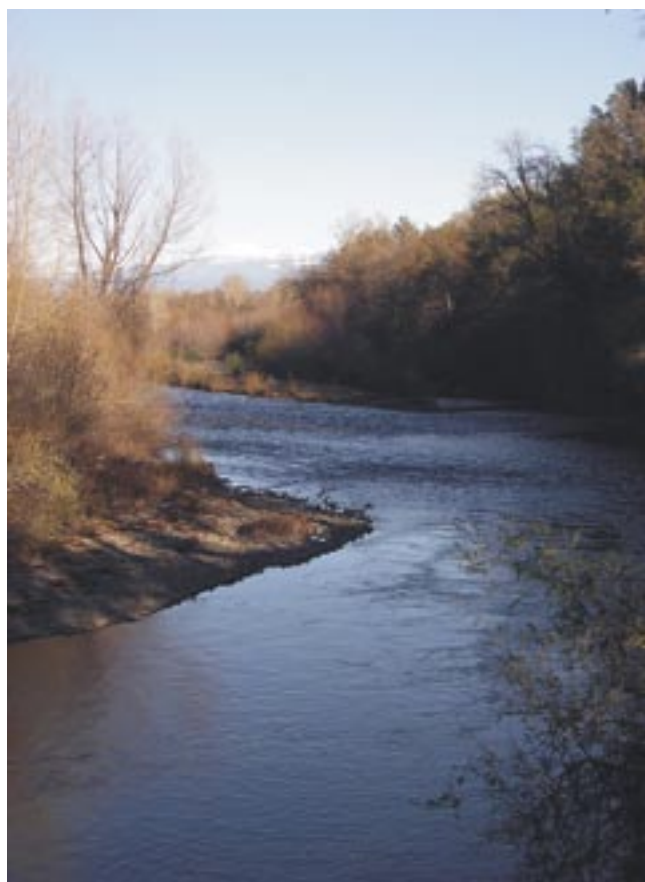
Fremont cottonwood once dominated many riparian corridors in the Central Valley of California, and was one of the first riparian species to colonize new alluvial surfaces along the Sacramento River in Northern California. This pioneer species influences canopy structure, nutrient cycling and species diversity in the riparian forest. As mature stands begin to topple from old age and drought stress, new recruits are necessary to replenish and maintain the riparian forest. Unfortunately, today

depriving downstream reaches of periodic floods known to facilitate cottonwood seedling germination and establishment. High magnitude flows create a "safe site" by scouring the area of competing vegetation, depositing a mineral rich alluvial substrate, and providing adequate soil moisture for root growth. Flood flows also recharge the water table to appropriate elevations for cottonwood seedling survival. The higher the elevation of establishment, the less likely the seedlings will be adversely affected by river stage fluctuation.

The Sacramento River is an example of a highly regulated system with low water levels in the spring and high flows in the hotter drier summer months to provide for the peaked

water demands of surrounding agricultural crops. Cottonwood seeds will germinate on whatever moist surface is available, which are typically the areas adjacent to the river channel, known as the capillary fringe. Consequently, cottonwood seedlings, which emerge from April to July, are subject to inundation from rising waters in early summer and abrupt water table declines in late summer as water is rapidly diverted for irrigation. Cottonwoods experience an increased rate of mortality in both conditions.

Careful analysis of cottonwood seedling growth, with an emphasis on root elongation, was performed in a controlled environment to determine how much water table decline this species is physiologically equipped to handle. Seedling survival and growth documented under simulated groundwater conditions prove that Fremont cottonwoods are equipped to handle recession rates of 0.0, 1.0, and 2.5 cm/day but cannot withstand



Mature willows, in winter, along Battle Creek, a tributary to the Sacramento River. Photo by Paul Kirk.

excessive rates of water recession, at least those rates which are consistently 5.0 cm/day or greater. Throughout the 2003 growing season, water levels receded at rates much greater than 5.0 cm/day (sometimes between 10 and 18 cm/day), in some cases dropping at these rates for many days at time.

Drastic river stage fluctuations, such as those experienced on the Sacramento River in 2003, make it almost impossible for Fremont cottonwoods to recruit. If current flow regulation practices continue and common ground cannot be met, there will be little hope for future natural cottonwood succession on the Sacramento River.

RP Says Goodbye to Michelle

Michelle Cederborg has left River Partners and is moving to Colorado to pursue an advanced degree at either the University of Denver or Colorado State University. Michelle says that she's learned more in the past 18 months at River Partners than in the last 18 years of school, and she feels well prepared to take on the next phase of her career. We wish Michelle the best and will miss her.

Dams alter river flow patterns by depriving downstream reaches of periodic floods known to facilitate cottonwood seedling germination and establishment.

cottonwood communities are lacking new individuals to succeed their once dominant ancestors. The fact that cottonwood seedlings are found annually in abundance along the Sacramento River seems to indicate that the problem is not in seed production or initial establishment, but in the inability of many young cottonwoods to survive the first year. Damming, in conjunction with in-stream flow inhibition, appears to be a major cause of young cottonwood disappearance in riparian areas.

Dams alter river flow patterns by



Submerged cottonwood seedlings in the Sacramento River near Phelan Island. Photo by Michelle Cederborg.

Restoring Our Rivers Campaign

Staff Resources Makes Campaign Gift to River Partners

River Partners is excited to be launching our most important and ambitious campaign to date: the Restoring Our Rivers campaign. The goal of this campaign is to raise five million dollars over the next three years, in order to initiate restoration on 2,000 acres of riverbanks, wetlands and flood-prone, non-productive agricultural lands along California's rivers and tributaries. Our objective is to balance the needs of flood protection, recreation and wildlife habitat, while creating an opportunity for individuals, businesses and corporations to exercise their social and environmental responsibility, through support of active restoration efforts.

We are thrilled to announce that Staff Resources, Inc. has helped us to kick off this campaign with a \$5,000 gift. Staff Resources has been providing Professional Employer Organization services since 1974. Based in Chico, Staff Resources provides employment law compliance, payroll processing, benefit plan administration, and risk management to a variety of companies and organizations in California.

It was in part because of their intimate knowledge of the talented people and successful work of River Partners over the years that stimulated the gift. "It's unusual to find such a talented group of people – doing so much great work in a cost-conscious manner," said Kent Ahlswede, Founder and CEO of Staff Resources. "I believe in what River Partners is doing. The more we can restore our area to the way it was, the better off our children and grandchildren will be."

We couldn't have said it better ourselves. Watching the success of our riparian restoration projects year after year, seeing the trees become established, and the native birds returning to areas along California's rivers and their tributaries, is what our campaign is all about.

"I believe that those of us who live here and enjoy the benefits of this area should share in the cost of restoring it," Ahlswede adds. River Partners would like to thank Staff Resources for its generous support, and we hope that you will join us in our ambitious mission.



We invite you to become a Partner.

Join us in our mission to create wildlife habitat for the benefit of people and the environment. Thank you!

Yes! I'd like to become a River Partner. Please accept my annual gift of:

- Individual \$35
- Family \$50
- Investor \$100
- Benefactor \$500
- Corporate \$1,000
- Life Time Membership \$2,500
- Other \$_____

I understand that my contribution is tax-deductible and that my information will never be shared with any entity.

Thank You to Our Members

Gifts

River Partners would like to acknowledge the following for their generous support between Dec. 1, 2004 – Aug. 1, 2005

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Grants

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Workshop Sponsors

Expecting the Expected: Flooding in the Sacramento Valley

Center for Economic Development, Chico
 Department of Water Resources
 Sacramento River Preservation Trust
 Sacramento River National Wildlife Refuge

New Members

Thank you to our new members for their exceptional support. River Partners' success is due to the generous financial support of our members. The following persons have joined since April 2005.

Investor Members

Kent Ahlswede, Staff Resources
 John & Marsha Anderson, Hedgerow Farms
 Thomas Dwyer
 Dave Neubert, Neubert Farms
 George Rawley M.D.
 Monroe & Carol Sprague

Adopt-A-Tree Program

Contributions to the Adopt-A-Tree program in honor or in memory of a special person benefit wildlife by helping to create and restore the forests and natural habitats in which many songbirds, baby animals and endangered species live.

In honor of the Chico Horticultural Society

In honor of the California State Society of N.S.C.A.R.

January O. Bill
 In honor of Loyd Bill

Scott and Raven Clemons
 In honor of the Sacramento Grove of the Oak

Ken Griggs
 In honor of Sandy Griggs

In honor of Mr. Jex's Class

Marilyn Niepoth
 In honor of Sam Niepoth

Your membership contribution will be put to work immediately restoring and protecting the rivers of the Great Central Valley of California. You will receive our quarterly *Journal* and a River Partners membership window decal.

Name _____

Business Name (if applicable) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Date _____ Phone _____ E-mail _____

Please complete this form and mail along with your check payable to River Partners to: **River Partners, 580 Vallombrosa Ave., Chico, CA 95926.**

Riparian Forest & Oak Savannah Habitat Tour



You'll be amazed at what you'll see on this guided walking tour of the natural habitat at Turtle Bay!

**Saturday, October 1, 2005
8:30 am - 10:30 am**

Join our guides Tom Griggs
Ph. D., Senior Restoration

Two-hour, 2 mile
Difficulty: Easy, fun for the entire family

Ecologist and Dan Efsaaff, Restoration Ecologist for this unique tour of a riparian forest and oak savannah restoration project implemented by River

Partners at the McConnell Arboretum in the Sacramento River floodplain. Your guides will explain the process of restoration with plantings of native species for wildlife habitat and eradication of invasive exotic species. This gentle walking tour offers something for everyone, as we guide you through the restoration project. We request a tour donation of \$5 for adults. Children under 12 are free and must be accompanied by an adult.

Complimentary with this tour, you'll receive a discount coupon toward the admission for a self-guided tour at the Arboretum and Exhibits of Turtle Bay. Come join our tour and spend an enjoyable day at the Turtle Bay Exploration Park.

To make reservations or for questions call River Partners (530) 894-5401 or stop by our office at 580 Vallombrosa Ave., Chico CA 95926. Space is limited, so sign up today!



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