



## County of Sacramento

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### Recommendation for Temporary Area Closure

To: Director Leatherman  
From: Sr. Natural Resource Specialist, Mary Maret  
Date: October 1, 2013

The portions of the American River Parkway adjacent to and under the Highway 160 overpass near Del Paso and Northgate Roads (Figure 1) are clear candidates to temporarily close due to overuse, in order to restore habitat values and environmental resources. These areas are being severely impacted due to constant trampling, use of ground tarps, and apparent intentional removal of vegetation by park users to clear large areas for off-trail day use.

The American River Parkway Plan goals and policies allow for portions of the Parkway to be temporarily closed under certain circumstances. Policy 3.14 states: *Portions of the Parkway may be temporarily closed to certain uses in order to restore habitat values, visual quality, and recreation opportunities, upon assessment that the environmental resources, aesthetics, or recreational setting of the Parkway have become degraded.*

Prior to the intense overuse, much of the park area in and around the Highway 160 overcrossing, has had a continuous cover of understory plants (Figures 2 and 3), as recently as one year ago. In fact, the parks maintenance supervisor reported that, prior to the increase in off-trail park use, it had been challenging to keep the bike trail shoulders free of encroaching vegetation. The understory in the bridge area included stands of native and non-native blackberry mixed with stinging nettle and poison oak – plants that would normally deter off-trail traffic. Nonetheless, much of the area has been reduced to bare dirt (Figures 4A, 4E, and 4H).

Also impacted by overuse, is a healthy stand of valley oak woodland just adjacent to the bridge overcrossing. This area supports an overstory of primarily valley oaks. Non trampled areas have an understory of many regenerating valley oaks, box elder trees, poison oak, native and non-native blackberry, a variety of forbs, and native creeping wildrye among Bermuda grass. Overused areas have only bare dirt, with many acorns on the surface. A naturally regenerating valley oak forest, such as this, is uncommon on the Parkway. However, the heavy off-trail park use is damaging the oaks' ability to regenerate, as young trees are trampled down or physically removed to create bare ground (Figures 4B, 4C, 4D, 4F, and 4G).

Closing these overused areas to off-trail use, will likely allow native vegetation to recover naturally, without much additional intervention. Based on the good health of the surrounding vegetation, observations of small plants regrowing from roots in cleared areas, and the soil's nearness to the water table, an initial strategy would be to release the pressure of off-trail use, and wait to see what grows back. Some weed control, soil treatment (in compacted areas) or additional planting may be necessary if desired results are not obtained naturally.

Figure 1: Map

# Proposed Temporary Closure Area (in yellow)

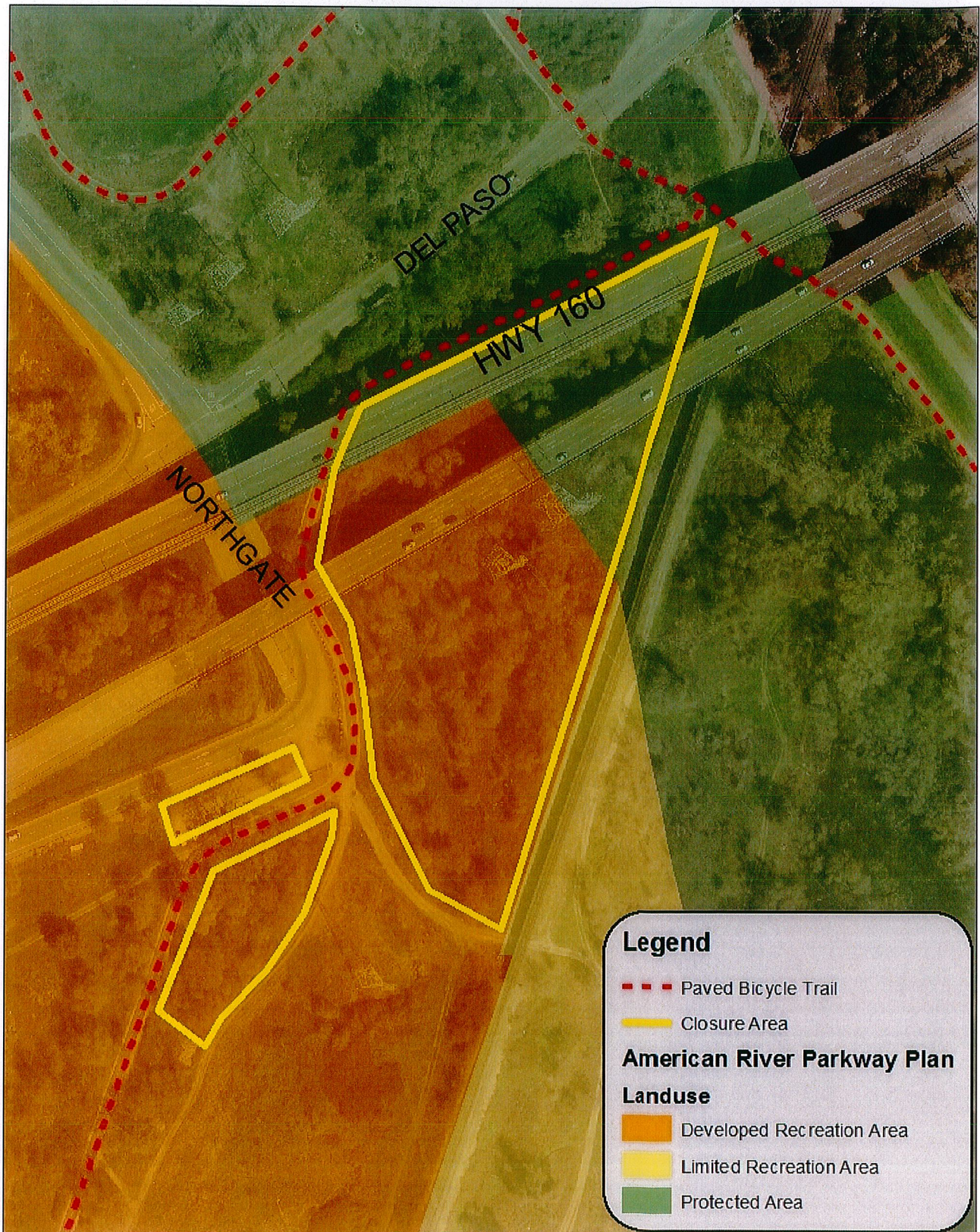


Figure 2: Before: Google Maps Street View Image. Date June 2011

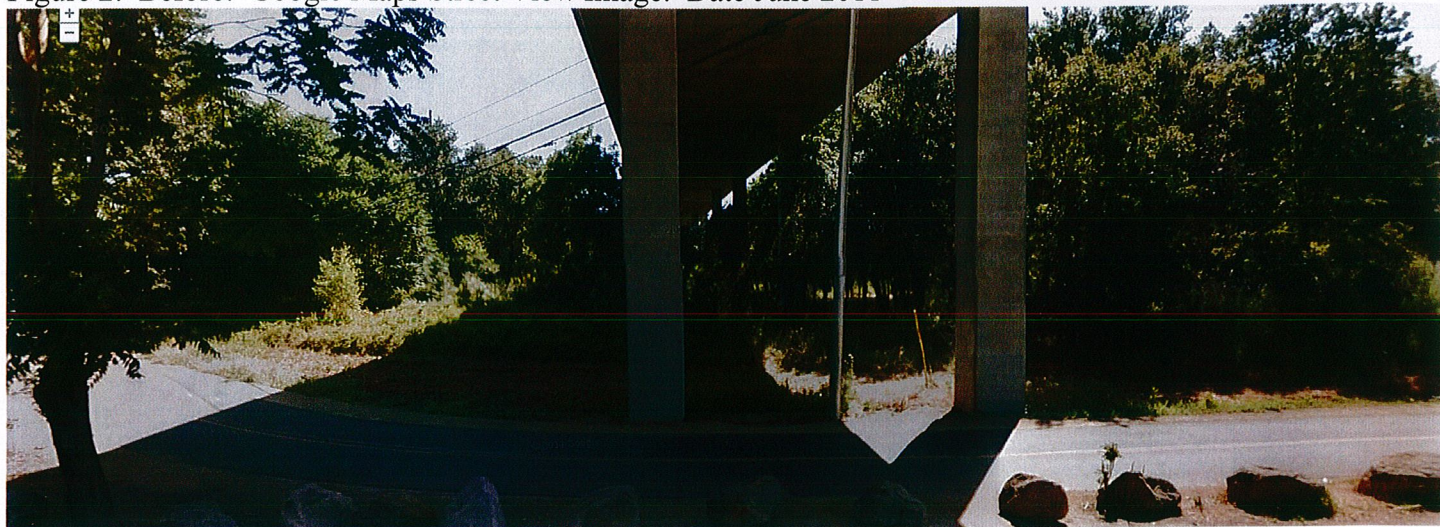
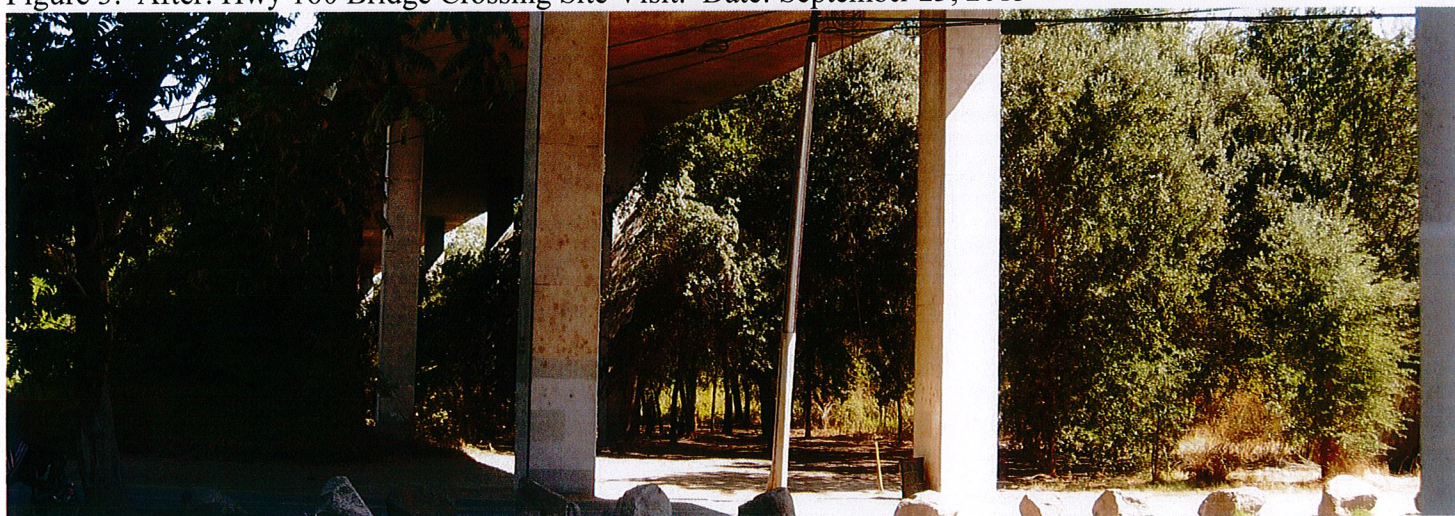


Figure 3: After: Hwy 160 Bridge Crossing Site Visit. Date: September 23, 2013



Figures 4 A-H were taken during the September 23, 2013 site visit.:

4A. Clipped-back poison oak and bare earth



4B. Cleared ground under valley oak trees



4C. Bare ground adjacent to bridge



4D. Cleared understory with brush piles at treeline



4E. Native plants next to cleared area under bridge



4F. Native plants on edge of cleared area.



4G. Valley oak seedlings at edge of cleared area.



4H. Dense native vegetation (adjacent to cleared area)

