

DRAFT Talking Points for the Solar Project

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FORB and other local groups supporting Sutter's Landing Park strongly support solar development. However, a solar project within the American Parkway is incompatible with the documented wildlife values as well as planned and existing recreation uses there. There are also hidden costs of such incompatible development, including loss of wildlife habitat, public recreation values and opportunities, as well as biological mitigation costs.

The city is promoting a project to cover the landfill mound with solar panels for the next 20 years. They had a minimal biological study done and wrote an inadequate environmental document that concludes there will be little impact to existing park uses, the river, or the wildlife in the area. This proposal has direct impacts on the parkway. This is wrong on all accounts.

FORB has organized monthly events that bring people out to Sutter's Landing Park including the river area for over 4 years now. During that time hundreds of people have come out during dozens of events that focus on this unique area within our neighborhood and the city overall. We now have a list of at least 77 birds, 16 mammals, 6 reptiles and 3 amphibian wildlife species known to live and share this area with us.

FORB activities and the observations of individuals have documented many native and sensitive wildlife species at Sutter's Landing park. This information will be on the FORB website and updated regularly. The observation of these species is shown in the popular events FORB holds there that bring many people including families with small children to enjoy them every month.

FORB has taken an initial step to restore a small area of the habitat in this area with a pilot project in 2010. We are now working with the city and other groups to apply for a river parkway grant that would bring approximately \$1 million dollars to further enhance the park and restore more native habitat for wildlife. Additional information on restoration plans and activities will also be maintained on the FORB website along with volunteer opportunities to get involved later in maintaining the area and helping monitor the wildlife using the area over time. Citizen science and fun for all.

AES, the city's consultant, spent only one day in the field in May and concluded that the habitat quality was poor and the likelihood of many raptors including Swainson's hawks and other species. The consultant did not consider local information gathered by FORB and others including pending information to be entered into the DFG CNDDDB database and as a result missed existing information that would have documented the frequent successful nesting and foraging by State-listed and other sensitive species known from the study area.

The city's consultant indicated that the short grass and management efforts that fill in burrows when found on the mound result in limited food for foraging raptors like the Swainson's hawk. The species actually present like California voles, Deer mice, and Western harvest mouse in fact mainly nest in the grass and don't rely on burrows. This habitat makes for easy hunting for raptors and other animals like coyotes, kestrels, northern harriers, red-tailed hawks and in particular white tailed kites. Like the Swainson's hawks that nest in the immediate area, we have documented white tailed kites foraging on the mound nearly every day we are out there.

FORB events have shown that Swainson's hawks have successfully nested in the immediate area for at least the last four years. In that time we've documented daily foraging on the landfill mound by nesting Swainson's hawks as well as other raptors. It's obvious that the habitat on the mound

provides an important source of food in the form of voles and other mice that are easy prey in the grassland habitat there.

The existing habitat at Sutter's Landing park provides valuable habitat for over 100 species of animals. That doesn't count the many insects and other species we regularly see during our monthly events and whenever we spend time there. FORB and others have developed a long term vision for the area that will insure that wildlife and recreation opportunities continue to be enjoyed by future generations.

The city is proposing to provide mitigation for the habitat loss that would result from covering the mound with solar panels but their concept is to find have as much area somewhere beyond the parkway which is questionable at best but would result in further loss by drawing wildlife away from the parkway rather than enhancing these values.

If the city goes forward with this plan it will be necessary for them to start over with a full environmental study and new biological study that takes into account the considerable local information that has already been gathered by FORB and others. This will take much more time and expense and need to include alternatives outside the park. The planned 20 year life of the proposed solar project is really a lifetime for many people that currently enjoy this area for existing wildlife and recreation values.

When the landfill was closed in the early 1970's and again later in the 1990's, it was capped by paving and soil brought in from other areas. The area to the west of the park is also used as a dumping ground for excess concrete rubble and soil which have been used to fill in area that previously served as foraging habitat for some wildlife regularly seen at Sutter's Landing. During some of this dumping several years ago, an occupied burrowing owl site was filled in possibly leading to the death of the only recently documented occurrence of this sensitive species in the area.

There are many examples of landfills that have been capped and restored to provide valuable wildlife habitat and recreation areas. This type of activity is favored by those agencies that now regulate the closure of landfills. It's not clear why the city didn't put more effort into taking this approach when the landfill at Sutter's Landing was closed but it's not too late to restore these values now.

Sutter's Landing provides a rare opportunity for the residents on the area and city overall to enjoy time in a large open space area along the river. This park is within the American River parkway which is considered a jewel at the state level and beyond. More people enjoy the parkway than travel to Yosemite every year and it's right in our backyard. With a little effort and commitment, we can restore the area to provide much greater values to the area for future generations. Such commitment would allow more of the landfill cap to be vegetated to manage runoff and provide habitat for wildlife and recreation for all of us. We can't afford to further impact the area and lose the scenic views, peaceful open space, and valuable wildlife habitat that allows us to be close to nature without every leaving home.