

American River Ranch Master Plan



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American River Ranch Master Plan

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VICINITY MAP
American River Ranch



American River Ranch Master Plan

Section I Site Overview

Purpose of Master Plan

The American River Ranch Master Plan is designed to provide an overview of core site functions, management and infrastructure. As the nonprofit leaseholder of this public facility, Soil Born Farms will use the master plan as a critical guide for site restoration, development and as a strategic fundraising tool to help secure funds to improve infrastructure at the American River Ranch.

Ranch Vision

Dating back to the 1840's, the historic American River Ranch is a 55 acre permanently protected community farm owned by Sacramento County Parks and operated by Soil Born Farms Urban Agriculture and Education Project (501(c)(3) nonprofit). Situated on mile 15 within the beautiful American River Parkway, the ranch offers a rare combination of natural resources, infrastructure and activities that help interpret the dynamic interplay between food, personal health and the environment.

The vision for the ranch as a regional center for food, health and the environment includes 27 acres of organic agriculture fields, 20 acres of riparian habitat highlighted by the restored Cordova Creek, landscaped grounds using native and edible plants, and a dynamic mix of interpretive center buildings. Through self-exploration, guided tours, classes and events a diversity of visitors to the ranch will become more empowered and educated about how to live longer and healthier lives while having a lighter impact on the Earth's precious natural resources. At full development, the American River Ranch will be recognized regionally, nationally and globally for its impact as an innovative community farm model.

Ranch: Prehistory

The American River Ranch lies in the ethnographic territory of the Niesenan Maidu. Also known as the Southern Maidu, the Niesenan inhabited the general area within the watersheds of the American, Bear, Yuba and lower Feather rivers. Village sites within the Sacramento Valley are generally found on low rises near streams and rivers and on south



facing slopes. Along the American, villages have been located on either side of the river. In 1832, a malaria epidemic introduced by northern trappers decimated most of the Niesenan people (Rio Linda/Elverta Historical Society, 2001).

Ranch: Modern History

The American River Ranch is the last working ranch on the Lower American River with a long history of agricultural activity dating back to the 1840's. The first documented

owner of the ranch was William Alexander Leidesdorff. Leidesdorff was born in 1810 in St. Croix to an Afro-Caribbean mother and Danish father. In the early 1840's Leidesdorff was provided with a 35,000-acre land grant called Rancho Rio de los Americanos located on the American River in modern day Rancho Cordova and Folsom. His early accomplishments also included initiating the first trans-bay ferry service in San Francisco and building the first hotel in the city.

After Leidesdorff's death in 1848, Joseph Folsom left San Francisco and headed for the Danish West Indies with the intention of locating Leidesdorff's heirs. In 1851, Folsom contracted with Leidesdorff's mother to purchase all rights and title to her son's San Francisco holdings as well as the land in the gold country for \$35,000. Two years after Folsom's death in 1855, Charles Nystrom acquired 9600 acres of the original ranch through a probate sale and then just one month later sold the property to Natomas Land and Mining Company. The last large agriculture operation at the American River Ranch occurred under the ownership of the Clifton family which leased the ranch from the Natomas Company and grew pears on about 300 acres. The Clifton's continued to grow pears through a private lease when Sacramento County began acquiring land for the American River Parkway beginning in 1964.

Upon completion of the American River Parkway Plan update in 2008, the American River Ranch was officially slated as a publicly accessible farm, native plant nursery and education center. In 2008 Soil Born Farms was awarded the long-term lease for the ranch and tasked with developing the site. Over the last seven years the basic functions of the farm have been restored, a native plant nursery now operates under the direction of California Native Plant Society, existing infrastructure has been restored and improved and education programs are engaging thousands of visitors each year.

Organization Background/Structure

Soil Born Farms Urban Agriculture & Education Project began as a for-profit farm in 2000 by Shawn Harrison and Marco Franciosa, two young and inexperienced organic farmers who had a dream and lots of ambition. Wanting to reconnect urban dwellers with healthy food and where it is grown, Shawn and Marco put a hand written note in the mailbox of a local Sacramento resident asking if they could farm on her land in exchange for produce. The next day a deal was struck, and Soil Born Farms was born. In 2002, Janet Whalen Zeller joined the team. Inspired by a shared vision of healthy food for all, a dedication to improve the quality of life in our community and a love of the natural world, the three co-founders transformed the farm into a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization in November 2004.

Today, Soil Born Farms operates under the leadership of co-founders Janet Zeller and Shawn Harrison, a 10 member Board of Directors and 22 paid staff comprised of talented farmers, educators and coordinators. Soil Born Farms primary base of operations is located at the American River Ranch. The organization retains its smaller farm in the Arden area on Hurley Way and runs various education and food access programs throughout Sacramento County. Operations are funded through grants, donations, events, product sales, facility rentals and program fees.

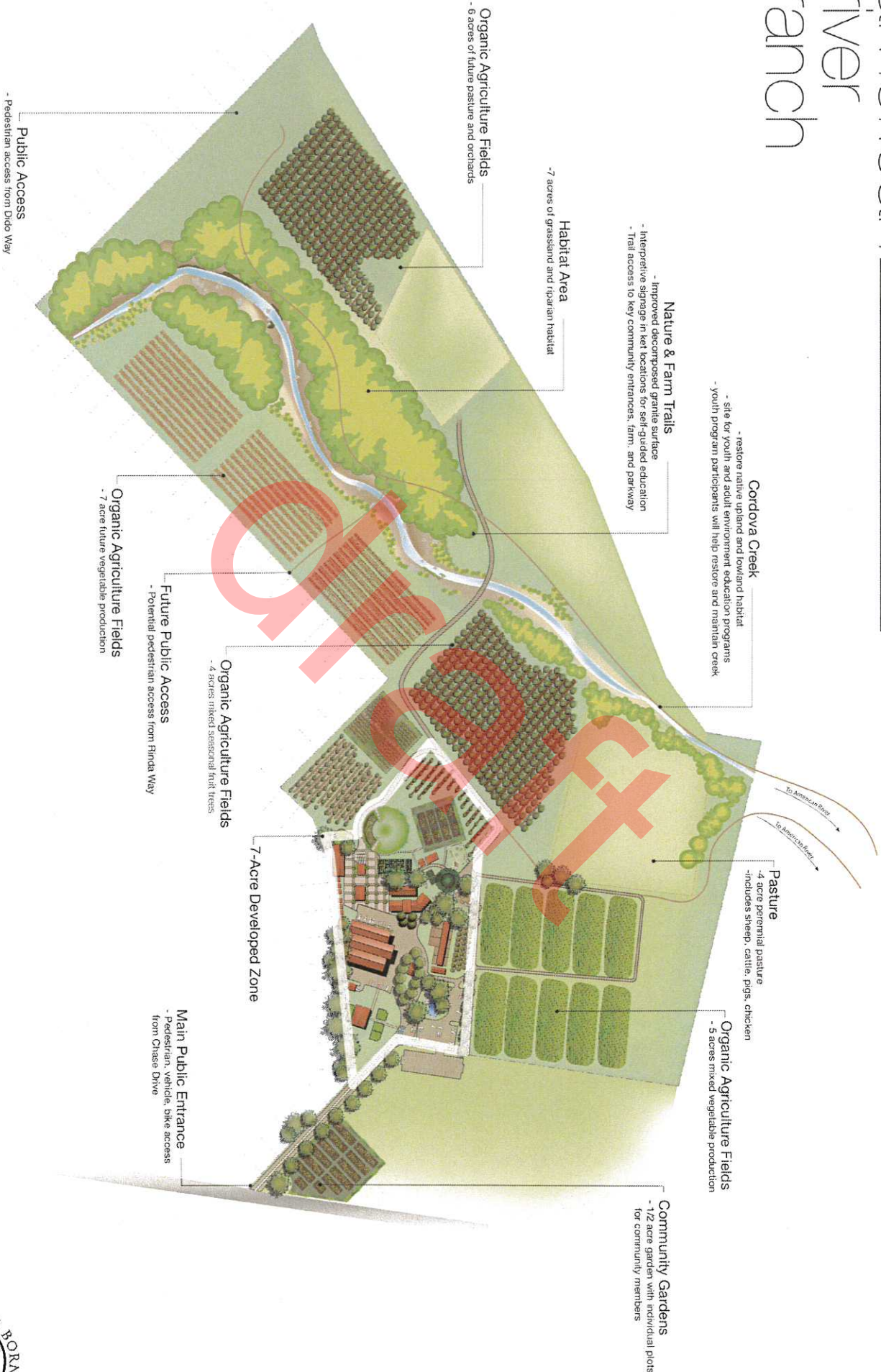
Programs Overview

Programs at the American River Ranch focus on educating adults and youth about the connections between our food, our health and the environment. These programs occur on a daily basis throughout the entire year educating thousands of youth and adults via formal classes, events, workshops and tours. Core program areas include:

- **Food Production:** Growing a diversity of vegetables, fruit, herbs, flowers, natives and livestock using sustainable and humane farming practices.
- **Farmer Training:** Training youth and adults to grow healthy food in home, school, community and small farm settings.
- **Resource Conservation:** Teaching sustainable and restorative management practices related to soil, water and vegetative resources for the urban landscape.
- **River Exploration:** Exposing youth and adults to the natural world of our unique American River watershed and improving awareness about how to protect our vital creek and river ecosystems.
- **Cooking with the Seasons:** Teaching adults and youth how to prepare simple and healthy meals.
- **Herbal Education:** Teaching for cultivation, preservation, and use of medicinal and culinary herbs for health.
- **Site History:** Sharing the American River Ranch's rich history serving to inform visitor's about the varied activities and events that helped shape this site and our Sacramento community.

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Section II Key Site Interpretive Elements

Ranch education and associated program activities are shaped by the site's dynamic landscape. These include:

Organic Agriculture:

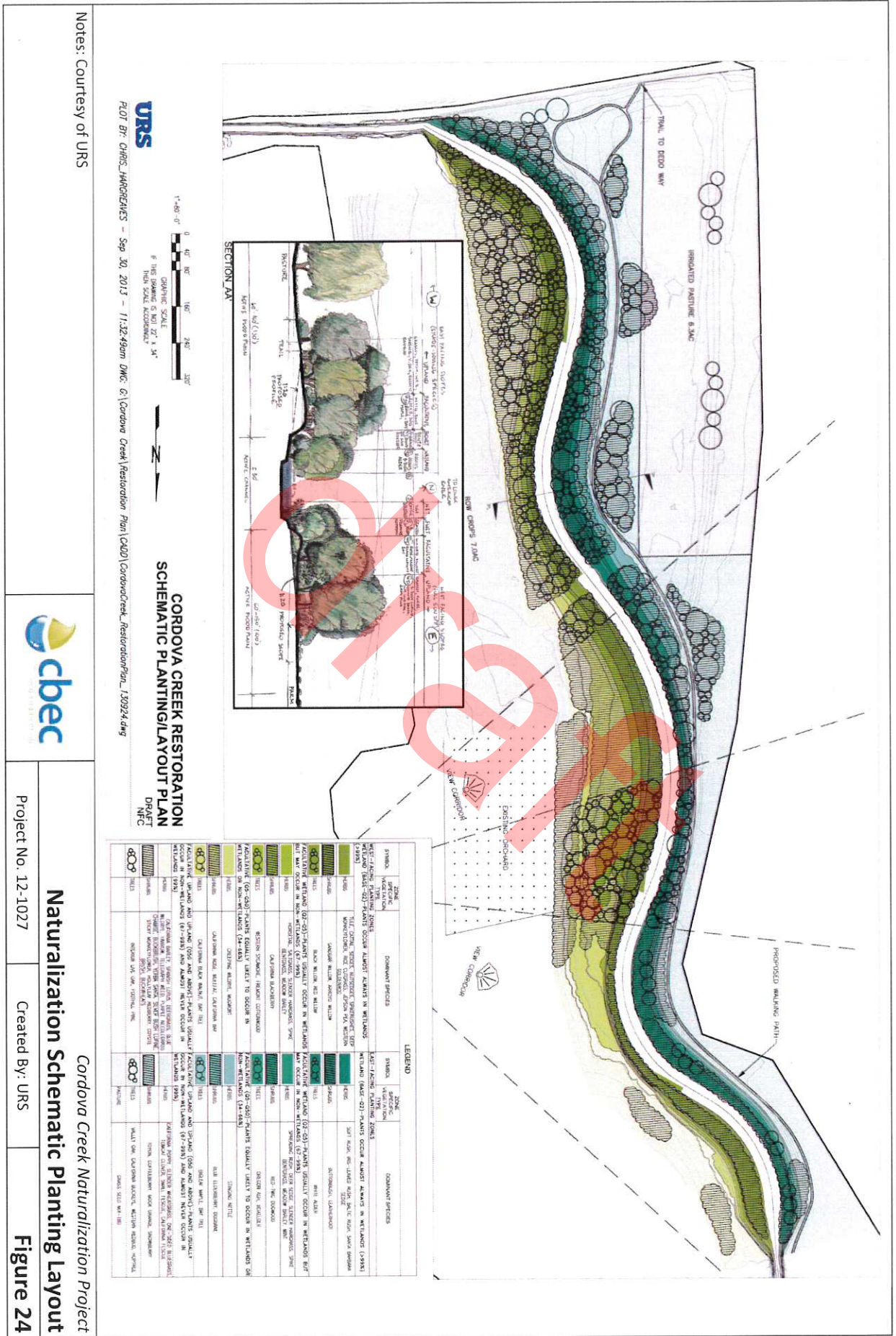
Agricultural fields are the most significant land use on the American River Ranch. Using certified organic agricultural practices, Soil Born Farms plans production on just over 27 of the total 55 acres. Production fields will be split between annual vegetable production, irrigated pasture and orchards. Beyond their educational value, the farm fields produce crops for a variety of sales outlets that help cover a portion of education program expenses. Outlets include an on-site farm stand, food box subscriptions, stores and restaurants. A large percentage of food produced is also grown specifically for one of our core partners Sacramento Food Bank and Family Services.

The farm fields serve as the primary hands-on classroom for our agricultural education activities. Each year thousands of youth and adults will learn how to grow food using ecologically friendly production practices. Program intensity ranges from standard informational field trips to our flagship Grow Your Groceries (GYG) intensive farmer training program. The core of this specific program focuses on training beginning farmers recruited from around the country, including United States military Veterans, to produce certified organic food. An intensive 9 to 36 month live/work program, the GYG helps directly address the vital need to help replace the aging farmer population in our country. Less intensive tracks of this training program are also developed for home, school and community garden students.

Cordova Creek and Riparian Habitat

A historic drainage feature on the farm will be converted back into the restored Cordova Creek in 2015. Soil Born Farms will take over the long-term maintenance and interpretation associated with this landscape feature. Currently curriculum and associated programming is being developed to engage youth groups and volunteers for the on-going educational and stewardship activities associated with the creek. The creek will be a prominent feature of the ranch, meandering through most of the site. Habitat restoration and farming activities will occur on the east and west sides of the streambed. Native plant habitat along the creek and throughout the ranch will comprise 15+ acres of the ranch. Plant mixes will include lowland and upland perennial habitat, grassland and mixed riparian habitat including clustered larger tree species. California Native Plant Society will play a key partnership role in helping to grow planting stock and monitor plantings.

The creek, riparian habitat and larger river ecosystem provides the learning space for the environmental focus of our education program. While environmental interpretive elements are folded into all of our education activities at the ranch, our core environmental program focuses on youth ages 10 to 17. Participating youth explore the American River Parkway while learning about local wildlife, ecology, habitat restoration, water, tracking skills, and other essential outdoor techniques. A particular focus of this program is the on-going interpretation and management of Cordova Creek and associated restored riparian habitat.



Youth Garden:

At Soil Born Farms our youth education program focuses on experiential learning in the natural world. The ½ acre youth garden serves as a critical interpretive element for the hands-on education associated with this program, helping us to teach visiting youth groups during the school day, after school and summer periods. The space includes raised beds and pathways for ADA access. Strategically located, the garden connects well with the larger ranch environment and building infrastructure of the site. Overall, experiences in the garden are designed to provide youth with a better understanding of what it takes to bring food from the farm to the table and helps children become more aware of the important connection between our food, our health and the health of the environment. This simple and profound discovery has the potential to create positive change in the world for generations to come, one person at a time.

Specific garden program elements include:

Discovery Field Trips: Customized to each age group from pre-school to grade 12, Discovery Field Trips bring together organic farming and academic standards. Students participate in hands-on garden interactions, meet the farmers, farm animals, explore nature and more.

Exploration: A Seasonal Journey: Students take a journey through the seasons at the farm through a series of field trips – 4 group field trips to the American River Ranch and 2 classroom visits by our farm educators. The series includes on-going service projects, healthy cooking demonstrations, and nature explorations. Open to grades 2 through 12.

Summer Day Camps & Farm Outings: Youth entering grades 1 through 12 can attend a fun and practical summer day camp at Soil Born Farms.

Trails and Public Accessibility:

A network of trails will link the farm to the parkway and the farm to the bordering communities helping to provide increased accessibility and create a rich self-guided interpretive experience. Key access points requiring improvement and signage include pedestrian access from Dido Way, pedestrian access from Rinda Drive, pedestrian/vehicular/bike access from Chase Drive, and pedestrian access from the bike trail east of Cordova Creek. Trails on the limited recreation portions of the ranch will consist of decomposed granite and internal trails on other portions of the developed recreation areas will be designed to be accessible for visitors with limited mobility.

Viewshed:

A rare feature of the American River Ranch is the expansive and unobstructed views of the American River Parkway. Infrastructure and vegetative planting activities are designed to protect and preserve this rare physical attribute of the site.

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Natural Playscape
-40 x 40 area
-Incorporation of picnic area
-creative play features

Plant Nursery
-Farm greenhouses and covered seeding areas

Plant Nursery
-Native plants
-Operated by California Native Plant Society

Outdoor Classroom
-Innate picnic area, tables, grills, and seats
-Seating for 200
-Edible and native landscaping

Kitchen Pavilion
-LEED Certified X outdoor food commercial training kitchen
-Staff kitchen with outdoor patio and kitchen garden

Multipurpose Room
-LEED certified indoor classroom
-Event and retail space
-Staff breakroom, laundry, bathroom

Animal Barn and Tool Shed
-Enclosed structure for animal protection
-Heavy lift design feature

Farm Stand
-Sales venue for fresh and value added farm products
-Innate picnic area with indoor and outdoor display
-Edible and native landscaping with picnic tables

Multipurpose Barn
-Enclosed building for produce pack and equipment storage and retail shop
-Wood and metal shop
-Covered event space

Farm Offices
-Renovated existing building
-Conversion of existing building to new interpretation
-Open space design

Interpretive Center Building
-LEED certified visitor center
-Reception, gift shop, community room

Staff Housing
-State manager main house with 3 bedrooms
-Eight 10 x 10 cabins for seasonal beginning farming trainees



Section III Seven Acre Developed Zone

The final seven-acre developed recreation zone of the American River Ranch will be designated through the master planning and area plan map amendment process. All permanent physical buildings and related infrastructure must be located within this zone. Much of the building infrastructure already exists on site, though many of the buildings will require renovation or rebuilding overtime.

Design Criteria

Key aspects of site planning considers how buildings and landscape relate to one another and function together in a way that creates an efficient, educational and welcoming built environment that blends in and integrates well with the larger ranch operation and landscape of the American River Parkway. Other primary design considerations include:

- Minimal impact on the American River Parkway resources.
- Reuse and replacement over time of existing structures.
- Increased public accessibility.
- Education program enhancement and issues interpretation.
- Site security and safety.
- Site aesthetics.
- Demonstration of resource conservation (building materials, water, energy, soil, habitat, clean air, etc.).

Existing Infrastructure

- **Plant Nursery:** A key activity at the American River Ranch is the production of native, edible and medicinal plant stock for site restoration, farming and sale. Currently CNPS and Soil Born Farms have infrastructure in place to conduct these activities including a shade house, greenhouse and potting shed. These uses will be improved and expanded over time providing us healthy plants and revenue to help support our operations.
- **Outdoor Classroom (include image):** The recently constructed outdoor classroom is designed to accommodate groups of up to 200 people for events, lectures, tours and classes. Design and construction for the outdoor classroom was done through a partnership with the Sacramento Metro Chamber's Leadership Sacramento Program. Over \$350,000 in cash and in-kind resources was raised to construct this beautiful space. Important goals for this structure were to use stone and wood materials that blend well with the natural landscape, preserving sweeping western ranch views and demonstrating edible and native plant landscaping practices.
- **Kitchen Pavilion:** Meal preparation for staff and visitors, culinary training, job training and farm product processing for value added products are all important activities at the American River Ranch. In general educating about the art of cooking simple and delicious meals is a key health promotion strategy that works in concert with our food access and food production programs. The kitchen pavilion currently includes a 600 square foot outdoor patio and 600 square foot residential kitchen. A third new commercial kitchen will be added to this space (see below).

- **Multipurpose Room:** A 2000 square foot building historically used as a bunkhouse for seasonal farm labor is located in the southwest corner of the developed recreation footprint. The building has been repurposed into our only indoor meeting, classroom and event space. The building also provides storage and a staff laundry. While functional, this facility is dated and will ultimately need to be rebuilt in its existing footprint.
- **Farm Office:** An 1800 square foot six bedroom duplex building will be renovated and converted from its existing use as staff housing to the primary office for Soil Born Farms. Locating the office to this more central location offers greater efficiency and accessibility to the visiting public. It also relates well for the proposed siting of the future interpretive center building, while maintaining separate functionality. Renovation of this building is slated for Fall 2014 or Winter 2015 pending funding availability.
- **Staff Housing:** The original ranch manager house is currently used for Soil Born Farm's office. Plans are to renovate and convert this structure back to its historic use. Renovation is slated for Fall 2014 or Winter 2015 pending funding availability. Maintaining site security is a key aspect of on site housing. Strategically located at the Eastern boundary of the Ranch, the manager's house can monitor the primary farm entrance while being set back far enough to preserve privacy for the occupants. On the central portion of the Ranch along its Southern property boundary additional housing is proposed for seasonal farm staff (see below). An additional home bordering the ranch on the southwestern edge of the farm is also currently leased for the ranch operations.
- **Multipurpose Barn:** The existing 10,000 square foot barn is a critical element of the American River ranch serving as a multipurpose facility used for packing produce, equipment storage, wood shop, metal shop, vehicle storage and flexible covered event space. Aesthetic and functional upgrades to the barn will be completed over time.
- **Farm Stand:** The farm stand is an existing 300 square foot building used for selling produce and farm products each week to the visiting public. This indoor/outdoor space is strategically located near the parking area, primary farm field, office and barn. Recent ADA upgrades were made to this building. Additional upgrades will be made to this building to make it a more functional and accessible space.
- **Animal Barn and Tool Shed:** Animals are an important component to the overall farming system and visitor experience. Currently the animal barn houses sheep, pigs, cattle and chickens when they are not rotational grazing in the fields. While functional, the barns are dated and will need to be renovated or rebuilt in their current location to better secure the animals, store feed and tools. There is also the possibility of integrating a small certified milking parlor into the space. A key aspect of the animal husbandry program is our focus on rare heritage breeds of cattle, sheep and pigs.

Proposed New Infrastructure

- **Natural Play-Scape:** A creative play space for visiting youth is a planned addition to the ranch. Located strategically next to the youth garden with good site lines for parents, this space addresses a critical need for children visiting the site to have the time and space for creative play. Our plan for the space includes natural themes and built elements that allows children to dig, run, balance, jump and create using a mixture of

permanent and moveable design features such as logs, stumps and climbing boulders. This 40 x 40 space includes shade elements and would be tied in with a picnic area. Funding, design and approval is planned for Fall 2014.

- **Community Kitchen:** Adding a certified kitchen to the kitchen pavilion is a focus for 2015. Uses will include public instruction, job training, catering, event support, and processing of farm production for value-added products. The building will anchor the east side of the kitchen pavilion and will interact well with the future interpretive center building, multipurpose room, barn and outdoor classroom. Design activities will be conducted in 2014 and early 2015. Construction will begin in 2015 pending approval, secure funding and permitting. As the first new building constructed on site, detailed examination of underground utility (water, gas and sewer) and electrical site upgrades will be necessary. Overall, this building is critical for supporting events on the farm and helps add value to farm products which we sell to help cover operation and program related expenses.
- **Staff Housing:** Staff housing has been present in multiple buildings on the American River Ranch for over 75 years. Seasonal staff housing currently provided for in the existing duplex would be transitioned to 8 X 12 foot cabins. A total of eight units are proposed for the site along the central southern boundary of the Ranch. These proposed sleeping units would include electrical for lighting and heating, but all other cooking and bathing uses would be provided for in adjacent buildings. Farm operations require constant presence at the farm to properly supervise crop production and animal needs. With our location on the parkway and easy access by the public, housing on site also provides critical site security needed to protect equipment, crops, animals and buildings. The beginning farmer training program also brings 5-10 students to the farm each year from throughout the country that live, work and learn on site.
- **Improved Parking:** A dirt and gravel parking area currently exists on the American River Ranch. An improved lot with parking for approximately 50-75 cars is planned for this location. Design considerations will allow for better vehicular flow in and out of this space as well as good two-way vehicle connection to the primary Chase Drive entrance. A natural pond feature will capture possible water run-off and the use of a pervious parking surface will help with water capture and drainage. An improved parking area is a critical need for the site to allow visitors to safely access the ranch for daily programs, events, tours and the weekly farm stand. The proposed parking area also limits the amount of vehicular traffic into the core of the facility helping to create a safer and more pleasant visitor experience.
- **Interpretive Center:** An interpretive center building is proposed for the American River Ranch. The 4,000 to 6,000 square foot building would be centrally located to be easily accessed by visitors and tie in well with other site infrastructure. This new construction would include a mix of uses including meeting rooms, visitor reception, classrooms, gift shop, exterior decks and office space. Thematically and functionally the building and its uses would help interpret ranch themes around the connections of food, health and the environment. This building would incorporate interior and exterior green design elements. Design and construction plans for this building would not be developed until significant funding is secured. Overall, the interpretive center would serve to address the sites shortage of indoor meeting, event, classroom and interpretive space. With a

formalized visitor reception area, the facility will also help staff to properly welcome and orient the public.

Section IV Management and Operations

Administrative and Facility Operations

Soil Born Farms staff will manage the administration, education, interpretation and facility maintenance duties of the American River Ranch. A key element of this management will include the funding and logistics responsibilities of developing and running daily programs and events. On-going integration of skilled volunteers to help interpret and upkeep the site is a priority for the American River Ranch. Currently the organization employs a staff of 22. Core site leadership positions include:

- Co-Directors: Manage day to day operations including fundraising, marketing communications, fiscal and staff management.
- Ranch Manager: Oversees management of 55 acre property including irrigation systems, animals and farm infrastructure. Plays central role in farmer training program.
- Farm Managers: Oversee production and sales of fruit and vegetable crops.
- Education Director: Credentialed teacher oversees youth education program.
- Financial Manager: Certified public accountant works with Co-Directors to manage all fiscal operations.
- Greenhouse Coordinator: Oversees all plant nursery activities and assists in integration of volunteers.
- Volunteer Coordinator: Organizes over 700 volunteers annually who are engaged on site and in the community. Includes oversight of youth employment activities.
- Adult Education Coordinator: Credentialed teacher manages all adult class development and logistics.
- Kitchen Coordinator: Responsible for coordinating all kitchen activities associated with education programs and events.

California Native Plant Society (CNPS) is one of our key site partners with an approved sub-lease in place to operate Elderberry Farms native plant nursery activities. This volunteer run effort provides native plants for site restoration and along the parkway and sells plants to the visiting public. They also play a critical maintenance role for the Ranch's native plant landscape and conduct visitor education and engagement activities related to native plants.

Operating policies and procedures

Soil Born Farms sets operating policies for the American River Ranch in accordance with the American River Parkway Plan and under the overall management of Sacramento County Regional Parks Department. Overall organization management and development is led by Soil Born Farm's Co-Directors and its Board of Directors.