

*El Dorado County River  
Management Plan  
5-Year Summary 2019-2023*



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# El Dorado County River Management Plan

## 5-Year Summary

### *INTRODUCTION*

The River Management Plan (RMP) was developed to manage use of the South Fork of the American River that flows within the boundaries of the County of El Dorado and adjacent land. The plan was designed to monitor and evaluate use within and along the river in order to minimize impacts to the environment and private landowners.

The RMP specifies that the annual reports be compiled every 5th year, along with County staff recommendations, for submission to the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) for input and comments. All input and comments from the PRC then go to the Planning Commission. All staff recommendations, including comments generated by the PRC and Planning Commission are submitted to the Board of Supervisors for review and consideration. The Board of Supervisors has the authority to determine whether to continue implementation of the existing RMP as prescribed, continue implementation of the RMP with minor modifications or to update the RMP. (Section IV of the RMP provides the guidance for annual and 5-year reports.)

In 2018 a comprehensive update to the RMP was adopted and implementation began in 2019.

This summary will focus on use trends and the results of public involvement opportunities for the period from 2019 through 2023. Recommendations include modifying guide education and etiquette requirements, clarifying Flex Permits, clarifying language related to Group or Pod sizes, streamlining the permit process regarding transfers and 3-year reviews, and adjusting violation penalties.

### *RECOMMENDATIONS*

As stated in Chapter IV, the River Management Plan (RMP) is designed to serve as an active, evolving tool that implements the County's river management goals. The five-year periodic review is intended to provide opportunities for ongoing refinement of the RMP in response to the results of annual operations review to ensure public safety, environmental protection, and the most efficient use of County resources. It also provides an opportunity to review the adopted and implemented management actions and impact mitigation measures to ensure that they remain meaningful and responsive to current guidance provided by the Board, the public, advisory committees, and other county departments. The following subjects are presented for consideration:

1. Chapter I, South Fork American River Flow Regime, Operation of SMUD's UARP and PG&E Operation of Chili Bar:

This section was updated to reflect the change in ownership and operation of Chili Bar Dam which is now solely operated by SMUD and no longer has any PG&E involvement.

2. Chapter III, River Management Plan Elements, Element 1, Educational Programs, 1.8 Guide Education Programs, 1.8.2 River Guides, 1.8.2.1 Outfitters Certify Guides

The County will no longer host a day long pre-season guide orientation workshop each year. Instead, Outfitters will certify that their guides have received orientation training including river safety, etiquette, and sensitivity to residents and local merchants.

3. Chapter III, River Management Plan Elements, Element 6, Permits and Requirements, 6.2 Outfitter Requirements: 6.2.1 Annual River Use Permits, 6.2.1.1 Term of River Use Permit

~~Staff recommends eliminating the three year term. Permits are reviewed annually and keeping track of separate three year terms for every outfitter can be unnecessarily time consuming with no direct purpose. This update was removed.~~

~~Staff recommends deleting section 6.2.1.1 as this text is copied from Ordinance Section 5.48.060 and section 6.2.1.2 as this text is copied from Ordinance Section 5.48.090. The Streams and Rivers Commercial Boating Ordinance Chapter 5.48 governs River Use Permit standards and procedures.~~

4. Chapter III, River Management Plan Elements, Element 6, Permits and Requirements, 6.2 Outfitter Requirements: 6.2.1 Annual River Use Permits, 6.2.1.3 River Use Permit Allocation 6.2.1.3.5 Flex Allocation

Staff recommends updating this section to include language stating that current Flex Permits will remain, but no new Flex Permits can be created by lowering permit user days.

5. Chapter III, River Management Plan Elements, Element 6, Permits and Requirements, 6.2 Outfitter Requirements: 6.2.1 Annual River Use Permits, 6.2.1.3 River Use Permit Allocation 6.2.1.3.6 User Days Cannot be Loaned or Borrowed

Staff recommends that this section is revised to clarify that user days can be transferred (per section 6.2.1.4.2) but cannot be loaned or borrowed.

6. Chapter III, River Management Plan Elements, Element 6, Permits and Requirements, 6.2 Outfitter Requirements: 6.2.1 Annual River Use Permits, 6.2.1.4 River Use Permit Transfers, 6.2.1.4.1 Transfer Guidelines and Procedures, 6.2.1.4.2 Transfer of River Use Permit User Days

Staff recommends revising this section to remove the Planning Commission from the process. Transferring River Use Permits is a ministerial process that will be overseen by the Parks Division.

- ~~7. Chapter III, River Management Plan Elements, Element 6, Permits and Requirements, 6.2 Outfitter Requirements: 6.2.1 Annual River Use Permits, 6.2.1.4 River Use Permit Transfers, 6.2.1.4.3 Consolidation of River Use Permits~~

~~Staff recommends that Outfitters that hold multiple River Use Permits be required to consolidate their permits into a single permit. This would both cut down on staff time to administer permits as well as save outfitters money as there is a \$200 renewal fee they pay on a per permit basis annually to cover staff time spent on renewing said permits. This update was removed.~~

8. Chapter III, River Management Plan Elements, Element 6, Permits and Requirements, 6.2 Outfitter Requirements: 6.2.2: Maximum Group Size, 6.2.2.1 Group Size for Safety Through Rapids

The commercial outfitters have recently voiced concerns on this rule, especially with regard to large or multiple permits being used simultaneously by a single company. This section regulates boat density on the river. Subsection 6.2.2.1 was updated to clarify the number of boats in a group will not exceed 63 people including passengers, guests, and guides, and deleted the term “pod”.

9. Chapter III, River Management Plan Elements, Element 6, Permits and Requirements, 6.2 Outfitter Requirements: 6.2.6 County Operating Reports and Fees, 6.2.6.1.2 Reporting TimeframeSubmission, 6.2.6.1.3 Penalty for Late PaymentNon-payment, 6.2.6.1.4 Operating Report Violation

Staff recommends revising this section to make it clear that payment of user day fees is part of the required monthly operating report and failure to submit payment with the monthly EMOR will result in a Class II Violation. Staff recommends moving sections 6.2.6.1.1 Operating Reports, 6.2.6.1.2 User Day Fees, 6.2.6.1.3 Late Penalty Charge, 6.2.6.1.4 Violation, and 6.2.6.2 Operating Report Contents to Ordinance Section 5.48.170 as Ordinance Chapter 5.48 governs river management standards and procedures.

10. Chapter III, River Management Plan Elements, Element 6, Permits and Requirements, 6.2 Outfitter Requirements: 6.2.7 Guide Requirements, 6.2.7.2 County River Safety and Etiquette Standards

Staff recommends this section be revised to state that Outfitters will be required to sign a statement verifying that their guides will comply with County River Safety and Etiquette Standards and will submit the statement with their annual permit application.

11. Chapter III, River Management Plan Elements, Element 6, Permits and Requirements, 6.2 Outfitter Requirements: 6.2.10 Violations, Penalties, and Appeals, 6.2.10.3 Penalty Schedule, 6.2.10.3.2 outfitter violations

Staff recommends revising the number of violations from four violations to three violations as the number of violations required in any one category to result in a recommendation of suspension of the River Use Permit for up to 10 consecutive days. Staff recommends further updates which include:

- Moving sections 6.2.10.1 Violation Terminology, 6.10.1.1 Class I Violations, 6.1.10.1.2 Class II Violations, and 6.2.10.2 Violation Notice to Ordinance Section 5.48.150 to align with County practice of establishing violation procedure by ordinance.
- Moving sections 6.2.10.3 to 6.2.10.3.2 Penalty Schedule to Ordinance Section 5.48.140 to align with County practice of establishing violation procedure by ordinance.
- Moving sections 6.2.10.4 to 6.2.10.4.4 Class I Violation Appeal Procedures and sections 6.2.10.5 to 6.2.10.5.3 Class II Violation Appeal Procedures to Ordinance Section 5.48.160 to align with County practice of establishing violation procedure by ordinance.

- Moving sections 6.2.10.6 to 6.2.10.6.2 Status of River Use Permits which are Denied or Revoked to Ordinance Section 5.48.100 to align with County practice of establishing violation procedure by ordinance.
- Moving section 6.2.11 Outfitter Food & Storage Requirements to section 6.29 for Outfitter Requirements.
- Moving section 6.2.12 Falsification of Documents to the class II violation schedule in Ordinance Section 5.48.150.

12. Chapter III, River Management Plan Elements, Element 6, Permits and Requirements, 6.2 Outfitter Requirements: 6.2.10 Violations, Penalties, and Appeals, 6.2.10.4 Class I Violation Appeal Procedures

Staff recommends changing Parks and Trails Hearing Officer in this section to- Assistant Chief Administrative Officer Parks Manager. This has been the County's practice in the past for who an outfitter would submit an appeal of a violation to; this proposed change would ~~just~~ be updating the RMP to reflect that practice.

13. Chapter III, River Management Plan Elements, Element 6, Permits and Requirements, 6.2 Outfitter Requirements: 6.2.10 Violations, Penalties, and Appeals, 6.2.10.5 Class II Violation Appeal Procedures

Staff recommends changing Parks and Trails Hearing Officer in this section to- Assistant Chief Administrative Officer Parks Manager. This has been the County's practice in the past for who an outfitter would submit an appeal of a violation to; this proposed change would ~~just~~ be updating the RMP to reflect that practice.

14. Appendix C, RMP Data and Standards.

~~Pursuant to discussions with the Outfitters, staff recommends that updated costs for River Use Application Fees, and the penalty and violation schedules be proposed in the RMP update. This update was removed. Any changes to fees shall be accompanied with a nexus study. The penalty schedule is established by California State Code 25132 and County Ordinance Chapter 1.24. Staff recommends further updates to include:~~

- Removing the late penalty charge as the penalty charge is established according to County practice and is included in Ordinance Section 5.48.170.

15. Ordinance Chapter 5.48 Streams and Rivers Commercial Boating

Staff recommends updating this ordinance to correct the commercial river use definition to reflect the definition as described in the RMP and align with recommended updates in the RMP including ~~changing the River Use Permits issuance procedure to be conducted by the Parks and Trails Division instead of the Planning Commission, updating the river use permit term from a three-year term to a one-year term, and adding the Outfitter Safety and Etiquette Standards requirement to river plan contents,~~ updating the staff position from County Hearing Officer to the Assistant Chief Administrative Officer Parks Manager as the staff position that can revoke a river use permit, updating the recommendation for dissolving allocations to the Planning Commission, updating Section 5.48.140 to reflect the violation penalties that are in alignment

with County Ordinance Chapter 1.24, adding new Section 5.48.150 to list the Class I and Class II violation schedule, adding new Section 5.48.160 for the violation appeal procedure, and adding new Section 5.48.170 for monthly operating report and fee requirements procedure.

#### 16. Ordinance Chapter 5.50 Specific Use Regulations for the South Fork of the American River

Staff recommends updating this ordinance to correct the Institutional Group definition to reflect the definition as described in the RMP, which clarifies the meaning of institutional as accredited academic programs and removes the inclusion of nonprofit organizations, and align with recommended updates in the RMP including Section 5.50.090 to reflect the violation penalties in accordance with County Chapter 1.24, and adding new Sections 5.50.091 violation schedule and 5.50.092 violation appeal procedure.

#### 17. Ordinance 4330 Sec 12.64.070

Staff recommends updating this ordinance to correct that language to include all device types capable of maintaining or transporting a person on the water.

#### 18. Chapter III, River Management Plan Elements, Element 6, Permits and Requirements, 6.3 Non-Commercial/Private and Institutional Boater Requirements, 6.3.1.1 Special Use Area Requirements, 6.3.2 Personal Flotation Device, 6.3.2.1 Unlawful to Traverse without PFD

Staff recommends updating 6.3.1.1 to remove details as included in Ordinance Chapter 5.50 and reference the Specific Use Regulations for the South Fork of the American River Ordinance Chapter 5.50 which governs the requirements for non-commercial/private and institutional boaters. In addition, staff recommends updating 6.3.2 to reference Ordinance Section 12.64.070 for personal flotation device requirements and deleting 6.3.21 as it is a copy of the text from Ordinance Section 12.64.070.

#### 19. River Management Plan Review and Revision Process, Five-Year Periodic Review

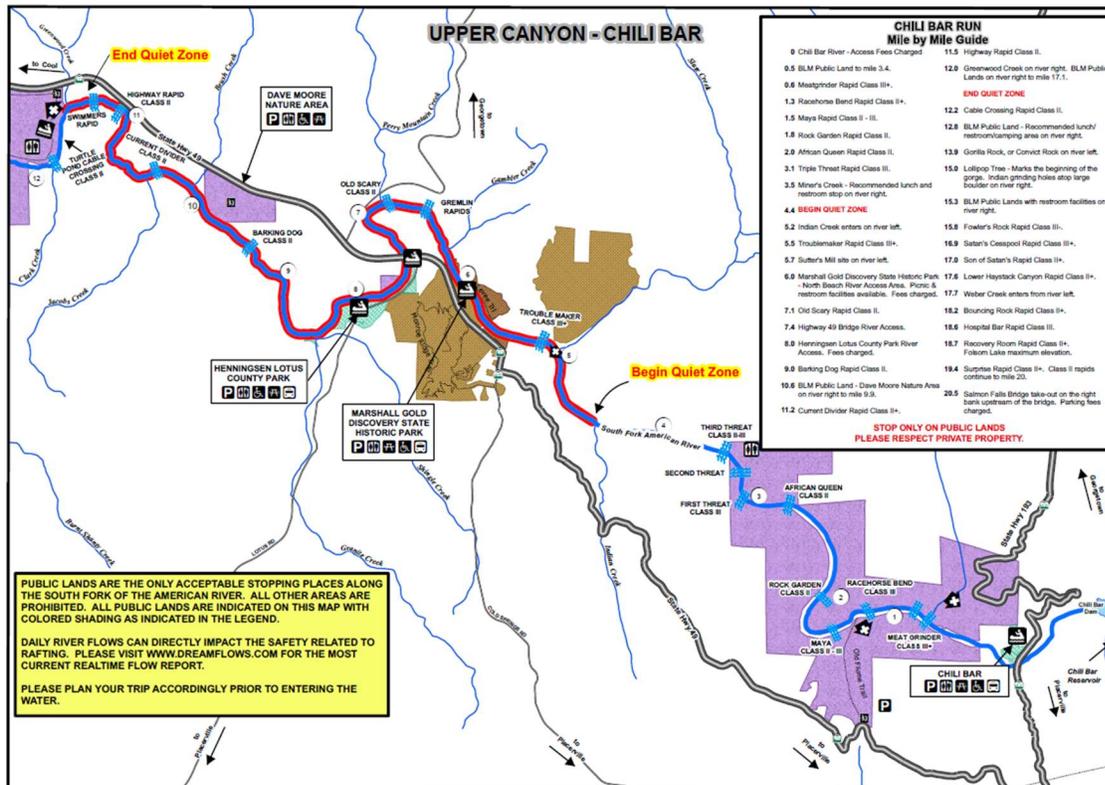
Staff recommends updating the procedure for the RMP five-year review to include the Coloma Lotus Advisory Committee, in accordance with Resolution 078-2019, as the first advisory body in the review process.

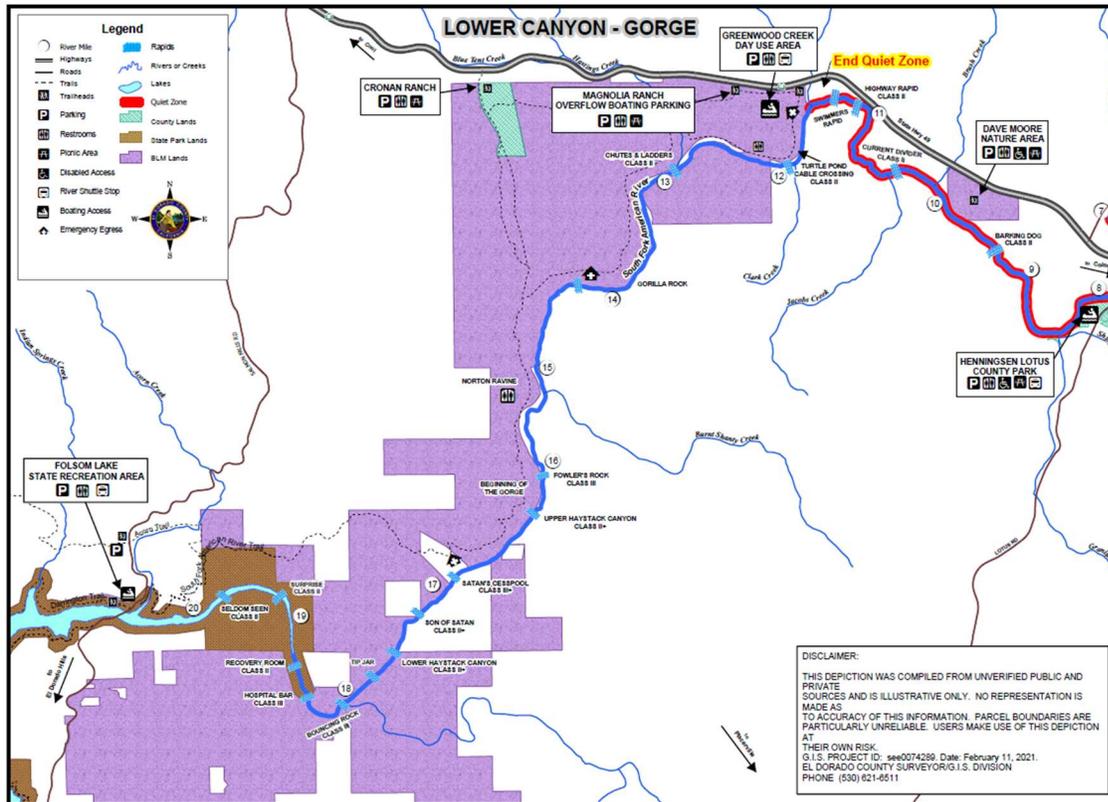
Staff will incorporate comments on these recommendations from the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC), as well as include any other issue areas that the PRC may discuss. Staff intends to consult both the Coloma Lotus Advisory Committee (CLAC) and Outfitter groups for a discussion of these issues and to refine any recommendations for changes to the RMP. Following these efforts, staff will return to the PRC, and then proceed to the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors with any recommended changes.

### ***PHYSICAL SETTING OF THE RMP PROJECT AREA***

The River Management Plan covers the South Fork of the American River from Chili Bar Dam to Folsom Reservoir. This reach continues to be one of the most rafted and kayaked rivers in the State of California. It is approximately 21 miles of exciting whitewater, with annual use averaging well over 100,000 people. The upper section, referred to as “Chili Bar,” starts at Hwy

193. It is about 5-6 miles of class III to III+ rapids. Most private boaters take out at either Marshall Gold State Park, or Henningsen Lotus Park. The middle section of this river, from about river mile 5 thru 11, flows through the Coloma Lotus Valley. Commonly referred to as Coloma to Greenwood or, "C2G". The Lower section, or "The Gorge" is 8-10 miles depending on access location. This is a very popular section due to its length and fun class III rapids, ending at Folsom Lake. Private boaters take out on river right, above Salmon falls bridge. Commercial raft companies utilize the boat ramp about 1/2 mile past Salmon Falls bridge on river left.





## Adaptive Management

The River Management Plan is designed with an Adaptive Management format and can be amended periodically as conditions or needs change.

In 2018, the County completed a comprehensive update to the 2001 County River Management Plan (RMP). The plan was adopted by the Board of Supervisors (BOS) on February 13, 2018. One notable change with the adoption of the updated RMP, is that Institutional groups are now defined as accredited educational organizations. Institutional ~~group~~ groups must register with the County and provide a post-season annual report. The non-profit groups that were operating as an Institutional group were required to get a commercial permit. Four of the six non-profits have obtained those permits.

In 2019, The Board of Supervisors rescinded Resolution 065-2002, establishing the RMAC and Resolution 078-2019 established the Coloma Lotus Advisory Committee (CLAC).

## ACTIVITIES COMPLETED 2019-2023 Achievements

Over the past five years, County staff have implemented a range of initiatives to support the objectives of the River Management Plan. These efforts focused on promoting boater safety, commercial use monitoring and reporting, and river use education. The following summary highlights key activities and accomplishments from 2019 through 2023.

In 2019, County staff maintained a presence on the river for the purpose of boater and river safety education, river use monitoring, to conduct boat counts in compliance with Element 1 and 4 of the RMP, and lead organized river cleanups. Staff on the river were previously identified as “River Patrol”, which portrayed staff as having an enforcement role. However, in 2019 the position title “River Patrol” was changed to “River Instructors”. This was changed to provide clarification as the title River Patrol indicated a law enforcement role which is an action conducted by the County Sheriff’s Office. Gear and equipment markings were updated with “EDC PARKS” instead of “River Patrol”.

In 2020, due to Covid-19 restrictions, it was estimated that river use would be 20% of normal. Budgeted expenses were reduced, along with anticipated revenues, to ensure the River Trust Fund would not be fully expended and would be available for use in future years. Fewer extra help River Instructors were hired, and an emphasis was placed on boater education at river access points, focusing on quiet zone, life jackets and river use monitoring. Commercial rafting resumed June of 2020 with safety precautions and commercial river use ended at 55% of a normal season instead of the estimated 20%. A new lifejacket campaign was launched which resulted in improved compliance, and new safety signage was planned for 2021 roll-out. (Appendix A)

2021 saw the implementation of goals from 2020. Safety education signs were created and installed at various locations including Chili Bar, Marshall Gold Park, and Henningsen Lotus Park. The boat ramp area was expanded, and signage was installed to delineate the ramp area.

In 2022, staff conducted extensive tuber counts (Table 1) and continued public interactions promoting safety. County staff also refurbished the North Beach kiosk at Marshall Gold State Park with a new roof, paint, and river map. (Appendix A) Staff built high top serving tables to be installed for outfitters lunch stops. State Parks installed the tables in Spring of 2023, and they received positive feedback from outfitters lunching at Marshall State Park. (Appendix A) The County acquired a new cataraft to replace the prior one which was acquired in 1998. The County also refurbished a dilapidated raft trailer making it structurally sound and easier to load and unload. (Appendix A) The boat ramp signs installed in 2021 made a difference in managing rafts putting in and taking out at Henningsen Lotus Park. Unfortunately, many signs were destroyed or missing after the winter season flood at the end of the year.

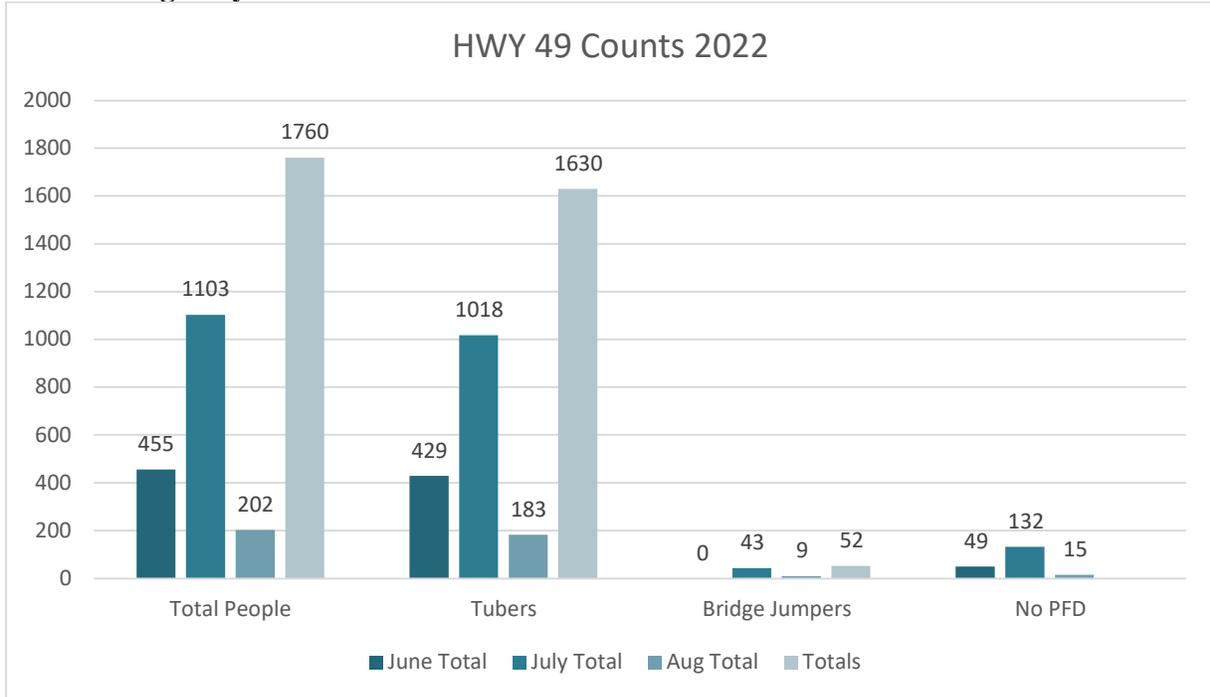
2023 began with record rain due to several atmospheric river events. Henningsen Lotus Park was flooded throughout most of the parking lot. The boat ramp expanded in 2021 was buried in rock debris. Staff cleared the larger rocks and replaced signage. The original safety sign kiosk was also destroyed. Park staff designed and built a new sign kiosk and changed the location and orientation to mitigate the possibility of future flood damage. (Appendix A). New boat room racks were also built for better storage in the boat room. These were painted with the help of a high school student volunteer earning school credit. Tuber counts continued with data (Table 2) demonstrating that the Personal Floating Device (PFD) campaign helped improve use.

River staff participated in a variety of river clean-up workdays organized with several of the Outfitters and partners such as BLM, and American River Conservancy (ARC).

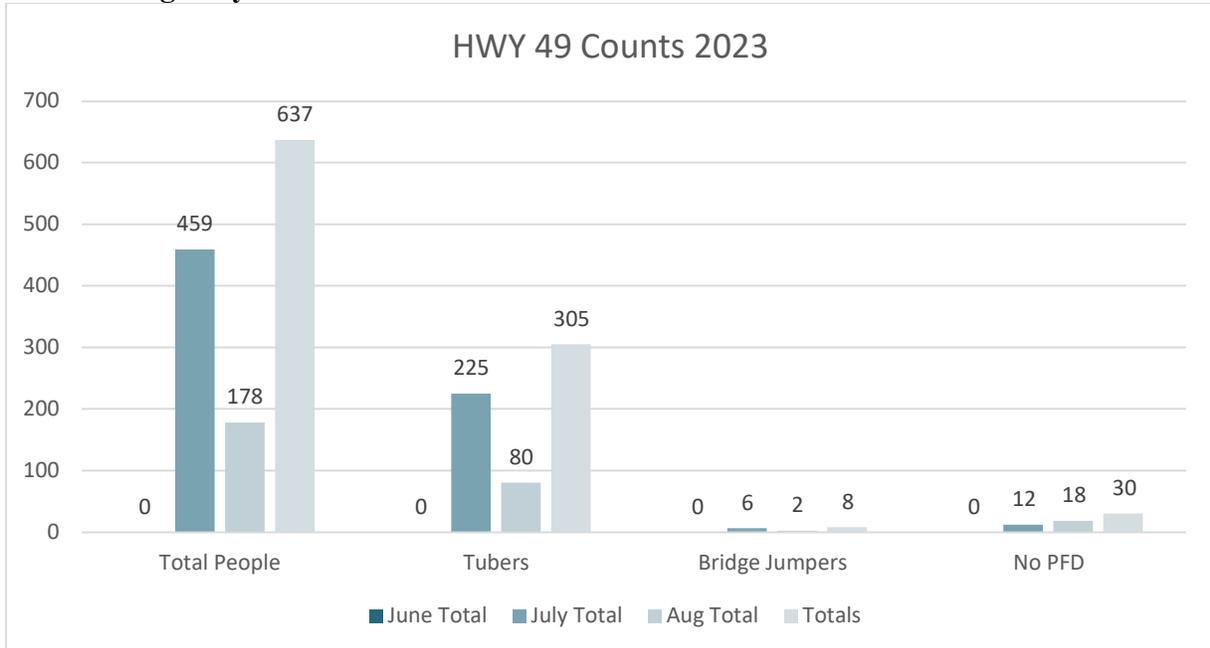
- 2019: Organized several river clean-ups on the upper and lower sections, and one clean-up at Henningsen Lotus Park.

- 2020: Due to Covid-19, no group clean-ups were organized, instead staff conducted daily river cleanups on the upper and lower sections. The trash levels were high this year due to increased use of the river.
- 2021: Two organized river clean-ups planned for August and September were canceled due to the Caldor Fire event and smoke that affected the air quality in the Coloma/Lotus valley. Staff continued daily clean-ups instead.
- 2022: An organized clean-up planned with ARC was canceled due to the Mosquito Fire. The river staff were pulled to assist with fire [supportsupport](#), and the Coloma/Lotus valley once again was impacted by fire smoke. Staff continued to [cleanupclean up](#) throughout the season.
- 2023: Staff hosted one clean-up with several Outfitters and BLM, and a second clean-up with ARC. At each event volunteers joined to help with the clean-ups and several truck loads of trash were removed.

**Table 1: Highway 49 Tuber Counts 2022**



**Table 2: Highway 49 Tuber Counts 2023**



## WATER FLOWS

The flow regime of the South Fork American River between Chili Bar Dam and Folsom Reservoir is highly regulated. During summer and fall (the primary recreation season), flows are the product of river system regulation by SMUD's Upper American River Project (UARP). The sustained high monthly and mean daily flows during August, September, and October result primarily from reservoir regulation and import to the South Fork basin by the UARP.

The precipitation for 2019 ended up being above average for the water year. As of May 1<sup>st</sup>, the yearly precipitation was 125% of normal. The precipitation for 2020 ended up being below average for the water year. As of May 1<sup>st</sup>, the yearly precipitation was 70 percent of normal, a decrease from 125 percent at the same time last year. The precipitation for 2021 ended up being dramatically below average for the water year. As of May 1<sup>st</sup>, the yearly precipitation was 50 percent of normal, a decrease from 70 percent at the same time last year. In 2022 precipitation was a below normal water year resulting in about 75 percent of average. October saw a significant increase in weather which contributed to a better water year. At the beginning of 2023 several atmospheric rivers led to record flows over 150 percent of average. That resulted in 2023 being designated as a wet year. Below is a graph showing minimum recreation flows based on water year type.

**Table 3: Release Schedule based on Water Year type**

South Fork American River Below Chili Bar Reservoir Dam Minimum Recreational Flow by Water Year (cfs)								
WATER YEAR TYPE	PERIOD	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Super Dry	April - Memorial Day	3 Hrs @ 1300					3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1300
	Memorial Day - Labor Day	3 Hrs @ 1300			3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1300	5 Hrs @ 1300	5 Hrs @ 1300
	Labor Day - September						3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1300
	October - March						3 Hrs @ 1300	
Critically Dry	March - Memorial Day	3 Hrs @ 1300					3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1300
	Memorial Day - Labor Day	3 Hrs @ 1300			3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1300	5 Hrs @ 1500	5 Hrs @ 1500
	Labor Day - September					3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1300
	October - February						3 Hrs @ 1300	
Dry	March - Memorial Day	3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1300			3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1500	3 Hrs @ 1500
	Memorial Day - Labor Day	3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1300		3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1300	5 Hrs @ 1500	5 Hrs @ 1500
	Labor Day - September					3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1300
	October - February						3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1300
Below Normal	March - Memorial Day	3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1300		3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1500	3 Hrs @ 1500
	Memorial Day - Labor Day	3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1300		3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1300	6 Hrs @ 1500	6 Hrs @ 1500
	Labor Day - September				3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1500	3 Hrs @ 1500
	October	3 Hrs @ 1300				3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1500	3 Hrs @ 1500
	November - February						3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1300
Above Normal	March - Memorial Day	3 Hrs @ 1300	4 Hrs @ 1750	4 Hrs @ 1750				
	Memorial Day - Labor Day	3 Hrs @ 1500	6 Hrs @ 1750	6 Hrs @ 1750				
	Labor Day - September				3 Hrs @ 1500			
	October	3 Hrs @ 1300				3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1500	3 Hrs @ 1500
	November - February						3 Hrs @ 1500	3 Hrs @ 1500
Wet	March - Memorial Day	3 Hrs @ 1500	6 Hrs @ 1750	6 Hrs @ 1750				
	Memorial Day - Labor Day	4 Hrs @ 1500	6 Hrs @ 1750	6 Hrs @ 1750				
	Labor Day - September				3 Hrs @ 1500			
	October	3 Hrs @ 1300				3 Hrs @ 1300	3 Hrs @ 1500	3 Hrs @ 1500
	November - February						3 Hrs @ 1500	3 Hrs @ 1500

## ***RIVER USE***

Spring runoff (snowmelt) behind dams that control the river level on the South Fork usually begins in May. Whitewater flows on the river have only been available consistently from year to year because of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) licenses' minimum recreational water flow requirements.

The South Fork between Chili Bar Dam and Folsom Lake is generally broken down to three sections. The Upper, or Chili Bar run, is Chili Bar put-in at Hwy 193 to Coloma. Boaters usually take out at either Marshall State Park or Henningsen Lotus Park. This stretch is about 6-8 miles, depending on where you take out. The Upper section is rated at class III+. This section is a popular run for kayakers and rafters. It is not recommended for Tubers.

The Coloma to Greenwood Creek section (C2G) is about 5 miles of class II. The C2G reach in the Coloma Lotus Valley continues to be a popular section of the river. Many types of boaters utilize this section of river, including rafters, kayakers, Stand up Paddle boards (SUPs). Along with downriver floats, many skills classes and trainings are given by permitted outfitters. Usage includes multiple runs, use during minimal flow and non-scheduled release days. Many people also access alternative put-ins and take-outs such as private landowners or at Hwy 49 bridge.

The Lower section, or Gorge run, is generally from Greenwood Creek to Salmon Falls at Folsom Lake. Many rafters will put in at Henningsen Lotus Park or another easier river access due to Greenwood Creek being a difficult trek from the parking area. This section is about 9 miles if starting at Greenwood Creek.

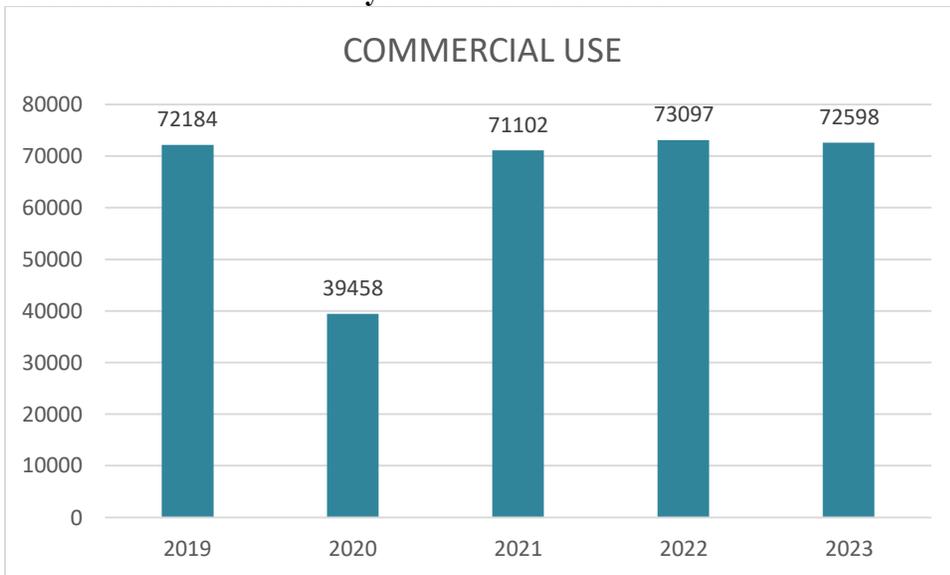
## ***RIVER USE PREFERENCES***

Preferences vary depending on type of use. Many rafters prefer the lower section because it is longer and has a fair number of exciting rapids. Kayakers tend to favor the upper run for its more technical type features including surf waves and eddies. Tubers utilize the section between Marshall Gold State Park and Henningsen Lotus Park which is about 2 miles with only two significant rapids (Gremlin and Old Scary). In recent years Stand up Paddle boards (SUPs) have become more popular. This type of craft tends to stay in the Class II sections (C2G) although some of the more experienced brave the harder Class III upper and lower section. Another craft gaining popularity is the inflatable Pack Raft. With its light weight and smaller learning curve, many boaters are enjoying its versatility.

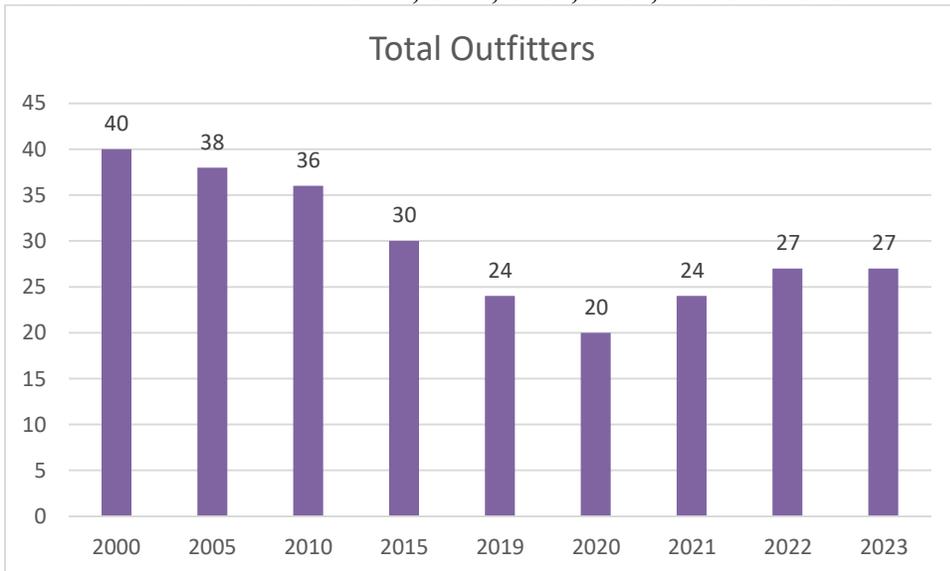
**OUTFITTER USE**

Commercial Outfitter use has been fairly consistent with the exception of 2020, which saw a significant drop in clients due to Covid-19 restrictions. There was an average of about 72,000 users per year over the past five years (Table 4). However, the total number of Outfitters has decreased with the trend of larger outfitters holding multiple permits. Of the original 79 permits created, only 46 are currently active. That is including the 6 permits allocated to Non-Profit organizations. [The total number of passengers since 2000 is shown below. The lowest numbers in 2019 and 2020 are also due to Covid-19.](#) The Total Outfitters graph below indicates the downward trend of outfitters holding permits since 2000 (Table 5). In the year 2020, several outfitters didn't renew permits due to Covid-19.

**Table 4: Outfitter User Days Per Year 2019-2023**



**Table 5: Total Outfitters 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, and 2019-2023**



**INSTITUTIONAL GROUP USE**

Only organizations teaching accredited educational courses are able to continue to register as Institutional Groups per the updated RMP. Staff worked with the nonprofit groups (previously identified as institutional groups) to meet the requirement for commercial use. Four of the six non-profit groups obtained their commercial permit in 2023.

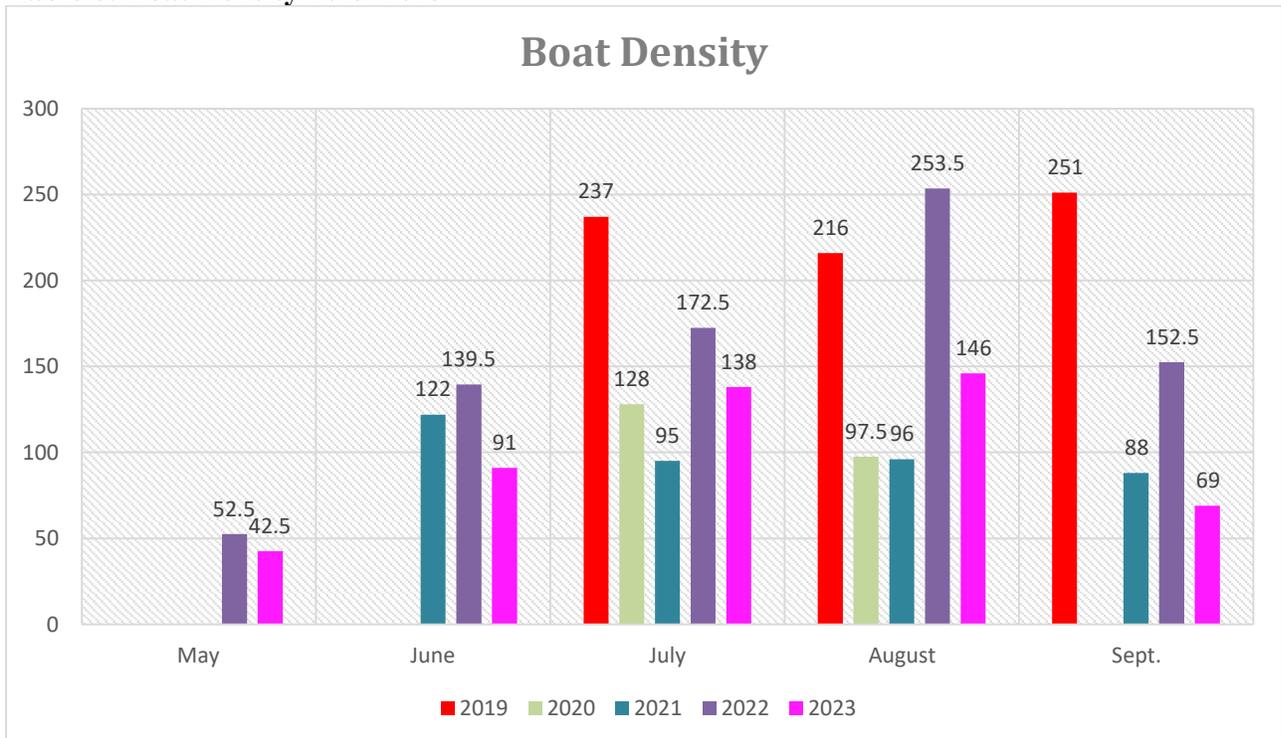
**BOAT DENSITY**

The boat density safety measures aim to prevent boating safety hazards from occurring due to boat congestion on weekends. In the event boat counts exceed a “density threshold”, the County will implement management actions to address density and associated safety issues on the South Fork as specified in Element 7 of the RMP.

Boat density measurements come from taking an aggregate total of all rafts, kayaks, inflatable kayaks, and inner tubes, paddleboards, or similar flotation devices. The sources of data utilized for estimating river use were boat counts completed as identified in Appendix C of the RMP. The Density Threshold is 300 boats in 2 hours (based on ¼ hour increments and a rolling 2-hour period) at Meatgrinder, Troublemaker, Barking Dog, Fowlers Rock, or Satan’s Cesspool rapids on two days during any one season. Two kayaks are equal to one boat for the purposes of determining boat density.

During this 5-year reporting period Boat Density was not exceeded, and no additional measures were needed. The graph below indicates highest counts each month per year.

**Table 6: Boat Density 2019-2023**



## ***COUNTY STAFF ACTIVITIES***

In 2019, the staff position designation changed from “River Patrol” to “River Instructor”. This was done to reflect the position as an educational role rather than enforcement role. At this time, the River Recreation Supervisor position was vacated, and the extra help river staff reported to the Department Analyst. The administrative duties for permit renewals and payments were assigned to the Administrative Technician.

Covid-19 greatly affected the River Program staffing in 2020. Due to projected reduction in revenue, hiring was reduced to just two extra help River Instructor personnel and further reduced to one River Instructor by midseason. The Parks Manager took on management of the program.

By 2021, Covid-19 restrictions were relaxed, and outfitters were able to resume operations with some Covid-19 protocols in place. The new position entitled, Parks Program Coordinator, was created and filled to oversee both the River program and the Rubicon Trail program. Two extra help River Instructors were hired and an intern assisted with water samples, boat counts, and public education. This was the first year the County issued permits and collected fees on behalf of State Parks as part of a newly created Joint Power of Authorities.

In 2022, the Parks Program Coordinator position was filled by a new staff member. The River Instructor positions were staffed by two new hires and one instructor from 2021 returned, and an intern again assisted with water samples and watercraft counts. River staff worked closely with the Sheriff’s Department this year to provide coverage on the river between the upper, middle, and lower sections to educate users and ensure safety.

In December 2022, Tim Canavarro was promoted to Parks Program Coordinator. In the 2023 season, there was one returning River Instructor and two new instructors joined the team, along with an intern that assisted with park maintenance, boat counts, and water samples. River staff continued to work closely with the Sheriff’s Department.

Regular duties and activities throughout the 5-year period for staff include:

- Emphasized controlling quiet zone noise, use of public lands, litter education, and use of life jackets by all boaters and inner tubers; dealt with ongoing concerns of the public.
- Provided boating safety, boater responsibilities, private property education, river etiquette, leave no trace education, and river flow information at river accesses and on the river.
- Stocked kiosks with waterproof river maps that provide boaters with the locations of restrooms, put-ins and take-outs, quiet zone locations, names of rapids with public and private land designations, agency and campground phone numbers, and a boating safety checklist.
- Assisted law enforcement, upon request.
- Educated tubers on river safety and life jackets in the C2G section.
- Regulated commercial use in the quiet zone for compliance.
- Provided safety information to people floating/boating on the class II section.
- Counted boat as identified in the RMP for carrying capacity. (Appendix B)
- Collected water samples as identified in the RMP. (Appendix B)
- Reported permitted outfitter violations to administration for processing as identified in the RMP.

## ***EL DORADO COUNTY LAW ENFORCEMENT***

The County Sheriff has the authority to issue citations for both State and County life jacket violations along with other related County Ordinances, such as private boater violations of the quiet zone, jumping off the bridges and the use of glass beverage containers within 100 feet of the water. California State Parks and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) rangers also occasionally patrol this section of the river.

In 2019, the Sheriff deputies performed several search and rescue operations along the shore of the river for boaters that left their rafts voluntarily and were assisted to safety via a land route. There was one probable drowning death reported on the patrolled section of the South Fork. The incident involved a swimmer who was not wearing a PFD. The Sheriff's Office Dive Team and Unmanned Aerial Drone team performed an extensive search. The victim's partial remains were found in 2021 several miles down river from the point last seen. Park staff assisted the deputy with the recovery.

In 2020, Sheriff deputies responded to several calls for service which ranged from several missing rafters/ swimmers, arguments, and a drowned subject, who was later found at Folsom Lake. The Deputies issued 29 safety advisements/ warnings.

In 2021, the Sheriff deputies also gave six citations for jumping from Hwy 49 bridge and multiple responses at Henningsen Lotus Park for drinking, fighting, abandoned vehicles, lost children, dogs off leash, and reckless vehicle operations.

During the 2022 rafting season, Deputy Sheriff patrolled the South Fork of the American River from Chili Bar to Folsom Lake on a river raft. He spent in excess of 395 hours on the river. He didn't issue any citations, but had about 400+ contacts with the public, which were educational or enforcement in nature. These included advisements on PFDs, navigation, safety, ordinance (glass containers, bridge jumping, trespassing), reckless behavior, intoxication, and inappropriate behavior. There was also one body recovery. A hiker fell into the water at Satan's Cesspool Class 3+ rapid and subsequently drown. The recovery was made by the Sheriff river patrol in a cataraft with assistance from the Parks Division River Instructors.

During the 2023 rafting season, a Sheriff Deputy patrolled the South Fork of the American River from Chili Bar to Folsom Lake on a river raft. He spent more than 330 hours on the river. This total does not include the time spent on equipment maintenance, reporting, training, etc. He had approximately 430 contacts with the public, advising on PFD use, bridge jumping, glass containers and inappropriate behavior. The deputy had 59 citizen assists, 110 Public Relations Events, 15 vessel assists, and issued 2 citations for no PFD. He also had 2 rescues: the first at Satan's cesspool due to a rafter with an injured arm and the second was a kayaker stranded at the island at Old Scary Rapid. Parks Division river staff assisted with both cases.

## ***OUTFITTER VIOLATIONS***

There are two violation classes. Class I violations include: not respecting the Quiet Zone; exceeding maximum group size limit; operating after sunset; improper boat markings; unauthorized land use; exceeding permit capacities; and violations of any requirements that are not specific as Class II violations.

Class II violations include: improper sale, loaning, borrowing or transfer of user days; late operating report submissions and non-payment of fees (this RMP update recommends updating this to a Class II violation from a Class I violation); improper consolidation, transfer, and adjustment requirements for River use Permits and insurance requirements; and fraudulent reporting or non-payment of user days.

The following violations were issued over the five-year period between 2019 and 2023:

- 2019 and 2020: There were no violations issued, although there were a few complaints regarding commercial trips stopping on private property and being loud in the quiet zones.
- 2021: County Parks Division issued 7 violations.
  - o 4 issued for Pod size violation with 1 violation overturned after appeal
  - o 3 issued for unmarked boats - 1 issued for late reporting
- 2022: County Parks Division issued only 2 violations. A pod size violation and unmarked boat violation.
- 2023: County Parks Division issued 4 violations for pod size. County staff also cautioned outfitters to be careful about following too close.

## ***WATER QUALITY***

Water sample test results are reported to the County Environmental Management Department in accordance with RMP section 4.4. Environmental Management monitors the water sample results and informs the Parks Division if action is needed. Water samples are taken the first week between the months of May through September. Sample locations are the Nugget Campground above Chili Bar, North Beach at Marshall Gold State Park, Henningsen Lotus Park, Greenwood Creek, and Salmon Falls. Total Coliform and E. coli is measured by an approved laboratory. Coliform above 2400 MPN (Most Probable Number) and E. coli above 200 MPN will trigger additional testing and public notice or possible beach closure.

Additional sampling has occurred as requested by County Environmental Management. During this 5-year period (2019 – 2023) there has been several instances where high levels of total Coliform and E. Coli was detected. It was determined the timing of when the samples are taken greatly affect the test results. Samples taken after low water days tend to have a higher test result. Low water days are defined as days without a scheduled release based on the water year type. Also, the geese population tends to concentrate at specific areas near sampling locations. Staff determined that taking samples on the second water release day brought the test results into acceptable levels.

When water samples come back with high counts of total Coliform and/or E. Coli, staff working with Environmental Management, will posts signs and takes direction from Environmental Management who becomes the lead department that handles public safety concerns with water quality. Below are examples of water quality notice signs that are posted at Henningsen Lotus Park.

*Water Quality warning signs*

**CAUTION:**  
**WATER QUALITY ADVISORY**

	<b>FOR YOUR SAFETY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Swim at your own risk</li><li>• Do not ingest water</li><li>• Shower after swimming</li><li>• Wash hands before eating</li><li>• Do not swim if you are ill</li></ul>
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*Increased risk of illness may be present based on recent monitoring E. coli bacteria*

**FOR MORE INFORMATION: (530) 621-6052**

**Water Quality Notice**

ALL NATURAL BODIES OF WATER CONTAIN MICROSCOPIC ORGANISMS. THIS AREA IS MONITORED FOR *E. COLI* BACTERIA, AN INDICATOR OF THE POSSIBLE PRESENCE OF HUMAN HEALTH RISKS. IF BACTERIA LEVELS ARE ABOVE STATE HEALTH STANDARDS, AN ADVISORY OR CLOSURE SIGN WILL BE POSTED AT THIS LOCATION. DO NOT INGEST WATER. SWIM AT YOUR OWN RISK.

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For latest water conditions: (530) 621-6052

**BUDGET**

The budget for the Parks Division River Program is a non-general fund program. The primary source of funding since 1997 is a \$2.00 per guest user fee paid by permitted outfitters. If a fee change is deemed necessary in the future it would require additional action and approval by the Board of Supervisors. Changes to the program made through updating the RMP has the potential to increase or decrease the amount of funding needed to implement the updated RMP.

**Table 7: River Program Budget 2019-2023**



**CLOSING**

The River Management Plan continues to meet its objectives of managing and monitoring commercial and private boating use on the South Fork of the American River. County staff will maintain adherence to the RMP by providing ongoing public education and collaborating with commercial outfitters. This five-year summary reflects the commitment to ensuring safe, sustainable, and enjoyable river recreation while supporting the long-term goals of the plan. The River Management Plan is meeting the objectives of managing and monitoring commercial and private boating use on the South Fork of the American River. County Staff will continue to follow the RMP by providing on-going education for the public and working with commercial

~~outfitters. This five-year summary addresses several issues mentioned earlier in the RMP that need modification or clarification. An outfitters meeting was held March 15, 2024 to obtain their input on those aforementioned issues. Their comments will be presented to the Parks and Recreation and Planning Commissions, as well as the Board of Supervisors for comment and possible implementation.~~

### ***Outfitters Comments:***

1. Guide Education & Requirements - It is the Outfitters responsibility to train their staff. The County should not have to hold a workshop yearly to orient guides on the requirements. There are a few things the County could do to assist the Outfitters with this responsibility:

- Hold Outfitters accountable for Guide Education, via signed affidavit upon permit renewal, etc.
- Provide ancillary workshops such as Helicopter protocols, etc.

2. Flex Days - Unless there is an issue that we don't understand we recommend that Flex Days be kept as is, with no additional Flex Permits created. We do not see the use of flex days creating a problem with the carrying capacity or overuse of the resource. Most if not all of the multi-RUP holders who have flex permits do not flex them. Attempting to eliminate them could create an issue that is not worth the cost.

3. Group or "POD" Size: The language here should be changed to eliminate any potential loopholes and this requirement should be enforced along the entire river corridor.

- 1 Group (POD) is 7 boats from a company (DBA's are the same company. E.G. 4 AWE boats and 3 ARR boats = One 7-boat group)
- All groups from a company must meet 1 of the following conditions when moving downstream at all times.
  1. 5-minute separation between the last boat in the downstream group and the 1st boat in the upstream group.
  2. The 1st boat in the upstream group cannot see the last boat in the downstream group.
  3. A separate group (from another company or private boaters) is in between the upstream and downstream groups of a company
- Group sizes should be monitored and enforced outside of the lower (Gorge) Class 3 sections (from the Highway 49 bridge to Fowler's Rock), as well as the upper (Chile Bar) section. Many problems arise in the Class 1-2 sections of the rivers. If the group sizes are kept within the requirements in these sections it will carry into the Class 3 sections, whereas correcting and managing group sizes is more difficult once it reaches the Gorge.

4. Permit Process - We agree that the permit process should be simplified administratively. We do not see a need for the current 3-year Planning Commission approval. We do think the County should maintain a process that would allow them to revoke or suspend an RUP if necessary.

5. Violations - We recommend that the violation penalties be increased significantly. So that the Counties cost to issue violations is not a barrier to their issuance and so that the penalties are significant enough to stop an outfitter from continuing to violate the RMP requirements. Here are our recommendations.

- Violations should be categorized into Minor and Major Violations.
  - Minor Violation - e.g. Boat missing Logo
  - Major Violation - e.g. Group Size
  
- Penalty Schedule
  - Minor Violations - Not Discussed
  - Major Violations (in any 1 category):
    - 1st Violations = Written Warning
    - 2nd Violation = \$1,000 fine
    - 3rd Violation = \$2,500 fine
    - 4th Violation = \$5,000 fine

The County should retain and include the right of possibly revoking and/or suspending a permit for a company that chronically violates the RMP requirements'.

Multiple Major Violations should not be issued so close together that the company has not had the time to be made aware of the violations and correct them. (i.e on the same weekend)

***PUBLIC COMMENTS:***

No public comment received.

# Appendix A

## Safety Signs



**New Catarcraft and Refurbished Trailer:**



**Raft trailer before and after**

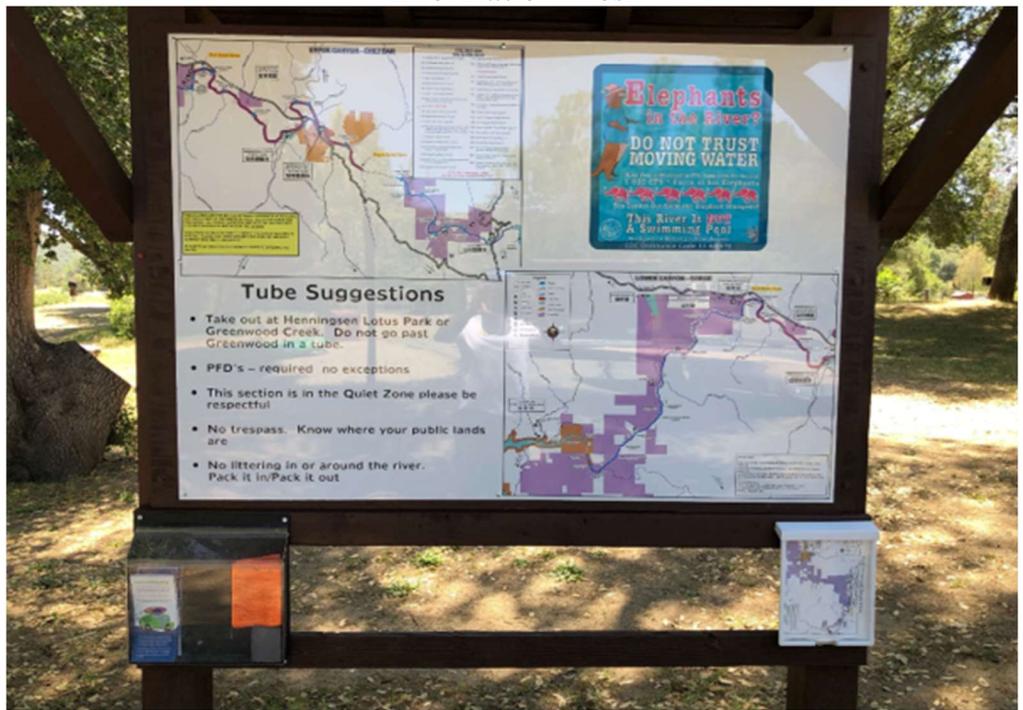


### New Sign Kiosk





### Marshall Gold Information Kiosk



**Marshall Gold  
High Top Serving Tables**



## Appendix B

### **Boat Density Threshold and Low Flow Releases – Element 7.2:**

*Density Threshold:* 300 boats in 2 hours (based on ¼ -hour increments and a rolling 2-hour period) at Meatgrinder, Troublemaker, Barking Dog, Fowlers Rock or Satan’s Cesspool rapids on two days during any one season. Two kayaks are equal to one boat” for the purposes of determining boat density.

### **Daily Boater Total Threshold - Element 7.3:**

Daily Boater Total Thresholds:

Upper Reach - 2,100 boaters on two days during any one season.

Lower Reach - 3,200 boaters on two days during any one season.

Note: Boater counts shall include all persons in each boat, including outfitter guides.

### **Water Quality Sampling and Analysis – Element 4.4**

The County shall sample for coliform bacteria (as a key indicator of water quality impacts and management action needs) during the months of peak river recreational use, May-September.

The County will report results to the County Environmental Management Department to identify if there is an exceedance of any water quality standard defined by the Basin Plan.