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Date 9-23-26

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
by Michelle [Signature], Deputy

September 23, 2026

Supervisor Jeff Flores
1115 Truxtun Avenue
Bakersfield, CA. 93301

This is written regarding: (1) A funding opportunity for the County of Kern for both the Kern River Riparian Preserve and Hart Park, (2) major incursions into and damage to the Kern River Riparian Preserve Park last month, (3) on-going concerns about possible fires in the Kern River Riparian Preserve Park and (4) dead trees in Hart Park.

With regard to funding, over \$189 million dollars are currently available through Round 5 of the Statewide Park Development and Community Revitalization Program (SPP). There is ample time for the County of Kern to obtain community input and submit an application as applications are due on December 17, 2026. Grant requests can range from \$200,000 to \$8.5 million per application. No matching funding is required. While funds are available for the creation of new parks, they are also available for the renovation of parks in climate vulnerable areas (which would fit Kern County).

Given on-going issues of concern in the Kern River Riparian Preserve we would recommend that Kern County develop an application for the Preserve--which by Code (see below) is a park. We would also recommend that such an application include Hart Park related issues. We will name two possible elements of an application and ask that the Kern River Parkway Foundation be consulted regarding possible further recommendations.

To be specific regarding the Kern River Riparian Preserve Park:

1. We are recommending better, higher quality, more robust/substantial fencing along the Preserve to limit access by motorized vehicles. This would include several portions of the Riparian Preserve—including those which directly adjoin Hart Park. Later in this letter we will go into more detail about recent issue (which you and your office became involved in last month).

2. We are recommending the paving and installation of several speed bumps in the Pyles' Boys Camp Overflow Dirt Parking Lot—which adjoins portions of the Kern River Riparian Preserve. Rationale: this parking lot is heavily used for “donutting” by trucks—damaging the fragile soil, causing dust (which could contain Valley Fever spores) and which interrupts the basic purposes of the Riparian Preserve. Many speed bumps are needed. This has been a chronic problem in this parking lot for many years.

3. We are recommendation additional signage bordering the Riparian Preserve (currently signage is limited to the acreage by the Pyles' Boys Camp Overflow Dirt Parking Lot—while the Preserve extends “downriver” to Hart Park). And, some signage specifying the specific flora and fauna in the Preserve would be helpful.

To be specific regarding Hart Park we are recommending:

1. The installation of speed bumps in selected areas to slow traffic which currently exceeds the speed limits. Of special concern is the area directly in front of the Kern River Parkway Nature Center.

2. The removal of dead trees (which were mature) and their replacement with live trees in a ratio of at least 3:1 (given the size of the dead trees). Two areas where these dead trees were observed were: (a) near Lake and River Crossing and (b) near Levee Drive and Sycamore Drive.

3. An may upgrading of/to the irrigation system to water trees and grass.

Again, we would encourage direct consultation with the Kern River Parkway Foundation regarding these and possible other recommendations for a grant proposal.

There are other recommendations not related to the grant possibility. These include:

1. For both the Kern River Riparian Preserve Park and for Hart Park we are recommending that Kern County Park Rangers perform periodic foot patrols during the warm months (and especially during weekends when there is heavy use). Illegal and unauthorized barbeque fires are often seen by visitors (as recently as 10 days ago).

We would note that this summer there have been numerous fires near the Preserve—across from Hart Park and above Alfred Harrell Highway just to name two. And, several years ago there was a major fire in the Preserve near the Kern River Soccer Fields. Foot patrols with citations issued as needed to help address this issue.

2. A portion of the Riparian Preserve directly below the Pyles Boys Camp Parking Lot has on it dry limbs from tree cuttings (source unclear). These are a fire hazard and have been previous noted. We are requesting that they be cleared (note: this is a second request). These branches are too large for volunteers to manage. Thanks to Rich O'Neill of the Kern River Parkway Foundation and many volunteers for cleaning up the trail itself of some months ago.

The recommendations noted above are made based upon several years of collaborative efforts—both with regard to the Kern River Riparian Preserve and Hart Park.

With regard to the Riparian Preserve the summary statement from 2020 creating the Preserve reads, “Kern River Riparian Preserve Park. Unauthorized vehicles, the use of firearms, open fires of any kind, overnight camping, smoking, littering, molesting and damaging flora and fauna are all strictly prohibited.”

Attached are copies of the full Ordinance from 2020 creating the Kern River Riparian Preserve (13.16.020) and additional background information regarding the development of the Preserve and recent incursions.

We would ask for your consideration of our four recommendations regarding a grant proposal and two recommendations regarding management of the Preserve and Hart Park.

Sincerely,



Eddy Laine, Member, Executive Committee

**cc: Kern County Board of Supervisors
Kern County Parks and Recreation
Kern River Parkway Foundation**

**Attachments: Additional Information Regarding the Creation and the Riparian Preserve and Recent Incursions
Kern County Ordinance creating the Kern River Riparian Preserve Park**

NOTICE: KERN RIVER RIPARIAN PRESERVE PARK. UNAUTHORIZED VEHICLES, THE USE OF ANY FIREARMS, OPEN FIRES OF ANY KIND, OVERNIGHT CAMPING, SMOKING, LITTERING, MOLESTING AND DAMAGING FLORA AND FAUNA ARE ALL STRICTLY PROHIBITED.
Kern County Ordinance Code Section [**13.16.020**](#)

The intent of this section is for the county to operate and maintain the Kern River Riparian Preserve Park in such a manner that is consistent with the existing Kern River Plan Element and Kern River Specific Trails Plan. Further, it is to protect the natural resource of the lower Kern riparian area for the use and enjoyment of future generations, while providing for compatible passive uses that will not adversely affect the riparian resource along the river.

The county shall operate the Kern River Riparian Preserve Park in such a manner as to preserve the existing natural conditions, including flora and fauna to the extent feasible, to promote education and community use, and provide opportunities for studies, research, and observation of wildlife.

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION REGARDING THE RIPARIAN PRESERVE

Several years ago our Sierra Club partnered with others in the community and the County of Kern to create the Preserve. It is 14 acres and extends from Hart Park and even “upstream” along the Kern River beyond the Pyles Boys Camp Overflow Parking Lot.

The process to develop the Preserve took several months. In 2020 Kern County Ordinance Code Section 13.16.020 was adopted. The summary of the code (which is found on signage):

“Kern River Riparian Preserve Park. Unauthorized vehicles, the use of firearms, open fires of any kind, overnight camping, smoking, littering, molesting and damaging flora and fauna are all strictly prohibited.”

Addition background information is also relevant regarding the request for improved fencing along the Riparian Preserve.

Recent major damage to the Preserve occurred during the last two weeks of August, 2026 (and first reported on August 25, 2026). One of more parties purposely cut fencing to the paved road along the Preserve and near the Pyles Boys Camp Overflow Parking Lot. After cutting the fencing they (there is evidence of more than one large vehicle) destroyed portions of the previously unaltered surface of the Preserve—creating tracks up to 18 inches deep racing or doing “wheelies” of otherwise destroying the natural contour of the Preserve

Invitations were issued on August 26, 2026 to the Kern County Administrative Office, Kern County General Services and staff from the Third District to join Kern County Parks and Recreation Commissioner Carol Lair for a brief walk in the affected area on August 28, 2026 at 10:00 A.M.

When Commissioner Lair, Maria Polite and Eddy Laine of the Sierra Club and Janell Gore of South Kern Sol arrived on August 28, 2026 there were two workers attempting to repair the fencing (which they could only partially do that day because of a lack of appropriate fencing materials). During a brief discussion one of the workers indicated that the fencing had been cut and the damage done by Kern County staff as a “training” exercise.

In response to a request from Supervisor Flores there was a response regarding the repair of the fencing—with Isaac Preston of General Services indicting on August 29, 2026 that “we anticipate having the repairs completed before the end of September...” Note: the fencing was repaired on Monday, August 31, 2026.

There were follow-up requests regarding whether the fencing was cut and damage done by the Kern County Fire Department. Kern County Fire Chief Aaron

Duncan did not respond to direct requests, but did indicate to Supervisor Flores that his Department did not cut the wire fencing.