

RIVCOPARKS

PARK TALK

FEBRUARY 2025



OUTDOOR EQUITY PAGE 8

RivCoParks is making an effort to bring nature to a wider audience through the creation of more accessible programs and events.

BREAKING GROUND PAGE 9

ARPA projects continue across the District. 2025 is an exciting year for construction completion and for many new park enhancements!



ASK THE GM is your go-to spot for getting in touch with your RivCoParks General Manager, all while keeping things anonymous and fun. Got a burning question, a quirky idea, or just something on your mind? This is the place to share it! No names, no worries—just open, friendly communication to make our RivCoParks team even stronger. So go ahead, ask away, and let's keep the conversation going.



A Message From *the General Manager*

Happy New Year RivCoParks,

As we step into 2025, I want to take a moment to reflect on the incredible work accomplished by our team over the past year. The energy, professionalism, and passion you bring to your roles are what make our parks, open-spaces, and interpretive programs such vital parts of Riverside County.

This year is truly meaningful as we celebrate the 35th anniversary of the RivCoParks as a special district. For 35 years, RivCoParks has been dedicated to protecting and enhancing the natural and cultural resources of Riverside County while providing exceptional recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. This milestone is a testament to the hard work and commitment of our team—past and present—whose efforts have made this achievement possible.

Throughout 2024, your contributions were nothing short of inspiring. I am especially proud of how our team has handled challenges with resilience and grace. Whether responding to public safety emergencies, maintaining park operations during demanding times, or creating safe spaces for families and students, you have demonstrated the very best of what RivCoParks represents. These efforts have not only protected our parks but also strengthened the communities we serve.

As we look ahead, 2025 promises new opportunities to grow, connect, and innovate. I am confident that, together, we will continue to uphold the mission of RivCoParks by being good stewards of our resources, enhancing visitor experiences, and inspiring a deeper appreciation for the outdoors. And as we honor our 35-year legacy, we also look to the future with a renewed commitment to excellence.

Thank you for the dedication, care, and teamwork you bring to every aspect of your work. You are the heart of RivCoParks, and I am grateful for all that you do.

Let's make this milestone year one to remember!

Kyla Brown

General Manager | Parks Director

ASK THE
GM

[Submit a Question or Subscribe!](#)



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Celebrating Success:

SARB Collaborative Website Wins National Award

BY JACQUELYN MULLER

The Santa Ana River Bottom (SARB) Collaborative Website received the National Association of Counties (NACo) Best in Category Award for Information Technology. This achievement highlighted the innovative efforts of the RivCoParks SARB Unit in leveraging Geographic Information System (GIS) technology to enhance homeless outreach while protecting the natural resources of the Santa Ana River Bottom.

The SARB Collaborative Website, developed by the Riverside County Information Technology Department, provided critical real-time data to support homeless outreach initiatives. Using GIS technology, the website allowed for precise mapping and monitoring of homeless encampments, equipping teams with the tools to track locations, sizes, and conditions of encampments effectively. This data proved vital in allocating resources, coordinating interventions, and addressing both immediate and long-term needs in the community.

The platform fostered collaboration across departments and partner organizations by offering a unified space for sharing data. This streamlined approach strengthened coordination among outreach providers and improved service delivery to unsheltered individuals, offering support such as shelter, medical care, and social services. The ability to analyze trends and patterns also informed policy decisions and strategic planning, ensuring that efforts were both responsive and sustainable.

The SARB Unit's commitment to innovation and teamwork stood out as a model for addressing complex challenges. The website exemplified how sharing resources and knowledge among partners could maximize services and improve outcomes for the community. The award not only recognized the functionality of the website but also validated the dedication of everyone involved in the collaborative effort.

This recognition by NACo highlights the importance of leveraging technology to drive meaningful change and serve the community more effectively. It also inspired the department to continue exploring innovative solutions that enhance both the environment and the lives of Riverside County residents. As we reflect on this achievement, we thank everyone who contributed to the success of the SARB Collaborative Website. The SARB units hard work and dedication were key to making this initiative a reality and ensuring its lasting impact.

Lake Cahuilla Veterans Regional Park:

A Natural Gem in Southern California

BY NORIKO GARDENER

Nestled at the base of the picturesque Santa Rosa Mountains in La Quinta, California, Lake Cahuilla Veterans Regional Park is a treasure trove of outdoor experiences waiting to be discovered. With its diverse recreational opportunities and serene atmosphere, the park is an ideal destination for individuals, families, and groups seeking to connect with nature.

For camping enthusiasts, the park offers an impressive 96 campsites, many equipped with water and electric hookups to accommodate a range of camping styles. Equestrians will appreciate the horse-friendly facilities, making this park a standout destination for those who enjoy exploring the great outdoors on horseback.

If you're visiting for the day, the park provides expansive grassy picnic areas complete with tables and BBQ grills, perfect for family gatherings or small group outings. A playground is available for children, while birding enthusiasts will find ample opportunities to observe local and migratory species throughout the park's 710 acres.

The surrounding Coachella Valley offers breathtaking landscapes to explore on foot or horseback. Nearby hiking and riding trails allow visitors to immerse themselves in the natural beauty of the desert, with opportunities to discover the unique flora and fauna of the region.

Lake Cahuilla Veterans Regional Park is more than just a place to relax—it's also a hub for exciting activities and events. The park proudly hosts the swim portion of the renowned Ironman 70.3 La Quinta, California, attracting world-class athletes and spectators from around the globe.

This serene park is a hidden gem in the Southern California desert, offering something for everyone. Whether you're camping under the stars, enjoying a quiet picnic by the lake, fishing, or simply soaking in the scenery, Lake Cahuilla Veterans Regional Park provides the perfect escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life.

Take the time to explore this incredible park and discover why it's cherished by locals and visitors alike. Whether for a day trip or a weekend getaway, Lake Cahuilla Veterans Regional Park promises unforgettable experiences and a deeper connection with the natural world.



Bridging the Nature Gap:

RivCoParks Outdoor Equity Initiative

BY JACQUELYN MULLER

Accessing nature and outdoor recreation is part of our RivCoParks family everyday lives, but for underserved communities in Riverside County, systemic disparities have created a significant “Nature Gap.” Economic challenges, limited resources, and historical inequities have restricted access to parks and green spaces, particularly for children, youth, and racial and ethnic minorities. Adding to these barriers, inadequate transportation options and a lack of targeted programming have made it difficult for residents in underserved areas to enjoy the benefits of nature.



RivCoParks has taken an ambitious step forward to address these disparities through the Outdoor Equity Initiative. This program directly focuses on increasing access to parks and open spaces for low-income communities and local veterans. By removing financial and logistical barriers, the initiative ensures that all residents, regardless of background, can experience the physical, mental, and emotional benefits of outdoor recreation.

Free and reduced-cost programs are at the heart of this effort, including fishing clinics, summer camps, and special events designed to engage participants with meaningful outdoor experiences. These activities not only promote personal well-being but also strengthen community bonds and inspire a lifelong connection to nature.

The initiative goes beyond recreation. It emphasizes education about conservation, environmental stewardship, and the cultural and historical significance of RivCoParks’ spaces. By combining these elements, RivCoParks empowers participants to develop a deeper appreciation for the environment while fostering inclusive spaces that celebrate Riverside County’s natural and cultural heritage.

Funding such a vital initiative has presented challenges, but with the support of elected officials and local business sponsorships, RivCoParks is well-positioned to sustain and grow this impactful program. This collaborative approach reflects a shared commitment to breaking down systemic barriers and ensuring that outdoor spaces are welcoming and accessible for everyone in our community.

The Outdoor Equity Initiative exemplifies RivCoParks’ dedication to equity, accessibility, and diversity in all its efforts. Together, we are working to create opportunities for all residents to experience the transformative power of nature—because everyone deserves to explore, enjoy, and connect with the great outdoors.



ARPA Projects Progress Report

1. Lake Skinner Sewer/Water (PK-ARPA003)

Construction on the water valve/backflow replacements began on January 6, 2025.

2. Lake Skinner Repaving Projects (PK-ARPA004)

Construction will began on January 6, 2025.

3. Rancho Jurupa Paving (PK-ARPA005)

Construction began on January 6, 2025.

4. OHV Feasibility Study (PK-ARPA006)

Contractor KTUA completed site visits and are drafting the opportunities and constraints report. The development of the OHV website and conceptual designs are also being drafted.

5. RivCoParks Tourism Project (PK-ARPA007)

The remaining \$27,905 funds will be used to subsidize school field trips at Nature Centers and Historic Sites.

6. D4 Feasibility Study (PK-ARPA008)

Contractor-Webb Associates has completed the Draft Opportunities and Constraints Report and Community outreach concluded on December 14, 2024. Webb is now preparing the economic analysis and Final Report.

7. Santa Ana River Bottom (SARB) Yard (PK-ARPA009)

Rough grading on the bldg. pad and the entry service road has been completed. Perimeter CMU walls footing have started, and the re-bar is being put in place.

8. Santa Ana River Trail Wayfinding (SART) (PK-ARPA010)

Manufacturing of the signs are underway with an estimated installation date January 13, 2024.

9. Lake Skinner Boat Launch Repair (PK-ARPA011)

Construction began on January 8, 2025.

10. Santa Rosa Plateau Broadband Project (PK-ARPA012)

Project complete.

11. Lawlor Lodge ADA Improvements (PK-ARPA013)

Contractor will begin hazardous material abatement and demolition.

12. Kabian Memorial Park Improvements (PK-ARPA014):

Demolition of the existing restrooms and trenching for the electrical and water lines has been completed. Over-excavating for the new restrooms has also been completed.

13. Lake Cahuilla Paving Project (PK-ARPA015)

Project complete.

14. Lake Cahuilla Amenities Update (PK-ARPA015)

Contractor KYA Services Inc. has mobilized and began demolition and grading work on January 6, 2025.

15. Lake Cahuilla Master Plan (PK-ARPA015)

Initial site visits have been completed by Webb Associates and their subconsultants. The amenities and trails analysis are underway.

16. Hidden Valley Nature Center (PK-ARPA016):

Contractor has mobilized and demo work has begun.

17. Hurkey Creek Park Beatification (PK-ARPA017):

Job Order Contract (JOC) in place and construction projected to begin winter of 2025.

Meet Ziggy,

The California King Snake

BY HARMONY TEHRANI

Ziggy is a California Kingsnake *Lampropeltis californiae* who joined HVNC in 2015. She will turn 10 years old this spring! Ziggy is known for her skittish personality—she startles easily and flinches at sudden movements.

A Fun Story!

Did you know that determining a snake's gender isn't easy without a vet or expert? It often requires a physical exam, but you can make an educated guess based on the shape of their tail. Since Ziggy was donated, she had always been referred to as male. That is, until May 2023, when eggs were discovered in her enclosure! (The eggs were not viable since she has never shared her space with a mate.)



Facts About California Kingsnakes

- **Classification:** California Kingsnakes are one of seven subspecies of the Common Kingsnake. The others include Eastern, Florida, Speckled, Black, Mexican, and Desert Kingsnakes.
- **Size and Appearance:** They can range from 36 to 82 inches long and have chocolate-brown to black skin with bold pale or yellowish crossbands.
- **Habitat:** These snakes are found throughout California, including Santa Catalina Island. They thrive in various environments, from forests to deserts, but avoid high elevations like the Sierra Nevada mountains. They are most abundant near streams and rivers.
- **Diet:** Kingsnakes are opportunistic feeders and eat lizards, rodents, birds, and even other snakes, including rattlesnakes! They possess special enzymes and antibodies that make them immune to snake venom.
- **Defensive Behaviors:** When threatened, California Kingsnakes may hiss, rattle their tail, roll into a ball, or release a foul-smelling musk from their postanal glands.
- **Predators:** Their natural predators include large mammals, birds of prey, and other snakes.

What is your favorite RivCoParks location? Why?

Santa Rosa Plateau Ecological Reserve.
It's a beautiful combination of wildlife, landscape and history.



Justin Carmichael *Interpretive Services Supervisor*

What is your favorite way to spend a day off?

Hiking a trail with my wife Andrea and our dog Mayze.

What is your hidden talent?

I was a venomous snake handler for over 25 years.

What are you passionate about outside of work?

MotoGP racing.

What is your favorite season for outdoor activity? Why?

Summer. I love the heat!

What is your favorite aspect about working for RivCoParks?

I enjoy how unique our parks are from one site to another.

Describe your favorite vacation/trip you've ever taken.

Why was it your favorite?

When my wife and I moved from Florida to California. We spent 2 weeks visiting parks across the country, in a teardrop trailer we built. Amazing experience!

What is your favorite food?

Crab legs.

What is your favorite movie?

Lord of the Rings series.

Who is your favorite singer or band? Favorite song?

Outkast. Too many to name one.



What is your favorite aspect about working for RivCoParks?

Seeing visitors enjoying time in the park.

Charlene Schreurs *Camp Host*

What is your favorite way to spend a day off?

Lunch with my Best Friend and Spending time with my Family.

What is your hidden talent?

My Hidden Talent is a Mystery!

What are you passionate about outside of work?

Watching the Birds, Animals and Critters in my park.

What is your favorite season for outdoor activity? Why?

The Fall, it's cooler weather and relaxing.

What is your favorite RivCoParks location? Why?

Box Springs

Describe your favorite vacation/trip you've ever taken.

Why was it your favorite?

Renting a cabin in Big Bear with my entire family.

What is your favorite food?

Tacos

What is your favorite movie?

Hunger Games

Who is your favorite singer or band? Favorite song?

Taylor Swift



California Baptist University is our newest adopter, taking on the Coyote Trail at Hidden Valley. On December 13, 2024, the Men and Women's Swim and Dive teams joined us for their 1st adoption event.

The event began with the coaches ceremoniously adding their sticker to our trail sign. In addition to surveying the Coyote Trail, they also agreed to help work on a portion of the education area near the Hidden Valley Nature Center. Ramon Barrera, Park Maintenance Worker, chose 3 volunteers from the group to help cut back overgrowth. Janae Pulido, Volunteer Services Coordinator, walked about a mile of the Coyote Trail with the rest of the group. They used gloves and trash pickers to clear litter and debris along the way. Later in the day, the two teams met up with and divided into 3 groups. The 1st group continued to cut overgrowth, the 2nd group used rakes, mcleods, shovels and pitch forks to clear trimmed foliage, and the 3rd group surveyed the staging area for more trash and debris.

CBU's athletes have previously used the Coyote Trail for training, and they can now take pride in the work they've done to keep it clean for wildlife and other visitors. We appreciate their hard work, and we look forward to our ongoing partnership.

Volunteers in Action: CBU Adoption Event

BY JANA E PULIDO





Reflecting On An Amazing Year *of Special Events*

BY ERIC BOOR

2024 was filled with milestone events:

Spooky Side of Nature: Due to construction at the Hidden Valley Nature Center, the event was relocated to the Jensen Alvarado Historic Ranch & Museum, where guests enjoyed a glimpse of early 1900s farm life.

Lake Cahuilla Veterans Day Fishing Derby: Attendance hit a record high of 1,100 guests! The lake was stocked with nearly 5,000 lbs of catfish, and the 1st place winner reeled in a 10.5 lb fish.

Bark in the Park: The Idyllwild Nature Center hosted its first-ever dog-friendly event. Visitors and their pups explored the nature center and trails.

Exciting Events Coming to Your Parks in 2025

The year 2025 is here, and it's bringing plenty of exciting events to look forward to! Among the highlights are the fishing clinics at Rancho Jurupa Regional Park, Lake Skinner Recreation Area, and Lake Cahuilla Veterans Regional Park. Additionally, the Park District will host a fishing derby with Fourth District Supervisor V. Manuel Perez, aiming to surpass previous attendance records.

For outdoor enthusiasts, there are three special outdoor equity events on the horizon. First-time campers will receive a free camping package that includes a weekend of camping and fun Saturday morning activities.

With the incredible growth in attendance last year, 2025 is packed with even more events at parks across the District. Be sure to check out the RivCoParks Event Guide for all the details.

We're excited to see you there!



IT Security Reminder for Park District Staff

BY CINDY MUÑOZ

Keeping our Park District's digital systems safe is everyone's responsibility. Here are some simple steps you can take to help protect our sensitive information:

1. Password Safety:

- ✓ Change your passwords regularly (every 3-6 months).
- ✓ Use strong, unique passwords for each account.
- ✗ Avoid using personal information in passwords.
- ✓ Consider using a password manager for better security.

2. Email Safety:

- ✓ Be cautious of unexpected emails, especially those asking for personal information.
- ✗ Don't click on links or download attachments from unknown senders.
- ✓ When in doubt, contact the IT department.

3. Computer Safety:

- ✓ Lock your computer when you step away from your desk.
- ✓ Keep your software and operating system up-to-date.
- ✗ Don't install unauthorized software on work devices.

4. Physical Security:

- ✓ Keep sensitive documents secure and out of sight.
- ✗ Don't leave work devices unattended in public places.
- ✓ Report any lost or stolen devices immediately.

5. Public Wi-Fi Safety:

- ✗ Avoid accessing sensitive work information on public Wi-Fi networks.

6. Data Handling:

- ✓ Only access and share sensitive information when necessary.
- ✓ Double-check email recipients before sending sensitive data.
- ✓ Properly dispose of documents containing sensitive information.

Remember, cybersecurity is an ongoing process.

Stay alert and report any suspicious activities to the IT department.

By following these simple practices, we can all contribute to keeping our parks district's digital assets secure.



RivCoParks Recognitions

July - December 2024



Andy Mick
Employee of the Month
July 2024



Lydia Herrera-Salsbury
Volunteer of the Month
July 2024



Jason Timme
Employee of the Month
July 2024



Sandy Tatich
Volunteer of the Month
August 2024



Shawn Huggard
Employee of the Month
October 2024



Josh Knisbell
Employee of the Month
November 2024



Tim Doughty
Volunteer of the Month
November 2024



Margaret Chavez
Employee of the Month
November 2024

The District recognizes the accomplishments of employees and volunteers that exemplify the District's values.

Individuals and groups were chosen based upon their demonstration of:

- A**daptable
- C**ommunity-Centric
- T**eamwork
- I**nclusion
- O**utstanding
- N**etworking
- S**tewardship



Mike Van Daele
Employee of the Month
August 2024



Rhonda Long
Employee of the Month
September 2024



Jacquelyn Muller
Employee of the Month
October 2024



Janae Pulido
Employee of the Month
December 2024



Al Macias
Volunteer of the Month
December 2024



[Click here to nominate the next Shining Star!](#)



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