

## **OTAY VALLEY REGIONAL PARK (OVRP)**

### **KUMEYAAY VILLAGE REPLICA AND INTERPRETIVE SIGN EDUCATION PROJECT**

**Criteria 1:** The Otay River Valley has a rich history of human occupation and resource use. Over 9,000 years ago, prehistoric Native Americans called the Kumeyaay, were early inhabitants, taking advantage of the valley's abundant natural resources. In 1769, Father Serra chose the Otay River Valley as his first camp as he traveled north to establish the missions in what is now California. In the early 1800s, vast Spanish ranchos covered the area, and cattle grazed on the gentle mesas surrounding the river. Later, pioneer farmers and wine makers settled the valley, attracted by its fertile soils. South San Diego County became the source for commercial salt production in the 1850s. In 1886 construction was initiated on Otay Dam by the Otay Water Company. The dam was completed by the Southern California Mountain Water Company between 1894 and 1897.

Today, with increasing urbanization, land use in the river valley is still changing. With the creation of Otay Valley Regional Park (OVRP), the Otay River Valley will continue to serve south San Diego County communities, residents and visitors by providing outdoor recreation opportunities ranging from playing fields and picnic areas to hiking, biking, and horse trails, and educational opportunities to learn and appreciate the historical and cultural significance of the river valley, while protecting open space, conserved lands, wildlife, historic, agricultural, and archaeological resources.

There are no known outdoor education facilities in south San Diego County, especially an open park system such as the OVRP which provides for critical outdoor educational activities. The Otay River Valley was a life sustaining environment first

settled by the Kumeyaay people, and for the subsequent population growth in the region. Educating residence and visitors in south San Diego County communities about the significance of the Otay River Valley is an effort to sustain the rich heritage, history, and culture that spurn from pre-historic occupation to the establishment of the California Missions, and the beginnings of settlement and growth of San Diego. In 2001, the OVRP Concept Plan was adopted to provide direction and guidance for park development, operation, and maintenance. To implement this, the Plan's purpose is to:

- Establish small interpretive centers for environmental and educational programs
- Identify areas adjacent to open space areas for potential recreational and educational opportunities; and
- Develop a trail system with staging areas to provide connections to recreation locations

The OVRP is a 9000 acre open space park that expands over 11 miles, and is the only such park in south San Diego County, but there is a significant deficiency of OVRP awareness for south San Diego County residence and visitors. This was evident the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual OVRP Discovery Day event held in early June 2017. Over 125 people attended the event and many had stated they were not aware of the OVRP, let alone the park's size even though the park has grown over 30 years. It is anticipated that the Kumeyaay village replica project will be a major attraction for park visitors, with the goal of educating them on the Otay River Valley and the OVRP, for a unique and enriching experience.

**Criteria 2:** The OVRP within the Otay River Valley contains a diverse ecosystem that includes sensitive flora and fauna, along with unique cultural and historical

resources. One of the ongoing efforts is the education program for elementary school students. The Chula Vista Elementary School District partners with Circulate San Diego on the "Safe Routes to Nature" program, with the goal to increase park visitation and education by bring kids to the outdoors through a weekly nature walk to OVRP. For example, on Friday's, students partner with volunteer guides from the Natural History Museum, to explore the OVRP and learn about becoming good stewards of the Park's diverse ecosystem. An added activity is as students leave school to get to the open space, they develop a cognitive map of how they get there for a report on improving safety and accessibility that will be given to school and city officials.

The Kumeyaay Village replica will enhance the visitation and educational goals for the OVRP, by attracting residence and visitors in the surrounding communities, in addition to school-aged children, to experience the river valley history and OVRP, while learning about the diverse ecosystem and resources. The replica village will be a major feature stop along the OVRP trail system as the village, and interpretive panels will enhance interactive learning for visitors for an exciting and excellent educational experience. It is anticipated that future camping and programming focused on the Kumeyaay, local history, conservation, and preserving and protecting the area's highly sensitive ecosystem to enhance visitors' experience and leave an everlasting impression, while providing a greater respect for culture and the natural environment. The Kumeyaay replica village project will include up to three e'waa (huts), interpretive panels, a ramada, a canoe, tools, grinding rocks to create a natural kitchen, boulders to sit on to create the scene for the village.

The village project will provide a nice location for quarterly Kumeyaay outdoor classes for public to learn Kumeyaay cooking, arrow making and all other ethnobotany of Kumeyaay, and would be the foundation for building of Kumeyaay Campground. This would allow people to camp at the village while learning how the Kumeyaay used, and respected the natural resources in the Otay River Valley. The goal is to have visitors learn to appreciate, preserve, and use the natural resources in a responsible manner. Additionally, it is anticipated that the replica village will be developed in partnership with the Jamul band of Kumeyaay in an effort to create an opportunity to stay connected with their original territory.

The grant funds offered for this OEEF grant application will provide for the design and construction of ewaas, and the other village items and the design and construction of interpretive panels to facilitate future planned educational programming that will include:

- Kumeyaay cultural classes throughout the year;
- Teach fishing hook and pole making;
- Teach Kumeyaay cooking- demonstration of shawii ( acorn mush);
- Teach Kumeyaay basket making;
- Teach Kumeyaay skirt making;
- Teach Bow and Arrow making;
- Teach Kumeyaay games; and
- Teach Kumeyaay dance and bird songs for performances at the annual Discover OVRP Day

The other critical educational opportunities anticipated are promoting community habitat cleanup and educational outreach events while preserving and protecting sensitive natural and cultural resources. The Otay River Valley was home to a rich ecosystem that was a critical resource for an abundant flora and fauna habitat in the river valley. Overtime, the ecosystem has degraded significantly as a result of human

activity in the last century including mineral mining, agriculture, urban development, and river damming at the Otay Lakes. In order to preserve and restore the Otay River Valley ecosystem as best as possible, continual implementation of the conservation and preservation policies, along with educating the public on the importance of stewardship in the OVRP, will greatly contribute to the conservation and preservation of the river valley. The Kumeyaay village replica will be a major asset to the OVRP experience that will affect the effort in educating and engaging the public on conservation, and preservation activities as they learn how the Kumeyaay used the natural resources effectively and efficiently.

**Criteria 3:** The demographic make-up in south San Diego County consists of a unique and diverse population that includes a myriad of age, ethnic and cultural groups, and socioeconomic status that live and work in south county communities. The various school districts that serve students in the Cities of Chula Vista, San Diego, San Ysidro, National City, Imperial Beach, Coronado, and county schools, have limited access to open space parks similar to the OVRP as such parks are located out of the area. The Kumeyaay replica village will be a focal point for interactive projects particularly for schools, youth groups, and environmental and natural science clubs. The general public will have access to learn how the Kumeyaay lived and thrived in the Otay River Valley. The village replica will be a special feature and destination point that will add to the existing viewpoints, overlooks, and water bodies along the western OVRP trail system offering an enjoyable experience for park visitors.

Over the past seven years, the Cities of Chula Vista, San Diego, and County of San Diego organized and held seven Discover OVRP Day events with the goal of

bringing south San Diego County residence and visitors to learn about the extensive park and its amenities including the diverse ecosystem, the trail system, the unique features including overlooks, viewpoints, and water bodies, the importance of Kumeyaay history in the Otay River Valley. The recent event held in June 2017, drew the largest number of visitors-125- to date. It is anticipated that the Kumeyaay village replica project will attract many more visitors to future events.

**Criteria 4:** The OVRP is located in the southern region of San Diego County, approximately four miles north of the international border, and extends from the southeastern edge of the South Bay Wildlife Refuge through the Otay River Valley to the Otay Lakes vicinity. The Park boundary encompasses approximately 9,000 acres, and will provide an extensive open space corridor in the Otay River Valley to the Otay Lakes vicinity. The OVRP is accessible from several locations from Interstate 5 and Interstate 805 on west to the County Park at the Otay Lakes vicinity in the east, and several access points and staging areas from residential neighborhoods. Visitors can access the Kumeyaay village project from the locations via public transportation, school bus, private vehicles, bicycles, horse, and walking.

Some access points are adjacent to residential neighborhoods, which enables families a close and convenience access to the village project regularly. The existing trail system from which the Kumeyaay village can be accessed is constructed with decomposed granite that provides a firm and smooth surface for ease of use by families with strollers, people with ambulatory challenges needing supporting modes of mobility including, but not limited to wheelchairs, walkers, and canes.

In June 2017, the Discover OVRP Day held its seventh annual event, which drew the largest number of visitors compared to previous events. The city and county agencies responsible for the establishment, operation, and maintenance of the OVRP participated as well as nature and environmental-based agencies that promoted preservation and environmental stewardship. Nature walking and bike ride tours were provided, in addition to crafts and educational displays. The Kumeyaay village replica and interpretive panels will be an important attraction during Discover OVRP Day in June 2018.

The OVRP can be visited between sunrise and sunset daily and year round (see table below). There are several locations where park rangers open gates to allow public access during early morning hours and close them as the sun begins to set. The OVRP can also be accessed at has several non-gated locations.

| Sun          | Mon          | Tue          | Wed          | Thur         | Fri          | Sat          | Total            |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|
| Dawn to dusk | Dawn to dusk | Dawn to dusk | Dawn to dusk | Dawn to dusk | Dawn to dusk | Dawn to dusk | 84 (approximate) |

**Criteria 5:** The OVRP is operated and maintained by an agreement between the cities of Chula Vista, San Diego, and the County of San Diego (explained in more detail in Criterion 6). The City of San Diego has experience in benefitting from State grant awards by successfully managing on-time completion of several large-scale grant funded projects, focused on learning and discovery opportunities including the development of the Mission Trails Regional Park Visitor Center, a San Diego hub for nature education; and managed the design, fabrication, and installation of interpretive panels that educate visitors about the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve.

More specifically, the City of San Diego managed the Otay Valley Regional Park (OVRP) History and Ecology Nature Education Exhibits whereby the OVRP was awarded and completed a State of California Natural Resources Agency Department of Parks and Recreation Proposition 84 2006 Parks Bond Act Nature Education Facilities Grant for the OVRP History and Ecology Nature Education Exhibits for \$304,500. The project included 32 interpretive panels, 10 benches, and was administered by the City of San Diego on behalf of the OVRP. The project was completed for \$151,059, and \$153,411, under budget, or approximately half of the projected cost. The grant was awarded in 2009, and the project was completed in March 2016, almost a year ahead of the scheduled the grant contract closing date of June 2017.

In addition, the City successfully completed 62 capital improvement projects, fully-expending the City's portion of the 2000 Park Bond (Prop 12) \$14,152,697. The City of San Diego Park and Recreation Department which employs a professional management staff with many years experience in completing improvements on 24,627 acres of open space park land managed by the department, will manage the construction Kumeyaay village replica and interpretive sign project in a manner similar to the following State grant-funded projects, which were recently completed within grant contract deadlines including:

- Mission Trails - Cedar Fire Riparian Restoration State HCF Grant # HR-37-011: Total Project Cost \$105,000. State Habitat Conservation Fund Grant \$54,878. Project completion date 3/26/2010 – Grant expiration date 6/30/2010.

- Mission Trails – Kumeyaay Lake Habitat Restoration State HCF Grant # HR-37-009: Total Project Cost \$90,000. State Habitat Conservation Fund Grant \$66,929. Project completion date 3/24/2009 – Grant expiration date 6/30/2009.

The City of San Diego's extensive experience will help ensure successful and on-time completion of the Kumeyaay village project subject to this OEEF grant.

City of San Diego Senior Planner Laura Ball of the Park and Recreation Department and OVRP staff will be the project manager for the Kumeyaay village project. Ms. Ball has served as both the project and construction manager of several large-scale restoration/mitigation projects of greater cost than the expected cost to construct the Kumeyaay village and interpretive panel project. Ms. Ball oversaw the site selection, conceptual planning, contracting (design/build), design, approval, and implementation/construction of the aforementioned projects. Other projects that were completed on time, and met permit requirements, despite construction-timing constraints with bird nesting season in environmentally sensitive lands include:

- San Clemente Canyon Mitigation Project, 01-2005 – July 2010, \$700K
- Tecolote Canyon Mitigation Project, 03-2004 – July 2010, \$600K
- Lake Murray Design/Build Mitigation Project, 01-2004 - July 2010, \$300K

**Criteria 6:** In 1990 the City of Chula Vista, City of San Diego, and County of San Diego formed a Joint Exercise of Power Agreement (JEPA) to share the responsibility for operating and maintaining all projects within the OVRP. This agreement was extended in 2006 as is binding for another 25 years. Although the Kumeyaay village replica project is located within the City of San Diego's jurisdiction, the JEPA agreement obligates the City of Chula Vista, and County of San Diego, along with the City of San Diego to operate, maintain, and provide year round programming activities for the duration of the 25 year agreement.

The City of Chula Vista in partnership with the City of San Diego's Parks and

Recreation Department maintains the trail system, brush management, clean-up, and ranger patrol. The existing projects in the OVRP include the ranger station at Beyer Boulevard, the Hollister Pond lookout deck, Finney Overlook, and various interpretive kiosks and panels along the trail system. The Kumeyaay replica village project has a similar concept and goal as the Mission Trails Kumeyaay Lake Habitat Restoration project described in Criterion 5. The Kumeyaay village project will be incorporated into the Parks and Recreation Department's ongoing park operations and maintenance as required by the JEP A agreement.

The village items and interpretive panels will be constructed of durable material that will require minimal upkeep. With its close proximity to the ranger station, the village replica will have frequent, regularly scheduled inspections and maintenance. The Kumeyaay Village replica will be the prize project for the western area of the OVRP, and the City of San Diego park rangers have committed to the programming for the Kumeyaay Village replica, and will manage the village replica and interpretive signs to ensure that they are well maintained long after their completion including wear and tear, and vandalism.

It is expected that maintenance funds from all three jurisdictions as prescribed by the JEP A agreement will be allocated for the project; not from the OEEF grant. Additionally, a docent program is planned to facilitate a volunteer program to help with operation and maintenance duties, and it is anticipated that the Kumeyaay will participate in development and implementation of educational programming. This is evidenced by the program features described in Criterion 2, which ensures year round use of the Kumeyaay Village replica and interpretive signs.