



Carr Lake Project Newsletter

WINTER 2008-09 NEWSLETTER

The Excellent City Park System

Beginning in 1859, when Frederick Law Olmsted, Calvert Vaux and more than 3,000 laborers created Central Park, the nation was swept by a wave of enthusiasm for urban "pleasure grounds". Thousands of parks were constructed and millions of words were written about their features and attributes. Over the next 75 years the purpose and design of parks metamorphosed, but they remained so important to cities that even during the depths of the Great Depression many park systems received large influxes of money and attention through the federal government's relief and conservation programs.

During the height of the city park movement, from about 1890 to 1940, great efforts were made to plan for parkland, to understand the relationship between parks and surrounding neighborhoods, and to measure the impact of parks. Leaders in Boston, Buffalo, Seattle, Portland, Denver, Baltimore, and elsewhere proudly and competitively labored to convert their

cities from drab, polluted industrial cores into beautiful, culturally uplifting centers. They believed a well designed and maintained park system was integral to their mission.

Inspired by boulevard systems in Minneapolis and Kansas City, and by Olmsted's "Emerald Necklace" in Boston, many cities sketched out interconnected greenways linking neighborhoods, parks, and natural areas. Careful measurements, were made of the location of parks and the travel distance (by foot, generally) for each neighborhood and resident. The field of park research was supported by the federal government through the National Conference on Outdoor Recreation, which provided funding for data collection, research, analysis, and dissemination.

Following World War II the nation's attention turned toward the development of suburbs, and the commitment to the urban public domain began to wane. There was even a naive assumption that private suburban backyards could replace most of the services provided by public city parks. Many of the ideas

regarding parks' role in city planning and community socialization were lost. More importantly, ideas about measuring park success, assuring equity, and meeting the needs of changing users languished.

Over the next half-century, much of the vast urban park system fell on hard times. Few cities provided adequate maintenance staffing and budgets, and most deferred critically needed capital investment. Many parks suffered from overuse -- trampled plants and grass, deteriorated equipment, erosion, loss of soil resiliency and health. Others declined from underuse -- graffiti, vandalism, invasion of noxious weeds, theft of plant resources and crime.

The decline was camouflaged.

In the older northern cities, general urban deterioration grabbed headlines and made parks seem of secondary importance. In the new cities of the south and west, low-density development made parks seem superfluous. Intellectual inquiry into city greenspace dwindled to almost nothing, with the single exception of the "urban natural area," the new concept of preserving wetlands, deserts, forests and grasslands for their ecological values and benefits.

But every pendulum eventually swings back, and the effort to revive city park systems has slowly gained momentum. When the Trust for Public Land was founded in 1972, it was the first national conservation organization with an explicit urban component to its work. At the same time, fledgling neighborhood groups began forming to save particular parks, either through private fundraising

or through public political action. There arose a new appreciation of the genius and work of Frederick Law Olmsted, and in 1980 the Central Park Conservancy was founded. In that same year, pioneering research by William H. Whyte resulted in the publication of *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* and the formation of the Project for Public Spaces. The rise of the urban community gardening movement and the spread of park activism to other cities led in 1994 to a \$12 million commitment by the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Foundation and the creation of the Urban Parks Institute and the City Parks Forum. Meanwhile, city park directors formed their own loose network through the Urban Parks and Recreation Alliance.

Beginning in 1995 many older cities including Chicago, Boston, Washington and Cleveland started bouncing back from years of population loss and fiscal decline. With new residents and a greater sense of optimism, they and other places like them began seeking to reestablish a competitive edge by combining their strong geographies and histories with their newfound economies. Elsewhere, in fast-growing, low-density places such as Charlotte, Dallas and Phoenix, planners were belatedly trying to create vibrant downtowns and walkable neighborhoods for a more cohesive urban identity. In both old cities and new there is rising interest in the use of parks to help shape vitality.

(The Excellent City Park System, 2006, reprinted with permission from The Trust for Public Land. To sign up for a free subscription to TPL's *Land&People* magazine, go to www.tpl.org.)

It is time that Salinas join these other forward-thinking cities and build Carr Lake Regional Park to address issues of recreation, public health, flood control, water quality, and environmental and economic revitalization. Please talk to your elected officials and let them know how important this project is to you and your community.

OTHER URBAN PARKS IN THE WORKS

The proposed Carr Lake Regional Park isn't the only large urban park on the horizon. Other communities have realized the benefits of creating a major park in their midst.

Among them are the restoration of the Los Angeles River and the creation of a large regional park in Orange County at the former El Toro Marine Corps Air Station.

The Friends of the Los Angeles River (FoLAR) have been working since 1986 to restore the concreted Los Angeles River, creating parks and recreation opportunities for the communities that border the river. For more information on their efforts check out their website at: <http://folar.org/>

Orange County is building a new 1,347 acre regional park on the former El Toro Marine Corps Air Station. They even have a tethered balloon (orange, of course) that lifts up to 50 people 400 feet in the air for a spectacular view. You can find out more about this undertaking at: <http://www.ocgp.org/>

It's great to see these other projects and get ideas about what we would like Carr

Lake Regional Park to look like, how to go about it, and what sorts of financial sources are available.

Hopefully, it won't be long until we are engaged in a process to make these kinds of decisions along with others in the community.

EVENTS

Coastal Clean Up Day!

Description: Clean up the creeks that flow to the bay

Date: August 16, 2008

Time: 9:00-12:00 p.m.

Location: Upper Carr Lake

Make a Difference Day!

Description: Clean up & weeds

Date: October 25, 2008

Time: 10:00-1:00 p.m.

Location: Natividad Creek Park

Clean up & weeds

Date: November 22, 2008

Time: 10:00-1:00 p.m.

Location: Upper Carr Lake

Clean up & weeds

Date: December 13, 2008

Time: 10:00-1:00 p.m.

Location: Natividad Creek Park

For more information on events call (831) 582-3686

Visit:

<http://watershed.csumb.edu/carrlake/>

For further information contact:

Gary Shallcross, Carr Lake Coordinator
CSUMB Watershed Institute

(831) 582-3323

gary_shallcross@csumb.edu