

MINUTE ITEM  
This Calendar Item No. 34  
was approved as Minute Item  
No. 34 by the State Lands  
Commission by a vote of 3  
to 0 at its 8/10/88  
meeting.

CALENDAR ITEM

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08/10/88  
W 23653  
Minnick  
Zimmerman

APPROVAL OF THE REPORT OF INVESTIGATION  
OF HISTORICAL SITES AND SHIPWRECKS  
ALONG THE SACRAMENTO RIVER BETWEEN  
SACRAMENTO CITY AND SHERMAN ISLAND

APPLICANT: State Lands Commission  
1807 L 13th Street  
Sacramento, California 95814

This report was prepared in response to a legislative request contained in the 1985/86 Budget Act. The State Lands Commission was requested to locate, document, and investigate the significant ships and artifacts from California's rich historical heritage along the lower Sacramento River. In general, the Commission was directed to:

- Inventory, map, and catalog all known points of historical significance along the lower Sacramento River, including ports, wharves, piers, villages, and ship sinkings.
- Prepare cost estimates for an electronic survey using magnetometers, side-scan sonars, and sub-bottom profilers for the purpose of locating historic ships and artifacts.
- Prepare cost estimates for a program of field verification of selected sites.
- Consider contracting all or part of the study with "outside entities" and consider contracting for consulting services with the State Office of Historic Preservation.

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(ADDED 8/9/88 pgs. 256-256-10)

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Staff of the Land Location and Boundary Section were assigned the task of document and map research. In addition to the material in the report, the investigation produced a mass of information analyzed but not included in this report. This material will remain on file in the offices of the State Lands Commission. All of this material is available to serious researchers and will be kept as a single unit of information in the Sacramento office of the State Lands Commission.

While the majority of the work on the report was done by Commission staff, outside expertise was retained to prepare two major components of the report. An archaeologist was used to propose criteria and provide an opinion as to which sites were not only significant, but which would have some potential for recovery or development as historical sites. A diver with experience in historical artifact recovery in different parts of the United States, including work in the Old Sacramento Waterfront area, was also used. His work included several dives in the River adjacent to Old Sacramento to reach conclusions and obtain information which has enabled staff to make recommendations regarding historic sites with more confidence.

AB 884: N/A.

OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION:

1. The report recommends that the State Lands Commission identify the sites noted in this report as being potentially significant historic locations. The State Lands Commission staff should, as part of their review of permits and leases, consider the impact on the site and any artifacts that may be contained within the perimeter, and report their findings with their recommendation.

Even though the document and map investigation failed to disclose any specific significant locations, it does document occurrences within specific areas which may have historical significance. There is no way to be certain, without further research, that the identified areas possess significant historical artifacts. Identification as a potential site does provide, however, the opportunity to conduct an intensive historical evaluation prior to any actions that would irretrievably damage the site.

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Authority: 1985/86 Budget Act, Item  
No. 3560-001-001.

3. Pursuant to the Commission's delegation of authority and the State CEQA Guidelines (14 Cal. Adm. Code 15061), the staff has determined that this activity is exempt from the requirements of the CEQA because the activity is not a "project" as defined by CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines.

Authority: P.R.C. 21065 and 14 Cal. Adm.  
Code 15378.

EXHIBITS: A. Site Map.  
B. Analysis, Conclusions, and Recommendations  
of Report.

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE COMMISSION:

1. FIND THAT THE ACTIVITY IS EXEMPT FROM THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE CEQA PURSUANT TO 14 CAL. ADM. CODE 15061 BECAUSE THE ACTIVITY IS NOT A PROJECT AS DEFINED BY P.R.C. 21065 AND 14 CAL. ADM. CODE 15378.
2. ACCEPT AND APPROVE THE REPORT AND AUTHORIZE ITS RELEASE AS SPECIFIED IN THE LEGISLATIVE CHARGE.
3. AUTHORIZE STATE LANDS COMMISSION TO IDENTIFY SITES NOTED ON PAGES 45 THROUGH 126 OF THE REPORT A POTENTIALLY-  
SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL SITES.

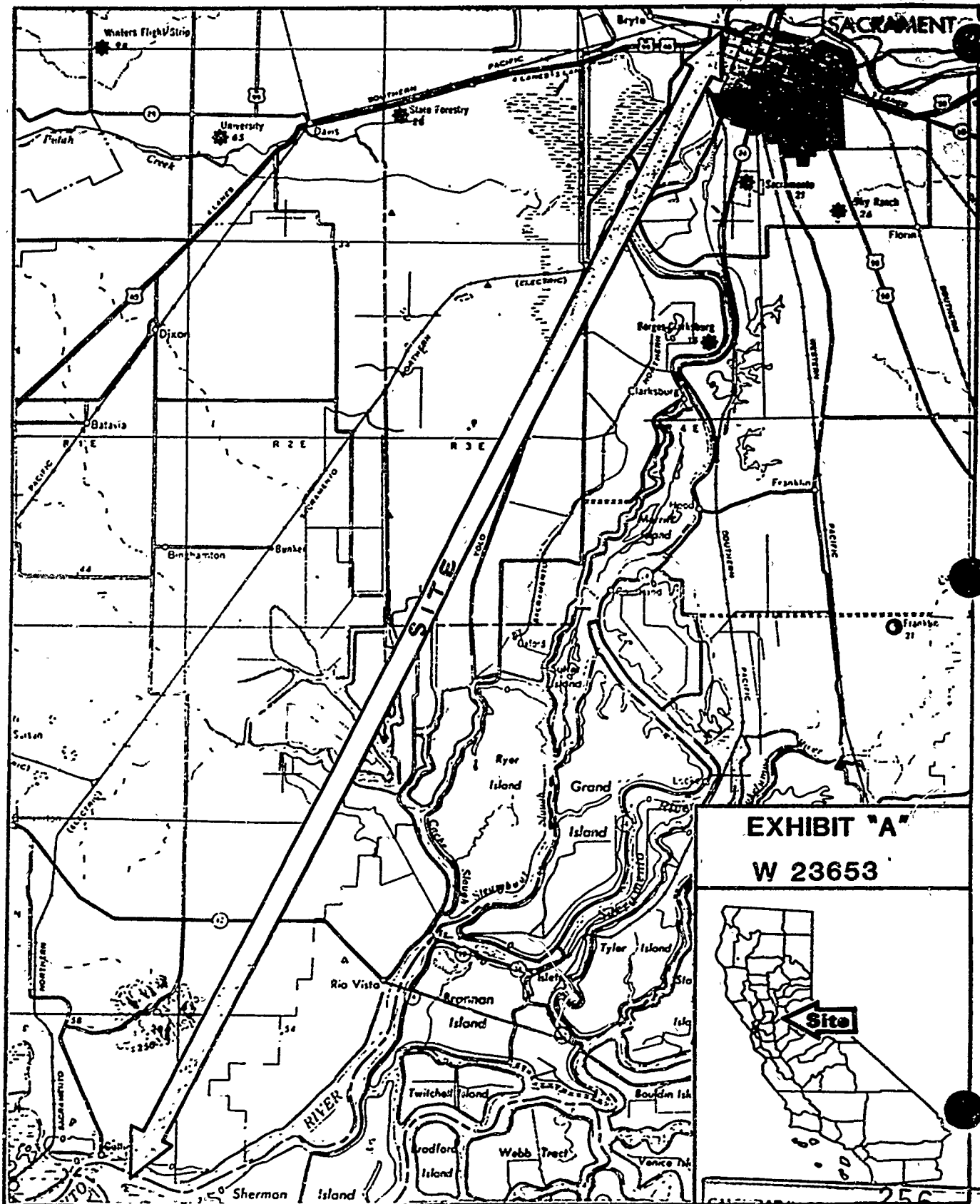


EXHIBIT "A"

W 23653



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**Analysis, Conclusions, and Recommendations of Report****SUMMARY**

The project area extends up the Sacramento River from its mouth to the I Street Bridge in Sacramento. We included several notable arms of the Sacramento, such as Steamboat Slough, because they were traveled by the inland rivercraft; we did not emphasize the section of river adjacent to Old Sacramento because it has been the subject of intensive study by historians and underwater recovery specialists.

While we are aware that the Sacramento River may have moved somewhat over the years, so that a wreck site may be buried in a dry field, the map and document study was hampered by lack of accurate maps showing the location of the river prior to establishing the present levees. No evidence of such dramatic change was disclosed by the study, but further work may be needed if any such evidence appears. The best technique would be surveys and maps by remote sensing methods.

**Historic Sites**

Although our consultant historian, as well as SLC staff, were able to find areas of possible interest, we were unable to provide any specific locations of potentially significant archaeological sites in any of the three topics of special interest: obliterated Indian villages, historic riverboat landings, or shipwreck sites that may yield artifacts. While we knew, for example, that Indians lived 20 miles below Sutter's Fort, we were unable to narrow the search area sufficiently by examining maps and documents, or by site inspections. One historical record may say "20 miles,..." but measured using what standard, measured by river miles, or as the bird flies. Another may refer to the same site, and give a different distance, again with no indications of measurement standards. Without such information, locating the site is speculative. Although we know something existed or happened in some general area, the scope of our search, limited to maps and documents, didn't yield data sufficient for us to indicate, on a map, a site with the degree of precision that would enable us to go out, point at the ground, and say "dig here."

### **Obliterated Indian Villages**

Sensible for the times, Indians lived along the river, and would, or could come into the study area during the summer when the waters had receded.

Also, other studies of the river locations after 1840, but prior to the construction of artificial levees, indicates that even though the river was free to meander, natural levees actually restricted this process, except during floods or highwaters which probably occurred frequently enough to destroy easily recognizable traces of Indian Villages. Certainly, some middens may be found, as well as other traces, but we need to obtain or develop more precise locations. Apparently, maps and documents won't provide an easy or a conclusive answer.

### **Historic Riverboat Landings**

Most farms, villages, and would-be villages had a landing of some sort. After all, the river provided the primary and certainly easiest mode of transportation between San Francisco and Sacramento, and all points between. Large and small riverboat companies made regular deliveries and pick-ups of personal and commercial goods. However, fluctuating river stages and custom, dictated the type of landings provided for the boats. Apparently most landings, and particularly the earlier ones, were little more than gang planks that swung either from the boat to shore, or were slid from shore to boat after the boat was tied to a tree, or "deadman" sunk in the bank for the purpose.

Several pictures in the report show examples of typical "landings". They were changed or modified to meet whatever timely need there may have been, and hence, other than a map of some of the sites, little evidence remains of their existence.

It seems that we are, at present, unable to do very much more toward locating significant historical landing sites without combining information obtained from underwater survey devices, physical dives, and parole accounts.

### Shipwreck Sites That May Yield Artifacts, or Even Remains of a Boat

There have been a number of shipwrecks in the project area. Some of them were common knowledge and so we began the investigation with optimism. However, we discovered that the cause of the shipwrecks often reduced our chances to successfully pinpoint locations using solely map and document evidence. Our studies show that wrecks resulted from several situations—the boat either blew up, or snagged itself and tore a hole in the bottom and sank; seldom was the exact site reported or obtained after the fact.

If it blew up, some of the vessel would be damaged, but the remainder sank. Records disclose that at least some cargoes of value were salvaged.

In the case of a less convulsive sinking, the boat, or at least most of its cargo, could often be salvaged, and was. Typically, if the boat snagged and tore a hole in its bottom, the Captain would steer to the nearest bank or sandbar and run aground, saving passengers and cargo. The historical deposits that remain may or may not be substantial.

Our research discovered accounts where the cargo was salvaged, the passengers rescued, and the boat refloated. Sometimes it would even be renamed.

Our investigation of available insurance records, although admittedly not complete because the sources are nearly untraceable or are in the Eastern United States, do not indicate that many large settlements were paid, even though there were a number of wrecks.

Dr. Goldfried provided some information about the impact on the river by hydraulic mining. It is conceivable that many items are covered up if they weren't carried down river. Our explorations in the River seemed to confirm Dr. Goldfried's opinion about the amount of silt or debris from the mining that could be expected in the river, and that it hinders location and recovery of smaller items.

Staff feels that hydraulic mining may have caused movement, along with other causes; to allow for this, staff has not refined sitings beyond the circles shown in the report on the site maps beginning on page 46 in the report.

While artifacts are in the study area, the amount of money and effort required to find and retrieve anything is substantial, and there is no guarantee of return on the investment. There may be, however, a moral obligation to future generations that requires that the effort be made.

Estimated costs are detailed in the chapter entitled *Survey Estimates*, specifically pages 154, and 155, and need not be repeated in detail here except to note the following:

- The cost per site for survey and mapping is \$16,444.00.
- A reasonable cost for scanning and essential corollary actions of this entire section of river is \$243, 802.00. Other alternatives are in the report, providing for different levels of input of existing staff.

Throughout this study, staff has worked towards identification of at least several significant sites that might be set aside for study, use, or development by the historical community. Staff also felt that one ideal situation would be to locate a significant ship wreck, adjacent to a landing and near the remains of an Indian Village, about 20 miles downriver from Sacramento, with transportation to the site provided by the railroad museum in a vintage train. This could be developed into a museum site where riverboating could be highlighted. One prototype of this is at Vicksburg, Mississippi, where a Civil war gunboat is being restored as part of the museum complex.

The history of the lower Sacramento is exciting, dynamic, and peopled with a collection of characters, some courageous, some outrageous. However, it unfortunately may remain a story to be found largely in maps, diaries, photographs and other records unless some additional steps are taken. Suggestions are outlined in the recommendations section.

Records, documents, and maps are not always the only answer. An underwater survey may uncover a site that failed to be reported, or may even have resulted from an incident that happened before John Sutter's time, or even the Spanish colonization of San Francisco. Staff feels that a means for review by all the disciplines must be provided so that decisionmakers are aware of the impact of their actions when use of one of the sites is contemplated.

In summary, perhaps the greatest benefit to be derived from this investigation and report and is that an inventory of potentially significant sites is available, and land-use decisionmakers have a point from which to start their evaluations of future uses of any land within these sites.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

**1. The State Lands Commission should identify the sites noted in this report as being potentially significant historic locations.**

The State Lands Commission staff should, as part of their review of permits and leases, consider the impact on the site and any artifacts that may be contained within the perimeter, and report their findings with their recommendation.

Even though the document and map investigation failed to disclose any specific significant locations, it does suggest that an occurrence happened in that vicinity that may have historical significance. There is no way to be certain, without further research, that the area does not possess significant historical artifacts. Identification as a potential site provides an opportunity to have an intensive historical evaluation prior to any actions that would irretrievably damage the site.

**2. The legislature should be asked for funds to provide State Lands Commission with the equipment essential for underwater research, such as a side-scan sonar, magnetometer, or other device that may be available when the funds are approved.**

This equipment is the best option of instrumentation for the proposed surveying and mapping program. The cost, as detailed in the report beginning on page 129, Chapter 3, would be about \$150,000. The State Lands Commission already has the boat and technical expertise to utilize the equipment.

Using State-owned equipment offers distinct advantages such as providing operational control and flexibility, allowing instant mobilization if a project is done on a site-by-site basis, and availability for use on projects other than the Sacramento River.

**3. A task force should be established that includes, in addition to State Lands Commission staff, professional diving and salvage personnel, historians and archaeologists, as well as others who may have a special expertise that may be needed. The expertise should be available on an as-needed contract basis.**

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An interdisciplinary task force could most effectively evaluate a site. While the map and document investigation was able to locate the general area of a site, it cannot be the sole tool to make a final evaluation of an underwater historical site.

Divers, without some idea of location, have a difficult time diving in the Sacramento River. It should be remembered that most finds in the River, to date, have been in areas where either sinkings were known to have happened, or there was likelihood that something happened, namely, the area adjacent to the City of Sacramento.

The purchases proposed in recommendation 2, above, would make available, on a permanent standby basis, the equipment to help pinpoint, within a general location, any search locations for the divers and their recovery tools.

Existing State Lands Commission boundary staff would be able to conduct the essential on-shore ground surveys to reference the underwater surveys, and provide site maps of the underwater exploration.

The task force should evaluate sites that are being considered for permit, or use, prior to any new physical modification to the area.

**4. State Lands Commission staff should be funded and directed to investigate and prepare a similar map and document report on the upper Sacramento and the San Joaquin Rivers.**

The report would provide the same type of inventory of potential sites that is the primary result of this report. Any sites that may be identified could be treated in the same manner by the already established interdisciplinary task force.

Even though our investigation of the lower Sacramento did not conclusively discover any precisely locatable sites of historical interest, we have amassed a great deal of information, and have a substantial amount of "river knowledge" on staff. Much of the research already completed would be valuable for any similar investigation on the Upper Sacramento and the San Joaquin Rivers.

Review of material already known to us indicates a strong possibility that the upper Sacramento River may have several potential wreck sites and significant historical sites along the River. There are also references, in historical reports, of islands that formed around sunken and abandoned vessels. These would probably provide excellent time capsules, and be of great interest to the community of professional historians.

River boats on the San Joaquin went into the foothills, at least as far as Fort Millerton, upriver from Friant Dam. Boat traffic to

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Stockton was quite heavy and there seems to be potential sites of interest in and along much of the river. Also, the San Joaquin was less affected by hydraulic mining so the underwater recovery problems would be less than might be expected on the Sacramento River.

Considering what is already known about river boating, and now in our data bank, the additional work on both rivers could be accomplished in a shorter period of time, and at an estimated cost of \$65,000, less than half of that appropriated for this study on the Sacramento River.

Based upon some of SLC staff's previous river boundary studies, islands in the Sacramento River, with potential historical sites, may already belong to the State of California as sovereign lands under jurisdiction of the State Lands Commission. If this proves to be the case, exploration or preservation by the historical community would be facilitated.

Similar boundary studies now underway along the San Joaquin may provide the same type of benefit.

With the recent public interest in the San Joaquin River, and the increasing development pressures it is important that historical sites in and along the river be promptly identified. If we wait until development of land intensifies and disturbs what are now relatively natural sites, we will have missed the opportunity to identify, locate, and recover significant sites at a reasonable cost.