

## **Current boating and recreation opportunities on the Lower Tuolumne River below La Grange Dam**

**Notes to the reader:** (RM = River Mile). The confluence of the Tuolumne and San Joaquin Rivers is (RM 0), La Grange Dam on the Tuolumne is (RM 52). Most of the 52 miles along the Lower Tuolumne River are Class I and II at normal summer flows (75-250cfs). However, at RM 42.5 two or three narrow chute maneuvers, in fast water, require Class III skills at most flows. Flows above 250cfs require a higher skill set. Classifications increase rapidly with rising flows on all sections of the river. Flows can be checked at (<http://www.tid.com/water/hydrological-data>). Flows between 150cfs and 250cfs are optimal for most users. Winds tend to blow upstream any time after 9am which can make paddling downstream very tiresome. I recommend starting and finishing your trip early in the day; sunrise to noon is best. Additionally, I recommend that you GPS your pullout location prior to starting your trip so that you don't pass it by.

### **Put In and Take Out Location Notes**

**Old La Grange Bridge (RM 50.5)** - No restroom, no boat launch, no designated parking lot and no signage. Parking and launching from either the north or south bank is possible. However, boats must be carried over a fence and dragged down about 100 yds. to the river. Vehicle safety is a concern. However, you may find the north bank to offer slightly safer parking near the California Department of Fish and Wildlife Office. If you choose to launch on the south bank you may find safer parking in town just 100 yards away from the south bank dirt parking at "Louie's Place Saloon and Grill" (fish tacos and prime rib are great!). Additionally, Valorie Periera owns and operates "Kountry Kayaks" out of Louie's Place, her number is 209-324-1933 and e-mail ([kkayaks@yahoo.com](mailto:kkayaks@yahoo.com)), she's also on Facebook. She has a minimal selection of kayaks. Valorie says, "Most people have me pick them up at Basso and I return them back to Louie's. Some people just want to leave their car at Basso, I take them to the La Grange Bridge and then that way they are able to leave from Basso." Valorie may shuttle you for a minimal fee if you have your own kayaks with you if you, please make arrangements in advance.

**Basso Bridge (RM 48)** – Parking, picnic tables and boat launch. Restrooms have been destroyed. 1 portable toilet may or may not be present and useable. Vehicle safety may be an issue. Little to no patrol of this area by law enforcement. Basso is one of the better public access points on the Lower Tuolumne.

**NOT A PUT IN OR TAKE OUT - River Mile (42.5)** - See Air Photo Map. This turn will eat a novice up. As you paddle through a long glide you will approach a hard left turn through a riffle. This riffle leads to a hard right turn that can paste you up against a sandstone bluff, where you can easily roll or be pinned. The best bet is to exit the river on river right above the riffle, walk down stream and scope it out before attempting it. Portage through the brush is possible on river right.

**Turlock Lake State Recreation Area Campground (TLSRA) (RM 42)** - Boat launch, restrooms, picnic tables in a now privately run campground. Day use parking for put in or take out requires a fee that ranges from \$5 to \$11 (frequent management changes). Some of the longest stretches of river are before and after this location.

**Roberts Ferry Bridge (RM 39.4)** - No restroom, no boat launch, no parking lot and no signage. Parking and launching the north bank is possible. However, one must carry or drag boats down a fairly steep slope 100+ yds. to the river. Vehicle safety is a concern. However, you may find parking at the Roberts Ferry Nut Company, across the street from the grammar school.

**Waterford Park (RM 32)** - Parking lot, restroom, picnic tables, no actual boat launch, 50 yards drag straight uphill from the water to the parking area. Vehicle safety may be an issue here. Works as a good take out spot after a very long paddle from TLSRA. From here the next take out is Fox Grove, there no place to take out in between that is not privately owned.

**Fox Grove (RM 26)** - Parking lot, boat launch, picnic tables, fishing access, no restroom. Vehicle safety may be an issue here. Fox Grove is one of the better facilities on the Lower Tuolumne. Recreation in the grove itself is good but for non-motorized boats once you go under the bridge you cannot get back upstream. It is a long way to the next take out spot in Ceres. Relatively safe stretch for the average boater regardless of flow and marks the beginning of the urban area of the river that is neglected and abused.

**Santa Fe Bridge and Railroad Crossing (RM 22)** - This is not a very legitimate put in or take out. However, very aggressive folks will do ok. No official parking, no restroom, no launch, Very difficult drag up or down hill and over a railing. There are no parking signs posted at the private driveway on the south west bank. However, there are two parking options. Lakewood Cemetery on the south east corner may allow you to use their parking if you make arrangements in advance. Call or write Linda Osborn at: 209-883-2016 or ([Linda.osborn@dignitymemorial.com](mailto:Linda.osborn@dignitymemorial.com)). The other option is the dirt parking strip on the north west corner of the crossing.

**River Bluff Park Ceres (RM 19.7)** - Parking lot but not close to the river's edge due to a gate that was installed. Restrooms very far from the river and up the bank. No launch and no signage to know where to take out. Vehicle safety may be a concern in this area. If you can find it from the river this is a decent location to put in or pull out.

**Legion Park Modesto (RM 17)** - Parking available, picnic tables, no restroom. The boat launch is located west of the Legion Hall Building at the west end of the park but you might find it easier to just launch from the lawn/beach below the picnic area. Vehicle safety may be an issue here. Dennett Dam lies downstream from here about 1 mile. It is a metallic low head dam that has a notch cut in it for fish and boat passage, but it prevents boaters from safely travelling up or downriver without a higher skill set, best to portage around either bank. It is scheduled to be removed in August of 2017.

**Riverdale Park (RM (12.2))** - Parking available. No restrooms and no launch. There is no signage and vehicle safety is a concern. Boaters have to know where to make their way up through the vegetation along the river in order to find it from the water. The parking lot has 3 spaces and is a hundred yards from the river making for a long drag.

**Shiloh Bridge (RM 4)** - The final public access for put in or take out on the lower Tuolumne. There is parking in front of the trailer park on the south east side of the river. This is behind a (sometimes) locked gate that creates a 300 yard carry along a gravel road to the river's edge if the gate is locked. There are no restrooms and there is no launch. Vehicle safety is an issue here as well as the sign that warns river retreaters that the water in the river is unsafe. This is provided by Stanislaus County and has problems with trash and illegal dumping. The next available take out spot from Shiloh Bridge is the privately owned Old Fishermen's Club on the San Joaquin. The next downstream take outs on the San Joaquin are where Highway 132 crosses the San Joaquin River, where there are no facilities, or Durham Ferry in Manteca.

### **Reach and Fishing Notes**

Travel time will vary depending on flow and wind. Paddlers generally travel about 1.5 miles/hour when flows are 100-150cfs. Flows under 150cfs will cause the paddler to occasionally drag their craft over shallow cobble riffles above the Santa Fe crossing and through sandy riffles below Santa Fe. When flows are 150-250cfs travel time increases to 2 to 3mph. Travel time for fisher's varies considerably and will generally slow the pace down to ½ mile per hour. It is best to have your trip planned on a smart phone or GPS. If you are fishing, don't mess around, make good casts and presentations and move on, you don't want to be out after dark and miss your take out. The river is generally closed to all fishing from some time in the fall (about November 30<sup>th</sup>) through about January 1<sup>st</sup>, and barbless hooks are required for all fishing above Hickman Bridge. Salmon cannot be targeted at any time of the year. Please don't take my word for it. READ THE REGULATIONS!!!

#### **Old La Grange Bridge to La Grange Power House and Back (3 miles round trip)**

Trout fisher's may want to try launching at Old La Grange Bridge and paddle/portage upstream as far as possible. Midges, Blue Dunn and assorted nymph trailers work well for fish between 12 and 28 inches. Species: Rainbow trout, striped bass, pike minnow and sunfish.

**Basso Bridge to TLSRA (6 miles)** is the most scenic reach and has fairly safe parking. I highly recommend this reach. It's 5.7 miles and takes about 3.5 to 4.5 hours. There are several tricky spots, the most hazardous is noted above at **RM 42.5**, and is shown on the air photos. Generally void of humans. Striped bass fisher's may want to launch at Basso Bridge and paddle upstream to the head of the run/pool and then fish their way back down past the bridge 6 miles to TLSRA. Large swim baits 6-12 inches in rainbow trout color work best, but big top water stick baits and Rapala's also do well. Fish spook

easy in the clear shallow water, so as you approach a pool make your first cast count, it will probably be your last productive cast in that pool. Black bass fishing is fairly productive from Basso Bridge to Legion Park. Smallmouth are less plentiful than largemouth but not by much. Crank baits and rubber worms work best. Pike minnow fishing can be good from La Grange Bridge to Fox Grove. Fish over 3 feet in length are not uncommon. Pike minnow feed on anything that moves, but tend to favor anything resembling a trout. Species: Rainbow trout, bass, striped bass, pike minnow, sunfish.

**TLSRA to Roberts Ferry (2.6 miles)** is a short reach that contains decent bass and striper fishing. Large swim baits 6-12 inches in rainbow trout color work best for stripers, but big top water stick baits and Rapala's also do well. Fish spook easy in the clear shallow water, so as you approach a pool make your first cast count, it will probably be your last productive cast in that pool. Species: Bass, striped bass, pike minnow, sunfish and carp. Generally void of humans except for the put in and take out.

**Roberts Ferry to Waterford Park (7.4 miles)** is a long reach that contains plenty of fishing. Black bass fishing is fairly productive smallmouth are less plentiful than largemouth but not by much, and spotted bass tend to occupy this reach as well. Crank baits and rubber worms work best. Species: Bass, striped bass, pike minnow, sunfish and carp. Generally void of humans until you arrive at Waterford.

**Waterford Park to Fox Grove (6 miles)** is a long reach that contains plenty of fishing. Crank baits and rubber worms work best. Most bass are under 3lbs. but the big pool at Fox Grove often holds a few in the 5-8lb. range. So, save a little time to fish the mile and a half long pool before you arrive at Fox Grove Boat Launch. Generally void of humans until you arrive at Fox Grove pool. Beware of motorized watercraft, you may run into jet skiers and motor boaters about 1 ½ miles upstream of Fox Grove and continue to see them down to the Fox Grove Boat Launch. Species: bass, striped bass, pike minnow, sunfish, catfish and carp.

**Fox Grove to Santa Fe Bridge (4 miles)** is a moderate reach containing decent bass fishing. Bass in the Fox Grove pool can be in the "HOLY SMOKES" size range, but are generally less than 4 pounds. Sunfish fishing is fairly productive from Fox Grove to Legion Park. Occasionally Warmouth and large bluegill take bass plugs and the like. If they are on the bite they tend to hook up more than bass in some sections. Traditional and bow fisher's alike are able to take carp from Basso Bridge to the confluence of the San Joaquin, but tend to have greater success downstream of the head of Fox Grove pool. Catfish of several species are common but I haven't targeted them. They tend to occupy the river below Fox Grove and above Shiloh. Species: Bass, striped bass, pike minnow, sunfish, catfish and carp. You may run into other fisher's in this reach.

**Santa Fe Bridge to River Bluff Park (2.3 miles)** is a short reach that holds a few fish. Catfish of several species are common but I haven't targeted them. They tend to occupy the river below Fox Grove and above Shiloh. Species: Bass, striped bass, pike minnow, sunfish, catfish and carp. You may run into other fisher's in this reach.

**River Bluff Park to Legion Park (2.7 miles)** is another short reach that holds a few fish. Species: Bass, striped bass, pike minnow, catfish, sunfish and carp. You will likely run into other fisher's and humans at the put in and take out. Do not engage these humans.

**Legion Park to Riverdale Park (4.8 miles)** is a moderate reach through a fully sand bedded reach of the river. Fish do not have much cover through this and lower sections of the river. However, there are fallen trees and some rip rap that will hold fish. Species: Bass, striped bass, pike minnow, sunfish, catfish and carp. You will likely run into humans at the put in and take out. Do not engage these humans.

**Riverdale Park to Shiloh (8.2 miles)** is a long reach through a fully sand bedded reach of the river. Species: Bass, striped bass, pike minnow, sunfish, catfish and carp. I've only sped through this reach in a jet boat.