2025-2026 KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY

Buttonwillow Recreation & Park District

Champagne Taste on a Beer Budget

Release Date
March 18, 2026

Buttonwillow Recreation & Park District
Champagne Taste on a Beer Budget

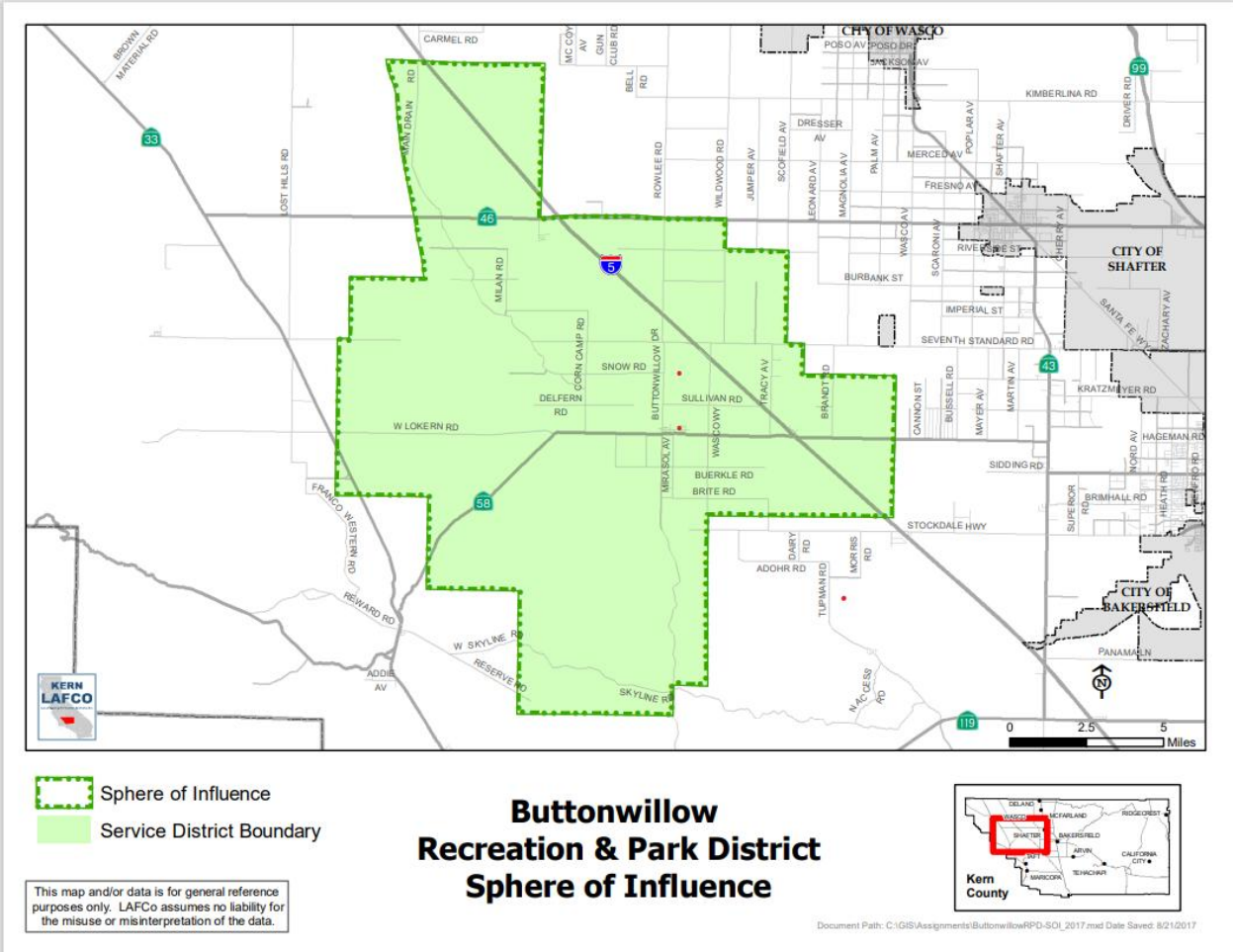
This is a picture of the Buttonwillow Recreation and Park playground with playground equipment.
Picture was taken from the website, www.buttonwillowparks.specialdistrict.org/.

SUMMARY

The Buttonwillow Recreation & Park District (District) appears to be fulfilling its job of serving the citizens of the area. They have many programs throughout the year that are well attended by the public. 2025 was a rough year with board members and staff leaving the District, and operating in a deficit. The District needs greater revenues to continue moving forward.

PURPOSE OF INQUIRY:

A citizen complaint was received by the 2025-2026 Kern County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) regarding the District's operations. Penal Code §933.5, grants grand juries the authority to investigate and examine the books, records, and operations of special purpose assessment or tax districts. The Grand Jury decided to re-examine the district to obtain their current status, and to compare the 2015-2016 and 2021-2022 Grand Jury findings and recommendations.



This image is a map of the District's boundary which also coincides with the District's Sphere of Influence.
Image courtesy of Kern County Local Agency Formation Commission

METHODOLOGY:

The Grand Jury conducted on-site visits to the District at 556 Milo Avenue, Buttonwillow, California. The Grand Jury looked at the District's park, swimming pool area and the main building. This building includes craft rooms, weightlifting rooms, basketball and volleyball courts, and offices. The Grand Jury also conducted interviews, attended the November 17, 2025, Board Meeting, and did a substantial amount of internet research.

DISCUSSION OF FACTS:

1. The Board of Directors consists of five elected community members on staggered 2-year terms.

2. Attendance at board meetings is an issue for some board members.

3. According to the District's Operations Manual, "Board Members are not allowed to miss three consecutive meetings or six per year."

4. Not all board members attend board meetings regularly; one member has missed seven meetings in one year.

5. Since July 2025, two board members and two employees left the District.

6. People from the community are being asked to record the Board Meeting Minutes.

7. The Operations Manual states, "the General Manager will record minutes at meetings."

8. Board Meeting Minutes have not been posted on the website since April 2025.

9. The District's website, www.buttonwillowparks.specialdistrict.org/, is not current.

10. The District's swimming pool has been closed for almost three years.

11. The swimming pool renovation was stopped midstream because the bids were not handled properly.

12. The swimming pool is five feet short in length of being able to be used for official swim meets.

13. The District is having a cash flow issue, losing money each year.

14. The District is using Facebook instead of its website.

15. The staff regularly posts and updates the Facebook page.

16. No one on the staff is capable of updating the District website.

17. Board Members search for grants and corporate donations.

18. A corporate sponsor has provided a part-time Grant Writer for six months.

19. Since July 2025, there have been two resignations from the District Board of Directors. Gov.Code 1780, requires the County election board be notified within 15 days of any board vacancy.

FINDINGS:

F1. The District website has not been updated with current information to keep the public informed.

F2. The Board of Directors does not follow the Operations Manual concerning attendance; some members are missing more meetings than allowed.

F3. A member of the public has been taking Board Meeting Minutes contrary to the Operations Manual. The Operations Manual requires the General Manager to take the Board Meeting Minutes.

F4. The District is losing money each year, which is unsustainable.

F5. A corporate donor has loaned a part-time Grant Writer to the District for six months.

F6. If the swimming pool was five feet longer, it could be used as an official competition pool generating more revenue for the District.

F7. The District did not comply with Gov.Code 1780(a)(b), by failing to notify the Kern County Elections Office of Board vacancies.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The 2025-2026 Kern County Grand Jury recommends:

R1. Effective immediately, the Board of Directors should follow the Operations Manual which states "Board members are not allowed to miss three consecutive meetings or six per year." (Finding F2)

R2. By April 1, 2026, the General Manager should start recording the meeting minutes in compliance with the Operations Manual. (Finding F3)

R3. Effective immediately, the District should continue to search for supplemental funding, such as registering with the Kern Community Foundation, and accessing California Grants portal website, www.grants.ca.gov. (Finding F4)

R4. Effective immediately, the District should hire a full-time Grant Writer. (Finding F5)

R5. By April 1, 2026, consider selling the naming rights to various baseball, soccer fields, weight room, pool and the gymnasium to generate revenue. (Finding F4)

R6. By August 1, 2026, a minimum of two people should be on the staff who can update and work on the District website. (Finding F1)

R7. By April 1, 2026, update the District website. (Finding F1)

R8. By August 1, 2026, extend the swimming pool five feet. (Finding F6)

R9. Effective immediately, the District needs to come into compliance with Gov.Code 1780. (Finding F7)

COMMENTS:

The 2015-2016 Grand Jury Report shows a loss of $200,000. The 2021-2022 report shows a loss of $95,557. In 2025, the District operated at a $102,924 loss. Something needs to happen quickly; the District cannot keep operating at this level.

There are a lot of good people involved in the District who are trying their best to keep it going. The Grand Jury encourages all the Board Members and staff to continue their effort. The community of Buttonwillow and surrounding areas need the Recreation & Park District to be kept alive.

NOTES:

- The Buttonwillow Recreation and Park District should post a copy of this report where it will be available for public review.

- Persons wishing to receive an email notification of newly released reports may sign up at: https://www.kerncounty.com/grandjury

- Present and past Kern County Grand Jury Final Reports and Responses can be accessed on the Kern County Grand Jury website: https://www.kerncounty.com/grandjury

RESPONSE DEADLINE:

- **REQUIRED WITHIN 90 DAYS FROM:**
  Buttonwillow Recreation and Park Board of Directors

RESPONSES ARE REQUIRED PURSUANT TO PENAL CODE §§933(c) AND 933.05:

- **PRESIDING JUDGE**
  SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
  COUNTY OF KERN
  1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 212
  BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301

- **FOREMAN**
  KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY
  1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 600
  BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Cal. Penal Code §929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.