2025-2026 KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY

NORTH OF THE RIVER
RECREATION AND PARK DISTRICT

More than Fun and Games

Release Date
April 30, 2026

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RECREATION AND PARK DISTRICT

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SUMMARY:

Currently, the North of The River Recreation and Park District (District) encompasses 215 square miles. Within these boundaries, the District manages 25 parks, totaling 270 developed acres. The District serves over 153,000 people from diverse economic backgrounds. In addition, they offer numerous programs serving families, youths, seniors, and shut ins. Its funding is derived from property tax assessments imposed on the residents of the District and various grants.

Playground equipment in a North of the River park
Photo from the 2025 District Annual Report

PURPOSE OF INQUIRY:

This inquiry was conducted pursuant to Penal Code §933.5. The Kern County Grand Jury had not reviewed the District since 2005. Considering the size of the budget and the growing number of residents residing within the District, a current review was deemed appropriate. Such an inquiry could provide insight that may not otherwise be readily available to the public.

METHODOLOGY:

The 2025-2026 Kern County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) interviewed District employees, visited the Rasmussen Senior Center, numerous parks, attended a Board Meeting, and viewed the North of the River Christmas Parade. Several residents were interviewed regarding various programs currently offered. Additionally, the Grand Jury examined the budget and reviewed information from the internet.

BACKGROUND

Originally organized in 1955 as the North of the River Public Recreation Department, it was reorganized and renamed in 1960 as the North of the River Recreation and Park District; Rosedale, Fruitvale, and Greenacres parks were also added that year. The North of the River Recreation and Park District operates under CA State Resources Code §5780.

Greenacres Park including a softball field
Photo from the District website, www.norfun.org/our-parks

DISCUSSION OF FACTS:

The District owns five undeveloped parcels being held for future parks.

In 2025, the District operated with a staff of 88 full-time and 178 part-time and hourly/seasonal employees. It also utilized 86 volunteers, providing an additional 6,784 hours of service. The current budget of $18,800,000 is derived primarily from property taxes levied upon all properties within the District. (See Addendum)

Revenues are derived from property taxes at an average of $0.05 per $100 of assessed valuation on all commercial, residential, and mineral properties within the District. Mineral taxes make up approximately 12.6% of the total estimated revenues. Property taxes paid by homeowners and commercial property owners, as a portion of the 1% county-wide tax, make up the remainder of the tax revenue appropriation.

The District conducts weekday after-school programs for Standard, Beardsley, Fruitvale, Rosedale, and Norris School Districts.

Activities are posted on the District's updated website (www.norfun.org) and in the Fun Book published by the district and available either online or in a hard copy. The website provides a link which can translate the brochure into 101 languages.

The Rasmussen Senior Center served 120,085 meals in 2025, of which 82,344 were Meals on Wheels. This is approximately 5,000 fewer meals delivered in 2024, while meals eaten at the center increased by approximately 5,000. The meals are prepared on premises, and a reservation is needed for those eating at the center. There is a suggested voluntary contribution of $3.00. These meals are only available Monday through Friday.

Grant funds provide for a large senior program, including prepared lunches and home delivered meals (Meals on Wheels).

Almost all of the Senior activities are scheduled during the day, Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM.

Golden Empire Transit On-Demand provides transportation for seniors and disabled adults to the Rasmussen Senior Center.

FINDINGS:

F1. Currently, most senior activities are scheduled Monday through Friday, this limits evening and weekend access for seniors.

F2. Reservations are required for transportation provided by Golden Empire Transit with a fee, determined by age, disability, etc.

F3. The District's website has been updated to be more user friendly, providing greater overview of the activities being offered with dates, times, and cost to participate.

F4. The Rasmussen Senior Center and Meals on Wheels only operate on weekdays, leaving few viable options for meals for seniors on weekends.

F5. The California Prevailing Wage requirements create a major obstacle for developing additional park sites.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The 2025-2026 Kern County Grand Jury recommends:

R1. By July 1, 2026, the District explore and report on increasing weekend and evening activities for seniors, families and/or children. (Findings F1, F4)

R2. By July 1, 2026, the District include funding for weekend meals in the budget. (Finding F4)

COMMENTS:

The 2025-2026 Kern County Grand Jury thanks the District staff for their cooperation in providing information for this report.

NOTES:

- The North of The River 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: 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: www.kerncounty.com/grandjury

RESPONSE DEADLINE:

- **REQUIRED WITHIN 90 DAYS FROM:**
  Board of Directors, North of The River Recreation and Park District

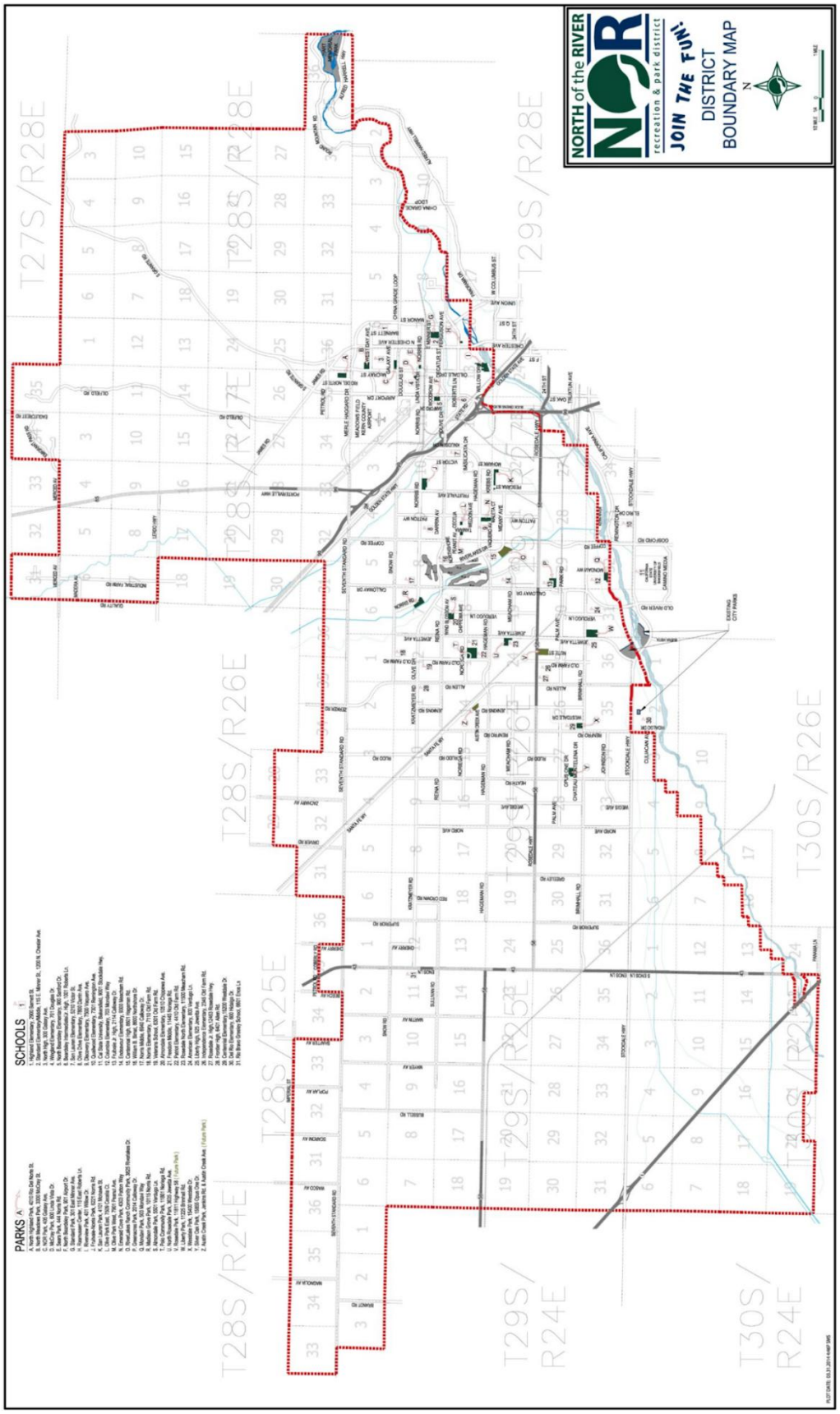
RESPONSES ARE REQUIRED PURSUANT TO PENAL CODE §§933(c) AND 933.05:

- **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.

ADDENDUM:



This map displays the footprint of the North of The River Recreation and Parks District outlined in red.