



Bidwell Park Pulse

Quarterly Newsletter of the City of Chico's Park Division

2011: Annual Report

Winter is a great time to reflect and check progress on our personal resolutions. It's also a good time to ponder the Park's future, and reflect on our progress in the Parks Division. This edition of the Pulse provides a snapshot of that progress. Citizen's who would like details can refer to the annual report presented to the February 2012 Bidwell Park and Playground Commission meeting (see page 8 for details).

Many citizens think of Chico as a small town with a big park, instead of the 14th largest metropolitan area in California with a regional park, jam-packed with sensitive resources that receives more annual visits than Redwood or Lassen National Park. For example, vehicle traffic estimates on the paved portion of Upper Park Road exceed 250,000 annually. That number excludes people that get there by bike, horse, or foot or playing at Hooker Oak. That number doesn't even reflect the number of people inside those cars or going to other parts of the Park.

The traffic counts provide one means of quantifying visitors. In the past, routine estimates of Bidwell Park usage have not occurred. Accurate visitation data allows us to create adequate staffing plans for peak times, budget allocation, emergency planning, and provides a clearer picture to granting agencies.

In the next few years, we will develop the data to arrive at good estimates, but even in the absence of good data, a crude estimate at least provide a starting point that we can continue to refine over time. Our "very preliminary / ballpark / best guess estimate until more definitive numbers can be developed" for visits annually to Bidwell Park exceeds 1,000,000.

Our management practices need to catch up to that tremendous use and 21st century standards. We've not done enough to remedy past actions or plan for current and future recreational uses. Forty or fifty years ago, dozers carved fuel breaks in the park with the idea that the cleared paths could serve as jeep roads. The jeeps are gone, the fire breaks grown over, but the damage from this practice is still evident. Parts of the Middle Trail follow the old dozer cuts, which means that we've inherited poor alignment and drainage issues that must be addressed to make the trail enjoyable and sustainable.

We ponder these challenges in the face of diminished resources. Yet for our community, there is no choice about our obligation to care for the park. Despite budget cuts, we have realigned the Parks Division to better equip ourselves for the future.

One thing that is clear from compiling the information related to the 2011 annual report is the remarkable breadth of tasks and long list of accomplishments that the Division completed last year. Some more salient accomplishments include:

Parks Division Programs

- Administrative Services
- Maintenance Crew
- Ranger/Lifeguard
- Volunteer Program
- Natural Resource Management
- Outreach and Education

- 1) Continued strides in our trail work and outreach from the public.
- 2) Improved outreach and education efforts including Park Talks, Quarterly newsletter, Ranger Bike Tours, and targeted signage in the Park.
- 3) Increased capacity of Parks staff in wildland management. Some efforts are large, such as the prescribed burn in Middle Park. Others are small, such as the redesign of entrances, to provide a more welcoming entry (and better habitat) into the Park. We are also testing new techniques such as using planted native grasses to demonstrate how to reduce fire dangers and maintenance costs, while providing weed resistant, beautiful wildlife habitat.
- 4) Re-examination of contracts. For example, in the case of a water quality contract for Big Chico Creek, the rewritten scope of work reduced the contract by more than \$20,000 annually.

So what does 2012 look like for the Park? Citizen's can track our progress on a number of tasks:

- 1) Upcoming Trails and Natural Resource Management Plans seek public input to lay out park priorities and articulate park management tasks.

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The Bidwell Park Pulse

The Bidwell Park Pulse is a quarterly newsletter of the City of Chico's Parks, Open Spaces, Greenways, and Preserves Division. The Parks Division is part of the General Services Department, and is responsible for maintaining and operating City parks, open space, and recreation areas including Bidwell Park, Children's Playground, Depot Park, City Plaza, Lindo Channel, Little Chico Creek Greenway, Teichert Ponds, and other preserves. Parks Division programs include: Maintenance, Ranger, Lifeguard, and Volunteer Programs. Printed on 100% recycled paper.



City of Chico Mission

To protect and enhance our community's quality of life for present and future generations.

Bidwell Park and Playground Commission (BPPC)

The BPPC is vested with the supervision, control and management of many public parks and playgrounds within the City. **Commissioners:** Mary Brentwood, Clay Craig, Lisa Emmerich, Mark Herrera, Jim Mikles, Jim Moravec, Richard Ober (Chair). **Staff Liaison:** Lise Smith-Peters, Administrative Analyst.

Contact

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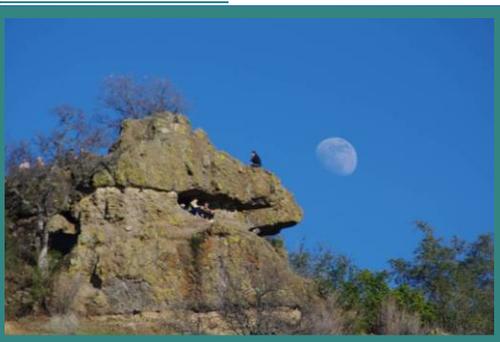
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Featured Banner Photograph

Photo Courtesy of Abram House Photography
Abramhousephotography.com
Ab.house@juno.com

Park Postcard:



Where is it? *Ok, maybe this one is too easy...Answer on p.8.*



(Photo Courtesy of Tom Barrett)

2) Bidwell Park poses unique challenges to trail building, and we've come a long way toward improving our approach. Last year, we completed over 3,000 feet of improvements to the Middle Trail with the help of staff, volunteers, and the California Conservation Corps. We will continue those efforts and explore sustainable options to protect Monkey Face.

3) Continuation of active wildland management, such as invasive plant management, plantings, and erosion control projects.

4) We must confront our aging infrastructure. The list is long: roads, paths, restrooms, fencing, signage, and so on, that are either decades old or engineered for a smaller population. Updated facilities will make them safer, more enjoyable, and easier to maintain. For example, our daily safety inspections and repairs of Caper Acres sometimes take hours each day, just to open the gates. New features may not only help capture the next generation's imagination, but prove to be cheaper to maintain.

In the Park, our successes and failures are fully displayed; and visitors will notice our progress. These include continued trail improvements and development of a trail system, prioritized weed control efforts, restrooms with vandal resistant surfaces and good lighting. Other efforts will be more subtle; visitors may observe more wildflowers in burn areas, safer gateways, and hopefully, more wildlife.

As we embark on this journey, we will share milestones with the public and provide opportunities for public input so that we can continue to improve. We report our progress to the Bidwell Park and Playground Commission (citizens can view these on the web or get on our mailing list). The Park Division provides an electronic newsletter (Bidwell Park Pulse), and quarterly Park Talks. Shortly, we will foray into social media. Citizens have been overwhelmingly positive in our approach. Still, we would like to hear what means of communication serves the public best.

Last year, volunteers devoted over 17,500 hours to their community. To build on these efforts, we are developing a training program for Park Watch, Trail volunteers, and volunteer leaders. Thoughtfully leveraging scarce City resources with these efforts will help us move forward on goals that may be impossible to undertake otherwise.

So what can you give to the Park?

Join us for a volunteer day. Adopt a picnic site. Attend a meeting. Donate to the Parks Division. Join Park Watch. Buy a Caper Acres brick. Endeavor to become a Volunteer Leader. Pick up trash. Stay on trails and stay off when it's muddy. Greet other park users.

Annie and John Bidwell demonstrated incredible foresight and generosity in their precious gift to the City of Chico. We all share a sacred responsibility to carry out that vision and to give it the tender loving care it deserves.

These upcoming efforts will require the community's support to move forward. Are you ready to help?

-Dan Ejseaff, Park and Natural Resource Manager, City of Chico

2011 Highlights: Park Ranger Program



Park rangers are entrusted with protecting, promoting and enhancing the natural and cultural resources of City of Chico parks, greenways, open spaces and preserves, and they play a critical part in maintaining public safety as well as perform an important educational role in the community. Rangers carry out a variety of functions including rule enforcement, emergency response, visitor assistance, event coordination, education and outreach, and they work

closely with Code Enforcement as well as Police and Fire Departments. Two full-time and two permanent seasonal park rangers were on staff this past year, responsible for protecting over 4,000 acres of City owned resources, which received an estimated 1 million visits. The rangers have performed well, despite limited financial and staff resources, and pride themselves in responding professionally and promptly to their varied responsibilities.

Among these responsibilities, community outreach and education is an important element of the Ranger program and is intended to foster stewardship and appreciation of the parks and recreational resources. This past year, the rangers were involved in numerous outreach efforts, including developing informational campaigns, leading bike tours, staffing several information booths, and conducting a number of interpretive programs at local elementary schools. These programs provided valuable information that enhanced park users' enjoyment and safety while also promoting the protection of our natural and cultural resources.



Rangers, along with other City staff participated in the 911 Safety Pals show this past year.

In an effort to expand community involvement, the Parks Division and Police Department hosted the National Night Out event at Caper Acres on August 2nd. Neighborhoods throughout Chico were invited to join forces with thousands of communities for the 28th Annual National Night Out event; a year long community building campaign, designed to invite citizens to participate in local anti-crime programs, heighten crime prevention awareness and strengthen relationships between neighborhoods and law enforce-

ment agencies. Rangers, law enforcement personnel, and city officials were present at the event and provided an opportunity to share information and to support citizen efforts.

Through community interaction, rangers gain insight as to what programs might benefit the park and improve visitor experiences. This past year the Ranger program launched a series of efforts designed to educate park users on rules and encourage safety. The "Be a Responsible Pet Owner" campaign was launched in late October. As part of the campaign, park rangers posted informational signs targeting pet owners, provided education on park rules and etiquette, and ramped up enforcement of pet related regulations. Staff noted that since the campaign launch, compliance with leash rules has increased, and the number of dogs in prohibited areas has decreased. Continuing to strive to make the park safer and more enjoyable for all visitors, another campaign, "Share the Trail," was fully implemented in 2011. Seasonally, rangers placed banners and kiosk signs up reminding visitors to "Approach Slowly, Announce Early and Pass Carefully." The signs were intended to remind visitors to safely share the trail.



While the focused efforts within the park have seen measurable results, Rangers strive to keep all of Chico's citizens, including those that may not regularly frequent the park, well informed of park information with the introduction of the "Park Minute." Expected to air soon, the "Park Minute" consists of 60 second radio public service announcements. The campaign presents topically relevant safety and educational information about Bidwell Park to the community and will play as public service announcement on local radio stations throughout the year. Currently, 13 different "Minutes" are recorded in English with the possibility of adding additional topics and recordings in Spanish.

The combined enforcement efforts, coupled with a strong educational and outreach program have culminated in the rangers' ability to effectively protect and promote the City of Chico's natural and cultural resources for present and future generations. The park rangers are committed to this endeavor and will continue to accomplish this mission by providing education to the public, professional customer service, and consistent and fair enforcement of the law.



Ranger Romain holding an injured barn owl at Caper Acres.

-Jessica Erdahl, Senior Park Ranger, City of Chico
(Background Photo Courtesy of Abram House Photography)

2011 Highlights:

Bidwell Park and Greenway Volunteers

The Bidwell Park Volunteer Program logged over 17,500 hours of volunteer work during 2011. The majority of this time was spent with habitat restoration efforts, which includes removing invasive weeds, propagating native plants, and restoring areas with native species. Some of 2011 highlights include:

- The City of Chico's partnership with Associated Students' Community Action Volunteers in Education (CAVE) is in its 6th year and in 2011 equaled 1,590 hours of student time spent in Bidwell Park.



Community Action in Education (CAVE) students cut up private trees to pack a dumpster at Lost Park.

- Sigma Chi Fraternity logged over 100 hours at their adopted picnic site #40 and received a grant of \$540 to purchase native plants from the Associated Students' Sustainability Funding Allocation Program.



Chico High School Horticulture students collect cuttings for a native plant project in their campus greenhouse.

- Chico High School horticulture students put in over 150 hours cultivating native plants for the Park's restoration sites. Students worked throughout the school year on this project and had two field days to take cuttings and to plant.



CSUC Phi Kappa Alpha Fraternity cleaned and applied sealant to the World of Trees viewing-sheds during Earth Day in Bidwell Park 2011.

- Friends of Bidwell Park spent over 1,500 hours continuing their annual beneficial projects: Privet removal and monitoring throughout lower park; bladder senna removal; overseeing park interns; and lending support to the City's Volunteer Program.
- For six-weeks during June-July, the City of Chico's partnership with CSUC's Upward Bound Program hosts 10 high school students.
- Barbour neighborhood and the Bidwell Park volunteer program put in close to 200 hours working at the Comanche Creek greenway.
- International Mt. Bike Association conducted a training workshop on trail repair with locals in Fall 2011. Since the training, Volunteers have worked with the Park trail crew on repairing sections of Upper Park trails.
- Make a Difference Day in Bidwell Park held on October 22 was the largest annual work day to date with a total of 366 volunteers. Work consisted of weed and litter removal at One Mile Recreation Area as well as a cleanup of Lost Park by Rotary of Chico and Friends of Bidwell Park.

-Lise Smith-Peters, Management Analyst/Volunteer Coord., City of Chico

(Background Photo: Young volunteers receive a safety briefing before going to work in the Park.)

2011 Highlights:

Urban Forest Program



Joint training with Butte County Tree Crew

Chico has submitted its application for its 28th Year as a Tree City USA. This is a national program that recognizes City's who attain certain standards of municipal tree care, namely:

- Have a tree ordinance defining responsibility of care for City trees
- Have an active Tree Board or Committee – The Bidwell Park and Playground Commission serves this role.
- Spend at least \$2.00 per capita on tree care. City spent just over \$9.00 per person in 2011.
- Have an annual Arbor Day Celebration, which in Chico is March 7th, Luther Burbank's birthday and California's Arbor Day.

The City of Chico received a grant in 2008 to complete an urban forest inventory – this grant led to a study and Master thesis, completed by Urban Forestry intern Scott Gregory, which defined some of the monetary benefits of trees in Chico. According to the study, each year the City's street trees:

- Sequester 42,980 tons of carbon, at a value of \$710,656
- Provide energy savings of \$556,696
- Absorb and reduce air pollutant, with a benefit value of \$412,200
- Produce \$223,693 in storm water services

This can be compared to the \$847,867 it cost to maintain the 30,667 street trees.

The tree crew completed the following during the year:

- SERVICE REQUESTS- Completed 634 requests, 2333 hours total
- DCBA- 334 hours - elevating and safety pruning street trees
- FORMATIVE PRUNING- 847 street trees pruned
- STORM DAMAGE CLEAN UP- 329 hours.



- ROUTINE ELEVATING- 204 hours.
- DOWN LIMBS AND HANGERS- 685 hours.
- PRIORITY TRIMMING- 7 hours.
- DOWNTOWN PLAZA- 71 hours, formative pruning 42 trees.
- TRAFFIC SAFETY- 149 hours to improve visibility and safety.
- SCHOOL ZONES- 290 hours pruning City Street trees for safety.
- PRIORITY REMOVALS- 81 hours.
- PARK PRUNING- 194 hours.
- TREE IRRIGATION-666 hours watering 450 trees in summer.

The City's Capital Projects Department and the Urban Forest Manager work together to improve construction practices around existing trees. These include exposing roots along side trenches so that only the necessary roots are pruned.



Staff illustrating planting techniques to assist with plantings at Jarvis Gardens on E 20th St.

A new landscape contractor, Carson Landscape Industries of Sacramento was awarded the Contract for the City's landscape maintenance services. They have sub-contracted with Sierra Landscape of Chico for the work.



Fall 2011 Tree Planting Workshop

The City began a new program to encourage citizens to plant and care for their own trees. The new program results in the planting of 85 new trees.

*-Denice Britton, Urban Forest Manager, City of Chico
(Background Photo Courtesy of Robert Woodward)*

2011 Highlights:

Maintenance Program

The Park Maintenance staff is involved in a broad mix of tasks that range from the daily facility upkeep to the many seasonal programs where we supply a highly skilled work force.

To cover just a few, let's start with our trail program, which runs between sixteen and twenty weeks each year. In that time frame, crews can vary from one staff member to twenty volunteers and or CCC crew workers and work from simple brushing to the complete rebuilding of trail bed sections. The pool season operates from Memorial Day to Labor Day with a weeks worth of pool preparation before and once a week cleaning throughout the summer.



Maintenance staff Lloyd Johns leads CA Conservation Corps on Middle Trail Project 2011

Staff often prepares the Park for the many special events that occur throughout the year. Some of the park areas require special care such as Caper Acres where careful inspections of the play equipment must be performed daily and repairs are made in a swift concise manner when possible.



One Mile reservation area is an ideal venue for family picnics and community functions, hosting hundreds of events annually.

Bidwell Park's restrooms have hundreds of users everyday and all but one are older facilities. The restrooms are kept safe and clean daily for the public by staff that are dedicated to providing the best park experience possible.



Crew installs French drain to accommodate donated all-weather water fountain at Parking Lot E.

The last program, natural resource management, is one of the newest and is really an umbrella for the many new approaches staff is undertaking for the care of Bidwell Park. This program includes revamping parking lots, trail heads, entrances, open spaces, invasive species control and the reworking of Upper Park road to reduce erosion.



Park crew, Rangers, CA Conservation Corps, and Chico Fire Dept conduct a prescribed burn in Middle Park to control for Medusa Head, Ripgut Brome and Starthistle.

*-Jimi Logsdon, Park Field Maintenance Supervisor, City of Chico
(Background: Parking Lot D – split rail installation to protect Blue Oaks.)*

Spring 2012 Volunteer & Park Watch Training



***Bidwell Park
Volunteers
Rock!***



If you have thought about volunteering in the park, now is the perfect time to get involved! Information about the Park Division and Volunteer Programs will be presented:

When: Thursday March 15th 6:00- 9:00 PM

Where: 2nd Floor of the Old Municipal Building, 441 Main Street

Training Programs that will be offered:

Trail Volunteer Program Training

The Park Division will offer a two-part Trail Volunteer Program Orientation for community members interested in helping work on Bidwell Park trails. Volunteers who wish to work on park trails should attend both sessions: Follow-up training is on Saturday, March 31st at 8:30 a.m.

Park Watch Training

As ambassadors of the park, Park Watch volunteers provide visitors with information and advise park staff about damage, hazards, vandalism, or other concerns they encounter. The program's mission is to provide a highly visible volunteer presence in the park that fosters a safe environment. Park Watch volunteers must be at least 18 years old, pass a criminal background check and volunteer a minimum of 4 hours per month. Follow-up training on Saturday, March 17th at 10:00 a.m.

Volunteer Team Leader Program Training

The Park Division is developing a new Volunteer Team Leader Program to train volunteers to lead others in constructive park work, the safe use of tools, and share information on invasive weeds and native plants. Team Leaders will conduct work sessions during annual events such as Earth Day and will be available to lead other monthly sessions based on their availability. Follow-up training on Saturday, March 31st at 9:00 a.m.

To apply and RSVP, please call the Park Division at 530-896-7800
Or by email contact: ispeter@ci.chico.ca.us or parkwatch@ci.chico.ca.us

2011 Park Division and Bidwell Park

By the Numbers

| | | | |
|----------------|--|------------------|--|
| 4,799 | Chico township population in 1900. | 12.4 | Acres of Parkland per 1,000 residents, National Median. |
| 1905 | The year Annie Bidwell donated land to the City of Chico. | 41 | Acres of Parkland per 1,000 residents, Chico. |
| 86,187 | Chico population in 2010. | 17,501 | Volunteer hours donated in 2011 |
| 212,968 | Chico metropolitan area population (includes Oroville and Paradise) in 2010. | 13,483 | Dollars donated to the Parks Fund in 2011. |
| 1,903 | Original acres of Bidwell Park. | 384,570 | Total visits to Lassen National Park. |
| 3,670 | Number of acres of Bidwell Park today. | 261,624 | Annual total of vehicles that travel on the paved portion of Upper Park Road. |
| 14 | US Ranking of Bidwell Park among municipally owned parks. | 1,158,571 | Preliminary, conservative estimate (best guess) of total visits to Bidwell Park. |
| 3 | California Ranking of Bidwell Park among municipally owned parks. | | |

(Background Photo Courtesy of Abram House Photography)

View the Annual Report

Please visit: http://www.chico.ca.us/government/minutes_agendas/bidwell_park_playground_commission.asp

Answer to "Where is it?": Do you see the primate? Monkey Face of course. In early 2012, Staff and the BPPC began collecting public input on trail planning to address erosion and trail issue.



Park Division
General Services Department

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