



# Bidwell Park Pulse

## 2012 Annual Report

This edition of the Pulse summarizes the Parks Division progress made in Bidwell Park and other areas of Chico. Citizen's who would like additional details may refer to the annual report presented to the Bidwell Park and Playground Commission (see page 8 for details).

"National parks are the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst." Wallace Stegner, 1983.

In 1905, Annie Bidwell, on behalf of herself and her late husband, John Bidwell, gifted 1,903 acres to the City of Chico, "as a token of their love and affection and that the grand work of God may be preserved to his glory and the happiness and pleasure of the people of said City for all time."

The deed required the "preservation and protection of the waters of Chico Creek" and to "sacredly guard" the trees, shrubs, and vines of the Park. These conservation concepts are certainly fitting of a couple that was close friends with John Muir, and a unique, extraordinarily generous gift for the early 1900's. Although a city park, Bidwell Park certainly fits in the "best idea" tradition, and continues to have a profound influence on the City and region.

Park visitors have long felt that Bidwell Park is their personal treasure. On February 22, 2013, the California Parks and Recreation Society (CPRS), District 2 will recognize Bidwell Park as a Regional Treasure. District 2 covers 19 California counties.

Bidwell Park seems well matched with the criteria for the award; Regional Treasures have great historical significance and tremendous multi-generational impact on the quality of life in the region. They contribute to the economic vitality of the region. On all counts, Bidwell Park is worthy of recognition. Another aspect of the award is to recognize significant organizations, partnerships, and individuals that support Park programs or facilities. We are lucky

to have a community that feels passionate about the Park and contributes to a variety of recreational opportunities and volunteers time for its care.

The affinity that the community holds for Bidwell Park runs extremely deep and resides in our community's DNA. The City logo shows a depiction of the Hooker Oak -- one of the famous historical landmarks in the Park. Generations of people (and their kids) from the Northern Sacramento Valley have swam in the Park's cool waters, hiked beneath majestic valley oaks, watched the antics of acorn woodpeckers, and frolicked at Caper Acres. And long before that, this landscape sustained the native Mechoopda people.

Yet amidst this celebration of the Park and vision of the Bidwells, we also need to acknowledge the needs of the Park and to "sacredly guard" it. We call upon everyone that steps into the Park to be good stewards: to pick up waste, to stay on trails, to tread lightly when it is wet, to leave the flowers for the bees, to keep the dog on a leash, to be courteous to others, to volunteer, to donate, to educate others, to build a culture that the Park is a delicate treasure.

In the following pages, we will highlight our accomplishments over this past year. We have all been given so much from our beautiful open spaces, we ask you to give something back. Enjoy the park, yes, but also volunteer, donate, educate, and help us "sacredly guard"

the Park and all of our open spaces.

We look forward to working with you in 2013!

~Daniel Efsseff, Park and Natural Resource Manager

### Parks Division Programs

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

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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, Lisa Emmerich (Chair), Mark Herrera, Jim Moravec, Richard Ober, Janine Rood, and Drew Traulsen. **Staff Liaison:** Lise Smith-Peters, Park Services Coordinator.

**Contact**

Questions, comments, or photo contributions?

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**About the Banner Photograph**

Recent efforts on Monkey Face



Rangers continue to monitor trail and course conditions during wet weather.

**2012 Highlights:****Administrative and Visitor Services**

Administrative functions of the Parks Division include reservations, permits, support and analysis for Bidwell Park and Playground Commission meetings, development and management of budgets, vendor payments and contracts, and customer and visitor services.

All Park Division staff carry out some duties in this area, and shared administrative staff from the General Service Department (GSD) and other parts of the City support this function as well. Our efforts in customer and visitor services are an important part of providing citizens with a good experience in the park and community.

**Brief highlights:**

- Staff continued efforts to provide BPPC agendas and information packets in a timely fashion with the entire packet going out 5-6 days before the meeting (the legal requirement is that the agenda must be posted 72 hours before the meeting).
- The Park Division processed \$524,146 in payments to over 118 vendors (60% were local) to provide professional services, materials, and supplies (Parks also support enhanced real estate values, sporting equipment sales, event sales, health benefits, and venues for supporting non-profits).
- Estimates indicate a staggering number of use for Bidwell Park. The preliminary estimate of annual visits to Bidwell Park exceeds 1.9 million with vehicle traffic counts on Bidwell Park roads exceeding over 650,000 vehicles.
- Staff is developing an online reservation system with Active Network. This system will help customers to identify the location, content, availability and cost of reservations and to make a reservation from any computer at any time using the Internet.
- An updated fees schedule will be developed to better capture staff costs associated with permits. For example, in the past, a Park Attendant would help with set-up, break-down, and monitor events; however as that position has been cut, Rangers currently provide event assistance. Realistic fees may help capture these costs and devote an hourly staffer to support the event and allow Rangers to better serve other park users.
- Staff issued a total of 360 permits (118 public and 242 private events) and made 334 reservations at Caper Acres.
- A minimum of 81,472 people participated in public events (the estimates do not include spectators, which could increase the numbers significantly).



*2012 Highlights:*

## Park Ranger Program

Chico Park Rangers experienced an exhilarating 2012 while being engaged in a wide variety of tasks. Without a doubt, most would agree our office has the best views in town. Rangers are privileged to do the work we do and we look enthusiastically forward to the opportunities and challenges facing us in the new year.

Education and outreach remain the hallmark of the ranger program. Rangers promote an understanding of City open spaces and wild lands and the proper uses of natural resources. Both adults and children are taught preparedness and how to avoid life threatening situations in the park's wilderness areas. Resource protection, stewardship, park history, and safety imbue the ideals rangers impart to an eager public wanting to know more about the treasured resource and legacy of the Bidwells.



*A young participant at the 2nd Annual National Night Out event receives a Jr. Ranger sticker.*

This past year, rangers collectively attended more professional development trainings than previous years. Rangers require a wide spectrum of skills and abilities and trainings included wildlife awareness, search & rescue, customer service oriented communication, advanced medical training, and fire suppression.

In 2012, ranger staff initiated the "Park Minute", a radio campaign designed to educate the community about park issues, safety and natural and cultural resources in the park. The success of the public service announcements and positive feedback from the public has generated a request for additional "minutes." Also, Rangers are sought after speakers for interpretive and public safety presentations at community events and schools. Rangers participated in the Snowgoose Festival; National Night Out; ranger led bike tours; Endangered Species Faire; and 911 Safety Pals.

Rangers serve an important public safety role, with rangers often first responders to incidents in the park, open spaces, and preserves. Within minutes after citizen's reported last June's 30-acre wildfire in Middle Bidwell Park (which started in the Sycamore Diversion Channel and raced toward the Hooker Oak and 5 Mile Recreation Areas), Rangers evacuated the area and assisted Chico Fire and Police with maintaining perimeters, traffic control, road closures

and notifying nearby residents. Last year, rangers guided agency personnel to accident sites and assisted in missing person searches. Rangers work often with Park Watch members on many projects, and worked with Volunteers in Police to staff information points in Upper Park. As a result, incidents and enforcement contacts during these periods were improved.

In recent years, rangers have taken an increasingly active role in monitoring the park. Rangers oversee the wet weather protocol to monitor trails and the Peregrine Point disc golf course. In 2012, Rangers extended visitation monitoring to Lower Park. Accurate visitation data allows the Park Division to create adequate staffing plans for peak times, budget allocation, emergency planning, and provides a clearer picture to granting agencies.

Bidwell Park remains a microcosm of the City of Chico and experiences many of the same City's problems. Rangers face challenges to address increased homeless issues, calls for service, and a rise in park rule violations. Rangers also work closely with the Police to help locate wanted subjects or serving as another set of eyes to protect the public.

2013 promises to be an exciting and challenging year for park staff. Rangers Jessica, Shane, Lisa and our newest ranger, Eric, look forward to engaging visitors and doing what we do best... protecting, promoting and enhancing the natural and cultural resources of the City entrusted to us.

*-Lisa Barge, Park Ranger, City of Chico  
(Background Photo Courtesy of Abram House Photography)*



*Ranger Barge explaining rattlesnake behavior at the spring safety faire.*

## 2012 Highlights: Volunteers & Donations

*You make a living by what you get. You make a life by what you give.*  
~Winston Churchill

When citizens take the opportunity to invest time and energy to Bidwell Park, their respect for our unique resource grows deeper and stronger. Our community provides vital volunteer hours and donations for Bidwell Park and greenways. In 2012, volunteers contributed 19,800 hours to weed removal, native plant restoration, trail work, crew leading, propagating native plants and seed collection, Park Watch, painting, litter removal and gps mapping. Cash and in-kind donations totaled over \$51,000.

In this day and age, everyone has competing interests vying for their time, be it a job, school, children, sports or other interests. The fact that volunteers make the time to volunteer is evidence of their love and willingness to invest in the health of their Park.

Some volunteers obtain class credit or fulfill



Home Depot contributes tools annually to Earth Day and sends a team!

community service requirements during their time at the University, whereas others devote time to the Park and greenways as their regular volunteer destination.

Park volunteers may Adopt-A-Site or lead other volunteers in work sessions. For example, long-time volunteer Susan Mason has lead volunteers to log in thousands of hours. Others choose to volunteer on large annual park work days, such as Make a Difference

**Volunteer Program Mission:**  
*enlist the help of the local community in managing Park resources and expand volunteerism in as many aspects of enhancing Bidwell Park as possible (Bidwell Park Volunteer Manual, April 2007)*

Day and Earth Day that usually see a diverse assemblage of students, families, community service groups and individuals).

These events are fun (there is nothing like working in unison with a few hundred folks...!) and attract groups

to make an annual commitment to pull a team together.

Volunteers get their hands dirty and their muscles worked, and also learn about the Park's history; ecology; plant life, and build skills while supporting the Parks' resource management goals.

Park and greenway volunteers make an invaluable investment in time, energy and stewardship. Using estimates from the Independent Sector organization, the Park's 19,800 volunteer hours translates into an equivalent of \$478,788. Perhaps more importantly, volunteers that work in the Park feel more invested in its care.

In addition to volunteer investment, the Park Division is also working to streamline its donations program, and will continue to build this program as a vital element to taking care of Bidwell Park and our greenways.

~Lise Smith-Peters, Park Services Coordinator

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



Weekly volunteers help with restoration efforts at the Sycamore Restoration site.

### Ongoing Park Division Volunteer Efforts and Partnerships:

Chico High Native Plant Project (5 <sup>th</sup> year) –students propagate native plants for restoration areas through the full school year.	Trail Volunteers – Work alongside Park crew on repair and maintenance of the Park trails.
Community Action Volunteers in Education (7 <sup>th</sup> year) –CSUC students work 30 hours a semester to the Park.	Intern Program – CSUC and Butte College students provided support in mapping, initial restoration planning, sign inventory, and volunteer sessions.
Upward Bound High School Summer Program (7 <sup>th</sup> year) – High schoolers from the North State work for 6 weeks).	Friends of Bidwell Park has donated funds and well over 2,000 volunteer hours toward vegetation management projects. Susan Mason leads these sessions.
Park Crew Leaders (1 <sup>st</sup> year) – trained to lead volunteer sessions in the Park and Greenways	CA Native Plant Society's adopted Yahi Trail work sessions and now weed removal in the greenways, such as Teichert Ponds.
Weekly Volunteer Sessions – Great way to learn about different locations in Bidwell Park.	Southwest Neighborhood volunteers work in Comanche Creek with Crew Leaders Janet Ellner and Liz Stewart.
Adopted Picnic Sites – Site 40 (Sigma Chi); Site 27 (Sierra View Elementary); Site 6 (Blue Oak Elementary); Site 31 (Rangels); and Site 11 & 12 (McCabes) and Site 37 (Olsons )	Kids and Creeks works with elementary students at 9 <sup>th</sup> and Hazel, Verbena Fields and the Sycamore Restoration Site.
Park Watch, longest running program, has 130 members trained to provide information to visitors and patrol the Park.	Stream Team monitors Big Chico Creek and partners with the Park Division to offer education programs at volunteer work sessions.

## 2012 Highlights:

# Urban Forest Program

People who live in Chico often identify the tree canopy as providing a distinct sense of place and character to the City. Trees not only provide aesthetic value to the town, they produce a huge benefit to the citizens in the form of energy reduction from shade, pollution absorption and carbon sequestration.

The Street Trees Program cares for and manages the City's urban forest of street and park trees, as well as the public landscapes, such as around City Hall and other City buildings. Within the City's responsibility are approximately 34,211 street tree sites, of which



30,667 contain street trees. There are approximately 3,544 open planting sites – or opportunities – at this time. The City's street tree population also has 1,439 trees that are scheduled for eventual replacement, due mostly to aging or structural problems.

There were a total of 172 street trees removed in 2012.

This was Chico's 29<sup>th</sup> year as a Tree City USA. The designation requires a City to have a tree ordinance, a tree board or Commission, a budget of at least \$2.00 per capita spending on tree care and an

annual Arbor Day celebration. In 2012, the City spent \$9.54 per capita on tree care, totaling \$834,875. An Arbor Day celebration was held on March 7 at Lost Park with the Chico High Horticultural Class Club planting 6 new trees. The tree crew also planted a seedling from the Bidwell Mansion Southern Magnolia at the County offices at Memorial Way and Oleander.

Street tree crews concentrate on safety pruning around school zones, elevating tree limbs over streets and clearing for signs and signals. They also completed 671 high priority service requests, many of which resulted from potentially hazardous situations. In winter months, the trees crew concentrates on formative pruning of young trees. Our most proactive form of managing our growing population of street trees, formative pruning reduces the amount of future maintenance a tree will need by improving its overall structure. In 2012, the crews pruned 1376 young street trees.

The City continued the citizen tree planting program, inviting citizens to plant and care for their street trees that need to be replaced. A total of 53 trees were provided to citizens under permit, plus another 48 were planted in CMD landscapes and other vacant sites. Another 6 permits were provided to citizens to plant trees they purchased.

Our biggest accomplishment in 2012 was the development of a draft Urban Forest Management Plan. The Tree Committee of the BPPC and a number of citizens met monthly to review and discuss proposed goals, concepts for management and wording for the plan. The Committee will begin to meet again beginning in March to complete the final draft and then begin the environmental review and approval process with the City Council. The draft plan can be found on line.

*-Denise Britton, Urban Forest Manager, City of Chico*

## 2012 Highlights:

# Planning, Monitoring, and Natural Resource Management

Although we began listing these as program areas in 2012, these tasks have long been an important part of Park Division work. Trails, invasive weed control, plantings, tree work, even managing behaviors in the park have an important effect on Park health, and all parts of the Park Division have responsibilities in this area.

### Highlights

- Wet weather – Revisions will be made to this document based on public, staff, and Policy Advisory Committee input and we anticipate that this document will return for BPPC consideration in 2013.
- Prescribed Burn - The Park Division working closely with the Chico Fire Department, the California Conservation Corps, and CAL Fire conducted several operations to reduce fuels, and prep and conduct prescribed burns in Middle Park. The burn objectives were to 1) control for medusahead (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*) and yellow star thistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*), and to a lesser extent other annual grasses such as hare (or foxtail) barley (*Hordeum marinum*) and 2) favor native plants during the next growing season, and 3) reduce woody fuel loads.
- Native Plantings: Staff and volunteers made good progress on removing invasive weeds, putting in native plants and updating and painting infrastructure of the park entrances and volunteer restoration areas.
- Peregrine Point Monitoring Report – Staff issued the first annual monitoring report for the disc golf course in July 2012. The report provides documentation of first year data and makes recommendations as part of an adaptive management framework.
- Trails Plan – Working with the Natural Resource Committee and the public, staff produced an initial inventory map of trails and estimate of trail totals. In 2013-2014, we will identify priorities and develop a draft of the Trails Plan.
- Natural Resources Plan – This plan is also part of the Natural Resource Committee process. The most significant milestone on this task has been the development of Management Units in the Park. Breaking down the Park into Management Units will help communicate goals and track progress for the various areas of Bidwell Park. The units will aid with the description of threats, issues, and remedies, and also provide a more effective description of areas to park crew, volunteers and emergency responders.
- Caper Acres – Staff is working on developing an estimate for the cost to develop an overall master plan for this beloved facility. The process will encourage public input. When complete, the plan will layout options and costs for improvements, which will allow for fundraising and capital campaigns.

## 2012 Highlights:

# Maintenance and Infrastructure

Park maintenance staff is responsible for the care and maintenance of Bidwell Park and other assigned parks, viewsheds and green ways. The balance of city owned parks and greenways are contracted out to landscape contractors, examples would be City Plaza, Children's Playground or Humboldt Park.

Many citizens are surprised at the scope required to maintain city-owned areas for safety and the satisfaction of park visitors. Our staff works seven day a week (365 days a year) and is comprised of four maintenance workers, two senior maintenance workers, and a field supervisor. Park staff duties include cleaning, safety inspection, graffiti removal, and maintenance of park grounds, facilities, and play areas.

To provide a sense of the scope, the Parks staff duties in Bidwell Park alone include:

- 6 reservation areas,
- 36 individual picnic sites,
- 8 porta pottie locations,
- 3 shower facilities,
- 7 park buildings that house 25 restrooms stalls
- 21.5 acres of irrigated lawn that is mowed and trimmed each week in the summer and leafed each week during the fall, and of course

Over 10 miles of road ways and bike paths, Along with the seasonal cleaning and maintenance of Sycamore pool that runs on a weekly cleaning routine from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

In addition to these daily tasks, Staff is engaged throughout the year on the repair of the various parts of the park infrastructure from painting, plumbing and electrical to adding, replacing or fabricating equipment or fixtures such as signs, waste receptacles, benches, picnic tables and exercise equipment. In addition, staff prepares and posts reservation areas for over 300 private and public events each year. While Bidwell Park is the main focus of Staff, they also have duties on other City properties.

In the past couple of years, wildland and land management tasks have been incorporated into daily and seasonal tasks. Park staff maintains the natural beauty from Lost Park to the end of Ten Mile House road. This work ranges from pruning trees, applying herbicide, mowing road and trail edges, developing and planting native rehabilitation sites, prescribed burns, invasive plant removal, trail maintenance, and wildland restoration.

## Highlights

- Middle Trail Grant – Staff working with the California Conservation Corps continued their progress with armored creek crossings, rolling dips with nicks, along with trail tread hardening and water shedding work on connecting trails.

- Department Support—Staff continues with the responsibilities of opening gates, wet weather trail assessments, support of the volunteer program and partnering with other departments in GSD to complete projects in and out of the park, such as Alamo Street clean up and illegal camp clean up through out the city.

- Wildland Restoration—Staff continues to learn new skills and techniques which they apply daily to this newer piece of our park maintenance regimen of removing invasive plants, controlled burn piles, herbicide application from lot E to Bear Hole, along with replanting sites at lot C, One Mile and Five Mile, drilling native grass seed at Hooker Oak and at lot A in Middle Park, and repairing creek banks from beaver damage at Centennial and Manzanita bike path.

- Volunteer Support - Park staff supported Make a Difference day at One Mile with site preparation and pile removal. Staff regularly supports volunteer efforts with removal of invasive materials in Bidwell Park, Verbena Fields and Hazel Street Park.

- Daily Maintenance - Staffs approach to daily maintenance is to revisit the basics regularly so that we may deliver the best service possible period. Staff plans and evaluates each project for the best methods and

materials to use for a quality job, the end result whether it's cleaning a restroom or replacing a fixture is something we all can be proud of.

- Homeless Impacts and Vandalism – Staff have observed an increase in homeless issues impacting the Park. For example, encampments have been observed in all areas of the Park. Some facilities require additional cleaning as use has increased. The cleanup of graffiti and vandalism also is a daily task.
- Infrastructure Inventory – Late in 2012, Staff began an inventory of Park facilities. We are aware of no similar previous effort. The inventory will provide us a rationale basis on which to prioritize and estimate costs for future repairs and replacements. It will also provide us with an estimate of unfunded obligations and budget needs. There are many signs of the park of infrastructure's overdue maintenance (for example, the gravel portion of Upper Park Road, paved bike paths, and restrooms).
- Night Inspection - Park staff participated in the first night time safety inspection which surprisingly generated fewer issues than expected. Staff focused on safety and security issues and ideas to improve them (adequate reflectors, lighting in areas, signs, observation of users and numbers, overgrown vegetation, etc.). Improvements to these areas will be made before the next peak season.

*-Jimi Logsdon, Park Field Maintenance Supervisor, City of Chico*



*Parks Crew Member leading a volunteer day in Bidwell Park.*

*(Background: Parking Lot D – split rail installation to protect Blue Oaks.)*

# Spring 2013 Volunteer Training



Join us to get an overview of volunteer efforts in Bidwell Park and other City Properties. This meeting will provide an overview of the Volunteer program for new volunteers and detail other training opportunities. Follow – up training will be announced at the meeting. Three main volunteer efforts will be covered:

- **Park Watch**—As ambassadors of the park, Park Watch volunteers share information to visitors and advise park staff about damage, hazards, vandalism, or other concerns they encounter. Park Watch volunteer’s visible presence fosters a safe environment. Park Watch volunteers must be at least 18 years old, pass a criminal background check and volunteer a minimum number of hours.
- **Trail Volunteer Training**—The Park Division continues to build our Trail Volunteer Program where citizens may assist the City with trail maintenance. If you want to work on park trails you will need to attend a follow- up field training that will be announced.
- **Volunteer Crew Leader Training**—Dedicated volunteers may apply to be Volunteer Crew Leaders. These Leaders guide work sessions safely and have the tools and knowledge to remove invasive weeds and care for native plants and help teach others. Crew Leaders assist with big events and regular work sessions.

## **Get Involved! Have Fun! Parks Volunteer Meeting**

**When:** Tuesday - March 12<sup>th</sup> 6:00 - 9:00 PM

**Where:** City Council Chamber Bldg at 421 W. Main Street

**Contact:** To apply and RSVP, please call 530-896-7800.

Please contact us for more information: Shane Romain (Park Watch) - [parkwatch@ci.chico.ca.us](mailto:parkwatch@ci.chico.ca.us), or Lise Smith-Peters (Crew Leader and Trail Volunteer) - [ispeters@ci.chico.ca.us](mailto:ispeters@ci.chico.ca.us)

## *2012 Park Division and Bidwell Park*

# 2012 By the Numbers

4,799	Chico township population in 1900.	\$1,799,000	Parks Division budget in Fiscal Year 2012-2013.
86,187	Chico population in 2010.	19,801	Volunteer hours donated.
212,968	Chico metropolitan area population (includes Oroville and Paradise) in 2010.	\$8,695	Tax-exempt donations to the Parks Fund.
		\$42,388	Value of In-kind service or material donations.
5,053	Total acres managed by the City of Chico.	523	Total Number of Ranger-Issued citations.
3,670	Total acres of Bidwell Park.	3,3392	Total Number of Documented warnings.
14	US Ranking of Bidwell Park among municipally owned parks.	398	Number of Police Incident reports in City Parks, open spaces, and greenways( 2012).
3	California Ranking of Bidwell Park among municipally owned parks.	302	Number of Police Incident reports in City Parks, open spaces, and greenways( 2011).
650,764	Annual estimate of vehicles that travel on Bidwell Park Roads.	59	Number of accident, damage, and theft reports ( 2012).
1,976,343	Preliminary estimate (best guess) of total visits to Bidwell Park.	35	Number of accident, damage, and theft reports ( 2011).
103	Total miles of trails in Bidwell Park.		
29%	Percentage of undesignated trails in Bidwell Park.		

