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Bidwell Park Pulse

2013 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).

The year 2013, posed significant challenges to the Parks, Open Spaces, Greenways, and Preserves Division (Park Division) and the Street Trees and Public Plantings Division (Street Trees).

Reorganization of the divisions and City Departments resulted in the supervision of the Street Trees and Public Landscapes Division shifting to the Parks and Natural Resource Manager. The Urban Forest Manager (UFM) position was held open with the retirement of Denise Britton. The Divisions are now under the Public Works Department (the Department represents a consolidation of General Services and parts of other City Departments). A reorganization of Public Works will likely occur in early 2014.

The biggest challenge and impact have been the reduction in staff, and consequently services, resulting from City-wide budget cuts. The combined staffing levels for both divisions is just over half of what was available in 2009. With these challenges, staff have been focused on providing basic services and implementing creative solutions to take care of our Natural Resources. Some examples include:

Increased donations (over $20,000 in comparison to about $8,000 last year) associated with an inaugural fundraising event and other activities.

Use of Butte County Sheriff's Work Alternative Program (SWAP) and Alternative Custody Supervision (ACS) to aid with Park work and help keep Caper Acres open.

Parks Division Programs

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

Street Trees and Public Landscapes Programs

- Street Trees (approximately 35,000 trees)
- Public Landscapes (for example, Children's Playground, City Plaza, Greenways, city parking lots, medians, landscapes around the City's public buildings, and the Airport.

The changes and development of new solutions to handle the work load have taken precedence over many of the goals in the workplan and efforts laid out last year. While we have made progress in many areas, progress has been delayed as we develop new solutions to handle workload and redefine staff responsibilities. Staff hopes that with stability, that 2014 will see the continuation of several efforts.

The Parks Division and Street Trees Division are pleased to share this annual report to the Bidwell Park and Playground Commission and the public. In the following pages, we will highlight our accomplishments, but also trace out a framework from which we need to address fundamental issues in the City. Expect us to continue to "sacredly guard" the Park, but also expect us to ask for help and donations to take care of it. We will continue to build partnerships every day. We look forward to working with the community toward solutions in 2013!

~Daniel Efseaff, Park and Natural Resource Manager

Inside:

▶ RANGERS.....3

▶ STREET TRESS 4

▶ VOLUNTEER TRAINING.....7

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 Public Works 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**: Vacant.

Contact

Questions, comments, or photo contributions? Contact us:

Parks Division

Public Works Department

965 Fir Street | P.O. Box 3420

Chico, CA 95927-3420

2013 Highlights:

Administrative and Visitor Services

The Watermelon eating contest was a big hit at the Birthday Bash!

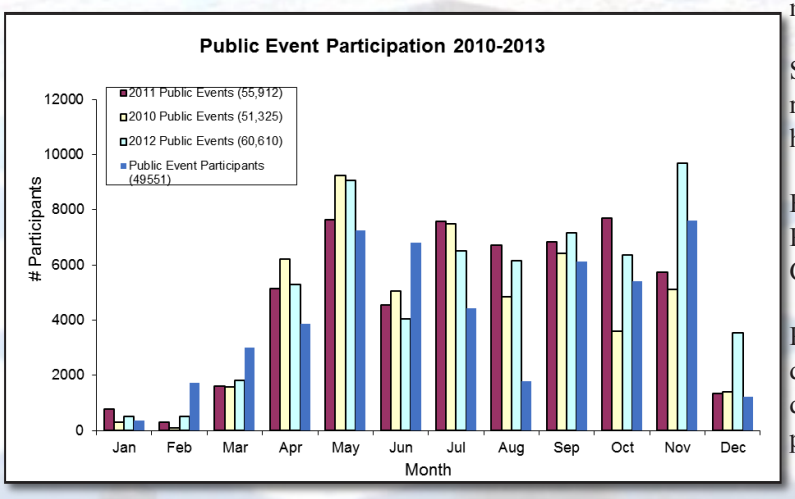
Administrative functions of the Parks Division include reservations, permits, support and analysis for Bidwell Park and Playground Commission meetings, development and management of budgets, vendor payments and contracts, and customer and visitor services. All Park Division staff, carry out some duties in this area, and shared administrative staff from the Public Works Department (PWD) 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.

Park Permits - Staff issued a total of 644 permits (103 public events, 238 private events, and 303 reservations at Caper Acres). After a 3 year rise, total public event participation declined (see Figure) from last year (81,472) to this year's (49,551). The largest decrease appears right after the start of the Fiscal Year. Of note is that the program to monitor visitation ceased in mid-2013, a cut associated with staffing reductions. We hope to restart the effort in 2014.

Economic Contribution - The Park Division processed $571,248 in payments to over 114 vendors that provided services, materials, and supplies for the Park and greenways. Approximately, 61% of the vendors are local suppliers based in Chico, with another 20% going to regional vendors between Redding and Sacramento. This economic benefit is small relative to the contribution to quality of life and local economic well being that Parks provide.

Closure of Park Areas – In response to staffing cuts associated with the budget, services were reduced to better match resources with work load. Staff prioritized services on peak days (Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays) with no changes in park hours, but closed the Five Mile Recreation Area parking and restroom, North One Mile gate and restroom, and Peterson Drive gates on Monday-Thursday. Caper Acres reopened due to assistance from Serve-Pro and now the Butte County Sherriff's ACS program to handle the workload on Tuesdays thru Thursdays. Patrons that enter the park via other means have not been impacted.

Figure 3. Monthly Total of Public Event Participation



Service Requests - Park Staff received approximately 84 service requests (mostly related to fallen trees, graffiti, vandalism, and homeless encampments).

BPPC Support – Staff supported 12 BPPC meetings, 2 Natural Resource meetings, 3 Policy Advisory meetings, and 4 Tree Committee meetings,

Research Tracking – Researchers requested permission to conduct six research projects in Bidwell Park (studies include: the dispersal methods of noxious weeds; Catalpa Tree herbicide pilot project; an Upper Park tick survey; sampling rattlesnake

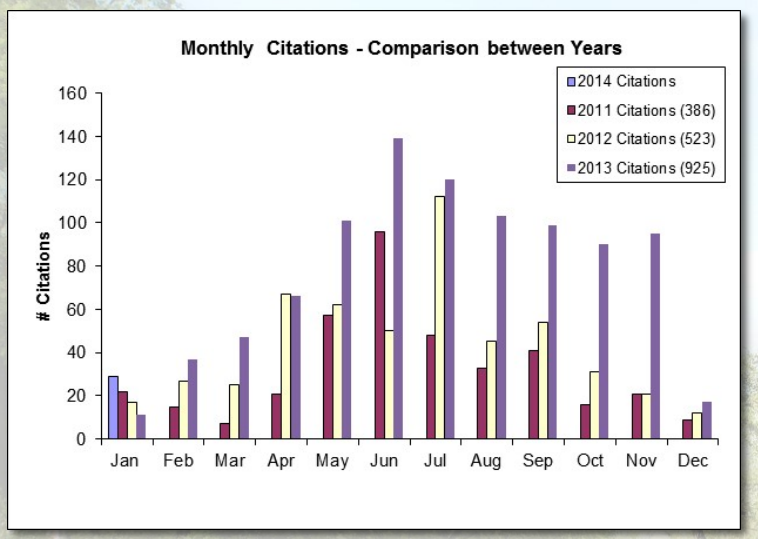
2013 Highlights:

Park Ranger Program

Park Rangers protect park resources and educate the community. Rangers patrol the City parks and greenways to enforce rules and laws; respond to emergencies; provide visitor assistance; report damage and safety concerns; assist with event coordination; address illegal encampments; develop outreach materials; conduct educational and interpretive programs; implement monitoring; assist with natural resource management task; as well as open/close park gates and facilities. Rangers continued to play a role in management and monitoring projects and assisted prescribed burns and vegetation management projects; although reductions in staffing, limited these efforts.

During the 2013 swim season, an estimated 41,752 park visitors utilized Sycamore pool and lawn area.

The rangers maintain high visibility during their patrols to help deter crime and provide visitor assistance and work closely with Police, Fire, Code Enforcement and other State and Federal public safety and natural resource based agencies. Two full-time and one permanent seasonal park ranger (down 1 full time position) were on staff this past year.



Citations issued rose in 2013, in comparison to past years. Note that the first month of 2014 is also included .

Park Rangers coordinate the Park Watch program, which began in 1995. As avid park users, Park Watchers incorporate their ambassador duties into their regular walking, biking, running, or horseback riding. Park Watch members provide visitors with information, foster a safe environment, and advise park staff about park concerns. In 2013, 10 new members joined the program, bringing the total membership to 124 who donated over 11,000 hours.

Rangers oversee the lifeguard program at Sycamore Pool. Lifeguards work mostly from Memorial Day through Labor Day (11 am - 7 pm, six days a week). Lifeguards monitor pool and lawn activities, encourage safe behavior, perform rescues and provide first aid. Rescues were about average this season, amounting to 7 (same as last year). The lifeguards treated another 11 visitors for bee stings, falls, abrasions and cuts. Due to the diligence of staff and good fortune there were no major injuries this year at the pool. The Lifeguard staff encourage safe behavior during busy summer months, and also provide important information to rangers and police.

Community outreach and education plays an important part in Ranger duties and is intended to foster stewardship and appreciation of parks and resources. In early 2013, rangers established a satellite office at the Chico Creek Nature Center (CCNC). The satellite office enables rangers to build a stronger relationship with the CCNC and adds visibility to the public. Rangers hosted the 3rd annual National Night Out event, contributed to the quarterly newsletter, staffed several information booths, and participated in 911 Safety Pals. These programs enhance park users' enjoyment and safety while also promoting the protection of our natural and cultural resources.

Staffing reductions at the Chico Police Department directly impacted Rangers, who responded to a large number of calls. Rangers reached out to other agencies such as the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and State Parks to assist with various needs. Rangers also worked with the Butte County Sherriff's Office Alternative Custody Supervision (ACS) and Sheriff's Work Alternative Programs (SWAP). These programs offered a tremendous help in the clean-up of illegal encampments.

The combined enforcement and resource management efforts, coupled with a strong educational and outreach program have culminated in the rangers' ability to continue to effectively protect and promote the City of Chico's natural and cultural resources.

-Shane Romain, Senior Park Ranger, City of Chico

Rangers help lead the cleanup efforts with the Butte County Sheriff's Alternative Custody Supervision (ACS).

(Background Photo Courtesy of Abram House Photography)

2013 Highlights:

Urban Forest Program

At the beginning of the fiscal year, the Parks Division absorbed the functions of the Street Trees and Public Plantings (landscapes) Division. The Street Trees and Public Plantings Division's major responsibilities include the City's Street trees and maintaining the City's public landscapes. The Landscape Maintenance Services contract is the City's largest service contract. It includes 229 sites, supported by 118 funding sources.

Within the City's responsibility are approximately 34,211 street tree sites, of which 30,667 contain street trees, including approximately 3,500 open planting sites. The City's street tree population also has 1,439 trees that are scheduled for eventual replacement, due mostly to aging, structural problems, or lack of establishment of young trees.

The City of Chico has been a Tree City USA since 1984. This 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. Citizens of Chico are proud of its tree cover and 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.

Demands for services have grown while the Division struggles with the loss of staff and budget cuts. The City has 10-15 years of deferred maintenance on its street trees.

The tree crew was an important part of taking care of the City trees (see full annual report for a list of accomplishments). July was very challenging with the entire Tree Crew laid off and the retirement of the Urban Forest Manager.

Using a bid process, the City hired a local tree service to handle emergency work, such as hangers, broken limbs, and safety pruning. To handle lower priority work more cost effectively, the Council later approve rehiring a Senior Tree Maintenance Worker (paid for with a shift from the contracting budget) who responds to emergency down limbs and hangers as well as smaller removals and traffic safety pruning.

As the economy begins to recover, the Division's aim is to concentrate on routine pruning of the highest priority trees. This will require additional staffing and a pruning contract for the large old trees in most need of work. Our long term goal is to develop a forest of strong young trees to replace the current aging population.

-Dave Bettencourt, Tree Field Supervisor

2013 Highlights:

Planning, Monitoring, and Natural Resources

Natural resource 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.

These priority areas are more integrated with the Division than ever before. For example, the recent burns in the park represent efforts from administrative staff (planning and public notice), to rangers (safety and securing permits), to maintenance (site prep and oversight of crews), to volunteers (Park Watch provided information during the event), and even beyond to other City Divisions (Fire) and other entities (CDF). We include in this program area, Park Division efforts with project and park planning, projects, and monitoring.

Peregrine Point Monitoring Report – Staff issued the second annual monitoring report in 2013. Rangers have been monitoring visitation since 2009, the average number of vehicles per observation has steadily increased over the past 3 years .

Wet weather – In October 2013, the BPPC reviewed recent data and adopted the "Adaptive Wet Weather Trail Management Plan". Staff anticipates annual reviews and regular revisions to program based on public input and new data.

Prescribed Burns - The Park Division (working with the Chico Fire Department, the California Conservation Corps, and CAL Fire) conducted efforts to reduce fuels in Middle Park. A prescribed burn occurred in October. Several areas have fuels reduction piles will be burned when favorable fire conditions return.

Native Plantings: Staff and volunteers made good progress on improving and updating infrastructure of the park entrances and volunteer restoration areas.

Catalpa Herbicide Trial Project – a partnership between CA State Parks, Friends of Bidwell Park and Park Division. This multi-year project will help determine which methods are most effective in killing catalpa trees of varying diameters.

Trails and Natural Resources Plan – Last year Staff reported progress on initial inventory maps, estimate of trail totals, and the development of Management Units. Staffing issues prevented the restart of those efforts, but we now anticipate that these efforts will be restarted before the end of 2014.

Caper Acres – Public input on a master plan for this beloved facility began. When complete, the plan will layout options and costs for improvements, which will allow for fundraising and capital campaigns. Staff anticipates a plan will be completed for BPPC

-Dan Efseaff, Park and Natural Resource Manager

2013 Highlights:

Volunteers & Donations

When citizens take the opportunity to give time and energy to Bidwell Park and our City greenways, their investment in and respect for Chico's unique resources grows deeper. Volunteers currently assist the Park Division in trail maintenance and repair, painting, litter removal, Park office tasks, control of invasive weeds, native plant seed propagation and planting in volunteer habitat restoration areas throughout Bidwell Park. Volunteer projects are now scheduled regularly in the City's greenways as well.

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)*

In 2013, volunteers contributed 19,056 hours of work to Bidwell Park and other Chico Greenways. Overall volunteer hours were down 1% from 2012. In addition to these tasks, the Park Services Coordinator and Park Intern also include educational components focusing on Park history, and ecology; implement photo monitoring measures for restoration sites so that improvements can be seen over time and assist with the natural resource management program through the donation of thousands of hours of weeding invasive species and planting native plant species. The incorporation of vegetation management for years as the major portion of weekly and annual work sessions has helped supplement and offset the Park's maintenance crew time.

The BPPC annual report provides more details. Large annual park work days remain popular events that school students, families, individuals, CSUC and Butte College students, community service groups and church groups participate. The Park Division continues to build on established partnerships and programs and relies on dedicated volunteers for this effort (see box). The Park Division conducted its second crew leader training in March 2013 and several active crew leaders schedule weekly sessions with support from the Park Division. The Crew Leader Training and program have developed into a reliable, knowledgeable force for good in the Park.

Happy Students from Chico Unified's College Connection Program pause to take a photo during Make a Difference Day.

Of special note are the efforts of the Friends of Bidwell Park (FOBP) and Susan Mason. Throughout 2013, Susan led sessions to remove invasive plants (olives, privet, bladder senna, pokeweed, silver dollar plants, yellow starthistle, puncturevine and much more) throughout the Community. In 2013 FOBP, provided three 40 yard dumpsters; donations toward the Park Intern stipend and to a certified herbicide applicator; and is partnering trial project to control Catalpa along Big Chico Creek.

A new partner, ServPro, stepped up and volunteered staff time to help keep Caper Acres open when budget cuts threatened to partially close it. The Butte County Sheriff's ACS program now helps serve that role and will continue in the future.

We highlight some of the other volunteers and Partners in the Annual Report. The scope of work and places that volunteers cover is very impressive. Volunteers cleaned up encampments and trash; planted native plants; restoration work; water monitoring; interpretive signs; weed control; and trail work opportunities all over Bidwell Park and Chico (including 9th & Hazel Park; Lost Park; Humboldt Park; Little Chico Creek; Memorial Way; Teichert Ponds; and Verbena Fields).

~Lise Smith-Peters, Park Services Coordinator

Partial Volunteers List

This list includes only a fraction of those that donated their time to their Community.

Active partners include:
Butte Environmental Council, CA Native Plant Society, Mt. Lassen Chapter (CNPS), CA Urban Stream Alliance "Stream Team" , Chico High School Native Plant Project (6th year), CSU Chico's Upward Bound (8th year), CSU, Chico's Community Action Volunteers in Education (CAVE) (8th year), Friends of Bidwell Park, Friends of Comanche Creek (2nd year), and Kids and Creeks .

Volunteer Adopt-A-Park Site Program :
Blue Oak Elementary 6th grade class (3rd year), McCabe Family (9th year), Rangel Family (4th year), Sierra View Elementary School's 4th grade classes (6th year), Sigma Chi Fraternity (4th year).

Active Volunteer Crew Leaders: Caitlyn Reilly, Elaine Elsmore, Elizabeth Stewart, Janet Ellner, Michael Bruhn; Michael Stauffer, Steve Overlock, Susan Mason, and Timmarie Hamill.

(Background Photo: Young volunteers receive a safety briefing before going to work

2013 Highlights:

Maintenance and Infrastructure

Park maintenance staff cares and maintains Bidwell Park and other City parks, view sheds and greenways. 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 three maintenance workers, one senior maintenance worker, and a field supervisor. Park staff duties include cleaning, safety inspection, graffiti removal, and maintenance of park grounds, facilities, and play areas. Park Maintenance is also responsible for the trails program, wild land restoration and maintenance.

To provide a sense of the scope, the Parks staff duties in Bidwell Park alone include: 6 reservation areas, 36 individual picnic sites, 7 park buildings that house 25 restrooms stalls, 8 porta pottie locations, 3 shower facilities, Numerous lighting systems, 21.5 acres of irrigated lawn that is mowed and trimmed each week in the summer and leafed each week during the fall, over 10 miles of paved road ways and bike paths, and the seasonal cleaning and maintenance of Sycamore pool.

In addition to these daily tasks, Staff repairs 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, wild land 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 wild land restoration through the planting of native plants and grasses.

2013 has been a challenging year with crews cut, parks reduced hours, and trying to implement volunteers to keep areas open with limited success. In spite of the turmoil, we managed to make limited headway in several areas:

Once finished some trail work is subtle and many visitors are not aware that anything had been done. Soil and rock was brought in to protect the roots of this tree and minimize erosion

Trail Program - The trail program has seen the completion of the ADA section of the trail grant and near completion of the trail grant itself, along with the start of the reroute of monkey face trail and the rehabilitation to remove all the scaring and erosion to area of the of the monkey face butte. Volunteers in conjunction with staff installed multiple grade reversals on North Rim trail to divert water away from the blue oak trail head. Total new trail tread work for all projects mentioned is 2,504 feet for 2013.

Removal of Potential Hazardous Materials - Toxic telephone pole barriers removal project is almost complete with 1,395 feet remaining to be removed in 2014 from the Centennial Avenue, Five Mile way and picnic site24 locations.

Native Plantings - Native Planting sites completed in 2013 include the Five mile levee, two sites on south park entrance and one site at the North One Mile Bridge.

Fuel reduction and prescribed burns in the park both the CCC and Salt creek worked on fuel reduction in Middle Park this year.

Infrastructure replaced, retrofitted or removed - staff installed two new drinking fountains one at Five Mile and one Cedar Grove to replace the badly worn ones, staff also rebuilt and installed a replacement on Peterson drive by the old nursery. Staff removed one observation deck from World of Trees and set up volunteers to replace with a less maintenance intensive type. Staff added over one hundred feet of new fence at Lot E to help preserve the integrity of the storage cell by keeping the public on the trail. The Five Mile septic system was completely replaced this summer with a more up to date system to handle the spikes in usage from the spring, summer, and fall schedules.

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

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

Spring 2014 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. Two 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.

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. Please contact us for more information.

Parks Volunteer Meeting

When: Thursday - March 13th 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 or parkinfo@chicoca.gov

2013 Highlights:

Donations

In calendar year 2013, citizens provided over $20,767 in park cash donations, including $1,594 devoted to Caper Acres. Donations, both cash and in-kind, have helped save the Park Division needed financial resources. This represents a substantial increase over last years total ($8,695).

In-kind donations valued at over $40,000 from area businesses and local organizations as well as in-kind labor provided by the CA Conservation Corps and community volunteers provided hundreds of thousands of dollars in support of Park projects. Of note are contributions from Serve-Pro to help keep Caper Acres open and the new Parks relationship with Butte County Sherriff's programs (ACS and SWAP).

In-Kind Donations

Here's a fraction of the Organizations that supported the Park in 2013: Butte County Sheriff (SWAP and ACS programs); CA Conservation Corps; Costco; Home Depot; Recology; Rotary of Chico; Serve-Pro; Soroptimist; Starbucks; Teichert Ponds; Waste Management.

Through the years, the community has contributed funds to memorial benches, plaques, vita course stations, Caper Acres bricks and toward equipment and facilities.

However, many citizens do not know that the Park Donation can accept donations to support Bidwell Park and to raise needed funds for other areas. Donations are tax deductible and may be given to separate costs centers. Staff hopes that the ease of donating will increase the community support of our parks.

Buy a Jake Early T-shirt from the Park Division—$25!

__ Yes, I would like to help Bidwell Park & City Greenways!

I understand that my contribution is tax deductible (IRS Publication 526 (2012) p. 2).

- ☐ Caper Acres (99170)
- ☐ Trails (99174)
- ☐ General Donation
- ☐ Park Intern (99173)
- ☐ Park Improvements (99171),
- ☐ Park Infrastructure (99172)
- ☐ Vegetation Management (99175)

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State ___ Zip_____

Enclosed please find my support in the amount of: $ _____

☐ My check is attached (Please make payable to Chico Parks Division)

☐ Please bill my credit Card ($20.00 minimum)

☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard

Card # : _____ Exp._____

Please clip and return to City of Chico/Parks Division/Donations/965 Fir Street/ Chico, CA 95926.

For official use only 050-000-46001/_____-000-3990

Park Division

965 Fir Street | PO Box 3420

Chico, CA 95927

View the Annual Report Online, please visit:

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

2013 By the Numbers

4,799 Chico township population in 1900.

86,187 Chico population in 2010.

212,968 Chico metropolitan area population (includes Oroville and Paradise) in 2010.

5,053 Total acres managed by the City of Chico.

3,670 Total acres of Bidwell Park.

14 US Ranking of Bidwell Park among municipally owned parks.

3 California Ranking of Bidwell Park among municipally owned parks.

$1,742,016 Parks Division budget in Fiscal Year 2013-2014.

$20.21 Total Spending on City of Chico Parks and other properties per resident (Compares to a high of $222 in San Francisco; to lows of $21 in San Bernardino and Tulsa).

19,056 Volunteer hours donated.

$20,767 Tax-exempt donations to the Parks Fund (over 2 x the value of previous year's donations). .

$49,149 Value of In-kind service or material donations.

925 Total Number of Ranger-Issued citations (2013). Last year was 523.

3,223 Total Number of Documented warnings(2013).