



# 1. INTRODUCTION



FINAL BIDWELL PARK MASTER MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

## Spirit of Bidwell Park\*

*We hear the mountain breeze as it begins to draw down the gorge of Big Chico Creek in its nightly descent. The sound mingles with the gurgle of the water and brings on a peaceful smile as the cool air blows across our faces. The air smells good now, smells of wildflowers and fresh leaves. The rock feels solid beneath our feet as we hike up to higher ground ... to waves of grasses where meadowlarks sing their evening ritual. Their song beckons to all who hear it to stop and reflect on the day, on life ... and to be joyful.*

*We can't help but feel this is a cathedral, a sanctuary from the daily rush of life, and a place to marvel at, learn from, play in, ... and to protect. Bidwell Park is the core of our being; a vein that runs through our community, that connects the broad valley to the rolling foothills and the past to the present. The whole park feels sacred ... it fills us physically, mentally, and spiritually. We feel calm and we are renewed here. We can escape the relentless hustle of work and the frenzies of city life and of modern technology. We can connect with the past, enjoy the present, and ponder the future. We can find solitude - or share this special place with family and friends. We can run and see no one for miles ....*

*We listen intently to the wind and the stream as we reflect on the countless lives past and present that have stood where we now stand and wandered and wondered where we are now. We can see kids swimming in Sycamore Pool and climbing and laughing among the castle spires at Caper Acres; young folks dipping at Bear Hole and Salmon Hole; hikers and horseback riders clipping along, mountain bikers clanging pedals and challenging the dirt and rock trails or whizzing by on paved roadways; moms and dads pushing babies along wooded paths in Lower Park; older folks enjoying a peaceful stroll among the welcoming shade of the majestic trees in Annie's Glen, families marveling at the stars and planets dotting the night sky on a cool clear night at the observatory.*

*Mammoths once roamed these hills and valleys. Bidwell Park was and still is the home of the sovereign Nation of the Mechoopda people. Their ancestors fished and hunted and told stories here not long ago. They cared about their home, and still do, as they are here to enjoy the park today. So much life calls this place home; salmon returning from the ocean to spawn in Big Chico Creek, deer, mountain lions, and black bears roaming the hillsides, turkey vultures and eagles soaring overhead on thermals, countless songbirds making their summer homes in oak and cottonwood trees. The limbs of the majestic oaks, sycamores, and cottonwoods give shade to the rushing waters of the creek.*

*We thank Annie and John Bidwell for having the foresight and generosity to give the park to our community, to Chico, for all to appreciate its beauty and splendor. And we feel the responsibility to carry on that vision, to protect this special place, to give it the tender loving care it deserves and to share it with the community ... we want to protect it for future generations to enjoy ... and grow in, and we want to share it with the wildlife whose home it is.*

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\* The "Spirit of Bidwell Park" was developed and refined through input received from the Citizens Advisory Committee formed for the Bidwell Park Master Management Plan Update.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE PARK

### 1.1.1 LOCATION AND SETTING OF THE PARK

The 3,670-acre Bidwell Park (Park) is one of the largest municipal parks in the United States and presents an important resource to the City of Chico (City) and to the surrounding region. The park is located within a three hour drive from several large city centers in northern California, being approximately 92 miles north of Sacramento, 72 miles southeast of Redding, and 170 miles northeast of San Francisco. The regional location of Bidwell Park is shown in Exhibit 1.1.1-1 and the project location is shown in Exhibit 1.1.1-2.

The Park is managed by the City of Chico and offers a variety of recreational opportunities that draw visitors from throughout the region. The Bidwell Park and Playground Commission (BPPC) is a seven member commission charged with providing guidance and feedback to the City regarding the management of playgrounds and parks, including Bidwell Park, in the City of Chico. The BPPC meets monthly to discuss important management issues, and meetings are open to the public.

Bidwell Park stretches over 10 miles along Big Chico Creek from the Cascades foothills to the valley floor and serves as an important biological corridor linking the mountains to the Sacramento River. For the purposes of this Master Management Plan Update, the Park has been divided into three zones that roughly correlate with topography and elevation and are referred to as Lower Park, Middle Park, and Upper Park (Exhibit 1.1.1-2). The riparian corridor along Big Chico Creek traverses all the park zones.

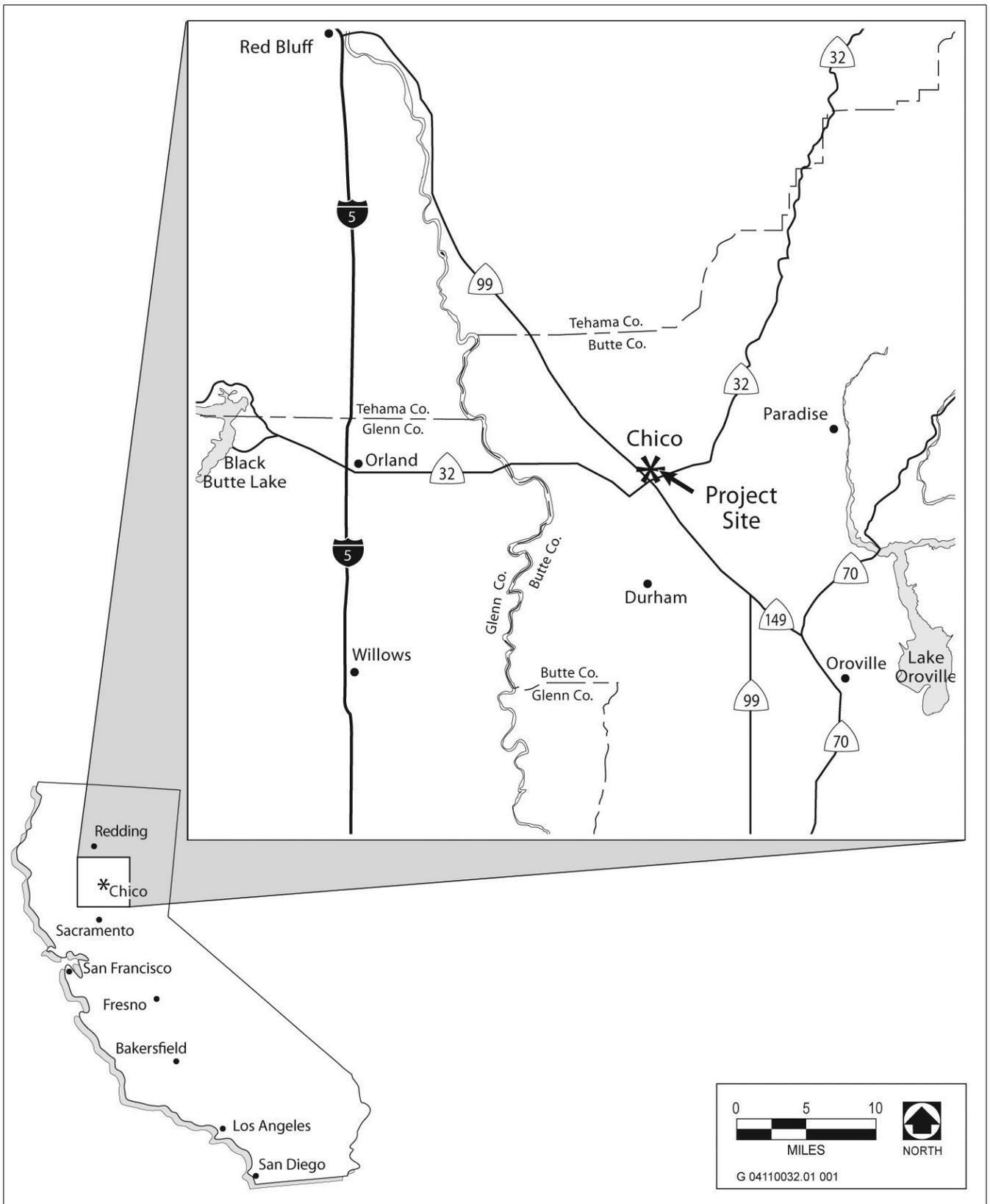
Lower Park encompasses the area between the historic Bidwell Mansion and Manzanita Avenue, including Lost Park, Annie's Glen/Camellia Way, the One-Mile Recreation Area, and the Cedar Grove area including the Chico Creek Nature Center. Lower Park is characterized by flat terrain with a thick canopy of trees which provide ample shade for visitors. Exhibit 2.1.1.1 (Lower Park Facilities) identifies the various areas within Lower Park.

The area east of Manzanita Avenue to the golf course and the ridge just east of the Horseshoe Lake area is referred to as Middle Park. Middle Park includes the Hooker Oak Recreation Area, the Horseshoe Lake area, the Five-Mile Recreation Area, the Kiwanis Community Observatory, the Chico Equestrian Association Arena, the Chico Rod and Gun Club and the Bidwell Municipal Golf Course. The terrain in Middle Park changes from the valley floor to gently rolling foothills. Exhibit 2.1.2.1 (Middle and Upper Park Facilities) identifies the various areas within Middle Park.

Upper Park includes the eastern portion of the Park and is characterized by steep foothill terrain. Upper Park includes prime examples of many geologic formations, including the Chico Formation and Tuscan, Redbluff, and Lovejoy Basalt. Upper Park also includes Bidwell Park's popular swimming holes including Alligator Hole, Bear Hole, Salmon Hole and Brown's Hole as well as many popular hiking trails. Exhibit 2.1.2.1 (Middle and Upper Park Facilities) identifies the various areas within Upper Park.

### 1.1.2 HISTORIC AND CURRENT CONTEXT OF THE PARK

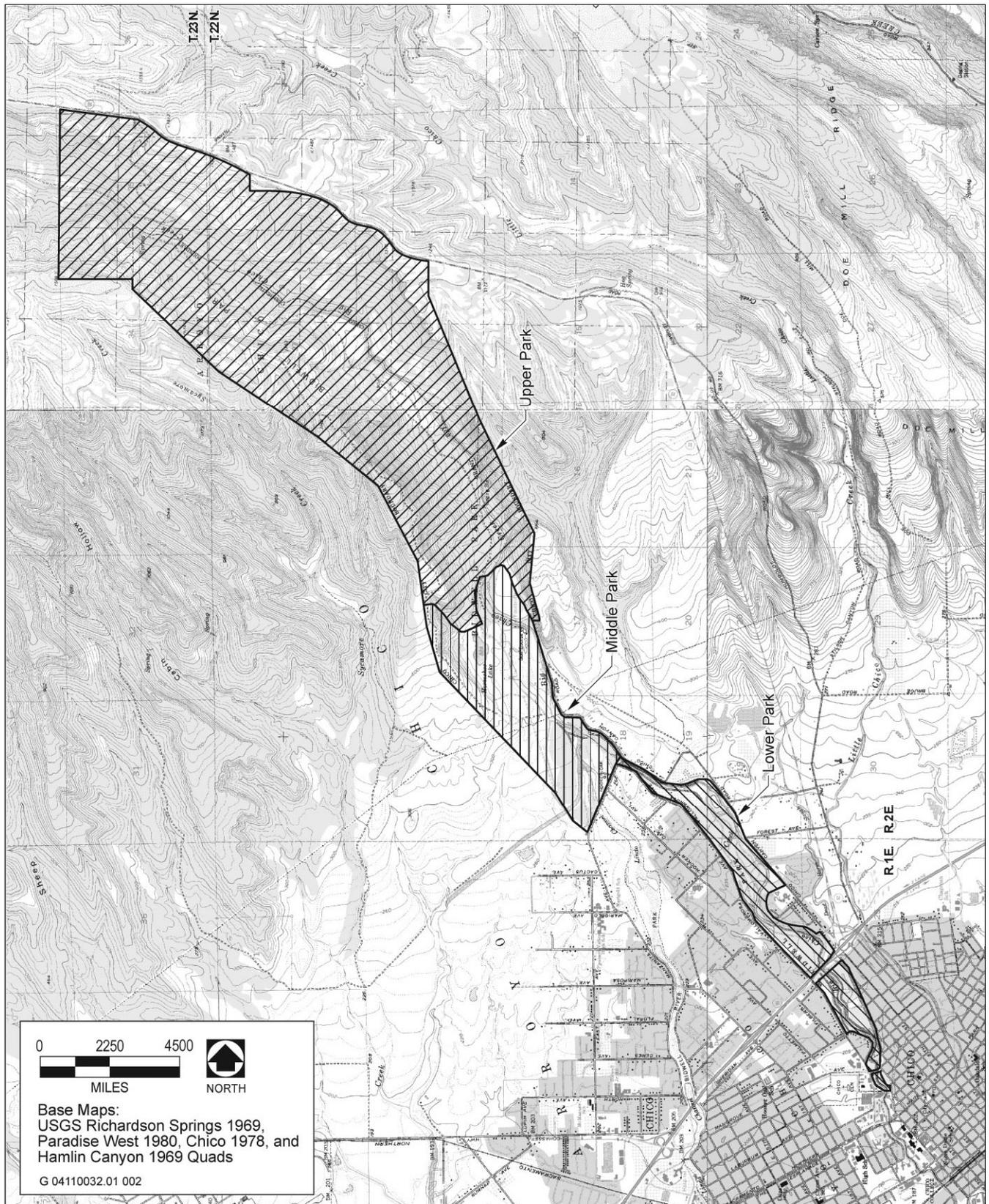
On July 10, 1905, Annie Bidwell on behalf of her late husband John Bidwell donated approximately 1,903 acres of land (subsequent conveyances included 302 acres on May 11, 1911 and the Children's Playground and Chico Creek from the Esplanade to the Southern Pacific Railroad) to the City of Chico to be preserved forever for future residents of the City of Chico. In her deed to the City (Appendix A), Mrs. Bidwell placed several conditions including, "that the land be used as a public park for the benefit of the citizens and residents of the City of Chico;"



Source: EDAW 1997

**Regional Location of Bidwell Park**

**Exhibit 1.1.1-1**



Source: USGS Richardson Springs Quad 1951 (photorevised 1969) – Contour Interval 20 Feet / Paradise West Quad 1980 – Contour Interval 40 Feet  
 USGS Chico Quad 1948 (photorevised 1978) -- Contour Interval 5 Feet / Hamlin Canyon 1951 (photorevised 1969) – Contour Interval 20 Feet  
 USGS Chico Quad 1948 (photorevised 1978) -- Contour Interval 5 Feet / Hamlin Canyon 1951 (photorevised 1969) -- Contour Interval 20 Feet

**Project Location/Park Zone**

**Exhibit 1.1.1-2**

“that the land not be used for the making or selling of intoxicating liquors;” “that the land not be used for hunting;” “that no public gatherings be on Sundays;” and “that the City preserve, as far as reasonably possible, for the beauty of the park as well as for the preservation and protection of the waters of Chico Creek, all of the trees, shrubs and vines therein, and it shall sacredly guard the same and only remove such thereof that it may find absolutely necessary.” In 1949 the City of Chico purchased the revisionary interests for the lands, resulting in ownership of full fee interest by the City, and the release from binding clauses of the original deed.

Since the initial donation, the City has added additional land to the Park, including the Cedar Grove area in 1922. According to the Biennial Reports of the U.C. Experiment Stations (1893–4, 1895–6, and 1896–7), the Cedar Grove area was a gift of 29 “deeded” acres from John Bidwell to the State Board of Forestry in 1885. The station was established in 1888. The property was transferred to University of California in 1893 and managed by Charles H. Shinn until 1903 when Professor Steubenrauch, a professor of pomology, took charge. In 1921 the University turned the property back to the state. In that same year, a “group of 15 public-spirited Chico Citizens” contributed \$100 each to purchase the property from the State and turned it over to the City to be added to the park. In 1994, 38 acres were purchased from the Trust for Public Land and added to Upper Park. An additional 1,417 acres of land south of Big Chico Creek were added to Upper Park in 1995.

Amenities within Bidwell Park include a wide variety of recreation resources, such as trails, and swimming pools. Developed areas include a children’s play area, picnic areas, restroom facilities, One-Mile Recreation Area, Five-Mile Recreation Area, Hooker Oak Recreation Area, Bidwell Park Golf Course, Cedar Grove Picnic Area, the Chico Creek Nature Center, Kiwanis Community Observatory, and the Horseshoe Lake area.

In addition to the recreational resources in the park, Bidwell Park is home to a variety of important and sensitive natural resources, including native plant communities, and many native plant and wildlife species. Several special-status plant species, including white-stemmed clarkia, rose mallow, California beaked rush, and Butte County Checker bloom are found in the Park, and many special-status wildlife species, including the Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle, a species federally listed as threatened, have the potential to occur in its diverse habitats. The Park provides nesting and foraging habitat for many species of raptor, including some that are federally and state listed as threatened or endangered. Big Chico Creek provides spawning and rearing habitat for the federally and state listed spring-run Chinook salmon and is home to five resident species of native, nongame fish and many aquatic invertebrates. Big Chico Creek and its tributaries also serve as an important wildlife corridor, linking the habitats of the foothills with those of the Sacramento River.

The presence of a variety of natural resources made the Chico area an ideal location for prehistoric and historic settlement. Consequently, Bidwell Park contains many important cultural resources of significance to the local sovereign Nation of the Mechoopda tribe as well as the citizens of Chico.

### **1.1.3 REGIONAL CONTEXT**

Bidwell Park is an important local and regional natural resource and recreational amenity. Lindo Channel, Wildwood Park, and Bidwell Ranch are other local amenities owned by the City. Outside the City, but within a short drive of Chico, are several other wildlife preserves and recreation areas. The Big Chico Creek Ecological Preserve which is owned and managed by the California State University at Chico (CSUC) adjoins Bidwell Park to the east. To the west along the Sacramento River are various properties comprising the Sacramento River National Wildlife Refuge Complex and Bidwell-Sacramento River State Park. The Grey Lodge Wildlife Area is located to the south near the City of Gridley. The Oroville State Wildlife Area and Oroville State Recreation Area are in the vicinity of Lake Oroville to the southeast of Chico. The Plumas and Tahoe National Forests also offer abundant year-round recreational opportunities in the nearby Sierra Nevada Mountains, to the east. A little further to the north and northeast are the Ishii Wilderness, Lake Almanor, and Lassen Volcanic National Park.

## **1.2 MASTER MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE**

### **1.2.1 PURPOSE OF THE MASTER MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE**

A Bidwell Park Master Management Plan was approved by the Bidwell Park and Playground Commission on July 31, 1989 and adopted by the City of Chico City Council on January 2, 1990. This plan includes a vision for the park and strategies to achieve the plan's goals and objectives. While some sections of the plan (i.e., trail manual, vegetation management, signage, volunteer programs, and circulation) have been updated since its adoption, the current comprehensive update is needed in order to incorporate new acquisitions, reflect new rules and regulations that affect public use, resolve planning issues, and provide opportunities for public input. In doing so, the updated plan revises and expands existing management policies to more accurately reflect current planning topics.

This Bidwell Park Master Management Plan (BPMMP) Update fully incorporates the 1995 Upper Park acquisition of 1,417 additional acres and approximately 40 acres referred to as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Parcel, which are now part of Bidwell Park. Furthermore, the BPMMP Update includes extensive information on the resources present in Bidwell Park both in graphic and text format. It outlines updates and expansions of existing management goals and objectives to more accurately reflect current planning topics. The BPMMP also contains implementing strategies and guidelines for translating the goals and objectives into actions guiding the everyday operation of the Park. Overall design standards for Bidwell Park have been updated and expanded to include new standards brought about by the additional acquired acreage. Zoning and resource information for the new addition as well as the entire Park have been integrated into all elements of the BPMMP Update. A Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP) has been developed to translate the goals and objectives for natural resources into management strategies for specific aspects of natural resource management and to set the framework for the development of future elements of the plan.

In addition to addressing park wide management, the BPMMP Update includes four specific projects: the Horseshoe Lake Area Concept Plan, the Cedar Grove Area Concept Plan, the Trails Plan for Bidwell Park, and the Disc Golf Course Plan for the State Route (SR) 32 (BLM) site. For each of these elements, a series of concepts that accommodate desired uses as well as known site constraints have been developed.

Finally, this BPMMP Update includes an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) that analyzes potential impacts to the environment resulting from implementation of the BPMMP Update in general, as well as the four detailed projects in specific. Where appropriate, the EIR includes specific mitigation to reduce any impacts to resources resulting from implementation of the proposed project to less-than-significant level.

### **1.2.2 SUBSEQUENT PLANNING ACTIVITIES**

The BPMMP Update/EIR addresses implementation of the proposed BPMMP and the four specific projects discussed above. Any future projects proposed in the Park that have not been covered in the EIR will have to undergo additional environmental review prior to their adoption and implementation. The BPMMP Update, as well as its specific elements, may also be amended, as future planning issues are addressed or additional funding becomes available.

### **1.2.3 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND AGENCY REVIEW**

A Notice of Preparation for the BPMMP Update and EIR was published on October 14, 2004. A public scoping meeting was held in Chico on October 28, 2004. The Draft EIR was circulated for a 45 day public review period April 2007. Comments received on the Preliminary BPMMP Update/Draft EIR will be compiled in Volume 2 of this document.

It is important that the updated plan incorporates a high degree of public involvement, reflects the values of the community, and is user-friendly for City staff and the interested public. A public outreach program and the involvement of volunteers in data gathering and the development of management recommendations have been important and integral aspects of the BPMMP Update.

At the onset of the planning process, the City of Chico assembled a Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) specifically for the BPMMP update. CAC members were selected based on their affiliation with a broad variety of organizations that represent various user and interest groups in Bidwell Park. All CAC members were invited to participate on the Committee based on their diverse perspectives and history of interest and involvement in Park matters. A total of 44 people/organizations formed the committee. A list of members and their affiliation is provided in Section 5.3 of this BPMMP Update.

The CAC met monthly from January 2005 to July 2005 to review all elements of the BPMMP Update, provide a forum for sharing ideas, discuss important aspects of the plan, and give input on certain planning topics. In addition to the CAC meetings, two technical workshops were held during the development of the trails plan and the concept plan for the disc golf course project to provide opportunity for more focused technical discussion on those topics beyond the more general scope of the CAC meeting. A final CAC meeting was held on September 8, 2005 to review a complete draft of the BPMMP Update, prior to its presentation to the BPPC at its September 26, 2005 meeting. Comments received from the CAC were incorporated into the second draft of the BPMMP presented to the BPPC.

Input into the BPMMP update was solicited from the Native American Heritage Commission and from the sovereign Nation of the Mechoopda of the Chico Rancheria. Tribal members of the Mechoopda met with City and consultant staff early in the planning process to provide input and comments.

The BPPC reviewed the second draft in a series of focused meetings held between September 2005 and March 2006. Comments and revisions made during this review are reflected in the current version of the document.

A Park User Survey was conducted in order to provide another opportunity for public input to the planning process and to update information on park use. Three surveys were implemented: a mail in survey was distributed to a random subsample of the citizens of Chico; a mail-in survey was made available to interested parties for downloading from the City of Chico's website, and on-site surveys were conducted by volunteers. The on-site survey was implemented during the period of March to early June 2005. The survey instrument, methodology, and detailed findings are provided in Appendix B of this document.

The City's website served as a tool for sharing important information relating to the planning process. All relevant documents and graphics developed as part of the planning process as well as meeting minutes from the scoping meetings, all CAC meetings and technical workshops, the user survey, draft BPMMP, and other relevant information are available for viewing on the city's website and were updated continuously throughout the planning process.

## **1.3 CONTENTS OF THE MASTER MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE**

### **1.3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The introduction chapter (Chapter 1) provides information on the location and context setting of Bidwell Park, explains the BPMMP Update planning process, and outlines the overall format and structure of the document.

### **1.3.2 EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The Existing Conditions chapter (Chapter 2) of the BPMMP Update provides a comprehensive review of the three park zones; existing land uses in and around the Park; existing physical, natural, cultural, educational, aesthetic

and recreational resources in the Park; and existing facilities. Also included are descriptions of current maintenance and operations of the Park and the role of volunteers. The chapter explores the various elements that influence park planning and identifies the key park planning issues and opportunities.

### **1.3.3 MANAGEMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES AND IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIES AND GUIDELINES**

Chapter 3 includes the Vision for Bidwell Park stating what the Park may ultimately look like once the BPMMP has been implemented in its entirety. Chapter 3 establishes goals and objectives for the Park at two levels: park-wide (Section 3.1) and zone-specific (Section 3.2). For each zone it defines permissible uses and specific goals and objectives. Goals and Objectives are structured by resource topic, following the same general outline as the resource descriptions in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 describes the policy body of the BPMMP, providing that any revisions or amendments to the goals and objectives presented in this chapter will be subject to approval and review by the City Council. Chapter 3 also includes implementing strategies and guidelines which “translate” the goals and objectives contained in Chapter 3 into guidance for the day to day operation of Bidwell Park. Implementing strategies and guidelines immediately follow the goals and objectives for each resource topic. Revisions and amendments to the implementing strategies and guidelines will be subject to approval by the BPPC, but will not have to go before the City Council, as long as proposed revisions are consistent with all goals and objectives provided in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 also provides guidance on the interpretation and implementation of the BPMMP once adopted, and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of staff and BPPC.

### **1.3.4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT**

Chapter 4 is the EIR prepared for the BPMMP Update and implementation of four specific projects (Cedar Grove Area Concept Plan, Horseshoe Lake Area Concept Plan, Trails Plan for Bidwell Park, and Disc Golf Area Concept Plan). An EIR is an informational document used to inform public agency decision-makers and the general public of any significant environmental effects of a project, identify feasible ways to minimize the significant effects, and describe reasonable alternatives to the project that can reduce environmental impacts.

### **1.3.5 PLAN PREPARERS**

Chapter 5 includes a list of all persons involved in the preparation of this document, including City staff, consultants, CAC members, and BPPC members.

### **1.3.6 REFERENCES**

Chapter 6 lists all personal communications, literature reviewed, and websites consulted in the preparation of the BPMMP update.

### **1.3.7 OTHER SECTIONS**

In addition to the sections described above, the BPMMP update contains several technical Appendices, including Annie Bidwell’s deed (Appendix A), Park Visitor and Community Survey Report Summary (Appendix B), a Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP) (Appendix C), Cultural Resources Management Plan (CRMP) Outline (Appendix D), Trails Plan (Appendix E), Horseshoe Lake Area Concept Plan (Appendix F), Cedar Grove Area Concept Plan (Appendix G), Disc Golf Area Concept Plan (Appendix H), Regulatory Framework (Appendix I), City of Chico General Plan Goals and Policies and Municipal Codes (Appendix J), Cultural Resources Information (Appendix K – Confidential), Design Standards (Appendix L), City of Chico Bench Policy (Appendix M), and Appendix N – Depository for Future BPPC Guidance on BPMMP Interpretation.