



E1. INTRODUCTION TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS



MASTER MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE AND ASSOCIATED PARK IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS
DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

E1 INTRODUCTION TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

E1.1 PURPOSE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (EIR)

This Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR) examines the significant and potentially significant effects on the environment that may occur as a result of implementing the proposed Bidwell Park Master Management Plan (BPMMP or Plan) Update, which includes four site-specific Park Improvement Projects – the Trails Plan, the Horseshoe Lake Area Concept Plan, the Cedar Grove Area Concept Plan, and the Disc Golf/Trailhead Area Concept Plan. The EIR is a companion to and integrated with the BPMMP, because both share certain presentations that have common uses in each document (e.g., description of existing conditions), as explained below and in the introduction to Chapter E4, Environmental Impacts. The BPMMP is the main body of Volume 1 of this document and the EIR is Volume 2.

The BPMMP Update provides the detailed project description information for the Draft EIR. To assist the reader, a brief narrative description of the BPMMP and each of the four Park Improvement Projects is also provided below in Chapter E3, Project Description. Details regarding the Park Improvement Projects analyzed in this EIR can be found in the Technical Appendices to Volume 1 as follows: Trails Plan (Appendix E), Horseshoe Lake Area Concept Plan (Appendix F), Cedar Grove Area Concept Plan (Appendix G), and Disc Golf/Trailhead Area Concept Plan (Appendix H). Each of these appendices includes concept plans (maps), as well as narrative descriptions. Volume 1 of this document – the Draft BPMMP – is available on the City’s website at the following link:

http://www.chico.ca.us/common/mod_resource.asp?p=50&f=251

This Draft EIR was prepared in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) of 1970 (as amended; Public Resources Code §21000 et seq.) and the State CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations §15000 et seq.). An EIR is a full disclosure, public information document in which the significant and potentially significant environmental impacts of a project are evaluated, feasible measures to mitigate significant impacts are identified, and a range of reasonable alternatives to the project that can reduce or avoid significant environmental effects are discussed.

An EIR is used as a key source of environmental information in the planning and decision-making process by the Lead Agency and responsible and trustee agencies. The Lead Agency is the public agency with primary responsibility over the proposed project. In accordance with State CEQA Guidelines §15051(b)(1), “the Lead Agency will normally be the agency with general governmental powers, such as a city or county, rather than an agency with a single or limited purpose.” The Lead Agency for the proposed BPMMP and site-specific Park Improvement Projects is the City of Chico.

The purpose of an EIR is not to recommend either approval or denial of a project, but to provide information to the decision-makers and the public about the potential environmental effects of the project. CEQA requires decision-makers to balance the benefits of a project against its unavoidable, significant environmental effects in deciding whether to carry out a project. The Lead Agency will consider the Draft EIR, comments received on the Draft EIR, and responses to those comments as part of the Final EIR before making a decision. At the end of the CEQA process, the Lead Agency prepares findings to disclose the disposition of significant effects on the environment, in accordance with Section 15091 of the State CEQA Guidelines. If environmental impacts are identified as significant and unavoidable, the Lead Agency may still approve the project if it determines that the economic, legal, social, technological, or other benefits outweigh the unavoidable environmental impacts. The Lead Agency would then be required to prepare a Statement of Overriding Considerations that discusses the specific reasons for approving the project, based on information in the EIR and other information in the record, in compliance with Section 15093 of the State CEQA Guidelines. If no significant, unavoidable environmental impacts would result from implementation of the project, the findings pursuant to Section 15091 of the State CEQA Guidelines will state that conclusion.

The environmental analysis is based on implementation of the BPMMP. The term “implementation” is intended to acknowledge that the guiding and implementing policies of the BPMMP would be in effect. The programmatic evaluation and level of potential environmental impacts are, therefore, the result of implementing all components of the proposed BPMMP.

Because of the nature of the BPMMP as an overall planning document that addresses a program of actions within the Park, many proposed policies are directive and qualitative, rather than quantitative. Consistent with the character of the Plan, this EIR is a “program” EIR for the BPMMP, as defined by State CEQA Guidelines Section 15168 (see discussion below), and many of the impacts and mitigation measures are, therefore, also described qualitatively, rather than quantitatively. This level of analysis allows the City to evaluate program-wide effects of the proposed BPMMP. If projects are proposed for the Park, the City would conduct subsequent environmental review of discretionary actions in accordance with CEQA when individual project plans and designs are known. Future projects would be evaluated in light of the information in this EIR to determine whether or not additional environmental documentation would be needed. This EIR, therefore, evaluates the overall level of impacts that would occur when the BPMMP is put into effect, i.e., adopted by the City Council and used by City staff as the guiding document for the Park. More precise and quantitative definitions of impacts and mitigation measures would occur when subsequent environmental review of specific projects occurs.

For the four site specific Park Improvement Projects, the EIR describes more quantitative impacts and specific mitigation measures, where applicable. Future projects that have been determined to be consistent with the BPMMP and result in similar impacts to those described herein may be recognized as within the scope of the

BPMMP and the analysis in the program EIR. If appropriate, this allows the City to use this program EIR for the later project and adopt mitigation measures from this EIR as part of the then proposed project. This process would eliminate the need for redundant review of projects that are within the scope of the BPMMP and program EIR. Mitigation measures will be compiled into the Mitigation and Monitoring Plan for this EIR, once the project has been approved and moves to implementation.

E1.2 TYPE OF EIR

As noted above, this document serves as a Program EIR, pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines §15168, for review and approval of the BPMMP. It also serves as a Project EIR for the four specific Park Improvement Projects.

E1.2.1 PROGRAM EIR FOR THE BPMMP

A Program EIR is an EIR that is prepared on a “series of actions that can be characterized as one large project” (§15168[a]). As stated in State CEQA Guidelines §15168(a), the individual actions contemplated in a program EIR may be related either:

- (1) Geographically;
- (2) As logical parts in the chain of contemplated actions;
- (3) In connection with issuance of rules, regulations, plans or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program; or
- (4) As individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulatory authority and having generally similar environmental effects that can be mitigated in similar ways.

As a Program EIR for the BPMMP Update, this document is intended to serve as a comprehensive and detailed document that evaluates the full range of impacts anticipated with implementation of the Plan. A Program EIR can either serve as a “first-tier” EIR upon which later project-specific CEQA documents can rely or as a comprehensive document that would allow an agency to carry out activities that are “within the scope” of the Program EIR without having to prepare additional site-specific EIRs or negative declarations. Subsequent activities consistent with the BPMMP will be examined in light of the analysis in the Program EIR to determine the appropriate CEQA documentation for their later environmental review and compliance.

Future park projects that have potential environmental effects beyond those described herein may use this EIR as a source of baseline information regarding environmental conditions and potential impacts. As envisioned by CEQA (Section 15168[d]), future project EIRs or Initial Studies would be able to incorporate by reference various portions of this EIR, including environmental setting information, impact analyses, and mitigation measures, as

appropriate to each project, a concept known as a “tiered” environmental analysis. For future projects, new research and reporting can focus on site-specific characteristics and potential impacts not covered in this document.

E1.2.2 PROJECT EIR FOR THE FOUR PARK IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

The document also serves as a Project EIR for the four proposed Park Improvement Projects. This is the most common form of EIR and it focuses on the changes in the environment that would occur as a result of the development of the four projects. It examines all phases of the four Park Improvement Projects, including construction and operation.

Pursuant to §15143 of the State CEQA Guidelines, a Lead Agency may limit the EIR’s discussion of environmental effects to specific issues where significant effects on the environment may occur. The City used a variety of information to determine which issue areas would result in potentially significant or significant effects on the environment. This information included field surveys within Bidwell Park during the preparation of the BPMMP, review of proposed changes to the existing Bidwell Park Master Management Plan, comments from the public and via agency consultation, and comments received on the Notice of Preparation (NOP). The NOP was circulated to public agencies and the public on October 15, 2004 for a 30-day review period and concluded on November 15, 2004. The NOP and comments received on the NOP are included in Appendix E1. Review of the NOP comments and preliminary analysis indicate that some environmental issue areas of the project may result in significant and adverse effects on the environment. These issue areas include: aesthetics, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, land use and planning, noise, open space and recreation, transportation and circulation, utilities and services, and cumulative effects. Consequently, the scope of this EIR focuses on these issue areas.

Based on the NOP, public comments on the NOP, and preliminary analysis, the project would have less than significant impacts on several environmental issue areas. These issues are described in Section E4.2 of the Draft EIR, Effects Found Not To Be Significant. These issues need not be evaluated in detail in this EIR, in accordance with §15128 of the State CEQA Guidelines.

E1.2.3 EXISTING CONDITIONS/BASELINE FOR THE EIR

The baseline refers to the conditions that serve as the point of comparison for determining environmental effects and their significance. A definition of “environmental setting” and guidance regarding baseline for environmental analysis are located in CCR § 15125 of the State CEQA Guidelines. These guidelines state that the EIR must include a description of the physical environmental conditions at the time the NOP is published. In the case of this EIR, the existing conditions are defined as the environmental setting that existed on the date that the NOP

(Appendix A) was published (October 14, 2004). Section 15125(a) of the Guidelines states that the environmental setting will normally constitute the baseline physical conditions by which a Lead Agency determines whether an impact is significant.

The City recognizes the desire of some members of the community to define the baseline for the Disc Golf/Trailhead Concept Plan Area as conditions that may have existed at some time in the more distant past to assess environmental changes from some more pristine character before disc golf use of the site. It would be speculative to define those characteristics because information on the physical conditions of the site and patterns of its use are not available for the more distant past. Furthermore, CEQA case law (*Riverwatch v. County of San Diego*, 1999; *Kenneth F. Fat vs. County of Sacramento*, 2002) has made it clear that the correct baseline for an EIR or negative declaration is the existing conditions at the onset of the environmental review process, even if prior and existing uses are unauthorized.

For most of the resources addressed in this EIR, the existing conditions are described in Chapter 2 of Volume 1 (the BPMMP) and a reference to the setting description is provided at the beginning of the resource topic impact section. If the environmental setting had not previously been presented in the BPMMP for a resource topic, the information is provided at the beginning of the respective technical resources impact sections. Additional environmental setting information for biological resources is provided in Appendices E3 (Special-status Plant Survey Report) and E4 (Oak Assessment).

E1.3 CEQA CONSULTATION AND PUBLIC REVIEW PROVISIONS

E1.3.1 RESPONSIBLE AND TRUSTEE AGENCIES

The City is the Lead Agency with the primary authority for approval of the proposed BPMMP and four Park Improvement Projects. Additional agencies (listed below) with potential authority over implementation of the Plan and projects (federal agencies with regulatory authority and state or local responsible agencies), or elements thereof, and certain agencies with jurisdiction by law over natural resources (trustee agencies) will have the opportunity to review this document during the public and agency review period, and will use this information in consideration and issuance of any permits required for the project. Consultation with those agencies has occurred during the preparation of the Draft EIR.

Federal, responsible, and/or trustee agencies relevant to the BPMMP or Park Improvement Projects may include:

Federal

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

National Marine Fisheries Service

State

State of California Regional Water Quality Control Board
California Department of Fish and Game

Local

Chico Area Recreation District
Butte County

E1.3.1.1 PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS

This Draft EIR is being circulated to local, state, and federal agencies, and to interested organizations and individuals who may wish to review and comment on the report. It is being circulated for a 45-day public review period, during which time written comments may be submitted to the City at the address below. Emailed comments may also be sent to the e-mail address shown:

Brendan Vieg, Senior Planner
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411 Main Street, P.O. Box 3420
Chico, CA 95927
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Copies of the Draft EIR are available for review at the following locations:

City of Chico Planning Services Department
411 Main Street, 2nd Floor
Chico, CA 95927

Butte County Library, Chico Branch
1106 Sherman Avenue
Chico, CA 95926

Meriam Library, Special Collections
California State University, Chico
Chico, CA 95926

A copy of the Draft EIR can also be found on the City's Web site at www.ci.chico.ca.us.

E1.4 CONTENTS OF THE EIR

This EIR is structured as follows:

CHAPTER E1 INTRODUCTION

The introduction chapter briefly explains the purpose of an EIR under CEQA, the relationship between Volume 1 (BPMMP and Technical Appendices) and Volume 2 (Draft Environmental Impact Report) of this document, the type of EIR prepared, the CEQA process, and the terminology used. It also provides an overview of the structure of Volume 2.

CHAPTER E2 SUMMARY

This chapter summarizes impacts that were found to be significant and mitigation measures to be implemented to reduce these impacts to less-than significant. Chapter E2 also provides a brief summary of the alternatives considered for the BPMMP, including the four Park Improvement Projects, and the level of impact resulting from the alternatives in comparison to impacts resulting from the proposed project.

CHAPTER E3 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This chapter contains a brief description of the projects analyzed in this EIR. For the BPMMP, it contains a brief overview of the overall structure and content of the Plan. For the four Park Improvement Projects, it contains a narrative describing the various elements of the projects. This narrative is in addition to the graphic descriptions and summaries presented in Appendices E through H of the BPMMP.

CHAPTER E4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

This chapter examines in detail the potential environmental impacts resulting from implementation of the BPMMP and the four Park Improvement Projects. It describes environmental impacts found not to be significant, followed by a detailed discussion of significant and potentially significant environmental impacts. Within each resource topic, significance criteria are provided first, followed by a discussion of methods for determining impacts. Potential impacts are then discussed for each environmental resource topic. Mitigation measures for all significant and potentially significant impacts are presented in Section E4.3 by specific resources topic. Each mitigation measure ends with a statement clarifying to which project the measure applies (i.e., the overall BPMMP and/or specific Park Improvement Project).

CHAPTER E5 EIR PREPARERS

This chapter provides a list of all persons involved in the preparation of the EIR, including City staff and consultants.

CHAPTER E6 REFERENCES

This chapter provides a record of all personal communications, literature reviewed, and websites consulted in the preparation of the BPMMP update and accompanying EIR.