
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Date: Thursday, March 15, 2007

Subject: Development of the Bidwell Ranch Conservation and Mitigation Bank

What is the role of River Partners on Bidwell Ranch?

River Partners is working with the City of Chico to develop a mitigation and conservation bank on the Bidwell Ranch property. Chico-based River Partners has extensive experience in natural resource management and working with agencies and the public to provide solutions to complex environmental questions. River Partners is a nonprofit, public benefit organization whose mission is to create wildlife habitat for the benefit of people and the environment.

River Partners goal is to provide a turn key product by completing all the tasks to develop the site as a mitigation bank, the City. Federal and State agencies will certify and approve the bank and the city will make the final decision on whether to move forward with developing the site as a mitigation and conservation bank. Federal and State agencies certify the bank.

What is a conservation or mitigation bank?

A conservation or mitigation bank is land managed for its natural resource values. Habitat credits are sold to entities that need to remedy environmental impacts. In wetland mitigation banking, the goal is to restore, create, and enhance wetlands to compensate for unavoidable wetland losses. Whenever possible the mitigation should replace the exact function and values of the specific wetland habitats adversely affected by a proposed project.

In conservation banking, the goal is to offset adverse impacts to a species. These different goals account for differences in the policies guiding operations of the two banks. In contrast to mitigation banks, an appropriate function of conservation banks is the preservation of existing habitat with long-term conservation value to mitigate loss of other isolated and fragmented habitat that has no long-term value to the species.

Why create a conservation or mitigation bank?

Conservation or mitigation banks:

- Offer landowners economic incentives to protect natural resources;
- Save developers time and money by providing them with the certainty of pre-approved compensation lands; and
- Provide for long-term protection and management of habitat.

Documents prepared for this project

Site Inventory – a brief summary of biological resources (from existing reports and studies) on the property.

Preliminary Mitigation Proposal – a working document that provides bank details.

Management Plan – provides details on the practices needed to improve habitat on the property.

Mitigation Bank Enabling Instrument (MBEI) –the legal instrument that establishes the bank.

Conservation agreement – an easement on the property that protects the site from future development.

Endowment Account – the fund required for long-term maintenance of the property.

How long will the project take and what's involved?

The project will take approximately 2 years to complete.. The main tasks of this project are to:

- Review and summarize existing documents and information.
- Establish a Citizens and Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) to provide input on the project approach and review key documents.
- Complete and submit a Site Inventory of biological resources and Preliminary Mitigation Proposal to State and Federal agencies.
- Develop a Management Plan and Mitigation Bank Enabling Instrument (MBEI).
- Prepare and record a conservation agreement. The entity that holds the agreement will be determined during the course of the project.
- Establish the mechanism for the endowment account with the appropriate entity.

How much will the conservation and mitigation bank cost?

Selling habitat credits will allow the City to recoup costs associated with the property acquisition, and pay for the long-term maintenance of the property. The value of credits will be determined as the inventory of the property is completed and in consultation with the regulatory agencies. Depending on the habitat protected and the demand in an area, mitigation and conservation credits can be sold for tens of thousands of dollars an acre.

Public input is very important to the project. River Partners will seek input though the Citizen and Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG). The SAG welcomes interested citizens to provide input on the development of the site as a conservation and mitigation bank, as well as the overall management plan. Please contact River Partners to get on the mailing list.

What will happen to the property if it becomes a mitigation bank?

The project will help define appropriate activities on the site. As a mitigation or conservation bank, the general nature of the property will remain as open space that supports habitat for a variety of plants and wildlife. Mitigation and conservation banks must have a sufficient area to support the intended biological resources being preserved. It is anticipated that future active management activities will be needed to enhance the property for habitat.

What is the role of the public on the project?

Public input is very important to the project, River Partners will seek input though the Citizen's Advisory Workgroup. The Citizen's group welcomes interested citizens to provide input on the development of the site as a conservation and mitigation bank. Please contact River Partners to get on the mailing list.

Will the public be allowed to access the property?

In keeping with the direction of the Chico City council, we intend to develop a management plan that maximizes public access to the property while protecting environmental resources. We will thoroughly examine appropriate public uses of the property consistent with primary use of the site as mitigation and conservation bank.

The regulatory agencies may wish to impose limits on activities and timing. Not all recreational activities that people enjoy in upper Bidwell Park are likely to be compatible with the use of the property as a conservation and mitigation bank. Ultimately, it will be up to the Chico City Council to determine if the benefits of converting the property to a conservation and mitigation bank outweigh other uses of the property.

For more information: Please contact Dan Efseaff (defseaff@riverpartners.org) (530) 894-5401 ext 21) or visit our website www.riverpartners.org.