
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Date: Thursday, March 29, 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. River Partners will complete the tasks necessary to develop the site as a conservation and mitigation bank. Once completed, the City will make a decision on whether the benefits of converting the property to a conservation and mitigation bank outweigh other uses of the property. Federal and State agencies must certify and approve the documentation before the site can operate as a conservation or mitigation bank. Chico-based, River Partners is a nonprofit, public benefit organization and has extensive experience in natural resource management and working with agencies and the public to provide solutions to complex environmental questions.

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. A conservation bank protects habitat for threatened and endangered species. Mitigation banks specifically compensate for unavoidable wetland losses. These different goals account for differences in the policies guiding operations of the two banks.

Why create a conservation or mitigation bank?

A conservation or mitigation bank is privately or publicly owned land managed for its natural resource values. In exchange for permanent environmental protection, the bank operator may sell habitat credits to developers who need to satisfy legal requirements for the environmental impacts of development. A conservation or mitigation bank is a free-market enterprise that:

- 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
- Consolidate small, fragmented wetland mitigation projects into large contiguous sites which will have much higher wildlife habitat values.
- 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 Citizen Work Group to provide advice to us 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.

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

As a mitigation or conservation bank, 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. If approved, the property will be entered into a conservation easement and be managed for its natural resources.

What is the role of the public on the project?

Public input is very important to the project. Citizens may sign-up to receive project updates and comment on draft documents. River Partners will also seek input through a Citizen Work Group. The citizen group will advise the project team on the long term management of the site and the development of the conservation and mitigation bank. Please contact River Partners to get on the mailing list or join the citizen work group.

Will the public be allowed to access the property?

The project will consider public uses and recommend ones that are consistent with the site as mitigation and conservation bank. Regulatory agencies often impose limits on the recreational uses on protected areas. Given this constraint, not all recreational activities that people enjoy in upper Bidwell Park are likely to be compatible with the property as a conservation and mitigation bank. However, we intend to develop a management plan that protects environmental resources and maximizes public access.

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