

Draft Citizen Work Group Meeting Summary – September 25, 2007

Bidwell Ranch Mitigation Bank Project

Meeting Time, Location, and Purpose

The Bidwell Ranch Mitigation Bank Project Team conducted a public meeting on Tuesday, September 25th from 5:30 – 7:00 pm at the Chico Municipal Building. The Project Team included representatives from the City of Chico, River Partners (the project lead), Tehama Environmental Solutions, and California State University, Chico – Archaeological Research Program.

The purpose of the meeting was to update the Citizen Workgroup on the progress of the Bidwell Ranch Mitigation Bank Project and to gather information and suggestions from those in attendance. Presentations by the project team covered the project process and presented results of the site inventory, wetland delineation, and archaeological survey. The meeting was open to the public.

This meeting summary is one component of a public involvement approach that provides interested members of the public opportunities to provide input and comment during the course of the project.

Meeting Overview

Approximately 15 people attended the meeting. Attachment 1 presents the sign-in sheet for the meeting. Handout materials included an agenda, project overview, project timeline, description of deliverables, table of special-status species to be considered for project, and a site inventory overview. Literature and poster displays provided additional information on the project, the site, and its resources. The meeting agenda, handouts, posters, and summary, and the project documents mentioned herein are available on the Bidwell Ranch web page (<http://www.riverpartners.org/where-work/bidwell/bidwell.html>).

The meeting included about 50 minutes of verbal presentations. The agenda for the presentations was:

- Introduction
- Update on Process
- Site Inventory Overview
- Draft Wetland Delineation Overview
- Archaeological Survey Summary

Presentation and Comments

A summary of presenters and meeting topics are provided below.

Introduction

Coral Cavanagh (Curalium Consulting), meeting facilitator, welcomed those attending and stated the purpose of the public meeting. She reviewed the ground rules for meeting participation. All in attendance introduced themselves briefly.

Update on Process

Dan Efseaff (River Partners) reviewed the project process and described the results of recent meetings with some of the agency personal that make up the Mitigation Bank Review Team. Agencies include the US Fish and Wildlife, Department of Fish and Game, and US Army Corps of Engineers, and the US Environmental Protection Agency. These agencies are revising their process for review of mitigation bank packages, and have requested that the Bidwell Ranch project team wait for their new set of guidelines before submitting a package. Mr. Efseaff explained that the development of new guidelines has already taken 1 ½ years, and that the project team has decided instead to submit an entire package quickly, under the existing guidelines. This will result in a change in the previous project schedule, effectively moving the development of the Management Plan much earlier in the project and delaying earlier products.

Those familiar with the Mitigation Bank Review Team report that it is overloaded, has a high member turnover rate, and meets infrequently, placing a premium on project readiness, and developing solid information and a prospectus to draw attention to the project. The agency representatives have been enthusiastic about the Bidwell Ranch Mitigation Bank Project thus far. In addition to compressing the schedule for the project, this change in approach will mean that development of the mitigation bank package will not be as interactive as the team hoped.

Site Inventory Overview

Colleen Martin (River Partners) described the process used to develop the site inventory, which was compiled largely from existing information, including an Environmental Impact Report performed by Jones & Stokes Associates, Inc. in 1994. The project team identified data gaps in the information that would need to be filled for development of the Mitigation Bank project: an updated wetland delineation and an archaeological survey. The project team contracted out for these services, and is discussing the need for an aquatic invertebrate survey, as well.

Ms. Martin presented the table of contents of the Site Inventory, which is a document intended for use by the community and agencies, and which was in final development at the time of the meeting. She highlighted a few of the many special status species that may occur on Bidwell Ranch, and requested that the interested members of the public

review the document and provide additional information on species sightings, the site's land use history, and other local knowledge regarding the site, the corridor, and park.

The Site Inventory will be available on the River Partners website. River Partners can also provide the document on CD or as a hard copy, if needed.

Draft Wetland Delineation Overview

Greg Treber (Tehama Environmental Solutions) provided an overview of the recently completed draft wetland delineation. He described the Bidwell Ranch wetland system as extremely complex, with feathered, difficult graduation of communities. The current work built upon the 1991 delineation conducted by Jones & Stokes Associates, Inc., which Mr. Treber described as excellent. Mr. Treber contacted the co-lead of the Jones & Stokes Associates, Inc. effort and found his input very helpful. Voluminous information developed for the previous effort may be available and helpful for this project.

The results of the current delineation (e.g., 54 acres of "jurisdictional wetland", 34 acres of clay flat, 3.4 acres of vernal pools) show discrepancies with the 1991 numbers. Mr. Treber noted that wetland delineation methods have changed much over the years, which may be a cause of some of the discrepancies. Other causes could be slight changes in vegetation, differences in interpretation, and differences in the technology available.

Comments and questions during this presentation included the following. Comments are paraphrased, and *responses from the project team and its consultants are shown in italics.*

- Definitions of the wetland types may differ from the previous work, and should be provided.
 - *We will do this.*
- The Environmental Impact Report, a source of info, was required for nearby development. Is it possible that politics influenced the amount of wetlands shown?
 - *It is unlikely.*
- Would this dry year influence the amount of wetlands?
 - *Possibly. Annual precipitation changes do make a substantial difference; however, delineations are performed knowing that it is a dry year. It is best to return to the site during a normal year, but even then, it could take time to show the effects.*
- How does the hydrology of the drainage channel affect the delineation?
 - *The impacts of the Sycamore Creek Diversion Channel will be considered as part of the management plan.*
- How can we get a handle on the differences between the old and new report?

- *This is challenging. To start with, the project team will provide a comparison in tabular form.*
- The use of a very recent soil survey gives you a lot of strength. The NRCS criteria for determining one type of soil, for example, are different than those used by the US Army Corps of Engineers.

Archaeological Survey Summary

The status of this survey is in progress. Greg White (California State University, Chico – Archaeological Research Program) provided a description to the survey approach and results from past surveys. Cultural resources, he explained are a category under the California Environmental Quality Act, and include historical resources (anything over 50 years old), as well as pre-historic resources, such as Native American sites. The original laws regarding these resources were federal; state laws parallel these laws, and the federal laws “trump” the state laws.

A previous archaeological survey for the site was conducted in 1994 by Jensen and Associates, under the procedures in place then. Current laws have much more rigorous consultation requirements. The 1994 survey was conducted without consultation. The 1994 survey found six cultural resource sites, all Native American, and included wedge-shaped tools at three separate campsites. This type of campsite is typical of areas with vernal pools, where families may have lived temporarily during springtime. The survey team will return to the sites with a tribal representative, and will test the effectiveness of the original survey. The final report will include evaluation of the previous work.

Follow-up activities associated with this survey:

- The tribe may request some restoration or propagation of plants that have traditional uses.
- A summary will be issued. Under California law, cultural record are not in the public record, in order to protect the sites from looting, other vandalism, or damage from curious amateur archaeologists. Thus, the publicly-available information will include only a summary, and will not provide specific locations.

Questions and comments during this part of the meeting included the following.

- How common are the type of sites at Bidwell Ranch? Are they unique in a way that might help gain support for protecting the site?
 - *Each cultural resource site is unique and valuable. We evaluate cultural resources based on their potential to inform us about the past. Note that if any human remains were found at a site, an additional layer of regulations would apply and the site would gain the same level of protection that a cemetery would.*

Questions and Answers

Additional questions and comments on the project included the following.

- Is the City considering the potential for Bidwell Ranch as a wetland “creation” site?
 - *No. The Agencies have said that perhaps the site could have some modification or restoration, but they are not interested in creation. The southwestern corner may have some enhancement potential.*
- There is a very straight ditch in the southern part of the site – this diversion channel has created cuts.
- The northwest corner has potential for gaining waters that have been destroyed by off-road vehicle recreation. Butte County meadowfoam is present along the trail – there may be habitat potential for this species.
- Is Butte County meadowfoam habitat restorable?
 - *There is some potential to bring in a source population. Creation of Butte County meadowfoam habitat has been done in the past.*
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is short of funds, and its situation is getting worse. Its field offices are losing people. To pull attention to this project, the stronger the package you develop and the stronger the coalition that brings this forward, the better.
 - *Our team, which includes not only the City, River Partners, and our consultant, but also local stakeholders and the public, brings much strength.*
 - *The agencies are trying to spread out their work. We need to raise the urgency of our project.*
- What are the oldest aerial photographs of the site that you have?
 - *1952, and we’re trying to track down 1937.*
- Talk to Mary Andrews, who may have some more aerial photos.
- The old maps don’t show the recent housing development.
- What is the plan for site management during the upcoming season?
 - *The continuation of livestock grazing.*

Summary

Many of the comments will be addressed in the management plan. The draft site inventory is now available on the River Partners website. Another meeting will be scheduled in Winter to discuss the management plan, prospectus, and agency involvement for the project.