

Citizen Work Group Meeting Summary – January 31, 2008

Bidwell Ranch Mitigation and Conservation Bank Project

Meeting Time, Location, and Purpose

The Bidwell Ranch Conservation and Mitigation Bank Project Team conducted a Citizen Work Group meeting on Thursday, January 31st from 5:30 – 7:30 pm at the City of Chico Municipal Building. The Project Team included representatives from the City of Chico, River Partners (the project lead), North State Resources, and Pacific Legacy (formerly represented by California State University, Chico – Archaeological Research Program).

The purpose of the meeting was to update the Citizen Work Group on the progress of the Bidwell Ranch Mitigation and Conservation 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 Preliminary Mitigation Bank Package, Property Analysis Record, and cultural resources 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 22 people attended the meeting. Handout materials included an agenda. Literature and poster displays provided additional information on the project, the site, and its resources. The meeting agenda, posters, project documents, and additional information are available for review at River Partner's office or on the Bidwell Ranch web page (<http://www.riverpartners.org/where-we-work/bidwell/bidwell.html>).

The meeting included about 60 minutes of verbal presentations and was followed with a 30 minute questions and comments section. The agenda for the presentations was:

- Welcome
- Preliminary Mitigation Bank Package Overview
- Property Analysis Report Overview
- Cultural Resources Survey Results
- Next Steps
- Prospectus Overview
- Questions and Comments

Presentation and Comments

A summary of presenters and meeting topics are provided below.

Welcome

Dan Efseaff (River Partners) and Brendan Vieg (City of Chico) welcomed those attending and stated the purpose of the public meeting. Mr. Efseaff gave a brief overview of the project and its history. All in attendance introduced themselves briefly.

Preliminary Mitigation Bank Package Overview

Colleen Martin (River Partners) described the process used to develop the Preliminary Mitigation Bank Package and its role in the development of the proposed Bidwell Ranch Bank. An outline of the bank package and the draft package were available for review.

Ms. Martin reviewed the contents of the Preliminary Mitigation Bank Package, which contains all necessary documents required for the process of establishing a mitigation bank. She explained that the package is to be submitted to the Mitigation Bank Review Team (MBRT), which is made up of representatives from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, CA Department of Fish and Game, and the US Army Corps of Engineers.

Ms. Martin explained that due to the stage of the project some of the sections in the package are incomplete. For example, the Financial Assurances section cannot be completed until the bank is in its final stages. However, a preliminary Property Analysis Record for the long-term management of the site has been completed.

Property Analysis Record (PAR) Overview

Paul Kirk (North State Resources) discussed the methods for preparing and the results of the preliminary Property Analysis Record (PAR Analysis) conducted for the long-term management of the bank. Copies of the PAR Analysis were passed around for review.

Mr. Kirk described how the PAR Analysis is conducted and the data is generated. Costs are based on the basic plans for the site, such as fencing and firebreaks, and the current prices of supplies and labor. A standard percentage increase anticipated in rates is then added to the total cost. These anticipated costs are used to calculate the endowment for the bank. Mr. Kirk explained that an endowment is the price necessary to maintain the bank in perpetuity. Five percent of the endowment is available every year for bank maintenance.

Mr. Kirk explained that the figures generated from this preliminary PAR Analysis are the baseline cost of what it would take to maintain the bank. As a result, they are not close to what the final endowment will actually be. The Management Plan will ultimately determine the endowment.

Comments and questions during this presentation included the following. Wherever such comments are provided in this summary, they are paraphrased, and *responses from the project team and its consultants are shown in italics.*

- Who will pay for the endowment? *The money for the endowment comes from the land owner. The land owner can recoup these costs once the bank is eligible to sell credits.*

Cultural Resources Survey Results

Greg White (Pacific Legacy, formerly with California State University, Chico – Archaeological Research Program) discussed the findings of the Cultural Resources Survey that was conducted on the Bidwell Ranch property in October 2007. Copies of the executive summary were passed around for review.

A previous archaeological survey for the site was conducted in 1994 by Jensen and Associates, under the procedures in place at that time. Current laws have much more rigorous consultation requirements. The 1994 survey was conducted without consultation from the Native American community. The 1994 survey found three archaeological sites, all Native American.

The survey team returned to the sites with a tribal representative from the Mechoopda Indian Tribe of Chico Rancheria, and tested the effectiveness of the original survey. Because UTM data was scrambled by the military at the time of the 1994 survey the data points taken during the 2007 survey are more accurate. The archaeological resource findings were consistent with the older survey and no new resources were identified.

Mr. White explained that findings support the idea that the area where Bidwell Ranch is now located has always been open habitat with scattered trees and was not historically wooded. The chips found onsite originated from tools that were used to dig up a type of bulb called geophytes that were collected for food. These geophytes grow in patches in rock outcrops in open areas. There is evidence of 1,000's of years of geophyte collection onsite. There is also no indication of acorn processing onsite, which would suggest that oaks were historically sparse.

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

- Are the cultural resource areas onsite camps?
 - *No, there is no evidence of a diversity of people or uses on site. The tools found on site do not have a broad range of uses; they are a monoculture of tools. If there was a camp on site there would be a great diversity of resources found. Evidence suggests that the site was occasionally used as a harvesting ground for bulbs (geophytes).*
- Are the archaeological findings on site significant once they've been surveyed?

- *Because there is not much variation in the types of tools found and no human remains occur onsite, no mitigation would be required once a detailed survey was conducted and recorded. Once the survey was completed the resources would lose their significance. Detailed data collection should be conducted prior to any land alteration, such as enhancement, fencing, and erosion control.*
- *What about the trail tracks that occur on site? No confirming evidence was found to support the idea that the trail track on site is a historic wagon trail. It is most likely a road that was used to access the old lumber yard that was located north of the Bidwell Ranch property.*

Next Steps

The Project Team discussed the current status of the project and explained that the preliminary draft Prospectus is in the final in-house review stages before it will be made available to the Citizen Work Group for review. Once feedback has been received and any necessary edits applied the Prospectus will be added to the Preliminary Mitigation Bank Package which will then be submitted to the Mitigation Bank Review Team for review and comments. It is the Project Teams hope that once the agencies have reviewed the Preliminary package they will provide guidance and recommendations that will help to further develop the management plan.

Prospectus Overview

Mr. Efsaef provided a brief summary of the preliminary draft Prospectus, which is a document that provides an overview and introduction to the project, including project goals, site information, current conditions on site, and conceptual enhancement and management plans. The Prospectus is intended to initiate agency involvement in the project and facilitate responses.

A slide show of the Prospectus was briefly reviewed and discussions included the 1941 historical aerial of the project site, the list of special-status species to benefit from the proposed bank, the apparent changes in landscape over time, and the Conceptual Plan Map for the proposed bank.

Mr. Efsaef noted that the Prospectus is conceptual and still in the planning stages and that input was welcome. The Project Team's anticipates an evolution of the concepts presented as discussions with the Mitigation Bank Review Team begin. As the design becomes more refined, then a Management Plan for the property will be developed.

Some of the conceptual plans that were discussed included:

- The introduction of Butte County meadowfoam (BCM) into the southwestern corner of the site. This area shares similar soils and hydrology as the northwestern corner of the site, which supports a population of BCM. Establishing a second occurrence of BCM onsite would help secure the survival of this population. If

something were to happen in the northwest corner of the property at this time, the entire BCM population would be destroyed.

- Enhancement of the oak woodland onsite. No saplings have been observed onsite, which suggests that no recruitment is occurring.
- Enhancement of the wetlands that occur on the southwest corner of the site. Grading and leveling is evident in this area and historical aerials suggest that the natural hydrology and topography has been altered since the 1940's.
- Walking trails for low impact recreational uses on site. A trail along the border of the property that has a hard pan and would cause little erosion would be open for year-round use and a trail through the middle of the site would be open seasonally at times that would not disturb the wetlands onsite.
- Cross fencing on site that would allow for better cattle management by providing the ability to move cattle out of the wetland areas during sensitive times of the year.

A draft copy of the Prospectus will be sent to Citizen Work Group members for review.

Questions and Answers

The following questions and comments were brought up and discussed at the meeting:

- Define the difference between a mitigation bank and a conservation bank.
- What about including the bald eagle on the species list?
- Do we think that the southwest corner was used as a staging area during the construction of the Sycamore Creek Diversion Channel and do we know where the dirt from that project went?
- Will the Management Plan incorporate the removal of un-needed things onsite, such as the old cross fencing, roads and telephone poles?
- Has the Project Team looked at the Wurlitzer Preserve? The BCM introduction that occurred on this site was not adequate as the preserve is outside of BCM's range. However, Bidwell Ranch is inside BCM's range.
- Why would we want to introduce BCM to an area where it is not naturally occurring? Will this allow for development somewhere else that will result in the destruction of a naturally occurring population? There is great concern that this will allow for the removal of a naturally occurring population. BCM is very easy to grow – that is not a problem. Establishing it and ensuring the population's survival is the problem.
- What laws are there to keep people out of the site since it is City owned at this time and is not a bank yet?
- Have we contacted other preserve managers? The Foothill Park East Preserve has an absentee land owner.
- What will happen to the livestock loading platform that is located in the southwest corner of the site?

- Will the Conceptual Plan Map be available on web?
- The first project of this scope was in Palm Springs by USFWS and was part of a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). How does the Bidwell Ranch project tie into the local HCP?
- *Comment:* The public can benefit from the site even if they can't walk on it – Bidwell Ranch is a viewshed to Upper Park and the surrounding foothills. Another benefit of the Bidwell Ranch bank is that the property is a flyover for the Chico airport.
- *Comment:* Keeping bikes off the bank will be an ongoing problem.
- *Comment:* The management of banks is usually not very good. The management tasks are often not implemented or done adequately.
- *Comment:* It can be difficult to take in all of the new information that is presented at the Citizen Work Group meetings and then be ready to answer questions and provide feedback right away. It would be helpful to receive guidance from the Project Team as to what type of questions/help you are looking for.

Summary

Many of the comments received will be further addressed in the upcoming Management Plan. Another meeting will be scheduled in spring to discuss the Management Plan, status of the Preliminary Mitigation Bank Package, and agency involvement for the project.